

In Topics 1 and 2, we saw that social class plays an important part in educational achievement. Just as we can think of everyone as belonging to a class, so too we can see individuals as being part of an ethnic group – whether a minority or a majority group.

Tony Lawson and Joan Garrod (2000) define ethnic groups as 'people who share common history, customs and identity, as well as, in most cases, language and religion, and who see themselves as a distinct unit'. In other words, we are talking about culture – that is, about all those things that are learned, shared and valued by a social group.

One difficulty in studying ethnicity and education is the problem of deciding who to include in an ethnic group. For example, should all 'Asians' be classified together – when this would include people of many different nationalities, religions and languages?

It is a mistake to think of ethnic groups as always being defined by physical features such as skin colour. Although many ethnic minority groups in Britain are non-white, this is not true of all groups. However, it happens that the largest minority groups in Britain are non-white.

Evidence of ethnic differences in achievement

We can see from Figure 2.3 that there are inequalities in the educational achievements of different ethnic groups. For example, whites and Asians on average do better than blacks. However, as Figure 2.3 also shows, there are significant variations among Asians. For example, Indians do better than Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

There are also important gender and class differences within and between ethnic groups. Among all groups other than Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children, girls do better than boys. Similarly, within each ethnic group, middle-class children do better than working-class children.

White pupils' achievements are very close to the national average – not surprisingly, since whites are by far the largest group, accounting for about four fifths of all pupils. However, when we look more closely, we find major class differences, with many working-class white pupils performing at a lower level than that of other ethnic groups. For example, according to a DFES (2010) study, only 23% of white boys on free school meals – a common measure of low income – gained five A*-C grades at GCSE.

According to Steven Hastings (2006), white pupils make less progress between 11 and 16 than black or Asian pupils, and it is possible that whites may soon become the worst performing ethnic group in the country.

Sociologists are interested in the reasons for these differences in achievement and have put forward a number of explanations. Some of these are similar to the explanations of social class differences in achievement we examined in Topic 1 and Topic 2.

As with class differences, we can separate them into internal and external factors, though these are very often linked.

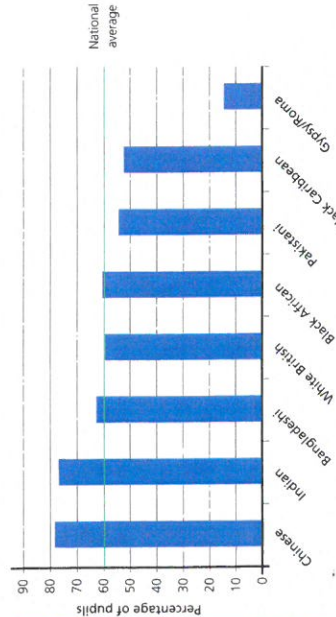
- **External factors** – factors outside the education system, such as the influence of home and family background and wider society.
- **Internal factors** – factors within schools and the education system, such as interactions between pupils and teachers, and inequalities between schools.

GETTING STARTED

Using Figure 2.3:

1. Describe the relationship between ethnicity and GCSE performance.
2. Suggest reasons for the differences in achievement between different ethnic groups. (You might find it useful to look back at Topics 1 and 2 on class differences in achievement to give you some ideas.)

Figure 2.3: Percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and maths, 2013



Source: National Pupil Database

Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Be able to describe the patterns of ethnic differences in educational achievement.
- Understand and be able to evaluate the role of different external factors, including cultural deprivation, material deprivation and racism in wider society.
- Understand and be able to evaluate the role of different internal factors, including labelling, pupil subcultures, the curriculum, institutional racism, and selection and segregation.

Do teachers treat pupils from different backgrounds unequally?

External factors and ethnic differences in achievement

Many sociologists argue that ethnic differences in achievement can best be explained by looking at factors outside the school – in the home, family and culture of the child, and the impact of wider society. The main explanations of this kind are cultural deprivation, material deprivation and class, and racism in wider society.

1 Cultural deprivation

As with explanations of class differences in achievement (see Topic 1), cultural deprivation theory sees the underachievement of some ethnic groups as the result of inadequate socialisation in the home. The explanation has three main aspects:

- intellectual and linguistic skills
- attitudes and values
- family structure and parental support.

Intellectual and linguistic skills

Cultural deprivation theorists see the lack of intellectual and linguistic skills as a major cause of underachievement for many minority children. They argue that many children from low-income black families lack intellectual stimulation and enriching experiences. This leaves them poorly equipped for school because they have not been able to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Similarly, Bereiter and Engelmann (see **Topic 1**) consider the language spoken by low-income black American families as inadequate for educational success. They see it as ungrammatical, disjointed and incapable of expressing abstract ideas.

There has also been concern that children who do not speak English at home may be held back educationally. However, official statistics show that this is not a major factor. For example, in 2010 pupils with English as their first language were only 3.2 points ahead of those without English as their first language (55.2% to 52.0%) when it came to gaining five GCSE A*-C passes including English and maths. Similarly, David Gillborn and Heidi Safia Mirza (2000) note that Indian pupils do very well despite often not having English as their home language.

Activity Webquest

The school where they speak 20 languages

...go to www.sociology.uk.net

Attitudes and values

Cultural deprivation theorists see lack of motivation as a major cause of the failure of many black children. Most children are socialised into the mainstream culture, which instils ambition, competitiveness and willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to achieve long-term goals. This equips them for success in education. By contrast, cultural deprivation theorists argue, some black children are socialised into a subculture that instils a fatalistic, 'live for today' attitude that does not value education and leaves them unequipped for success.

Family structure and parental support

Cultural deprivation theorists argue that this failure to socialise children adequately is the result of a dysfunctional family structure. For example, Daniel Moynihan (1965) argues that because many black families are headed by a lone mother, their children are deprived of adequate care because she has to struggle financially in the absence of a male breadwinner. The father's absence also means that boys lack an adequate role model of male achievement. Moynihan sees cultural deprivation as a cycle where inadequately socialised children from unstable families go on to fail at school and become inadequate parents themselves.

The New Right put forward similar explanations. For example, Charles Murray (1984) argues that a high rate of lone parenthood and a lack of positive male role models lead to the underachievement of some minorities. Roger Scruton (1986) sees the low achievement levels of some ethnic minorities as resulting from a failure to embrace mainstream British culture.

Ken Pryce (1979) also sees family structure as contributing to the underachievement of black Caribbean pupils in Britain. From a comparison of black and Asian pupils, he claims that Asians are higher achievers because their culture is more resistant to racism and gives them a greater sense of self-worth. By contrast, he argues, black Caribbean culture is less cohesive and less resistant to racism. As a result, many black pupils have low self-esteem and underachieve.

Pryce argues that the difference is the result of the differing impact of colonialism on the two groups. He argues that the experience of slavery was culturally devastating for blacks. Being transported and sold into slavery meant that they lost their language, religion and entire family system. By contrast, Asian family structures, languages and religions were not destroyed by colonial rule.

Sewell: fathers, gangs and culture

Unlike Murray, Tony Sewell (2009) argues that it is not the absence of fathers as role models that leads to black boys underachieving. Instead, Sewell sees the problem as a lack of fatherly nurturing or 'tough love' (firm, fair, respectful and non-abusive discipline). This results in black boys finding it hard to overcome the emotional and behavioural difficulties of adolescence.

In the absence of the restraining influence of a nurturing father, street gangs of other fatherless boys offer black boys 'perverse loyalty and love'. These present boys with a media-inspired role model of anti-school black masculinity, whose ideal Chris Arnot (2004) describes as 'the ultra-tough ghetto superstar, an image constantly reinforced through rap lyrics and MTV videos'.

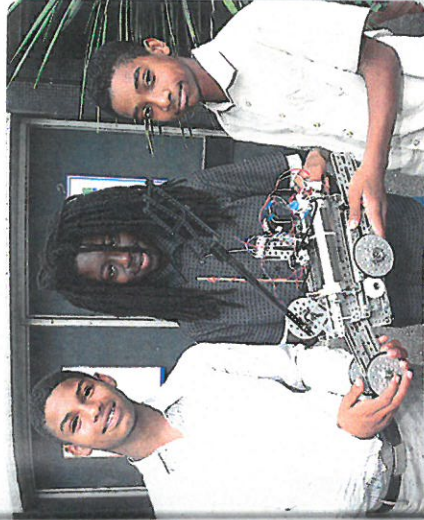
Many black boys are thus subject to powerful anti-educational peer group pressure: most of the academically successful black boys that Sewell interviewed felt that the greatest barrier to success was pressure from other boys. Speaking in Standard English and doing well at school were often viewed with suspicion by their peers and seen as 'selling out' to the white establishment.

As Sewell says:

'The biggest barrier facing black boys is actually black peer pressure. We need to talk about how black students discourage their peers.'

Sewell argues that black students do worse than their Asian counterparts because of cultural differences in socialisation and attitudes to education. As he puts it, while one group is being nurtured by MTV, the other is clocking up the educational hours. Sewell concludes that black children – particularly the boys – need to have greater expectations placed on them to raise their aspirations.

However, critical race theorists such as Gillborn (2008) argue that it is not peer pressure but institutional racism within the education system itself that systematically produces the



▲ Sewell's charity, *Generating Genius*, offers a 'nurturing programme' for students from disadvantaged communities.

failure of large numbers of black boys. (For more on this view, see pages 45–8.)

Asian families

While many black families have absent fathers, in Sewell's view Indian and Chinese pupils benefit from supportive families that have an 'Asian work ethic' and place a high value on education.

Likewise, Ruth Lupton (2004) argues that adult authority in Asian families is similar to the model that operates in schools. She found that respectful behaviour towards adults was expected from children. This had a knock-on effect in school, since parents were more likely to be supportive of school behaviour policies.

White working-class families

Most research has focused on black family structures as possible causes of underachievement. However, as we saw earlier, white working-class pupils often underachieve and have lower aspirations. For example, a survey of 16,000 pupils by Andrew McCulloch (2014) found that ethnic minority pupils are more likely to aspire to go to university than white British pupils.

This low level of aspiration and achievement may be the result of a lack of parental support. For example, Lupton studied four mainly working-class schools – two predominantly white, one serving a largely Pakistani community and the fourth drawing pupils from an ethnically mixed community.

She found that teachers reported poorer levels of behaviour and discipline in the white working-class schools – despite the fact that they had fewer children on free school meals

(a common measure of poverty among pupils). Teachers blamed this on lower levels of parental support and the negative attitude that white working-class parents had towards education. By contrast, ethnic minority parents were more likely to see education as "a way up in society".

Similarly, Gillian Evans (2006) argues that street culture in white working-class areas can be brutal and so young people have to learn how to withstand intimidation and intimidate others. In this context, school can become a place where the power games that young people engage in on the street are played out again, bringing disruption and making it hard for pupils to succeed.

Activity Discussion

Do cultural differences explain differences in achievement?

...go to www.sociology.uk.net

Compensatory education

The main policy that has been adopted to tackle cultural deprivation is compensatory education. For example, the aim of Operation Head Start (see page 20) in the USA was to compensate children for the cultural deficit they are said to suffer because of deprived backgrounds.

Criticisms of cultural deprivation theory

Geoffrey Driver (1977) criticises cultural deprivation theory for ignoring the positive effects of ethnicity on achievement. He shows that the black Caribbean family, far from being dysfunctional, provides girls with positive role models of strong independent women. Driver argues that this is why black girls tend to be more successful in education than black boys.

Errol Lawrence (1982) challenges Pryce's view that black pupils fail because their culture is weak and they lack self-esteem. He argues that black pupils under-achieve not because of low self-esteem, but because of racism.

Keddie sees cultural deprivation as a victim-blaming explanation. She argues that ethnic minority children are culturally different, not culturally deprived. They under-achieve because schools are ethnocentric: biased in favour of white culture and against minorities.

These critics oppose compensatory education because they see it as an attempt to impose the dominant white culture on children who already have a coherent culture of their own. They propose two main alternatives:

- **multicultural education:** a policy that recognises and values minority cultures and includes them in the curriculum
- **anti-racist education:** a policy that challenges the prejudice and discrimination that exists in schools and wider society.

Some sociologists argue that material deprivation rather than cultural deprivation is the main cause of under-achievement. We examine their view next.

2 Material deprivation and class

Material deprivation means a lack of those physical necessities that are seen as essential or normal for life in today's society. In general, working-class people are more likely to face poverty and material deprivation.

Material deprivation explanations see educational failure as resulting from factors such as substandard housing and low income. Ethnic minorities are more likely to face these problems. For example, according to Guy Palmer (2012):

- Almost half of all ethnic minority children live in low-income households, as against a quarter of white children.
- Ethnic minorities are almost twice as likely to be unemployed compared with whites.
- Ethnic minority households are around three times as likely to be homeless.
- Almost half of Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers earned under £7 per hour, compared with only a quarter of white British workers.

In addition, ethnic minority workers are more likely to be engaged in shift work, and Bangladeshi and Pakistani women are more likely than others to be engaged in low-paid homeworking.

There are several reasons why some ethnic minorities may be at greater risk of the material deprivation that results from unemployment, low pay and overcrowding:

- Many live in economically depressed areas with high unemployment and low wage rates.
- Cultural factors such as the tradition of purdah in some Muslim households, which prevents women from working outside the home.
- A lack of language skills, and foreign qualifications not being recognised by UK employers. These are more likely to affect recently arrived groups, many of whom are refugees. Most members of established minority groups are fluent in English.
- Asylum seekers may not be allowed to take work.
- Racial discrimination in the labour market and housing market (see the section on 'Racism in wider society' below.)

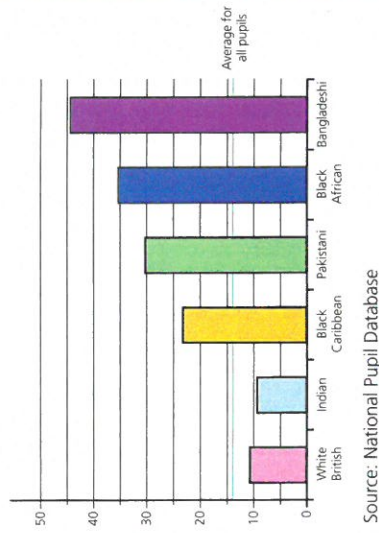
Analysis and Evaluation

How might (a) parents working shifts and (b) parents engaged in low-paid homeworking affect their children's education?

Such inequalities are reflected in the proportion of children from different ethnic groups who are eligible for free school meals, as Figure 2.4 shows. The material deprivation explanation argues that such class differences explain why Pakistani pupils tend to do worse than Indian and white pupils.

Indian pupils – whose achievements are generally above average – are likely to be from better-off backgrounds. For example, they are the ethnic group most likely to attend private schools – at twice the rate of whites and five times that of blacks.

Figure 2.4: Percentage of children entitled to free school meals, by ethnic group, 2011



Source: National Pupil Database

Does class override ethnicity?

Thus if we fail to take the different class positions of ethnic groups into account when we compare their educational achievements, there is a danger that we may over-estimate the effect of cultural deprivation and under-estimate the effect of poverty and material deprivation.

However, even those Indian and Chinese pupils who are materially deprived still do better than most. For example, in 2011, 86% of Chinese girls who received free school meals achieved five or more higher grade GCSEs, compared with only 65% of white girls who were not receiving free school meals.

This suggests that material deprivation and social class factors do not completely override the influence of ethnicity. For example, Tariq Modood (2004) found that, while children from low-income families generally did less well, the effects of low income were much less for other ethnic groups than for white pupils.

3 Racism in wider society

While material deprivation and poverty has an impact on the educational achievement of some ethnic minority children, some sociologists argue that poverty is itself the product of another factor – namely, racism. As David Mason (2000) puts it, 'discrimination is a continuing and persistent feature of the experience of Britain's citizens of minority ethnic origin'.

John Rex (1986) shows how racial discrimination leads to social exclusion and how this worsens the poverty faced by ethnic minorities. In housing, for instance, discrimination means that minorities are more likely to be forced into substandard accommodation than white people of the same class.

Internal factors (1) labelling, identities and responses

Labels may lead teachers to treat ethnic minority pupils differently. This disadvantages them and may result in their failure.

Black pupils and discipline

A good illustration of the impact of labelling on black pupils comes from studies by Gillborn and Youdell (2000). They found that teachers were quicker to discipline black pupils than others for the same behaviour.

Gillborn and Youdell argue that this is the result of teachers' 'racialised expectations'. They found that teachers expected black pupils to present more discipline problems and misinterpreted their behaviour as threatening or as a challenge to authority. When teachers acted on this misperception, the pupils responded negatively and further conflict resulted. In turn, black pupils felt teachers underestimated their ability and picked on them. Gillborn and Youdell conclude that much of the conflict between white teachers and black pupils stems from the racial stereotypes teachers hold, rather than the pupils' actual behaviour.

This may explain the higher level of exclusions from school of black boys (see Figure 2.5). As Jenny Bourne (1994) found, schools tend to see black boys as a threat and to label them negatively, leading eventually to exclusion. Exclusions affect achievement: only one in five excluded pupils achieves five GCSEs.

According to Osler (2001), in addition to higher rates of official exclusions, black pupils appear more likely to suffer from unrecorded unofficial exclusions and from 'internal exclusions' where they are sent out of class. They are also more likely to be placed in pupil referral units (PRUs) that exclude them from access to the mainstream curriculum.

1 Labelling and teacher racism

To label someone is to attach a meaning or definition to them. For example, teachers may label a pupil as a troublemaker or cooperative, bright or stupid. Interactionist sociologists study the face-to-face interactions in which such labelling occurs.

When looking at ethnic differences in achievement, interactionists focus on the different labels teachers give to children from different ethnic backgrounds. Their studies show that teachers often see black and Asian pupils as being far from the 'ideal pupil'. For example, black pupils are often seen as disruptive and Asians as passive. Negative

Black pupils and streaming

As we saw in **Topic 2**, Gillborn and Youdell found that in the 'A-to-C economy', teachers focus on those students who they believe are most likely to achieve a grade C at GCSE – a process the authors call 'educational triage' or sorting. As a result, negative stereotypes about black pupils' ability that some teachers hold means they are more likely to be placed in lower sets or streams.

Similarly, Peter Foster (1990) found that teachers' stereotypes of black pupils as badly behaved could result in them being placed in lower sets than other pupils of similar ability. Streaming black pupils on the basis of negative stereotypes about their ability or behaviour can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement.

Asian pupils

Cecile Wright's (1992) study of a multi-ethnic primary school shows that Asian pupils can also be the victims of teachers' labelling. She found that despite the schools' apparent commitment to equal opportunities, teachers held ethnocentric views: that is, they took for granted that British culture and Standard English were superior.

This affected how they related to Asian pupils. For example, teachers assumed they would have a poor grasp of English and left them out of class discussions or used simplistic, childish language when speaking to them.

Asian pupils also felt isolated when teachers expressed disapproval of their customs or mispronounced their names. In general, teachers saw them not as a threat (unlike black pupils), but as a problem they could ignore. The effect was that Asian pupils, especially the girls, were marginalised – pushed to the edges and prevented from participating fully.

2 Pupil identities

Teachers often define pupils as having stereotypical ethnic identities. According to Louise Archer (2008), teachers' dominant discourse (way of seeing something) defines ethnic minority pupils' identities as lacking the favoured identity of the ideal pupil.

Archer describes how the dominant discourse constructs three different pupil identities:

- **The ideal pupil identity** A white, middle-class, masculinised identity, with a normal sexuality. This pupil is seen as achieving in the 'right' way, through natural ability and initiative.
- **The pathologised pupil identity** An Asian, 'deserving poor', feminised identity, either asexual or with an oppressed sexuality. This pupil is seen as a plodder, conformist and culture-bound 'over-achiever', a slogger who succeeds through hard work rather than natural ability.
- **The demonised pupil identity** A black or white, working-class, hyper-sexualised identity. This pupil is seen as an unintelligent, peer-led, culturally deprived under-achiever.

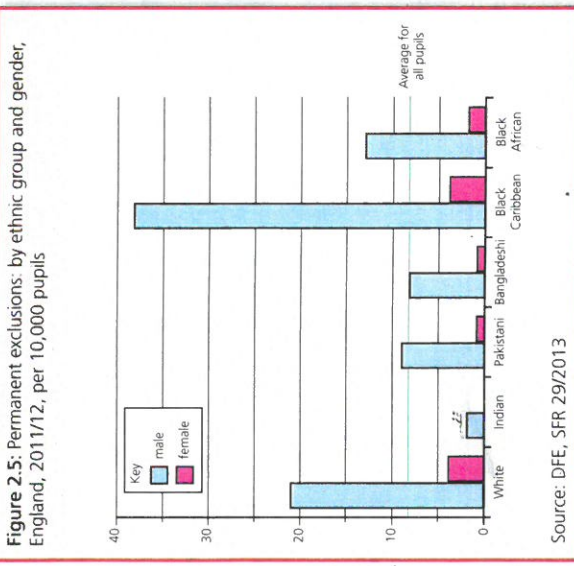
For Archer, ethnic minority pupils are likely to be seen as either demonised or pathologised pupils. For example, from interviews with teachers and students, she shows how black students are demonised as loud, challenging, excessively sexual and with 'uninspirational' home cultures.

In a further study, Archer (2010) found that teachers stereotyped Asian girls as quiet, passive or docile. As Farzana Shain (2003) notes, when Asian girls challenge this stereotype by misbehaving, they are often dealt with more severely than other pupils.

Chinese pupils

Archer argues that even those minority pupils who perform successfully can be pathologised (seen as abnormal). For example, Chinese students were simultaneously praised and viewed negatively by their teachers, who saw them as:

'a homogenous passive, quiet and hardworking mass with Chinese girls as educational automatons, who are too quiet, too passive and too repressed, while the boys tended to be positioned as effeminate and subordinate – and hence not properly masculine – by virtue of their passivity, quietness and hard work.'



While successful, therefore, Chinese students were seen as having achieved success in the 'wrong' way – through hardworking, passive conformism rather than natural individual ability. This meant they could never legitimately occupy the identity of 'ideal pupil'. Archer and Francis (2007) sum up the teachers' view of them as a 'negative positive stereotype'.

Teachers stereotyped Chinese families as 'tight' and 'close' and used this to explain the girls' supposed passivity (similar to the way teachers often see South Asian girls as victims of oppressive family situations). Teachers also tended wrongly to stereotype their Chinese students as middle-class.

The result of the distinctions that Archer identifies is that even the successes of ethnic minority (and female) pupils will only be seen as 'over-achievement' – since 'proper' achievement is seen to be the natural preserve of the privileged, white, middle-class ideal pupil.

3 Pupil responses and subcultures

As we have seen, there is evidence of teacher racism and negative labelling. However, research shows that pupils can respond to this in a variety of ways. For example, they may respond by becoming disruptive or withdrawn. Alternatively, pupils may refuse to accept the label and even decide to prove it wrong by working extra hard. Negative labels do not automatically turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.



▲ A positive attitude to academic success.

Fuller and Mac an Ghaill: rejecting negative labels

A good example of pupils responding by rejecting negative labels is Mary Fuller's (1984) study of a group of black girls in year 11 of a London comprehensive school. The girls were untypical because they were high achievers in a school where most black girls were placed in low streams.

Fuller describes how, instead of accepting negative stereotypes of themselves, the girls channelled their anger about being labelled into the pursuit of educational success. However, unlike other successful pupils, they did not seek the approval of teachers, many of whom they regarded as racist. Nor did they limit their choice of friends to other academic achievers. Instead, they were friends with other black girls from lower streams.

Also unlike other successful pupils, they conformed only as far as the schoolwork itself was concerned. They worked conscientiously, but gave the appearance of not doing so, and they showed a deliberate lack of concern about school routines. They had a positive attitude to academic success but, rather than seeking the approval of teachers, they preferred to rely on their own efforts and the impartiality of external exams.

Fuller sees the girls' behaviour as a way of dealing with the contradictory demands of succeeding at school while remaining friends with black girls in lower streams and avoiding the ridicule of black boys, many of whom were anti-school. They were able to maintain a positive self-image by relying on their own efforts rather than accepting the teachers' negative stereotype of them.

The study highlights two important points. Firstly, pupils may still succeed even when they refuse to conform. Secondly, negative labelling does not always lead to failure. These girls were able to reject the labels placed on them and they remained determined to succeed. There was no self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mairtin Mac an Ghaill's (1992) study of black and Asian 'A' level students at a sixth form college reached similar conclusions. Students who believed teachers had labelled them negatively did not necessarily accept the label. How they responded depended on factors such as their ethnic group and gender and the nature of their former schools. For example, some girls felt that their experience of having attended an all-girls school gave them a greater academic commitment that helped them to overcome negative labels at college. As with Fuller's study, this research shows that a label does not inevitably produce a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mirza: failed strategies for avoiding racism

Like Fuller, Heidi Safia Mirza (1992) studied ambitious black girls who faced teacher racism. Mirza found that racist teachers discouraged black pupils from being ambitious through the kind of advice they gave them about careers and option choices. For example, teachers discouraged them from aspiring to professional careers.

A large majority of teachers in the study held racist attitudes. Mirza identifies three main types of teacher racism:

- **The colour-blind:** teachers who believe all pupils are equal but in practice allow racism to go unchallenged.
- **The liberal chauvinists:** teachers who believe black pupils are culturally deprived and who have low expectations of them.
- **The overt racists:** teachers who believe blacks are inferior and actively discriminate against them.

Much of the girls' time at school was spent trying to avoid the effects of teachers' negative attitudes. The strategies they employed to do this included being selective about which staff to ask for help, getting on with their own work in lessons without taking part and not choosing certain options so as to avoid teachers with racist attitudes.

However, although the girls had high self-esteem, these strategies put them at a disadvantage by restricting their opportunities. Unlike the girls in Fuller's study, their strategies were unsuccessful.

Sewell: the variety of boys' responses

As we saw earlier, Sewell focuses on the absence of fathers and the influence of peer groups and street culture to explain the underachievement of black boys. However, he also notes that their responses to schooling, including racist stereotyping by teachers, can affect their achievement. He identifies four such responses.

The rebels were the most visible and influential group, but they were only a small minority of black pupils. They were often excluded from school. They rejected both the goals and the rules of the school and expressed their opposition through peer group membership, conforming to the stereotype of the anti-authority, anti-school 'black macho lad'. The rebels believed in their own superiority based on the idea that black masculinity equates with sexual experience and virility. They were contemptuous of white boys, who they saw as effeminate, and dismissive of conformist black boys.

The conformists were the largest group. These boys were keen to succeed, accepted the schools' goals and had friends from different ethnic groups. They were not part of a subculture and were anxious to avoid being stereotyped either by teachers or their peers.

The retreatists were a tiny minority of isolated individuals who were disconnected from both school and black subcultures, and were despised by the rebels.

The innovators were the second largest group. Like Fuller's girls, they were pro-education but anti-school. They valued success, but did not seek the approval of teachers and conformed only as far as schoolwork itself was concerned. This distanced them from the conformists and allowed them to maintain credibility with the rebels while remaining positive about academic achievement.

Sewell shows that only a small minority fit the stereotype of the 'black macho lad' (the 'rebels' in Sewell's study). Nevertheless, teachers tend to see all black boys in this way and this contributes to the underachievement of many boys, whatever their attitude to school. Furthermore, many of the boys' negative attitudes are themselves a response to this racism.

Investigating racism in schools

The issue of racism in schools has certain important **research characteristics** – particular features that may make it easy or difficult to investigate. For example:

- Racism is potentially a breach of the law, so teachers, pupils and parents are likely to be particularly careful about displaying racist attitudes to a researcher.
- Teachers are also bound by a code of professional conduct forbidding them from displaying racist attitudes, making it even harder to get behind any public front they may put up.
- Schools are legally required to keep records of any racist incidents and this can provide researchers with relevant statistical data.
- However, there is no easily applicable official definition of a 'racist incident' and some teachers may feel they have had insufficient training to be able to identify one.
- The group nature of some racist behaviour means that peer pressure is likely to influence the responses of individual pupils, making it more difficult for a researcher to uncover individual variations in attitudes.
- It may be hard to obtain parental consent for the research because parents may be unwilling to have their children identified as exhibiting racist behaviour.
- Victims of racism may be unwilling to identify themselves for fear of further abuse for talking to a researcher. Alternatively, victims of racism may welcome an opportunity to share their experiences with a supportive outsider.

- 1 What other research characteristics of racism in schools can you think of? You could consider issues of confidentiality, stereotyping etc particular to investigating this topic.
- 2 Using the research characteristics listed above and any others you can think of, identify two strengths and two limitations of using **documents** to investigate racism in schools. You can read more about documents on pages 152–4.

However, while Sewell recognises that teachers' racist stereotyping of black boys disadvantages them and can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, he argues that factors external to school, such as the role of peer groups, street culture and the lack of a nurturing father, are more important in producing underachievement.

Evaluation of labelling and pupil responses

Rather than blaming the child's home background, as cultural deprivation theory does, labelling theory shows how teachers' stereotypes can be a cause of failure.

However, there is a danger of seeing these stereotypes as simply the product of individual teachers' prejudices, rather than of racism in the way that the education system as a whole operates. For example, as we saw in **Topic 2**, Gillborn and Youdell argue that the policy of publishing league tables creates an 'A-to-C economy' and leads to large numbers of black and working-class pupils being placed in lower streams or entered for lower-tier exams.

There is also a danger of assuming that once labelled, pupils automatically fall victim to the self-fulfilling prophecy and fail. Nevertheless, as Mirza shows, although pupils may devise strategies to try to avoid teachers' racism, these too can limit their opportunities.

Internal factors (2) institutional racism

Troyna and Williams (1986) argue that to explain ethnic differences in achievement, we need to go beyond simply examining individual teacher racism. We must also look at how schools and colleges routinely and even unconsciously discriminate against ethnic minorities. They therefore make a distinction between:

- **individual racism** that results from the prejudiced views of individual teachers and others
- **institutional racism** – discrimination that is built into the way institutions such as schools and colleges operate.

Critical race theory

Critical race theory sees racism as an ingrained feature of society. This means that it involves not just the intentional actions of individuals but, more importantly, institutional racism. According to two of the founders of the Black Panther party in the USA, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1967), institutional racism is:

'less overt, more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts... It originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society.'

Locked-in inequality

For critical race theorists such as Daria Roithmayr (2003), institutional racism is a 'locked-in inequality': The scale of historical discrimination is so large that there no longer needs to be any conscious intent to discriminate – the inequality becomes self-perpetuating: it feeds on itself.

Gillborn (2008) applies the concept of locked-in inequality to education. He sees ethnic inequality as "so deep rooted and so large that it is a practically inevitable feature of the education system".

Critical race theorists see the education system as institutionally racist in several ways, which we shall now examine.

Marketisation and segregation

Gillborn (1997) argues that because marketisation gives schools more scope to select pupils, it allows negative stereotypes to influence decisions about school admissions.

Gillborn's view is supported by Moore and Davenport's (1990) American research. They show how selection procedures lead to ethnic segregation, with minority pupils failing to get into better secondary schools due to discrimination. For example, they found that primary school reports were used to screen out pupils with language difficulties, while the application process was difficult for non-English-speaking parents to understand.

These procedures favoured white pupils and disadvantaged those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Moore and Davenport thus conclude that selection leads to an ethnically stratified education system.

The Commission for Racial Equality (1993) identified similar biases in Britain. It noted that racism in school admissions procedures means that ethnic minority children are more likely to end up in unpopular schools. The report identifies the following reasons:

- reports from primary schools that stereotype minority pupils
- racist bias in interviews for school places
- lack of information and application forms in minority languages
- ethnic minority parents are often unaware of how the waiting list system works and the importance of deadlines.

The ethnocentric curriculum

The term 'ethnocentric' describes an attitude or policy that gives priority to the culture and viewpoint of one particular ethnic group, while disregarding others. The ethnocentric curriculum is thus a curriculum that reflects the culture of one ethnic group – usually the dominant culture. Many sociologists see the ethnocentric curriculum as a prime example of institutional racism because it builds a racial bias into the everyday workings of schools and colleges. Examples of the ethnocentric curriculum include:

- **Languages, literature and music** Troyna and Williams note the meagre provision for teaching Asian languages as compared with European languages. Miriam David (1993) describes the National Curriculum as a 'specifically British' curriculum that largely ignores non-European languages, literature and music.
 - **History** Ball (1994) criticises the National Curriculum for ignoring ethnic diversity and for promoting an attitude of 'little Englandism'. For example, the history curriculum tries to recreate a 'mythical age of empire and past glories', while ignoring the history of black and Asian people.
- Bernard Coard (1971; 2005) explains how the ethnocentric curriculum may produce underachievement. For example, in history the British may be presented as bringing civilisation to the 'primitive' peoples they colonised. He argues that this image of black people as inferior undermines black children's self-esteem and leads to their failure.
- However, it is not clear what impact the ethnocentric curriculum has. For example, while it may ignore Asian culture, Indian and Chinese pupils' achievement is above the national average. Similarly, Maureen Stone (1981) argues that black children do not in fact suffer from low self-esteem.

Assessment

Gillborn (2008) argues that 'the assessment game' is rigged so as to validate the dominant culture's superiority. If black children succeed as a group, 'the rules will be changed to re-engineer failure'. For example, in the past, primary schools used 'baseline assessments' which tested pupils when they started compulsory schooling. However, these were replaced in 2003 by a new way of measuring pupils' abilities, the foundation stage profile (FSP).

The result of this change was that, overnight, black pupils now appeared to be doing worse than white pupils. For example, in one local authority, where black children in

Access to opportunities

- The 'Gifted and Talented' programme was created with the aim of meeting the needs of more able pupils in inner-city schools. While this might seem to benefit bright pupils from minority groups, Gillborn (2008) points out that official statistics show whites are over twice as likely as Black Caribbeans to be identified as gifted and talented, and five times more likely than Black Africans.
 - **Exam tiers** Similarly, Tikly et al (2006) found that in 30 schools in the 'Aiming High' initiative to raise Black Caribbean pupils' achievement, blacks were nevertheless more likely than whites to be entered for lower tier GCSE exams. This was often because black pupils had been placed in lower sets. The effect is that they can only gain a grade C at best.
- Steve Strand's (2012) analysis of large scale data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) shows a white-black achievement gap in maths and science tests at age 14. He found this to be the result of black pupils being systematically under-represented in entry to higher tier tests. Strand suggests that ethnic differences in entry to test tiers reflect teachers' expectations, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The 'new IQism'

Access to opportunities such as higher sets or the Gifted and Talented programme depend heavily on teachers' assessments of pupils' ability. This works against black pupils because, as Gillborn notes,

'When teachers are asked to judge the 'potential' and/or 'motivation' of their students, they tend to place disproportionate numbers of Black students in low ranked groups.'

Furthermore, teachers place students in sets not only on the basis of prior attainment, but also on disciplinary concerns and perceptions of their 'attitude'. As we saw earlier, Gillborn and Youdell found that teachers had 'racialised expectations' that black pupils would pose more discipline problems.

In what Gillborn calls the new IQism, he argues that teachers and policymakers make false assumptions about the nature of pupils' 'ability' or 'potential'.

They see potential as a fixed quality that can be easily measured – and once a pupil's potential has been measured, they can be put into the 'right' set or stream, onto the Gifted and Talented programme, and so on. Gillborn and Youdell (2001) note that secondary schools are increasingly using old-style intelligence (IQ) tests to allocate pupils to different streams on entry.

For Gillborn, however, there is no genuine measure of 'potential'. All a test can do, is tell us what a person has learnt already or can do now, not what they may be able to do in the future. This is like the driving test; failing it doesn't mean you will never be able to drive – simply that you can't do so now.

From his analysis of school assessment methods, programmes for gifted children, and attempts to measure pupils' potential, Gillborn concludes that the education system is institutionally racist, creating an environment in which ethnic minority pupils are routinely disadvantaged. In his words,

'Race inequality is a constant and central feature of the education system. Racism [is] a fundamental defining characteristic of the education system.'

Criticisms of Gillborn

Criticisms of Gillborn's view that ethnic differences in achievement are the result of institutional racism focus on two issues:

- the underachievement of some minority groups such as black boys
- the 'overachievement' of Indian and Chinese pupils.

Black boys' underachievement

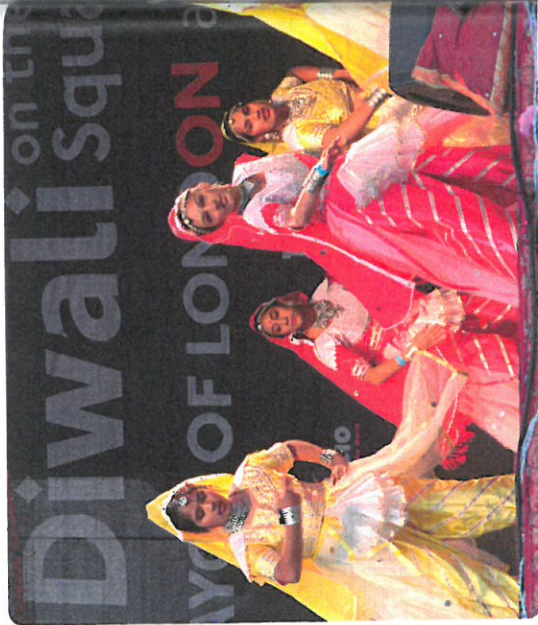
As we have seen, critical race theorists such as Gillborn argue that institutional racism is the main cause of underachievement. They argue that 'internal' factors within the education system, such as assessment and setting, systematically produce the failure of large numbers of ethnic minority pupils, especially black boys.

By contrast, sociologists such as Sewell reject this view. Although he does not believe that racism has disappeared from schools, he argues that it is not powerful enough to prevent individuals from succeeding. Rather, in Sewell's view, we need to focus on external factors such as boys' anti-school attitudes, the peer group and the nurturing role of the father.

Model minorities: Indian and Chinese achievement

Critics of the idea that the education system is institutionally racist point to the fact that, as well as underachievement of groups such as black boys, there is also 'overachievement' by other, 'model minorities'. For example, Indian and Chinese students perform better than the white majority.

In other words, if these two groups do so well, how then can there be institutional racism in education, as critical race theorists claim?



▲ The Hindu festival of Diwali: does the school curriculum ignore minority cultures?

2000 had been the highest achievers on entry to school (20% above the average), by 2003 the new FSP had black children ranked lower than whites across all six developmental areas that it measured. Gillborn concludes:

'And so the old story of Black educational success at age five has been entirely rewritten. The new assessment has established Black failure as, once again, the norm.'

Gillborn explains this reversal as a result of two related institutional factors:

- The FSP is based entirely on teachers' judgments, whereas baseline assessments often used written tests as well.
- A change in the timing: the FSP is completed at the end of reception year, whereas baseline assessments were done at the start of primary school.

Gillborn argues that both these factors increase the risk of teachers' stereotyping affecting the results. For example, a study of GCSE by Sanders and Horn (1995) found that where more weighting was given to tasks assessed by teachers rather than by written exams, the gap between the scores of different ethnic groups widened.

Analysis and Evaluation

Why might a change in the timing of the assessment make it more likely that teachers' stereotypes will affect the results of the assessment?

Gillborn (2008) responds by arguing that the image of Indians and Chinese as hardworking 'model minorities' performs an ideological function. It conceals the fact that the education system is institutionally racist:

- It makes the system appear fair and meritocratic – that Indians and Chinese succeed because they make the effort and take advantage of the opportunities offered to them.
- It justifies the failure of other minorities, such as blacks – that they fail because they are unable or unwilling to make the effort, due to their 'uninspirational' home culture.
- It ignores the fact that 'model minorities' still suffer racism in schools. For example, Chinese students report similar levels of harassment to Black Caribbeans.

Ethnicity, class and gender

Gillian Evans (2006) argues that, to fully understand the relationship between ethnicity and achievement, we need to look at how ethnicity interacts with gender and class. For example, she claims that in examining black children's achievement, sociologists tend to look at their culture and ethnicity, but rarely at their class.

One example of how ethnicity intersects with gender to affect achievement is Paul Connolly's (1998) study of five and six year olds in a multi-ethnic inner-city primary school. Connolly shows how pupils and teachers construct masculinity differently depending on a child's ethnicity. Teachers saw black boys as disruptive under-achievers and controlled them by punishing them more and by channeling their energies into sport. The boys responded by seeking status in non-academic ways, such as playing kiss-chase and football.

By contrast, teachers saw Asian boys as passive, conformist, keen and academic, when they misbehaved, they were seen as immature rather than threatening. Other boys picked on them to assert their own masculinity and excluded them from playing football. Both teachers and pupils saw Asian boys as more 'feminine', vulnerable and in need of protection from bullying.

Studies such as those by Evans and Connolly show that we cannot consider ethnicity in isolation from gender and class.

For example, Connolly (2006) notes that there is an 'interactions effect': class and gender interact differently with ethnicity depending on which ethnic group we are looking at. For instance, there is a bigger gap between the achievements of white middle-class and white working-class pupils than there is between black middle-class and black working-class pupils.

Activity Webquest

Do schools disadvantage minority ethnic pupils?

...go to www.sociology.uk.net

Questions to try

Whether or not you are taking the AS exams during your A level course, trying the AS questions below is a very good way of testing your knowledge and understanding and practising your skills in preparation for your A level exams.

Item A There are marked ethnic differences in educational achievement. Some minority ethnic groups do much better than others. For example, Indian pupils on average achieve more highly than Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. These differences may be due to factors outside the school. For example, some sociologists suggest that cultural differences have an important influence on achievement. Others claim that it is more to do with the material circumstances of different ethnic groups.

Item B There are important differences in the experiences of different ethnic groups in the education system, for example in terms of examination entries and allocation to sets or streams. Similarly, studies show that teachers may be quicker to discipline pupils from certain ethnic groups for apparent misbehaviour. These differences can lead to educational failure for some groups.

AS questions

- 1 Define the term 'model minorities'.
- 2 Outline three ways in which the ethnocentric curriculum may operate in education.
- 3 Outline and explain two forms of pupil response to teachers' racism and negative labelling.
- 4 Applying material from Item A and your knowledge, evaluate the view that ethnic differences in educational achievement are primarily the result of factors outside the school.

A level question

- 5 Applying material from Item B, analyse two factors inside schools that lead to ethnic differences in educational achievement.

QuickCheck Questions

Check your answers at www.sociology.uk.net

- 1 List the following groups in order of achievement at GCSE, highest first: blacks, Chinese, Indians.
- 2 State one criticism of cultural deprivation theory as an explanation of ethnic differences in achievement.
- 3 How does Sewell explain the differences in achievement between black boys and Asian pupils?
- 4 What is meant by the term 'teachers' racialised expectations'?
- 5 What is meant by the ethnocentric curriculum?
- 6 Name the three pupil identities described by Archer. Which class and ethnic groups does each identity refer to?

The Examiner's Advice

Q4 Spend about 30 minutes on this question. Avoid lumping all ethnic minority groups together – describe the achievement patterns of specific named groups. Explain a range of factors outside schools that affect ethnic achievement, e.g. linguistic skills, attitudes and values, family structure, cultural deprivation, material deprivation and racism in society. Explain how each may affect achievement. Do this by creating a chain of reasoning (see page 248). For example, the authority model in Asian families mirrors school, so Asian pupils are more respectful towards teachers and work as instructed, leading to educational success. Use evidence from studies such as Murray, Pryce, Driver and Ballard, the Sutton Trust, Evans, Lupton and Sewell, and develop the points noted in Item A. You need to evaluate these factors. Make criticisms of each factor as you go, rather than in a separate section at the end. For example, discuss whether factors inside school, e.g. institutional racism, are more important than external factors in explaining black boys' underachievement.

Q5 Spend about 15 minutes on this question. Divide your time fairly equally between each factor. You don't need a separate introduction; just start on your first factor. To answer this question, it's essential that you take two points from the Item and show through a chain of reasoning how each one leads to ethnic differences in achievement. (It is a very good idea to quote from the Item for each factor.) You could use exam entries, allocation to sets or streams, or disciplining pupils. For example, institutional racism means some minority ethnic pupils are allocated to lower streams than their ability merits. This means their self-esteem is lowered so they cease to try, resulting in underachievement. Use concepts such as teachers' racialised expectations, pupil subcultures, the A -C economy, model minorities, the new IQM and ideal/pathologised/demonised pupil identities, and studies such as Gillborn and Youdell, Sewell, Mirza, Archer and Francis, and Bourne. Include some brief evaluation.