OVERCOMING THE DEFICIT MODEL: USING BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS OF TWELVE MIRPURI MALE GRADUATES FROM BRADFORD TO UNDERSTAND THE ATTAINMENT DISPARITY OF BME STUDENTS IN ENGLISH HIGHER EDUCATION

MOHAMMED BILAL NAZIR

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the growing ethnic attainment disparity in English higher education (HE). Research on the subject has attempted to explain how this disparity exists and what can be done to reduce it. Generally, a binary view is presented. On the one hand, the deficit model considers the correlation between entry qualifications and degree outcomes, concluding that BME students enter universities with sub-optimal courses not possessing the skills needed to achieve good degrees. On the other hand, the argument of institutional racism posits that the attainment disparity persists after prior qualifications are accounted for, suggesting that institutional racism within universities explains the attainment disparity. This thesis argues that prior qualifications are a strong factor in the ethnic attainment gap, in addition to the university setting. To overcome the deficit model this study uses biographical narratives of twelve Mirpuri male graduates from Bradford to chart their transition from level three vocational courses into HE. The findings suggest that Mirpuri students transition from further to higher education in relation to their individualised learning biographies and by utilising forms of ethnic capital. However, prior to entry, Mirpuri students are negatively impacted by racial warehousing, and a flawed vocational curricula which does not cultivate the skills needed for HE. Within the university context it is argued that vocational degree courses possessing more traditional academic characteristics exclude Mirpuri students by tasking them to succeed in an alien educational context. This thesis stresses that though structural discrimination is a major factor to low attainment, unique Mirpuri habitus helps to navigate the stated binary of institutional structures and racial deficits.

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# List of Abbreviations

BERA British Educational Research Association

BME Black Minority Ethnic

BTEC British Technical Education Council

CAT Colleges of Advance Technology

CNAA Council for National Academic Awards

CRT Critical Race Theory

FE Further Education

GNVQ General National Vocational Qualifications

HE Higher Education

HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for England

HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency

HEI Higher Education Institutes

HEIC Higher Education Institutes and Courses

IUT French University Institutes of Technology

LBU Leeds Beckett University

NCDAD National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design

NCTA National Council for Technological Awards

NCVQ National Council for Vocational Qualifications

NVQ National Vocational Qualifications

TLA Teaching, learning and assessment

UCAS Universities and Colleges Admission Service

VET Vocational Education and Training

# Introduction

*We do not really know whether ethnic differences in attainment are reflected in variations in the student experience. We do not know what factors are responsible for the ethnic differences in attainment that remain when differences in entry qualifications have been taken into account. Finally, we do not know what aspects of teaching and assessment practices are responsible for variations in the attainment gap.* (Richardson, 2015 p. 287)

It is well established that the black and minority ethnic (BME) students in England achieve fewer upper second class or first class (good) degrees, compared with their native white peers (Khan, 2019). Why this disparity exists has been part of ongoing debates since the expansion of higher education (HE) in 1992 and the ever-increasing participation of BME students (Richardson, 2015; Modood, 2004). This thesis builds upon the work done by a handful of researchers who are concerned about the ethnic attainment gap in English universities (Smith, 2017, Cotton et al, 2016, Richardson, 2008, 2015, Connor et al, 2004, 1996). Studies on BME attainment generally attempt to understand why BME students gain fewer good degrees and what can be done to reduce the attainment disparity (Hill et al, 2016). When exploring the ethnic attainment disparity as a phenomenon several antecedents emerge, making it difficult to discern where the problem areas are located (Richardson, 2015). The ethnic attainment disparity is a primary concern for ethnic minority groups as it contributes to what Shiner and Modood (2002) defined as a ‘cumulative pattern of ethnic disadvantage’, where BME groups are subject to various forms of exclusion within the UK tertiary education sector and are subsequently positioned unfavourably within the labour market (Slawson, 2017).

The concern with BME student attainment in HE has been exacerbated by the notion that class of degree attained has a strong correlation with employability (Khan 2019). The Bow Group report (2012) particularly highlighted how BME graduates are less likely to gain ‘good’ degrees and are three times as likely to be unemployed than their white peers. This comes at a critical moment in UK HE history where greater numbers of BME students are entering HE. Statistics from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2016) indicate that 29 per cent of the full-time degree students are from BME backgrounds, even though they represent only 18 per cent of students leaving compulsory schooling. The HEFCE data also indicates that from 2011 to 2016 there was a 34 per cent increase in BME student participation compared with a 5.5 per cent increase in white students during the same period. The increasing participation rates suggest that common barriers of exclusion faced by BME student groups are being resisted and overcome (Shah et al, 2010), however, the lower attainment levels, and consequently the unequal labour market entry, suggests a potentially discriminatory system that continues to marginalise (Zwysen and Longhi, 2018).

Data from the HEFCE’s (2014) report stated that after accounting for prior attainment, age, gender and degree subject, 61 per cent of BME students achieved first or upper second class degrees compared to 76 per cent of white students. Cotton et al (2016), further add that BME students had similar studying patterns to their white peers and were perceived, by their lecturers, as hard working, yet their attainment was below white students. The authors suggest that the attainment gap maybe due (1) lack of guidance upon entry and (2) limited support provided during their HE studies. This thesis builds on these conclusions by understanding how twelve Mirpuri male students transitioned from further to higher education, taking account of their racialised experiences as Mirpuri males from Bradford. This study is divided in two phases the first phase considers entry dynamics which include the Mirpuri male experience with level three courses; how Mirpuri males entered level three courses, and how they engaged with curricula, as well as, making their HE institution and course decisions. The second phase explores the Mirpuri male engagement with HE, namely in relation to university pedagogy and assessment (Singh, 2011 Richardson, 2015).

The focus on HE entry dynamics and student experience within institutions was considered important, as ongoing debates on the BME HE attainment is divided by a binary opinion of racial deficit and institutional racism (Sanders and Rose-Adams, 2014). The deficit position highlights the impact of student choices before entering, and during their HE studies, suggesting that the types of qualifications used to enter HE have the greatest impact on degree attainment, and as more BME students enter HE with low tariff scores i.e. with level three vocational courses, they are less qualified at a degree level compared to most white students who enter through the academic route (Leslie, 2003, 2005). Leslie (2005), who is considered a key advocate of this narrative has since been critiqued, yet the fact that BME students enter HE from mainly vocational courses and its detrimental impact on degree attainment is an undisputed point (Richardson, 2015). Arnold (2014) stated that ethnic differences are substantially diminished when prior qualifications are considered while Smith (2016) adds that social differences are also diminished when prior qualifications are considered. The deficit model has been given further credence by mostly quantitative studies that continue to correlate attainment data with prior qualifications without considering the BME experience before and during their time at university (Cotton et al, 2016).

The institutional racism model, on the other hand, points towards the residual attainment disparity that remains after prior qualifications have been accounted for (Sanders and Rose-Adams, 2014). The case is made that institutional racism in both explicit and implicit forms negatively impacts BME student attainment (Smith, 2017). Richardson (2008, 2011, 2015) who has been at the forefront of examining the ethnic attainment gap acknowledges, like Elias and Jones (2006), that BME students commonly have lower tariff scores upon entry (which implies that BME students enter HE with level three vocational courses). Additionally, the differences in entry scores are relatively fewer, when commencing HE, whilst the disparity in degree attainment is much wider, which suggests that differences in entry qualifications *partly* explain the difference in attainment. Other mix-method and more qualitative studies (Smith, 2017 Connor, et al 1996, 2004, Stevenson, 2012) have examined the institutional context where issues with regards to teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) have been highlighted as being exclusory to BME students and their unique cultural identities (Thomas and May, 2010). Other researchers on the subject have advanced the argument of institutional racism (Smith, 2017, Stevenson, 2012, Singh, 2011, Connor et al, 1998, 2004) which focuses on the institutional practices and the failure of faculties to overcome race related issues.

Nevertheless, Richardson (2015) states that prior qualifications accounts for up to half of the attainment disparity. This is a problematic statistic which suggests that prior qualifications cannot be ignored. Additionally, Richardson (2015) concludes that ethnicity per se cannot account for under-attainment rather the BME student educational journey, needs to be taken into consideration to identify accumulated inequalities from their compulsory and further education experience. In agreeing with Richardson (2015) this thesis argues that current literature on BME attainment does not take account of the BME student journey, particularly their transition from level three vocational courses. By undermining such transitional dynamics, the deficit model *appears* to provide greater explanatory power. By qualitatively exploring the two phases of the BME student journey, beginning with entry dynamics, followed by their experiences within HE, this thesis attempts to advance the argument of structural racism by highlighting various forms of discriminatory structures experienced by BME students before entering HE, and during their time within universities.

## The Mirpuri Community in Bradford

The Mirpuri male population was chosen for this study due to their unique social and cultural characteristics. Mirpuris are the largest cohort of the Pakistani minority community in the UK (Communities and Local Government Report, 2009). Emerging from the foothills of Kashmir in North West Pakistan, Mirpuris are considered distinct from their (mainly Punjabi) Pakistani counterparts (Kalra, 2000). The Mirpuris embody the more rural Kashmiri culture, in contrast to, the relatively urban Punjabis (Werbner, 1990). The Punjabis can be identified with their more indigenous Punjabi dialect, whilst the Mirpuris speak a form of Patwari or, as Bhatti (2013) calls it, Mirpuri Patwari; given that the mountainous terrain in Kashmir produces variations in dialect in relatively small distances. A further and more obvious distinction between the Punjabi and Mirpuri community is in their contrasting pre and post migration context. The Mirpuri community were very much part of a small district with strong attachment to the rural Kashmiri culture, and a greater reliance on the *biradari* (caste) system (Kalra, 2000). Historically, Mirpuris have also suffered from higher levels of poverty than the non-Mirpuris and a lack of, or no engagement, within an urban industrial society (Saifullah Khan, 1979). The Punjabi community, though, still relatively poor are considered to be more accustomed to various aspects of industrialisation as they migrated to Britain from major cities like Rawalpindi, Islamabad or their neighbouring villages (Shaw, 2000; Ballard, 1979; Saifullah khan, 1977; Singh 1987). It is also understood that the non-Mirpuri Pakistanis have been able to achieve better social mobility in Britain akin to their Indian counterparts (Werbner, 1990). Saifullah-khan (1979) stated:

*…sections of the urban population in Pakistan are exposed to considerable westernisation and modernisation and thus migrants to Britain from this background are better prepared and face fewer stresses on arrival’ (p. 48). Whilst ‘…the Mirpur villager does not possess the social skills or the documentation demanded by a complex bureaucratic system. (p. 49).*

In addition to their distinct socio-economic context, the Mirpuri migratory and settlement history is also unique. Kalra’s (2000) work on the Mirpuri migration and settlement brings to light two characteristics that are unique to the Mirpuri migrants. First, Kalra (2000) notes that, even prior to the Pakistani independence in 1947, Mirpuris had created an ‘environment of migration’ due to the discriminatory practices of Sikh rulers upon the Muslim population, which led many Muslims from Mirpur to migrate to various cities in what was then British India. Many of these migrants found work on British steam ships and, during the inter-war period, were amongst the first Mirpuri migrants to arrive in Britain (Saifullah Khan, 1979).

Second, the Mirpuri population was required to permanently relocate to new areas within the Kashmir region due to the construction of the Mangla Dam in 1961. The construction of the Mangla Dam was a landmark event in the history of the Mirpuris, particularly those who migrated to Britain (Saifullah Khan, 1979; Kalra, 2000). The construction of the dam meant that the Mirpur district was required to become part of the dam reservoir, forcing the Mirpuris to relocate elsewhere. This was a traumatic experience as over 100,000 Mirpuris were forced to leave their ancestral homes and re-establish in other parts of the region, leaving behind their cultural heritage and their familiar surroundings. As a result of the stress caused by the relocation, the Mirpuri community was compensated for the damage by the state of Pakistan, in accordance with previous land-holdings (Anwar, 1979). And though legislative controls were underway, via the Commonwealth Migration Act of 1962, the Pakistani government promoted the migration of over 5000 people to Britain. ‘This was intended to help some of the Mirpuri families due to be dispossessed by the construction of the Mangla Dam, but also included some people not affected by the dam project.’ (Rose, 1969 p. 71).

According to Rahim (1995) a deal was struck, after the relocation of the Mirpuris in 1965 between Ayub Khan - Pakistan’s president at the time – and the British government to give priority to the Mirpuris in the allocation of the work vouchers. By utilising the capital acquired through compensation and the political support provided by the state of Pakistan, Mirpuri men throughout the district made their way to Britain as a way of rebuilding their lives (Saifullah Khan, 1979). The Mangla dam experience is unique to the Mirpuris, in comparison to all other Commonwealth migrants, who arrived in Britain in the 1960s. The Mangla Dam can also be seen as the catalyst to the ‘mass’ migration of Mirpuris to the UK, contrasting with the more normative chain migration experienced by other Pakistanis (Kalra, 2000; Anwar, 1979). As a result, Mirpuris have come to comprise the largest sub-group of the British Pakistani community, constituting approximately 70 per cent of the British Pakistani population (Lothers and Lothers, 2012).

In relation to settlement, the migrants that arrived in UK from Mirpur and are reported to have experienced discriminatory practices by the host society, particularly in relation to housing (Rex and Moore, 1697) which may have led to the formation of concentrated Mirpuri communities in the inner wards of Bradford. Dahya’s (1974) early study of the Mirpuris in Bradford also points to caste networks (biradari), which were strengthened in the process of migration and have led to the British Mirpuri community being organised in parallel lines to the caste networks established in Mirpur (Shaw,2000; Anwar, 1979) This is in comparison to the other non-Mirpuri diaspora (predominantly from Punjab) which settled in major cities like Manchester (Werbner, 1990) and are perceived to exhibit less ‘stress’ (see Saifullah-Khan, 1979) in integrating within an urban Western city. It is plausible to suggest that normative chain migration, as experienced by non-Mirpuri Pakistani migrants, eased the process of integration to the demands of a distinct host community. Werbner’s (1990) study of Pakistanis in Manchester highlights this difference where the Punjabi migrants, predominantly from Jhelum, exhibit increased social mobility, amongst the second and third generation, whereas the Mirpuri community in Bradford continues to be dealing with issues of poverty and is generally criticised for not desiring integration (Bunting, 2018, Akhtar, 2013).

The unique migratory and settlement history of the Mirpuri community in the UK has generated substantive literature on the way the Mirpuri communities have organised (Samad, 1992, Shain, 2011). The highly insulated Mirpuri enclaves within the inner wards of northern post-industrial cities have become tropes for those wanting to discuss either the failures of multiculturalism (Parkinson, 2012), on the one hand, or the disenfranchised experiences of Britain’s ethnic minorities on the other (Miah, 2015). Many of the Mirpuri students’ educational history is constituted by attending schools within what Dahya (1974) called ‘ethnic boundaries’. Mirpuri students in Bradford commonly attend schools within a majority Mirpuri community and are negatively impacted by intersectional factors of race, class gender and more recently religion (Kitwood and Borrill, 1980; Bagguley and Hussain, 2017; Miah, 2017).

This is particularly the case in Bradford which hosts the highest concentration of the South Asian diaspora in the UK at 26.8 per cent of the total population, of which, the Pakistani/Mirpuri community comprise 20.4 per cent (City of Bradford Met Council, 2017). The concentration of Mirpuri communities within the inner wards of Bradford is further augmented by Bradford’s overhaul socio-economic context which is one of the most disenfranchised local authorities in England (Jenkins, 2018). The most recent data release from the Department for Education (2017) indicates that 38.2 per cent of Bradford’s students are disadvantaged (eligible for free school meals) and have a 45.7 attainment score in secondary school which is well below the 50.1 national average. It is clear, that those who enter HE from amongst the Mirpuri community in Bradford are from a population who experience several disenfranchising circumstances. These factors make the Bradford Mirpuri university student, the quintessential non-traditional HE student, whose engagement in HE requires careful examination.

The Mirpuri male population experiences greater disadvantage due to their gendered identity. It should be noted that the literature on educational attainment does not demarcate the Mirpuri male population as a distinct population of students, which means the following points are made in light of the studies on Pakistani and/or Muslim male population in general. It is an established fact that the Pakistani male students are the lowest performing university students amongst the South Asian minorities, second only to the African male students (Advance HE, 2018, Richardson, 2015). Though HE attainment research does not discuss why the Pakistani *male* students are amongst the lowest performing students, the notion that girls are outperforming boys in schools is another established fact (Kuper and Jacobs, 2014). The gender attainment gap has been discussed to be the result of shifting perceptions of girls in schools and their roles in society, namely due to the rise of feminism and greater accessibility of women in the workforce (Archer, 2003).

Some of the recent data reflects this gender attainment gap, chiefly in relation to ethnic minority females. The recent Advance HE report (2018) showed that UK universities host 93,730 South Asian females compared with 83,380 South Asian males. Additionally, 69.6 per cent of South Asian females gained an upper second-class degree compared with 67.3 per cent of their male counterparts. This suggests that South Asian females were not only participating in greater numbers but also attaining better degrees than South Asian male.

Malik and Wytes (2018) also report that more Muslim females were participating in HE than males and were more successful, in relation to attaining their desired degrees. Their data shows that Muslim female participation is 3 per cent higher than Muslim males and that the females were 17.2 per cent more likely to gain their desired degrees than their Muslim male peers. Khattab and Modood (2017), comment on these developments arguing that a stronger Islamic identity is allowing females to overcome some of the barriers to success that can be observed in traditional Asian attitudes towards women and education, or perhaps Muslim females suspect greater disadvantage in the labour market which incentivises an ethos of educational success.

The lower participation and attainment of Muslim males observed within all stages of their educational journey can be a result of many factors (Malik and Wytes, 2018, Khattab and Modood, 2017). With regards to Mirpuri/Pakistani male students a growing body of literature is highlighting how the Islamic identity of Pakistani males in general and the Mirpuri males from Bradford in particular (see Akhtar, 2013) is being framed as a national threat (Miah, 2017). Bradford’s Mirpuri male community took centre stage in the media discourse due to the book burning event in 1989 (Akhtar, 2013) followed by the 2001 race riots in Bradford. Other major events such as the September 11 attacks in New York, the 2005 London bombings, the 2017 attacks in Manchester and London have particularly contributed to the rise of Islamophobia in Britain (Marsh, 2018). This has fuelled the image of the Pakistani male as a violent, radical Muslim, opposed to the ways of the West. Within the context of HE the implementation of UK’s counter terror measure - the Prevent strategy – further contributes to the vilifying of Muslim students in general who are always ‘under the gaze of the many’ and seen as a suspect community (Bagguley and Hussain, 2017). This context further isolates the Mirpuri males from Bradford within HE, who are not only excluded due to their racial identity but also due to their gender, religion and perhaps affiliation to Bradford as a locality (Stevenson, 2018).

The research methodology was subsequently based on gaining rich qualitative data from twelve Mirpuri graduates from Bradford who have traversed the contemporary English HE sector, graduating at different points over the last 13 years. The various themes in this thesis analyse the further and higher education experiences of Mirpuri male students who are a product of working class ethnic minority circumstance (Akhtar, 2013; Shain, 2011 Kalra, 2000). It develops the discourse on a group of racialised students who are marginalised and are affected by structural forms of discrimination before and during their university experiences. The focus on entry dynamics, also necessitates an exploration of the English vocational education and training (VET) sector and the forms of marginalisation that are experienced by BME students when transitioning from further to higher education.

## Theoretical Framework

By taking account of the above factors, the present study employs a number of theoretical models to assist in explaining the experiences of Bradford Mirpuri male students as they transition from further to higher education. The first theoretical framework applied in this study is Bourdieu’s theory on cultural conflict which, in the context of HE, argues that working class students are disadvantaged within the cultural domain and excluded from the general HE academic experience (Holton, 2018). A substantive portion of Bourdieu’s work has been a polemical discussion on France’s expansion of HE and the struggles of non-traditional students interacting with a culturally elite field (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979, Bourdieu, Passeron and Martin, 1996). Bourdieu emphasises the experiences of non-traditional students, who bring with them cultural practices and values that contradict the ‘objective’ culture of the university field, thus limiting their chances of being successful (Bourdieu, 1988). Lane (1998) similarly stresses that Bourdieu’s descriptions on what happens when a new type of student enters ‘a teaching body imbued with a set of cultural, intellectual and linguistic assumptions… have a particular resonance in British universities in the wake of the mass expansion in student numbers of the early 1990’s’ (p. 308). Bourdieu’s work thus provides the primary theoretical framework to examine the Mirpuri male entry and experience of HE, particularly the notion of cultural capital and its exclusionary nature.

The second theoretical model applied in this thesis is Critical Race theory (CRT) which maintains that society is racially divided where white people and white structures dominate by subordinating non-white bodies and forms of expression (Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT is critical of much of liberal scholarship including Bourdieu, insisting that the issue of race is undermined by a focus on class where white privilege continues to be fostered (Yosso, 2005). The use of CRT ensures that the unique cultural attributes of the Mirpuri males are not undermined by a generic understanding of cultural capital which positions middle class white forms of capital as the ideal, and the cultural attributes of minorities as secondary. Unique cultural attributes that are exhibited within England’s South Asian communities are the positive norms regarding education and the ethos of educational success (Noden et al, 2014a, Abbas, 2004). Modood (2004) defined this as ethnic capital which represents the value systems that are transmitted mainly from parents to children which encourages participation in HE. Ethnic capital is thus a valuable form of capital that Mirpuri students have developed in the dense Mirpuri localities within Bradford that assist them in progressing towards HE. This is generally exhibited in the collective practices amongst Mirpuri students who provide knowledge and assistance to each other in the various stages of their HE experience.

CRT also allows us to examine structural forms of racism that exist within universities which creates intersectional forms of discrimination for Mirpuri students who are both non-white and from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A particular analytical model that attempts to locate the racially distinctive experience of BME students within the context of vocational education is the notion of ‘racial warehousing’. Avis et al (2017) defined racial warehousing as a form of ‘ghettoisation’ of BME students towards low valued vocational courses, which limits their development in terms of equal labour market entry and, according to others, in developing skills for better participation in HE (Hatt and Baxter, 2003, Williams, 2000). Avis et al (2017) state that such warehousing is a product of late capitalism where high surplus in labour funnels ethnic minority students to level three vocational courses and subsequently into HE as they do not possess the social capital utilised by their working class peers to enter apprenticeships.

The third theoretical model applied in this thesis is the theory of academic drift. Academic drift is utilised to better understand the BME student engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. Academic drift generally refers to the evolution of vocational HE institutions and courses (HEICs) towards more traditional academic practices, which generally excludes non-traditional learner from the institutional setting and the curriculum, as they are less familiar with traditional academic practices (Burgess and Pratt, 1970, Pratt and Burgess, 1974; Pratt, 1997, Tight, 2012). This can range from: (1) the broadening of learning content which requires the student to engage with a wide range of topics. (2) The increasing use of progressive teaching methods which encourages limited contact with tutors. (3) The change in assessment, where theoretical knowledge is tested using traditional forms of assessment, such as essays and examinations. The use of academic drift is seminal in making sense of the Mirpuri male experience for two primary reasons, firstly because Mirpuri males, like most other non-traditional students enter HE as vocational students seeking to gain a qualification that will better their future employment (McDonald, 2019). And secondly because most Mirpuri students enter former Colleges of Advanced Technology (CAT) or polytechnic institutions that generally have a vocational ethos and are marketed as institutions that are committed to developing the vocational skills amongst students (Noden et al, 2014b, Boliver, 2015). Academic drift challenges this point by stating that though vocational HEICs are marketed as being occupationally relevant their practices are very much academic that do not fulfil the vocational needs of non-traditional students.

Factors such racial warehousing, and academic drift bring to the fore the structural limitations that are present in the BME entry into HE and within vocational HEICs respectively which limits their chances of gaining good degrees. The issue of low BME attainment in HE is thus seen in light of the various inequalities present within the English tertiary education system which allows more disenfranchised students, like the Mirpuris, to participate in HE in greater numbers, but systematically discriminates them in the process of attaining good degrees.

## Research Aims and Questions

The main aims of this study are:

* To examine the transition of Mirpur students from level three vocational courses to degree courses and its impact on attainment
* To explore the Mirpuri male engagement with university pedagogy within vocational HEICs
* To examine the Mirpuri male experience with university assessment within vocational HEICs

The subsequent research questions are:

1. How do Mirpuri male students from Bradford enter level three vocational courses?
2. Do Mirpuri male students from Bradford experience racial warehousing?
3. How do Mirpuri male students from Bradford engage with level three vocational courses and how best do they prepare them for HE?
4. How do Mirpuri male students from Bradford make their HEIC choices?
5. How do Mirpuri male students engage with university pedagogy within vocational HEICs?
6. How do Mirpuri male students engage with university assessment within vocational HEICs?
7. How do all the factors above impact the Mirpuri male degree attainment?

## Organisation of the thesis

Chapter two provides a discussion on the various theoretical frameworks applied in this study. The discussion of the theoretical framework at the onset of this thesis ensures greater clarity and coherency with regards to how the literature is reviewed, the methodology adopted, and how data is analysed. To give one example, Bourdieu’s theories require a comprehensive study of particular cultures and the interaction of group members within culturally defined fields (Reay, 2004). As a result, chapter three, which is the literature review chapter, discusses the migratory and settlement history, and the current milieu of the Mirpuri community in Bradford to understand the cultural trajectory of Mirpuri male students and how this impacted their educational practice. This is followed by analysing the literature on BME attainment in HE and how the present thesis attempts to contribute to the discussion of BME transition from level three vocational courses into HE. This aspect of the thesis is primarily driven by CRT and the notion of ‘rational warehousing’ which is concerned with race, namely in recognising structural racism that excludes BME students. The final section of the literature review chapter explores how the theory of academic drift has been applied in the English HE context and its impact on disenfranchised students. Chapter four is concerned with methodology. Central to the methodology is the use of biographical interviews which provide insight into the experiences of Mirpuri males as they transitioned from level three courses to degree courses. Biographical narratives generate counter-narratives to overcome the deficit model which is a primary concern of critical race theorist (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Sablan, 2019). Chapters five, six and seven present the findings which deal with level three course choices and the Mirpuri male engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. The theoretical framework plays a central role in interpreting and analysing the interview accounts. Chapter eight presents the conclusion and implications for further research.

# Chapter Two: Theory

## Introduction

This chapter presents a number of distinct, yet inter-related, frameworks which are utilised to theoretically position this study and make sense of the biographical accounts of the twelve Mirpuri male graduates from Bradford. The first section of this chapter presents Bourdieu’s theoretical models which attempt to broadly elucidate conflicting practices of a population of students within a culturally imbued social structure (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Thereafter, Modood’s (2004) concept of ethnic capital is explored to recognise, and make sense of, the types of practices Mirpuri males enact to resist discriminatory barriers that could hinder their progress towards entering HE and participating in it. The second section of this chapter presents Critical Race Theory (CRT) which brings to the fore the distinctly racial character of the Mirpuri male students experiences. The academy is argued to possess both socially and racially oppressive structures that undermine the cultural assets of people of colour, requiring the Mirpuri students from Bradford to overcome intersectional forms of discrimination in order to attain good degrees (Bhopal, 2018). The third section of this chapter discusses the theory of academic drift which provides insight into the field of English HE, primarily in highlighting the curricular and pedagogical context of ‘new’ or post 1992 universities (Pratt, 1997). Academic drift considers the context of vocational HE and how it has evolved to exclude the non-traditional student (Pratt, 1997).

These theoretical frameworks are employed in articulating both symbolic and practical obstacles that the Mirpuri students face during their HE experiences which have the greatest impact on their chances of gaining good degrees. These theories become primary models of application, not only due to their emphasis on racially orientated social practice but also the acute focus on the education sector as the basis of microaggression and cultural reproduction (Gillborn, 2005; Christensen and Erno-Kjolhede 2011; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu (1979) and Modood’s (2004) models assist in making sense of the forms of capital embodied by the Mirpuri male habitus which can limit, as well as, incentivise progression and participation in HE. CRT highlights the racial dimension of the Mirpuri HE experiences, and the white hegemony that hinders the ability of Mirpuri students to attain good degrees. The theory of academic drift brings to the fore discriminatory aspects of the field of vocational HE in England, and its impact on Mirpuri students’ attainment in HE.

## Bourdieu’s Framework

Bourdieu fundamentally deals with conflicts of status amongst socially stratified groups (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu’s theory rests upon the notion that individuals inherit cultural practices - given their class position - which allows them to gain or lose status within a socially defined field (Weininger, 2002). The group or individual, occupying the inferior social position, is judged by those who are culturally dominant. If there is any lapse in showcasing disinterested and culturally aligned practices, the group or the individual is unable to acquire equal status, as legitimacy is questioned and scrutinised by the dominant group (Reay, 2004). Entry into an elite faction is actualised in the person’s reputability amongst the culturally dominant, ordaining the individual with the authority to legitimise cultural practices (Webb et al, 2002).

The drive to maintain cultural distinctions is further conflicted by the necessity of showcasing valued cultural practice. To increase the value of distinct practices, individuals must showcase their tastes to other members within a particular field (Moore, 2014). Bourdieu (1977) argues that this is done with efficacy if the individual is successful in convincing others of *disinterested* action,and in averting any suspicion of being politically motivated. Consequently, agents that hold positions of distinction within a field will display their elite status through symbols such as language, bodily characteristics, leisure activities, food, art etc. (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). Bourdieu defined this display of abstract distinction as ‘symbolic violence’ imposed upon those who are perceived to have lower valued cultural practices (Watson and Widin, 2015).

Robbins (1999), understands Bourdieu as a theorist attempting to uncover deep meanings in human actions where status is utilised as a form of capital in order to dominate others, particularly when an individual or a group of people are required to participate in an alien social and cultural context. Within the educational domain this translates into schools and universities becoming tools to reproduce elite culture, orchestrating perceptions and allowing those who have ‘the right cultural attributes’ the advantage of utilising elite systems in the best possible way (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Moore, 2014). Bourdieu’s work has opened up a vista of discussions on the reproduction of elite culture within education, distancing those who have not embodied the dominant psyche, by way of symbolic stratification. Bourdieu’s models and ideas have become ubiquitous in social research in general, and education research in particular, namely in highlighting issues of social inequality (see Ball et al 2002).

Bourdieu’s foundational claims have raised many critical challenges, primarily in his belief that individuals *unconsciously* embody their cultural practices by virtue of their class position, thus favouring a structuralist line of argument (Jenkins, 1982). Bourdieu opposed such criticism and defined his theories as ‘constructivist structuralism’ (Joas and Knobl, 2011). Constructivist structuralism entails an acceptance of structures divorced from agency as the basis of reality, whilst recognising that these structures had a social genesis through group interaction and socialisation (Garrett, 2007). For Bourdieu, the individual is not a completely unconscious entity, defined by social structure but consciously acting out social and cultural norms to seek symbolic profit. People, according to Bourdieu can manipulate rules and patterns, they are not merely passive objects of social classification (Grenfell, 2013). Bourdieu’s models presume that though working class students, like the Mirpuri students in this study, will inherently be limited in cultural attributes to enter, and succeed within universities. They will, however, remain conscious of their lower social standing and attempt to negotiate their engagement within the field of education.

Bourdieu’s essential claims rest upon the idea that individuals are unconscious of their embodied culture, but, aware of the cultural structures in which they participate, and so, human action in following rules is a masking of real interests (Webb et al, 2002). Bourdieu’s sociology of Algeria in the 1950s; and his observations of the ‘duals of honour’ amongst the Kabyle tribe became the genesis of his theoretical framework; latter developing to explore cultural reproduction, taste and education within Prussian society (Robbins 1999). It is from these observations that we are introduced to the three inter-related models of field, habitus and cultural capital (Reay 2004).

## Field

A field is understood as a social space in which the dominant group(s) strengthen and reproduce their dominance through exchange and maintenance of cultural practices (Watson and Widin, 2015). According to Bourdieu, this is achieved by legitimising the practices of the dominant group and subordinating the practices of others (Bourdieu, 1984). Those within the lower strata of the field hierarchy are inclined or pulled by the ‘magnetic nature’ of the field to conduct themselves or display tastes which are esteemed, whilst the dominant will invest in ensuring that their practices remain distinct (Swartz, 2016). Bourdieu demarcates two distinct types of fields; ‘fields of power’ and ‘sub-fields’. Fields of power are viewed primarily as the political and economic fields which exert great influence on most other fields (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Sub-fields, in contrast, are characterised by distinct cultures developed within occupations, professions, crafts, art and sports, all of which have a dominant ‘culture of practice’ and a hierarchy, despite being susceptible to influence from other fields of power (Webb et al, 2002). This thesis primarily engages with the field of English HE, which is a sub-field that has gone through drastic reform over the last half century due to global technological developments (Zeleza, 2016). Section three of this chapter is a detailed discussion on the field of English HE. The theory of academic drift has been applied to understand the development of a relatively new field, which is the field of *vocational* HE. Vocational HE within the English context can be argued to have initiated with the civic universities in the late 20th century (Whyte, 2015, Barnes, 1996), followed by the former CATs in 1964 (Burgess and Pratt, 1970) and former polytechnic institutions in 1992 (Pratt, 1997). Academic drift is a way of understanding the field of vocational HE and how it has evolved in the direction of traditional academia which has compromised the provisions to cultivate a distinct vocational HE sector (Pratt and Burgess, 1974).

Lane (1998) highlights certain points of criticism in field dynamics arguing that Bourdieu does not fully articulate the transitioning relationships between fields of power and sub-fields. Lane (1998) questions how fields of power engage with potentially new formations within sub-fields, where those with low cultural capital and limited autonomy become commercially and culturally dominant. Bourdieu’s absence of articulating this possibility, and the possibilities that may arise from field transitions, suggests that hierarchies within the field are static, whereby the culturally elite will continue to occupy a small but culturally dominant position, whilst those who do not have highly valued cultural characteristics will remain inferior. This thesis recognises the static nature of Bourdieu’s field dynamics, whilst simultaneously recognising its utility in highlighting the conflict between dominant and subordinate groups within a field. It should be noted that Bourdieu advised that his models are tools for social analysis and not a means to advocate a political or ideological viewpoint (Bourdieu and Waqcuant, 1992). Bourdieu’s models are not utilised to generate any predictive value, rather his models assist in generating descriptive richness which assist in understanding the tensions that may exist between Mirpuri males from Bradford, who are the new entrants in the field of HE (Shah, et al, 2010), and the white middle-class members of English society, who occupy positions of authority within it (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979).

## Habitus

The second of Bourdieu’s theoretical models is habitus. Habitus denotes something possessed or embodied rather than just being acquired or maintained (Nash, 1999). Habitus is the disposition of an individual sculpted by ones’ cultural trajectory, and current socio-economic circumstance, which restricts or aids an individual depending on the field in which it is situated (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The habitus is positioned and manifests itself in a field, as well as, being moulded by the objective structures of a particular field (Bourdieu, 1984). Additionally, habitus is a misrecognition or an unconscious forgetfulness of where and how the categories of classification originated; a naturalisation of one’s socio-economical and historical background; habitus thus refers to both the cognitive dispositions and physical bodily dispositions (bodily hexis) (Reay 2004). Habitus is also malleable and does not necessarily entail that dispositions are static, it is subject to modifications which are contingent upon the social position it occupies, albeit modifying gradually (Webb et al, 2002). The physical dispositions and the categorisation internalised from the cultural history of agents, remains with the individual whilst transitioning across diverse and distinct fields. The habitus is a powerful tool that allows us to fully examine the Mirpuri males. The habitus entails that we understand the Mirpuri males in relation to their migratory and settlement history, as ethnic minorities from Bradford and how these factors manifest as the Mirpuri males enter and participate in HE. By understanding the field of HE, and the Mirpuri male habitus we can pinpoint how aspects of the field exclude Mirpuri students, impeding their chances of gaining good degrees, as well as, the strategies employed by Mirpuri students to resist oppression.

It is in Bourdieu’s assertion that the habitus is an unconscious naturalising of a field’s hierarchy that has been subject to much controversy, where habitus simply becomes a structuralist trope (Joas and Knobl, 2011). Herzberg (2006) argues that because Bourdieu defined the habitus as ‘an all-embracing “generative, unifying principle,” which “causes the characteristic style of an individual to form a totality with its own physiognomy” (p.39), there is no conceptual room for the habitus to develop. Herzberg (2006) develops the notion of a ‘biographical learning habitus’ which recognises that primary socialisation impacts *groups* of students who come from similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This primary ‘habitus’, however, is always in a state of ‘becoming’ in relation to the ‘individuals’ learning experience. This individualised development of the habitus is what Herzberg (2006) defines as the ‘biographical’ element of the learning habitus. The biographical learning habitus thus embodies aspects of primary socialisation whilst remaining in a state of transition given a student’s individual learning experience. Herzberg (2006) states that the biographical learning habitus can develop due to individuals’ educational aspirations, coping strategies, transitions in different fields, and to what extent students are aware of their own abilities by reflecting on their biography. Others like Hodkinson (1998) also spoke of the habitus being in a constant state of evolution as it confronts new structures where new ‘horizons of practice’ are realised.

Colley et al (2003) propose an analogous model of ‘vocational habitus’ which are dispositions demanded by specific vocational cultures. Colley et al (2003) argue that students transition from an ‘idealised vocational habitus’ (upon entering a new vocational learning environment) to a ‘realised vocational habitus’ (once they have matured within a particular vocational culture). Colley et al (2003) provide the example of students entering engineering training which values, and seeks to cultivate, dispositions of being logical and detached. These dispositions tend to be *idealised* by students, before entering their training, but upon completing the course the *realised* habitus also demands the emotion of comfort and belonging within a community of practice. In relation to this study the Mirpuri males have deeply embedded dispositions that are a product of working class Mirpuri culture in Bradford which accounts for practices shared by all Mirpuri participants, these include forms of speech, hobbies and various tastes, however, each Mirpuri student’s habitus is in a state of transition based on their individual learning biographies (Herzberg, 2006). In other words, Mirpuri students will cultivate new practices and strategies to negotiate a learning environment. Mirpuri students will thus have diverse ‘horizons of practice’ based on individual success and failures within schools, which impacts their transition from further to higher education and their experiences within universities.

## Cultural Capital

Bourdieu’s third interrelated model is cultural capital which expresses the exchange of ‘honoured practice’. It is what the habitus embodies by displaying its specific tastes and practices, allowing the individual or groups, to acquire symbolic profit or loss according to how familiar or distant it is to the dominant culture of a field (Bennett et al 2009). This means that individuals possess knowledge of cultural norms such as tastes, and forms of speech that are privileged in society. It is a concept developed from its economic antecedent and so equating culture to an object of exchange that can be used to accrue profit. ‘Cultural capital then is comprised of ‘linguistic and cultural competence’ and a broad knowledge of culture that belongs to members of upper classes and is found much less frequently among the lower classes’ (Dumais, 2002 p. 44). Robbins (1999) presents cultural capital, by illustrating its economic parallel suggesting that the manner in which successful exchange of money transforms one’s economic position, social position is transformed by the embodied cultural tastes ‘in as much the cultural system assigns more value to some tastes than to others’ (Robbins, 1999 p. 32).

In relation to HE, cultural capital is incorporated within HE institutions (HEIs) not as explicit elements of university pedagogy and assessment but as the ‘unwritten rules’ of institutional culture that all students are expected to know. As a result, Mirpuri students from Bradford who embody cultural attributes that belong to working class ethnic minority groups have a disadvantage within universities because the cultural capital they enter the field with does not readily facilitate their engagement within it. Conversely, students from middle class white backgrounds have an advantage as they possess forms of capital that ensures their understanding of the ‘unwritten rules’ (Crozier Reay, 2011). Much of the literature that discusses the experiences of non-traditional students in HE has applied the cultural capital model to make sense of their experiences. Nairz-wirth et al (2017) for example mention how non-traditional students have generally been taught with the assistance of trained teachers which creates tensions when non-traditional students are required to work independently at universities. Nairz-wirth et al (2017) argue that non-traditional student habitus requires additional nurturing to ensure independent learning can be implemented as an efficient form of pedagogy. Moskal’s (2016) observation of non-traditional students conducting examinations suggested that in order for non-traditional students to compete with traditional students they must develop their academic language proficiency; concluding that assessments are not objective measures of students’ abilities. Similarly, this thesis considers the demands of university pedagogy and assessment by taking account of the ‘unwritten rules’ embedded within institutional culture that potentially impede the Mirpuri male students’ chances of gaining a good degree.

Though the present thesis is primarily concerned with forms of cultural capital embodied by HE institutes (HEIs) and how that limits Mirpuri students attempting to succeed within them, the discussion on university entry will also apply cultural capital to identify the forms of capital cultivated as a result of participating in level three vocational courses. This application of cultural capital is inspired by Ecclestone’s (2004) study on the types of cultural and social capital that is developed within students on outcome-based vocational courses. Ecclestone (2004) states that vocational courses using outcome-based assessment do not develop the right kinds of social and cultural capital that students need for success in HE. Outcome-based assessment cultivates what Ecclestone (2004) defined as the ‘comfort zone’ ethos where students are not incentivised to challenge themselves and develop complex skills as the achievement of outcomes becomes the primary source of focus, compromising engagement with learning content. Ecclestone (2004) essentially points towards the failures of applying progressive pedagogy within a narrowly defined assessment framework, where the loss of authority by the teacher due to outcome-assessment creates a culture of ‘tick box’ assessment (Fisher, 2003).

In examining cultural capital Goldhorpe (2007) points towards the inherent contradictions between cultural capital and the present socio-political context. Goldthorpe (2007) argues that the issue of upper members of society possessing more valued forms of capital which they pass on to their children is undermined within more progressive and open societies where subordinate members of a society are given access to high culture and are able to achieve upward social mobility. Goldthorpe’s critique of Bourdieu’s models reflects similar critiques of others such as Lane, (1998), who argued that Bourdieu’s models do not create a conceptual space to articulate social change, particularly as cultural dynamics are in transition (Watkins, 2017; Prieur and Savage, 2013). Nevertheless, cultural capital, can allow for a more complex and dynamic social reality, once perceived beyond Bourdieu’s Franco-centric application (Prieur and Savage, 2013). Bourdieu’s limitation is in the examination of scenarios in which social transformations may occur and how that would affect the field (Lane, 1998). Bourdieu, in principle, suggests that there is a potentiality for subordinate cultural practices to increase or decrease in value but, in most cases, does not suggest how this would be actualised. As stated above this thesis is seeking to analyse the experience of Mirpuri students as they transition from level three vocational courses to degree courses. Bourdieu’s theories are not being applied to discuss the macro transitions of fields (Lane, 1998), or how progressive society may have become (Goldthorpe, 2008). Rather, this study focuses on points of ‘stress’ where the university imposes its cultural dominance upon Mirpuri students and how such forms of dominance are negotiated, by the Bradford Mirpuri habitus.

## Ethnic capital

Bourdieu’s concept of capitals has inspired numerous analytical models that assist in identifying positive and negative forms of capital that individuals embody when they enter specific fields or social spaces (see Miller, 2016 for *white capital*, see Yosso, 2005 for *aspirational capital*). These models have been applied in examining the experiences of ethnic minority students in many ways, taking account of various intersectional factors that impact their experiences. Modood’s (2004) concept of ethnic capital for example sheds light on some of the advantageous forms of capital embodied by South Asian minorities that allows them to overcome obstacles commonly faced by white working class students. Modood (2004) argues that the general Bourdieuisan analysis of utilising cultural capital as an analytical tool can assist in explaining the low white working class student participation within HE, but it cannot explain the high participation of South Asian students ~~participants~~, many of whom also belong to working class families. Modood (2004) suggests that community relationships (mainly amongst South Asian migrants) become key determinants of student participation in HE, where senior family members or other associates in the community enforce norms and provide assistance and knowledge on how to progress towards HE.

Modood’s (2004) concept of ethnic capital takes account of three socially interconnected dimensions, these include: (1) familial adult – child relationships (2) transmission of aspirations and attitudes (3) norms enforcement. Modood (2004) states that the familial child relationship consists of developing a goal orientated identity, within children by parents, which allows them to progress into HE in greater numbers. Such norms are reinforced by the dense localities where structures of support are established to achieve upward social mobility.

The primary mode by which ethnic capital is generated, mobilised and deployed amongst the Mirpuri communities in Bradford is through traditional caste networks best known as biradari groups. Though biradari implies caste relations it has a greater range of meaning and can be understood multifariously. Its indigenous Persian meaning implies brotherhood manifesting in the Mirpuri case by the occupations of families who are, but not exclusively, the descendants of a singular paternal line (Akhtar 2013). The biradari functions like an extended family with members helping and supporting each other while simultaneously exhibiting power struggles. Individual Mirpuri parents will instil a goal orientated identity amongst their children which ensures their progression towards HE while the biradari network in general provides assistance by exchanging valuable knowledge on how to progress through the education system. This thesis applies biradari as an analytical tool based on the following definition:

‘the specific meaning of biradari depends on the frame of reference and levels of contact, such as an endogamous group, those who belong to one quom (sub-caste), those who became friends in Britain at the time of migration and settlement, those who live in one area, those who work together and so on.’ (Anwar, 1979 p.64).

Anwar’s (1979) definition of biradari extends biradari networks beyond the genealogical affiliations; biradari relations can expand and contract subject to the context. Two Mirpuri males working together as colleagues and being in close contact over a prolonged period of time could lead to biradari like bonds - analogous to genealogical affiliations - where similar support structures and power asymmetries can be observed. This thesis applies the term biradari to describe not only the close networks between immediate and extended family members, but also the friendship groups that are formed amongst Mirpuri students during their primary, and secondary schooling which are strengthened in what Shain (2011) called ‘neighbourhood power dynamics’. These ‘student’ biradari groups remain intact throughout their entire schooling phase, as well as, HE, impacting the decisions made by Mirpuri students and the means by which Mirpuri students navigate through the education system.

With that said, Shah et al (2010), caution on viewing ethnic capital as a generalised concept that impacts all South Asian groups, rather, the type of ethnic capital available to various ethnic groups remains subject to the distinct social structures that encompass them. South Asian students can be limited in forms of ethnic capital depending on their particular socio-economic status and localities. Bradford’s dense working class Mirpuri community for example, generates forms of ethnic capital which encourages greater participation in HE but does not necessarily ensure that Mirpuri students will enter research-intensive universities and/or be successful in degree outcomes. Consequently, this thesis applies both ethnic and cultural capital to bring to the fore the multitude of ways in which Mirpuri students interact with the education system. Where Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital highlights the socially oppressive structures within the field of HE, which accounts for HE entry through the vocational track and low attainment, ethnic capital highlights the characteristics that allow for collaboration and progression towards HE amongst Mirpuri males from Bradford (Modood, 2004, Shah et al 2010).

## Critical Race Theory and Racial Warehousing

Though Bourdieu’s theories provide a foundational framework by which the experiences of Mirpuri males, prior to entering, and during HE can be examined, it does not, however provide the conceptual tools to examine the racial dimension of the Mirpuri male HE experience. Other forms of capital (such as Modood’s ethnic capital) must be considered to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which Mirpuri males navigate through the education system. Yosso (2005) also speaks of the notion of aspirational capital which parallels Modood’s (2004) model of ethnic capital. Aspirational capital is ~~defined by (Yosso, 2005) as~~ the ability to persevere as subordinate groups in the face of oppressive conditions. This is evidenced amongst certain BME students who after gaining consistently poor grades within universities persevere in the hopes of graduating and achieving self and familial esteem, as well as, social mobility through graduate employment (Arnold, 2013).

Both Modood (2004) and Yosso (2005) conceptualised ‘advantageous’ forms of capital that are embodied in BME populations by critiquing Bourdieu’s model of cultural capital. Yosso (2005) argues that according to Bourdieu the middle and upper middle classes possess cultural characteristics that are valuable within a hierarchically structured society which inherently positions the non-white bodies as possessing cultural deficits. Yosso (2005) states:

‘Therefore, while Bourdieu’s work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of ‘culture’ are judged in comparison to this ‘norm’. (P. 76).

This limitation in much of liberal scholarship is discussed by critical race theorists to have undermined the role of racism in Western societies. Yosso, (2005) concludes that CRT positions race at the centre of its framework seeking to add value to the cultures of people of colour that is inherently undermined within a traditional Bourdieuisan analysis.

Yosso’s (2005) analysis is part of a growing body of work within education research that applies CRT in understanding the experiences of BME students. CRT stems from the work of critical legal scholars in the late 1970s, who argued that American legislative framework was not race conscious and systematically discriminated people of colour (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Bell (1993) stated that racism was a permanent factor within American society whose legal code is inherently advantageous to the white majority and suppressive to the African American minorities.

CRT encompasses broad themes, particularly with Crenshaw’s (2019) use of intersectionality and how factors such as class, gender, sexuality and disability are part of the complex experience of people of colour. Nevertheless, CRT rests upon several key positions, principally that racism is a normalised occurrence in society, as opposed to, something abnormal (Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is argued that people of colour embody deprived racial positions within white European societies whether that be on an individual level or institutional.

Another key tenant of CRT is that the analytical status of ‘race’ is subject to its social and political context. For CRT scholars, the undermining of ‘race’ for example, in American and European scholarship could be seen as an attempt to silence the legacy of colonialism, cultural domination by whites and the history of slavery (Harris, 1995). Parker and Stovall (2004) discuss how education discourse has addressed issues of feminism, Marxism and post structuralism whilst remaining silent on issues of race and pedagogy. Ahmed (2007) further elaborates on this point by arguing that marginalising the issue of race hides inequalities and undermines the daily experiences of racism towards people of colour. Gillborn’s (2006) analysis of the education sector also highlighted how minority voices are marginalised by white structures that do not contend on the issue of race and the discriminatory practices that manifest within the school environment.

The more recent work of Miah (2015, 2017) addresses how the Muslim identity in Britain is being racialised, under the guise of the counter-terror Prevent strategy, and Western liberal ethics. Miah (2017) proposes that The Counter-Terrorism Security Act and the Prevent strategy defines extremism as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values…. [such as] …democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’ (p.5). These ‘non-negotiable’ values create a demarcation line between the ‘real British’ who uphold such values and the racialised outsiders who do not, namely the Muslim community. Miah (2017) argues that racialisation of Muslims is a form of racial governmentalisation which seeks to categorise and monitor Muslim communities. Miah’s (2017) analysis of the 2013 Trojan Horse scandal in Birmingham’s majority Muslim schools, evidenced this racialisng process where the state-led investigation of the scandal was argued to be stereotyping all of the Muslim school leaders as an internal threat. In the same vein Bagguley and Hussain (2017) analyse how the Prevent strategy manifests within the context of HE. The authors argue that Prevent creates a synoptic form of monitoring where Muslim students are always ‘under the gaze of the many’. The Prevent strategy systematically excludes Muslim students from the university environment labelling them as a potential threat.

Bhopal’s (2018) broad commentary on the BME transition from education to work shows a myriad of limitations where students are made to overcome white oppressive structures such as Eurocentric curricula and the adoption of white ways of ‘being and doing’ within the university setting. Bhopal (2018) particularly draws parallels between neo-liberal policy making and classical liberalism arguing that the rhetoric of liberalism in both forms ostensibly calls for the dismantling of racial categories whilst undermining the issue of racism. The advocacy of tolerance silences the call to overcome inequalities faced by people of colour; tolerance replaces the issue of inequality by its desire for sameness (Puwar 2004). Similarly, neo-liberalism appears to promote a rhetoric of choice and meritocracy but masks intersectional forms of discrimination, where only those with ‘social, cultural and economic capital’ are able to utilise the resources available to them (Bhopal, 2018). As a result, hierarchies of power persist within society where the issue of race becomes invisible.

Avis et al (2017) point to this issue within the context of English VET, stating that though VET is a space within which many BME students participate, their experiences within it are rarely researched. Much of the work on English VET focuses on class dynamics rather than the issues of race (Hardy, 2019). Avis et al (2017) proposed that within the context of late capitalism there is burgeoning surplus of labour where ethnic minority students are ‘warehoused’ towards poor quality courses that limit skill development and/or access to good universities or employment. This was evidenced in the large numbers of black students in the late 1980s, who participated in community colleges and in subjects like social and life skills; pathologising black students into subjects that suggested they had a cultural deficit. According to Avis et al (2017) very limited work has been conducted on race and VET, in general, which evidences how England’s FE provision with its focus on freedom of choice, and meritocracy masks underlying pressures that funnel ethnic minority groups into low ‘yielding’ courses.

The issue of racial warehousing is central to this thesis, as it explains the structural limitations that Mirpuri students experience, immediately in their post-16 period, which leads to greater participation in level three vocational courses (Abass, 2004). Avis et al (2017) stress that BME students are more likely to enter level three vocational courses and remain in education for longer periods (this includes participating in universities), as white working class students utilise forms of social capital to gain apprenticeship positions. With an understanding of racial warehousing forms of structural racism can be highlighted in the Mirpuri male’s entry dynamics. Racial warehousing suggests that Mirpuri males are more likely to enter level three vocational courses because no other options are available to them. Participating in level three vocational courses is a default strategy utilised to overcome structural limitations inherent within a neo-liberal system.

CRT scholars thus recognise perceived ‘deficits’ of BME students under the guise of white privilege, which describes how white people are advantaged at the expense of people of colour. This entails that meritocracy, within education, is only fully ‘actualised’ by white people. Gillborn (2005, p.495) elaborates on this by discussing how white privilege, is a ‘deeply rooted exercise of power’ amongst white members that is left uncovered amongst other more overt forms of discrimination. White privilege is then an inherent part of white ‘habitus’ and a fundamental element of what Miller (2016) describes as ‘white sanction’ which allows white people to seek advantage of Eurocentric structures and misrepresent the plight of non-white bodies as a form of cultural deficit.

One of the ways white privilege is maintained and often obscured is through what CRT scholars call ‘interest convergence’ (Bhopal, 2018). Interest convergence describes how members of white middle classes will often act in the interest of non-whites as a way of protecting their own self-interest. Bell (1980) brought this dynamic into focus with his analysis of how Whites accrue greater benefit by advocating for racial justice than people of colour. Harper (2009) expanded on this point by analysing American universities and their acceptance of black students. Harper (2009) states that certain American universities only cared about black male students if they were able to play in lucrative college sports, that would ensure universities profited through advertising and TV rights. In their most recent study Harper et al (2018) bring to light how black students were accepted into universities as they ensured the university received federal state grants. Parallels can be drawn with the UK’s neo-liberal model of HE where the acceptance of more students means that universities will gain student finance provision through student loans and government grants (Skoulding, 2018). Additionally, it has been shown that BME students are less likely to gain university offers from Russell Group universities and be concentrated in low status universities indicating towards the maintenance of white privilege, through interest convergence (Boliver, 2015).

## CRT in HE and White Curriculum

The analysis of HE under the CRT framework has led to substantial literature on how universities are white spaces where people of colour are oppressed by structures of white privilege. (Harper et al, 2018, Bhopal, 2018). White privilege is generally located in the liberal ethos of universities which assumes that the university campus and the practices of faculty members are colour blind where students are free to think and work independently (Madriaga, 2018). This belief has been reinforced in the under-attainment of ethnic minorities particularly in the issue of staff complacency which, according to CRT, evidences how the liberal ethos of the academy hides white structures that discriminate ethnic minority groups in subtle and explicit forms (Stevenson, 2012). Such colour blindness allows institutional racism to inhibit the experiences of non-white bodies, where the needs of non-white students are disregarded, which impacts their overhaul performance (Singh, 2011). Bhopal (2018) expands on this by stating:

They [universities] require students to adopt particular ways of being and doing – those which conform to middle-class practices that define success in higher education: ways of writing, speaking and the use of academic language. Universities measure a particular type of success that is possessed by those from white middle-class backgrounds. The lack of identity with academic life can impact negatively on students who feel out of place in a white middle-class environment. (p. 92)

Another key character of white privilege within HE is the curricula and the content of learning which is often critiqued by CRT scholars for undermining non-white contributions to scholarship (Cabrera et al, 2016). This phenomenon is commonly defined as ‘white curriculum’ which privileges Eurocentric scholarship over other scholarly traditions. Peters (2015) commentates on the development of race conscious curricula arguing that the critique of HE curricula has been part of the race conscious movement since the civil rights in 1960s USA. The promotion of white Eurocentric narratives is argued to foster whiteness as ideology, which implies that such undermining of non-white, non-European contributions to scholarship serves to preserve white hegemony (Salami, 2015). Salami (2015) contextualised the notion of white curricula within philosophy stating that: ‘it is why Oriki – in short, performative, spiritual and philosophical African “praise poetry” … are considered mythological, while Homer’s mythological epic poem, The Iliad, is philosophy.’

More recently Kester (2019) addressed the issue of white curriculum within a peace studies degree programme. Kester (2019) argues that though the peace studies degree seeks to resolve issues concerning minority groups, the course, however, continued to foster whiteness. Kester (2019) shows that the reading list on the courses were mostly based on the work of white scholars, and in terms of pedagogy the teaching strategies were based on constructivist notions which favours a psychological understanding of learning, inherently undermining the cultural and racial dimensions of students.

The notion that universities are white spaces and that the curriculum privileges white contributions to scholarship is seminal to the experiences of Mirpuri students and an important factor in understanding how institutional factors negatively impact attainment. The problem however, concerning this thesis, is that the issue of universities being white spaces, as well as, offering a white curriculum, is unable to account for how whiteness impacts racialised students in *vocational* institutions, and on vocational degree courses. Bhopal (2018) for example states that universities are white spaces only after discussing how BME students are less likely to be accepted by elite universities, implying that white spaces exist primarily within high status universities. The notion of universities as white spaces may not fully accommodate the contexts of some former CAT or former polytechnics which generally have a large BME student population (Noden et al, 2014a, Boliver 2015). This is certainly the case with Mirpuri participants in this study who participated in local HEIs and vocational degree courses.

Discussions on white curriculum have commonly taken issue with more traditional academic subjects like history, philosophy and literature (Mambrol, 2018). As a result, much of the current discussions on race and curriculum disregard vocational curriculum in HE. For this reason, this thesis seeks a third theoretical model that accommodates the class and racial experiences of Mirpuri students in vocational HEICs. In principle a theory is required that allows us to examine how forms of ‘othering’ continues to take place within universities and courses that are attempting to provide vocational learning. The theory of academic drift has been selected to understand this particular context, below is a detailed discussion on how academic drift has continued to foster white middle-class structures within relatively new HE institutions that aimed to be accessible to non-traditional students (Pratt, 1997).

## Academic Drift

Academic drift in general addresses the issue of vocational HEICs that were established to serve the vocational needs of society but have become more academic in their evolution, thus marginalising the non-traditional students who were, and continue to be, the primary recipients of vocational HE (Pratt and Burgess, 1974). Academic drift had been studied within the American HE context since the nineteenth century, albeit under the term ‘academisation’ and mainly in relation to engineering training institutions (Manegold, 1978; Seely, 1999). The concept came under greater scrutiny after Burgess and Pratt’s (1970) commentary of the Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs), followed by their commentary on the British polytechnics (Pratt and Burgess, 1974, Pratt, 1997). Pratt and Burgess’s application of academic drift was underpinned by the notion that academic drift is undermining the *technical college* tradition and excluding non-traditional students from gaining the valuable training they needed for the labour market. As studies on academic drift have increased, the common understating has broadened under terms like mission drift, vertical drift (Willetts, 2017), mergers and extension, to describe the various ways in which the theory can manifest. Hart (1923) first mentioned the notion of academic drift in his examination of the educational needs of social workers stating that social work research was commonly confined to theory and not practice. Hart, however, did not elaborate on the concept and simply referred to it on one occasion (Tight, 2015).

Pratt and Burgess (1974), on the other hand, expanded the idea of academic drift as a theory stating that academic drift is inevitable within hierarchically structured HE sectors. For Pratt and Burgess (1974), institutions positioned within the lower echelons of the institutional hierarchy will seek equal status to elite universities via cultural imitation, in order to achieve equal funding and similar administrative structures (Gellert, 1993). As a theory, academic drift implies that any institution in the HE sector structured analagously to the former CATs and British polytechnics will also experience academic drift. This point is made evident in the university status given to former CATs and polytechnics and in the evolution of European non-university HE institutes, namely the German Fachhochschulen, (Harwood, 2010), the French University Institutes of Technology (IUTs) (Neave, 1979) and the Danish engineering schools (Christensen and Erno-Kjolhede, 2011) which are structured similarly to the English post 1992 HE institutes and have experienced similar trends in their development (Neave, 1979).

## Contemporary Application of Academic Drift

Pratt and Burgess’s initial utilisation of academic drift commentated on the evolution of technical college tradition and its impact on non-traditional learners. Contemporary studies apply academic drift in discussing inter-institutional phenomena characterised by specific contexts (Pilcher, et al, 2017; Erixon and Arreman, 2017). A common theme is in observing drift in curricula, where practical/taught features of vocational courses are being neglected for a theory/research orientation; eliminating the skill development required for praxis (Harwood, 2010; 2006; Christensen and Kjolhede, 2011). Harwood (2010), for example, defines it as the tendency to shift from practice-orientated curricula to science-orientated curricula. Practice-orientation means generating research aims from practice and solving them through theoretical frameworks, whilst science-orientated curricula acquires research questions from theoretical science and attempts to solve it through application in practice.

All applications of academic drift tend to function within two realms of drift: drift in tradition and policy (the macro dimension), and/or drift in curricula and in stakeholder attitudes towards institutional objectives (the micro dimension). Pratt and Burgess (1974), were clearly focused on the macro forms of drift similar to Christensen and Erno-Kjolhede’s (2011), who spoke of academic drift in terms of mergers of engineering institutes with other HE faculties. Edwards and Miller (2008), focused on the micro-level, where academic drift is contextualised in curricula and pedagogy within the Scottish FE sector suggesting that literacy requirements on courses are more academically relevant rather than being relevant to occupations. Erixon and Arreman (2017) also speak of academic drift on a micro level commenting on the early years education in Sweden and how HE trained teachers are given a higher rank than those who have more practical experience. The various studies and the multifaceted nature of discussions on academic drift has meant that academic drift has come to represent diverse meanings, in contrast to Pratt and Burgess’s (1974) initial conceptualisation as the evolution in institutional tradition. Christensen and Erno-Kjolhede (2011) provide the following definition which embodies the various ways academic drift has come to be defined:

‘Academic drift is commonly understood as an overarching concept that refers to a long-term tendency of non-university higher educational systems, institutions, study programmes, faculty and the student body to strive for an upward movement in the direction of an institutional setting or curriculum that resembles that of the university as the epitome of prestige’ (Christensen and Erno-Kjolhede, 2011 p. 286).

This overarching nature of academic drift has given rise to various levels of drift, all of which embody the transition from the initial vocational ethos to more academic and elite university practices. Kyvik (2007) demarcates six levels of drift.

## Kyvik’s Typology

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Type of Drift | Definition |
| Student drift | Students attempting to acquire the highest possible qualification to ensure the best possible standing in the labour market. This form of drift suggests a demand-pull as the cause of academic drift. Also known as the credentialist perspective, taken from Randall Collins work on credentialism. (Jonasson, 2006, Christensen and Erno- Kjohded, 2011). |
| Staff drift | Staff within vocational non-university HE institutions seek theoretically embedded study with emphasis on research and traditional academia, as opposed to, the practical teaching of a discipline. This is a push factor from within the institutions. This is also the most ubiquitous form of drift referred to by most studies (see Seely, 1993; Harwood, 2010). |
| Programme drift | Programme drift concerns the drift within the course where a more theoretically based degree structure is sought in contrast to a practical mode of education. Neave (1979) describes this as accentuation ‘of abstract knowledge, gradual reduction in emphasis attached to ‘practical work’, move away from utilitarian approach, coalescence of subject areas around university ‘disciplines’. (p. 155). |
| Institutional drift | Based on Dimaggio and Powel’s (1983) theory on institutional isomorphism, institutional drift is the tendency to imitate other more successful institutions in order to achieve equal status (see also, Morphew and Huisman, 2002). |
| Sector drift | Sector drift describes a drift amongst a group of non-university HE institutions in their pursuit towards equitable status with universities, generally brought on by legislative force. This was observed within the British polytechnics sector, initially by incorporation in 1988 and then in achieving university status in 1992 (Pratt, 1997). |
| Policy drift | In contrast to Neave’s definition of policy drift, who saw it as faulty policy being manipulated by faculty staff, Kyvik (2007) states that policy drift implies gradual change by state authorities ‘…on the purposes of non‐university education, the rights and obligations of academic staff, and the status and role of non‐university education within the higher education system.’ (p. 336). |

Kyvik’s (2007) typology provides a comprehensive model in which the diverse forms of academic drift can be conceptualised. More contemporary studies either apply Kyvik’s typology directly or implicitly refer to one or more form of drift. To give an example, academic drift within tradition as understood by Pratt and Burgess (1974) can be described as a form of sector and institutional drift, leading to all other forms of drift. Harwood’s (2006, 2010) studies can be described as one of staff drift leading to programme drift. His theoretical model of hierarchical status rivalry, mirrors Kyvik’s notion of institutional drift. Both Erixon and Arreman (2017) and Pilcher et al (2017) are observing staff drift, with the former discussing the university graduate early years teachers, and their social standing within the working environment, whilst the latter are concerned about career academics within the engineering and construction sector who are seeking research opportunities.

A form of drift not identified by Kyvik (2007) is what Buchanan (2005) defined as pedagogical drift. Buchanan (2005) spoke of pedagogical shift as the adoption of new learning techniques to accommodate various macro pressures that impacted religious education in Australia. This thesis in parallel applies pedagogical drift in highlighting the adoption of academic learning techniques as a result of transitioning vocational education from technical colleges into universities and offering degrees rather than diplomas (Burgess and Pratt, 1970). This can be observed in the transition from practical/workshop methods of teaching, towards an academic form of pedagogy which embodies independent learning, teaching within a classroom or a lecture theatre. This also includes the drift away from taught-focused programmes, which were teaching intensive, towards broader and progressive programmes, requiring independent learning. Pedagogical drift is more visible if institutions are historically located (Buchanan, 2005). For example, within the English HE context, pedagogical drift was observed in the use of the London degree framework as a syllabus archetype (Barnes, 1996). Essential features of the London degree included a liberal research pedagogy; increase in student residential facilities; the formation of academic committees; and of recruiting academic staff (Silver, 1990; Pratt, 1997). The London degree was highly influential in all the three stages of HE expansion; the civic universities placed a great emphasis on preparing students for the London degree examination (Armytage,1955), whilst, the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA) which later became the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), designed and approved their courses for the CATs and the polytechnics respectively, based on the London degree framework (Burgess and Pratt, 1970; Silver, 1990).

## Academic Drift and Mirpuri learners

Academic drift as a theory was proposed by Pratt and Burgess (1974) in order to pinpoint the issues socially disenfranchised students were having in the polytechnics as they became more like traditional universities. According to Pratt and Burgess academic drift creates a cultural gulf between working class student and the content of learning where traditional academic forms of learning and assessing are adopted by vocational HEICs. The more dominant use of the theory, since then, has been to make sense of the dislocation between the universities and the demands of the economy (Harwood, 2010). Apart from Pratt and Burgess, researchers have seldom addressed the issue of how academic drift impacts socially disenfranchised students, let alone consider its impact on BME learners. Academic drift thus embodies many of the concerns raised by CRT scholars, such as the marginalisation of race at various levels of institutional organisation and its impact on racialised students (Bhopal, 2018). This study is the first attempt at applying academic drift in order to identify the issues faced by a group of BME students within vocational HEICs. Academic drift provides insight into the context of vocational HE and how barriers of exclusion have been established by ‘new’ universities as a result of seeking esteem with traditional universities. Hence, becoming distant from the vocational needs of BME students like the Mirpuris in this study who do not possess the ‘right’ cultural capital to engage in white middle-class institutions, nor the desire to engage with traditional academia.

Academic drift presents a more deliberate attempt to maintain white hegemony as vocational education, in principle, seeks to disseminate codified knowledge of practice, rather than requiring students to learn and be assessed through methods that are part of traditional academia (Burgess and Pratt, 1974). To further expand the idea of how academic drift functions within the study of racialised students, the CRT notion of alternative narrative or counter-storytelling provides some guidance. I specifically refer here to Gillborn’s (2006b) use of the imaginary racist society. Gillborn (2006b) speaks of an imaginary racist society where every public agency is imbued with racism. In this society the dominant group come to know that the ‘detested group’ are doing well in highly valued examinations. To impede such progress, the dominant group stop the ‘detested’ group from accessing the examination. Gillborn (2006b) subsequently juxtaposes this imaginary racist society on the real-life case of GCSE exam tiering, where students on the lower tier exam could only achieve C as the highest grade. Gillborn (2006b) presents data to show that more black students were enlisted on the second-tier exam than other ethnicities limiting their progress into FE and professional occupations.

Academic drift presents a similar case whereby *vocational* knowledge and its mode of dissemination is systematically transformed to limit the success of non-white students who do not embody the middle-class white aesthetic. The entry of vocational knowledge within universities and the use of academic pedagogy and assessment makes evident the attempts to maintain and extend white liberal structures within fields that have become more lucrative due to the advancement of technology.

## Chapter Conclusion

By applying Bourdieu’s theories, ethnic capital, CRT and academic drift, this study develops its theoretical grounding by which the various elements of the Mirpuri male HE experiences can be illustrated. Bourdieu’s models help us recognise the limitations embodied by Mirpuri students by virtue of their class position and the subsequent strategies used to overcome the ‘symbolic barriers’ within HE. Ethnic capital and CRT bring to light the racial dynamics of the Mirpuri male experience, with the former pointing towards advantageous forms of capital, that allow the Mirpuri male to progress into HE and towards graduation, and the latter focused on white hegemony that limits non-white bodies throughout their HE experience. With the use of academic drift it is possible to discuss the embedded racialisation of teaching and learning practices within vocational HEICs and subsequently provide an experiential understanding of why Mirpuri male students, like other BME students, are less likely to gain the upper second class benchmarks in their degree attainment. Academic drift essentially increases the cultural gulf between the non-white student and the university ethos, even though there is a general awareness that the students entering more vocational courses in lower-status universities come from sub-optimal vocational backgrounds with limited academic training (Avis et al, 2017, Leslie, 2005).

# Chapter Three: Literature Review

## Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the attainment of Mirpuri males in HE, which is part of the wider research on BME attainment in HE. The continuous disparity in attainment between BME and white students in UK universities has raised concerns about the possibility that HE institutions that are not inclusive may foster forms of racism (Stevenson, 2012, Singh, 2011, Richardson, 2015). Researchers have continued to stress the complexity of the issue and have proposed that more nuanced accounts of BME students must be provided (Cotton et al, 2016). This includes an exploration of their journey towards HE (Richardson, 2015) and their engagement with teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) practices within HE (Smith, 2017, Singh, 2011, Thomas and May, 2010).

In order to bring to the fore, the BME student journey, this chapter begins by discussing the context of Mirpuris in Bradford, starting with their migration and settlement followed by their general educational context. It is argued that Mirpuris in Bradford have faced social marginalisation and racial discrimination since their migration and early settlement, exacerbated by their persistent poverty rates and poor performing schools in Bradford (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2018b, Department for Education, 2017). The deprived socio-economic context of Mirpuris in Bradford, in addition to the highly politicised rhetoric on Muslim males as a potential security risk, means that the Mirpuri male population in Bradford faces intersectional forms of discrimination (Jenkins, 2018, Bagguley and Hussain, 2017). It should be noted from the onset that research on BME students rarely demarcates the Mirpuri group as a separate ethnicity. Subsequently, this study takes account of the data on British domiciled Pakistani HE students in general, as the Mirpuri group constitute 70 per cent of the British Pakistani population (Lothers and Lothers, 2012, Communities and Local Government Report, 2009). The following chapter applies the term Pakistani, as opposed to, Mirpuri: the Mirpuri category is only applied if the study in question also uses it.

The literature on attainment highlights several key themes: (1) Pakistani male students hold the lowest ‘good’ degree attainment in comparison to other South-Asian minorities (Advance HE, 2018). (2) Entry qualifications produce the strongest correlation with degree attainment (Richardson, 2015). (3) Institutional factors augment the under-attainment of BME learners (Smith, 2017). (4) A fundamental gap in literature indicates a lack of critical understanding of how level three course choices are made and its impacts on HE performance, as well as, the context of BME learners participating in *vocational* higher education institutions and courses (HEICs). This chapter presents the case that hitherto a substantial portion of literature, perhaps unintentionally, contributes to the deficit model where BME learners are ostensibly shown to be making the ‘wrong’ level three course choices, and are not able to perform well in HE. The literature review highlights how BME attainment in HE must consider the funnelling of BME students into level three vocational courses (Avis et al, 2017) which have a flawed curricula that does not develop the types of skills needed for HE (Ecclestone, 2004, Williams, 2000, Bates et al, 1998). This is in addition to the structural discrimination that emerges as a result of academic drift (Burgess and Pratt, 1970, Pratt, 1997).

## The Mirpuri Migration

In order to comprehensively make sense of the Mirpuri male educational journey, the Mirpuri migration and settlement history is instrumental. Bourdieu’s models dictate that a person’s cultural history constructs the perceptions embodied by the habitus which impacts the individuals’ engagement within various fields (Webb et al, 2002), as such, a detailed understanding of Mirpuri history also allows us to understand the Mirpuri male habitus. Kalra (2000) states that the Mirpuri migration story is particularly unique due to two key factors that were absent in the migration of other Commonwealth migrants of the 1960s. (1) There was an established culture of migration amongst Mirpuris due to the oppressive practices of non-Muslim rulers in Kashmir. (2) The construction of Mangla dam in the 1960s which displaced over 100,000 Mirpuris to other parts of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir further incentivising migration to the UK. Subsequently, Mirpuris are the largest sub-group of the British Pakistani community, particularly in Bradford (Shackle, 2010; Bunting, 2005) comprising 70 per cent of the Pakistani diaspora in Britain (Communities and Local Government Report, 2009).

The Mirpuri community were very much part of a small district on the fringes of Jammu and Kashmir with strong attachment to the rural Kashmiri culture, and a greater reliance on the biradari system (Saifullah Khan, 1977). Mirpur was a sizeable district with a population of approximately 110,000 comprising of two main towns: Mirpur (the district capital) and Dudial, including two hundred smaller villages. Mirpur town hosted the *adha* or the main bus station which provided transport links to neighbouring Punjab or further into the mountainous terrain of Kashmir; Mirpur city thus functioned as the main commercial centre for the district (Ali, 1988). Though mainly agricultural in its general economic makeup, Mirpur district was a thriving trade hub with Mirpuri sailors mediating trade on the Poonch River between Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of modern-day Pakistan. During the British administration, the Maharaja (ruler) of the district called for the building of railways which became the main source of delivering goods, thus precluding the work of the sailors (Imran and Smith, 1997). During the colonial period, farming and craftwork continued to be the key source of income, while the Mirpuri sailors migrated to Mumbai to find work on British navy ships in the early 1910s. The Maharaja’s discrimination of the Muslims, during this period, further incentivised migration to other cities of India thus forging a culture of migration (Singh, 1987; Kalra, 2000).

Mirpuri sailors that had migrated to Mumbai found work as stockers in the engine rooms of the British Navy merchant ships. Reputed as being hardworking and able to work under extreme conditions, these initial pioneers made first contact with Britain as early as 1929 (Imran and Smith 1997). After the Second World War, and in anticipation of the phasing out of coal powered ships, more Mirpuri sailors decided to remain overboard and find work in Britain. During this period, the migration was legislatively incentivised by the British Nationality Act 1948 which gave all subjects of the Commonwealth the legal right to enter and work in Britain. According to Hansen (1999) the non-white migration from ex-colonies was an unexpected outcome of the British government’s attempt to ease migration from the old dominions, i.e. United States, Canada and Australia. Hansen (1999) states that the various elements of early globalisation such as the ease of transportation vie commercial airlines and increasing methods of communication had not been considered in the formulation of the 1948 British Nationality Act. Many of the Mirpuri sailors and those who were aware of the entry into Britain simply required a passport and an airline ticket for the opportunity to work and live in Britain, as British citizens.

Additionally, the partition of 1947 was a major transitional phase for the whole of the Indian sub-continent and Mirpur district was no exception. With the alliance of Pakhtun tribesmen, the Pakistani military successfully annexed what is now the Azad Kashmir district from the Maharaja, and analogous to other parts of modern-day Pakistan, the sizeable Sikh and Hindu communities were forced to flee (Snedden, 2012). As a result of partition, Mirpur became religiously homogenous. The partition also concluded the employment of Mirpuri sailors in Mumbai, who by then had become familiar with the employment opportunities available in Britain; where the wages for low skilled labour far exceeded the wages in Pakistan (Imran and Smith, 1997). Saifullah Khan (1977, 1979) and Ballard (1979) amongst others consider the contact made by the Mirpuri sailors during this early period to have instigated the later migration.

In accounting for the post war Commonwealth migration, chain migration is generally referred to as the most common modality (Anwar, 1979; Shaw, 2000). Chain migration is the process whereby pioneer or settled migrants sponsor other migrants to join them, and as new migrants become settled, they then sponsor other migrants, thus generating a chain. The beneficiaries of the sponsorship are commonly family members or close kin, and the penetration into the host community is usually concentrated in the initial phases, gradually reducing as economic opportunities in the host society become saturated (Werbner, 1990). This is partly true of Mirpuri migration. Kalra (2000) argues that chain migration instigated by the Mirpuri sailors fails to account for what he calls ‘an environment of migration’ due to the history of migration amongst Mirpuris and the added consequences of the Mangla Dam construction which led to a form of ‘mass’ migration from Mirpur in the 1960s.

Mangla Dam was then the largest hydro-electric dam to be built in the world. Its construction marking the initial phase of infrastructure development for Pakistan and the concluding outcome of many years of disputes with India (Hall, 2013). The Indus Water Treaty of 1960, under the aegis of the World Bank, concluded the discussions on the distribution of river waters. The three rivers west of the Indus valley: Indus, Jhelum and Chenab were assigned to Pakistan whilst the three rivers on the east, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej were assigned to India (Ahmed, 2016). Jhelum river was designated for the construction of the Mangla Dam which meant that most of the Mirpur district was to become part of the dam reservoir requiring the Mirpuris to relocate elsewhere in the region (Imran and Smith, 1997).

Present-day Mirpur city, as well as Dudial, are located further south and north from the Mangla Dam respectively. Other sizeable towns have also been located around the reservoir. The construction of the Mangla Dam and the relocation process of the Mirpuris from the old district to the current sites is part of a collective memory as over sixty-five thousand acres of land was submerged forcing over 100,000 people to relocate (Kalra, 2000). This was a traumatic experience for the Mirpuris who were forced to leave their ancestral homes and re-establish in other parts of the region, leaving behind their heritage sites and their familiar surroundings. Due to the stress caused by the construction of the Mangla Dam, the Mirpuri community was compensated for the damage by the state of Pakistan, in accordance to previous landholdings (Anwar, 1979). And though legislative controls were underway, via the Commonwealth Migration Act of 1962, the Pakistani government promoted the migration of 5000 people to Britain. ‘This was intended to help some of the Mirpuri families due to be dispossessed by the construction of the Mangla Dam, but also included some people not affected by the dam project.’ (Rose, 1969 p.71).

According to Rahim (1995), a deal was struck between Ayub Khan - Pakistan’s president at the time - and the British government to give priority to the Mirpuris in the allocation of the work vouchers. By utilising the capital acquired through compensation and the political support provided by the state of Pakistan, Mirpuri men throughout the district made their way to Britain as a way of rebuilding their lives (Saifullah Khan, 1979). The Mangla dam experience is unique to the Mirpuris, in comparison to all other Commonwealth migrants, and evidently the catalyst to a ‘mass’ Mirpuri migration, as opposed to, normative chain migration experienced by other Pakistanis (Kalra, 2000; Shaw, 2000; Anwar, 1979). A watershed moment in the region’s history, the Mangla dam and the networks established by the first generation of Mirpuris in the 1950s provided strong impetus to migrate to Britain.

## Settlement in the inner wards of Bradford

It is known that the 1960s Commonwealth migrants arrived in the UK to supply the manpower needs of the declining manufacturing sector (Hall, 2012). Textile mills in the UK, predominantly in the North, were bastions of the industrial revolution; Bradford in particular had become the epicentre of the worsted trade, acquiring the name ‘Worstedopolis’ for manufacturing and supplying its worsted textile to many of the world’s markets (Law, 1972). By the end of 19th century, the textile industry had been on a steady decline. Commentators on industrial relations argue that the decline of ~~the~~ Britain’s manufacturing sector in general and the textile mills in particular was due to a lack of innovation and failures to adapt to new market conditions (Hall, 2012). A central failure was the out-dated machinery which made British textiles more expensive. In the 1960s the textile sector attempted to revive their diminishing returns by investing in capital intensive machinery (Cohen and Jenner, 1968). The cost of the machinery meant that the mills had to remain operational 24 hours a day. The nightshift became the primary shift for the migrants in Bradford during the 1960s, as the poorer migrant provided inexpensive labour and did not mind odd working hours. A number of studies refer to the majority Mirpuri staffing of the night shift in Bradford and the importance of Mirpuri labour in ensuring the mills were functioning 24 hours (Singh, 1987).

The first wave of Mirpuri migrants resided in the inner urban areas of former industrial towns and worked in the neighbouring manufacturing mills; this was further augmented by discrimination from the host society in providing access to better housing. Rex and Moore (1967) conducted one of the earliest studies on the subject stating that a housing shortage in Sparkbrook Birmingham, instigated by the influx of migrants, gave rise to discriminatory practices in the access to housing in both public and private sector. Dahya (1974), on the other hand, argued that Bradford, it seems, did not have a housing problem and that there were means by which the migrants could have acquired housing outside the inner-city zones. Dahya (1974) argued that the case of Mirpuri migrants not settling in more rural locations suggested more personal motives to remain in the inner wards, perhaps due to the availability of religiously and culturally tailored institutions such as mosques and halal meat suppliers.

Anwar (1979), in contrast, popularised the notion of ‘myth of return’ which indicated that the Pakistani male migrant’s acceptance to live in cheaper housing, working long arduous hours in low skilled labour, was based on their aim of returning home. However, as new economic opportunities were realised, this desire to return home became a myth. Rose (1969) further emphasised that nearly half of the Pakistani male were still living without their wives and children seven years after the reunification of families in the 1970s, alongside the continued sending of remittance. The ideal of returning home became a myth as more families were reunited in 1970s and as new opportunities were realised in the host society, commonly, in establishing commercial enterprises and access to free education (Shaw, 2000).

Another important factor in understanding the Mirpuri settlement within the inner wards of Bradford is by considering how the Mirpuri community is organised, namely in the form of caste or biradari networks. It is ubiquitously referenced that the settlement pattern of the Mirpuris in Bradford and other parts of UK duplicate the biradari system (Akhtar, 2013). Shaw (2000) develops a unique picture of the Mirpuri settlement in relation to biradari networks as her anthropological work took her to Mirpur allowing her to reflect on the Mirpuri culture and its negotiated accommodation in Britain. Shaw (2000) highlights how various social and economic opportunities in Britain allowed biradari members to gain social mobility and *izzat* (honour) amongst other biradari members. Shaw (2000) adds that during the early years of settlement migrants were primarily concerned with sending remittance to Mirpur, however:

*‘Now that most families have been united in Britain and have relatives and fellow villagers living locally, they are also concerned with socio-economic success and status in relation to the local South Asian socio-economic hierarchy. In this context, the criteria of success include the extent of property and business ownership. (Shaw, 2000 p. 109)*

It is possible to suggest then that the Mirpuri settlement in the inner wards of Bradford was a result of many factors, such as employment in the former norther towns (Hall, 2012); discrimination from the host society (Rex and Moore, 1967) establishment of ethnic and religious institutions (Dahya, 1974), and the social makeup of the Mirpuri community which exhibits strong collective practice (Akhtar, 2013, Shain, 2011, Kalra, 2000). As a result, dense Mirpuri communities have a substantial presence within inner wards of various post-industrial towns such as Bradford (Bunting, 2018).

The presence of a large Mirpuri population in Bradford, has led to criticisms of the Mirpuri communities for being self-segregating, particularly in light of high profiled cases such as Bradford’s race riots in 2001 and the London bombings in July 2007 (Miah, 2015). The Ouseley report of 2001 stressed, that Bradford presents challenges of race relations and many ‘fears’ need to be overcome, in particular the ‘…fear of confronting all white and/or all Muslim schools about their contribution, or rather lack of contribution, to social and racial integration’ (Ouseley 2001 p.1). Miah (2015) opposes this view and argues that the perceived self-segregation of the Pakistani community in Bradford is a consequence of communities experiencing various forms of disenfranchisement, namely their lower socio-economic position. Self-segregation is not an active attempt to exclude outsiders and remain exclusively Islamic or Pakistani, rather it is a by-product of a myriad of disadvantages.

## Socio-economic status of Mirpuris in Bradford

Miah’s (2015) point about the British Pakistani communities mobilising in order to overcome disenfranchisement has also been stressed by others. Kalra (2000) for example argued that after the demise of the mills in the 1980s there was a period of long- term unemployment, which forced many of the second-generation Mirpuris (also known as kakas) to look for employment elsewhere. Second generation of Mirpuris are those who arrived during the reunification phase in the 1970s. According to Kalra (2000) the only opportunities the *kakas* had were in low pay employment, welfare or self-employment. Faced with racism from white manufacturing companies, majority of the low pay employment was in South Asian owned factories. The South Asian owned factories however, had very poor working conditions which led most of the *kakas* to work on a short-term basis to acquire capital for self-employment. Kalra (2000) writes that many of the soft skills developed within the manufacturing sector transferred into three sectors concentrated by the Mirpuris: (1) niche retail stores, (2) taxi driving and (3) restaurants and takeaways. Furthermore, many of the attempts to develop successful enterprises led to low returns, or, complete failure due to a lack of knowledge on how to work within competitive markets (Kalra, 2000). The lack of skills developed as a result of working in low skilled labour, and the segregated nature of the Mirpuri community was an indication that the Mirpuri migrants were likely to remain in low skilled labour and suffer from persistent poverty (Weekes-Bernard, 2017).

Contemporary statistics of the Mirpuri minorities in Bradford, and their socio-economic condition reflects this position. Though Bradford District Council does not present data on poverty and ethnicity per se, Bradford as a district in general is one of the most disenfranchised places in the UK (Jenkins, 2018). The most recent intelligence bulletin by Bradford Council stated that Bradford ranks 5th as the most income deprived local authority in England (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2018b). The deprivation figure, however, does not apply to all of the localities, rather most of deprived areas are the inner-city wards of Bowling, Barkerend, Manningham, Great Horton and Little Horton. These wards also host majority of the Mirpuri population in Bradford (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2018b). The latest government figures suggest that the Pakistani population has the lowest household income in comparison to other South Asian minorities, where only 17 per cent of the population earn more than 1000 pound a week in comparison to 35 per cent of the Indian population and 21 per cent of the Bangladeshi population. (Department for Work and Pension, 2018). Weekes-Bernard, (2017) found that the Pakistani ethnic group, in particular has the lowest increase in income at 28 per cent, compared to Bangladeshi minorities, who have had a 38 per cent rise in income from 2011/12 to 2015/16, which suggests that the Pakistani minorities experience ‘persistent poverty rates’.

The low socio-economic context of Braford Mirpuris is further augmented by Bradford’s failing school system. Department for Education’s (2017) data release shows that Bradford’s average attainment score at key stage four is 45.7 which is below the national average of 50.1. The data also shows that the average attainment score for Bradford’s disadvantage students is 38.6 which is below the national average of 41.2. This also includes students eligible for free school meals who scored 37.2 for average attainment in comparison to the national average of a 39.1. In 2016 the late British politician Jo Cox opened the debate about the low school performance in the region and the various interventions that were required to make improvements. In 2015, Ofsted Chief, Sir Michael Wilshaw asked for a public enquiry for the ‘generation after generation’ of failing students from Bradford schools (TES, 2016). Wilshaw compared Bradford’s socio-economic context to that of London’s East End suggesting that even though London’s East End had a similar socio-economic context to Bradford, East End schools were performing better. Additionally, Wilshaw commented on how poor education can lead to issues of radicalisation (TES, 2016). In 2016, Bradford was specifically highlighted for its below average performance as MP Phillip Davies of Shipley questioned Nick Gibb (Minister of State for Schools) about the measures taken for improving school performances. Nick Gibb argued that more schools were turning into academies and that greater investment was being made in increasing the number of highly trained teachers (House of Commons, 2016). No reference was made to the socio-economic circumstance of Bradford’s inner wards, nor, the issue of racial discrimination and ethnic marginalisation, which has been the focus of more independent studies (Miah, 2015).

It is clear when considering the context of Mirpuris in Bradford that those who enter HE are from a population of students who suffer from a number of disenfranchising circumstances. The unique migratory and settlement context which has led to dense Mirpuri communities in Bradford is further problematised by a deprived socio-economic context and a failing school system (Department for Education’s, 2017). These factors make the Mirpuri university students the quintessential non-traditional HE student, whose engagement in HE requires careful examination. If one of the aims of expanding HE is to better the life chances of England’s disenfranchised populations (Robinson, 1968) then the study of Mirpuris from Bradford is an essential part of that aim. The discussion thus far has presented the context of the Mirpuri community in Bradford and the various challenges it faces. The following section of this chapter presents the literature on the Pakistani/Mirpuri male experience of school in light of contemporary socio-political context that portrays them as a threat (Miah, 2017).

## Muslim Boys Schooling

A relatively recent report from the Equality Challenge Unit (2015) highlighted a concerning trend amongst the Pakistani students as the attainment gap between Pakistani students and other BME students had increased. In 2005/06 Pakistani students had a two per cent disparity in comparison to Bangladeshi students whilst in 2013/14 this increased to a three per cent difference. The under-attainment of Pakistani students has been an established fact in previous studies but the fact that the Pakistani population attainment has increased provides an urgent examination of the population to locate the problem areas.

It is possible that the burgeoning low attainment of Pakistani students may be due to the discrimination they face as Muslims (Stevenson, 2018). It is also possible that the religious discrimination is experienced unequally based on gender roles (Malik and Whytes, 2018). In discussing the better performance of female Muslim students, Khattab and Modood (2017) argue that female Muslim students are utilising a form of ‘Islamic capital’. Islamic capital alludes to the positive view of education in Islam. Khattab and Modood (2017) stress that female Muslim students internalise this educational ethic to overcome some of the barriers established by cultures of the Indian subcontinent or, other traditional cultures that do not encourage educational success amongst their females. Another factor pointed out by Khattab and Modood (2017) is that female Muslim students anticipate greater levels of discrimination in the labour market, perhaps due to their religious, gender and racial characteristics, and so they are motivated to achieve higher in education to ensure a better labour market position.

Pakistani/Mirpuri males, in contrast, have continued to be discussed as dealing with intersectional forms of discrimination, due to their religious identity as Muslims (Miah, 2017). One of the early studies on Muslim boys’ education was conducted by Archer (2003) who began by commentating on how post-structuralism and the rise of feminism has led to fractured male identities. For Archer (2003), like most critical thinkers, male identity is part of an ongoing masculine discourse where identity is in flux and in the process of negotiation. Muslim male identities are further problematised by the rhetoric of folk devils and in being framed as potential threat to British society.

Some of the points made by Archer (2003), were that Muslim men have a traditional framing of masculinity where the ‘responsibility’ towards one’s family are considered central, whether that be in providing economic security or in maintaining the ‘honour of the family’. According to Archer (2003), this general construction of masculinity, which is negotiated and constructed locally, has led to a more instrumental perception of education, where attending HE is a means to ensure the boys ‘get a foot in the door’ to more lucrative occupations. Archer’s (2003) study is inherently dated and her framing of the Muslim masculinity as ‘bad’ or ‘rude’ masculinity, affiliated with gang culture has been critiqued. ‘Bad’ or ‘rude’ masculinity is understood as a reactionary response by Muslim men towards a hostile majority which marginalises them (Shain, 2011). Archer’s (2003) insight into the Muslim males being stereotyped as ‘folk devils’ is, however, timely and a ubiquitous point of consideration in more contemporary work.

Recent commentators continue to raise awareness on how British Muslims are being categorised within a counter-terrorist framework where the state and popular mass media are systematically advocating an aggressive integrationist agenda (Miah, 2015, 2017; Breen, 2018). High profiled events, like 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombings, have produced and continue to produce a growing body of literature discussing how British Muslims in general and the Mirpuri male in particular (see Akhtar, 2013) are progressively being categorised as a national threat (Miah, 2017). The Iranian revolution in 1978 is commonly stated to have initiated the reframing of the British Pakistani as a problematic group, further augmented by the Rushdie affair in 1989. Bradford’s Mirpuri community in particular took centre stage in the media discourse due to the book burning event (Akhtar, 2013). The 2001 race riots in Bradford and then September 11 attacks fuelled the image of the British Pakistani male as a violent, radical Muslim, opposed to the ways of the West (Pidd and Halliday, 2015). The July 7 bombings in 2005 and the 2017 attacks in Manchester and London have particularly contributed to the rise of islamophobia in Britain (Marsh, 2018). It is within this larger socio-political context that literature on Muslim boys within HE takes form and attempts, in many ways, to highlight the unfair treatment faced by British Muslims in HE education policy and practice.

The Prevent strategy (Home Department, 2011) has been the primary counter terror measure which has impacted Muslim students subsequently generating what Miah (2017) calls the Muslim problematic. The Muslim problematic is an alternative way of framing the Muslim ‘other’ within Britain and the wider European society. The British Muslim is framed outside his theological definition which accounts for the Islamic creed and his anthropological definition which embodies Islam’s diversity of adherents, their cultures, and distinct doctrinal manifestations. Muslim problematic is generated by the events mentioned above amongst others such as the ‘war on terror’ and the recent grooming cases. Miah, alongside others (Shain, 2011; Meer, 2007, 2009) have argued that the Prevent strategy is unfairly augmenting the Muslim problematic by marginalising the Muslim community and its practices and branding it as a potential security threat. Miah (2017) writes that the initial Prevent strategy aimed to buffer any forms of violent extremism. The revised policy, however, includes non-violent extremism, which contributes to the marginalisation of British Muslims; ‘tool used for ethnic profiling, monitoring and spying of Muslim communities…’ (Miah, 2017, p. 100).

Miah (2017) focused on the 2014 Trojan Horse scandal as a case study on racial politics. The Trojan Horse saga was an ostensible exposing of a perceived attempt to radicalise Muslim students, by senior Muslim teachers. The Trojan Horse saga generated national media coverage and subsequent action by the state to extensively monitor all majority Muslim schools in Birmingham, even though there were some schools that were not directly involved in the incident. Miah (2017) critically analyses three reports emerging from the incident and points towards cases of unfair treatment by the state and media in covering the incident and its consequences in vilifying British Muslims. The reports in Miah’s (2017) analysis present the British Muslim as an ontological threat, seeking to undermine the European self-identity embodied in secular liberal values.

Within the context of HE, Bagguley and Hussain (2017) speak of the implementation of Prevent and its inherent conflict with the autonomous nature of university education. The authors argue that:

‘Prevent treats Muslim students instrumentally, denies their autonomy and agency, homogenising them, seeking to govern their conduct and deny their subjectivities. Prevent has constructed a synoptical form of power, whereby Muslims are policed on an everyday basis under the gaze of the many. Everyone now in universities are expected to be suspicious of Muslims, constantly vigilant for signs of vulnerability to radicalisation. For Muslim students these ‘imaginary identities’ constructed within official discourses and practices undermine their ‘ontological security’ producing a generalised feeling of anxiety and the destruction of trust in those around them.’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2017 p. 47).

Prevent has clearly augmented the vilifying and categorisation of Muslim students, yet it could be argued that such categorisation existed before the implementation of the Prevent strategy. A much earlier study by Tyrer (2004) who spoke outside the context of Prevent and in light of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in general, suggested that the Islamophobic rhetoric surrounded the academy, where Muslim boys are particularly portrayed as being prone to radicalisation and a security threat. Tyrer’s (2004) examination on the *actual* threat of Islamic radicalisation suggested that no ample evidence for extremism existed, rather the exacerbated effect of sensationalist reporting by the media gave rise to campaigning by the National Union of Students. Furthermore, Tyrer (2004) analysed a report by the Committee for Vice-Chancellors and Principles on combating extremism and intolerance and found that there was no mentioning of any particular Islamist group, rather the whole Muslim student population was implicitly categorised as a threat. Tyrer (2004) argued like more recent studies that Islamophobic rhetoric further excludes Muslims within universities. This particular form of marginalisation of Muslim male students may explain their burgeoning lower degree attainment grades even after all variables of class race and gender are accounted for (Advance He, 2018).

The common counter narrative to the exclusion of Muslim students has been their perceived propensity to self-segregate. It is argued that deep cultural divide amongst more conservative Muslim students and the comparatively liberal West means that Muslim students actively segregate themselves from the wider community. Miah (2015) commentates on this line of argumentation by stressing how the perceived self-segregation is a consequence of communities who experience disenfranchisement and occupy a lower socio-economic position. Miah (2015) provided empirical evidence of active integration of Muslim students within the schooling context, stating that Muslim students consider mix schooling to be ideal, as it presents cultural and social capital incentives. Shain (2011) also argued that many Muslim students resist the individualisation of schooling and develop strong bonds to counter the discrimination posed by an Islamophobic and racist environment. The strong collective masculinity that has been negatively ascribed to Muslim boys is thus a means to express their assertiveness. Shain (2011) also notes that this collective ethos is heavily invested in through neighbourhood power dynamics, which limits many of the Muslim students from developing what Putnam (2001) defined as bridging capital. Bridging capital are networks that are made across social and racial divides and can be positive in sharing and exchanging valuable information that aids in overcoming marginalisation.

Kitwood, and Borrill’s (1980) early study of Mirpuri/Muslim students from Bradford provides similar observations. Kitwood and Borrill (1980) note that Muslim students are group oriented, which generates a practice of co-operation and the development of strong bonds. As a result, Mirpuri students strongly embody their own culture whilst negotiating the white neo-liberal ethos of the schooling environment. Secondly, the authors note that this context places many of the students in a position of resistance as they refuse to accept, like their working class white British peers, their ‘destiny’ as unskilled labourers. This resistance incentivises the progression into further and higher education, in addition to the positive reinforcement provided by their parents and relatives.

Kitwood and Borrill (1980) do not discuss achievement rates nor why such a positive environment would lead many students in an unfavourable position once they leave compulsory education (Avis, et al, 2017). Nevertheless, the notion that Muslim boys are more group orientated, whilst functioning in a context that is discriminatory appears to be a common observation. It appears that Muslim boys tend to form strong groups that have a dual function: resisting the various discriminatory dynamics present within the education system and incentivising progression into further and higher education. This collective ethos, however, has its limitations in developing excessive bonding capital which subsequently limits their access to valuable information on how best to engage with the education system, and to make informed decisions on choosing the most optimal path towards HE (Shain, 2011).

Other studies that look beyond the counter-terrorism backdrop, address the impact of neo-liberalism on Muslim students. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2014) for example, discuss the implications of neo-liberal structuring of the education system with its emphasis on performativity and individual achievement where Muslim students are personally blamed for failing within schools, as opposed to, recognising the racial politics inherent in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. When we aggregate the various factors discussed above, it is clear that Mirpuri male students from Bradford face intersectional forms of discrimination, as they may be marginalised due to their racial, religious, gender and socio-economic characteristics. This disenfranchised milieu stresses the importance of further researching into the Mirpuri male students in HE as the barriers that may impede their attainment of good degrees are substantial.

## Prior Qualifications and Deficit Model

The statistical analysis of UK’s ethnic minority educational attainment has been ongoing since the 1960s (Tomilinson, 1991), studies on ethnicity and degree attainment are, however, relatively recent coinciding with the expansion of the HE sector in 1992 and the increasing participation of BME students within it (Noden et al, 2014). Recent statistics from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2016) indicate that 29 per cent of full-time degree students are from BME backgrounds, despite this group representing 18 per cent of students leaving compulsory education, suggesting that BME students are entering HE in greater numbers. The HEFCE data also indicates that from 2011 to 2016 there was a 34 per cent increase in the BME participation within HE compared to a 5.5 per cent white student increase during the same period. As a result, a growing body of literature has been concerned with the ethnic minority participation within HE and their ultimate outcomes as graduates (Khan, 2019).

Connor et al (1996) conducted one of the early studies on BME degree attainment presenting both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of BME HE experiences and their progression into employment. Connor et al (1996) analysed the 1994/5 data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and stated that 61 per cent of ethnic minority graduates gained a lower second or lower-class degree compared to 35 per cent of white students. Though a dated study, Connor et al (1996) observed various issues with BME students in HE that are still relevant such as: (1) non-traditional entry qualifications, namely in entering with level three vocational courses, which was understood to be the most powerful factor in degree outcome. (2) Various discriminatory factors that impede equal participation in university life, such as the lack of inclusivity in HE institutions and limited support provided by the faculty. Connor et al (1996) provide some specific characteristics about the Pakistani students such as attending local universities which have a large ‘ethnic profile’, as well as, participating in ‘caring for’ courses such as medicine, dentistry, business administration and ICT. Other points of interest from Connor et al (1996) regarding Pakistani students is that they are amongst the lowest performing students amongst other BME students and are generally concentrated in vocational degree courses within ‘new’ or lower status universities.

Connor et al (1996), provide the starting point for later studies on BME attainment both in terms of the themes they developed, and the methods taken to study BME attainment. One way in which they influenced contemporary research was in their method of statistically levelling prior qualifications amongst white and BME students and then to identify if the attainment disparity persists. Generally, the data shows that attainment disparity persists without the influence of prior qualifications which points towards institutional racism as an explanatory factor for the residual attainment disparity. It must be noted that one drawback in the way Connor et al (1996) analysed the data is that the entry qualifications and attainment scores for Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students were aggregated to show the mean entry qualification and attainment scores of ‘Asian’ students. This is somewhat misleading as later studies show that Pakistani and Bangladeshi students have lower Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) tariff scores and lower attainment than the Chinese and Indian students (Connor et al 2004). Nevertheless, the method of statistically levelling entry scores and then identifying if the attainment disparity persists is a method used by many other studies after Connor et al (1996). This is done in order to identify, if, and to what extent institutional factors impact BME attainment in HE. To further analyse the institutional factors, Connor et al (1996) used surveys, questionnaires and interview data to make sense of student experiences. Their study showed that BME students experienced limited direct racism, but substantial indirect racism.

The issue with exploring BME student experiences *per se* is that the diverse institutional contexts, and the diverse profiles of BME students, leads to varied qualitative accounts which do not provide conclusive answers. A good example of this is how the qualitative data in the follow up study by Connor et al (2004) provided distinct conclusions from their 1996 study. Connor et al (2004) reiterated that the ethnic attainment disparity exists where 48.9 per cent of white students gained upper second-class degrees compared to 36.2 of ethnic minority groups. Black African minorities had the lowest rate of upper second-class degrees at 27.5 per cent whilst the Pakistani students had the lowest upper second-class degrees amongst the South Asian students at 34.5 per cent (Data taken from HESA 2001/02). Conner et al (2004) also highlight gendered differences where female ethnic minority students in general performed better than their male peers with white females exhibiting the highest attainment levels, suggesting that Pakistani males are amongst the lowest performing students. Connor et al (2004) conclude on two key points, firstly that the Pakistani students (alongside Bangladeshi students) are more likely to enter HE with vocational qualifications and secondly that prior qualifications have the strongest impact on degree attainment, where those students entering with vocational courses gain lower class degrees. Conner et al (2004) also add that the attainment disparity exists even after entry qualifications are accounted for and the residual attainment gap is based on their racialised experience within HE.

Hitherto, both studies through statistical data alone arrive at similar conclusions. Their qualitative accounts, however, provide distinct views. In their 1996 study Connor et al highlighted issues of inclusion and exclusion and suggested that certain ethnic minority students, at both pre and post 1992 universities, may feel isolated potentially by forms of racism which may hinder effective performance. The surveys and questionnaires stressed the issue of diversity indicating that limited support was provided to BME students which left them isolated, where they felt like they had to work harder than white students to achieve the same grade (Connor et al, 1996). This is in contrast with the conclusions reached in their 2004 study. Connor et al (2004) caution on institutional racism as a factor to minority under-attainment. The interview accounts in Connor et al (2004) highlighted that it was the ‘disorganised nature of the course’ and the ‘lack of one-to-one support from tutors’ to have negatively impacted their performance (p. 65). Ethnic minority students additionally stated that personal issues, family responsibilities and part-time work negatively affected their performance.

One way we can explain some of the distinct experiences of BME students in HE is by considering the sample group amongst the two studies. Connor et al (1996) surveyed a large sample of graduates who had completed their study, these graduates attended pre and post 1992 universities. In the follow up study the sample group was undergraduates within a pre-1992 university alone that hosted a majority white student population. Conner et al (2004) were aware that such a distinct sample of students could not provide generalisable results as most BME students are concentrated in post 1992 universities which has a larger ethnic mix (Shiner and Modood, 2002, Boliver, 2015). We can thus argue that the impact of entry qualifications was considered to have the greatest explanatory power in making sense of the ethnic attainment gap but because Connor et al (1996, 2004) do not engage with BME entry dynamics, by asking how BME students enter level three vocational courses and its potential impact, their conclusions do not provide conclusive proof of institutional racism thus implicitly giving credence to the deficit model.

The advocacy of the deficit model is more explicit in the work of Leslie (2003, 2005). Leslie (2005) argued using purely quantitative methods that ethnic minority students choose subjects that on average warrant less good degrees, such as business and computer science and as greater numbers of ethnic minorities enter HE, a ‘diminution in average quality of applicant would be expected’ (p. 631). Leslie (2005) further argues that the best indicator of good degree attainment is in choosing the ideal entry path and as BME students are clearly under-represented in traditional academic subjects they do not possess the right skills to attain good degrees. Given this context, Leslie (2005) argued that the researchers pointing towards ethnic penalty or racial discrimination as indicators of underachievement cannot be substantiated. Rather, entry qualifications and the type of degree provide a more comprehensive explanation of low academic performance amongst certain ethnic minority groups. As compelling as Leslie’s (2005) research is there are no accounts of BME student experiences which implies that the complex experience of BME students is not accounted for. The use of purely quantitative methods to make sense of the issues faced by BME learners has long been critiqued by CRT scholars to not take account of the cultural assets possessed of distinct ethnic groups, such as ethnic capital (Modood, 2004) or aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) consequently developing narratives of deficit where students appear to be blameworthy for their failures (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Sablan, 2019).

This quantitative drawback continues to be observed in other major studies. Following Leslie’s (2005) study research was conducted by then the Department for Education and Skills (Broecke and Nicolas, 2006) attempting to explore how much impact ethnicity has on attainment after controlling a number of variables. Broecke and Nicolas, (2006) found that ethnicity did not have major impact on BME student performance and stressed that prior qualifications has the biggest impact on attainment. According to Broecke and Nicolas (2006) those who entered HE with a mix of A-level and vocational courses and those with just vocational courses had relatively lower attainment than those who entered HE with just A-level courses. Broecke and Nicolas’s (2006) conclusions mirror Conner at al (1996, 2004) and Leslie (2005) where prior attainment has the highest correlation with university attainment.

In examining some of these studies, Richardson (2008) pointed towards potentially inflated results. Richardson (2008) argued that Connor et al (1996, 2004) analysed data on those who achieved ordinary as well as, honours degrees where general degree results are accumulated with those who were awarded third-class honours. The data thus confuses the level of the qualification with the level of performance. Additionally, Richardson (2008), sternly highlights the inconsistency in Leslies (2005) logic of perceiving low ethnic minority attainment as a ‘more means worse’ dynamic. Richardson’s (2008) data pointed towards similar participation rates amongst Black and Asian students, yet, Black students had lower achievement than Asian students. Richardson (2008) also found no correlation between the choice of subjects and the level of degree attained. Nevertheless, he maintained that there was substantial evidence pointing towards a significant disparity in degree attainment amongst white and ethnic minority students. Richardson’s (2008) analyses of HESA’s data from 2004-05 showed that at 61.4 per cent white students gained more ‘good degrees’ than 47 per cent of Asian minorities with the Pakistani students attaining the lowest amongst the South Asian students at 42.1 per cent. Like earlier studies, Richardson (2008) shows that at 49.3 per cent the female Asian population gained more ‘good’ degrees compared to 46 per cent of Asian male students.

Given the importance of Richardson’s (2008) research his methods and conclusions are not novel. His use of quantitative methods simply draws the correlations between UCAS tariff scores and degree attainment data which is inherently devoid of the experience of BME students prior to entering, and during their time at university. Richardson’s (2008) conclusions also reiterate the points made by Connor (1996, 2004), Broecke and Nicolas (2006) and Leslie (2005). Richardson (2008) states:

*One major reason why Asian and Black graduates are less likely to obtain good degrees than White graduates is that Asian and Black graduates tend to have lower tariff scores at the time of their entry into higher education, and that the likelihood of any student obtaining a good degree varies directly with their tariff score.* (p.40).

Richardson (2008) like Connor et al (1996, 2004) also concludes that after various factors are accounted for including prior qualification there continues to be an attainment disparity, which suggests that at least partly institutional factors contribute to the attainment disparity. Richardson’s subsequent studies takes account of various institutional factors such as teacher and student feedback (Richardson, 2010), as well as, examining how distance education impacts attainment (Richardson, 2011, 2012). Richardson’s continued use of quantitative methodology, however, does not examine BME HE entry dynamics, nor the study of BME experiences in HE, which means that Richardson provides inconclusive evidence of discrimination faced by BME students.

Richardson’s 2012 study, for example focused on the attainment of distant learners which sought to remove the discriminatory variables that may have been prevalent within universities. Richardson (2012) found that ethnic minority students continued to attain less ‘good’ degrees than their white peers. The gender disparity amongst males and females was also maintained with Asian females attaining more ‘good’ degrees than Asian males (37.5% to 35.3% respectively). From this Richardson (2012) concludes that the ‘mode of delivery simply does not impact on the relative attainment of white and ethnic minority students’ this would also be true of gender cohorts (Richardson, 2012 p. 405). However, it is obvious that the quantitative bias in Richardson’s work limits a comprehensive understanding of BME experiences within the university context.

To further refine the sample characteristic, Richardson’s 2015 study, focused specifically on three categories of students: (1) medical students, (2) postgraduates and (3) distance learners. Richardson (2015) reinforces Leslie’s (2005) conclusions, acknowledging that if entry qualifications are regarded as proxy to academic ability, ‘then about half of the attainment gap is attributable to differences in academic ability’ (p. 282). Richardson (2015) further concludes that the ethnic gap in attainment is more precarious than first stated as students in different courses and different institution have varied academic performance rates. Though Richardson (2015) indicates towards potential discriminatory practices that may impact BME students, he argues that ethnicity per se cannot account for their low attainment, rather the ethnic minority educational journey, needs to be considered to identify accumulated inequalities from their compulsory and further education participation, namely in not developing the right ‘learning practices’ required for HE. Richardson (2012, 2015) does, however, point towards other more qualitative studies which suggest that minorities in general may be discriminated against, whilst remaining consistent that ethnic minorities engagement with teachers and students does not account for the ethnic attainment disparity in HE.

Richardson’s overhaul work points towards the difficulty in stating the primary antecedent to the ethnic attainment disparity. Quantitative studies generally point towards prior qualifications as the most powerful indicators of degree success, yet, these studies are inherently short sighted by not addressing issues with entry dynamics. The established trend in quantitatively studying BME attainment is also devoid of BME experiences prior to entering HE which could help pinpoint problem areas that hinder chances of gaining ‘good’ degrees by BME students.

A relatively recent study by Cotton et al (2016) attempted to address the quantitative trend in BME attainment literature and actively attempted to develop a counter narrative to the deficit model. Cotton et al (2016) used a mix methods approach and concluded by reiterating that BME under-attainment in HE is a complex discussion which must consider many factors before conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, Cotton et al (2016) indicated towards three factors that ‘warrant exploration’. First, that male BME students use surface learning techniques, whilst white students use a deeper learning approach. Second, BME students have an over involvement in clubs or societies, and third male BME students do not effectively judge their likelihood of success and so do not employ effective learning techniques. It appears that even though Cotton et al (2016) attempted to avoid a deficit position, all three of the issues that ‘warrant exploration’ reinforce the deficit model. Additionally, Cotton et al (2016) gained interviews from international BME students which means that limited comparisons can be made with home BME students who have a distinct socio-economic profile. The research site for Cotton et al (2016) was also a small university with a minority BME student and town population. Other studies provide similar results, Davies and Garrett’s (2012) analysis of student experiences within a small norther university suggested that no overt forms of racism were experienced and that in general BME students had a positive experience.

The above literature has presented some key points about BME attainment. It is almost unanimous that Pakistani male students are amongst the lowest performing BME student demographic and that they enter vocational HEICs with level three vocational courses (Richardson, 2015). Prior qualifications have the greatest impact on degree attainment where BME students from vocational backgrounds appear to have the lowest attainment record (Cotton et al, 2016). Institutional factors also influence the attainment of BME students, yet no conclusive evidence suggest if overt forms of racism are experienced by BME students. Nevertheless, the common method of correlating prior qualification data with university attainment scores continues to suggest that Pakistani males have a deficit in terms of ability when they enter HE. The obvious drawback within BME attainment literature, however, is that the entry dynamics are not fully studied which in the case of Pakistani male students is the transition from level three vocational courses to universities. As such, the first aim of this research project is to explore how Mirpuri male students from Bradford, who are amongst the most disenfranchised BME students to enter HE, choose their level three courses and its impact on degree attainment. To understand this context in more detail we must consider the context of BME students entering with level three vocational courses.

## Choosing level three vocational courses and Racial Warehousing

Literature on how BME students choose level three vocational courses and the various factors that lead to their decision making is limited, though it is an established point that working class Pakistani males are more likely to enter level three vocational courses in further education (Abbas, 2004). This is shown in the UCAS data analysed by researchers on BME under attainment in HE (see last section). A recent large scale independent study on BTEC students was conducted by the Social Market Foundation (2018) which stressed that ‘Asians’ are more likely to enter HE with vocational courses, second only to the Black students, and that, at 32 per cent, most of the students who entered HE with vocational courses had parents who were employed in ‘routine and manual labour’ (p.15). The report did not demarcate Pakistani students from other Asian students, nor was data provided on gendered performance, however, a recent report by Pearson (2018) showed that females in general were outperforming the males in almost all subjects. 3.8 per cent of female students achieved top grades compared to 2.4 per cent of male learners and, at level two, 15 per cent of the females gained the top D\* grade compared with 9 per cent of the males.

Why Pakistani students enter level three vocational courses has not been fully examined, cursory points have been made with regards to their socio-economic position (Abass, 2004) or their identity as males (Archer, 2003). However, the experiences of *working class* students on vocational courses have been studied extensively which provides some insight on level three course decision making. Hodkinson (1998) focused on this phase of the educational journey and, like many studying contemporary British vocational education and training (VET), highlighted the social stratification created by the more prestigious middle class A-level pathway, in comparison to the working class and ‘secondary’ vocational path dominated, at that time, by the GNVQ courses. He suggested that student choices are ‘…locked within the cultures in which young people have lived their lives and in their, often unequal, interactions, negotiations and sometimes struggles with educational providers.’ (p. 151). Hodkinson (1998) spoke in opposition to the neo-liberal/progressive presumption of students being ‘empowered’ to make the ‘right’ choice given the host of post-16 education providers and courses. Hodkinson (1998) suggested that dispositions and ‘life histories’ of students, in reality, account for the decision-making process, where decisions are partly intuitive, discursive rational and pragmatic (see also Hodkinson et al 1996). As an example, Hodkinson (1998) emphasises that the 100 per cent coursework assessment, incentivises the choice as it enables the learner, who is generally underachieving in examinations, to continue progressing with an assessment that is harmonious with their ‘life histories’.

Swift and Fisher (2012) provide further elaboration on post-16 choices. In studying the perception of the two main post-16 pathways, Swift and Fisher (2012) argue that the academic route remains to be considered the more prestigious and sought-after path, though many were ‘destined’ to enter the vocational. The notion of destiny emerges from structural limitations brought forth by the weak labour market conditions facing under-achieving school leavers, as well as, their perceptions of level three vocational courses to increase their earning capacity and provide access to desired careers.

Though English VET, and the issues facing working class students have, and continue to be studied, the BME experience is still in its infancy. Avis et al (2017) voice their concerns about the dearth of research conducted on race and VET, even though it is understood that BME students have high participation rates in level three vocational courses. The authors also present their analysis on how BME students make their level three course decisions. Speaking in the context of late capitalism, they state that the affluent sections of society are able to automate and/or outsource their demand for labour, in addition to the white working class communities who are able to utilise their social capital to enter apprentices, leaving the BME learners to participate in level three vocational courses and entering HE. Avis et al (2017) defined this as racial warehousing and proposed that racial warehousing explains how participating in low quality vocational courses, and remaining in education, becomes a default strategy for most BME students who attempt to resist various forms of inequalities.

Racial warehousing provides a good starting point in discussing BME attainment and entry dynamics. If we accept that Pakistani male students enter HE with level three vocational qualifications, which leads to their lower average attainment, racial warehousing expresses the structural discrimination that funnels them into such courses. Racial warehousing suggests that BME learners are participating in level three vocational courses as no other options are available to them. It should be noted that Avis et al (2017) speak mainly from a theoretical standpoint. They take account of the discriminatory elements of late capitalism where BME students are likely to experience greater number of discrimination due to both class and racial factors. By considering racial warehousing as a structurally discriminating factor a stronger case against the deficit model can be developed, as the deficit model is hinged on the observation that more Pakistani HE students have low degree attainment due to their entry into HE via ‘sub-optimal’ level three vocational courses (Leslie, 2005).

## The Paradox of Progressive Vocationalism

After considering the structural limitations that funnels BME students into level three vocational courses, we also need to understand how well vocational courses prepare BME learners for the demands for HE. This study particularly draws inspiration from the discourse developed by Bates et al (1998) in the second issue of the *Journal of Education and Work* (1998). This issue was mainly focused on the paradoxes of progressive vocationalism within the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) where progressive vocationalism entails the use of progressive pedagogy with competence assessment based on narrowly defined outcomes. This pedagogical and assessment model was adopted and advocated by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) which was a government body established in 1986, who organised the plethora of vocational qualifications that were available at the time. Amongst the first courses the NCVQ developed were the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), which were designed primarily for work-based assessment. This qualification adopted the controversial competence model, where outcomes were explicitly stated, and students were required to develop a portfolio showcasing evidence of competence. The learning was progressive allowing students to utilise diverse methods to showcase evidence of competence. This competence model would later be adopted by BTEC during the formation of the GNVQ in the early 1990s (Fisher, 2003).

The GNVQ qualification created a tripartite structure in the post-compulsory sector, made up of the ‘academic’, GCE A-levels; the ‘vocational’, BTEC/GNVQ qualifications; and the ‘occupational’, NVQ qualifications, (Higham and Yeomans, 2011). Robertson (1995) - an ambassador of the GNVQ – proposed that the GNVQ courses would also deal with issues of access and accountability. By ‘access’ the allusion was to the recent expansion of HE, where the GNVQ would provide entry level qualifications to an expanding HE sector. Accountability suggested that FE and HE qualifications should be relevant to the labour market where competence can be highlighted and modules providing accreditation would ensure students took ownership for their life-long learning and development. The GNVQ was then the middle-path that served learners who were not ready to enter the labour market and who wanted academically orientated vocational education which would give them access to HE.

The rationale for outcome-based assessment was provided by Jessup (1991), the then director of the NCVQ, who spearheaded the outcome movement. Jessup perceived the outcome model as a revolutionary device in transitioning from norm-criterion referencing and summative assessment, embodied by the traditional examination, to a more explicit and formative assessment. Jessup (1991) clarified that competence was not merely the minimal form of knowing on how to carry-out a task, but to be industry standard, which suggests that individuals will be able to showcase mastery in employment functions. The idea of explicit outcomes is rationalised by its ability to provide a standardised national framework which would allow employers to seek trained employees and use the framework for continuing skill development amongst their own staff. In addition to the outcomes-based assessment, the pedagogy of the NVQ/GNVQ courses was to be progressive. This was a means to develop the flexibility required for an unpredictable labour market and learner empowerment. In theory, teachers became facilitators ensuring student-centred learning, whilst students would generate evidence to showcase competence (Yeomans, 1999).

One of the drawbacks of the NCVQ model was that it assumed a number of operationalising elements, mainly that evidence of competence would be provided in a work environment and that the employer would create a learning environment in which the evidence of competence could be accrued (Jessup, 1991). The ultimate outcome of the GNVQ courses and the BTEC Diplomas that followed was a course that was comparable to A-levels by virtue of providing entry into HE, whilst assessing students based on narrow competence assessment, where evidence could be shown by any appropriate means (Higham and Yeomans, 2011, Isaac, 2013).

It is in relation to this pedagogy and assessment context that Bates et al (1998) voice their concerns. It should be noted that though Bates et al (1998) and the articles within the same issue are dated, their focus on the *logical* contradiction of adopting competence assessment within a progressive framework is very timely. The current Diploma courses still function within the NCVQ progressive/competence framework (Isaac, 2013).

Bloomer (1998), one of the contributors to the issue, suggested that competence assessment within a progressive framework became a ‘treasure hunt’ for information where the learner was simply paraphrasing or copying from a book. This was common in courses where the desired work environment was not created, and the students were left to seek information from various textbooks, online sources and news articles. Bates, (1998) analogously used the phrase ‘hunters and gatherers’ of information to describe the students who attempted to achieve the unit outcomes, subsequently limiting a deep engagement with the learning content (Bates, 1998). This apparent flaw within the course was argued by the authors to be a consequence of the conflict between technical rationalism expressed through narrowly defined outcomes and progressive pedagogy (Bates et al, 1998).

Bloomer (1998) pointed to the ideological evangelism of the competence model, suggesting that BTEC/GNVQ courses were an expression of neo-liberal politics where progressivism was simply a rhetorical devise. The idea of student empowerment through choice is, in reality, the need to fulfil consumer demand. The teachers, in principle, adopted the identity of a salesperson, whilst, the content is marginalised, and the qualification becomes simply a means to progression. Fisher’s (2003) analysis of the BTEC’s compliance with the NCVQ, continued with this general theme of criticism; Fisher (2003) outlined the ‘contradictory’ nature of the course structure where progressive pedagogy was utilised within a context of explicit outcome assessment. Fisher stated:

‘The characteristics of the curriculum were contradictory, ‘progressive’ in pedagogy, conservative in content, radical in assessment methodologies… The inﬂuence of the NCVQ, however, ensured that the technical rationalism that was intrinsic in new vocationalist curricula came to the fore. The resulting Advanced GNVQ represented Lyotardian performativity in its detailed performance criteria and near-Foucauldian surveillance in its assessment regime.’ (Fisher, 2003 p. 269).

Bates et al (1998) further stated that vocationalism and progressivism are, in essence, antithetical, where progressivism sought to emancipate the learner by empowering them and giving them a sense of autonomy and entitlement. Vocationalism, on the other hand, seeks to instil the skills of a particular occupation or job where the central focus is the vocation being pursued. Progressive ideology was historically located in primary education sector, whereas, the secondary schools, in general were dominated by classical humanist tradition (McLean, 1995). For Bates et al (1998) progressive vocationalism, of the GNVQ courses, is best understood as a compromise between these two diverse ideologies of teaching. This compromise leads to contradictions, particularly when a contributing ideology becomes dominant, which in the case of the GNVQ and the various vocational courses that followed, was the neo-liberal element that underpinned competence assessment, creating a controlled vocationalism. The progressive nature of the courses became a ‘ghost’ functioning simply as a form of rhetoric (Bates et al, 1998; Bloomer, 1998).

One of the tenants of progressive vocationalism was the idea of ensuring learner empowerment which was ought to be achieved in the independent accumulation of evidence and building unit portfolios. Bates (1998) argues that the empowering elements of the course fail to operationalise. For Bates (1998) the attempt to shift the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the students is problematic as the students ultimately resist this empowerment due to a lack of knowledge on how to successfully complete the course. Moreover, Wahlberg and Gleeson (2002) examined the tension between the students and teachers; where teachers were aware of what was required to succeed, in employment and HE, but the autonomous nature of BTEC/GNVQ courses created a power vacuum where students opted to take control, and attempted to achieve the objectives with minimum input. As a result, the students failed to develop the concrete skills needed for employment or HE. Ecclestone (2004) also argued that the outcome model did not develop the social and cultural capital within students, rather an ethos of remaining within the ‘comfort zone’ was cultivated where students avoided achieving the distinction level work if it was too challenging.

The GNVQ courses came to an end in 2007. The qualification that followed was the National Diploma, which in addition to adding functional skills to the programme preserved the previous NCVQ philosophy of progressive/competence. Higham and Yeomans (2005) described the continuous use of the competence assessment in the Diploma courses to be borderline ‘policy amnesia’, in that many of the flaws of the GNVQ were carried forward, even though the faults of the GNVQ had been extensively documented. The most pertinent concern for the policy makers was the issue of ‘parity of esteem’, as opposed to, the operational flaws of the course (Isaacs, 2013; Higham and Yeoman, 2011). The Diploma was thus a means to rectify the issue of parity between the GNVQ, or the middle vocational pathway and the academic pathway, rather than reforming the inadequate pedagogy and assessment, that had been the main flaw within the GNVQ model. Isaacs (2013) suggests that when policy learning conflicts with politics any information that undermines predetermined notions gets marginalised.

‘The policymakers at both the QCA and the DfES … suffered from policy amnesia bordering on deliberate blindness and an unwillingness to take seriously any warnings from past developments because the idea that the diploma would successfully bridge the vocational/ academic divide was sacrosanct.’ (Isaacs, 2013 p. 279).

The focus on esteem as opposed to the curriculum structure meant that the progressive and narrow ‘tick box’ assessment referred to by Fisher (2003) in the third generation of BTEC courses were brought forward in the BTEC National Diploma courses and continues to function within the current Pearson Diploma courses (Isaac, 2013). This design flaw in most level three vocational courses presents the second structural limitation that is faced by BME students before entering HE. The level three vocational courses that BME students are likely to undertake to enter HE limits their development by fostering a form of surface learning (Bloomer, 1998) and completing narrowly defined unit outcomes (Fisher, 2003). The following section highlights the literature that focuses on the transition of students from level three vocational courses into HE. This body of literature particularly focuses on the skills that level three vocational students bring into HE and how that impacts their performance within various forms of assessment.

## From Vocational Courses to Degree Courses

The use of competence assessment within progressive vocational courses represents a critical design flaw which limits engagement with the content of learning and promotes a form of surface learning (Bloomer, 1998). This is further examined by other researchers who primarily consider the performance of former vocational students within HE assessment. A seminal study by Williams (2000) provided rich accounts of how students from level three vocational courses engaged with university assessment. Williams (2000) reported that former GNVQ students found it challenging to engage with, and succeed in, the demands of degree level qualifications; in both formative and summative assessment. GNVQ students were reported to prefer coursework over exams and generally achieved satisfactory grades given the timeframe provided to complete the work. However, there was a tendency for GNVQ students to struggle with conducting critical research, critically examining their evidences and providing a structured argument for essay-based answers, Williams (2000) quotes:

‘We also find the ability to write an essay very lacking. Structure, synthesis, how to follow a basic argument through, how to reference, what constitutes effective evidence, the construction of an argument.’ (p. 358).

According to Williams (2000), the main deficiency with regards to academic skills, amongst GNVQ students, was in their apparent inability to critically analyse and write a coherent argument which requires other sub-set of skills such as, examining resources, synthesising and coherently structuring the coursework. This was in addition to having limited experience with exams, which meant former GNVQ students had poor revision strategies, and in producing coherently written answers in the exam. It was argued that the lack of engagement with traditional examinations raised stress levels of students which further contributed towards poor performance.

Williams' (2000) study may not be generalisable, but the inherent flaws within the progressive/vocational model provide a compelling argument that BME students who enter HE using level three courses do not possess the right skills because of a flaw in the design of the courses and not the students abilities or potentials per se (Advance HE, 2018). Other studies have reported similar issues. McEwen et al (2001) made the case by comparing former vocational student performance in assessment with former A-level students. They found that A-level students’ carry out more examinations, engage in understanding concepts and arguments and continuously consolidate previous learning optimally aligning them to the demands of HE. The assessment structure of traditional A-levels is thus advantageous in preparing for HE assessment.

Lillis (2001) study focused primarily on the academic demands of HE and argued that:

‘Writing is a key assessment tool, with students passing or failing courses according to the ways in which they respond to, and engage in, academic writing tasks…. a very particular type of writing continues to be the mainstay within many subject areas. Such writing, institutionally labelled as the ‘essay’ is at the center of practice’ (p.20)

Lillis further states that students from non-traditional backgrounds including those entering HE from vocational courses have to contend with an academic culture that is distant from their own forms of speaking and writing. Lillis (2001) concluded by suggesting that reform in HE curricula is necessary in order to accommodate students with non-traditional qualifications.

Hatt and Baxter (2003) carried out one of the large-scale comparative studies on the assessment performance of former vocational students compared with those who entered HE via A-level, access, and foundational courses. Hatt and Baxter (2003) argued that students from vocational courses had to negotiate from a vocational to an academic culture which led to lower performance rates and high levels of dropouts. Students from vocational courses stated having difficulty understanding assessment requirements where academic writing was a major transition from writing reports, which was a common form of assessment within level three vocational courses. Hatt and Baxter (2003) state that vocational courses do not cultivate skills required for ‘well referenced’ essays, stating that:

‘…students were not only negotiating a transition from FE college to HE institution, they were also ‘crossing the divide’ from a vocational entry route to an academic programme. They were experiencing a significant shift in assessment culture with little preparation to support the adjustment process and this helps to explain why their achievement rates fell below those of the other groups.’ (Hatt and Baxter, 2003 p.27)

More recent studies continue to stress lower performance levels of former vocational students due to their inability to fully comprehend the assessment and pedagogical change from vocational courses to degree courses (Carter 2010). Leese (2010) spoke of how students found the level of independence at university as a surprise, as they came from institutional cultures where they were continuously supported by teachers. Nairz-Wirth et al (2017) add that independent learning in universities creates tensions for non-traditional students as they enter from courses that has afforded them the support of trained teachers, who apply supportive pedagogical practices. Students from vocational courses require further nurturing in order to fully actualise the benefits of independent study. Cree et al (2009) spoke about the same issue for students on social work degree stating that:

‘For the majority of informants, the difficulties lay in making the transition to a new teaching and learning environment and, in common with other studies of student learning, they documented a process of ‘learning shock’ as they entered the university’ (p.896)

A recent study by Shields and Masardo (2018) reiterates what has been mentioned in other studies. The authors drew attention to three categories of HE students; those who enter through the academic path; those with a mixture of qualifications and those with just VET qualifications. The authors conclude that students entering with just VET qualifications have the lowest outcomes in HE than those who participate in just academic courses.

It is almost unanimous that students from level three vocational courses struggle within universities primarily with assessment which suggest that level three vocational courses do not adequately prepare students for HE (Williams, 2000, Hatt and Baxter, 2003). This is possibly due to the flawed design of most level three vocational courses that have continued to adopt the NCVQs competence assessment and progressive pedagogy (Bates, et al 1998). When factors such as, racial warehousing and a flawed curricula within level three vocational courses are aggregated, the validity of correlating BME attainment with UCAS tariff scores, as a way of understanding BME attainment in HE, is diminished. Simply correlating attainment data with UCAS tariff scores without comprehensive knowledge of the English VET sector and the entry dynamics of BME students is misleading. We must then consider the structurally discriminating factors that are faced by BME students in their entry dynamics, primarily in how they make their level three course choices and how those courses prepare them for HE when discussing their lower attainment in HE.

It is the aim of this research to examine how Mirpuri males engage with level three vocational courses and how that impacts their attainment in HE. From the substantive literature that points towards low degree attainment of Pakistani male students and the limited work conducted on how BME students enter HE from level three vocational courses, provides the rationale for the first aim of this study, which is:

* To examine the transition of Mirpur students from level three vocational courses to degree courses and its impact on attainment

This includes an examination of how the Mirpuri students chose level three vocational courses, how they engaged with them and how well they were prepared to succeed in HE. As stated, these entry dynamics are instrumental in ensuring that we continue to identify the structural limitations faced by BME students in order to overcome the deficit model.

## HE Entry

The above literature provided the rationale for the first phase of this study which considers how Mirpuri students enter HE. The next phase of this research considers the impact of the institutions on degree attainment. To begin, it is important to understand how BME students enter HE in terms how they make their higher education institution and course (HEIC) choices and their perception of HE. A growing body of research has observed that certain universities racially discriminate BME students which leads to the BME clustering within former CAT or polytechnic institutes (Noden, et al 2014a and b, Boliver 2015). Studies on BME university entry tackle a crucial but an alternative line of argument. The most dominant narrative within BME university entry literature is that the sector exhibits potential inequalities in terms of access to prestigious universities, as ‘new’ and mainly former polytechnics continue to host ethnic minorities in greater numbers (Shiner and Noden, 2015; Noden et al 2014a; Boliver, 2013, 2016). The narrative of discrimination by prestigious universities against BME students was first proposed by Shiner and Modood (2002) and then challenged by Leslie (2003). Leslie (2003), unlike more recent studies; argued that the quality of entry qualifications and the type of courses undertaken are the best indicators of university offers. Leslie (2003) provides a model by which the entry qualifications can be categorised in terms of quality. Leslie’s (2003) model proposes that the courses within which students gain low results but gain acceptance are the best courses to participate, in order to gain access to prestigious universities. Given that logic it would infer that courses which afford students high grades but have low acceptance in university admission are the lowest quality of courses. Leslie’s (2003) results suggest that, those with a GNVQ at pass level had an acceptance rate of 55.39, whilst those achieving a mere 0.5 A-level points enjoyed a 66.61 acceptance rate (See Leslie, 2003, p. 333). This suggests that university admissions staff considered that level three vocational qualifications are a less suitable preparation for degree study than A-level, or potentially that their ignorance of the qualifications led to a form of credential discrimination.

Predominantly quantitative in their method, contemporary studies in the field of BME university entry have highlighted forms discrimination that challenges Leslie’s (2003) deficit model. Noden et al (2014b) for example, take account of the relative competitiveness of different subjects and the quality of applicants and affirm that ethnic minorities are less likely to gain offers to elite institutions, especially the Pakistani minority who had the highest rejection rate compared to other ethnicities. Gender continues to play a part in entry dynamics with white females from privileged backgrounds most likely to get offers from elite universities than any other ethnic and gender cohort. Boliver (2013, 2016) adds that a form of ethnic penalty is being charged and that forms of discrimination are evident as ethnic minority students are less likely to gain offers from Russell Group universities after accounting for prior attainment and the ‘numerical competitiveness’ of courses. This was particularly true for Black Caribbean/African and Pakistani/Bangladeshi students.

With that said, Noden et al (2014a b) and Boliver (2016) advice caution in viewing institutional bias through the lens of discrimination alone. This is primarily due to the lack of data that can *categorically* suggest if any ethnic penalty exists. Institutional bias can also be instigated by the,’…mix of subjects available in the different groups of universities and different course offer rates’ (Noden et al (2014b p. 359). Although Boliver (2016) maintains that Russell Group universities are far less equal in accepting ethnic minority applicants than the new universities, she adds that this claim can be overstated if it is likely that ethnic minorities may not have the right combination of A-levels, over-subscription to particular courses, and poorer GCSE grades. Like other studies on attainment, Noden et al (2014 a and b) and Boliver (2016), do not examine the impact of participating in level three vocational courses even though it is generally known that that certain elite universities do not readily accept most vocational courses (Russell Group, Informed Choices Report, 2015; Aynsley and Crossouard 2010; Grove, 2013; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). It could be argued that numerically driven research continues to mask racial barriers (Yosso, 2005). This according to CRT scholars systematically gives credence to the deficit model, which ostensibly suggests that wrong decisions made by BME students in their post-16 studies have led, in this case, to their ethnic clustering within ‘new’ universities (Yosso, 2005).

Ball et al (2002), in contrast to recent studies, provided a more qualitative analysis on the BME student entry to HE. The authors suggested that there were distinct types of BME student *choosers* and various complexities involved in decision making. The first of these choosers were defined as being ‘contingent’; these are commonly first generation HE participants, with parents generally educated abroad: these students are typically limited by socio-economic circumstances and decide to enter HE after GCSE or in most cases after A-levels. Contingent choosers generally have limited knowledge of high-status institutions; where subjects, rather than courses are discussed, and where institutional distinctions on curricula and pedagogy are rarely entertained. Other characteristics consist of making decisions based on ‘cold’ knowledge without taking account of university prospectuses and information available online. Additionally, a comprehensive knowledge of, what is a degree, and the opportunities a degree certificate entails, are not fully grasped, rather vague aspirations and faulty perceptions encourage participation.

The second type of chooser was defined as an embedded chooser, these were akin to the traditional HE students. Embedded choosers are generally expected to enter HE and have parents who are also graduates. The choice of institution is not limited to a specific location and it is almost certain that embedded students will leave home and attend a university that was suited to their talents. Information on various HE institutions are taken from several sources; the authors particularly point to league tables and the desire to participate in prestigious universities.

Ball et al (2002) also emphasise that the most decisive factor of ethnic minority HE choice was based on knowledge concerning the student population, and in seeking an ethnically mixed university. The authors argue that some students seek to defend their identity, by applying to universities that are known to be more ‘tolerant’ in terms of providing ethnic provisions and creating conceptual spaces in which ethnic identities can be expressed and accepted. ‘Settings of diversity potentially offer an escape from essentialism, from fixity, and allow for the possibility of play across a variety of identities: the making and remaking of identity’ (Ball, et al, 2002 p. 348).

Ball et al (2002) provide interesting insights into BME student choices, yet, their study does not comment on entry qualifications, which as stated above, profoundly impacts entry to certain universities (Aynsley, Crossouard, 2010). Additionally, specific student profiles are not fully articulated which suggest that the typology of ‘contingent’ and ‘embedded’ choosers may not express the complexity of decision making. This is further problematised by contemporary data on certain working class ethnic minorities who exhibit some embedded patterns of decision making. Modood’s (2004) model of ethnic capital provides evidence to this point; ‘ethnic capital’ (derived from the concept of ‘ethnicity as social capital’) allows working class ethnic minorities to participate in HE in much higher numbers than working class white students (see Chapter 2). Shah, et al (2010) further add that certain ethnic minority communities, like those in Bradford, generate such ethnic capital where distinct value judgements regarding education allow students to ensure progression.

The literature on HE attainment does not speak of how entry within certain universities can impact attainment, though Richardson (2015) did suggest that those who participate in former polytechnics have lower overhaul attainment than those within higher status universities. This thesis is concerned with the context of Mirpuri students and that most of the Mirpuri male students enter and participate in ‘new’ universities which have a stronger vocational ethos than elite or research-intensive universities. Another common characteristic of Mirpuri students is that they enter ‘caring for’ courses such as medicine, dentistry, business and ICT, this is mainly the case for Pakistani and Bangladeshi students (Richardson, 2015; Connor et al 1996, 2002; Leslie, 2003). These two characteristics of Pakistani students are seminal to this study as they indicate that Pakistani students, in general, seek to develop occupational skills and knowledge, and gain qualifications that will ensure entry into desired professions. Though limited work has been done to understand why Mirpuri students choose vocational HEICs, what is important to understand is that when entering HE Pakistani students may not desire, or, expect to engage in traditional academia both in terms of pedagogy or assessment, as their courses are perceived to be vocational. By examining the transition from level three vocational courses into HE we can also identify how the Mirpuri students made their HEIC choices and their general perception when entering HE. This is important to understand as the literature on institutional racism generally makes the case that university pedagogy and assessment is not inclusive of BME students (Singh, 2011). This includes the student-centred learning which limits student/tutor contact (Sanders and Rose-Adams, 2014) and curricula content which is not meaningful (Thomas and May, 2010).

## Institutional Racism in Focus

It is commonly stated that after accounting for prior qualifications there continues to be an attainment disparity between BME and white students which suggests that institutional racism plays a role in the under-attainment of BME students (Smith, 2017). Studies that have focused primarily on institutional racism are generally contextualised by the residual disparity that remains after prior attainment is accounted for. Furthermore, most studies do not indicate towards the type of institutions and courses that BME students participate in which means no discussion is developed with regards to vocational HEICs. Nevertheless, certain studies have focused primarily on the institutional factors to identify the problem areas. It must be clarified that in the sections above the argument was made that qualitative studies are limited by the diversity of contextual characteristics which limits their ability in providing conclusive answers with regards to institutional racism. It is for this reason that the studies in this section are dedicated to the issue of race and HE, highlighting more covert forms of racism, namely with regards to university pedagogy and assessment.

A key component of CRT is to highlight the institutional forms of racism that are embedded in white liberal structures, this can entail the neo-liberalism as an economic model that impacts England’s tertiary education sector (Avis et al, 2017) and the liberal education philosophy of universities which may hide racially excluding forms of pedagogy and assessment (Bhopal, 2018).

To begin, Stevenson’s (2012) account of BME experiences provides a unique picture in relation to degree performance. Stevenson (2012) took account of students’ journey into HE, alongside degree aspirations, and academic strategies, as well as, interviews with faculty staff to identify if mechanisms were in place to mitigate the low attainment by BME students. Stevenson (2012) stated that:

‘Many students were highly critical of the lack of support offered to them, in particular the lack of individual time with academic staff, which they felt was both unacceptable and callous…The students also repeatedly referred to what they regarded as the universities failures to integrate them effectively and develop a sense of belonging (p.4)

The faculty staff on the other hand ‘blamed’ the students and their lack of abilities due to:

‘inadequate academic background…’or having ‘non-traditional qualifications’ and, consequently, having an inadequate knowledge base on which to build, meaning they quickly fell behind their peers; academic communication ‘deficiencies’ – both inadequate English language skills and also an inability to write well academically’ (p.10)

Stevenson (2012) argues that faculty staff generally blamed the students for poor performance but also stated that university culture in general is a continuation of a traditional elitist culture which favoured a selected number of individuals. Pedagogical methods such as the traditional lecture and the three hour closed book examinations are not conducive to the current student demographic. Stevenson’s (2012) conclusions took account of the common problem areas addressed by both students and staff. One common response was that low attainment was due to ‘inadequate academic background and academic preparedness of some students and their poor academic communication skills, inadequate student support mechanisms and a lack of understanding of what was expected academically’ (p.16). Staff and students also felt that their needed to be greater commitment to ensure integration of BME students and inclusive teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) practices.

Stevenson (2012) attempted to provide alternatives to the deficit model, however, it seems prior qualifications continue to emerge as a major factor to attainment. Stevenson (2012) does, nonetheless, provide valuable insight of the TLA practices within universities namely in the traditional academic culture which does not accommodate BME student needs. This includes the use of lectures and traditional closed book examinations, as well as, the lack of support given to students within universities. This is a key point that potentially highlights the impact of academic drift on BME learners. The issue of universities applying traditional academic practices that are excluding BME learners parallels the observations that were made by Burgess and Pratt (1970) and Pratt (1997) where non-traditional learners were excluded as the university setting abandoned the technical tradition for more academic practices. Another very comprehensive study by Mountford-Zimdars et al (2015) who reported for HEFCE highlight several factors that may explain the ethnic disparity. Like other studies before them Mountford-Zimdars et al (2015 state:

Prior attainment on entry to HE is the main driver of progression and performance at university, so gaps in performance may fall if attainment is boosted earlier in the education system. (p.22)

This continues to stress the need to study how BME students make their level three course choices and how it impacts their HE attainment. Nevertheless, Mountford-Zimdars et al (2015) present some valuable insight on student experiences such as the negative and generally racial experience with TLA. The authors argue that ‘different student groups indicate varying degree of satisfaction with HE curricula, and with the user-friendliness of learning, teaching and assessment.’ (p.i). Other factors include relationships with staff and students and the lack of inclusion within university environment; recurring differences in experience due to social, cultural and economic capital, and the level of support provided by faculty staff. Overhaul Mountford-Zimdars et al (2015) stress on the complexity of the issue and state that more qualitative or mix method approaches are necessary to make sense of varying contexts that emerge with students on different courses. What remains conclusive in their study is that problem areas emerge in relation to curricula and general TLA practices, this was also stressed by Stevenson (2012).

A relatively recent study by Smith (2017) provides further details about attainment within the context of Leeds Beckett University (LBU). This context is of significant importance as LBU is a former polytechnic with a diversity of students and dedication for widening participation. Similar to Stevenson (2012), Smith (2017) interviewed staff and students, as well as, considering attainment data of LBU students. Smith’s (2017) primary focus was how BME students engaged with teaching and learning practices. Smith (2017) argued that reform in university pedagogy and assessment is key to ensuring a reduction in BME attainment disparity. From her field work Smith (2017) reports:

When asked to speculate why BME students were less satisfied with their course and did not achieve as well as their peers, respondents (staff and students) consistently highlighted problems with the curriculum, the academic environment, assessment practice and academic support (p. 54).

Smith (2017) provides valuable insight into the experiences of BME learners and their engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. The study also continues to add that Asian students were not supported during independent study time which may be a consequence of Asian students living at home thus not gaining access to support. Smith (2017) stresses that Asian student attainment is off particular interest, possibly due to the lack of research on Asian students and their engagement within HE. Smith (2017) like Stevenson (2012) and Mountford-Zimdars et al (2015) stress the importance for TLA practices to be inclusive to all learners.

Studies that commentate on race and HE in general discuss some of the issues with regards to traditional university ethos. Bird (1996), for example argued that universities were lagging in discussing race discrimination and that BME students in general are not stereotypical university students, rather they embody distinct racial and ethnic practices that require flexible provisions. This includes providing culturally sensitive student services, and student support beyond the actual timetabled hours. Similarly, the various chapters in Law et al (2004), voice concerns of faculty staff complacency towards race relations and the attainment gap. Purwar (2004) presents the university setting as a racialised social space where white hegemony functions to marginalise black academics. Purwar (2004) deconstructs the concept of the liberal or ‘open space’ in HE and states that the ‘open’ culture masks racialised patronage amongst academics and manifests in forms of social cloning.

Madriaga (2018) particularly suggests that white dominance is maintained in the majoritarian view that HE is value neutral, meritocratic and colour-blind undermining cultural nuances embodied in racialised BME students. Madriaga (2018) critically examines the race relation polices at a number of universities that are recognised for their race equality work. Given the perceived advocacy of diversity and equality, Madriaga (2018) argues that inadequate policies of inclusion or inclusive practice with limited understanding of the racialised experiences of BME students. Madriaga (2018) suggests that cultural differences must be seen in light of how ‘whiteness, white supremacy, structures lives’ (p.13). The university setting according to Madriaga (2018) is thus defined by white hegemony which enforces whiteness and discriminates ethnic minority students.

In synthesising various studies on BME HE attainment, Singh (2011) argues that the HE sector is substantially laxed when it comes to issues of inclusivity and potential racial discrimination. The common university ethos of being liberal and progressive, systematically ignores issues of race and in implementing interventions to overcome the attainment gap. Singh (2011) consequently advices that the TLA practices within universities must transform to cater for BME and non BME students. Analogously, Sanders and Rose-Adams (2014) review of BME attainment literature stresses that institutional racism in HE is being ignored by the sector as a whole, the authors argue that in addition to TLA, staff and student expectations need to be considered, as misplaced expectations exacerbates the problem of inclusion. Sanders and Rose-Adams (2014) advice on continued support for the students and reflective practice by faculty staff.

The issues of race within HE are substantial and to provide a comprehensive examination would require resources beyond the scope of this study. Given the substantive literature on racialised institutional characteristics, the lack of inclusivity within university TLA practices are a critical factor in the BME under-attainment. The main issue emerges from the academic TLA practices which are not inclusive to BME students (Stevenson, 2012, Smith, 2017). This observation is in line with theory of academic drift, however, as the studies above are not contextualised within vocational HEICs (with the exception of Smith, 2017) this notion cannot be substantiated. This also highlights one key limitation in studies that focus on institutional racism *per se*. They do not comment on entry dynamics and more importantly the context of vocational HEICs, although it is understood that BME students in general and Pakistani students in particular enter ‘new’ universities and commonly participate in vocational degree courses (Robinson, 2015). Given this gap in knowledge the present study takes into account the context of vocational HEICs and how Mirpuri students engage with vocational HEICs and its impact on attainment. It is thus the aim of the present research project:

* To explore the Mirpuri male engagement with university pedagogy within vocational HEICs
* To examine the Mirpuri male experience with university assessment within vocational HEICs

Before we highlight the research methodology, it is crucial to consider the context of vocational HE sector in England, particularly in light of academic drift, which states that vocational HEIs have adopted many traditional academic characteristics which limits such institutions and courses to be inclusive to non-traditional learners (Pratt, 1997).

## Academic Drift in English HE

In the previous chapter the theory of academic drift was discussed as a way of making sense of vocational HEICs and how they have evolved by adopting traditional academic characteristics both on a macro and micro levels (Kyvik, 2007). This section explores how academic drift has been applied within the English context in order to understand the institutional evolution of vocational HEICs and how it impacts the Mirpuri students within English universities. Pratt and Burgess (1974) applied academic drift in two contexts, beginning with the CATs (Burgess and Pratt, 1970) and then the polytechnics (Pratt and Burgess, 1974, Pratt, 1997), and primarily discussed how the change in technical college tradition impacted the non-traditional students who were to be the main student demographic within CATs and polytechnics. The present thesis considers the impact of academic drift on Mirpuri learners who have the added disadvantage of being racially discriminated as a result of academic drift. This section should also be read in light of the previous section which highlighted how academic TLA practices are one of the primary factors that alienate BME students in HE, which impacts their attainment. Academic drift serves as a framework to describe how academic TLA practices were adopted by vocational HEICs. The following section explores the English HE context in light of academic drift starting with CATs and followed by the polytechnics both of which serve most of the current BME undergraduates (Advance HE, 2018).

Though major reform in HE began in the post-war milieu, there have been discussions regarding the expansion of HE due to the advancement of technology since the mid-nineteenth century (Whyte, 2015). Locke (1984) stated that the growth in the dyes, pharmaceuticals, engineering and mechanics industries created a close connection to the universities requiring advanced study of organic chemistry and applied science. Given the new technological context, Locke (1984) argued that British engineers were resilient to change their workshop apprenticeship model which produced the engineers that had spawned the industrial revolution. The apprenticeship model provided practical expertise but was limited in inculcating the theoretical understanding necessary for innovation. As a result there emerged a skill deficit in technologically trained manpower.

In 1944, the Percy Committee was appointed to identify the details of the deficit in higher technological education. The Percy report (1945) made clear that the ‘…position of Great Britain as a leading industrial nation [was] being endangered by a failure to secure the fullest possible application of science to industry; and… that this failure [was] partly due to deficiencies in education.’ (p. 5). According to the Percy Report a substantial number of highly skilled labour was required in the form of, (1) senior administrators, (2) engineer scientists and development engineers, (3) engineer managers (design, manufacture, operation and sales), (4) technical assistants and designer draughtsmen, and (5) draughtsmen, foremen and craftsmen. (p. 6). This demand for highly skilled labour was to be met by a co-operative interaction between the education system and the industrial sector and by designating new colleges of technology that awarded degree level qualifications. The Percy Report (1945) concluded by suggesting that technological education and management education was in short supply; recommending a need to rapidly organise higher technical education as the divide between the technical colleges and the universities was not sufficient.

A year later, the Barlow Committee was asked to report on the manpower needs of the country. The Barlow Report (1946) concurred with the Percy Report (1945) stating that the cultivation of science and scientist(s) was instrumental to future economic success. The Barlow Report defined the scientist as someone who had qualified at a degree level in mathematics, physics, chemical and biological sciences. Subsequently, the Barlow report made the case that the demand for scientists can only be supplied by the universities, and that faculties of technology should conduct advance level work by merging with local universities. Other more remote faculties of technology should be given university status. In both cases, the argument remained that highly skilled labour was in short supply and reform in HE was necessary in order to increase the national skill level; where Percy suggested the designation of new colleges providing degree level work, Barlow advised expanding the university sector.

## Colleges of Advanced Technology

In 1956, a decade after the Barlow Report (1946), David Eccles the then Minster of Education designated eight - later ten - Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs) (Patchett, 1962). These colleges were to be upgraded technical colleges that were given the responsibility to develop their own courses; award their own qualifications; and contribute to the cultivation of advanced level technical education. Burgess and Pratt (1970) argue that the technical colleges had a distinct vocational ethos prior to their designation. The *technical college tradition* was distinct from *the academic tradition* of the universities due to its emphasis on teaching rather than research; serving the public sector; being responsive to the vocational needs of society, and catering for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast the general purpose of university education was to develop within the elite factions of society a liberal disposition and transmit cultural knowledge transforming the students into objectively thinking gentleman scholars, who were not concerned about the technical obsessions of the day (Newman, 2009; Fieldhouse, 1996). The outcome of this education created a distinct elite culture one that sought preservation of the self, and cultivation of arts, it formed a solid identity and forms of cultural practices that were prevalent amongst the elite factions of English society (Anderson, 1995).

The CATs attempted to retain the technical college tradition whilst seeking the esteem that was generally afforded to the universities (Burgess and Pratt 1970). One way to achieve parity with the universities was through the Diploma in Technology (Dip tech). The Dip tech award was designed by the CATs but was accredited externally by the National Council for Technological Awards (NCTA) who gave approval based on the London BSc syllabus. This was to ensure that the Dip tech had parity with the university degree, whilst attempting to retain the technical college tradition. NCTA demanded that faculty staff be highly experienced in their fields and have good connections with industry and the that Dip tech courses added liberal studies as an essential part of their syllabus (ibid., p. 91).

Academic drift within the programme and pedagogy was thus observable rapidly, as the aims of achieving parity with the degree qualification meant that Dip tech courses adopted liberal elements of broad independent research and academic writing. Burgess and Pratt (1980) state that one of the outcomes of adding liberal education elements to the course was that engineering students, for example, were pushed to write more academically and, for this reason, tensions emerged between the students and lecturers. The engineering students resented the lecturers whilst the lecturers sought to ‘civilise the rude mechanics’ (p. 91). This drift was also criticised by the local industry who argued that courses exhibited an ‘academic bias’ and did not develop the relevant skills for industry.

Other consequences of CATs attempting to be on par with traditional universities was that courses considered lower level, i.e. courses not worthy of an ‘advance’ institute, were eliminated from the prospectus (Burgess and Pratt, 1970). This policy affected courses like bakery, chiropody and art, as well as, part-time and evening courses which had to become defunct in order to increase the capacity of full-time residential students (ibid). Additionally, the heavy teaching load was a quintessential characteristic of the technical college tradition which was reduced overtime as staff complained that they were overworked with teaching duties and not able to conduct research, whilst, students claimed that it impeded with their extra-curricular interest. The resolution to these demands was the reorganisation of courses to university like semesters and the intense teaching timetables became shorter with two 19-week semesters and longer holidays (ibid.). Burgess and Pratt (1970) state that as a result of such programme drift (see Kyvik, 2007), the technical college tradition of craftsmanship was being lost in favour of the academic tradition distancing the non-traditional students who did not embody the cultural attributes of the middle-classes. Burgess and Pratt (1970) commented on how this negatively impacted students who were expecting to have more contact with lecturers. Many of the students that initially attended CATs came from vocational backgrounds and were not accustomed to having reduced teaching hours. Parallels can be made with contemporary BME students who struggle with the lack of student/teacher contact where limited support is provided and issues of racial exclusion are not being addressed (Madriaga, 2018; Smith, 2017)

Academic drift in structural administration was observed as the CATs increased their student entry requirements to two O-levels and increased in the number of London degree graduates. Additionally, staff within the colleges continuously lobbied to be removed from local authority, arguing that it allowed for greater ‘academic’ freedom which would stimulate innovation (Burgess and Pratt, 1970). As the CATs became indistinguishable from the traditional universities in many of their curricula and pedagogical matters, and had expanded many of their facilities, the 1964 Robbins Committee felt that the CATs should be able to award their own degrees.

In response, the CATs were removed from local authority control and began to be funded by the Universities Grant Committee (UGC). Burgess and Pratt (1970) add that when the UGC was assigned to fund the CATs they did not perceive them as institutions with a distinct technical tradition rather the CATs were perceived as new universities. The switch to UGC meant that there were pressures to further diversify subject choices and eventually create autonomous collegiate departments, and academic advising councils, particularly in the non-technological fields such as sociology. With regards to being autonomous, vis-à-vis being independent from the local council, Burgess and Pratt (1970) state that it had no bearing on educational innovation, implying that the move to be autonomous was more symbolic and driven by the desire to be more like universities than fulfilling operational goals. We can thus see that the institutions in which many of the BME students currently participate have evolved by becoming similar to traditional universities which had a distinct academic tradition utilising academic pedagogy and assessment. The technical college tradition was to avoid such drift in order to remain relevant both to the students who participated within it and for the needs of the society which required occupationally trained gradates, as opposed to, graduates with academic skills (Percy Report, 1945, Barlow Report, 1946).

In 1966, a mere decade since their designation, the CATs were given university status. Burgess and Pratt (1970) disparagingly conclude that the whole academic drift process within the CATs hindered the cultivation of a rich technical college tradition becoming inaccessible for disenfranchised students, whilst the faculty staff perceived the university status to be an apotheosis for the CATs.

## Polytechnics

The transformation of the CATs into universities was perceived as one of the early signs of academic drift within British HE (Burgess and Pratt, 1970). What was to follow is considered the greatest instance of institutional, programme and pedagogic drift in British HE history (Pratt, 1997). Anthony Crosland, as the Secretory of Education in 1964, reacted to both the Robbins Report (1964) and the CATs rapid transition into universities by proposing for a highly controversial binary HE sector. Crosland was concerned, like many others during the post-war era, about the lack of technological advancement in Britain and its correlation with technically skilled manpower (Emmerson, 1973). A long-held anxiety had existed before World War One about Britain’s deficit of high skilled labour, and the antagonistic national attitudes towards participating in technological endeavours (Weiner, 1981; Ashby, 1974). These attitudes were witnessed in various sectors of British society and were seen as a causal factor to the nation’s economic decline (Barnett,1996). It is in this context that the British political elite began to criticise the universities for failing to cultivate highly skilled technologists.

Crosland in his famous Woolwich speech proposed for the creation of polytechnics that would supply the vocational and technological needs of a technological society (see Pratt and Burgess, 1974, for full transcription). The polytechnics were to be supervised and monitored by the local authorities, being proactive to the changing needs of society, namely in technological advancement, and more importantly being accessible to disenfranchised learners. The universities, however, would remain autonomous and protected by their respective royal charters (Pratt and Burgess, 1974). Crosland was conscious of the academic drift that had occurred with the CATs, and so the binary structure was a way avoiding another drift. For Crosland a unified HE sector proposed by the Robbins Committee entailed an inevitable academic drift eliminating the imperative of developing a rich vocational tradition accessible to working class students (Pratt, 1997). Crosland’s binary system would allow the polytechnics to carryout advanced vocational learning whilst the university sector would remain autonomous maintaining their academic traditions with its focus on liberal arts and advance science research. It should be noted that though the universities, at the time, taught advanced engineering and applied-science, this was considered inadequate for the needs of a rapidly developing society (Silver, 1990; Burgess and Pratt, 1974).

With the polytechnics, as with the CATs before them, the academic drift commenced with the awarding of qualifications. The polytechnics did not award their own degrees but rather degrees were awarded by an external body, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) (Silver, 1990). The CNAA, established in 1964, inherited the responsibilities of the NCTA and were amalgamated with the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design (NCDAD). It supervised the accreditation of degrees for social sciences, business studies, teacher training and creative and performing arts (Rogers, 1993). The CNAA was a major step forward in expanding the HE sector as it was the first time in British HE history an independent body outside of a university could accredit a degree. One of the main responsibilities of the CNAA was to ensure that the degrees were of ‘comparable standards with that of universities’ (Silver, 1990 p. 75).

Programme and pedagogical drift within the polytechnics can be seen as a consequence of gaining course approval from the CNAA. The CNAA would monitor various elements of a proposed course to see if it met the criteria of a degree level qualification. The criteria required for approval normally related to recruiting academic staff, expanding facilities and revising the syllabus by *broadening* its scope and adding a final year research project (Silver, 1990). It is this broad study of various theoretical elements of a discipline, alongside an element of research, which made a degree qualification distinct from the commonly awarded diploma. A diploma was commonly awarded in other European polytechnics, but in Britain this was widely seen by English policymakers as being instrumental and of displaying a type of parochialism (Pratt, 1997). This meant that for the proposed courses to gain the approval by the CNAA a broad liberal orientation was mandatory, avoiding a restricted focus. The polytechnics, also began to offer postgraduate courses which, according to Pratt (1997) demonstrated their ‘academic standing’ and was a way of avoiding criticism by the universities for not developing HE worthy qualifications. Pratt (1997) further states that the higher the academic level of the awards became the more indistinguishable the polytechnics became from the universities.

A matter of interest concerning the drift in the polytechnics was that, although distinct from the universities in purpose and administrative structure, Crosland wanted the polytechnics to award degrees (Pratt, 1997). Eric Robinson, the leading policy maker for the polytechnics, argued that this was a means of transitioning ‘…higher education out of the ivory tower and make it available to all’ (Robinson, 1968 p. 10). The real dilemma with the awarding of degrees was that the degree qualification was inherently defined by a liberal/research orientation, which tested scholarly attributes, it is for this reason that the CNAA did not approve courses that did not embody various traditional attributes, such as a broad content of study and research provision (Silver, 1990). The fact that both Crosland and Robinson insisted on allowing polytechnics to award (external) degrees, rather than diplomas is a clear case of what CRT scholars discuss as nominalised whiteness. By seeking to award degrees rather than diplomas both Crosland and Robinson unconsciously extended white hegemonic structures that are an inherent part of traditional universities (Madriaga 2018). It seems paradoxical that Crosland and Robinson desired to democratise the elite universities by adopting elite cultural objects, which inevitably gave the universities the ability to impose their meanings on what defined a degree qualification and a university institution.

By analysing how academic drift has transitioned vocational HEICs, we can begin to understand the structural limitations for BME learners who enter former CATs and polytechnic institutes. We can argue that the academic TLA practices which limit BME learners within vocational HEICs may be the result of the unwarranted evolution of vocational education towards academia. As Burgess and Pratt (1970) state the technical college tradition was a rich vocational tradition which had a distinct ethos, one of teacher student contact, occupationally relevant learning content and pedagogy. The reduced teaching hours and the implementation of a liberal ethos were, and continue to, challenge non-traditional learners who must adopt to academic ‘rules of the game’ (Crozier et al, 2008). This is further challenging for Mirpuri learners who embody unique cultural assets and as such must negotiate socially oppressive and racially defined academic structures.

Criticism can be drawn regarding the application of academic drift as certain commentators have discussed a form of vocational drift that is observed with the dominance of neo-liberal policymaking (De Wit and Verhoeven, 2003). Vocational drift has come to be defined as the outward motives of universities particularly in the offering of short-cycle vocational courses (Ntshoe, 2014) and an increase in corporate research (Johnson and Finkelstein 2017; Burnes, Wend and By, 2013). Though this phenomenon cannot be ignored, the discourse on vocational drift - according to the above definition - is inherently hinged on the commercial influence on the ideals of autonomous university ethos. It would be beyond the scope of this study to entertain the question of neo-liberalism and its impact on university education: an alternative definition from Pratt (1997) provides a more familiar ground for discussion. For Pratt (1997), vocational drift refers to the adoption of the ‘service tradition’ by elite universities, Pratt (1997) states that:

…the universities have increased their commitment to modular courses, have become involved in the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme: have increased their commitment to part-time courses particularly in professionally oriented continuing education… They have increased their income from industry and other sources, so that their UGC grants account for only a half of all income. They have accepted increasing numbers of mature and non-traditional students. (p. 39)

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A key issue in relation to Pratt’s (1997) definition is that the methods used to observe vocational drift do not recognise a drift in programme and pedagogy. Vocational drift as the adoption of modularisation; recruitment of non-traditional students by elite universities; (though this is highly contested, see Boliver, 2015) and presenting the courses as occupationally relevant, does not in any way deter the academic nature of course content and methods of teaching and learning. There is a continued use of academic assessment and pedagogy in both elite and lower status institutions. According to William (1985) the application of human capital theory further accentuates academic drift, as all forms of learning, regardless of its vocational or academic merit are seen as valuable to the cultivation of human capital. William states:

’Universities and other institutions of higher education were, within broad limits, able to offer a range of subjects that reflected academic interests of their professors and lecturers, since there was no reason to believe that the labour market had a preference for graduates in any particular subject areas.’ (p. 183).

In other words, the vocational drift within elite institutions may simply refer to the perceived vocationalism that can be observed in the way universities are marketed. This may influence why students participate in an academic course; and/or why certain courses maybe offered, as well as, influencing the purpose of certain research projects, but it does not, in any way, influence the programme or the pedagogical drift observed within them. Academic drift is thus a key component in how the experiences of Mirpuri students are analysed in HE. By taking into consideration the evolution of vocational HEICs under the aegis of academic drift we can pinpoint how the change in university ethos becomes a structurally discriminating system which undermines the vocational needs of Mirpuri learners.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed rationale for this study namely in highlighting how current literature on BME degree attainment does not provide a complete account of why BME students have low degree attainment, in comparison to the white student population. The Mirpuri student population in Bradford is a unique BME demographic whose migratory and settlement context suggest a number of disenfranchised elements, namely the mass migration to the UK due to displacement in Mirpur, amplified by racial discrimination within UK, which has led to dense communities within the inner wards of former industrial towns like Bradford (Kalra, 2000). Bradford as a specific locality also suffers from lower-socio economic characteristics and a failing school system (Bradford District Council, 2018).

The literature on BME attainment in HE presents a number of long-term term trends primarily that the Pakistani male are one of the lowest performing BME student demographics with a burgeoning low attainment record, whilst most of the BME students in general perform below the white student population (Advance HE, 2018). The corollary discussion is then concerned with explaining some of these disparities. Prior qualification is identified as the most powerful indicator of degree attainment, where those students who enter HE with A level qualifications perform better than those who participate in level three vocational courses (Richardson, 2015, Leslie, 2005). Studies focused on institutional racism have sought to examine this disparity by assessing the university context and the positions of BME students within it, suggesting that the liberal ethos of the university creates a laxed environment with regards to addressing race related issues (Madriaga, 2018), this is in addition to academic TLA practices that are not inclusive to minority students (Stevenson, 2012, Smith, 2017) .

The concern of the present study is that literature generally does not address BME entry dynamics subsequently fostering the deficit model which suggests that Pakistani male students lack the abilities to succeed when entering HE (Leslie, 2005, Richardson, 2015). The literature that focuses on institutional racism provides valuable insight on the inefficient TLA practices and the undermining of racial discrimination in HE, however, the institutional discussion is not contextualised in vocational HEICs, nor the transition of students from level three vocational courses. This is concerning as most BME students participate in vocational HEICs and without due recognition of this context, a nuanced understanding of why Pakistani/Mirpuri male have low attainment cannot be realised (Thomas and May, 2010).

This thesis seeks to challenge the deficit model by focusing on three key structural elements which must be considered when making sense of BME attainment. (1) Racial warehousing which describes the funnelling of BME learner into level three vocational courses (Avis et al, 2017). (2) Flawed curricula within level three vocational courses which have adopted progressive pedagogy and competence assessment limiting the cultivation of skills required for HE (Ecclestone, 2004, Williams, 2000). (3) Academic drift which describes how vocational HEICs have become more academic in their evolution by adopting traditional university pedagogy and assessment, consequently creating racial and social barriers for BME learners who mainly engage within vocational HEICs (Burgess and Prat, 1970, Pratt, 1997). The literature review chapter has thus raised the following research aims:

* To examine the transition of Mirpur male students from level three vocational courses to degree courses and its impact on attainment
* To explore the Mirpuri male engagement with university pedagogy within vocational HEICs
* To examine the Mirpuri male experience with university assessment within vocational HEICs

More specific research questions are:

1. How do Mirpuri male students from Bradford enter level three vocational courses?
2. Do Mirpuri male students from Bradford experience racial warehousing?
3. How do Mirpuri male students from Bradford engage with level three vocational courses and how best do they prepare them for HE?
4. How do Mirpuri males from Bradford make their HEIC choices?
5. How do Mirpuri male students engage with university pedagogy within vocational HEICs?
6. How do Mirpuri male students engage with university assessment within vocational HEICs?
7. How do all the factors above impact their degree attainment?

# Chapter Four: Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology detailing the utilisation of the biographical narrative approach. This includes a discussion on the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of a qualitative methodology and the methods taken to ascertain the necessary data required to generate biographical narratives. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to gain the biographical accounts of twelve Mirpuri male graduates from Bradford taking into account my position as a researcher and the multiple identities that I embodied during field work. This entailed being a Mirpuri male from Bradford, from a working class background, and experiencing a broadly similar educational journey as the respondents. The latter sections of this chapter details the practical elements involved in seeking and choosing respondents and the ethical considerations embodied during the interview process. Data collection techniques are also addressed, as diligence in managing data is imperative when seeking to acquire information on educational attainment.

## Biographical Narratives

The aim of this study was to explore the transition from level three vocational courses to HE, of twelve Mirpuri males from Bradford in two parts, firstly, their entry dynamics, which explored how they made their level three course choices and how they engaged with the curriculum. Secondly their engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. Considering this broad aim, the biographical approach was adopted to fully illuminate this phenomenon. The biographical approach is a genre of qualitative research similar to the narrative enquiry approach (Elliot, 2005). Riessman (2008 p.5) states that narrative ‘refers to a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question’. As such, biographical accounts allow for the generation of narrative; which is the telling and retelling of lived experiences. According to Bruner (1987) narrative enquiry is the best method by which ‘lived time’ can be explored where the temporal nature of narratives and their inherent fusion in time and locality are presented. Other characteristics include the chronological modality of narratives in which past events are expressed by the individual and how they impact their current stage in life (Bruner, 1987, Eliot, 2005). Many like McCormack (2000) view the narrative process as a natural human activity, as human beings view the world as a narrative and can make sense of it through narratives.

In addition, Chase (2011) focused on the emancipatory nature of narratives, arguing that narrative research is part of the postmodern tradition of giving ‘voice’ to marginalised groups, and in overcoming the more hegemonic character of positivistic research. Elliot (2005), however, reminds us that the emancipatory feature of narrative research rests upon the researcher’s ability to impactfully present the data, and the readers ability to understand what is being said. Narrative enquiry also considers individual narratives in collaboration with the researcher and in light of the participants’ social and political context, thus highlighting the *continued process* of experiencing the education system (Elliot, 2005). The narrative tradition is particularly focused on how various macro elements function in creating the narratives of individuals and its relation to the larger stories of groups of people within certain times and places (Elliot, 2005). For this study, educational perspectives of Mirpuri males were explored by highlighting the embedded social conditions of the Mirpuri community in Bradford; their unique engagement with the education system, and the impact of race and VET on their entry, engagement and attainment in HE. Class, ethnicity and culture were explored to provide holistic experiences of respondents and their impact on degree attainment.

Bron and Thunborg (2015) state that narratives take account of how past events lead to the decisions that were made and how attitudes and values are impacted by socio-economic dynamics. Bron and Thuborg (2015) additionally stress that narrative generation through the biographical approach enables the interviewer to acquire rich detail about an individual’s life, whilst the interviewee gains an opportunity to learn about themselves. A biographical interview is thus a meaningful interaction between two people, where the interviewee tells his or her life story, in order to piece together their values and their distinct ‘human practice’ (Bron and Thunburg, 2015).

## Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

The biographical narrative approach is underpinned by ontological and epistemological positions that are particular to various forms of qualitative research. One such ontological position is the belief that human action is inherently meaningful, and that there is intentionality and subjectivity embedded in action. This belief limits the understanding of human practice through any rigid quantitative methods (Weber, 2001). The complexity of human experience and human action creates diverse human sciences and requires creative methods to uncover subtle truths (Mounce, 2002). Subsequently, the Mirpuri male experience of HE was understood to be complex, multifaceted, and subject to the individual life experiences they have encountered prior to entering HE, which impacts their participation within it. Roberts (2002) adds that biographical research rests on the notion that participants are creators of meaning, in that, whatever is considered meaningful from their perspective assists in making sense of the world. There is also an acknowledgement of the political, social and economic contexts affecting the participants, and how HE was experienced from their perspective. The biographical approach duly recognises the historical context of participants, allowing in our case, the Mirpuri males from Bradford, to speak freely about their cultural values and ways of being (Shwartz, 1999).

Critical race theorists also stress the need to present ‘stories’ that examine the experience of BME students, in order to counter-act more Eurocentric narratives generated by quantitative research (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Solórzano and Yosso, (2002) advocated the concept of counter-storytelling as a way of ‘exposing, analysing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege’ (p.32). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) present counter-storytelling as a form of critical methodology which is used to counter deficit narratives about BME students; it focuses on the experiences of racialised groups to unearth various forms of subordination (Delgado, 2009). Counter-storytelling is then a method of gaining insight into the lived experiences of those whose voices have gone unheard (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). The *experiences* of Mirpuri males as they entered HE is crucial in providing a counter-narrative to the more quantitative research which simply relies on statistics to understand the ethnic attainment gap (Richardson, 2015; Leslie, 2005). The present study examined, with theoretical sensitivity (see Solorzano and Yosso, 2012), the racialised experiences of Mirpuri students followed by their lived experiences within the university. This method brought to the fore intersectional forms of subordination experienced by Mirpuri students, before, and during their HE experiences, which negatively impacted their attainment.

The biographical approach also raised epistemological dilemmas, namely with regards to the level of validity displayed by the accounts (Lather, 1993). Criticism of validity, within qualitative research in general, has led to categorical scrutinising of various areas of qualitative sociology, conspicuously concerning ethics of research, reciprocity in data collection, and most importantly the level of reflexivity displayed by the researcher (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Reflexivity, in this sense, is an acknowledgement ‘that the orientations of scientists, from both material and social sciences, will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2003 p. 15). It is understood that the researcher will necessarily impose their values and political dimensions upon the research, and so researchers ‘must take responsibility for their value commitments and for the effects of their work’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2003; p. 14). Responsibility here entails a focus on the ethical dimensions of the biographical study, where researchers are cognisant of their underlying assumptions, ensuring a critical approach to narrative enquiry is actualised.

## Positionality and Reflexivity

One of the key strengths of this research design was my own positionality as a Mirpuri male graduate from Bradford. I belong to the research population which means I was able to gain an ‘insiders’ position (Greene, 2014, Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Being a Mirpuri from Bradford; similar in age and educational history, I was able to achieve higher levels of relatability amongst the respondents and was able to interpret their accounts with appreciation of their culture and their experiences as BME students in HE. Like the Mirpuri graduates in this study, I entered HE with level three vocational courses and participated in vocational HEICs. Unlike most of the participants in this study I entered the teaching profession which gave me insight into the educational challenges that BME students face due to their social, racial, gendered and religious identities. During my teacher training, and later in my Masters degree in Education I was able to reflect on my own educational journey in light of research and experience. Working in the FE sector as a business lecturer I began to specialise in vocational education and training (VET) and conducting research on the transition of BME students from level three vocational courses into HE. I explored the reasons why BME students, namely the Mirpuri students from Bradford entered level three vocational courses; how they engaged with progressive pedagogy and competence assessment; and the types of skills they cultivated before transitioning to HE.

The research of Mirpuri students and their experience with level three courses was a subject of personal interest and concern, primarily due to the structural limitations the students face before they enter HE and how that impacts them during their time in HE. In addition to my personal desire to ensure better understanding of the attainment disparity amongst BME students in HE, Brannick and Coghlan (2007) state that the insider position provides better access to the population and greater knowledge of the research population, their context and unique cultural characteristics both current and historical. As a result, the data gathered, namely in the researcher’s interaction with participants, is more authentic and generates reliable data.

Greene (2014) on the other hand, argues that because the ‘insider’ position is ‘close’ to the research population, this could compromise the researcher’s ability to be critical. Greene (2014) advices that the issue of closeness/distance will always remain an issue of ‘insider positionality’ and must be overcome with reflexivity where the researcher remains critical of their own bias. Green (2014) advises that greater care with ethics must be considered namely in the power relations that emerge when the researcher interacts with respondents who may also be personal associates. The closeness with research subjects may compromise the level of sophistication in remaining ethical and ensuring all personal information is only used for research purposes. Given the difficulties of ‘insider’ research Greene (2014) maintains that ‘insiders’ remain free from ‘cultural shock’ where the interactions with participants are natural generating reliable data.

Bhopal’s (2010) reflections on the challenges of holding an ‘insiders’ positions paralleled many of my experiences during field work. The primary benefit was the ability to fully comprehend experiences of participants as many experiences are shared by the researcher. This subsequently allows participants to feel comfortable and share their experiences openly generating authentic biographical narratives. Bhopal (2010) also illuminates how her insider position was corrupted by her professional identity as an academic. I also experienced this as my identity of a teacher and a doctoral candidate created an ‘othering factor’. This was overcome by achieving trust and by focusing on my presentation and the style of speech, this included dressing casually and speaking colloquially. The Bradford Mirpuri males have a unique style of speech, which embodies a working class Yorkshire dialect fused with Mirpuri Patwari (see Bhatti, 2013) and occasionally the participants switched codes between English and Mirpuri Patwari. I also embody this style of speech and the ability to switch codes like the participants, which enabled me to develop rapport, relatability and more readily understand the participants’ views and gain rich insight to their experiences. (Dearnley, 2005, Fontana and Prokos (2007).

## Bassey’s Fuzzy Generalisability

In relation to validity, Bassey’s (1999) notion of ‘fuzzy’ or open generalisability attempts to defend the qualitative approach in education research. Bassey (1999) claims that within education research the conditions and variables of students and their contexts are multivalent and multifaceted thus significantly reducing the validity of generalisable conclusions, regardless of the methodology taken. What is possible then is to conduct the research where ‘fuzzy’ conclusions can be made such as, A *may* lead to B, subject to condition C, rather than, A *will* lead to B, given the condition C. The validity of the research is then left to the experts to identify its utility in practice. Bassey (1999) states:

‘The only authority that I claim is in the extent to which my peers in the education research community will judge the ideas worthwhile and choose to adopt them’ (p. 3). Fuzzy generalisation is then ‘the kind of prediction, arising from empirical enquiry, that says that something may happen, but without any measure of probability. It is a qualified generalisation, carrying the idea of possibility but not certainty’ (Bassey, 1999 p. 46).

In critiquing Bassey (1999), Hammersley (2001) argues that this simple linguistic alteration, from ‘*does’* to ‘*could’* or from ‘*will’* to ‘*may’,* is not novel, as all scientific and statistical claims are conditional, ‘…fuzziness is not a feature of a particular type of generalisation but rather a mode of formulation that ought to be characteristic of all generalisations, including those of scientific research, when they are intended to guide future action in the world.’ (Hammersley p. 222). Furthermore, the judgment of the academic community, or any community of practice, follows the same logic as conducting comparative work in other scientific research.

Pratt (2003) highlights that Hammersley’s (2001) critique is emphasising the usefulness of fuzziness to researchers, whereas, Bassey (1999) is appealing to the practitioner. For Pratt (2003) the validity of fuzzy generalisation is not in the affirmation that the same thing will happen in similar conditions, but, how can a practitioner within similar situations and in relation to the research ‘make use of them in effecting change proactively in their own situation’ (2003, p. 30). To put simply, there is an emphasis placed on the practitioner and alterations to his ‘craft knowledge’, rather than merely developing on academic knowledge. Validity then is ‘… not that the result generalises to all cases (with the same conditions), but whether it can be made to generalise to the practitioner’s own case.’ (Pratt, 2003, p.30). It is from this notion of fuzzy generalisability that this study puts forward its methodological case, where the biographical narrative approach can provide insight into a reality that can aid practitioners and policy makers in further and higher education.

## Semi- structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviewing was the primary means by which biographical narratives were generated; the interviews were enhanced by being cognisant of my role as a researcher and an interviewer, before, during and after the interview process. Interviews are defined in a myriad of ways, subject to the purpose of the interview, within social science, Cohen et al (2011) define the interview process as a conversation initiated by an interviewer to obtain information based on research aims. Research interviewing is distinct in that it has a particular aim and so defined, ‘… as a conversation that has structure and purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge’ (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015 p. 6). Semi-structured interviews seek the middle ground, between the more non-directive conversational interviews and the highly structured interviews. Non-directive interviews seek active engagement which is more spontaneous and unguided, while highly structured interviews only allow for simple responses (Drever, 2006). Semi-structured interviews attempt to gain detail of the experiences of the interviewee which ‘capture past experiences through the person's perspective of a present understanding together with future expectations and potentials’ (Bron and Thunburg, 2015 p. 2).

A general concern about the interview process is the ethical dynamic that may arise between the interviewer and the interviewee, where discussing sensitive issues like attainment and the impact of deprived circumstances can lead to awkwardness thus limiting the acquisition of comprehensive narratives. Brar, (1992) stated that researchers can overcome such awkward encounters if the researcher has similar ethnic characteristics to the participant. This dynamic can limit the chances of stereotyping, and the discussion between the interlocutors can remain culturally neutral. Babbie (2012) and Fontana and Prokos (2007) add that to gain the most accurate interview data it is necessary that the respondents develop trust in the interviewer and perceive the interviewer as someone relatable.

One of the focal contentions regarding the interview process is the power asymmetry that arises between the interviewer and interviewee; this complexity results primarily from the authority of the interviewer (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). The interviewee may express what the interviewer desires presenting a favourable narrative. This was an acute problem in the present study as the Mirpuri culture is organised in biradaries, where reputability amongst other biradari members is sensitive (Webner, 1990). To mediate such power asymmetries, Rail (2001) advices that the meta-cognitive dimension of the interview must be considered through the process of reflection and in ‘being aware’ during the interview process. This entails being attentive of the unconscious behaviour of respondents, where heightened emotive states can be overcome by due recognition of nonverbal cues (Goleman, 2000). Nonverbal behaviour, such as, facial expressions, open and closed body posture, alteration in voice tones, and general cues in response to the interviewer are a seminal aspect of semi-structured interviewing (Goleman, 2000). Brinkman and Kvale’s (2015) further advice that interviews should be conducted with a craftsman ethos. Partly, inspired by Bourdieu’s ‘non-violent’ forms of interviewing, (see Bourdieu, 1993 p. 607-626): the craftsman model seeks to understand the subtleties of interviewing by becoming fully aware of the participant and their lived experiences ‘in and out’ (Geertz, 1973). The craftsmen method stresses the importance of acquiring extensive knowledge on the participants and the subject matter, this allows the interviewer to identify cues where the discussion could engage in critical reflection and further depth could be developed.

In practical terms this would mean that the researcher uses appropriate language and presents a level of relatability and empathy towards the participants. As I conducted the interviews, I became aware of the benefits of belonging to the Mirpuri group and to have gone through similar experiences of HE. Being able to speak in similar styles to the participants by fully embodying the colloquial form of speech within Bradford I was able to gain access to cultural references and cues that other non-Mirpuris from Bradford would not.

A main feature of semi-structured interviews is in the provision to probe, to aid in eliciting, and developing depth (Wengraf, 2001). Probing can develop on the various themes that may arise during the interview and to clarify contradictions and incoherency in the narratives. The interview script is thus characterised by open ended questions which have been prepared prior to the interview and in line with the aims of the research. The interview script was a simple one, such that it revolved around the research questions; questions based on life history, educational choices, engagements within courses and how that impacted attainment in HE. Other sub-questions emerge serendipitously from what is said by the participant, and reflections made by both interviewer and interviewee. Spontaneous questioning may limit the ability to consolidate narratives, as distinct experiences are articulated, however, the aim of this study was to understand the experiences of each participant and so the semi-structured interview is well suited in developing on points of interest particular to each respondent.

Other techniques employed during the interviews was the continuous application of reflection and reciprocity (Galletta and Cross, 2013). Listening carefully, probing to clarify, and in seeking meaningful dialogue was some of the ways reflection and reciprocity was encouraged. Galletta and Cross (2013) stress the importance of reciprocity which Lather (1986) defines as the ‘mutual negotiations of meaning and power’ (p. 267). This allows the researcher to overcome potential power asymmetry and create space within the interview for the subject to question and engage in a dialect. Galletta and Cross, (2013 p. 89) further add that, ‘creating space within the interview for the participant to challenge, question, and discuss with you dimensions of the topic of study is invaluable to your research. It is central to the interpretive process.’ Other normative protocols in conducting the interviews are to ensure that the interview starts with simple questions potentially regarding the respondent’s background and context. For narrative generation, the researcher is required to remain patient allowing the interviewee to present their story without interruption and only after a past ‘life episode’ is fully narrated that probing to illicit more detail can be applied. Focus and theme development are possible once the respondents complete presenting their accounts (Bron and Thunborg, 2015).

With due care in executing semi-structured interviews, I was able to execute the biographical interview comprehensively with patience and in appreciation of the complexities and subtleties that are ever present in the interview. The aim was to ascertain the most accurate data possible, recognising that knowledge is being generated, which must pertain to analytical rigour and respect for the participants and their views. Brinkman and Kvale (2015) advise that prior to conducting the interviews the researcher should study other interviews and engage with interview transcripts to refine their interview skills; others like Drever (2006) recommend practice and observing interviews. Before conducting any interviews, a pilot study was conducted and transcribed, this was later analysed in order to refine the interview questions, and gain insight on how best to carry out the interview, particularly regarding appropriate: location, time, use of a recorder and transcription.

## Pilot Study

One pilot study was conducted with a Mirpuri male graduate from Bradford who graduated with a lower second-class degree in business management. The participant was 28 years of age, graduated in the last five years and had entered HE with a mixture of vocational and A-level courses. The participant is self-employed and owns his own online marketing company. The pilot interview took place at the participants work-place in the evening outside business hours. The interview took 57 minutes and 26 seconds to complete. This was the shortest of all the interviews and upon transcribing I was made aware of a number of questions which were not addressed. This included the issue of biradari (peer groups formed in Bradford); how it was perceived, and how it influenced the participants educational choices. I had made note of the important questions that had been overlooked and ensured that they were part of the interview script for the actual interviews. The pilot study was valuable in understanding how narrative generation requires greater care in questioning, particularly in allowing the interviewee to fully complete their answer and developing a narrative before further probing and eliciting can begin. The pilot study allowed me to test my questions and to identify if the wording of the questions were suitable, as well as, the structuring of the questions. By reflecting on the interview, and later when transcribing, I was able to reflect on any leading questions or when the narrative become less focused. Consequently, I was able to implement changes for the main interviews and ensure the questions were suitable and in the right order. Other practical elements were also identified, namely the location. For biographical narratives the location needed to be quiet and comfortable, as biographical narratives require deep reflection on past experiences. The subsequent interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes and at a time convenient to them.

## Sample

Through a combination of opportunity and snowball sampling twelve male graduates from Bradford were selected, all of whom identified themselves as Mirpuris. I approached individuals who were part of my own social network in Bradford, such as former university colleagues and neighbours who identified as Mirpuri male graduates from Bradford who had attained below the upper second class ‘good’ degree benchmark. Other participants were drawn from a community events organiser who is part of a large network of Mirpuri graduates. From this event’s organiser I was able to get access to other Mirpuri graduates who wanted to be part of the research and share their stories.

The participants can all be characterised as belonging to a lower socio-economic background, as they all resided within the inner wards of Bradford during their undergraduate years, such as Little Horton, Great Horton, Bowling and Manningham (Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2018). The participants attended local technical colleges and have had structurally similar, but subjectively unique experiences of schooling and HE. All the participants attended a post 1992 or a former CAT university, and had entered HE with level three vocational courses, or a mixture of vocational and A-level courses. The ages of the participants at the point of interview were diverse; two of the graduates were over 40 (Amin and Sajid). They had participated in HE during the initial stages of HE expansion and had gained access to their degree courses without paying fees. Their accounts provided a distinct picture of HE during the years immediately following the 1992 expansion, however, similarities with the other participants emerged in the entry dynamics, as well as, in their engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. Three of the participants had recently graduated (Haroon in 2015, Luqman in 2016 and Saqib in 2017), and the remaining five graduated 5-6 years ago. All the respondents in this study gained a lower second class (2:2) degree.

All the interviews were held in Bradford, in the participants’ homes, and lasted approximately an hour. The time limit ensured focused probing and in maintaining a purposeful line of questioning. Each of the interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed for analysis. During the interview the respondents were given time to ask questions and to clarify any questions, as well as, the opportunity to not answer a question if they deemed the question too personal. Great care was taken in ensuring the respondents were comfortable, by arranging suitable time and location. The start of the interview was also orientated towards building rapport. This is in line with the advice given by Rubin and Rubin (1995) who state that the interviewer must showcase their inter-personal skills during the interview by being sincere, empathetic, humorous and sensitive in the event that intense questions might trigger negative emotions. The opening questions set the ideal mood for the preceding questions, where my upbringing from Bradford and school experience was shared with the participants to develop rapport, trust and relatability. At the end of the interview it was crucial that the participants left with a better understanding of their experiences and an awareness of all the structural limitations that impacted their attainment in universities. Additionally, the participants were made aware of what will happen with their interview accounts, and that they were able to opt out from the study, if they wish to do so.

## Participants Profiles

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Participant Name** | **Age** | **Degree Subject, Year Graduated** | **Entry Qualifications** | **High/low streamed** | **Dates of interviews** | **Attended HE in/out of Bradford** |
| Amin | 40 | Business and ICT Management, 1999 | BTEC National Diploma in Business and ICT | High | 12/04/  2017 | Out |
| Danny | 27 | Criminal Justice, 2013 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | Low | 28/12/  2017 | In |
| Gul | 26 | Accounting and Finance, 2013 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | Low | 16/04/  2017 | In |
| Hafiz | 24 | Accounting and Finance, 2013 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | Low | 10/04/  2017 | In |
| Haroon | 25 | Accounting and Finance, 2015 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | Low | 10/04/  2017 | In |
| Ibrar | 27 | Accounting and Finance, 2012 | BTEC Double Business  BTEC ICT  AS level Maths  A-level psychology | Low | 14/04/  2017 | In |
| Khurrum | 27 | Fashion design, 2011 | Product design, Graphic Design, sociology, psychology | High | 27/03/  2017 | Out |
| Luqman | 22 | Mechanical Engineering, 2016 | BTEC ICT  BTEC National Diploma in business  Product Design | High | 10/04/  2017 | Out |
| Nasser | 25 | Forensic and Analytical Science, 2015 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | High | 14/04/  2017 | Out |
| Sajid | 44 | Business Management, 1996 | BTEC Diploma in Travel and Tourism | Low | 11/04/  2017 | In |
| Sami | 25 | Human Resource Management, 2013 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | Low | 09/04/  2017 | In |
| Saqib | 23 | Degree in education 2017 | BTEC National Diploma in Business | Low | 18/12/  2017 | In |

## Data Analysis

Data analysis is a way of making sense of the raw data through coding and categorising in order to create consolidated narratives (Miles et al, 2014). Generally, two positions are held with regards to coding, (1) whether categories should emerge from coding, where coding is extensive, or, (2) to impose set categories on the data and then code in relation to set-categories (Miles et al, 2014). Those who choose emerging themes generally attempt to avoid imposing their own set-categories which may impose their bias on the raw data, while advocates of set-categories are concerned with the data being able to achieve research objectives (MacFarlane & O’Reilly-de Brún, 2011). The selection of coding methods thus depends on how the researcher approaches the data before analysing. Questions like, is there a specific research question that needs to be answered or, are the points of interest going to emerge after engaging with the data, need to be part of the broad research strategy (Saldana, 2015).

Set-coding method was utilised in this study as a way of developing thematic analysis; set- coding implies that data is classified based on pre-conceived categories, commonly in relation to research aims (Blair, 2015). After analysing the data in relation to the codes various themes were identified. Thematic analysis is defined by leading advocates Braun and Clark (2006, p. 6) as ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data’. This study for example has two main points of discussion firstly the university entry dynamics, followed by engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. These two aims generated the categories for coding, examples of which are ‘choosing level three vocational courses’, ‘engaging with vocational courses’; followed by ‘engagement with HE pedagogy’; ‘engagement with HE assessment’ and so on.

The distinctive feature of thematic analysis is the inherent flexibility of the approach. Where other methods like grounded theory, discourse analysis, and hermeneutics are methodologically driven, thematic analysis shares functions with these methods, whilst remaining flexible, giving the researcher more options to achieve the research aims (Clark and Braun, 2017). Flexibility here implies that thematic analysis can be applied to a number of research design. This can range from the diverse epistemological standpoints, to the mode in which the data is organised. Given the aims of this study, a thematic approach to data analysis was adopted seeking to generate both semantic and latent narratives. This ensures that explicit statements pinpointed the perceptions of the Mirpuri graduates, whilst a latent analysis aided in extrapolating their meta-experience pertaining to how they experienced the vocational courses before entering HE and their experience during HE.

The interview transcripts in the present study were coded and organised into broad themes, thereafter a process of reviewing and refining the themes was initiated. When reviewing and refining the themes the idea was to consider whether all the extracts are coherent enough to ‘combine to form an overarching theme’ (Braun and Clark 2006 p. 19). The aim was for the data to be organised into distinct and unified themes that provide analytical patterns and meanings of the various accounts. Braun and Clark (2006) raise concerns on the potential to not be analytical if themes show no coherent structure in narrative and become mere extracts strung together. Failures to extrapolate themes may result from choosing themes based on the interview questions which would entail no analytical rigour or a systematic organisation of the data into distinct themes. This study maintained analytical rigour by ensuring the least amount of overlapping in the interview excerpts, which were organised into distinct themes and then analysed further to achieve the research aims.

## Ethical Considerations

It is commonly understood that all contemporary research, aiming for dissemination and of an emancipatory nature, should be underpinned by ethical principles and guidelines (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). This is recognised acutely in social sciences where human beings are the key participants; giving rise to concerns of integrity, respect for, and sensitivity towards the dignity of individuals, institutions, gatekeepers and wider society (Israel and Hay, 2006). This research, with its use of semi-structured interviews, is inherently pursuing rich and intimate details of how the participants entered HE and their engagement with pedagogy and assessment; necessitating deep underpinning of ethics.

The foundational ethical principles guiding this study stemmed from the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) which places respect at the centre of its ethical focus. The guidelines advocate equality for the diverse range of individuals that may take part in the research. As such all the participants in this study were treated equally regardless of age, sexuality, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference.

BERA also stresses the need to ascertain ‘voluntary informed consent’ from respondents, prior to conducting any field work. In light of these guidelines, all the respondents taking part within the present study were asked to complete the official university consent form, which provided information on the nature of the research, and details on how the data will be used and processed. Most importantly, the consent form incorporated the ‘right to withdraw’ at any time, with or without, a reason. This also entailed showing the participants the draft thesis and the right to omit any part of their account which was deemed too personal.

Other guidelines focus on privacy and disclosure. Privacy was implemented by ensuring all the interview transcripts were kept safe within a password protected cloud system and all the participants’ names were changed on the transcripts to ensure the information remained anonymous. The interview accounts were held in full confidentiality or even disallowed from the research if the respondents felt that the information provided was too sensitive. The participants were also informed, prior to their consent, on how the data will be used and analysed. This ensured full transparency avoiding any deceit or subterfuge.

BERA (2011) guidelines stress that the researcher must gain ethical approval from a local or institutional ethics committee. This was done by a rigorous review of the interview process; analysing potential risks involved and scrutinising the interview questions to ensure questions were not personal. Approval was only granted after all the above ethical imperatives were thoroughly reviewed and safeguards were put in place, such as consent forms and means of protecting the data and anonymity.

Miller and Bell (2005) advocate continuous awareness of ethical standards, post approval, and throughout the field work; ensuring that equality and respect for the respondents and their views are upheld and maintained. Allmark et al, (2009) also proposed that consent should be imbedded throughout the interview process, to give the interviewee the chance to decide whether they would want to continue with the questioning. There is also the potential of harm particularly concerning vulnerable subjects who may provide sensitive information during the interview. Allmark et al (2009) recommend the implementation of ‘consoling refrains’; which means to avoid further probing in order to resolve an interviewee’s heightened emotive state. During the interview process I ensured that when I asked a question, I gave the participant the option to answer the question or to continue to another question. I also gave the participants the choice to continue with the interview or to end it. I did not ask any questions about what grades the participants achieved as this would have been personal, leading to awkwardness in the interviews and corrupting the data, though many of the respondents were happy to share this information voluntarily.

Politics and power remained the most critical ethical considerations within semi-structured interviewing (Nunkoosing, 2005). In knowing that I am a doctorate student, and a qualified teacher, this may have led some respondents obliged to participate, when requested to do so. One of the ways this power asymmetry was overcome was by ensuring one-to-one correspondence, initially through email or social media, which limited the chances of participants being coerced or pressured into giving an interview. Within those early correspondence the aim was to be friendly and informal, this was crucial as participants may have felt obliged to participate if they felt the interviews were important. In addition to this the interviews were organised when the participants had free time and during social hours.  The interviews were done in full confidentiality and in each participants’ home. During the interview I remained conscious of my authoritative position and that to a large extent I controlled the conversation. Furthermore, the participants were given unbiased questions and sufficient time to answer. The aim was to reduce, any potential of obscuring the interviewee’s responses stemming from inferiority complexities. This was addressed by remaining friendly, relatable and culturally empathic (Brar, 1992).

Being a Mirpuri male like the respondents and having gone through similar experiences of HE, I acquired an insider’s understanding of the respondents’ context and a heightened empathy towards their potential frustrations and/or positive experiences stemming from their engagements with HE. I therefore ensured the dignity and appropriate representation of the research participants and ensured that no injustice was done to their biographical accounts. I belong to the same community as the participants and seek to make positive changes in the transition from school to HE and in increasing their attainment in HE. Other complexities emerging from gatekeepers and institutions which give rise to legal considerations and conflicts of interest; were considered prior to the interview process (McAreavey and Das, 2013). The participants within this study were all adults discussing their educational biographies, there were no real gatekeepers or institutions involved.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter presented the methodological approach to this study. It has been argued that the narrative inquiry was the ideal form of research needed to achieve the research aims, as it allowed for the generation of biographical accounts, and in highlighting the educational experiences of Mirpuri male graduates from Bradford. Narrative enquiry ensures a holistic understanding of participants, namely their locality their socio-economic dynamics, cultural trajectory and its impact on educational endeavours (Roberts, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were part of the research strategy which ensured the interviews were guided and focused while creating a space to probe and observe non-verbal ques. My position as a Mirpuri male from Bradford was also discussed and how a reflexive approach can overcome power asymmetries that may arise during the interview process. This also includes the advantages of having an ‘insider’ position where authentic responses can be acquired (Bhopal, 2010). Opportunity and snowball sampling methods were applied to gain twelve Mirpuri male graduates to participate in this study. All the respondents entered HE through the vocational track and attended either a former CAT or polytechnic university. All other respondents gained a degree below the upper second-class benchmark. The following chapters are the findings of their biographical accounts, starting with their HE entry dynamics and their subsequent engagement with university teaching and assessment.

# Chapter Five Entry Dynamic

## Introduction

The following chapter is the first of the three findings chapters in which I will discuss the experiences of twelve Mirpuri graduates from Bradford regarding their entry into HE via level three vocational courses. This includes their reasons for selecting level three vocational courses and their engagement with curricula, as well as, their selecting of higher education institutions and courses (HEICs). The findings have identified three themes which relate to three main areas of entry into HE. (1) Learning habitus and ‘horizons of practice’ which showcases how entering level three courses was an interplay of biographical learning habitus that has been cultivated throughout their secondary school experience, and the strategic decisions that were made in order to overcome some of the structural limitations Mirpuri students face in order to ensure the best labour market outcome. (2) Vocational courses ‘a walk in the park’, which showcases the Mirpuri male engagement with level three vocational courses, who unanimously expressed that they were unchallenging where the readily available information from various sources ensured successful completion (Fisher, 2003). (3) Destiney or identity: selecting vocational HEICs, highlights how the selection of vocational HEICs is for some students pre-established where the local HEIs and vocational degrees, namely business-related courses, are chosen.

For others their biographical learning habitus influenced their HEIC decision making, this implied that some Mirpuri participants selected their HEICs based on their school performance and requirements for entering desired occupations. The overhaul HE entry dynamics suggests that Mirpuri males interact with several structural factors, as well as, unique identities and generally make negotiated decisions. Structural racism, in addition to several other intersectional factors influences the Mirpuri male entry dynamics which systematically reduces the validity of employing the deficit model in understanding the low attainment of Mirpuri students in HE.

## Learning habitus and ‘horizons of practice’

One of the initial questions that were posed to the Mirpuri participants was why they chose level three vocational courses. The most dominant theme was identity and the subsequent strategies taken to realise one’s identity within a structurally limiting milieu. The Mirpuri participants had cultivated their biographical learning habitus as a result of their personal school experiences which led to negotiated outcomes in their post-16 course choices. Learning habitus amongst the participants was developed throughout their compulsory schooling, reinforced by streaming in high, mid and low sets, further solidifying in their GCSE outcomes. Though variations in each learning habitus were observable, one category of students could be considered to possess wide ‘horizons of practice’ (Hodkinson, 1998) due to being streamed in top sets and gaining relatively better GCSE results (Khurrum, Luqman, Nasser and Amin). Mirpuri males with wider ‘horizons of practice’ aimed to enter specific occupations, or sectors, based on their interests and strengths; and generally exhibited intrinsic motivation in selecting their level three courses. In the interest of brevity students with wider ‘horizons of practice’ will be addressed as ‘high streamed’ students. This category reflects their general experience of secondary schooling and the unique learning habitus that was subsequently cultivated.

The second category of students possessed narrower ‘horizons of practice’ (Ibrar, Gul, Sajid, Hafiz,, Haroon, Sami, Saqib, Danny) these participants were mostly streamed in mid to lower sets who spoke of being talented in certain vocational subjects, such as product design (Gul) or being strong in one particular academic discipline like Maths (Ibrar, Gul, Hafiz and Haroon). Students with narrow ‘horizons of practice’ did not envision a clear occupational path rather they sought what they perceived as the most rational choice in their post-compulsory education that would ensure a strong labour market position (Swift and Fisher, 2012). Students with narrow ‘horizons of practice’ generally exhibited extrinsic motivation when selecting level three courses. Students with narrow ‘horizons of practice’ will be addressed as ‘low streamed’ students which reflects their biographical learning habitus and how it has been cultivated throughout their schooling experience. These self-concepts and forms of motivation had an instrumental impact on how Mirpuri participants perceived, approached and finally selected their level three courses.

When speaking to Luqman, a high streamed student, about his level three course choices, he mentioned that his aim was to ensure he developed skills in motor mechanics. Luqman stated that motor mechanics is his passion which was influenced by his father’s profession as a mechanic. Luqman also mentioned that Bradford’s youth culture highly values the proprietorship of luxury sports cars which reinforced his desire to enter the motor mechanics profession.

*‘I was really into cars, I am a big fan of cars it’s a Bradford thing, cars play a big part in Bradford. They say Bradford is known for two things, cars and curries… my dad used to be a mechanic as well, he worked in a garage, he builds engines and he gave me a lot of practical experience, so I wanted to develop from that and choose courses that would increase my knowledge in mechanics.’*

Khurrum, another high streamed student, also expressed his passion for designing which influenced his later decisions on course selection.

*In terms of graphic design, I could spend my full week of school time on that one subject and I would never get bored of it. I was always pushing the boundaries. I was always trying new things, over and above what the curriculum asked... I’d design stuff that had nothing to do with my work and it was purely out of passion… so I thought I like designing and I carried on with it after GCSEs…*

Khurrum and Luqman’s responses suggest that high streamed students had established occupational objectives and decided to select subjects based on individual interests. Herzberg (2006) in discussing the biographical learning habitus states that one of the ways students individualise and adopt unique strategies to cope with new fields is by possessing greater awareness of their skills and abilities. Herzberg (2008) defined this as ‘*biographical reflexivity’*. The learning habitus amongst high streamed students exhibited a strong awareness of personal talents and abilities, as well as, embodying a strong ‘idealised vocational habitus’ (Colley et al 2003). As discussed in the theory chapter idealised vocational habitus are perceptions amongst students regarding the dispositions required for a particular vocation. High streamed students like Khurrum and Luqman had developed such strong idealised notions of how they should approach their learning and subsequently select their level three courses based on the requirements of a particular vocation.

The low streamed students in contrast did not express a desire to enter particular occupations, rather their level three course selection were based on the perceived return on investment i.e. courses which ensured the best chances of gaining good employment. This was primarily expressed in their idea of entering business courses. Sami makes this case:

‘… *straight up erm I was just looking to do the thing that I could easily enter and make money, obviously I knew… no one could really be good at business, it was theory, it was business, I did it in year 10 or 11 got my GCSE’s out of it and growing up everyone used to say go into business do that as a degree right…’*

Haroon also stresses this point:

*We did have interest in things, but you think business, we might become businessmen (laughter) but it’s nothing like that is it, you do business because the course work is easy and you know the subject, you might get a good job out of it, or, you might end up starting your own business…*

Low streamed Mirpuri students expressed a generic outlook about their labour market position. Their general strategy was to ensure that whichever course was undertaken in further education, it would afford them a strong labour market position in the future. The notion of identity and the influence of the labour market choices has been considered by several researchers on post-16 course decision making. It has been stressed that the concept of ‘choice’ can be contested as students experience multifaceted and dynamic structures, namely with regards to race, gender and social class (Riaz, 2018, Ball, et al 2000, Archer, 2002). Ball et al (2002 p. 24) also stated that ‘post-16 ‘choices’ are bound up with the expression and suppression of identities. Biographical learning habitus amongst Mirpuri participants were also a product of their interactions with school and wider society and their unique educational journeys. Archer’s (2002) point about identities being bound by common sense notions which are product of social, racial and gendered identities was expressed by the Mirpuri students when they suggest ‘growing up everyone used to say go into business’ (Sami) or ‘they’ say ‘Bradford is known for two things, cars and curries’ (Luqman). Riaz’s (2018) study of how Muslim BME students make their post 16 course decisions further suggest how much teachers can negatively impact BME students. Riaz (2018) argued that BME students tend to depend on their teachers, while teachers have fractured knowledge about BME students and their unique cultures, thus providing limited guidance to BME students who are transitioning from compulsory education.

This thesis, however, is concerned with how high and low streamed Mirpuri students were led to participate in level three *vocational* courses and its impact on their attainment in HE. Interview accounts suggest that both categories of students were led to participate in level three vocational courses as a second chance, either due to failures in A-level courses, or not being accepted on apprenticeship programmes (Swift and Fisher, 2012). For high streamed Mirpuri students there was a general attempt to tread the traditional A-level route as their biographical learning habitus perceived vocational courses as being unchallenging and culturally inferior. Nasser highlights this point further:

*‘…some stayed for 6th form, those who stayed went on to do BTEC’s, and even till this day I don’t count it as an A-level. I think people should not be allowed to do them, I think sitting in an exam where your being tested for what you have learnt over the year is what you should do, with BTEC you get your grade before you even leave the school, I don’t think it’s challenging, it’s far too easy, people were getting A\* for IT. Don’t get me wrong, IT is a good subject, if you want a good career, but BTEC IT? It was no way an A-level, and I still think that now, and that’s why I didn’t want to do a BTEC. At the time that was the easiest route to use if I wanted to get UCAS points. I didn’t want to do a BTEC, in my mind, it was frowned upon, even now I don’t like it. Look! I did BTEC for Product Design, and as I said before, I didn’t enjoy Art, yet I got four B’s in it, so I could do something I was awful at and still get a qualification out of it.’*

Nasser’s perception of BTEC vocational courses being inferior and not counting it as ‘proper’ A-level was in line with his learning habitus. Nasser’s success in GCSE examinations and his general performance during his secondary school years cultivated the perception that participating in academic A-Level subjects was better than participating in level three vocational courses. This perception of level three vocational courses was also shared by other high streamed students. Khurrum for example mentioned on two occasions that he had chosen ‘proper’ AS, as opposed to, any other course.

*‘erm when I went to Kingsbury [school], for 6th form… I did Chemistry, Biology, Geography and Graphics… all AS … none of them were BTEC… proper AS level…Graphic design was AS…. graphic design I loved it, smashed it, I did really well in it, I got B in the AS level…’*

Others like Luqman simply stated that he did not choose BTEC courses because he wanted to choose subjects he enjoyed:

*Yeah, I didn’t want to do BTEC, I wanted to do what I enjoyed or what I was good at*

Luqman’s response gives the impression that those students who undertook BTEC courses were perceived to be extrinsically motivated, perhaps BTEC students had become reputed to utilise the course, primarily as a way of entering HE. Given the negative perception of BTEC courses amongst high streamed Mirpuri students they continued to participate in them. The reasons for this were that many of the high streamed students failed in their A-level courses and thus participating in vocational courses was necessary to gain the required UCAS or tariff scores to enter HE, and subsequently their desired occupations. As a result, the high streamed students qualified with a mixture of vocational and A-level courses before entering HE. Nasser makes this case below:

*‘So we had to choose three at least, I ended up choosing five so it was Maths, all three sciences, Chemistry, Biology and Physics, and I ended up choosing history… and I think it was a big ask… I hit a brick wall, because I didn’t understand a word… and then I didn’t attend, and I didn’t work. I went from being in love with say maths to absolutely hating it. In the space of four months I began to hate the subjects… and also the teachers, I went from being their favourite, to being an unknown they looked at me like I was failure, so I thought to myself I need to get out of this school, I need to grow a pair and do something for myself… either way I’m staying in education, I need to go uni, that was my mind-set, I wanted to enter any science field and I needed a degree… So I start applying, I get a call back from [another] college, they said you’ve applied late and there are not that many courses so he’s offered me a BTEC in Business triple award…and they said there are only certain courses available here, it’s either you do them or you don’t, and so at this point I started looking at UCAS points and how many I needed, so I ended up doing BTEC business, double award, applied science and A Level IT.’*

Nasser’s detailed account of how he was led to participate in BTEC business courses suggests a number of critical points, firstly that as a high streamed student the desire to participate in universities was a key motive in participating in level three vocational courses. Secondly, Nasser’s reluctance in accepting ‘triple’ business suggested that he was aware of the low status of level three vocational courses but participated in them in order to ensure that he remained in education.

Why high streamed students failed in their A-level courses which *in-turn* led them to participate in level three vocational courses was due to several factors. It would be beyond the scope of this study to highlight them all. The most common issue with A-level assessment emerged with the notion of language, or the limitation in linguistic capital that is not embodied by the Mirpuri male habitus. Possessing middle class forms of speech and succeeding in academic exams is an established position amongst researchers on BME students in schools (Abass, 2004). This was very recently highlighted by Moskal (2016) who stated that proficiency in English language was one of the key determinants of success in exams and as such those students who do not possess such capital are likely to underperform (see also Garyson, 2008). Khurrum makes this case below, where he compares his failures in exams that demanded stronger literary skills (within A-level Psychology and Sociology) with his success in exams that were testing occupational protocols (like in A-level Textiles and Graphics). Khurrum stated:

*‘In textiles and graphics, we had practical, we had a course portfolio to develop which involved research design and there were exams at the end of it, quite intense exams actually about processes and industry processes and whatever else, and I did really well in them exams… Sociology on the other hand I dropped very quickly, and Psychology I carried and got an E… But that was, from my point of view, masses of reading and writing, and I wasn’t really a big fan of reading and writing, I was more hands I had a real passion for designing things’*

For Khurrum the more academic examinations were distant from his habitus that did not embody the white-middle class forms of speech or writing. The more academic A-levels were also distinct from his occupational goals of becoming a designer which perhaps negatively impacted his motivation hindering his engagement with course content. Luqman also stressed this particular issue:

*‘I chose A-level product design, ICT, religious studies, and psychology… I failed psychology and religious studies that’s purely because my heart was not in it, and I am more hands on, I never did well in exams, my main subject was product design and I went on to do engineering in uni… I chose psychology and religious studies because I found them interesting but I couldn’t do exams so I dropped religious studies and psychology to do [BTEC] business, when I saw the requirements for engineering it was obvious religious studies and psychology had nothing to do with it’*

Failures with passing A-level exams that required ‘lots of reading and writing’ meant that participating in BTEC courses, for high streamed students, was a strategic decision in order to ascertain the required UCAS points to enter HE.

The issues expressed by high streamed students, with regards to failures in A-level courses do not emerge in the discussions with low streamed. Low streamed students did not desire to participate in A-level courses as they were conscious of their skills and career objectives. Hodkinson (1998) observed a similar phenomenon and stated that with some students, certain courses are at the ‘edges’ of their ‘horizons of practice’. This suggest that low streamed students had cultivated a biographical learning habitus that viewed A-level courses as being distant from their abilities and interests. As a result, low streamed students sought to enter apprenticeship programmes and desired employment after their compulsory education. Sadly, failing to be accepted on apprenticeship programmes meant that entering level three vocational courses was the only option that would enable them to develop a strong labour market position. Gul presents this case:

*‘Initially I did apply for apprenticeship, so after GCSE when I was doing my application, I applied for accountancy apprenticeships, but I didn’t get that, so I fell back on BTECs and going university, I was adamant on doing an apprenticeships, because I did my research, spoke to a few businesses, and they said apprenticeship would be better, its more hands on and more work experience, you learn a lot better, and they also said that if you stayed with your company they will also pay for your degree and the degree will be a lot more easier because you’ve done the work, and so you’ll understand it a lot more, but obviously I didn’t get it and so I didn’t have any choice but to do BTECs’*

Whilst Gul’s case suggests failures of entering apprenticeships, Hafiz discussed the lack of information available to enter apprenticeships. Hafiz reflected on this phase of his educational journey and began to speak about apprenticeships retrospectively. Hafiz’s case suggests that he was not informed or guided towards apprenticeships even though apprenticeships would have suited his learning habitus and increased the likelihood of better employment. Hafiz stated:

*‘Its bollocs man! In some ways I think if you did do an apprenticeship for three years yeah and you did go and work for an accountancy firm, in three years they would have developed in you the skills you need to do that job, you could have come out earning a good wack [money], but with a degree you can’t…, it’s easier to go into uni than to get an apprenticeship… can I tell you one more thing in 6th form everyone is pushing you towards BTECs, no one pushes you towards another route. People in apprenticeship will be in a good post after 5 years whereas a degree guy after five years there is no way you will be, after five years he will get into an entry level job and that’s if he pursues that job…your parents tell you to go uni and your teachers, I don’t remember teachers telling me to do apprenticeships’*

Ibrar similarly stressed that he had attempted to enter apprenticeships but had no guidance with regards to how he could enter apprenticeship programmes.

*‘OK at first I didn’t want to stay at Grange [school] I wanted to go college or get an apprenticeship… I had done my GCSE and I want to get a job and start something fresh get away from the area and the people around me… I was ready to work and I remember being sure that I wanted to do apprenticeship but I didn’t get it because I didn’t know how to… I feel like the teachers had lied to me and persuaded me to stay, I remember my sister and all her friends sat me down and gave me a lecture on staying at [school] and I ended up staying’*

These responses stress that the lack of information on apprenticeships and limited guidance and support from teachers restricted the Mirpuri students to select level three vocational courses. Low streamed students chose level three vocational courses as no other options were available. Once low streamed students opted to partake in level three vocational courses, it was implied that they must also participate in HE. This was possibly due to the low value of the courses in the labour market (Avis et al, 2017). Hafiz discussed this issue who, as a low streamed student, went from participating in double award Business Diploma to triple business or National Diploma which provided ample tariff (UCAS) scores to enter HE.

*‘…Like most of the boys, I did double business, maths and design, after failing maths, I thought you know what, I’m just gonna pick triple business, if I’m gonna stick to other subjects, I’m not gonna get anywhere. With triple business at least you got the UCAS points to go uni, your whole aim with BTEC courses was to get UCAS points, so it’s not like I did it because I enjoyed it, I did it because I needed the points’*

Gul also stressed:

*‘I was only supposed to do two, I was signed up for two BTEC National Diplomas, instead I got three, because as long as you get the units done you get the qualification don’t ya, so I did extra units so I got distinction, triple distinction, and that gave me a lot of UCAS points’*

Ibrar succinctly stated:

*‘the real reason was, and this is probably why most others do it, is that it was seen as easy and you could get the UCAS points you needed. I remember if I got distinction in the[BTEC] business course I would then get 280 UCAS points which was the requirement for most courses in uni…’*

These three responses, as well as, those discussed earlier all point towards the Mirpuri male desire to remain in education or training. Failures to participate in alternative pathways, whether that’s A-level, or apprenticeships, means that level three vocational courses were the only option available in ensuring a strong labour market position. The high participation of Asian males within level three vocational courses has been an established point (Abass, 2004, Shain, 2013), however, there has not been a detailed examination as to why this is the case. While Abass (2004) pointed to the class stratification as a factor to South Asian males participating in level three vocational courses, Archer (2003) alluded to the Muslim male identity as the breadwinner which may incentivise participation in level three vocational courses, yet, both these positions had no empirical underpinning. Hodkinson (1998) provides a more compelling case which seems to parallel the Mirpuri male experience. He suggested that student choices are ‘…locked within the cultures in which young people have lived their lives and in their, often unequal, interactions, negotiations and sometimes struggles with educational providers.’ (p. 151). Swift and Fisher (2011) further add that participating in vocational courses has long been characterised as a second chance option.

How the Mirpuri students came to participate in level three vocational courses and their engagement within it can be seen from a number of intersectional factors. Firstly, the Mirpuri habitus appears to be conscious of its abilities, and whether the academic or the vocational path should be taken in further education. This view is in parallel with Reay’s (2004) notion that the habitus is aware of its ‘opportunities and constraints’ and subsequently negotiates the dynamics of a field. The Mirpuri students who had developed their biographical learning habitus by being high streamed saw greater incentives to participate in A-level courses. This was in contrast with low streamed students who were aware that continuing with education was not the best option and intended to enter apprenticeships. Only upon failing to gain places within apprenticeship courses, low streamed Mirpuri students entered level three vocational courses.

The interview accounts also suggested that all the participants were aware of the academic and vocational hierarchy and that, for the high streamed Mirpuri students, participating in A-level courses was a way of developing on their talents and skills (Luqman, Khurrum). The Mirpuri students that failed to complete their A-level courses mainly pointed towards what Bourdieu (1991) calls ‘educated language’ or ‘linguistic capital’ (Watson, 2013) that is inherited by middle class students who in turn use it to succeed in their educational endeavors. The limitation in educational language meant that high streamed students experienced a form of symbolic violence which impeded their success in examinations. Khurrum’s account stresses this point. Khurrum’s success in examinations that tested occupational protocols, or codified knowledge, were much better received: Khurrum’s failure in A-level Sociology or marginal success in Psychology was understood to be due to the requirements of traditional academia.

The issue of language in general and academic language in particular resurfaces amongst the accounts of all the respondents throughout their engagement with academia. Amongst CRT scholars this particular context has been analysed as a way of excluding non-white bodies and maintaining white privilege (Bhopal, 2018). Bradbury’s (2019) recent study on primary school students argues that because students undertake assessment in formal English, they come to view their own language to be inferior and formal English language to be superior. This Bradbury (2019) argues continues to foster white middle class students within education where students who are bilingual, (which is also the case for the Mirpuri students) or speak colloquial forms of speech, will perceive their own forms of speech and language to not have cultural value. This certainly was the case with the Mirpuri students who were required to engage with assessment which required formal English that was not part of their habitus or unique cultural assets (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). In failing to properly engage with A-level assessment they were required to resign from A-level courses and to enroll on level three vocational courses.

Structurally reinforced intersectional dynamics of race and class are also visible amongst the low streamed Mirpuri students who were not accepted, or, guided in acquiring apprenticeship positions. The desire to participate within apprenticeship programmes, amongst low streamed Mirpuri students was in line with their biographical learning habitus (Herzberg, 2008). Which was defined by ‘being more hands on’. The Mirpuri students were very much limited by what Avis et (2017) argue are social capital factors that are possessed by white working class school leavers, who have established networks and acquaintances that eases their entry into apprenticeships programmes. It appears that ‘*racial warehousing’* as understood by Avis et al (2017) was observed amongst low streamed Mirpuri students who simply do not desire to remain in mainstream education.

The experience of Mirpuri students prior to entering HE also suggests that the deficit model discussed in the literature review chapter ignores intersectional factors of race and class in the BME student participation in level three vocational courses. The interview accounts suggest that Mirpuri males negotiated and strategised their progression given their socio-economic, racial and biographical learning habitus. Mirpuri students actively identified their ‘opportunities and constraints’ to ensure that the courses they selected ensured the greatest labour market outcome (Reay, 2001). The following section considers how well the Mirpuri students engaged with level three vocational courses to identify the forms of capital that were cultivated before they entered HE (Ecclestone, 2004).

## Vocational courses ‘a walk in the park’

After discussing how the Mirpuri students came to select level three vocational courses the next major discussion was on how they engaged with them to identify the forms of capital they developed before entering HE. Level three vocational courses were discussed in the literature review as being flawed courses, that limit the cultivation of skills needed for universities (Williams 2000, Bates, et al 1998). This flaw in curriculum was argued to have arisen in the use of progressive pedagogy within a narrow outcome-based assessment structure by most level three vocational courses (GNVQ, BTEC National Diplomas). Bloomer (1998), amongst others (see Fisher, 2003, Ecclestone, 2004) suggested that the progressive vocationalism within national vocational courses became a ‘treasure hunt’ for information turning the students into ‘hunters and gatherers’ of information (Bates, 1998). For most of the Mirpuri students this particular issue within level three vocational courses was proven true. The Mirpuri students in general were required to showcase evidence of competence, by a typed report, or by paraphrasing articles, either online, or from a textbook and all of the Mirpuri students stated that this was unchallenging and, in many ways, absurd. Nasser’s account indicates to this point:

*‘BTEC was a walk in the park, I used to put my headset in and because I was an A-level person, that was walk in the park. I was getting distinctions in every unit, and I was the first one to hand it in, I’m not even trying, and I’m getting distinction, and the teachers would ask me if I’ve done the course before. BTEC was common sense, skim reading a book and typing up…’*

Nasser’s point of ‘not even trying’ and still being able to get ‘distinctions’ highlights how the flaw in level three vocational courses was obvious to the students. The ease by which information could be acquired meant that the courses did not challenge the learner, nor develop the skills needed for success in HE. Hafiz further stresses this point:

*‘The [UCAS] points were there and it was easy enough. Business was an easy ride man, you can’t lie about that, and remember with your business units you got your books pretty simple, you paraphrase and you get the points’*

Similar to Bloomer’s (1998) observation the narrow competence assessment with progressive pedagogy meant that students were surface learning when paraphrasing from text-books. Below, Haroon states that the vocational courses were detrimental to his development:

*‘…we did it [business diploma] in year 10 so we knew how they were. We used to have business every day, and you think, you know what, you got half of the work here, and that work was like GCSE work, or worse. You do Business [diploma] and you think what the f\*\*k have I gone and done…Because you don’t f\*\*king learn anything from it do ya, because once you’ve done an assignment, I mean realistically you haven’t learnt anything really.*

These responses make evident that level three vocational courses failed to challenge the learners and cultivate the skills they required for HE. It is possible then to argue that level three vocational courses are not the optimal entry courses because of the flawed pedagogical and assessment practices that they foster. This particular issue sheds light on the structural limitations faced by Mirpuri students before they enter HE.

One unique aspect of Mirpuri students’ engagement with level three vocational courses, that has not been highlighted in literature is how biradari dynamics assisted students in ascertaining previously completed work. In the theory chapter the concept of biradari was discussed to indicate that biradari does not only connate the genealogical affiliation amongst caste members, but also that biradari bonds can be made and strengthened as a result of daily interaction amongst Mirpuri people (Anwar, 1979). The term biradari here refers to Mirpuri peer groups which consist of immediate and extended family relations, as well as, friendship groups that have been established since primary schooling and reinforced in neighbourhood affiliations (Shain, 2103). These biradari like bonds are generally reinforced when students are struggling to complete courses by providing assistance and exchanging valuable information. Biradari networks, as discussed in theory chapter, are a means by which Mirpuri students generate, mobilise and deploy ethnic capital (Shah et al, 2010). Danny discussed how the biradari group had assisted him in gaining completed coursework from other students. Danny stated:

*‘…I had all the work, all the boys left, and they left me all the coursework, so basically in 6th form I didn’t use my brain at all… (laughter) I got a distinction star in everything…’*

Saqib expressed a more extreme point of simply giving the teacher the same work

*‘my mate had done all the work, and he had got a distinction star init, and I literally used every piece of work from his. I used to be nice and quiet, slowly give the work in, so that the teacher didn’t click on…’*

The interview accounts of the Mirpuri students point toward the often-referenced drawback of level three vocational courses, that being the contradiction of implementing progressive pedagogical methods within a narrow outcome-based assessment structure (Fisher, 2003). This context creates a learning environment where a substantive degree of teacher authority is void and where students are able to show competence in the learning objective, with relative ease (Ecclestone, 2004, Bloomer, 1998). For the Mirpuri students the biradari ethos of collective assistance exacerbates the curricular flaw by creating a space where students can exchange completed work with minor, or no alterations and submit the work as their own.

The space created for plagiarism is part of the curricular flaw in level three vocational courses. Bloomer (1998) argued that outcome-based assessment created an ethos of gaining simple information from books or online articles, he defined this as the ‘treasure hunt’ for information. Bates et al (1998) similarly described the students as becoming ‘hunters and gatherers’ of information as the narrow objectives simple required rephrasing passages from text-books. From the accounts of some Mirpuri participants the information required to achieve unit objectives were ascertained from other biradari members, as such new students on level three vocational courses simply become ‘inheritors’ of information. The ethnic capital that is generated amongst biradari members ensures that struggling students are assisted in their attempts to enter HE. Which means that the acquisition of completed work and its utilisation, in order to pass level three vocational courses, is always a possibility for Mirpuri students.

Ecclestone’s (2004) study of how students engaged with outcome-based assessment courses reflects some of the interview responses of Mirpuri participants in this study. Ecclestone (2004) firstly states that students within level three vocational courses are defined by a learning habitus that is impacted by race, class and gender, as well as their, low attainment in compulsory education. This means that for most students participating in level three vocational courses is their ‘second chance’ at remaining in education. The learning habitus of such students is tasked to engage in a course that are complicated by the flawed vocational curricula, namely in the use of outcome assessment. The result of this interaction according to Ecclestone (2004) develops an ethos of remaining in one’s ‘comfort zone’. Comfort zone implies that both students and teachers’ expectation of desired social and cultural capital development is reduced to the ‘command of the official requirements and the strong boundaries exerted by the grade criteria’ (p.38). Paralleling the Mirpuri male experience Ecclestone (2004) observed that the teachers’ comfort zone consisted of allowing students to conduct work in informal working patterns and with their friendship groups, whilst students ‘played it safe’ by not participating in difficult distinction level work. The outcome of such engagement is stressed by Ecclestone (2004) to not develop the right types of social and cultural capital needed for HE or employment.

From a theoretical perspective we are also able to observe Modood’s (2004) concept of ethnic capital amongst the Mirpuri students. The accounts above suggest that in order to complete the level three courses most often students collaborated with others which eased their process of completing the course and subsequently progressing into HE. Such collaboration varied from gaining simple assistance on how to complete an assessment outcome, or, as much as acquiring completed work which was amended, or re-casted, in order to give the impression of original work. With that said, we must be cautious of imposing blame upon Mirpuri students for perhaps plagiarising completed work, rather the flaws of using outcome assessment within a progressive framework as manifested in most level three vocational courses must be taken into account (Bates, et al, 1998). Many of the Mirpuri students were able to utilise their ethnic capital through biradari networks in such substantial ways because the course assessment had allowed for such collaborations. Or we could argue that the progressive vocationalism, which underpins level three vocational courses only considers white, liberal forms of pedagogy and the collaborative efforts that are the norm amongst Mirpuri students are not considered within curricular design (Hughes, 2016).

The Mirpuri male engagement with level three vocational courses highlights the second structural barrier impacting BME students in their entry dynamics. Alongside the issues of race and class which impacts their participation on level three vocational courses, student engagement with outcome-based assessment does not develop the types of capital required for HE (Ecclestone, 2004). Consequently, the deficit model which correlates HE attainment to prior qualifications cannot be considered as a valid framework in making sense of the attainment gap. The Mirpuri male transition from FE to HE highlights how several intersectional barriers interplay which limits their chances of developing the right forms of capital for success in HE.

## Destiney or Identity: choosing vocational HEICs

What was common amongst all the Mirpuri participants, was that level three course selection was underpinned by the motive of employment, though high streamed and low streamed students envisioned distinct means of entering the labour market. The employment factor also dictated their HEIC selection. How such choices were made, however, is a much more complex phenomenon. It is possible to argue that in addition to potential discriminatory practices by elite universities, biographical learning habitus impacted HEIC decision making (Ball et al, 2002).

Interview accounts of lower streamed students suggest that certain institutions were ‘destined’, in that Mirpuri students had actively chosen their level three courses knowing which university they would attend, and inevitably enrolled in that particular university. The destined university in the case of the Mirpuri students was the geographically closest HE provider, which offered vocational degree courses; had a large ethnic profile, and accepted the UCAS tariffs point acquired from BTEC/National Diploma courses. Hafiz makes this case:

*‘The only [HE provider] I was gonna go to was Bradford. It was close to home, all the lads were going there, I wasn’t going to live away from home, because you don’t really live away from home, I didn’t have a car, wasn’t going to wake up at seven and travel to Leeds or summat… I did business BTEC and I decided to do Accounting and Finance degree in Bradford’*

Hafiz’s response suggests several factors why he decided to participate in a higher education institute (HEI) in Bradford. The general impression given is that remaining in Bradford was the most convenient choice as other HEIs outside of Bradford did not have the ‘lads’ participating in them. Less peers within a HEI means less biradari members to assist with the challenges of HE assessment. The second point that emerges from Hafiz’s response is that it would be irrational in terms of travel costs and convenience to leave Bradford as the ‘return on investment’ does not warrant attending another post-1992 HEI in neighbouring cities. The fact that Hafiz only mentions Leeds as the alternative location to attend a HEI, further highlights the notion of ‘destiny’ where the idea of leaving home and attending an elite university was not even entertained. This phenomenon reflects Hodkinson’s (1998) observation about disenfranchised students perceiving certain educational opportunities to be on the ‘edges’ of their ‘horizons of practice’. This is also reiterated by Gul who stated that:

*‘Most of the lads were going there [HE provider in Bradford], and there was a big hype about doing accounting, and plus it was that thing of travelling to Leeds or Huddersfield, which was not easy at that age, dealing with public transport daily, it takes a lot out of your day. You could utilise that time studying or doing something else, so I chose Bradford in the end and I did Accounting.’*

Sami also very brief states:

*‘I decided to go to [HE provider in Bradford], pointless to go to any other…’*

Haroon also states:

*‘So I chose Bradford, mainly because most of the boys chose Bradford…’*

Eight out of the eight Mirpuri students that were identified as low stream students entered HEIs in Bradford and had entered courses that were aligned with their learning trajectory. This means that majority of the participants in this study attended a HEI in Bradford and participated in business courses, primarily in Accounting and Finance. The remaining four high streamed students showcased different motives and perhaps not surprisingly participated in courses that were aligned with their occupational goals. Khurrum, Nasser, Luqman and Amin attended universities outside of Bradford but within West Yorkshire. Khurrum, Nasser and Luqman attended a HE provider in Huddersfield, whilst Amin decided to go Leeds. Course selection was also unique to their occupational goals, Khurrum entered a Fashion Design degree; Nasser selected Forensic and Analytical Science degree, Luqman entered a mechanical engineering degree and Amin enrolled on ICT and Management course.

For Khurrum and Nasser the institution and course selection was straightforward, they chose a HEI in Huddersfield because it was the closest institute that offered their desired courses. For the remaining two students it was possible to stay in Bradford and gain the same degree. When probing to clarify why Amin and Luqman decided to leave Bradford and attend another university, their responses were similar. Both students felt that studying in the same university, with their local friends, would impede their success of gaining a good degree. Amin makes this case:

*‘…out of the group of friends there were seven or eight of us, all of them decided to go into Bradford, but I didn’t, I didn’t want to go with them all, because I didn’t feel right going with them all, I had something to achieve, I had a lot of pressure on my shoulders, I had to do well for myself and my family, I felt like the lads would have been a bad influence so I decided to go to Leeds and all of the rest of the lads went t’ Bradford… and the funny thing is most of them dropped out after first year.’*

Luqman also makes this case:

*‘I ended up going to Huddersfield because I wanted to get out of Bradford. Get away from the distractions, in the area, didn’t want to get mixed up with the wrong people. I enjoyed studying and I was really into mechanics, so I just wanted to do well, I felt like in Bradford I couldn’t do that…’*

Amin and Luqman point towards some of the negative influences of Bradford as a locality which may not ensure successful participation in HE. Their desire to gain occupational skills and to achieve good degrees meant that they actively sought and participated in universities that had a lower ethnic mix. This contrasts with all other low streamed Mirpuri participants who desired and participated in ethnically mixed institutes where assistance from biradari members could be sought. A possible explanation for this stems from the type of learning habitus that is cultivated amongst high streamed students. They are driven by an idealised vocational habitus that actively seeks the dispositions they perceive are necessary for particular occupations (Colley, et al, 2003). From the accounts of Amin and Luqman the ability to work independently without the support of the biradari is part of the idealised vocational habitus.

The entry dynamics of Bradford Mirpuri males have some parallels with literature. It is possible to suggest that certain Mirpuri males, who were low streamed, considered entering HEIs that had a higher ethnic mix. Ball et al (2002) proposed this notion and added that this was an attempt by BME students to find spaces where they could defend their ethnic identity. The Mirpuri students in this study, however, viewed the ethnic mix strategically. Their reasons for entering local HEI was due to the biradari network which would ensure that ethnic capital could be deployed in order to overcome the challenges of HE. Additionally, the phenomenon of living at home is a common practice amongst non-traditional HE students in general, where limited financial provision restricts the possibility to live in student accommodations (Holton, 2018).

The desire to participate in ethnically mixed institutions, however, does not apply to those Mirpuri students who were high streamed. Their primary motive was to ensure that they enrolled on the right degree which allowed them to enter their desired occupations. High streamed Mirpuri students participated in universities outside of Bradford which was due to local HEI not offering the course they desired, or that Bradford as a locality was considered as a barrier to their success in HE. This particular context has not been studied within BME literature on HEI decision making, however, the work of Miah (2015) does address that certain Muslim students will actively want to participate in white or mixed schools in order to ascertain valued social and cultural capital.

The most dominant discussion amongst researchers on BME entry into HE has been with regards to the high concentration of BME students, particularly the Pakistani students, within low status universities (Shiner and Modood, 2002, Boliver, 2015, Noden et al, 2014). The struggle with entering elite HE institutes does not emerge from the accounts of the Mirpuri students in this study. It is possible to argue that the Mirpuri habitus, which is cultivated within the dense Mirpuri communities in Bradford and within technical colleges perceives high status universities to be at the ‘edges’ of their ‘horizons of practice’ (Hodkinson, 1998). Hodkinson et al (1996) vividly present the idea that the immediate locality extended family, (which in the Mirpuri case is the biradari), has as much influence as teachers, peers and career advisors. The collective orientation amongst biradaries influences how most Mirpuri students perceive and approach HE. One of the primary reasons for enrolling with HE providers in Bradford amongst the Mirpuri participants was that other biradari members (lads) were also attending the same institute and were likely to be on a similar course. This indicates that the biradari ethos of collective effort that has been a hallmark characteristic of the Mirpuri community in Bradford since their migration influenced the way Mirpuri students chose their HEICs.

The utilisation of ethnic capital is thus observable in the selection of local HEIs by Mirpuri students. Which implies that ethnic capital as cultivated in Bradford incentivised entering local universities. This recalls Shah et al’s (2010) conclusions who argued that types of ethnic capital acquired by South Asian students are subject to other factors such as class and locality. Shah et al (2010) state that factors related to class imply that more South Asian students will enter HE due to ethnic capital but will remain within lower status universities due to their class position. It could also be added that biographical learning habitus impacts how certain South Asian’s utilise their ethnic capital. High streamed Mirpuri students for example actively sought universities outside of their locality in order to avoid some of the negative influences of remaining in Bradford. These students were, however, constrained by their class position which meant that they could only participate in HEIs located in neighbouring cities. This ensured that they were able to live at home. Reay (2018) argues that options and choices available to working class students are based on the types of capital available to the students. ‘The crucial role of cultural, social and economic capital means that horizons are inevitably wider for some than for others, permeated by both structural and cultural factors’ (Reay, 2018 p. 529).

From a more racial perspective it could be argued that the schooling context does not provide information on the opportunities available to students, namely with regards to the diversity of courses and institutions they could enter. Perhaps Mirpuri students are pathologised as being vocational students and thus orientated by their teachers towards HEIs that are not prestigious, and that generally offer vocational degree courses (Avis et al, 2017). The fact that students only considered post 1992 or former CATs within their locality suggest that Mirpuri students were reliant on their limited ethnic capital which restrained their options to local universities and within specific vocational degree courses, namely business-related subjects.

The discussion on how Mirpuri students selected their HEICs is not discussed as factor to low attainment by most commentators, though Leslie (2005) did state that ethnic minority students choose subjects that on average warrant less good degrees, such as business and computer science and as greater numbers of ethnic minorities enter HE, a ‘diminution in average quality of applicant would be expected’ (p. 631). This point was challenged by Richardson (2008) who argued that Leslie’s logic of ‘more means worse’ is not valid as certain ethnic minorities gain better degrees than others who have similar number of participants. The Mirpuri accounts further highlight that choice in HEICs is an interplay between unique identities, socio-economic and socio-historical factors. The deficit model as proposed by Leslie (2005) thus fails to fully explain the under-attainment of BME learners in HE as it is unable to account for the structural limitations that are faced by most BME students like the Mirpuri male in this study when making their HEIC decisions. What also needs to be emphasised here is that *all* of the Mirpuri male participants perceived entering HE, as a means to bettering their labour market position, whether that was generic or focused on a particular occupation. In other words, before entering HE the perception amongst all Mirpuri students is that HE is a place where vocationally relevant education takes place.

## Conclusion

On the whole, the interview accounts suggest that the experiences of Mirpuri students before participating in HE are complex and multifaceted. The Mirpuri habitus in general was conscious of its ‘opportunities and constraints’ (Reay, 2004). This was observable in their biographical learning habitus and the strategies deployed to actualise their unique student identity (Herzberg, 2008). Mirpuri students who were high streamed engaged with the educational field distinctly to those who were low streamed. High streamed students initially partook in A-level courses, whilst low streamed students desired to enter apprenticeships. These experiences stress that participating in level three vocational courses was not the first, nor, the desired choice, rather it became the default position given the lack of alternative options. Mirpuri students were cognisant of the limitations of entering vocational courses, however, both class and racial dynamics funneled these students onto the vocational path (Avis et al, 2017). For those students who participated in A-level courses, failure in examinations, by virtue of, what Bourdieu (1999) defined as ‘educated language’, led to resignations and/or marginal success. More critically, it was argued that this linguistic challenge in A-level examinations embodies whiteness that is inherent within educational policy where formal English language dominates over other forms of speech (Bradbury, 2019).

The engagement of Mirpuri students within level three vocational courses showcases the mobilisation and deployment of ethnic capital in their collective effort to progress into HE, however, such collective efforts are constrained by a flawed- curricula that does not challenge the learner (Ecclestone, 2004). With regards to HEIC selection it was clear that all of the Mirpuri students were vocationally oriented and entered vocational degree courses within former CAT or polytechnic institutes. They also entered geographically close institutions in order to continue to live in Bradford. High streamed students left Bradford but remained within West Yorkshire, whilst low streamed students only enrolled in HEIs within Bradford. These dynamics are best described as negotiated outcomes based on students, racial and social profiles (Reay, 2018).

# Chapter Six: Engaging with University Pedagogy

## Introduction

The previous chapter considered the Mirpuri male transition from further to higher education in relation to their level three course choices and how they made their HEIC decisions. This chapter presents the institutional context namely in how the twelve Mirpuri graduates engaged with university pedagogy. The first theme highlights the challenge of degrees that had a broad subject range which, according to theory of academic drift, is understood as form of programme drift that occurs as vocational courses adopt the curricular structure of traditional degrees (Kyvik, 2007, Silver, 1990, Burgess and Pratt, 1970). The second theme explores how the Mirpuri participants engaged with independent learning. This theme primarily discusses how independent study time fostered an ethos of collective leisure, in order for the Mirpuri students to strengthen their ethnic capital, which is later deployed to overcome the demands of assessment. The third theme discusses the Mirpuri students’ engagement with lectures and how the passive form of the lecture - augmented by online lecture capture - fostered absenteeism. This is seen in contrast with vocational pedagogy where the learning environment simulated the potential workplace, consequently, the Mirpuri students had more contact time with tutors and were engaged in their learning. The fourth theme discusses the Mirpuri male experience with tutorials and seminars, which represented a familiar (school-like) learning environment where Mirpuri students could engage with discussions and debates and ascertain the desperately needed contact time with tutors.

## ‘If you’re doing it, I’m doing it too’: Choosing Modules

When discussing some of the initial challenges of university pedagogy, the Mirpuri participants stated that they were required to engage with subjects that had no bearing on their future occupational goals, nor any relation with their previous learning experience. This tension appeared to have arisen from the broad modular structure of the courses where diverse modules were made compulsory, or, a diversity of optional modules were offered. Many of the students expressed interest in one subject, yet, the course required the students to partake in subjects that were not only distant from the core focus of their chosen degree, but also consisted of topics that had not been studied prior to entry. Business students, for example, were required to pass modules that ranged from accounting, to marketing or human resource management (HRM), even though the students were aiming to study only one of these disciplines. The broad modular range meant that the Mirpuri students were unable to find meaning in engaging with certain modules that were not integrated with their long-term vocational goals.

The commonly referred to economics module was a primary example. The economics module in the first year of study was considered by all the students on business courses as an unwarranted subject that required advanced knowledge of economic theory, which none of the participants possessed nor desired to seek. The economics module entailed analysing and evaluating complex formulae which was assessed through closed book examinations. Consequently, all the Mirpuri participants who enrolled on business degrees failed to succeed in the examination, prompting numerous retakes. Gul’s discussion on engaging with economics module and the diverse range of modules in general, stressed this point and the detrimental impact of a broad curricula.

*‘…some modules like economics were very hard, so I didn’t enjoy them…I failed, failed both macro and micro… In Accounting [degree], you’re doing things that have nothing to do with it, which sets you back, so you end up doing marketing or economics or any other essay based module which doesn’t really link with your topic or degree, you get given an essay question to do in an exam, I can’t pull together a few sentences, never mind an essay.’*

Sami also makes this case:

*‘…yeah so in first year we did various things didn’t we, I was doing human resource degree but for some reason I was sitting marketing exams and accounting exams, economic exams… I failed it [economics exam]… and in second semester I failed macro[economics] as well…’*

Haroon also highlights this point:

*‘I chose my course because it had maths and so I thought it’ll all be numbers and stuff like that, but when we got in, we found out it was not, we got economics that we had to re-sit four times’*

The general impression that is given about engaging with broad subjects is that it had limited bearing on the students’ vocational aims and was perceived to serve no occupational purpose. This inherently led to tensions where students were not motivated to engage with the subject and as a result failed in their examinations. The numerous resits also meant that to merely pass a module, which would ensure progression into the next stage of study was considered enough. The broad subject range of the degree course limited the Mirpuri students’ aspirations to simply passing and progressing to the next stage of the course. Thomas and May’s (2010) report on inclusive curricula stated that one way a curriculum could be inclusive to all learners is by being meaningful. In the case of the Mirpuri students, the broad nature of the course did not generate meaning as certain modules did not align with their long-term goals.

The lack of meaning is exacerbated by a traditional assessment requirement. Gul’s experience of not being able to ‘pull a few sentences together’ emphasises the literary demands of university examinations. Bruce et al (2016) present a similar case arguing that academic disciplines possess a range of discipline-specific linguistic conventions, which becomes a barrier for BME students as they must engage with forms of speech that they are not accustomed to. Marshal and Mathias (2016) also stated that ‘non-traditional students have to learn academic English as a distinct from the dialect they grew up with’ (p.137). It is the unexpected learning content, by virtue of engaging with a broad curriculum, that presents itself as the initial challenge for the Mirpuri students. Many students did not succeed in the ‘unexpected’ modules that were not part of their previous learning experience, nor their future occupational goals. The Mirpuri respondents stated that they did not necessarily understand why they had to engage with subjects that they had no prior experience in, or interest, either academically or occupationally.

Another challenge posed by the broad modular course structure was the number of optional modules students could select from. The Mirpuri students stated that they had limited information about the content of the various modules and were subsequently led to make strategic decisions based on a number of factors such as, how the module is assessed; how many of their peers are also participating in certain modules; and tacit knowledge about the module leader and their temperament with regards to marking. It is possible that such strategies were fostered in their level three course decision making where the limited information on how best to engage with the system, to attain the desired outcome, led to what was perceived to be the most rational decision (Ecclestone, 2004).

Collective decision making with regards to module selection was a tactic that the Mirpuri students had been accustomed to throughout their educational experience, within HE this manifested in ascertaining assistance and valuable knowledge from as many biradari members as possible. Haroon’s discussion below on how he made module decisions is common amongst other Mirpuri students in that the strong bonds that have been cultivated within Bradford and during their level three courses, are reinforced when the groups engage within an unfamiliar learning context. Haroon stresses this point:

*‘...the modules that I chose were whatever the lads chose, I didn’t even choose them, I think I was out of the country and one of the lads chose them for me. I gave them my password and username and…. whatever you’re doing I’m happy with it, and you’ll get me through it. And that’s’ what my uni mentality was, whatever you lot [the peers] are doing, you’re clever, you’re gonna help me… alright, safe, put it down…I didn’t know anything about them, I knew they were assignments and we’ll be OK, I wasn’t even in the country, either we did it in Morocco or, someone did it for me here, through someone’s phone or iPad. Someone was asking for usernames and passwords to fill in the forms…’*

Haroon’s point about being on a holiday in Morocco during the module selection indicates towards strong collective bonds amongst biradari members and its utilisation in making module decisions. A similar experience is described by Hafiz who argues that he had no real knowledge of the module leader and their temperament in terms of grading i.e. which lecturer was renowned for lenient marking techniques. Hafiz’s only means of overcoming the challenge of making module decisions was to work with the biradari and ensure that the best possible decision was made.

*‘How did I choose my modules… erm… all the boys sat together and we chose the modules together. My strategy was if you’re doing it, I’m doing it too… My strategy wasn’t as in depth as others, because I didn’t know who was an easy marker. The lads would ask others and then later we all sat together. We made sure we all chose the same, sat with our group of friends, girls or boys, whoever they were. It was like shall we pick this one, yeah! Let’s pick this one…’*

Below Gul describes a similar scenario, however, unlike the other students Gul states that ‘realistically it should be done on your own’. This suggest that Gul was aware that module selection is best done individually and in accordance to each person’s interests and occupational aims. However, the challenge of university academia appeared to put pressure on students to make collective decisions. Many of the Mirpuri participants ensured that decisions were made only after tacit knowledge was acquired from senior students, as well as, ensuing other biradari members were participating in same modules. When collective decisions were made, assessment demands were analysed with the aim of avoiding examinations, in particular those that were essay based. Coursework form of assessment was preferred so that assistance from biradari members can be acquired in order to increase the chances of gaining higher grades, Gul’s states:

*‘Yeah so we chose them [modules] with our friends, so we were all sat together, and said “boys we need to choose our modules”, realistically it should be done on your own, but we called everyone together saying we need to choose our modules, and so we ended up doing the same modules…, we spoke to the elder students, asking what they have done, and how was it, and if they had assignments, and then it was like fine, so and so has already done the work… it’s whatever your friends chose, we were in it together, you roll together, you die together (laughing) there were eight of us, so we just joined groups together, so it worked out that way…’*

Gul’s response indicates to one of the drawbacks of mobilising and deploying collective knowledge in making module decisions. Collective decision-making limits the module selection to a certain group of modules, namely those which are considered less challenging. If students are made to select from a series of modules that are not familiar to the biradari, decisions are made on cold knowledge. Sami’s account below highlights this issue, Sami was required to select from a series of modules that were not familiar to the biradari. Subsequently he selected a module that was outside of his interests and capabilities and was only passed after several resits.

*‘Right, Okay, so basically the way me and my friend, tried to choose these modules were that we sat on computers both of us, yeah, and we opened up the sheet with the modules on, I’m not lying, whatever looked easy we kinda went for it, I’m not proud of this…. right so that dipstick of a friend of mine, f\*\*king plonker, decided to choose FS, Financial something decision making, this turned out to be about algebra and shit. It had a maths element to it related to business and the lecture room was full of Chinese people and WOW! this was the hardest shit I’ve ever done in my life… I read a little bit about my modules, I was going to choose two and he was going to choose two, something like that, so I chose like the easy marketing ones, I did my job, he didn’t!’*

Sami’s account stressed that collective decision making is continuously sought, however, as a collective the biradari may be limited in their knowledge of modules which means students will make decisions based on cold knowledge. Sami’s understanding of choosing ‘whatever looked easy’ also stresses the lack of guidance provided on what each module entailed and whether it will be in line with students’ abilities and strengths. The notion of doing what is perceived as easy was stressed by Ecclestone (2004) in her discussion on outcome-based assessment in level three vocational courses and how it fostered an ethos of remaining in the ‘comfort zone’ where students tended to avoid tasks that were challenging. Ecclestone’s (2004) stressed that this was due to the interplay of outcome-based assessment and the general habitus of students on vocational courses who perceived themselves as ‘second chance’ students ‘playing the game’ of qualifications. The Mirpuri student approach to modular decision making is thus a product of the Mirpuri communities’ general practice of collective effort, and the student habitus that had been fostered in level three vocational courses which did not incentivise students to work outside their comfort zones.

Not all the Mirpuri participants defined their courses as being broad in curricula. Three of the participants (Khurrum, Luqman and Nasser) described their degrees to be more focused in terms of learning content and module selection. It should be noted that these three students were given the opportunity to select from a diversity of modules, however, all modules were strongly integrated to the occupation being pursued. Additionally, optional modules were less in number compared to the broad courses experienced by most of the other Mirpuri students. The following account by Khurrum highlights this point.

*‘In first year there were six modules and they were all compulsory, two sample development modules, they teach practical and how to saw and stuff we also had two design modules, where they taught you how to design fashion, so research and design fashion, we had a textiles module, we had one which was like a cultural studies module, which was like the history of design…we chose one module in the second year, it was either marketing or manufacture, I chose marketing because, it was the graphics side of things and I understood marketing; that was sort of a passion of mine. In final year we had all compulsory modules, but in terms of your design briefs you could do pretty much whatever you want’*

A similar context is described by Luqman:

*‘They [modules] were all compulsory, they were all engineering related, maths and physics mainly… I don’t think we chose any in second year either, I don’t think, erm no second year they were all compulsory, third year we chose them. Three or four of the modules were mechanical, two were automotive, because I chose an automotive degree. I did the automotive modules I chose computational fluid dynamics , which is going deeper into actual engineering, that was one, and there was engine systems in third year we had core modules same as mechanical, the core modules were mechanical engineering or engineering and two modules were automotive based.’*

Nasser reinstates this point:

*‘In the first year, we had no optional modules. I don’t think we chose modules in second year either no! I think in third year we chose modules, they were all core, until third year… The modules were more refined in the second year, very focused on certain things so, we had one big unit on the actually practical side of a forensic lab, the environment, then we had two units on chemistry, organic and inorganic chemistry and then we had physics and then we had two law units, which were all core units. In third year, we had to choose a focus, physics, organic or inorganic, and it was common sense to drop physics because organic and inorganic are linked.’*

The focused modular degrees discussed by Khurrum, Luqman and Nasser were clearly distinct from the broad modular degrees discussed by the other students. The subject range was limited and there were fewer optional modules, consequently, students on focused degrees did not discuss the various module selection strategies. Students on focused degrees appeared to be more engaged in their learning and were able to independently comprehend how the modules ensured specialisation (Luqman and Nasser). The shorter range in subject also ensured that students were intrinsically motivated to choose certain modules, this experience was absent amongst the Mirpuri students on broader degrees. For Khurrum, this was observed in his decision to select marketing modules, and for Luqman it was in the automotive engineering modules. For Nasser this was exhibited in his desire to continue with chemistry modules because organic and inorganic chemistry modules are inter-related where greater level of specialisation can be achieved. A further point to note is that unlike students on broad degrees, Khurrum, Luqman and Nasser were able to recall the names of most of the modules, this indicates that focused degrees fostered deeper learning in comparison to the more surface learning expressed by Mirpuri students on broad degrees.

The broad curricula tasked Mirpuri students to participate in modules that are outside their interests and occupational goals, which dislocated their *idealised* vocational habitus in relation to the *realised* vocational habitus demanded by their selected courses (Colley et al, 2003). This particular context was also addressed by Sanders and Rose-Adams (2014) review of attainment literature where the miss-match of expectations between the demands of HE and the BME students was highlighted as a factor to their under-attainment. Additionally, certain modules required students to engage with content that had not been part of their previous educational experience, and some were seen to serve no purpose in their long-term goals. This context impacted motivational levels as students felt that they could not relate to the content and were not aptly prepared to overcome the assessment demands. Subsequently most of the Mirpuri graduates failed certain modules or performed below the 60 per cent (good degree) average.

The broad curricula with a diverse range of optional modules also fostered a culture of collaboration which allowed the Mirpuri males to mobilise and deploy forms of ethnic capital which assisted them in their negotiations and engagement with a challenging learning environment. Such collaborative decision making was based on collective knowledge of certain modules, or, most commonly, based on assessment requirements of a module. The Mirpuri students ranked what modules to select by identifying the level of academic orientation of the assessment process, and the strength of the collective group in aiding successful completion. It is possible to argue that one of the reasons why Mirpuri students make collective modular decisions is due to their primary socialisation within Bradford and within biradari networks where, as an ethnic group, the Mirpuri population in Bradford have historically been working collectively to overcome challenging circumstances (Kalra, 2000). The collective ethos is thus part of the Mirpuri habitus which explains their collaborative practice in module selection. Why the Mirpuri participants chose modular courses that are mostly coursework points towards the level three vocational courses that only assess based on portfolios (Bates, et al 1998). The research that has focused on the transition from students from vocational courses to HE has continuously stated how certain level three vocational courses like BTEC/GNVQ limit the cultivation of exam skills, such as the ability to consolidate knowledge and to optimally prepare for examinations (McEwan, 2001, Williams, 2000, Hatt and Baxter, 2003). It could also be argued that universities with policies for widening participation do not accommodate the vocational student who have cultivated different types of skills before entering HE (Hatt and Baxter, 2003).

Theoretically speaking, the theme of broad curricular has been discussed as being part of the academic drift process. Highlighted by Neave (1978) and Kyvik (2007) under the category of curriculum or programme drift, it is argued that advance vocational qualifications evolved from a focused orientation towards a more broad or ‘liberal’ programme. This broad nature in curricula according to theory of academic drift was to ensure equal status of ‘new’ vocational degrees to the traditional arts degree that covered a broad range of subjects (Silver, 1990). Burgess and Pratt (1970) argued that such drift creates tensions between the working class student habitus and the field of HE. For the Mirpuri students this broad orientation meant that they were required to participate within subjects that had not been part of their educational journey, which led to initial failures, and overhaul lower performances in assessment.

This contrasts with those students who engaged in more focused curricula. Mirpuri participants on courses with a focused curriculum appeared to be clear about their personal development and knew how they could achieve some form of specialisation. These students did not make strategic or collective decision like their peers on broader courses and exhibited deeper learning and ownership of their learning. This is an evidential point about the detrimental impact of academic drift where vocational HEICs fail to fulfil their purpose of being accessible to disenfranchised students who do not know the ‘rules of the game’ with regards to modularisation. Academic drift posits that because vocational courses have evolved towards *traditional* university degrees, which affords greater student independence in relation to what, and how they learn. As a result, non-traditional students are excluded as they come from vocational backgrounds where this traditional university ethos is not encouraged (Pratt, 1997). The Mirpuri experience within focused curricula suggests that academic drift, in its various forms, is more observable in some degree courses than others. Focused curricula, by virtue of being focused, do not embody what can be classified as traditional degree merits (Barnett, 1990). The limited range of subjects meant that the Mirpuri participants could monitor their skill development and reflect on their progress. Modules were seen to be aligned with occupational goals, which ensured a greater sense of purpose to participate with various learning practices.

For most of the Mirpuri students however, the broad modular structure meant that they were required to choose from a diversity of optional modules. The Mirpuri students experience with module selection indicates towards both disadvantageous and advantageous forms of capital. The deficit of white middle-class forms of cultural capital undermines their ability to fully engaging with the ‘liberalism’ embedded in module selection. This is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about specific modules. On the other hand, ethnic capital is mobilised and deployed, by seeking assistance from biradari members. Senior students give advice in terms of choosing more accommodating modules, as well as, tacit knowledge on module leaders and their temperament in terms of grading. The Mirpuri students then make what is perceived to be the most rational decision in terms of choosing the modules that can provide the highest possible grade.

## Independent Learning and the ethos of leisure

Independent learning has been a hallmark characteristic of liberal university education (Newman, 1996). In more contemporary context independent learning has taken on a number of roles that has maintained its use as a primary pedagogical approach in HE. This includes the desire for students to take ownership of their learning both in terms of scholarly pursuits or vocational pursuits where students can decide on their chosen areas of specialisation (McCabe and O’Connor, 2014). When discussing how the Mirpuri participants were taught, independent learning was the most common form of pedagogy. Even though independent learning is considered beneficial for students as it encourages self-learning and empowerment, the independent learning ethos of universities was another challenge for Mirpuri students. The Mirpuri participants considered it detrimental to their progress as it meant that students had limited contact with tutors and were left on their own to overcome the challenges of university learning. Hafiz presents this case.

*‘So you go to your lectures, after a lecture you might have an hour free sat around with friends or whatever, normally in atrium and then you went t’ to eat or summat, come back, you might have another lecture, nobody told us to study or where to go, so uni for us became that thing of you go to lectures and then your chilling, uni was that, for us the studying for exams was a few days or a week before the exam kicks in, and you study for that specific exam, we all used to be in library trying to help each other out, get someone’s notes when deadlines and exams kicked in’*

In Hafiz’s response that ‘nobody told us to study or where to go’ expresses how independent learning was an alien concept to Mirpuri students, which is further problematised by the challenges of university assessment. It was also common for Mirpuri students to study on the eve of examinations where the time spent ‘chilling’ was a means of strengthening their ethnic capital which would be needed during assessment season. The strong bonds that had developed within Bradford’s locality and throughout their educational journey were further reinforced in socialising during independent learning time. Many of the respondents reflected on the time spent ‘chilling’ as being detrimental to their attainment as no curricular or academic support was provided. The respondents were left to their own vices to understand and comprehend an alien academic culture that had limited relatability with their endowed mode of being and doing (Bhopal, 2018), further detaching the Mirpuri students from the university as a learning environment. Haroon for example makes a bold statement of how the substantial time for independent learning removed the weekday/end boundary, and attending university felt like a continuation of the weekend. This further indicates to a form of marginalisation where the institutional culture was unable to accommodate diverse learning needs.

*‘Saturday night, chill out all night, Sunday go back to work, Monday uni, uni was like a weekend anyway, you didn’t know what a weekend was because your relaxed, chilling’*

Gul further adds that the lack of time spent studying made the whole experience of university much more difficult as more contact with tutors would have ensured assistance and support.

*‘In school you had people around you, in uni they give a time table to attend and that’s it, you would be relaxed, chilling with friends, going out to eat… Looking back I didn’t enjoy it because its harder init, whereas if you’ve got teacher’s support then it’s a lot easier’*

Ibrar also stressed the negative aspect of independent learning as it did not incentivise a work ethic that would challenge the learner and assist in developing study habits.

*‘It’s the first time you realise you don’t have to go to any lessons even though you should and you don’t (laughter). You have a lot of free time and you’re just chilling and getting to know other people. People from out of town and around the world, we discovered the atrium and that we could be there having a laugh with friends till 10 at night, go home, go to sleep, come back the next day and do it all over again… The thing is I just couldn’t figure out what was required of me. But then again, we were having so much fun and were so relaxed that I sort of forgot about it’*

Ibrar and Gul’s tendency to contrast their experience of learning between school and university showcases the idea of ‘learning shock’ (Cree, 2009), where students must accommodate a unique academic culture which BME students are not accustomed to. Ibrar’s point about not being able to ‘figure out what was required’ highlights the lack of support and the all-important guidance needed to carryout independent learning.

Literature on low BME attainment in HE has been associated with staff complacency and the lack of support in accommodating BME students, where the guise of independent learning continues to foster intersectional barriers that negatively impact BME students (Madriaga, 2018, Singh, 2011, Stevenson, 2012). Independent learning within the university setting appears to only cater for those who Bourdieu (1998) argues already know ‘the rules of the game’. This is reminiscent of Tett’s (2000) conclusions that students from non-traditional backgrounds are inherently positioned as the ‘other’ as their middle class ‘traditional’ peers would possess the ‘unwritten rules’ of practice that allows them to benefit from certain institutional practices. The Mirpuri experience with independent learning magnifies the disharmony between student habitus and the ethos of the academy. Nairz-Wirth et al (2017) particularly focused on this aspect of university experience arguing that university lecturers make the erroneous assumption that non-traditional students (like their traditional counterparts) are intrinsically motivated, self-organised and fully capable of undertaking the academic challenges of university education. Yet, it is seldom reflected upon that non-traditional students come from educational backgrounds where trained teaching professionals take responsibility for student learning. Nairz-Wirth et al (2017) add that in order for independent learning to work the ‘non-traditional student habitus’ would require further nurturing, particularly in ensuring that the social characteristics of the students encourage independent learning. The failure to nurture the non-traditional habitus in such a way would entail tensions between the students endowed cultural capital and the demands of the university field.

In parallel to the observations made by Nairz-Wirth et al (2017), the Mirpuri students highlight how the lack of structure due to independent learning negatively influenced motivation, further reinforcing an ethos of leisure and networking. For Ibrar, the university atrium became a social space to network where bigger and stronger networks were established and strengthened. This context continues to stress the lack of support from faculty staff in guiding and supporting BME learners who may utilise their independent learning time to take part in socialising and strengthening their networks of assistance.

Sami’s discussion below also reflects this experience with independent learning. Sami’s account, in many ways, consolidates the Mirpuri male’s perception and subsequently engagement with independent learning. Sami’s responses exhibited feelings of being overwhelmed by the size and scale of the institution, which for Mirpuri students was an unfamiliar environment. This is aptly expressed in his notion of university being ‘such an open space’ and the ‘amount of people’ that were attending. Similar to other Mirpuri students, majority of the time provided by the university to conduct independent learning is utilised by participating in leisure activities to strengthen collective bonds. Sami states like others that independent learning was only applied on the eve of examinations.

*‘…yeah so freedom meeting mans [new friends]…it was, you know the whole aspect of being around friends a lot more, and then even just the amount of people, it’s just such an open space the university, l… erm… in uni you tend to have two months of work out of the 24 week periods or whatever it is, them two months are mid-December to mid-January and then around May, end of April… the other times you’re doing f\*\*k all, you’re having a good time and you’re not exactly working hard…’*

When probing the students as to why they approached independent learning at the eve of examinations, a common trope was that the university presented a substantial contrast to their prior learning experience. Sami very briefly stated that his prior learning experience had been ‘spoon-fed’ which was in contrast to the free time given for independent learning.

*‘You give a person who has been spoon-fed his education throughout… erm… from year seven to eleven and then 6th form… you give this person freedom… he’s not going to use his time well.’*

In addition to Sami, Khurrum also used the phrase of being ‘spoon-fed’ to describe his secondary school experience in comparison to the independent research required for universities. Below Khurrum, a high streamed student, stressed how his secondary school did not prompt him to learn deeply and independently.

*‘…I didn’t really understand, and no one ever sort of sign posted or told me how to do my work, so everything I knew about designing…I picked up myself… and again it came back to that thing in school, about how it was spoon feeding ya, you weren’t really taught to go out there and prompt t’ look into things in depth as well as you could have done’*

It is clear from the interview accounts that the Mirpuri students were left to their own vices to negotiate with an alien academic culture. Such context fostered an ethos of socialising where biradari networks were strengthened as a way of increasing ethnic capital. The contrast between their previous learning experience, which was teaching intensive and guided by the teachers also created tensions with the university ideal of learning independently (Naiz-Wirth et al, 2017). The lack of experience with such a distinct pedagogy meant that Mirpuri students relied on their established networks to help and assist in overcoming some of the university challenges.

It is possible to suggest that the very prescriptive assessment regime of level three vocational courses limited the cultivation of research skills and the ethos of working independently (Ecclestone, 2004). Though none of the authors who discuss the transition from vocational courses to HE discussed the impact of level three vocational courses on research skills. It is plausible to suggest, given the work of Bloomer (1998) and Bates et al (1998) and more importantly Ecclestone’s (2004) notion of ‘comfort zone’ that the abilities to conduct independent learning and research are not cultivated amongst students on level three vocational courses. Cree (2009) broadly stated that majority of the students on vocational courses struggled with the new ‘teaching and learning environment’ where students experienced a form of ‘learning shock’.

With that said there were two accounts that were exceptions to the other ten students. Nasser on the Forensic and Analytical Science degree and Khurrum on Fashion Design degree discussed how their courses remained teaching intensive. The pedagogical and assessment features of Fashion Design (Khurrum) and Forensic and Analytical Science (Nasser), were more interactive where a workplace environment was simulated. In contrast to courses that are considered more academic, the pedagogic and assessment practices on these two degrees remained within the parameters of the core discipline and used various forms of assessment to measure core occupational skills. For Khurrum this entailed formulating and presenting fashion related designs on a regular basis, and for Nasser it was working within labs and going into court. Khurrum also spoke about reduced holiday time and being given a summer project before the course began. As a result, the time for ‘chilling’ as discussed by other Mirpuri students was not discussed by Khurrum or Nasser. Khurrum for example stated:

*‘I think it was really practical and I think it was right for that, because of the nature of industry, I don’t think you can learn fashion by siting and reading and writing to be honest with ya. It was all about doing and learning, and trying and seeing, we had courses that were very intensive, we started before everyone else, we even got given a summer project prior to getting to uni…which we had to take on, we had to do a whole series like a design brief before we even got to uni, so we spent a lot of the time in the design studio or in computer labs. I remember for holidays in Easter we had two weeks and at Christmas two weeks and then six weeks through summer. It was like school except we didn’t get half terms.’*

Nasser similarly discussed how most of his time was spent in the forensic lab where he was briefed by tutors and required to produce daily lab reports.

*‘You had to be in the labs and physically do the work…the lab days I used to love, I used t’ have a lab from 9:15 to 1:15 so for four hours you’re in a lab. Just doing lab work … There are different types of labs for different modules, we had a chemistry lab, that’s just getting your chemical properties and mixing them up, putting it under scanners and finding out what you made. I used to love the forensic labs, so stuff like finger prints and sweat… So, you’re in the lab all day,, they give you forty-minutes briefing of what you need to do, so it might be we’ve got bags here, find evidence from it and that could be anything…So it’s very hands on, and you get on with it, the first hour is spent by them-lot explaining stuff and you setting up your equipment. You got three hours to do your thing and they want a lab report, if you’ve done your work your free to go, as long as you have got your results, whether, your right or wrong…’*

Khurrum and Nasser provide us with a relatively detailed account of their pedagogical experiences indicating towards greater levels of engagement, learner satisfaction and being intrinsically motivated. Both Nasser and Khurrum understood how the content of learning and the methods of teaching were assisting them in acquiring skills that they may need in their chosen occupations. This is in comparison to the students engaging in independent learning who did not recall intricate details of their courses and felt that most of the methods of teaching had little relevance to their desired occupations. It could be argued that the pedagogical approach on more occupationally driven courses were more accommodating for the Mirpuri students and generated greater meaning because it was logically aligned with their vocational aims.

In relation to theory, independent learning within vocational HEICs is understood as another aspect of academic drift (See Pratt 1997; Barnes, 1996, Whyte, 2015). Overtime, vocational courses reduce their teaching provision in order establish a more traditional liberal ethos that is common in elite research universities. For Pratt and Burgess (1974) this transition within CATs and polytechnics was another way of distancing from the technical college tradition where substantial time was provided for teacher – student contact. Burgess and Pratt (1980) discuss how such reduction in time became detrimental for students who did not embody middle-class or traditional student attributes and required more support from tutors.

For the Mirpuri participants, independent learning further complicated their engagement with the content of learning. Independent learning expressed an ongoing struggle to make sense of an alien academic culture and a lack of contact with tutors. The Mirpuri students were required to negotiate with the ethos of independent learning, constrained, on the one hand, by the institutional cultural capital, but assisted by their ethnic capital to overcome and resist barriers that may preclude progression. The cultural capital deficit that is generated, by virtue of class position, systematically positioned the Mirpuri students at odds with the expectation of the university where embodied perceptions do not allow for harmonious engagement (Cree, 2009). The Mirpuri male habitus does not possess the ‘rules of the game’ to accommodate independent learning as their previous learning experience had been guided by trained teachers in school (Nariz-Wirth et al, 2017). Additionally, the Mirpuri habitus has been cultivated with a collective ethos to work within groups, particularly within alien contexts like the academy, where ethnic capital is desperately needed. As a result, independent learning without any guidance was translated as time to network and strengthen their ethnic capital by participating in leisure activities. This context allowed Mirpuri students to gain assistance in selecting modules and overcoming the challenges of assessment.

The two exceptions provided by Nasser and Khurrum further solidify the negative impact of academic drift on vocational HEICs. Their relatively positive experience on courses suggest that more contact with tutor and working within occupationally defined spaces like the forensic lab or the design studio leads to better engagement and greater student satisfaction. The two courses which exhibited the least amount of traditional academic practices where the learning content and methods of teaching were focused and occupationally relevant ensured better student engagement.

In the context of more occupational degree courses like fashion design and forensic and analytical science, there was a harmonious transition from the idealised vocational habitus embodied by the Mirpuri student towards the realised vocational habitus (Colley et al, 2003). Additionally, the use of various pedagogical tools, namely those that simulate the working environment, inhibited less middle-class white characteristics where students were given clear instructions on how they should work. This can be seen in Khurrum’s reflection on how instructions were provided in order to design for particular fashion brands. Khurrum did not require, like students on more academic courses, to analyse theory and critically evaluate literature which demanded strong academic writing skills. Analogously, with Nasser, clear instructions were provided on how to conduct lab work. Mirpuri students on more occupationally orientated degrees did not have to know as many ‘rules of the game’ as students on more academic degrees. The occupational pedagogy meant that within say the forensic lab (Nasser) or within a design studio (Khurrum), learners actively participated in developing their skills and understanding the requirements of the course with the assistance of tutors.

The issue of independent learning is commonly referenced amongst researchers on BME attainment, namely those who desire to understand the institutional forms of racism (Stevenson, 2012 Singh, 2011). Researchers argue that such ‘liberal’ ethos excludes BME students that do not embody the traditional white middle class attributes to be fully included (Madriaga, 2018; Sander and Rose-Adams, 2014, Singh, 2011). CRT scholars particularly argued that the liberal ethos within HE hides white structures where faculty staff fail to address how the racial barriers are imbedded in institutional culture. Bhopal’s (2018) observations parallel those of Mirpuri students who argued that BME students must conform to the middle class white culture of universities that positions, for example the collective ethos of Mirpuri students as ‘other’ forms of being and doing. The time spent ‘chilling’ as stated by some of the Mirpuri students is thus a natural consequence of the lack of inclusivity in university pedagogy which does not accommodate the needs of diverse students. The outcome of such disharmony between student habitus and the university field is one where there is a lack of adequate preparation for assessment and relatively lower attainment.

## ‘*I didn’t really pick up much on lectures’*

The second most common form of pedagogy experienced by most of the Mirpuri students was the lecture. University lectures are progressively occupying a precarious position in the current HE sector, given the various external technical developments, that limit the incentive to attend lectures (Luttenberger et al, 2017). The increasing use of information technology, mainly the utilisation of the internet and its capacity to increase access to recorded lectures has potentially led to the preclusion of the traditional university lecture. Bligh’s (2000) seminal study on the use of lectures argues that lectures are only useful when certain conditions are met, such as the lecturer’s ability to transfer tacit knowledge to large audiences, and the students ability to find *meaning* in the content. Bligh (2000) resolutely states that lectures are mainly beneficial in transferring information and cannot adequately facilitate, other elements of learning such as promoting thought, changing attitudes, or developing certain behavioural skills. More importantly the learning content articulated by the lecturer can only serve the purpose of transmitting information, retention and later application if it is considered meaningful to the student. The experiences of Mirpuri students are in accordance with Bligh’s (2000) observations. The lack of relatability with traditional academia was exacerbated by the limited experience in attending lectures as Mirpuri students felt that they were unable to gain any relevant information during lectures. Sami’s account below stresses this point.

*‘…even if you sit in lectures, I would sit there thinking I don’t care about any of this, I cared enough because I know I needed a degree, I cared enough because I wanted to pass I couldn’t give a shit about the lecture. I didn’t care for it. See I didn’t understand the whole lecture thing, the whole idea of printing off lecture slides going to the lecture, making notes. You just go there and write out what was written in front of ya, rather than writing down what the lecturer was saying, because that’s the main thing…I literally used to re-write what the lecturer said, then I gave up…You don’t know how it works, the whole idea of sitting in front of the f\*\*ker and listen to him talk.’*

Sami’s emotive statement parallels discussions on lectures not being accommodating to non-traditional learners, French and Kennedy (2017) for example state that in the absence of meaning the lecture remains a passive teaching practice. Mirpuri students like other non-traditional student require different forms of university pedagogy because they have had unique, intersectional experiences that do not conform to white liberal forms of being and doing (Bhopal, 2018). Moodie (2014) presents an illuminating case, stating the printing press increased the availability of books, which meant that the lecturers were left to highlight the main discussions in a written scholarly work and engage in corollary debate. With the increased use of internet, where scholarly works can be accessed, including lectures of academics, there are thus fewer incentives to attend or even use the lecture format. This is augmented by the general profile of non-traditional students, who may not be able to commit to the live lecture, due to work commitments, family obligations (commonly for mature students) and unique learning styles (due to entry through the vocational track) (Bamber and Tett, 2000).

All of the Mirpuri students stated that after the initial few lectures they only attended a limited number of lectures, this was primarily due to the lack of knowledge on how to approach lectures, which can simply mean not being accustomed to the practice of attending lectures and taking notes (see Sami above). Additionally, the passive nature of lectures meant that many of the Mirpuri participants spoke of losing interest and deciding not to attend. Amin makes this case:

*‘…you go from being sat in a classroom, to sat where there are 2 to 300 people and you got one person talking in front, the thing is, it was always one way as well, nobody every spoke up, nobody ever asked any questions, whatever they said that’s it, you needed to get it right the first time…’*

Another factor that emerges with the Mirpuri male engagement with lectures is that the lecture slides were commonly found on the university’s online learning portal, which further incentivised absence from the actual lecture. The Mirpuri students preferred to access lecture content online at a convenient time. Hafiz makes this case:

*‘You went to them for the sake of going to them, I didn’t really pick up much on lectures… you go there because everybody else is going there, your trying to listen to them, you might not understand it, but you say, when it comes close to exams, I’ll find out what’s coming up and I’ll go through it then. I didn’t really get it, I never really went to my lectures, but later on if they had good slides online. I could go on those slides’*

Paralleling their experience with independent learning, the Mirpuri students stated that the lecture as a pedagogical tool was an unfamiliar learning experience. This also led to an ethos of absenteeism as students felt that the passive nature of the lecture was not beneficial, whilst the lecture material used by the lecturer was available online, which could be accessed at their own convenience. It is clear, given the almost unanimous response from Mirpuri participants in this thesis that lectures were considered passive and of no value. Gul states:

*‘You had lectures, which I didn’t enjoy I didn’t feel like I got anything out of them, and so I never used to go to lectures much, I used to be one of those guys. Out of the group one or two used to go [lectures] so we used to give our cards to them for them to scan us and the rest would sleep in or go SU [student union], we always used to be out, get something to eat’*

Gul mentions that it was common practice to request one or two biradari members to scan their university cards, on the card reader at the front of the auditorium, which would mark the student as having attended the lecture, thus giving the module leader false information regarding their attendance. The fact that students were being asked to scan their cards suggests that absence in lectures amongst students was very high and scanning ID cards was a measure taken to discourage absence. Additionally, it highlights how the Mirpuri students utilised biradari networks to resist university surveillance. Attending the live lecture served little purpose as students lost engagement due to its passive format and in knowing that lecture slides were available online. From Gul’s response we can also understand that being absent from lectures amplified the detachment from the university further reinforcing the ethos of leisure and networking with biradari members. Gul’s experience reflects the research done on the use of lectures, which possess little meaning for non-traditional students (Bamber and Tett, 2000, Bligh, 2000). Moodie (2016) points out that lecture capture allows students to access the lecture material remotely further precluding the incentive to attend.

Though the use of lectures per se has not been discussed by academic drift theorists, it can certainly be inferred that the use of lectures, as a way of developing vocational skills and knowledge, is a product of pedagogical drift (see theory chapter). Lectures have traditionally been part of universities, whilst vocational courses have more recently adopted the lecture as a pedagogical tool. Vocational education had been, for most parts, located on the job and defined by the apprenticeship model (Fieldhouse, 1998). From the perspective of academic drift, the lecture is an adoption of traditional university pedagogy. As a result, the lecture alienates and positions those who do not embody the ‘rules of the game’ as outsiders. The Mirpuri students like other non-traditional students must, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) state, confront and negotiate the mainly ‘unwritten rules’ established by the dominant group.

This also presents a racially defined challenge for students where the lecture exhibits white liberal forms of learning. Kester (2019) stated that university pedagogies, in general, were based on constructivist notions of pedagogy which favours a psychological understanding of learning, inherently undermining the cultural and racial dimension of the student. This is apparent in the difficulty of taking notes, for example and engaging with passive lectures that do not facilitate discussions and debates. Bourdieu (1988), and many who speak in the same vain, (see Bamber and Tett, 2000) continue to remind us that learning environments like the lecture are more problematic for non-traditional learners, where difference in language codes and culturally distinct cues and practices render the non-traditional student unable to fully accommodate culturally fused tacit knowledge and subsequently engage with the content in a meaningful way.

## Attending Tutorials/Seminars

The third most copious form of pedagogy experienced by Mirpuri students was the tutorial and the seminar. Seminars are generally larger class sizes than tutorials, but both have the advantage of engaging with the tutor. Fulford (2013) states that tutorials are beneficial in many ways as they open up new dimensions of cognition. The discussions and debates generated by the tutor and the learners are engaging and interactive where according to Fulford (2013) ‘genuine education’ takes place. Clarke and Lane, (2005) make a similar case for seminars but also stress the need for tutors to ensure that various types of learning styles are catered for. Discussions are effective for more active learners who prefer the group work method; however, tutors must differentiate for the reflective, theoretical and pragmatic students, who may require other teaching methods in order to engage with the learning content (Clarke and Lane, 2005).

The Mirpuri students in this study spoke favourably about attending seminars and stated that their overhaul experience with tutorials was much more beneficial to their learning experience. When asking Sami about his experience in attending tutorials he replied by comparing tutorials with lectures highlighting the significant contrast these two pedagogies can have on engagement.

*‘…see the lectures themselves are pointless, not pointless but they are hard to concentrate in and you can easily drift off and nobody’s going to say anything to you, so the tutorials were a little bit better because it was a smaller size room, less people, you can interact with the lecturer and if you had any questions you can ask them as well, so I did kind of enjoy the tutorials more than the lectures.’*

The tutorials and seminars were described as a familiar learning environment by the Mirpuri students, the class sizes are relatively small and students are able to acquire the all-important contact with the module leader or assistant academics (Oldfield et al 2018). The tutorial allowed for a relatively better learning experience for the Mirpuri males as they were able to engage in discussions and gain a much better understanding of the learning content. Hafiz highlights this point:

*‘Tutorials were alright, tutorials were a bit more informative, you got a bit of a grasp for what was going on, I think that was more because of the smaller groups, so if you didn’t understand something, you can catch up can’t ya…’*

It is important to note that both Sami and Hafiz suggested that they ‘*kind of’* enjoyed the tutorials or they ‘got *a bit of a grasp* for what was going on’ which implies that tutorials are a relatively better learning environment but not completely accommodating. This indicates to the common Bourdieuisan understanding that tutorials like any other fields that are defined by a logic of practice have within them individuals who will experience it unequally. Colvin et al (2012) state that tutorial activities can range from class debates, group presentations and general discussion based on the subject. When students begin to engage in such discussions the style and form of speech is given more value than the content of learning, where those who do not possess the academic proficiency contribute less within tutorials. Colvin et al (2012) also state that unlike Bourdieu’s assertion that such inequality in fields of education are caused by class, their study showed that the unequal participation was more in relation to the white and non-white culture. White middle-class students were observed to be more dominating in their contribution to tutorial tasks where their proficiency in academic language undermined the less academic forms of speech amongst non-white students. This unequal interaction may have led to unequal participation within tutorials amongst Mirpuri students.

Nevertheless, the tutorials provided the desperately needed contact with tutors which was absent during independent learning and lectures. This point is reiterated by Ibrar who stated that the tutorials provided the well needed support and engagement with faculty staff and subsequently the learning content.

*‘Tutorials were good, because it feels like a classroom where you had to work, you could speak to the lecturers and ask questions.’*

Ibrar, amongst others, suggested that the tutorials were successful due to their familiarity with the school classroom; it was a learning environment the Mirpuri students were familiar with. This contrasted their experience with independent learning and lectures which distanced them from the content and provided no assistance on how best to approach the learning. Unfortunately, after the first year of study the tutorials were only every fortnight for each module, which meant that for majority of the time spent in university the Mirpuri students did not get the type of pedagogy that would accommodate them, as well as, the guidance and support that was needed to fully engage with their subjects.

In contrast to independent learning and lectures, the tutorials became the desperately needed form of pedagogy, that afforded the Mirpuri students access to tutors. From the perspective of academic drift, the tutorial or seminar, are remnants of the more teacher-intensive vocational courses before the process of drift, which reduces the direct teaching time (Burgess, 1970, Pratt and Burgess, 1974, Pratt, 1997). It is understood that the less academically drift a pedagogical model is the more familiarity there is between the non-traditional learner and a particular pedagogy, as the pedagogy will embody less white middle class attributes (Burgess, 1970, Burgess and Pratt, 1974, Pratt, 1997). Concurringly, Mirpuri students spoke positively about engaging with tutorials as the learning was guided by trained staff, where they could interact, and clarify points of interest. The relative success of the tutorial as a pedagogical tool represents the harmony between their biographical learning habitus and the tutorial as a learning space. The Mirpuri students were accustomed with the tutorial format because it represented a familiar learning environment, that does not (like the lecture theatre) alienate the learner *to a great extent* (Colvin et al, 2012). The Mirpuri students could question the tutors and gain insight on information that may have been misunderstood, as well as, gaining information on how to prepare for their assessments.

## Conclusion

This chapter presented the Mirpuri male experience in various forms of university pedagogy, such as modules selection, independent learning, attending lectures and tutorials and more occupationally orientated pedagogy. University pedagogy that adhered to more traditional academic practices generated both class and racial barriers for many of the Mirpuri undergraduates. The challenge of traditional academia entailed a negotiated engagement within the university field. The broad range in subjects in both core and optional modules meant that Mirpuri students were required to engage in subjects that were neither familiar nor part of their long-term occupational goals. Additionally, the lack of knowledge about modules meant that Mirpuri students relied heavily on biradari networks to make module choices and in overcoming assessment demands. Unable to overcome some of the challenges of traditional academia on their own, independent learning time was utilised to strengthen ethnic capital through leisure and sociability. Such ethnic capital is then mobilised and deployed in a number of contexts for example, when selecting modules and conducting coursework assignments.

Lectures were unanimously considered problematic due to the passive nature of the lecture, which made it difficult to gain any beneficial information. This was augmented by lecture capture which allowed Mirpuri students to view lecture materials online at their own convenience (Bligh, 2000, Moodie, 2016). This dynamic created an ethos of absenteeism further alienating the Mirpuri students from university pedagogy. Given the theory of academic drift, both independent learning and lectures are understood to be an effect of vocational degrees adopting traditional university pedagogy, as a result, the endowed cultural capital possessed by the Mirpuri male habitus is undermined in a culturally defined field (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Academic pedagogy possesses middle class white characteristics namely in the liberal ethos of independent learning which are not harmonious to the biographical learning habitus of BME learners (Madriga, 2018). Independent learning embraces the liberal ethos, which CRT scholars have criticised for maintaining racial barriers, where white forms of being and doing are privileged in comparison to others (Bhopal, 2018). This is primarily observed in the collective ethos of Mirpuri students which is not accommodated within the academy.

This is in contrast to less academic pedagogy observed in tutorials where students were able to gain the desperately needed contact time with tutors and enquire about the learning content and gain guidance on assessment. Focused degrees in general were considered less academic as they possessed narrow subject range in terms of core and optional modules. Additionally, the primary form of pedagogy utilised in less academic courses like fashion design and forensic science was specific to the occupation being pursued. The logical integration of subject matter with occupational aims within more vocational, work-based pedagogy meant that the Mirpuri students found meaning in the process of learning and were intrinsically motivated to engage in university pedagogy. In less academic courses, there was less independent learning time, greater contact time with tutors and much of the learning was located within settings that simulated the work environment. The overhaul Mirpuri engagement with traditional university pedagogy highlights the detrimental effects of academic drift, where greater levels of drift create greater distance between the learner and the university as a learning environment (Burgess and Pratt, 1970).

# Chapter Seven: Overcoming Academic Assessment

## Introduction

The following is the third findings chapter which presents the Mirpuri male engagement with university assessment. Five themes emerged in relation to the most common types of assessment undertaken by the Mirpuri participants: these included traditional examinations, practical assessment, individual coursework, student-selected group work and tutor-selected group coursework. Traditional closed book examinations were unanimously considered to be the most difficult forms of assessment, particularly the examination that demanded answers in an essay format. Coursework, which varied from writing reports and essays was preferred due to the lengthier timescale within which the assessment had to be completed and in utilising various forms of capital available to the Mirpuri students. Given the relatively inclusive nature of coursework assessment, Mirpuri students continued to struggle with the academic writing this included, structuring, critical analysis and referencing (Williams, 2000). Group-based coursework, which consisted of report writing and/or presenting was also a preferred form of assessment as established peer groups continued to collaborate. Though ethnic capital was utilised in coursework assessment, collective unfamiliarity with academic conventions, namely in structuring and referencing coursework led to average outcomes. Tutor-selected group work was another challenge as it was the only time when Mirpuri students were engaging with non-Mirpuri students. Racial differences and miscommunication in tutor-selected coursework led to lower performances in assessment.

## Academic exams, occupational exams and the search for meaning

In the UK university assessment is commonly divided into two distinct categories: examinations and coursework (Bridges et al, 2002). Where coursework can be varied in its format and execution, all examinations share some basic characteristics such as being conducted at a particular time and place; within time constrained conditions; and invigilated by members of staff/exam board (Bridges et al, 2002). Examinations are also of two types: closed-book and open book format. All of the Mirpuri students in this study were required to participate in some type of examinations at the end of each semester. All Mirpuri students exhibited great frustration throughout their undergraduate years, due to examinations and generally performed below their expectations within them. This frustration was exacerbated in traditional examinations which tested an understanding of theory, requiring short essay responses in which the students were required to articulate a case, for or against, a particular theoretical or abstract model. Traditional examinations demanded advance literacy and the ability to write a coherent argument, which utilised critical analysis skills and the abilities to evaluate.

In the previous chapter on pedagogy, it was stated that some examinations, (like economics for business students) were not part of Mirpuri students’ education journey and occupational aims. This meant that in addition to being required to show competence in academic skills via examinations, the Mirpuri students, on occasion, were required to engage with subjects that were not integrated with their long term goals. Additionally, as former students on vocational courses most of the participants had not participated in examinations since their compulsory GCSE examinations, which meant that most Mirpuri students had limited experience of preparing for and participating in examinations. Not surprisingly Mirpuri students expressed how traditional examinations were laden with anxiety where they were unable to recall relevant information and construct the right answer(s), Hafiz highlights this point:

*‘you know when you have to go in exam and they just give you a worksheet with all those lines, and you have to write…. I never did well in that. I was never able to do well… like some people can do it, I can’t… like you see them half hour into the exam asking for another booklet, and I swear at that point I’m thinking, what the f\*\*k are you writing, because I’m still on my first page, (laughing). So what am I missing? The funny thing is, I’m on my first page and I’m out of ideas, everything is finished, and people are asking for another booklet and I’m thinking oh no something is not right here’*

Hafiz was unable to recall and then communicate ideas beyond the initial page of the answer sheet, this limitation is then augmented by the exam setting where other students are seen to be writing extensively leading to anxiety and the belief that ‘something is not right here’. Hafiz’s experience was shared by other Mirpuri participants, Danny for examples stressed that exams were difficult due to memorising large portions of legal acts, and the limited time frame in which he had to recall and communicate these acts in written form.

*‘Exams I found difficult, with criminology there were a lot of acts that we had to remember, about the criminal justice system and that I found difficult, all the various sections of act, it had to come all from your head, for two hours everything from head to paper, I found it difficult and they* were going up each year from an hour to two hours and the up to three hours, sometimes I had examinations in the morning and in the afternoon, so it was getting more difficult, I was never comfortable with examinations.’

Danny’s point about increasing difficulty in examinations suggests that the challenges posed by examinations were ongoing throughout his time spent in university. Hafiz and Danny’s responses are in-line with other research on student engagement with traditional examinations. Bridges et al (2002) mention that exams require the ability to remember, identify appropriate information and then to analyse, evaluate and communicate within the parameters of academic conventions; such skills are not readily cultivated in most BME learners. Bridges et al (2002) also stress that exam conditions themselves will reduce the chance of good performance, which reflects Hafiz’s discussion on how seeing other students in the exam, writing lengthy answers, made him question his abilities.

In discussing examination Richardson (2015) addressed that one of the reasons why students are not successful in examinations is due to a lack of experience with examinations before entering HE. As former BTEC business students, most of the Mirpuri participants had very limited experience with exams prior to entering HE. Luqman’s response about participating in examinations also stressed a lack of experience with examinations, Luqman stated:

*‘…exams were my weak point, because you always have that, you don’t know what was going to come up and you can’t go off nine months of lectures, they’re not going to ask nine months of questions.’*

Luqman was unable to acquire information of what specific questions will be asked and how to consolidate nine months of learning material. The seminal study by Snyder (1971) who considered how elite university students prepared for exams, proposed that privileged students are able to uncover the ‘hidden curriculum’ or the unwritten rules of assessment and are able to differentiate the more important aspects of the course from those that are least important, consequently they prepare for their examinations with greater efficiency. Enswistle and Enswitle (1991) also found that academic students are aware of the ‘game of examinations’ where the middle-class students learn what will come up in the exam, and how it will be marked by building rapport with lecturers and reading their books to recognise what the examiner will like to see in their papers.

The lack of experience with examinations and the subsequent ill attempts to prepare are further complicated by the emotional dimension of examinations. Falchikov and Boud (2007) argued that summative examinations generate unforeseen pressures for students who are aware that the culmination of educational endeavours will only be worthwhile if they pass their examinations. This realisation leads many students to work tirelessly in preparation for the examinations but, during exams students find it difficult to recall what they had revised due to

stress and anxiety. Falchikov and Doud (2007) suggest that the emotional dimension of examinations is instrumental to student success, where negative emotions must be overcome by good preparation and experience. Amin contributes to this point.

*‘…I failed that exam twice because I couldn’t get my head around it, no matter how much I tried, doesn’t matter how much you read into theories, doesn’t matter how much you do when you’re sitting in an exam your mind goes blank, because at school you had coursework for this kind of stuff, at uni it was about the exams so there was a lot of pressure I just about managed to pass’*

Amin like other Mirpuri students stressed on the difficulties with recalling information but also on his prior schooling experience which was mostly assessed through coursework. The lack of experience in conducting examinations and subsequently applying sub-optimal strategies in preparation for exams was discussed by Williams (2000) who focused on students from vocational backgrounds. Williams (2000) found that students from GNVQ/BTEC backgrounds did not exhibit appropriate exam skills, which entails the methods taken to prepare, and in producing a coherent written answer in the exam. Williams (2000) argued that the lack of engagement with traditional examinations raised stress levels of students which contributed towards poor performance. Additionally, study skills such as, writing—taking down notes, summarising and in-depth reading were also considered lacking.

The very negative experience with examinations by most of the Mirpuri participants in this study should also be seen in light of the pedagogical context discussed in the previous chapter. The pedagogical exclusion that is generated by engaging with broad subjects and independent learning inherently influences examination performance, as effective preparation strongly favours good performance in exams (Bridges et al, 2002). Not surprisingly the Mirpuri students expressed how they began to revise at the eve of examinations (please see previous chapter). This led to heightened pressure during exam season, Haroon expresses this point

*‘Bad times is when you get exams you haven’t been to lectures, you can’t figure the stuff out, plus like the lecturers haven’t got time for ya, they have gone away, and you just feel the pressure don’t ya when you got five, six exams in a week’*

Haroon’s response indicates how the lack of contact with tutors is exacerbated during exam season as faculty staff are not on campus, to provide assistance. This is further evidence for the lack of support that is provided to Mirpuri students and the absurd assumption that all students at universities, study and learn the same way (Nairz-Wirth et al, 2017). Consequently, for the Mirpuri students the emotional challenge of engaging with examinations, is heightened during exam season (Falchikov and Doud 2007).

When questioning whether the Mirpuri students found all exams to be pressured and challenging with lower performance outcomes, the general response was that some exams were more accommodating of their skills than others. The exams in which the Mirpuri students succeeded had some common characteristics: commonly these exams were instrumental to the occupation being pursued where the ability to follow occupational protocols were being tested, as opposed to, more academic exams which required essay format answers. The most common example of this type of exam was the taxation exam in the third year for the accounting and finance students. Gul makes this case

*‘…taxation in last year I got 70 [per cent] in that, that was my highest grade, and the reason we got that was because it was well explained, it made sense and there was a set answer, and it was number based, whereas with other exams you can’t understand what they want you to write’*

Gul’s response suggests that exams which have ‘set answers’ and test occupational protocols were more meaningful than other exams which required him to ‘write’. This alludes to the more essay-based exams which demand a high level of literacy and an understanding of academia which the Mirpuri students did not readily possess, nor desired to pursue. The more occupational exams were clear, well understood and meaningful which generated intrinsic motivation to engage in the subject and which led to overhaul better performance in exams. This point is made by McDowell (2008) who argued, that university assessment requires the student to learn new concepts like argumentation, which requires the knowledge of academic conventions, style and form of writing and the abilities to recall and structure ideas under pressure. Lillis (2001) comprehensive discussion about the writing demands in HE also addresses this point, Lillis (2001) stated that the most common form of writing demand in university was the essay, which was distant from most non-traditional students’ natural way of speaking and writing. The Mirpuri students were thus unable to fully engage with traditional exams, however, this was not the case with exams which required ‘set’ answers. Ibrar stated, for example that:

*‘I loved taxation in the final year, I suppose it was the fact that it involved maths and calculations with structure and formulas which I like but it also made sense, it was relevant, and it was based on real life example. I knew how I would use that knowledge.’*

Ibrar’s point about the exam being relevant parallels the accounts of Nasser and Khurrum with regards to vocational pedagogy (see previous chapter) where more occupationally orientated pedagogy was considered meaningful or relevant to the occupation being pursued. Ibrar and others undertaking the taxation module stress how the assessment was relevant and ‘based on real life examples’. In other words, the Mirpuri students were able to generate *meaning* with the assessment by comprehending its logical integration to an accounting function. Hafiz’s account below further reinforced the idea of meaning as he found the taxation exam enjoyable and was intrinsically motivated to participate in the examinations and subsequently to succeed. Hafiz discusses this below

*‘…when it came to second year, there were a few subjects I didn’t like, and when you don’t like something you can’t concentrate. You know when you’re doing something for the sake of doing it, it’s different to when you like something; you want to learn more and you want to do well, and it wasn’t, so like , I did well in some like taxation I remember doing well in that, I remember completing the taxation exam and thinking I’ve smashed it!... I also did well in financial accounting, which was similar because you had to calculate figures and then write about it’*

The relative success in examinations that tested occupationally relevant knowledge suggests that Mirpuri students can engage in certain examinations which are aligned to their occupational goals and test occupational protocols. Heijne-Penninga et al (2008) discuss this issue within the context of medical students and conclude that closed book examinations are more efficient for medical students as knowledge of medical process was required and students wanted to showcase their body of knowledge. This contrasts examinations that require candidates to construct and organise arguments and reference various sources from memory, where the aim is not simply to show competence in knowing occupational protocols but to argue, for or against, a case using academic conventions (Lillis, 2001).

The accounts of Mirpuri participants suggest that the perceived sub-optimal approach taken in preparing for examinations, has more to do with cultural elements brought onto the course through academic drift than the students’ abilities per se. This is made evident in the discussions related to participating in occupationally focused exams like taxation in comparison to the more essay-based examinations. Academic drift creates a cultural challenge, where the Mirpuri males are required to showcase their knowledge of academia which according to CRT scholars also embodies white liberal cultural attributes, namely in what Bourdieu (1999) calls one’s academic habitus (see also Bhopal, 2018, Madriaga, 2018).

The higher levels of motivation, enthusiasm and engagement with occupational examinations implies that BME students like the Mirpuri males in this study, can succeed in HE examinations when the content of examination and the skills being tested are aligned with occupational goals, as opposed to, the testing of various traditional academic skills such as essay writing (Lillis, 2001). The academic challenge in terms of language proficiency was exacerbated by the high-stake nature of summative examinations, this led to greater emotional challenge (Falchikov and Doud 2007). From a Bourdieuisan lens, the Mirpuri undergraduates experienced disharmony between their habitus and the field of university academia that possess a distinct middle-class institutional capital (Crozier and Reay, 2011, Cree, 2009). This can also be understood to be racially discriminating as BME students may have distinct forms of speaking and writing which are undermined by favouring white forms of being and doing (Madriaga, 2018, Bhopal, 2018).

## Practical success and academic failure

The occupationally orientated examinations discussed above share similar characteristics to practical forms of assessments on the two occupational degrees discussed in the previous chapters: Fashion Design (Khurrum) and Forensic and Analytical Science (Nasser). Practical assessments require students to operate within ‘workstations’ and generally test the students’ abilities to carry out a job-related task (Chewter, 2018). For Khurrum on the fashion design degree this was within the design studio, and for Nasser this was in the forensics lab and in attending court. Additionally, the high frequency of job-based assessment meant that occupational degrees had more formative assessment embedded into their learning. Both students considered this to be a very beneficial and engaging form of assessment which allowed them to gain good marks and acquire real occupational skills. Nasser’s discussion on assessment provides evidence to this point.

*‘I liked practical assessment like lab reports, you have a little exam as well, but the majority of it is the lab, 75% is lab, so you could pass the unit before sitting the exam. That was the same for law modules I had to go to Bradford crown court, go into actual real life scenarios, and then we had to practice ourselves, they’d give you a scenario, you’d go and work on it, they had a court room and we used to do it over there, they would ask you questions, and that was very daunting because you were being questioned by experts in the field and if you can’t explain yourself, they will click on straight away, as I said I’m vocal and I can talk so that was good for me’*

Nasser’s general overview of practical examinations suggests that practical assessments were considered meaningful which meant that he was intrinsically motivated to engage with the assessment. Nasser’s point about going to court and being tested vocally reflects the work of Simons and Hicks (2006) who argued that university assessment is geared to favour those who possess strong literacy skills and that disenfranchised learners must be assessed beyond the demands of the written exam. The authors argued for more creative forms of assessment such as role-plays and storytelling which do not embody the potentially discriminatory characteristics of traditional university assessment. Nasser’s ability of speaking confidently was demanded in the assessment for the law modules allowing him to apply this particular strength in the assessment. For Khurrum a similar scenario is presented where popular fashion labels would provide the assessment brief based on their requirements and ask students to design for their fashion collection.

*‘…in the second year we had a lot more live briefs, briefs being, we got companies coming in…and brief us on what they wanted us to design, - actual fashion labels come in - they used to brief us on what they want, and once they briefed us, we had to go away and design for that particular brand. Like you got River Island as a brand; they are developing a men’s wear range, you need to design something that fits in with their current range, remember the brand ethos! Remember the price! Remember the people they are aiming at! … erm… and design for them. You had to design something that would sit in their shops. This was very beneficial, it made you understand what the whole purpose of design is, not design that looks or feels good but to design something that would sell, coz, if design is not making money, you cannot sustain and continue… That was our main assessment, and for modules like marketing you had to design and make some packaging and create a proper campaign.’*

For Khurrum and Nasser practical assessments were inherently aligned to the occupational demands and both Nasser and Khurrum were able to observe how the assessment was contributing to development of their work-related skills.

Given some of the obvious benefits of occupational assessment, both Khurrum and Nasser, like other Mirpuri students in this study, gained lower class degrees. When discussing this particular issue Nasser and Khurrum referred back to the traditional academic aspects of their courses. For Khurrum, the main challenge came in the form of independent research, which was exacerbated by his learning history which did not encourage independent learning, (at degree level). Khurrum was also limited by the lack of experience in using a sketch book.

**‘***I didn’t come from an art background, which most of the students on that course came from, so they understood the design process, what you needed to do, I didn’t, so going into it was just like, alright I’ll just do whatever, being from an Asian background being a male, I think the tutors and everyone else sort of, they didn’t know how to approach me, so the first year it was me trying to figure everything out, learning the process of design, researching and everything else….I mean, simple things like sketch books for example I had never created a sketch book, I was never taught how to create a sketch book, I didn’t know the concept of creating a sketch book. It was a disadvantage, even till the final year, I never really grasped things like research the way other people did it, so my research was very minimum, I did what I had t’ I did a lot of copy and paste, and I just think because of the background, my A-levels didn’t necessarily teach me that. , I think the way we worked at school we just did what the teacher said and what was necessary, so again that was a habit that I had picked up.’*

Khurrum touches upon multiple challenges that he faced, firstly his ethnicity in a majority white environment, and the lack of appropriate engagement with tutors to guide and support during formative assessment. Stevenson (2012) and Woolf et al (2016) spoke at length about how faculty staff were simply not in touch with diverse cultures; lacking knowledge on cultural differences. Khurrum’s lengthy point about the inability to use sketch book, which was a basic skill required on his course, highlights that even with creative approaches to assessment, which according to Simon and Hicks (2006) are less discriminatory to BME learners, university assessment must also take account students’ prior experience and current abilities in order to ensure they feel included in the assessment process. Khurrum like students on more academic degree courses also pointed towards his inability to engage with independent learning due to his secondary schooling experience where assistance was readily available through trained teachers who would carefully guide students (See Nairz -Wirth et al, 2017).

Unlike Khurrum, Nasser was required to engage with more traditional examinations in addition to completing lab reports and attending court sessions. For Nasser traditional examinations lowered his overhaul average, he states:

*‘Ok second year I didn’t get good grades second year was a lot more intense I didn’t manage to keep up with it. Don’t get me wrong I was aiming for 70’s all the way, but come second year I was basing it on first year experience, it was a lot more intense, it was a lot more difficult, the boundary lines were a lot more tough, so second year I had three re-sits and they were capped at 40, I did get good grades in the re-sit but because they were capped it didn’t work out to be really good, I mean I got a 70 but it was capped at 40 so I lost out.. I would say with exams there was no guidance I’d say, the teachers sat back a little, I couldn’t really say why they set back a little. I worked very, very hard in labs, just so that I knew, like I knew, for some of my modules that I had passed before I even sat the exams, but because exams are not very specific you just don’t know what’s going to come up, I struggled in them.’*

Though most of Nasser’s discussion about examinations is typical of other Mirpuri students, his point about resitting examinations sheds new light on the issue of resits and the practice within most HEIs to cap resits at pass mark to ensure students do not use resits to gain an unfair advantage (Ricketts, 2010). Pell et al (2009) argued that students generally perform better at the resist exams. Ricketts (2010) concurs with this and argues that resit examinations provide insight in the development of the students from their initial exam until the resit. That being the case, Ricketts (2010) argues that both the main and resit exams must be combined to create a multi-stage assessment which can buffer any advantage gained by students taking resits. In the context of BME students it is possible to argue that the discriminatory environment of the university and the lack of support in the initial exam should exempt them from being capped; perhaps Ricketts (2010) position on multi-stage testing can be considered.

From a theoretical perspective much can be said about these two unique experiences with practical and academic forms of assessment. From the perspective of academic drift, the occupational forms of assessment would embody less middle-class academic values which would then entail that the assessment is accessible to non-traditional students (Pratt and Burgess, 1974). This is observable in Khurrum and Nasser’s responses where the practical assessment was engaged with greater motivation and was seen to be meaningful in terms of developing the skills needed for practice (Burgess and Pratt, 1970). Both students also argued that they performed well in these forms of assessment. The example of Nasser, who was tested by preparing for court sessions also highlights how his verbal strengths were tested, which ensured better engagement. This was in contrast to Nasser’s experience with traditional exams where there was a miss-match between Nasser’s expectations and those required by the exams thus leading to lower averages (Sanders and Rose-Adams, 2014). It is possible that practical forms of assessment, like those discussed by Khurrum and Nasser embody fewer racial challenges as they are engaging with mostly codified knowledge and practical ability in contrast with tacit knowledge testing academic ability.

Overhaul it could be suggested that the biographical learning habitus of Mirpuri students found relative harmony with practical forms of assessment. Poorer performances on more traditional academic assessment continued to be a challenge. This dynamic brings to fore the negative impact of academic drift where traditional examinations dislocate the biographical learning habitus embodied by Mirpuri students from the field of university assessment. For Khurrum this limitation was in his inability to conduct independent research whilst for Nasser it was the demands of examinations. Their experiences with these two forms of assessment parallels other Mirpuri male experiences with examinations where the requirements of advanced literacy, namely in writing essay-based questions was considered challenging where the anxiety of the examinations generates both cognitive and emotional pressures, leading to lower performances. The Mirpuri habitus is constrained within academic examinations that inherently embody white middle class ‘practices’, consequently undermining the unique cultural assets of Mirpuri students such as working collectively and seeking occupational skills and knowledge (Colvin et al, 2010, Bhopal, 2018).

## Utilising capitals with coursework assessment

In UK universities all forms of assessment that are not formal examinations have come to mean coursework: coursework-based assessment can consist of corporate reports, essays, field and laboratory reports (Bridges et al (2002). For this section we will be focusing on the report and essay-based assignments, as they were - alongside examinations - the most common forms of assessment for the Mirpuri participants. Much of the recent literature in coursework assessment problematises the use of coursework as a valid form of assessment, given the availability of online tools such as reference generators and ghost writers (Richardson, 2015). For non-traditional student’s coursework assessment has become the most preferred form of assessment as examinations can be difficult for students from non-traditional backgrounds who have had limited experience with sitting exams (Williams, 2000, Ecclestone, 2004).

When questioning the Mirpuri participants about their experience with coursework several issues came to the fore. The most common theme was their preference for coursework assessment compared with exams. Haroon below makes a comedic gesture when discussing coursework, stating that even though he did not like writing essays or reports per se, his sheer dislike for exams meant that he always preferred coursework assessment. One of the main reasons for this was that coursework assessment ensured various forms of capitals could be utilised in the process of completing the assignment. Ethnic capital in the forms of biradari networks provided coursework advice and proofreading services; cultural capital in terms of using online resources, which the Mirpuri students became accustomed to as a result of their level three vocational courses, and the relatively lengthy timescale which ensured planning and preparing and effective deployment of capitals. Haroon makes this case:

*‘…the thing is I don’t like writing coursework, but I hated exams, for exams you need to memorise stuff whereas for coursework you have internet and books, you have the lads to help ya and we always started early to make sure we got high marks’*

Haroon reflected on coursework by presenting a comparison to examinations. The primary comparison was the lengthier timescale afforded for coursework assignments than in examinations, as well as, not being required to recall information from memory. See Danny’s response below.

*‘… coursework was a lot more relaxing [than exams], where you are doing something but you can sit down and relax, you can get something to eat whilst your typing, with exams I found that I had to be a lot more focused for that period of time’*

Similarly, Sajid states:

*‘I like doing assignments because you had a bit of time to do it, when you have an exam your always thinking you, have 45 minutes to an hour, and its constantly back of your head, I’ve got t’ do this, I’ve got t’ do that, whereas with assignments you just did them and I enjoyed them, they were a lot easier for me’*

Given the Mirpuri students preference for coursework over examinations and their relatively better performance within it, a number of challenges emerged in terms of executing an essay or a report which impacted overhaul attainment. Williams (2000) spoke in detail about former GNVQ/BTEC students struggling with the demands of assignments, especially when it came to analysing, referencing and structuring the essay. Below Danny provides detailed insight into his initial engagement with essay writing and how he mobilised various forms of capital, primarily assistance from family members, in order to complete the task. His points about the anxiety of failure and how that led him to contemplate dropping out reflects a well-established notion of how universities are not providing sufficient support to BME learners who require extra support (Smith, 2017, Stevenson, 2012).

*So we got our first essay on what is crime? 500 words. What is crime? I went home, I said to mum I need to do 500 words mum, how am I going to do 500 words on what is crime,* *I’m going to be here for hours and days, And I had a big tantrum and I remember I had quite a while to do it, I think I had three or four weeks to do it. For two of those weeks I wanted to leave uni. I was telling mum how university wasn’t for me and how I made a wrong decision being there… I’m never gonna make it… And err mum said get a few books, go into library, ask someone…. I went in (library) found a few books came home, mum helped me highlight everything, came to uni print some stuff out, I had so much help for this, uncle helped me, mum helped me, and we got it done and it was the biggest assignment of my life, and I got 64 in it and I was like yeah! Next assignment comes, 1500 words, I said mum I’m leaving again*

Danny described a typical case with HE assignment writing. The assistance of peer groups and family members is a reflection on how participating in local institutions (see chapter on entry dynamics) and selecting similar modules was a means to ensure such assistance was available through biradari networks. As Danny provided more detail on how he approached assignment writing, his response paralleled those of other Mirpuri students who discuss how they struggled with referencing and structure. Danny in particular reflected on how his vocational (business) courses did not develop the right skills for HE, as those who had done A-levels before entering HE were perceived to be better prepared.

*‘I always found referencing hard, I never got comfortable with referencing, so there was never a point where I thought I got this, so like I was comfortable referencing from books, but if I was referencing something else like journals, I couldn’t reference journals, and websites that didn’t have authors name or summat. Now when I look back at it, I keep saying I wasted GCSEs, I wasted A-levels, the people who were good at structuring assignments told me they did it in A-levels, their schools taught them referencing then, our schools did but I didn’t do the work, the referencing were given, I just changed the name, so it was completely different’*

Discussing similar issues with writing coursework, Ibrar emotively stresses how the basic elements of academic writing such as knowing the difference between a bibliography and a reference list was not understood leading up to his final year. Ibrar states:

*‘Simply speaking I just didn’t get it, I didn’t get how to write an assignment, I didn’t know what a reference or bibliography was, I mean I just didn’t understand the system. Even until my third year I was trying to figure out the difference between a reference list and a bibliography. I mean the whole process of writing the type of assignment that universities wanted, I hadn’t grasped….’*

This suggests that no support or training was provided to clarify basic elements of academic writing. Naiz-Wirth et al (2017) stress on this point and argue that HE institutes make the erroneous assumption that all students are already equipped with the norms of academia and capable of surmounting the challenges of academia on their own. Amin describes a similar experience:

*‘…what I found surprising about assignments is that when you went to uni it was a totally different structure. The whole layout of putting an assignment together, that was challenging, I found it very hard to put things in order and to make it sound good. I had loads of people who provided help and I think that was because everyone was in the same position. We went online to get references Google books helped a lot. But ultimately, we pulled through because we all helped each other and to be honest with ya, I don’t think I would have been able to do it without my friends’*

Amin’s response brings to light the importance of ethnic capital in the form of biradari groups and the use of technology in resisting and overcoming the challenges of coursework assessment (or any other form of assessment). Online tools, like reference generators and Google Scholar, were used extensively to assist in searching and generating relevant references. Literature on coursework assessment has - contrary to the Mirpuri students experience - stated that using online resources such as Google Scholar, online reference generators, and at the very extreme, ghost writer services gives unfair advantage to those who have more coursework than exams in the courses (Richardson, 2015). Nevertheless, online resources have become an important factor for non-traditional students to resist some of the discriminatory barriers of coursework assessment (Dhlamini and Mearns, 2019). A good example is the often-discussed challenge of citing references according to the university approved mode of referencing. Mirpuri students discussed how this challenge was overcome by online reference generators which allowed students to simply select their desired mode of referencing and input the necessary data regarding the cited source.

From a theoretical perspective the Mirpuri habitus found relative harmony with coursework assessment, namely in provision to work collectively. Ethnic capital was deployed during coursework assignments where peer groups provided assistance in sharing valuable knowledge and experience, as well as, assisting in research and proof reading to ensure that all biradari members succeeded in their coursework assessment. The peer groups ensured that individual coursework was done at a high level in order to buffer the lower performance in examinations. The challenge with structuring and referencing coursework suggests, however, that conventions that are particular to academic writing continued to pose a challenge for Mirpuri males (Lills, 2001).

## Biradari-ism and Group Course Work

The collective ethos that is generally observed amongst Mirpuri students is inherently incorporated when they are required to conduct group coursework. Group coursework entails a goal-orientated task where group members will meet outside the timetabled hours completing a single or a number of assignments, namely in writing a report and/or presenting the report to assessors (Scotland, 2016). Generally, the final grade is given to the whole group but in certain cases peer assessment may mitigate the final grade. Group coursework can be of two kinds, 1) student-selected, where the students can choose their own groups and 2) tutor-selected, where module leaders create random groups (Hill et al, 2016). The Mirpuri experience with these two forms of grouped coursework was distinct. When modules were self-selected students were required to create their own groups. Most of the Mirpuri participants responded by saying that they selected members from amongst their own biradari networks and, in most cases, it was the same group of friends who have been together since primary schools (Anwar, 1979). Danny succinctly states this below

*‘Some groups we chose and with that you always choose your mates…’*

Student-selected groups were ‘always’ formed with biradari members. Groups made up of biradari members indicates towards the reinforcement of strong bonds which have been maintained throughout the Mirpuri students’ compulsory education and within the inner wards of Bradford. Gul succinctly states:

*‘…we used have a good amount of friends so we used to make our own groups’*

Haroon further adds that his biradari network was large enough to create two groups. This meant that two groups would function as one with a greater network of biradari members assisting each other.

*‘Yeah group work was good, like normally if your allowed to choose a group and there was enough of us, we split the group between two and help each other through it’*

In their review of various forms of assessment undertaken by BME students, Hill et al (2016) state that group work assessment unlike other forms of assessment does not indicate towards lower attainment. Additionally, the authors claim that performances were similar in groups where the group members were all BME or a mix of BME and white students, concluding that group work could be an inclusive form of assessment. It appears that working with peers in this manner was the norm amongst Mirpuri students as Mirpuri students generally work collaboratively even on individual coursework. With regards to performance however, a mixture of responses were given, some students preferred coursework with their peers, whilst others stated that group based coursework with peers became difficult to manage, as group members were relying on each other with tasks not being delegated to various group members. Gul makes this case:

*‘…none of us were leaders, we used to shout and swear at each other, it’s not fair when a few take their time out to do the work whilst others are just hanging about… sometimes we did not do well in group coursework, whereas when groups are chosen no one knew each other, everyone would turn up [to group meetings], but when your with friends, some people used to think you can take the back seat…’*

It is possible that the biradari networks are better suited with individual coursework where assistance is provided by peers whilst the individual students take ownership of their work. With group coursework, however, where all students are working on one assignment the inability to establish team roles meant that students were unable to be organised to complete the assignment as a team. This according to Gul led to poorer outcomes in group assignments. Group coursework which was student-selected showcased that the Mirpuri habitus has a propensity to select biradari members as teammates. The long-established networks that have developed throughout their lives are further reinforced when Mirpuri students are required to select their own groups. Ethnic capital is thus mobilised and deployed where the strong bonds amongst peers ensures that the students remain together and assist each other towards completion of assignments. The strong bonds can also be limited as individuals within groups rely on others and team roles are not delegated. Shain (2011) comments on this issue during her observation of Muslim male students. She argues that strong bonds amongst male students limits the amount of bridging capital, where networks beyond racial and social relations can provide access to valuable information.

## Tutor-selected groups and cultural tension

When discussing their experiences with tutor-selected group assignments all the participants stated that this generally entailed that the group consisted of a diversity of ethnicities. As such, this was the first time Mirpuri students were tasked to work with other students who were not Mirpuri or part of the biradari. Participants who were part of mix groups, which consisted of white and BME students discuss some tensions that emerge due to perceived cultural distinctions. Luqman for example stated that white group members ’were a lot more intelligent’ because ‘they sounded a lot more educated’, Luqman states that this gave them a natural advantage with assessment.

*‘…we had people from all over the country, it was a good experience getting to know them and working with them, but I did feel like the white students from like majority down south, were a lot more intelligent and I’d say that was entirely their upbringing. They sounded a lot more educated, their parents probably had good jobs they had a lot more advantage especially in engineering… they understood what was required better…’*

A general impact of such engagement meant that Mirpuri students in mixed groups were required to change various aspects of their habitus (Bhopal, 2019). Saqib for example states that he felt like he could not speak as he would naturally when communicating with white group members.

*‘…you have to communicate differently with white people, you can’t talk as lads, you don’t want to come across dumb in front of them lot, in front of your boys you can act like shit, or say that I don’t know what I’m doing, but there I had to show that I am clever’*

Saqib’s statement suggests that working with white students entailed what Bourdieu (1977) describes as ‘duals of honour’. Bourdieu (1977) observed ‘duals of honour’ amongst individuals who showcase their cultural capital to ensure they are perceived as culturally similar or superior. Saqib was also required to engage in duals to ensure that he is perceived to be smart mainly by speaking and behaving what he thought was ‘clever’.

Nasser in contrast expresses how some of the white group members already knew each other as they lived in dorms together, which made him feel excluded from the group.

*‘I could tell they [white members of the group] formed groups before uni started, majority of them were in dorms together, so they knew each other before, which was a bit shit coz you feel like an outsider…’*

Hill et al (2016) stated that mixed students generally perform well, however, it is plausible to suggest that when engaging with traditional white students, Mirpuri students were isolated and did not feel included. Additionally, white privilege in terms of language was evident, where those who had inherited the ‘educated language’, by virtue of both class and white privilege were able to show their ‘natural’ superiority within assessment, undermining the Mirpuri forms of being and doing (Bhopal, 2018).

The Mirpuri participants also spoke of working with other non-traditional students, namely international or ‘Chinese students’ which led to issues of miscommunication and failures to execute assessment objectives. Sami discusses this below

*‘…you know when you have to do group presentations and your telling Chinese people - who don’t know how to speak English - what to say, and they just mess up. In one of my group assignments on the deadline day, all the work was done and we had prepared for it, I was meant to start in a group presentation because it was timed and I was meant to have five minutes, everyone was meant to have two minutes and so everyone was going through there little parts and then it came to this one Chinese guy and he’s decided just to read off a sheet. When it came down to it I had a minute left or thirty seconds even, so where I was to have the biggest part to play, I got 30 seconds…’*

Sami’s case suggests that cultural difference between Mirpuri students and international students meant that group strategies with regards to executing group work was not effectively communicated which led to failures in gaining good marks. Danny similarly stresses the challenges of communicating with Chinese students, as well as, mature students where Danny was unable to develop rapport in order to work collaboratively.

*‘…they would put us in groups, it wasn’t just Asians any more we had different people, there were a lot of white people, we had a few Chinese people, I had a Chinese guy messaging me, I didn’t have a clue what he was on about, we had a white girl on our group and she was forty years old, and I thought she was too old, what do I talk about with her, we had nothing in common, it was all about I need to go home, I need to pick the kids up and it was so weird, I didn’t know how to speak to her’*

The inability to develop rapport with a diverse group of students impeded effective collaboration where time was utilised in overcoming communication challenges, as opposed to, conducting group work. As Sami states communication barriers impacted performance in group assessment where certain international students were unable to implement the group strategy to successfully complete the assignment.

Some of the experiences of Mirpuri students stand in contrast with Hill et al (2016) who argued that group-based coursework did not have a significant impact on BME performance and could be utilised as an inclusive form of assessment. It is possible, however that Hill et al (2016) may have overlooked the racial dynamics where superiority in relation to language and white forms of speech may have demoralised BME students in other individual forms of assessment. This is possible, at least in the case of Luqman, who stated that white students sounded ‘more educated’, that is to say, white forms of speech was seen as the ideal and their own Bradford dialect as secondary (see also Nasser). It is also possible that Hill et al (2016) did not consider the dynamics of all non-traditional student groups, which in the case of Danny and Sami presented issues of miscommunication and challenges in relation to building rapport which led to complications in executing the coursework.

Tutor-selected group tasks provided the first ever opportunity for the Mirpuri undergraduates to engage in learning - at a distant social space - away from their biradari network. Tutor-selected groups functioned, as points of reflection, where the Mirpuri students were able to examine, individually, their own embodied cultural characteristics, mainly the cultural practices of Mirpuris in Bradford and then attempt to modify their habitus. This is expressed by Saqib who discussed how he had to speak more formally in order to position himself culturally on par with his white teammates. Tutor-selected groups made evident, to some of the Mirpuri participants their cultural capital deficits namely in language, where those from more traditional affluent backgrounds sounded ‘intelligent’, this consequently meant that the very distinct Mirpuri Bradford dialect was not valued (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002).

## Conclusion

Mirpuri students in this study were required to carry-out various forms of assessment: two of the most common forms of assessment were examinations and coursework. The performance on traditional examinations was considered poor, and students were required to resit many of the exams throughout their time in HE (Crozier and Reay, 2011). In contrast, examinations that were focused and tested occupational protocols were approached with greater enthusiasm and students generally got higher grades in them (Heijne-Penninga et al 2008). Two accounts of Mirpuri participants (Khurrum and Nasser) who experienced more practical assessment performed relatively better and had better engagement. This was mainly due to the relevance of the assessment and because it was testing certain skills that the students had developed. This was in contrast to students on more academic examinations that tested their writing skills. These dynamics with various forms of examinations and assessments suggests that Mirpuri participants can achieve high exam outcomes and effectively engage with assessment, if the learning content is linked to tasks required in particular occupations. Given this context, it is argued that academic drift within degrees and within certain modules creates a cultural and racial challenge for Mirpuri students, who are required to engage with a culturally distant forms of assessment which leads to limited motivation, inefficient preparation and overhaul lack of understanding of what the university requires from them (Sanders and Rose-Adams, 2014).

Individual coursework was the most preferred form of assessment as the Mirpuri participants were able to utilise various forms of capital; most importantly their ethnic capital which ensured assistance was provided by biradari members. Cultural capital developed within level three vocational courses (see Ecclestone, 2004) in terms of utilising online resources, was also deployed when attempting to overcome some of the academic challenges of coursework such as researching and referencing. Given the forms of capital that assisted the Mirpuri students, other academic conventions like structure and analysis were not fully understood which led to lower attainment in coursework assessment (Williams, 2000).

Student-selected group assessments were generally made up of biradari groups which ensured that teammates assisted each other, however, the lack of leadership entailed that group organisation was not efficient with some group members relying on others to complete the work. Tutor-selected group assessments were a unique experience for all Mirpuri students as it was the only time Mirpuri students worked with others who were not part of their biradari. This context provided a chance for the Mirpuri students to reflect on the structural characteristics that limited them, namely language. Attempts were made to mould their habitus, mainly in modifying their colloquial way of speaking so that they could effectively engage with white students. Engagement with non-Mirpuri students highlights forms of white privilege that was exhibited in their engagement with white students as well as, episodes of miscommunication with international students which led to ineffective teamwork and overhaul low group performances.

# Chapter Eight: Conclusions

An exploration of Mirpuri males from Bradford and their transition from level three vocational courses to HE has brought to the fore valuable insight into the general issue of the ethnic attainment disparity in HE. The first of these insights is to recognise the importance of unique BME student characteristics, namely their socio-historical, economic and local context. The Mirpuri males from Bradford, for example, have cultivated an ethos of collective work which continues to be reinforced throughout their cultural trajectory and holds a doxic position in relation to the Mirpuri male habitus. This is acutely visible when observing biradari-like networks amongst Mirpuri students in HE. Biradari networks have been strengthened as a result of several historical and contemporary situations (Imran and Smith, 1997). The Mirpuri Muslims have historically experienced discrimination and displacement from their native territory which incentivised a form of mass migration to the UK in the 1960s (Kalra, 2000, Saifullah Kahn, 1977, 1979). Their further segregation as low skilled labourers within UKs declining manufacturing sector; their generally disenfranchised socio-economic status as Mirpuris in Bradford, and political position, as Muslims in the west, has led to dense Mirpuri enclaves within former industrial cities and towns like Bradford, that are formed based on biradari networks (Miah, 2017, Shaw, 2000). Such hostile conditions exacerbate exclusion and mobilisation where Mirpuris in general rely on old family ties or biradari networks in order to negotiate the ‘stresses’ imposed by oppressive circumstances (Saifullah Khan, 1979). One of the outcomes of such cultural dynamics was that Mirpuri students generally perceived education as an economic investment, which was exhibited in their desire to collectively ensure a favourable labour market position. How this objective was achieved was subject to individual students’ learning biographies and the ‘horizons of practice’ they envisioned (Herzberg, 2006, Hodkinson, 1998).

## Phase One Entry Dynamics

The second major factor that needs to be considered is the context of entry. This study has highlighted two main structural limitations in the Mirpuri male entry dynamic that impacts their attainment in HE (1) the role of racial warehousing (Avis et al, 2017) which funnels majority of the Mirpuri students to participate in level three vocational courses (2) the design flow in vocational curricula which utilises progressive pedagogy and competence assessment (Bates, et al, 1998). In the context of these two structural limitations, a compelling case could be made that BME students, contrary to the deficit model (see Leslie, 2005) do not actively decide to participate in level three vocational courses as a means to entering HE. Rather the limited options in relation to pursuing alternative paths incentivises their participation in level three vocational courses. From this we could argue that the deficit model advocated by Leslie (2005) and further reinforced by much of the quantitative literature, is limited in its explanatory power, at least in the implication that BME students *actively* select the wrong courses before they enter HE and, as a result, gain less good degrees. This study has particularly shown that racial warehousing is experienced by most BME students as Mirpuri participants were fully aware of the limited value of level three vocational courses and actively sought apprenticeships or A-level courses during their post 16 phase. Their failure to succeed in alternative post-16 pathways leads to their funnelling into level three vocational courses.

Upon engaging with level three vocational courses, the Mirpuri participants stated that the courses were unchallenging where the information required for the unit objectives was easily accessible and simple paraphrasing of a textbook was accepted as competence. This curricular context was discussed to have emerged due to the NCVQ model of progressive pedagogy and outcome assessment in level three vocational courses, which have long been criticised for creating and maintaining a paradoxical curriculum (Isaac, 2013). Bates et al (1998) discussed this to be limiting student engagement where the notion of progressive education is lost within narrowly defined outcomes leaving students to simply ‘tick off’ the unit requirements (Fisher, 2003). In certain cases, Mirpuri students who had completed the course gave new students completed work which was altered to give the impression of original work. In this sense certain Mirpuri students simply became ‘inheritors of information’. The accumulating effect of being funnelled into level three vocational courses and engaging with a flawed curriculum meant that the Mirpuri students were not sufficiently prepared for university pedagogy and assessment, particularly independent learning and examinations (Ecclestone, 2004). Though the relative failure of level three vocational courses in preparing students for HE has been studied, much of this research has not considered the BME student context and its relationship with HE attainment (Williams, 2000). Racial warehousing and the flawed NCVQ curricula further emphasise on how the deficit model limits our understanding of BME attainment in HE and systematically ignores racial and social barriers BME students experience prior to entry.

## Phase Two: Institutional Dynamics

Once BME students enter HE other structural factors come into affect that compromise the students’ chances of gaining *good* degrees. This study particularly took account of the theory of academic drift in order to present this context. The theory of academic drift brings to the fore structural barriers that specifically impacts vocational higher education institutions and courses (HEICs) where relatively ‘new’ universities (either former CATs or polytechnics) are described as becoming more academic over time, in order to be on par with traditional HE institutions (Burgess and Pratt, 1970, Pratt, 1997). This academic drift can be seen in all areas of institutional dynamics, whether that is in the way HE institutions are administered, or, the way courses are designed and taught (Kyvik, 2007).

The notion of academic drift is crucial as the Mirpuri students embarked on their degree courses with the desire of gaining vocational skills, however, when they engaged with university pedagogy and assessment they found themselves in a distinctly academic context, that was distant from their labour market aims and their general educational history which has been, in most parts, (and certainly in their post 16 phase) vocationally orientated. This conflict in student perception and university expectation is where much of the lower performance is located. One of the first challenges created by academic drift was the broad modular structure of the degree. From the perspective of academic drift the broad structure within vocational degree courses are result of the evolution of vocational degree courses towards more academic practices, where the broader characteristics were added to ensure courses were on par with the liberal character of traditional degree courses (Burgess and Pratt, 1970, Pratt, 1997 Silver, 1990). When Mirpuri students were tasked to participate in broad modular courses which consisted of modules that had limited bearing to their desired occupations, the Mirpuri students exhibited a general lack of motivation which led to surface learning and lower performances in assessment. This was in contrast with courses that had a focused curriculum where all modules were logically aligned to occupations being pursued by the Mirpuri students. In such focused courses Mirpuri students were able to find meaning and were able to take ownership of their own development and were intrinsically motivated to participate and deeply engage with learning.

Another aspect of academic drift is the increased independent study time which exacerbated the lack of harmony the Mirpuri students experienced within universities. From the perspective of academic drift, independent learning as a pedagogical method is a hallmark characteristic of the academic or traditional university ethos of cultivating liberal scholars, whilst the technical college tradition was historically defined by its teaching intensive ethos (Burgess and Pratt, 1970). The gradual reduction of teaching hours within vocational courses is perceived as a way of distancing from the technical college tradition in order to create a more ‘authentic’ university experience (Whyte, 2015, Burgess and Pratt 1970, Silver, 1990). For the Mirpuri students this particular form of pedagogy further excluded them from the university environment, as students were not given the support they required. This particular context brings to the fore both racial and class dynamics of independent learning where there is an erroneous assumption that all undergraduates who enter HE are like traditional HE students (Nairz-Warth et al, 2017). Independent learning creates forms of othering as it provides limited support and ethnic provision and maintains whiteness by assuming that the university is colour blind and value neutral where all ethnicities can work under the same pedagogical framework (Madriaga, 2018, Bhopal, 2018).

For the Mirpuri students in this study the substantial independent study time fostered an ethos of socialising and bonding with peers in order to generate ethnic capital (Modood, 2004, Shah et al, 2010). This ethnic capital is then deployed when Mirpuri students begin to engage with assessment where the help of peers is considered necessary to overcome the challenge of university assessment. The result of such networking was that Mirpuri students engaged in more recreational activities amongst their biradari members, as opposed to, engaging with the learning content. This was detrimental to their performance where Mirpuri students are left to their own vices to comprehend an alien academic culture. This was in contrast with the accounts of two Mirpuri students who were afforded limited independent study time and substantial guided study (see accounts of Khurrum and Nasser). These two students had an intensive timetable where a substantial portion of the time was spent within course specific environments and under the supervision of tutors. Their generally positive feedback in focused courses that afford less independent study time further highlights the detrimental effect of academic drift, where the ethos of independent study is not fully accommodated by ‘non-traditional’ students like the Mirpuri male who need greater assistance and support when engaging with learning (Smith, 2017).

The Mirpuri male experience with university assessment reflects the Mirpuri male experience with university pedagogy as a result of academic drift. The most challenging form of assessment for all the Mirpuri participants was the traditional closed book examination, which required essay-based answers. Specific challenges with exams were the inability to consolidate and write essay-based answers within a time constrained environment. This was due to a whole host of issues faced by the Mirpuri students, such as the lack of experience in conducting academic exams due to their participation in level three vocational courses; their engagement with broad academic subjects which had little bearing on their occupational aims, and the lack of contact with faculty staff under the guise of independent learning. More importantly however, are the demands of academic writing within an exam that generate the greatest tension. As noted by racially conscious commentators the formal academic writing is a very distinct form of writing that BME students in general are not familiar with (Bhopal, 2018). The ability to write academically is part of white privilege which undermines the ethnic cultural assets of BME learners as it positions white forms of speaking and writing as the dominant form of expressing truth (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002).

This was in contrast with exams that tested occupational protocols where Mirpuri students were required to present their knowledge on how specific work-related tasks are conducted. The Mirpuri students stated that they performed well in occupationally orientated exams and were more motivated to revise for them. This case suggests that when exams demand more academic skills like essay writing, where specific academic conventions are needed students perform poorly because they must showcase literary skills which is a form of counter-practice for non-traditional students who do not embody the linguistic capital more common amongst traditional students (Watson, 2013, Lillis, 2001).

The anxiety with participating with examinations was substantial enough that it led most Mirpuri participants to avoid participating in modules that entailed closed book examinations. It also meant that much of the focus was on coursework assessment which were used to mediate the lower performances within examinations. Coursework assessment was the preferred from of assessment as it increased the utility of various forms of capitals readily possessed by the Mirpuri students. Ethnic capital was deployed to ensure assistance was ascertained from biradari members, as such, individual assignments were done collectively, at least in terms of making sure the work was correct and proofread. Other benefits of coursework assessment were the use of online tools such as Google scholar and reference generators which assisted in completing work. Coursework assessment also afforded the Mirpuri students greater length of time to complete the assignment.

Given the preference, and the relatively better performance on coursework assessment, the Mirpuri students continued to discuss challenges with structuring and referencing their written assignments. This is possibly due to their previous learning experience on level three vocational courses which did not require the students to reference or structure their assignments like the more academic essays demanded in universities (Williams, 2000, Hatt and Baxter, 2003, Lillis, 2003). Demands of written coursework were overcome through trial and error and with the assistance of peers and online tools such as reference generators. Other forms of coursework such as group coursework provided a number of unique challenges particularly when Mirpuri students were required to work with white and international students. Episodes of white dominance, particularly in relation to language undermined the Mirpuri students’ unique cultural assets, as formal English language was given greater value than colloquial forms of speech. With regards to international students, issues of miscommunication were highlighted which led to lower performances is group assignments.

## Recommendations for Further Research

This study has highlighted a number of problem areas, many of which can be further scrutinised to provide a clearer picture of the BME student experience: before and during their engagement with universities, which ultimately impacts their degree attainment. Two areas need pressing attention: firstly, that we cannot undermine the pathways taken to enter HE. There is a need for rich qualitative study of how BME students enter certain level three vocational courses, and how well those courses prepare them for the pedagogical and assessment demands of HE. It is simply not wise to ignore such seminal factors of BME experience, as the lack of preparation in terms of engaging with university pedagogy and assessment leads to the ‘learning shock’ that is experienced by BME students in universities (Cree, 2009, Crozier and Reay, 2011).

Secondly for researchers seeking to understand institutional factors that impact BME attainment, academic drift as a model must be considered. One of the recurring themes in this study has been the tension that emerges between Mirpuri students, who possess mostly ‘non-traditional’ student characteristics, and the tensions emerging from *traditional* university practice. Traditional academia generates a cultural rift between the perspectives, abilities and expectations of BME students and the demands of vocational HE curricula. Academic drift pinpoints the positions where vocational education has adopted academic practices that exist simply to generate the parity of esteem that is afforded to traditional degree courses, and not in any way develop the vocational skills required for praxis. Thomas and May (2015) in discussing inclusive curricula stated that one of the defining factors of inclusive curriculum is the ability for it to be *meaningful* for a diverse body of students. As vocational students who enter vocational HEICs the traditional academic elements limit how much the content, and the methods by which it is taught and assessed, has meaning for them. The lack of meaning leads to exclusion, marginalisation, limited motivation and engagement in university learning.

## Recommendations for Practice

The aim of this study has been to understand the ethnic attainment disparity in English HE by focusing on one specific group of BME students; their transition into HE and how that transition impacted their engagement with university pedagogy and assessment. One of the central claims of this thesis is that students interact and negotiate the curricular structures in unique forms, given their cultural trajectory. For the Mirpuri students this took form in biradari like student groups that exhibited strong collaborative practice especially when engaging with traditional pedagogy and assessment. Another claim of this thesis is that vocational HE has been, and, continues to go through the process of academic drift (Pilcher, et al, 2017; Erixon and Arreman, 2017). This means certain vocational degree courses are utilising traditional pedagogy and assessment that does not accommodate non-traditional students (Naiz-Wirth et al, 2017), as well as, developing skills needed in practice (Harwood, 2010). Degree programmes that exhibited less academic drift, which includes being focused in terms of learning content and applying occupationally aligned pedagogical and assessment practices, created learning environments where Mirpuri students were engaged and attained relatively better exam results (see chapter 6 and 7). The primary recommendation then must be to reform curricula to counter the issues that arise due to academic drift, while embedding greater cooperative learning strategies to enrich the learning experience of students who prefer to work collectively.

One of the ways this can be done is through the application of Team-Based Learning (TBL) which unlike cooperative learning, or, causal teamwork is a fully integrated instructional strategy that employs group learning (Michaelsen, et al, 2002). Fink (2002) defines TBL as ‘…a particular instructional strategy that is designed to (a) support the development of high-performance learning teams, and (b) provide opportunities for these teams to engage in significant learning tasks (Michaelsen, et al, 2002 p.8). Comparing TBL with other small group learning methods, namely collaborative or cooperative learning, Fink (2002) argues that collaborative learning is generally applied by instructors in a series of independent learning activities, while TBL is systematic sequence of semester-long, interlinked activities that are undertaken by groups of five to seven students. The interlinked activities are based on three phases of learning, the first is preparation, the second is application and the third is assessment.

Popularised by Michaelsen et al (2008), TBL has been applied in various HE contexts since the 1970s and has been increasingly used by medical schools throughout the world. This is because professional training requires the understanding of large knowledge content and its application to real life problems, which is a key feature of TBL. This is in addition to developing professionals who possess strong interpersonal skills, namely the ability to work with other professionals to resolve problems in practice. The central aim of TBL is to expose students to the application of course content and to solve problems as teams, thus TBL is designed to promote both conceptual and procedural knowledge.

Before I provide details on how TBL is fully implemented it is important to highlight that from its foundational principles TBL assists in mitigating some of the problems caused by academic drift. TBL courses require a review of module content with instructors ‘working backwards’ to identify the module objectives (Michaelson et al, 2008). Working backwards implies that when instructors review their modules they should not begin by asking what their students should *know* as a result of completing the module, but to ask what the students should be able *to do* and then consider what knowledge students need in order to do a particular task. This idea of working backwards by establishing what a student needs to *do* and then asking what they need to *know* develops greater integration of the course content with functions of a professional practice. This reform in module content can help overcome some of the issues that arise due to academic drift, particularly the broad content of a degree which was one of the first major challenges faced by Mirpuri students when entering HE (See section 2 in chapter six).

The more programme and module leaders can assure that they ‘think backwards’ the chances of exhibiting academic drift will be limited as the knowledge of practice will take precedence over the status of a degree in terms of its academic merits. This thesis has shown that greater alignment of course content with occupational practice positively impacts Mirpuri students as knowledge is seen as relevant and meaningful. Even forms of assessment such as examinations, which were generally avoided by Mirpuri students viz-a-viz optional modules, were engaged with positively when the knowledge being tested clearly represented its utilisation in practice (see Chapter 7 section two/three).

Once module reform is complete TBL can be implemented. In TBL all student groups are tutor-selected. It is very important at this stage that students are part of diverse groups in terms of class, ethnicity, gender and prior qualifications. If courses have a dominant presence of one ethnic group from the same locality, which was the experience of many of the Mirpuri students in this thesis, then groups based on various postcodes can be used to create teams. This idea of separating students based on postcodes may be effective as Mirpuri students create strong bonds with those from their own wards and may have little exposure to students from neighbouring wards (Shain, (2011). With group formation the aim is to limit any pre-established networks that may preclude group cohesion and ensuring that the strengths and weaknesses of diverse groups can be considered (Michaelsen and Sweet, 2008).

The issues of freeloading can also be reduced if prior relationships are avoided during group formation. When creating their own teams Mirpuri students tend to select their own biradari members which may have less active biradari members who rely on others to undertake all group tasks. Delegating tasks and upholding team roles is also impeded when Mirpuri students select their own groups (see Chapter 7 section 5). By actively forming diverse teams some of these issues can be overcome as many of the student biradari groups will be forced to work with others where similar ‘in-group’ power asymmetries will not be exhibited (Michaelsen and Sweet, 2008).

By carefully selecting groups limitations in random tutor-selected groups can also be overcome. For example, some Mirpuri students felt marginalised when they were in groups that had a dominant white presence, while others felt they were unable to work with their groups because too many international students led to communication issues (See Chapter 7 section 6). When groups are carefully designed most of these problems are resolved, whilst ensuring Mirpuri students engage in diverse networks and continue to learn collectively.

Once groups are established these groups remain together throughout the semester. Before any in-class work is conducted assigned learning materials are released; typically two weeks before students meet for in-class work. This thesis showed that one of the clearest ways of marginalising Mirpuri students was to apply unguided independent learning as form of pedagogy (See chapter 6). The releasing of learning materials ensures that students know which materials to study thus guiding their independent learning practice (see Chapter 5 section 3). The students are also made aware that they will be tested on this material. In TBL this process is called the Readiness Assurance Test (RAT). The test is the first activity students will undertake during their timetabled teaching sessions, answering multiple choice questions (MCQs) based on the key ideas from the reading. The first RAT is also called the iRAT as it is done individually. Once students complete the iRAT all papers are collected, and students are given the same test again to complete with their team. The second test is called the team readiness assurance test or tRAT. This way students can discuss the answers amongst each other and gain instant feedback and a team score.

Feedback and team scores are operationalised through IF-AT or instant feedback – assessment technique which uses scratch-cards. The team must decide as to the right multiple-choice statement and scratch the answer. If the team gets the answer right the first time, they get the highest mark. The more wrong answers that are scratched on the card the lower the team mark. It is then important for all students to ensure that they understand the learning material in depth to avoid being the team member(s) who were the cause of the low team score (Michaelsen and Sweet, 2008).

The tRAT with its use of IF-AT scratch-card system is one of the most powerful tools of TBL; much of the deep learning happens when students begin to discuss the content amongst themselves and are able to see how others have arrived at their particular conclusions. The chances of freeloading are precluded as students feel they must contribute to group decisions especially when the answers are taken to the vote. The engagement is further heightened with the instant feedback as wrong answers can be discussed further. Getting questions wrong also incentivises greater independent study as no single team member desires to arrive at the RAT without appropriate revision and deep understanding of the content. Once the RAT process is complete and scratch-cards collected, students can go through an appeal process and make a case for why their answers should have yielded the highest mark. This further reinforces the learning content allowing students to understand the depth and breadth of their knowledge. After the appeal process the instructor can give a brief lecture on the learning content by focusing on the more challenging areas of learning.

One of the primary reasons Mirpuri students were disengaged during lectures was that students felt online learning materials were simply repeated, making the lecture a passive learning experience (see Chapter 6). The RAT process ensures that students are deeply familiar with the learning content before a brief lecture which only focuses on the more challenging aspects of the learning content. According to Bligh (2000) for lectures to be successful it is important that students find the content meaningful. The short lecture at the end of the RAT process, focused on key areas, assists in generating meaning.

Once the RAT process is complete the second phase of learning is initiated which is the application process. Students are required to carry out application assignments. The application assignments can take place at a different location but must be done on the same day as the RATs or very soon after the RAT process. The RAT process would have ensured that students have become deeply familiar with the theoretical aspects of their subject, the application assignments will now test their mastery of theory by asking them to resolve occupational problems. All the groups are assigned an in-class task, these could be based on creating group presentations or writing brief reports. Students will have a set-time to carry out the application task and can use a variety of online and hard copy materials to research and execute the assignment. The aim of the application assignments is to achieve a level of professional expertise where students get a chance to solve occupationally relevant problems. The application assignment process can assist Mirpuri students in developing key occupational knowledge and skills through group interaction and in solving occupational problems. The diversity of ways in which application assignments can be marked and graded i.e. using presentations and reports means that students will not be tested on the essay-based examinations which Mirpuri students, like other non-traditional students find challenging (Lillis, 2001).

After the application assignments students will also be undertaking summative assessment at the end of the semester to consolidate their knowledge. It should be noted that though Mirpuri students in this research did not prefer examinations, and performed poorly in them, some examinations were well received. These exams were usually those that tested occupational protocols through short question answers or were numerically based (see Chapter 7). TBL principally seeks to make the course content occupationally relevant which means that summative exams can have a greater use of MCQs or short answer questions, as opposed to, an essay-format which requires the mastery of other skills, namely in being able to form debates and showcasing strong literary skills (Hatt and Baxter, 2003).

TBL is a teaching and learning method that contrasts other psychologically underpinned forms of pedagogy that is common in HE. Kester (2019) argued that university learning is based on these psychological modes espoused by the likes of Piaget which undermines the cultural and racial dimensions of students. TBL gives value to collaborative learning efforts that are common amongst Mirpuri students from Bradford.

One of the key issues that non-traditional students face, certainly the Mirpuri students in this study is identifying how large contents of knowledge are meaningful to practice. When there is greater alignment of theoretical knowledge with professional practice students are more motivated and engaged in the learning. The mismatch of expectations which impacts BME student attainment, according to Sander and Rose Adams (2014), is substantially reduced by the ethos of TBL to make the learning content more occupationally relevant and to create work-based scenarios during RATs and the application assignments.

TBL does require major institutional and cultural reform and can have numerous operationalising barriers (Haidet et al, 2014). It is thus valuable to trial TBL at a small scale perhaps within certain modules where module leaders are open to reforming their TLA strategies. Some key challenges can arise from student demographics where large cohort of students from one ethnic background can create challenges in configuring diverse teams. There is also the issue of staff workload. Implementing TBL means staff will be focused on preparing and then assessing large volumes of work. In terms of assessment much of the RAT process can be automated to reduce staff workload, and even though more time and resources are invested during the RAT and the application process this is concentrated during certain weeks within a semester. This leaves time for academics to invest in their independent research.

Haidet et al (2014) also point towards the general perception of TBL especially the RAT and application assignments which stress the ability to apply knowledge. The transition from didactic lecture based teaching to complex application exercises can be seen as being ‘unorganised’ or ‘messy’ by students and teachers, which means it is important that staff and students are fully aware of the importance of applying knowledge and the benefits of TBL in supporting more complex forms of thinking and doing. In relation to this thesis, it is imperative that academic staff understand that traditional teaching methods may not be suitable for Mirpuri students and so TBL may be a valuable alternative to either simple collaborative work during tutorial/seminar sessions or traditional lecture-based teaching.

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# Appendix 2 Participant Consent Form

University of Huddersfield

*School of Education and Professional Development*

Participant Consent Form (E4)

**Title of Research Study:** Where Are They Now? British Mirpuri Male Graduates’ Perception of Occupational Skill and Identity development in British Higher Education

**Name of Researcher:** Mohammed Bilal Nazir

**Participant Identifier Number:**

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant Information sheet related to this research, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

I understand that all my responses will be anonymised.

I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

I agree to take part in the above study

**Name of Participant:** ……………………………………………………………

**Signature of Participant:** ………………………………………………………

**Date:** …………………………

**Name of Researcher:**

**Signature of Researcher:**

**Date:**