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## **A Moral Education? British Values, Colour-Blindness, and Preventing Terrorism**

### **Abstract**

The Prevent strategy tasks the British education sector with preventing radicalisation and extremism. It defines extremism as opposition to fundamental British Values and requires schools to promote these values and refer students and staff believed to be vulnerable to radicalisation. Little research examining the enactment of the Prevent and British Values curriculum has included students. To fill this gap, we investigated how students, teachers and Prevent/British Values trainers engage with this curriculum by conducting individual interviews in two multicultural secondary schools in England, framing the study in recent work on colour-blindness. We found that whilst multiculturalism was celebrated, discussion about everyday structural racism was avoided. Critical thinking was performed strategically, and classrooms were securitised as sites for identifying potential safeguarding referrals. Moral education, colour-blindness and safeguarding intersected to negate racialised experiences, whilst exposing students and teachers to racialised Prevent referrals.

**Keywords:** British Values, colour-blindness, curriculum, Prevent, ‘race’

### **Introduction**

The Prevent Strategy has tasked the British<sup>i</sup> education sector with preventing radicalisation – a duty statutorily enforced under the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act. The Strategy defines extremism as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values’ (HM Government, 2011, p. 107). Schools are recognised as organisations which can build ‘resilience’ to extremism at an early age and are responsabilised for promoting ‘British Values’ and making safeguarding referrals about students and staff seen to be ‘vulnerable’ to radicalisation. The five ‘British Values’ are defined as democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths (DfE, 2014). By teaching students the five ‘British Values’, the Department for Education (DfE) seeks to train students to think critically about radicalising narratives they might encounter online, in school, or at home. Enlisting the school curriculum as a force against radicalisation is part of a wider international movement in education.

A 2014 guidance document emphasised that teaching ‘British Values’ (BV) would align smoothly with existing duties to promote students’ spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development (DfE, 2014, pp. 3-5). The Prevent Strategy is included as a footnoted reference at only one point in the document, with no other mention of the origination of the BV curriculum in preventative efforts against terrorism and extremism. In effect, the BV curriculum has packaged terrorism prevention as social and moral education in specific national values and attitudes. Furthermore, BV/Prevent policies mark a stage in the increasing Government control of the school curriculum in England since the introduction of the Education Reform Act (1988) and the National Curriculum (Winter, 2017). Whilst educators have, to a greater or lesser extent, complied with the process of de-professionalisation associated with increased curriculum control, Prevent/BV policies continue this trend, but in a different tone, by not only disenfranchising teachers as educators but re-enfranchising them as state security agents.

Given the difficulties involved in accessing classrooms for empirical study of a sensitive topic, educational research into the Prevent Duty is often limited to analyses of official discourses and teaching materials (Ford, 2019; O’Donnell, 2016; Sian, 2015). These valuable studies shed light on official, ideal-type conceptualisations of counter-radicalisation education – but are limited reflections on the practice of educators, and the experiences of students, in classrooms. Thankfully, empirical research is emerging which explores the complicated, real-world balance teachers strike – and the moral quandaries they experience – when negotiating the duty (Elwick & Jerome, 2019; Faure-Walker, 2019; Vincent, 2019). This literature deals with questions of agency, resistance, and complicity which play out around the Prevent Duty in classrooms across Britain. Limitations still exist though, as many studies are constrained to interviews with teachers, non-teaching staff and school management and observation of lessons and training sessions (Elwick & Jerome, 2019; Busher, Choudhury & Thomas, 2019; Vincent, 2019). Thus, the voice of students is missing in much academic literature on the enactment of the BV/Prevent curriculum through counter-radicalisation and safeguarding referrals in schools.

It is important to recall that the political context of this study is the global rise in Far-Right, anti-immigration, and anti-Muslim ideologies. In England, hate crimes doubled 2012-2018. During 2017-18, 85% of attacks were motivated by race or religion (Home Office, 2018). We unfold the links between race, religion and counter-radicalisation by focusing on counter-radicalisation enactment in two co-educational multicultural secondary schools in England. We

interviewed trainers,<sup>ii</sup> teachers, and students. This range of interviewees has enabled us to gain a multifaceted perspective on the Prevent Duty in the classroom.

Complementing various studies of Prevent's racialised implementation in the public sector (Coppock & McGovern, 2014; Fernandez, 2018; Younis & Jadhav, 2019a, 2019b), we paid special attention to the presentation of BVs as 'universal' colour-blind values, and the discussion of Prevent referrals as neutral, safeguarding measures – situating both in contemporary literature on colour-blindness. This paper draws upon the seminal work of Tarek Younis and Sushrut Jadhav (2019a, 2019b), using their insights on colour-blindness and the Prevent Duty in healthcare to better understand similar mechanisms at work in the BV curriculum and Prevent in English schools.

Our article precedes with an overview of our use of colour-blindness as a theoretical framework, and a juxtaposition of our paper with the existing canon of Prevent-related research in Education Studies. We then discuss our methodology for interviewing teachers, trainers, and students, before presenting our findings within three broad themes: British Values as Moral Education; 'Race' and Colour-Blindness; and 'Safe Spaces' and the 'Chilling Effect'.

### **Colour-blindness, British Values & Prevent**

Colour-blindness assumes that if people claim not to notice race nor to let it influence their decision-making, then they cannot be enacting racial bias (Apfelbaum, et al. 2012). Performative colour-blindness is 'the active recognition and negation of the race frame' (Younis and Jadhav, 2019a, p. 620). Here race is dismissed or overlooked (Frankenberg, 1993) through either 'rejecting the possibility of white privilege or by diminishing the importance of racism in social structures' (Younis and Jadhav, 2019a, p. 620), thus 'invisibilizing' discussion of race/racism within social policy (Craig, 2013, p. 712). The colour-blind perspective posits that culture is the problem, not institutional racism, and removes discussion of 'white supremacy or white guilt while legitimising the existing social, political, and economic arrangements which privilege whites' (Gallagher, 2003, p. 26). Masking white privilege behind ideas of meritocracy, enables whites to seem progressive while doing nothing to change institutional and structural arrangements that produce and perpetuate racial hierarchies, racial inequality, and white privilege (Gallagher, 2003). Here a racialised conception of the social

order is key to the ‘securitisation of social policy’ (Ragazzi, 2017), and the ways it is enacted in schools.

This approach maintains white innocence through eclipsing analysis of structural racism (Orozco, 2019), instead framing racism as an event, accusations of which are targeted at individuals (Sian, 2015, p. 194). The wider impact of these processes lies in sustaining racist structures, while protecting those in power from the charge of racism (Alexander, 2012, p. 203). Thus, ‘colour-blindness is not the opposite of racism, it is another form of racism’ (Carr, 1997, p. x). Paying attention to colour-blindness enables Younis and Jadhav (2019a) to show the omnipresence of race in Prevent and its implementation in UK healthcare (p. 620), where colour-blindness is most evident in the use of interchanging examples of Muslim and white Far-Right radicalisation, and the message that everyone is susceptible to radicalisation (p. 615). Refusing to see the racialised effects of power does not make a society post-racial, but rather enables the continued operation of those mechanisms.

Whiteness and racialised thinking dominate in English schools, where it is the ‘default setting’ of much classroom culture (Abdi, 2015, p. 60). Drawing upon Hesse’s (1997, p. 96) analysis of white governmentality, (Winter and Mills, 2020) suggest that the teaching of ‘British values’ operates a ‘disciplinary logic of whiteness’ (Hesse, 1997, p. 99) that constitutes students, teachers, and parents by means of the internalisation of a ‘British nationalist imaginary’ (*ibid*, p. 96). Here being British comes to be conflated with being white, while terrorism and radicalisation come to be associated with Muslims and Islam (Sharma and Nijjar, 2018; Younis and Jadhav, 2019a, 2019b). The BV curriculum and Prevent Duty also place British Muslims under constant surveillance, nudging them to show allegiance to and acceptance of the ‘fundamental British Values’ (Habib, 2017, p. 54). The Muslim student, constructed both as threatening and vulnerable, is deemed to be deficient, in need of surveillance and intervention (Coppock & McGovern 2014). Vulnerability, linked here with radicalisation and Islam, come together to justify enactment of duty of care in the form of state surveillance and safeguarding practices which claim to be in the best interests of the student.

Teachers are trained to seek advice from safeguarding leads in schools if they have concerns about students who they believe to be at risk of radicalisation. But the ambiguity surrounding official definitions of extremism, plus the vagueness, banality and racialisation of practical ‘how to spot a terrorist’ criteria, render decision-making on the part of teachers difficult. As

Sian (2015, p. 192) points out, teacher judgements about students are open to ‘interpretation, speculation, and bias’ (p. 192); ‘media, newspapers, and personal experiences’ (p. 194) and threaten student-teacher relationships of trust. This environment constructs the Muslim student through a reductive negative stereotype and escalates fears of Muslims as ‘other’ (Sayyid, 2010, p. 15; see also Abbas, 2019, p.404). Research points to a resulting ‘chilling effect’ in schools (O’Donnell, 2016), a further device for management and regulation of Muslim families and teachers (similar to the racialised self-censorship of healthcare workers found in Younis and Jadhav (2019a). This is evident where Muslim students are reluctant to talk about their concerns in school for fear of referral to the authorities (Faure-Walker, 2019) and teachers lack confidence to raise discussions about radicalisation for fear of offending students and parents (Farrell & Lander, 2018).

Busher, Choudhury, Thomas, and Harris (2017) found little clear evidence of the ‘chilling effect’ in their interviews and survey. Faure-Walker (2019), however, found that whilst Prevent closed down certain kinds of debate in school, it promoted others. Authentic dialogic exchanges, for example, about students joining ISIS were suppressed and discussions ‘repeat(ed) what the teacher want(ed) to hear’ (p. 9). In similar vein, Vincent draws attention to the potential for ‘surface acting’, and ‘false enthusiasm’ (2018, p. 235) when students seek to perform ‘correct’ emotional literacy (2019, p. 43). The Prevent Duty, by strategically silencing deliberations of political and ethical importance because of their so-called radicalising potential and risk of referral, ‘disrupt(s) the process by which extreme views would otherwise be moderated’ (Faure-Walker, 2019, p. 9) and ‘can lead to alienation, disaffection and disengagement’ on the part of students (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 54).

### **Studying the British Values curriculum – methods**

Two co-educational secondary schools participated in the study. The amount of detail we provide about the school neighbourhood, staff, and students posed a methodological challenge to us, in the light of the sensitivity and (racialised) culture of suspicion surrounding Prevent/British Values policy and practices in schools. We decided, on ethical/safeguarding grounds, not to individualise descriptions, name or provide any data that would jeopardise the anonymity of the schools, their communities, or staff and student populations.

However, to give some context - the neighbourhoods of both schools are amongst 10-20% most deprived in the country (Multiple Deprivation Index 2019). Both schools serve larger than national average proportions of: ‘disadvantaged’ students (in receipt of pupil premium); minority ethnic groups, students for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) and those identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We interviewed seven teachers, four Prevent/BV trainers, and fourteen Year 10 (aged 14-15) students (seven in each school), giving access to a range of subject-positions, from those designing and implementing ‘British Values sessions’ to those on the receiving end. Teachers were selected on the basis of their responsibilities for Prevent/BV/Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE) curriculum, teaching, coordination, and/or safeguarding. Of the seven teachers, one self-identified as Muslim, another as Sikh, both were of South Asian heritage. We did not discuss the ethnic or religious affiliations of other teachers. Trainers were selected across local authority, non-governmental, and cultural sector organisations, and were all white. The key informant in each school selected student participants. While we had no control over the selection of students, we requested a mix of ‘ethnically diverse’/‘multicultural’ and white British (using the schools’ own terminology) participants who would be confident to speak with unfamiliar researchers. The students in the sample interviewed comprised 50% white British and 50% with family origins in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Most participants treated the interviews in a matter-of-fact manner, seemingly unaware of their potentially sensitive character. In contrast, being acutely aware of the sensitive ethics involved, interviewers carefully avoided the use of leading questions and refrained from pushing interviewees to express political views. Candid responses were accredited to the strong rapport established, through humour, curiosity, and humility. A few students appeared to wish to say more, but noticeably restrained themselves, halting their speech when broaching a controversial topic, with, for example, ‘I don’t remember ...’, then moderating their words. We recognise that the ‘chilling effect’ we identified in the literature about the enactment of Prevent BV policies was also likely to be at work in our project interviews. But we do not wish to make claims that hesitation and restraint in vocalisation were directly determined by the subject matter, when evidence of this would be very difficult to collect, given the sensitive/dangerous nature of the topic. Given our commitment to anonymity on this sensitive topic, we decided against individualising participants by providing pseudonyms. This helped us to avoid ethical problems with selecting appropriate pseudonyms for participants from a huge range of

backgrounds and also the (small) risk that we might accidentally render participants identifiable to their peers.

The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Themes were identified through in-person and online discussion involving four different researchers (two of whom coded by hand and two used N-Vivo). To deepen critical engagement with the data, early findings were discussed at an international project webinar with invited experts. Analysis was seen as a ‘decision-making process’ (Elliott, 2018, p. 2850) that centred researcher interpretation and positionality and not a source of bias to be minimised. Therefore, it is important to note that five researchers were involved in this research (although only four were involved in the writing up process). Three are white academics in permanent academic posts, and two are researchers of colour completing their doctoral studies.

While we’ve made significant efforts in this paper to reflect on colour-blind practices in schools, we should also note that the researchers’ racialisations are bound-up in the power structures of Higher Education. Two of the three white researchers, and one of the researchers of colour, carried out the interviews for the project. Then, analysis and writing were undertaken by the three white colleagues and one researcher of colour. Occupying (sometimes longstanding) permanent positions in academia led the white researchers to drive the writing process. The white colleagues have had more access to positions in Higher Education and to accumulate professional experience. Of course, the whiteness of British Universities is not neutral but rather the result of systematic inequality.

### **British Values as moral education**

Three intersecting themes were identified from the analysis of student, teacher and trainer interviews: BV as moral education; ‘Race’ and colour-blindness; and ‘Safe spaces’ and the ‘chilling effect’. Within each theme we both present our data analysis and link this to relevant literature.

Moral education emphasises the importance of socialising children into dominant normative beliefs and behaviours (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Nucci et al., 2014). In an Anglophone context, this ‘character development’ often takes place in dedicated citizenship or PSHE lessons, or in assemblies. The British DfE explicitly packages the British Values curriculum as



SMSC education. Our interviews reveal the moral discourses circulating through the school communities and how these reflect and construct types of identities and characters deemed acceptable.

Many of the students interviewed struggled to name any or many of the BV, nor could many think of instances when BV had been directly taught to them. Instead they seemed to have a vague idea of the sentiment of BV rather than conceptualising them in concrete terms. Nonetheless, all were positive about the teaching of BV in school, while also offering nuanced critiques (see later). They understood BV as moral values, about being ‘good’, ‘decent’, ‘kind’, ‘honest’, ‘open’, and ‘caring towards anyone’. ‘Respect and tolerance’ were the BVs most frequently referenced by students. One student said:

That’s one of the big things, because you have to be able to respect other people [...] and you have to treat other people the same. You have to be able to look at someone like, we have different views, but I can put up with your view, because we’re all the same and we have to look at each other the same. (Student 12)

Several students were less familiar with the BVs of democracy, rule of law, and individual liberty. One said that individual liberty and democracy needed more attention:

... people may have trouble with individual liberty and democracy, since things such as political is something that should be developed upon. ... I actually don’t understand what individual liberty is. (Student 14)

BVs of ‘respect and tolerance’ also dominated Ford’s (2019) and Vincent’s (2019) studies. These encourage a subjectivity shaped by so-called ‘correct’ moral values that focus on the pastoral and on non-judgemental attitudes. According to students’ accounts, there appeared to be ‘writing-out’ of political critique in lessons (Suissa, 2015). Students described BV lessons as ‘boring’; ‘... like textbook ... not much interactive stuff’ and wanted to see more debates, arguments and in-depth study. One student said:

‘...they’re always just getting random teachers to teach it, like Maths teachers, English. They’re not really that logical about the subject, so they’re just reading it off the white board. I think you need to get teachers that understand it more, so that they can go in

deeper and like explain the different topics that mean a lot to people. I think they should do that properly instead of a rag tag bunch of teachers that don't really know what they're doing. (Student 15)

Teacher L understood knowledge as fixed, rational and objective, and teaching as a knowledge delivery system, unrelated to students' own thoughts. Referring to 'what we're supposed to be teaching them' s/he suggested an uncritical stance towards BV/Prevent. Likewise, other teachers were confident that BV were 'the right values' (Teacher M) and 'the right information and resources' (Teacher H).

Teacher L said:

... if the kids are getting the knowledge from ourselves, we're impartial, we're delivering it appropriately and we're telling them all the facts, then they're going to hear the facts from the right people. Rather than hearing it from someone who may not have all the correct information ... who may be wanting to lead them down a certain route.

Critical thinking by students was encouraged by all four trainers, but in diverse ways. Trainer B argued that students needed critical thinking 'in a world of fake news' and 'corporate advertising', whilst Trainer D conceptualised critical thinking as protection against teaching from home that:

... teaches children to question what they're told by their parents, which is one of the issues with some of the orthodox religious views. There will be some young people who will get a different point of view from lessons and it depends on what their reinforcement is at home.

The BV curriculum is weaponised here to critique home-sourced 'orthodox religious views' but without critique of the political and social principles underpinning the BV curriculum itself.

Compliance with discourses of respect and tolerance, objective knowledge and religious preference was consistently reinforced by presenting BV as universal, moral values. All participants agreed on the universal nature of BV. One student said: 'I don't think it should just

be a British value, I think it should be a world value in my opinion, since like, it's something everyone should follow' (Student 14 Y). A teacher explained:

... I know people weren't pleased initially with this idea of it being core British Values ... it's more about, these are the values that any human being should have. And these are the expectations that you will see of someone who is well-mannered, polite, respectful, has a duty of care to their fellow person. (Teacher N)

Trainer A brought a more critical perspective to the subject, raising issues of race, religion, politics, and power, whilst remaining committed to universalism:

I don't see British values as being British in any way whatsoever. I see some of the terminology as coming from a colonial point of view. We tolerate other faiths. What is that? I have a fundamental problem with it...I think it's arrogant to say democracy is British. I also think it's arrogant to say democracy is the only way of functioning. I'm not advocating any other way, but I, we seem to think that we have this, we're the centre of the world and we're right and I try and challenge that quite a lot with the kids when I work with them.

Universalism functioned in 'seemingly benign race-neutral ways' in our schools, (Jaffe-Walter, 2019, p. 286). These multicultural schools normalised the moral values of respect and tolerance but the role of race in schools, and society, is overlooked under cover of colour-blind moral values of goodness, decency, kindness and rationality. Meanwhile, interrogation of the way white privilege structures the status quo, remains untouched, maintaining racialised hierarchies. While questioning the supposed Britishness of seemingly universal democratic values forms a useful critique (Cowden and Singh, 2017), this risks a slippage from 'British' to universal values across the BV curriculum, illustrating the way whiteness 'conceals itself discursively' as universal (Hesse, 1997, p. 87). This was recognised somewhat reluctantly by a student of colour:

Most of us, when they say, oh we're doing British values, we're always then like ... why can't we do other places values? Why do we always have to do British...but I live in Britain, so I've got to learn about British values. (Student 6)

Interestingly, students who supported the teaching of BVs also offered their own nuanced critiques – noting their irrelevance to the real pressures on their lives, their in-built nationalist connotations, and the irony of being taught ‘respect’ but not being respected in the school:

Because, we must be good people in the future. But I don’t really think they need to prioritise it [BV]... In my view, school’s preparing us for jobs, and a lot of jobs don’t really need good people. Like, there’s office workers who don’t really talk to anyone. (Student 17)

I feel like they [BV] can be manipulated in some kind of way, because people can be like, oh, tolerance means this and that, I can’t tolerate you. And somebody can see something cool about them and be like, it’s a British value. Then people can discriminate and stuff like that towards other people, other cultures and religions and stuff like that. (Student 12)

Because some teachers take that [respect] for granted and think that they absolutely deserve it just because they’re a teacher. You’ve got to earn it. (Student 7)

To conclude this first section, we found BV to be subsumed within a wider discourse of moral education, with emphasis on respect and tolerance and less attention paid to other, more politically oriented BVs. This complements Skoczylis and Andrews’ findings that Prevent (and by association, the BV curriculum) should be seen more as an ideological apparatus aimed at producing the ‘right kind of subjects’, rather than a simple counterterrorism policy (2019, p.6). The idea of moral values as complex, politically charged, and contested was negated by a view of BVs as fixed, objective, and unquestionable. Whilst students agreed with the teaching of BVs, some also expressed insightful critique, yet we were unable to find out if the former was a case of ‘surface acting’. At the same time, political critique of the racialisation underpinning the BV curriculum, students’ communities and wider society went unaddressed.

### **‘Race’ and colour-blindness**

Throughout our interviews, participants expressed a celebratory view of diversity and multiculturalism. ‘Race’ and racism were discussed more explicitly by students than teachers or trainers. Racism was named as something that is talked about in some BV lessons, often as

linked to specific events (such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence) (Student 9) or specific key figures (Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King) (Trainer B). Racism as a structure / structural racism was largely absent from discussion. Terrorism also was talked about as an event rather than as shaped by structural conditions. For example, one student concluded that the introduction of BV in schools was linked to religious terrorist attacks:

Student 13: They were only bothered when it was terrorist attacks, but other than that, they didn't bother. So, if we didn't have terrorist attacks, and have just every-day disagreements and stuff, then they wouldn't bother. But if something big happens, then they only bother.

Interviewer: And the terrorist attacks that they were bothered about, to bring British values about, which attacks were those?

Student 13: I think mostly Islamic ones.

Here it is only spectacular events that are understood to lead to government action, while the everyday (including perhaps everyday forms of structural racism) is something not worth bothering about. This is echoed by Trainer A:

As far as, all I know is if a bomb goes off you're going to get a lot more money. Even if your Mayor says he hates Prevent.

Islam remained the reference point for extremism in participants' talk and in the experiences they recounted – consistent with findings in the literature that Islam is associated with terrorism in public consciousness (Sharma & Nijjar, 2018; Younis & Jadhav, 2019a, 2019b). One trainer recounted:

So, I went into a school and it was a bit hectic [...] Anyway, let's go into year five and let's deliver this session. So, I'm doing it and then the head teacher burst in and going, "what you doing? You're supposed to be in year six, they're doing Islam... you're supposed to be going in and talking about terrorism". (Trainer A)

People are quick to think that whenever a terrorist attack happens, they think it's a Muslim. So, they need to be educated that it's not always Muslims, and they shouldn't be so discriminatory. (Student 4)

While most participants also mentioned Far-Right extremism in connection with radicalisation, Islam remained the main reference point. One trainer explained that:

It's kind of criminalising Muslim communities, mostly Muslims. And they'll say, oh no, we've got far-right extremists.... Well, up until quite recently they'd always say, no, actually, you know, this is about Islamic stuff. But more recently, I went to a talk where somebody from the Home Office spoke. And he was saying we are quite worried in the last couple of years about right-wing extremism. It is actually becoming a thing.  
(Trainer B)

While this trainer seems to hint at the performance of colour-blindness, they also imply that right-wing extremism is new ('becoming a thing') rather than embedded within British society. Similarly, Trainer C, having met someone from the 'Building a Stronger Britain Together' Home Office initiative recounted: 'and this guy said, you know, we've been probably too focused on Muslim extremism'. The Home Office drive for increased focus on Far-Right extremism alongside Muslim extremism risks treating the former as a 'new' and individualised issue; overlooks the powerful influence of the Far-Right in UK centrist politics, including in the formation of counter-extremism policy (Fekete, 2018, p. 20); and enables the Government to claim colour-blindness to deny evidence of the racist design of Prevent (Younis & Jadhav, 2019b).

Teacher J recounted their experience as the only Muslim teacher at a Prevent training:

When you're the only person that's obviously not from that culture [it] is a bit, not scary, but a bit patronising and you sit there and you think this is about me and my culture, but I can't say anything because it isn't about me at the same time. Obviously, they don't mean it to be read that way, but sometimes it does feel like we are trying to get away from the stereotype but the more we try to get away from it, the more we're implementing it constantly.

In the interview it emerged that this teacher had actually been referred to Prevent by another teacher for teaching lessons about 'peace and conflict in Islam'. In their ethnographic research into Prevent in UK healthcare, Younis and Jadhav's (2019b) racialised Muslim participants

recount similar experiences of Prevent training to the teacher above. Attempting to shift prejudicial Islamophobic stereotypes by emphasizing Far-Right extremism is an example of performative colour-blindness – used ‘to draw attention to and immediately dismiss terrorism’s hegemonic association with Muslims’, assuming a pedagogical position that individuals can be trained away from racial prejudice, overlooking how ‘social structures...legitimise everyday racial prejudice’ (Younis & Jadhav, 2019b, p. 616-617). Thus, white referrals to Prevent linked to the Far-Right have become ‘integral in the colour-blind performance of a racialised policy’ (Younis & Jadhav, 2019b, p.621), which ‘gives prejudicial thoughts...institutional and clinical legitimacy’ (p. 618).

Identifying as British or not was also a topic of discussion in the interviews, where being British is implicitly coded as white and identity is largely seen as an individual apolitical trait. One white teacher, while celebrating diversity, emphasised the importance of understanding and fitting into Britain (Teacher L). Trainer C felt that young ‘Muslim Britons’ feel alienated both from their parent’s backgrounds and from the wider community, and thus ‘don’t feel accepted as British, so therefore to talk about British values, they feel excluded from that’.

Another trainer spoke about their experiences of intervening in tensions in multicultural schools, which they felt were ‘not about racism’ but were instead caused by ‘challenging’ ‘teenage boys’:

It’s teenage boys. Teenage boys are, [...] challenging...When I first, [...] took this job up [it] was described to me as an issue between Somali young men and Yemeni young men, actually, when you looked at it, it was an issue between young men who were about 15 years of age who happened to be Somali and happen to be Yemeni’. (Trainer D)

Here racism is rejected (by a white trainer) in favour of explanations centred on gendered assumptions of ‘boys will be boys’, which seek to naturalise tensions in schools (through locating them in biology). Similarly, speaking of young men ‘who happened to be’ of specific ethnicities diverts attention from systemic prejudice and discrimination of particular ethnicities, and the complexity of race-making and racial identity, and their intersections with gender, and in this instance masculinities, including within schools (Abdi, 2015).

The relational nature of Prevent (how it impacts on the relations between people within schools) was also discussed by one Muslim teacher, who said: ‘You will see black, white, Asian, mixed race, Slovaks sat together at lunchtime ... but Prevent stops those kids from interacting with each other.’ (Teacher J). The intersections of racialisation and gender are also at play in a Trainer C’s observation that:

The only time Ofsted seems to pick anyone up is when Muslim schools are treating boys and girls differently. But they’re not picking that up that most mainstream schools are anyway.

This stands in contrast to the more structural understanding of British identity from a student who identifies first and foremost as from an African country:

So, I think if we could get past the fact that Muslims aren’t all terrorists, and black people aren’t all aggressive, and things like that. Then I think...people would claim that they’re British. (Student 6)

This student suggests that not only are prejudiced thinking and racist stereotyping also constitutive aspects of British identity, with which many people of colour would not want to identify but also that structural racism pre-dates Prevent and BV curricula. Structural racism and colour-blindness also intersect with particular ideas of meritocracy in schools, and in wider society. One student talked about Britain as the ‘land of opportunity’, yet ‘there are setbacks due to your race’ meaning ‘you need to work harder, in order to stand on a level playing field with other people’, they went onto explain:

If you go for a job interview and they see my name, yes, they’re going to judge me beforehand and say oh, they’re fresh off the boat, they don’t understand English or something. (Student 15)

This section shows that while students and teachers talk about celebration of diversity, there is a subtle coding of British identity as white. Students spoke more than other participants about race and racism, yet both racism and terrorism were conceptualised as individual traits and events rather than being structural. Islam and Muslims remained the reference point when



talking about terrorism and BV, and performative colour-blindness was evident in participants' references to Far-Right extremism.

### **'Safe Spaces', safeguarding and the 'chilling effect'**

During our research, a powerful dichotomy became apparent regarding 'safe spaces' to discuss controversial issues in schools. For some trainers and teachers, the BV curriculum provided opportunities to facilitate classroom discussions about race, migration, and terrorism enabling careful exploration of divisive issues, under supervision, to enable cohesion between different groups in the school. As stated earlier, BVs are conceptualised as facilitating cross-cultural discussions which enable students to adopt 'universal' British Values and develop resilience to 'extremist' narratives in the home, and on the internet. The values of 'respect' and 'tolerance' were most often used in our schools' BV teaching to underwrite this promotion of a colour-blind, 'safe', ideologically homogenous atmosphere.

However, sanctions for non-compliance with this inducement towards colour-blindness were also prominently reported – the subject of this section's discussion. Our participants discussed an under-current of surveillance and control. Teachers often reported that 'safe spaces' serve a dual function. The first enabled the monitoring of student attitudes and incalcitrance, the second where students, reluctant to moderate their views on 'controversial' issues, entered the space of potential safeguarding referrals. Teachers reported concerns that students' stubbornness around safe-space discussions might represent the obstruction of 'critical thinking' by unhealthy ideological attachments – possibly brought into school from the home. Students reported feeling reluctant to share their opinions on 'controversial issues' for fear of negative consequences (a 'chilling effect'), but this was directly linked (by them) to the reactions of other students, and not surveillance by teachers.<sup>iii</sup> However, in one school, students were aware of the surveillance imposed by school management on their internet searches, and actively tried to provoke 'hits' on the software – turning the imposition of internet monitoring into a game.

The securitisation of cultural and political discussions becomes most apparent in the following quotes from BV trainers and teachers, which outline how student resistance to discussions about controversial issues can, and does, produce safeguarding and Prevent referrals. Trainer A teaches BV sessions in schools for Local Authorities, and was particularly explicit about how safe-spaces for discussion both inoculate the majority of students against the threat of

extremist ideas, but also facilitate the identification of students unable – or unwilling – to rethink their political or religiously inspired beliefs.

If I'm honest I go into a school, I can be there an hour with those kids. That's it, 60 minutes. I can't sit and go through a ladder of radicalisation with them, do you know what I mean? I can't. What I *can do* and I think, again, it's experience, is *I can spot when a kid can't change their mind*. When a kid can't listen. When a kid can't or can switch off. In a sense it's, they're the ones, right, I need to knock on your door kid and find out what's going on - and the way that I do that is creating a safe space. (Trainer A, emphasis added)

This repurposing of safe-spaces for discussion was also mirrored by one of the teachers we spoke to:

Those are the safe spaces and those are the conversations that are had in schools like ours [...] We can then open debate. By the end of it, they may have changed their mind [...] Some kids might have a viewpoint that is a bit worrying, but [...] I'm not going to send this kid out of the room. I'll educate that person and the rest of the class on the thoughts, not their thoughts, but what we're supposed to be teaching them, and their viewpoint might have changed by the end of the lesson. If it hasn't then, at the end of the lesson, *then we go and alert someone*. (Teacher L, emphasis added)

However, this approach was not deemed appropriate by all 'trainers' we interviewed. Trainer B explicitly highlighted the deep ethical and practical contradictions involved in the securitisation of 'safe spaces':

There's a massive contradiction between, 'we want a safe space, we want children to talk about sensitive and difficult conversations' - but actually we're not making it safe for them. How ironic is that? We're actually saying, 'we'll shop you; you know. We want to get you to open up and then we'll jump on you and we'll send the police round to your house. And you'll come home, and there'll be police outside your house' [...] It's deeply contradictory, the whole thing, especially, you know, the safe space and the snooping. The two just don't add up.

At the heart of this disagreement, lie two different conceptions of students. Trainers who accept the securitisation of discussion spaces as a necessary safeguarding measure tend to describe students as vulnerable subjects, who might be groomed by extremist narratives. Against this ‘threat’, the BV curriculum inoculates the students by developing ‘critical thinking defences’:

With kids, the reason that they’re vulnerable is because [...] they’re just like this sponge, this hate stuff just filters into them [...] it’s about the critical thinking skills because they’re their own best line of defence, aren’t they? [...] Not to be suspicious of the whole world but to assess it and work out how it fits in with them, maybe I’m helping them protect themselves from somebody who might be trying to draw them into violent extremism. (Trainer A)

Prevent is very much a safeguarding issue and how to deal with vulnerable people - but also giving people the information and just what’s out there [...] There are people out there who want to manipulate people, and they will manipulate people who are vulnerable for a whole range of reasons. (Trainer D)

But Trainer B, and academic commentary on the implementation of Prevent in schools (Ford, 2019), possess a very different understanding of critical thinking and of students. These understandings focus more on students as political citizens, engaging in an holistic education, where critical thinking is not curtailed to the protection of the state from threats, but offers a genuinely critical, questioning attitude towards all forms of domination in society – including that perpetrated by the state. This is something which might be imperilled by the securitisation of debate in schools.

It is important here to refer to the testimonies of schoolchildren themselves. A significant finding is that students identified their peers – and not teachers, in whom their trust was strong – as the potential source of ‘chilling effects’ on their confidence to speak freely in the classroom. When asked if students felt comfortable expressing their differing opinions in lessons, Student 11 replied: ‘Not really, because people are like, “why do you think that? That’s not right”. So, I don’t think people give their opinion much’. Asked why this happens, another student explained that the silencing is effected, not by teachers, but by ‘other students’, because: ‘Maybe a person that will feel uncomfortable when they have something to say, but they don’t want to say it because people will disagree, and an argument will start up [...] Or

they have like a bad experience of Britain, and they don't want to say it, because then people will think, 'oh this guy', like, he might think bad of himself' (student 5).

To conclude this section, our interviews with students suggest that they have internalised understandings of the preferred viewpoints expected by the colour-blind, supposedly universal, white curriculum – but they understand the risks of non-compliance to be shame, and potential humiliation at the hands of other students. Students remain seemingly unaware that teachers and some trainers provide 'safe spaces' not only to further embed these values, but also to identify those students demonstrating risky attitudes.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

In this article, we demonstrate the complexity which surrounds the teaching of 'British Values' in two English secondary schools, and evidence the intersections of moral education, colour-blindness and safeguarding in the promotion and 'doing' of BV. The construction of BV as universal, colour-blind, and as a safeguarding measure work together to inoculate against critique of the policy and its underlying ideologies. Differently from previous studies, our interviews with students enriched those conducted with teachers and trainers to open a significant window on the enactment of Prevent Duty, and BV in schools. Bearing in mind our small dataset, it is still significant to highlight that most of the students interviewed could not name all of the BV, nor remember many instances of learning about them. What this signifies, i.e. resistance, or students' perceptions of lack of relevance to their everyday lives remains unknown.

Our study shows that 'British Values' are presented by teachers, and often interpreted by students, as universal moral values – despite the nationalism evident in their name, their content, and that instrumentalist/technicist assumptions underpin the notion that 'correct' BV knowledge is beyond critique and will produce respectful and tolerant students. The performance of radicalisation and terrorism prevention as social/moral education has made use of a universal, colour-blind frame, presenting the British political system and culture as the only acceptable model.

Participants tended to associate terrorism with Muslims, even when they attempted to present a colour-blind account of multiculturalism's successes. Colour-blindness and white denial are evidenced through the naturalisation of racial tensions, for example, in the case of 'boys will

be boys’. Our study is significant for recording the same performative colour-blindness operating in school that Younis & Jadhav (2019b) identified in health settings, where equivalence between Islamic and Far-Right extremism reinforces prejudicial stereotypes.

Also apparent in the data is the securitisation of the classroom as a site for counter-radicalisation safeguarding referrals. Teachers and trainers open discussions with students to educate them about BV (and ‘immunise’ them against external extremist influences), but, alert to ‘extremist influences’ in the home which they felt they might detect in the attitudes of children, they also use those discussions to identify students assumed to be vulnerable to radicalisation. Trainers and teachers frame ‘critical thinking’ that challenges values falling outside the BV remit as evidence of healthy identity, and associate fixed conservative attitudes with radicalisation and safeguarding issues. Yet ‘critical thinking’ extended only so far, and was not usually applied to questioning the political status quo, structural racism, or British foreign policy. Our interviews with students indicate they may be unaware of the explicit risk that Prevent referrals might be made by teachers (at least, they didn’t feel comfortable mentioning that knowledge to a researcher) or, well aware of the risk, may operate a circumspect peer-surveillance system to reduce it. Whatever the case, they indicated feeling powerful social pressure to replicate dominant attitudes, for fear of humiliation and shame by others. The threat of a safeguarding referral, and the entry of Social Services into the lives of these families, weaponises safeguarding. Those students perceived by white society as Muslim, or as potentially Far-Right, must demonstrate compliance and celebration of ‘British’ values or face an intervention. Even more chilling, this curriculum is delivered through the frame of a colour-blind celebration of diversity and tolerance.

Increased government regulation of school subjects over the last 30 or so years has left students and teachers in English schools with little political agency. Policy interventions into education often target curricular matters or structural provision. However, the Prevent Duty is not unique in directing schools to counter socio-cultural ‘threats’ identified by government. Section 28 legislation (1986–2003) in England and Wales forbade teachers from ‘promoting homosexuality’ and new government guidance outlaws the use of material from organisations deemed ‘extremist’ (due to their anti-capitalism) in the classroom (DfE, 2020). The BV/Prevent curriculum goes further, by coercing students and teachers to subscribe to BVs and risk referral through non-compliance. BV/Prevent are evidence of ‘the material and psychological ways that white supremacy is structured into the education system and policy-making’ (Winter and

Mills, 2020, p. 60). Policy reform in these areas alone would not necessarily challenge the underlying white supremacy and colour-blindness of the English education system. The new theoretical insights revealed here lead us to consider future participatory studies with students as co-researchers, who conduct inquiries with other students, their families and community leaders to engage politically and ethically with these issues.

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<sup>i</sup> The Prevent Strategy does not apply to Northern Ireland; only England, Wales and Scotland.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Trainers' refers here to people who teach school students and teachers about and/or coordinate Prevent and BV activities.

<sup>iii</sup> However, families may advise their younger members to avoid 'controversial' topics at school. Ragazzi et al. (2018) found that Muslim families frequently advise their children not to discuss certain matters while in earshot of public servants, for fear that they will be profiled as potential radicals.

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