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Understanding the impact of whiteness on academic advising in UK Higher
Education, using critical discourse analysis.

An extended research proposal: E822 dissertation

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Table of contents	
Abstract	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review - Conceptual Framework	7
2.1 Developing my worldview	7
2.2 Origins of Critical Theory	8
2.3 Critical Race Theory	9
2.4 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice	12
Chapter 3: Literature Review – The Topic	14
3.1 Literature search process	14
3.2 The ethnicity degree awarding gap in UK Higher Education	15
3.3 Whiteness in UK Higher Education	17
3.4 Decolonising the University	19
3.5 Academic Advising and awareness of whiteness	22
Chapter 4: The Research Proposal	26
Chapter 5: Research Design, Research Methods and Methods of analysis	28
5.1 Research Design	28
5.2 Research methods, analysis and validity	29
5.3 Ethical considerations	33
Postscript: Narrative Critical Reflection	37
References	39
Appendices	55
Appendix 1: E822 Ethical Appraisal Form	55
Appendix 2: EMA Reflection Evidence Grid	58

Abstract

Despite many initiatives over the years, the awarding gap between white and Black students, in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), persists (Universities UK, 2022). In this extended research proposal, I use Critical Race Theory to uncover the underlying reasons for the awarding gap and draw on Bourdieu's (1977) Theory of Practise to discover whether the habitus and capital of white advisors might impact outcomes for Black students. I propose the use of Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse conversations between white advisors and Black students. The research would be carried by myself, a white female, with white advisors within a UK HEI.

Chapter 1: Introduction

There is a long-standing awarding gap between Black and white students in UK Higher Education (Office for Students, 2021a). Even when individual attributes are controlled for, the awarding gap persists suggesting that structural barriers within the University and society are perpetuating the gap (Advance HE, 2021). There have been many initiatives across the sector to close the ethnicity degree awarding gap and, although it has narrowed, the gap remains (Universities UK, 2022). An area of focus that has received less attention in the UK is the advice and guidance practice of student support advisers. If practitioners have a lack of awareness of issues such as white privilege this could impact on the advice they give, and therefore negatively impact outcomes for Black students. The proposal here is to use Critical Discourse Analysis, to analyse conversations between white advisors and Black students, to unearth whether underlying ideologies are impacting on the advice given.

This proposal is directly related to the Inclusive Practice pathway of the Masters in Education, in its focus on equity of outcomes for Black students in UK Higher Education. The first module of the Masters, EE814, takes a Critical Theory approach to scrutinising educational policy and practice and this approach has provided the methodological underpinning to the research design of my proposal. I was drawn to using a Critical Theory approach due to the way in which it encourages challenge to accepted norms through problematisation (Ozga, 2000). I feel this is critical in researching practice in UK Higher Education where whiteness is entrenched in the institution and therefore routinely goes unchallenged (Bhopal, 2018). I was also drawn to the transformative nature of Critical Theory in education and the way in which it can lead to long-lasting change (Freire and Ramos, 1972). An important aspect of my research proposal is therefore to involve advisors in the analysis of their own conversations. The aim being to enable advisors to uncover their own hidden ideologies and to empower them to challenge structures that produce barriers to success for Black students.

Given the focus on the ethnicity degree awarding gap, the methodological approach to this research proposal is Critical Race Theory which provides an important perspective to the reasons behind the gap. The methodology has allowed me to develop a deep understanding of concepts such as whiteness and white privilege, as

well as the inextricable link between education and colonialism. It has therefore opened my eyes to new ways of thinking in relation to why the gap exists. I also propose to use Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977) to provide a framework to understand the internalised norms and beliefs (*habitus*) the advisors hold, and the resources (*capital*) they draw on, when providing advice to students. The *habitus* and *capital* held by white advisors will produce symbolic power over Black students and this in turn could impact on outcomes for Black students.

Throughout the research proposal I make specific reference to Black students and white advisors. It is important to note here that the focus, specifically on outcomes of Black students (and not other ethnicities), relates to the awarding gap identified by the Office for Students (2021a) and acknowledges that the gap is most significant between Black and white students. It also avoids aggregating different ethnic groups in to one homogenised category which can lead to underlying causes, for degree awarding gaps, being hidden (Gov.uk, 2021). It should be noted that there are other factors that influence awarding gaps such as class, disability, and gender (Office for Students, 2022). The intersectionality of such factors is often discussed and is an important consideration, however, for this research proposal it could distract from the underlying causes of the ethnicity degree awarding gap, such as whiteness within the institution (Gillborn et al., 2017).

With regards to terminology, I have capitalised the term Black as a way of recognising that I am referring to a culture and social identity of a group of people as opposed to a colour. I have chosen not to capitalise white as this relates to a social construct and does not describe a particular group of people, but rather has negative associations linking to colonialism and oppression (Dumas, 2016). Where I am not specifically referring to the awarding gap between Black and white students, I use the term Global Majority to refer to people who have been previously racialised as ethnic minorities (Campbell-Stephens, 2021). The term Global Majority avoids 'othering' and is a reminder that, people from these groups represent 80% of the world's population. Where I am making specific reference to research by another author, I will use the terms they use and indicate this with the use of quotation marks.

The questions within my proposal have been developed throughout the course of the Masters. My original ideas for the research questions in EE814 focused on the awarding gap but lacked specificity relating to module concepts such as habitus and capital. The literature review in E822 cemented my understanding of whiteness within the institution and highlighted the importance of including concepts such as whiteness and hidden ideologies within the research questions. I have provided more detail on the development of my research questions in chapter 4, The Research Proposal.

Finally, in terms of my positionality, I am a white female working in a professional services unit within a UK Higher Education institution. Although I have previously worked directly with advice and guidance practitioners, I now work across the service at a strategic level. As for many work-based researchers this raises an insider/outsider dichotomy (The Open University, 2023a). I am an insider within the relevant unit of the organisation and in relation to my ethnicity (in conducting research with white advisors) but an outsider in relation to my role (I am no longer a practitioner). The benefits and issues associated with this dichotomy will be covered in more detail in chapter 5, Research Design.

Chapter 2: Literature Review - Conceptual Framework

2.1 Developing my worldview

This chapter starts with a description of my educational and work background to describe both my positionality and how I have come to the worldview that has influenced the thinking behind this literature review.

My educational background consisted of studying A Levels of Maths, Chemistry and Biology; all science-based subjects with the disciplines sat firmly in a positivist paradigm. I went on to study a BSc Psychology which covered a range of disciplines from Cognitive, Biological and Social Psychology and the subjects were very much situated in the post-positivist paradigm. On reflection, there was little mention of other paradigms and the teaching, or at best my perception of the teaching, was that qualitative research lacked validity due to issues such as small sample size and an inability to relate results to a general population.

In terms of work, my career has almost exclusively been in UK Higher Education. Prior to studying the Masters in Education, I was highly aware of the awarding gap between Black and white students with the Office for Students publishing stark results across the sector in 2018 (Office for Students, 2018). In the same year I attended a workshop focused on 'Reducing the Black Degree Awarding Gap' (The Open University, 2018) where I became aware of the research by Nona McDuff and colleagues (McDuff et al, 2018). Hearing this research being presented was the start of my journey into initiatives that could help to close the awarding gap but my thinking at this time was still very much rooted in the post-positivist paradigm, for example, using control groups to measure benefits of proactive phone calls to students.

It was in undertaking the first module of the Masters, EE814, that I first realised the inseparable link between politics and education. The neo-liberal nature of the UK Government has shaped the nature and content of Higher Education, for example in relation to funding available for high-cost subjects (Office for Students, 2021b) and measuring success in relation to the percentage of students progressing into professional employment (Office for Students, 2021c). In turn creativity and

continuous improvement in Higher Education has been dominated by ideas of redistribution and deficit thinking (The Open University, 2023b).

The module EE814 was my first introduction to the concept of critical theory and the idea of problematising normative theories (The Open University, 2023c). I became aware for the first time of the impact of power and political structures on education policy and student outcomes (Madriaga, 2020) as well as the transformative nature of critical theory, which helped me to understand how qualitative research can have validity. That is, research is not just about proving a theory but also about driving change (Freire and Ramos, 1972). The module was also my first introduction to Bourdieu (1977) and how his concepts of capital, field and habitus can be used as a lens within a conceptual framework (Costa et al., 2020).

In EE815 I developed a deeper understanding of Bourdieu and how the theory can be used as a lens for understanding the reasons behind a particular set of outcomes (Carrington and Luke, 1997). Finally, in E822, I returned to my interests related to the causes of the awarding gap between Black and white students in UK Higher Education. My reading around Critical Race Theory has led me to believe that such a theoretical framework was imperative in understanding the underpinning issues behind the awarding gap. Without this understanding, normative theories relating to white privilege in higher education would go unchallenged.

2.2 Origins of Critical Theory

The origins of Critical Theory can be found in the establishment of the Frankfurt School in 1923 where Max Horkheimer (the first Director of the school) offered a distinction between 'traditional theory' and 'critical theory' (Horkheimer, 1937). The defining aspect of Horkheimer's work was that Critical Theory should not just seek to interpret aspects of society but should seek change to emancipate individuals from the structures in society that enslave them. To do this, Critical Theory involves the identification of marginalised groups, the problematisation of normative theories (that is, challenging theories that most people take for granted) and transformative action (McKernan, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, Critical Theory has itself had its critics over the years, particularly as society has evolved with the inception of neo-liberal and capitalist politics. Allen (2008) highlights the complacency in Critical Theory in relation to societal norms relating to race and gender and argues that such norms are so ingrained in early childhood that it becomes impossible to emancipate oneself from them. To rectify these issues with Critical Theory, Allen (2017) proposes that the framework behind the Frankfurt School of critical theory needs, itself, to be decolonised. It is for such reasons that I have looked towards Critical Race Theory, as opposed to Critical Theory, as the underlying methodology of this literature review.

2.3 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the United States in 1970s when legal scholars, such as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, came together to further develop the already liberal movement of Critical Legal Studies (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2019). Critical Legal Studies aligned with critical theory thinking in proposing that the law was designed to support the interests of those who created it, therefore perpetuating the class structure in the United States (Kennedy, 1984). Critical Race Theorists took this concept further to focus specifically on race inequality in both the legal system and society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Although there is not an agreed statement defining the principles of CRT, there are central tenets on which critical race theorists agree (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2019). These tenets are summarised by Rollock and Gillborn (2011; pp. 3) as centrality of racism, white supremacy, voices of 'people of colour', interest convergence and intersectionality.

Mainstream discourse relating to racism tends to focus on direct discrimination whereby an individual is disadvantaged on account of their race. CRT provides a different perspective, stating that racism is the norm within society having become ingrained in beliefs, attitudes, and policies (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2019). This is a much more subtle definition which explains the centrality of racism and relates to concepts such as institutional racism whereby organisational structures, such as policies and procedures, can perpetuate discrimination (Macpherson, 1999). This is an important aspect of my research proposal in that if white advisors are unaware of

the centrality of racism, they will be less able to advocate for Black students who are required to overcome structural barriers to succeed.

Central to the theory of CRT is the idea of 'white supremacy'. Firstly, it is important to note that within CRT this concept is not specific to the beliefs and behaviours of the far right. Instead, in CRT the term is used to describe the taken-for-granted privileges that are afforded to white people and the way in which political systems perpetuate these privileges (Gillborn, 2006). Following on from this definition, are terms such as white privilege which describes the opportunities that are granted to white people on account of their race, regardless of whether they realise and accept these privileges (Arday and Mirza, 2018). And white ignorance which describes the failure of white people to recognise the existence of white supremacy and therefore white privilege (Mills, 2007). The term whiteness is the overarching term: a socially and politically constructed system of beliefs that reinforce the dominance of white people (Gillborn, 2019). Through developing my understanding of such concepts, it has become clear to me that the research questions need to focus on the practice specifically of white advisors. That is, if white advisors fail to recognise the racist norms within society and/or the acts of whiteness that can privilege white students over others, then the advice or support that they provide to Black students could be unhelpful or inappropriate.

Storytelling and counter storytelling are important features of CRT in enabling people from the Global Majority to be heard when sharing their lived experiences. In societies where the narrative is dominated by white people, storytelling is a powerful way of raising issues relating to race that white people are otherwise likely to be ignorant to (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). I am conscious that in my research proposal I am lacking the voice of Black students and, given the importance of ensuring the voice of people from the Global Majority is heard, this has made me uncomfortable. However, given my positionality as a white woman, I am also aware that researching the views of Black students in relation to whiteness in the institution would present uncomfortable power dynamics for both the participants and I (Costley, et al., 2010). Rather than deviate away from the topic in an act of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) I have focused my research proposal on the attitudes and behaviours of white advisors with the intention of enabling transformative action to

provide long-lasting change. Within the topic section of the literature review I have also ensured that research providing voice to students from the Global Majority is presented, to understand the true nature of the problem.

With regards to Interest Convergence, Bell (1980) proposes that the interests of people from the Global Majority will only be supported if they align with the interests of the powerful white elite. As an example, Bell (1980) proposed that the landmark ruling in *Brown vs Board of Education* (which determined that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional) only happened as it suited US politics, and the interests of the white elite, at the time. In a seminal paper, Ladson-Billings (1998) explains how education in the United States is inextricably linked to politics. She goes on to describe how CRT could be used to examine policies and practices, designed to promote equality of opportunity for 'African Americans', to show how they are in fact perpetuating inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1998, pp. 22). A criticism often aimed at CRT is that the theory lacks relevance to the UK (Parsons, 2015; as cited in Warmington, 2020). However, Critical Race Theory has been used successfully to analyse race inequities within UK education policy. One of the earliest studies of this kind determined that education policy is, in itself, an act of white supremacy due to the priorities it sets, the people it benefits and the outcomes it produces (Gillborn, 2005). This is an important concept for white advisors to understand, in relation to advocating on behalf of the student. In relation to my research proposal advisors will possess capital relating to knowledge of policies and procedures and have embedded ideologies that relate to students being able to benefit, or not, from such policies. It is therefore necessary to understand how aware the advisors are of their own ideologies.

Another criticism aimed at CRT is that it homogenises white people and fails to consider intersectionality (Cole, 2017). Although CRT refers specifically to race in the name of the theory, it does not ignore or exclude other marginalised groups such as those relating to sexuality, gender, class, or disability (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019). Crenshaw (as cited in Hardy, 2023) has been a prominent voice in black feminist pedagogy and Gillborn (2015) has drawn links between class, race, gender, and disability in political discourse. In close parallels with my proposal, Gholami (2021) investigates the intersectionality of racism and islamophobia and uses CRT to

understand the awarding gap for Muslim students. The findings were that islamophobia and racist incidents were an everyday reality for Muslim students and had led to students fearing being misreported or misunderstood, which in turn had led to awarding gaps for Muslim students.

2.4 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Seeing CRT as the underpinning methodology for my research proposal, I will also use Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977) to provide an explanation and framework to describe the symbolic power that may exist between advisors and students in Higher Education. The theory introduces the concepts of habitus, capital, and field: a set of theoretical tools that are intended to be used relationally. That is, to understand one of the concepts you need to understand each in turn and how they relate to each other. The concept of habitus relates to the internalised norms and expectations individuals have which will unconsciously determine how that individual interacts with the social world. Habitus is therefore a subjective concept which contrasts with the more objective concept of 'field'. Field is a social space in which people interact, dominate, and are dominated by others. People inhabit more than one field and as they move between fields their habitus will lead them to interact in different ways. Finally, capital(s), are resources that individuals draw on to determine their social status in different fields. Bourdieu (1986) describes four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic.

As discussed in Heffernan (2022), Bourdieu had a strong interest in studying the structural and political landscape of Higher Education because of his own experiences. Bourdieu felt that students and academics who did not fit the mould were prevented from benefitting from the system and that Universities therefore held significant power in relation to social mobility. To put the theory in to context, the fields inhabited by a university advisor and student could be their local communities, their homes, and the university at which they are working or studying. The habitus of the advisor and student will drive them to display different behaviours and social interactions in the different fields, and the capital they possess will lead them to have different social standings in the different fields. For example, even if a student has a

high standing in the local community, within the university the advisor may possess capital such as knowledge of university policies, structures and language which provides them with symbolic power over the student in the university setting. Students may also possess symbolic power over each other. For example, possessing cultural capital such as knowledge from parents with prior experience of higher education, an inherent understanding of the Western canon (The Open University, 2023d) or a particular language or dialect, can provide students with an advantage in a university setting. If advisors lack an understanding of the power they hold over students, or the power that some students hold over others, then this could lead to disadvantage for specific cohorts of students.

Bourdieu's work has been critiqued over the years for being Eurocentric and class-focused and hence ignoring issues such as colonialism and race within the theory (Said, 1989). In response to such critique, authors have discussed Bourdieu's early life in colonial Algeria and how his personal experiences of colonialism influenced his thinking and writing (Puwar, 2009) and have argued that Bourdieu's early work should be part of advancing a postcolonial society (Go, 2013). More recently, Ayling (2019) went further in describing how Bourdieu's personal experience of living in a colonised country was the driver behind the Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977). In her research relating to the schooling choices of elite Nigerian parents, Ayling (2019) combines the thinking of Bourdieu with the work of Fanon (a theorist of race, racism, and colonisation) to demonstrate how colonisation and whiteness continues to influence the choices of elite Nigerians. Similarly, I will look to combine the theoretical concepts from CRT and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977) to provide a lens to examine the impact of whiteness on advising practices, and therefore student outcomes, in UK Higher Education.

Chapter 3: Literature Review – The Topic

3.1 Literature search process

I started the literature review by conducting a search using The Open University online Library search (The Open University, 2022e). I was keen to start here as the library provides access to an extensive range of databases including EBSCO host, ProQuest and JSTOR. Results returned from the Library Search, clearly identify those articles which are peer reviewed and my aim was to use such articles as the main component of the literature review to provide validity and reliability to the review (Oliver, 2014).

An initial search of the terms *critical race theory* and *academic advising* returned results of specific relevance to my literature review (Carnaje, 2016; Lee, 2018; MacDonald, 2014). The results returned were all from researchers based in the US. As a result, I widened the search using Boolean searches combining 'UK Higher Education' with the terms *whiteness*, *decolonisation*, *race*, *white privilege* and *anti-racism*. Apart from seminal articles, I felt it was important to focus my attention on research conducted within the last 5 years (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). However, after determining that research in this area to date was not extensive, I widened this to 10 years to ensure a wide enough knowledge base.

Following the search, I scanned titles and abstracts to identify relevant articles. Articles were excluded for the following reasons:

- Not related to Higher Education
- Not focused on students studying UG or PG taught programmes
- Methodology is opposed to Critical Race Theory

I also used Google.com to search for grey literature relating to the UK Higher Education awarding gap. I felt this was a necessary step in understanding the context behind the ethnicity awarding gap in UK Higher Education and what initiatives, to close the gap, have been attempted to date. As a result of working in Higher Education I was aware that reputable sources were the Office for Students (the UK Higher Education regulator) as well as organisations such as Universities

UK, Advanced HE and TASO which work with Universities and the Government to make improvements across the sector.

3.2 The ethnicity degree awarding gap in UK Higher Education

To set the scene for this literature review I have started with an overview of the problem (the ethnicity awarding gap between Black and white students) and in doing so have referenced much of the grey literature produced to date. Following this I will examine the academic literature, from a Critical Race Theory perspective, to provide evidence as to why the awarding gap remains and to provide support to initiatives that may help to close the awarding gap, as referenced by my over-arching research question:

“Does advice and guidance, delivered by white advisors, impact on outcomes for Black students in UK Higher Education?”.

Within UK Higher Education there is a long-standing ethnicity degree awarding gap with the gap being defined as the difference in the proportion of ‘white and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students’ achieving a First or 2:1 degree (Advance HE, 2021). The gap is most significant when comparing the outcomes of white and Black students and this gap has been persistent since records began (Advance HE, 2022). Broecke and Nicholls (2007) provided a seminal moment in understanding the reason for the gap with their comprehensive statistical analysis of 65,000 students for the Department for Education. Their findings showed that even when individual attributes were controlled for, the gap remained.

The analysis by Broecke and Nicholls (2007) was followed by the Ethnicity Gender and Degree Attainment Project (Higher Education Academy and Equality Challenge Unit, 2008) which reported similar findings. The project report recommended that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should be supported in developing and disseminating good practice related to closing the awarding gap. To provide such support the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) developed a national change programme, in partnership with 15 HEIs, with each HEI

undertaking initiatives to close the gap. The change programme took a positivist stance with the final report championing a data driven approach with key performance measures at the forefront (Berry and Loke, 2011).

Although the change programme was successful in laying the foundations for future improvements, it was less successful in identifying opportunities to close the awarding gap. Many of the initiatives took a 'does it work?' approach in measuring changes in outcomes following an initiative, as opposed to looking to determine underlying causes (Allison and Pomeroy, 2000, pp. 96). When the Office for Students (OfS) was established in 2018, a report on 'differences in student outcomes' showed that the stark differences in outcomes between white and Black students continued to persist. (Office for Students, 2018). The OfS response was to establish a key performance indicator (KPI) to measure whether Universities were making improvements against the metric.

Universities responded with a range of initiatives including decolonising the curriculum, improving representation across the staffing body, and improving data to better enable support services to make changes (Universities UK, 2019). Three years on and although improvements have been made, the gap persists (Universities UK, 2022). It is noticeable that none of the nation-wide change programmes mention Critical Race Theory and terms such as white privilege, whiteness and even racism are few and far between (Higher Education Academy and Equality Challenge Unit, 2008; Berry and Loke, 2011; Universities UK, 2019). The absence of such terms in the grey literature has led me to focus the subsequent sections of the literature review on the underlying causes of the ethnicity degree awarding gap from a Critical Race Theory perspective and my findings are covered in the sections entitled whiteness in Higher Education and Decolonising the University. It is also noticeable, from the grey literature, that many of the initiatives focus on change within the academic space (for example, decolonising the curriculum or assessment) as opposed to addressing change in Student Support Services. The final section of the chapter, Critical Race Theory and Academic Advising, is therefore focused on research specific to academic advising and the contribution this can have in relation to closing the ethnicity awarding gap.

3.3 Whiteness in UK Higher Education

A starting point in determining why there is an awarding gap between Black and white students in UK universities is to understand the prevalence of whiteness within the institution. In the following section, I will take a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective to make sense of the historical and current presence of whiteness in education.

As discussed in Bain (2018), hundreds of years of colonialism, perpetuated by white citizens of countries across Europe, America, and Australasia, has led to white supremacy being a dominant ideology across the Western world. Bain (2018) explains how the UK political system perpetually reinforces the ideology that 'white' is superior, for example, through immigration policy and the erasure of white racism throughout history. This has led to the UK education system being entrenched in its colonial history, for example, through the whiteness of the curriculum (Schucan Bird and Pitman, 2020), policy making (Gillborn, 2005) and even within architecture: the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oxford University being a prime example (Chantiluke et al, 2018).

In addition to colonialism, many critics believe that neo-liberalism has also led to the dominance of whiteness in society (Bhopal, 2018). Neo-liberalism is an ideology which is prevalent in politics, economics and policy making in the Western World. In economics, the premise is that free markets, privatisation, and lower taxes lead to greater economic growth. For individuals, it is the idea of self-determination. That is, hard work is rewarded by increased opportunities and increased wealth (Laermans, 2020). Critics of neo-liberalism describe how the privatisation of public services, because of neo-liberalism, has led to inequities in areas such as education with the thirst for profit-making meaning that the needs of marginalised groups have been ignored and gaps based on class, gender and race have widened (Phipps, 2020). As state funding for Higher Education declines, and Universities look towards partnerships with corporate entities, those Universities will be pressured into following research agendas that fit with the capitalist world (Gopal, 2021).

The presence of colonialism, neo-liberalism and whiteness within the UK University has not gone unnoticed over the years with student led political statements being

good evidence of this. In 2014, a video created by a University College London (UCL) Philosophy student questioned 'Why is my curriculum white?' (University College London, 2014). The commentary highlighted how most students and academics are simply unaware of the whiteness of the curriculum and that academia perpetuates this through giving validity to authors who are published and cited the most. In 2015, students at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, occupied a university building refusing to come out until the statue of Cecil Rhodes was removed (Fairbanks, 2015). A similar campaign spread to the University of Oxford which was also the home of a prominent Cecil Rhodes statue (Chantiluke et al, 2018). This campaign has polarised opinions with proponents for (Timalsina, 2021) and against (Fitzsimmons, 2015) the removal of the statue voicing their opinions. In 2019, Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action (GARA) saw University students occupy Deptford Townhall, demanding an institution wide approach to tackling racism across the University (Weale, 2019). Students highlighted a Eurocentric curriculum, inadequate complaints procedures and under-resourced mental health provision as contributors to institutional racism.

If the UK's colonial history and neo-liberal political landscape has led to whiteness being prevalent in UK HEIs, then how does this impact on the student experience? Research using photovoice, to empower postgraduate students to share their experience of belonging at a UK University, provides undeniable evidence of the way in which whiteness is entrenched in physical spaces and how this results in students feeling othered, out of place and voiceless (Ahmet, 2020). Reports of racist hate speech in UK Higher Education continue to rise and intersectionality relating to whiteness, social class and 'laddism' is perpetuating white hegemony in university spaces and policies (Banga, 2023). And the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated racial inequities that left students within HEIs suffering a 'pandemic within a pandemic' (Arday and Jones, 2022, p.15). Sadly, racism and white privilege remain commonplace, but students have become emotionally detached and desensitised as a way of coping (Wong et al., 2022).

Similar results have been found in relation to the experiences of staff in UK HEIs. The lack of Black female professors in UK Universities has been well documented (Advance HE, 2021), and a report on the career experiences of 20 of these

professors evidenced passive and overt bullying, racial microaggressions, and the prominence of whiteness across the UK Higher Education sector (Rollock, 2021). Further qualitative research, involving interviews with 18 staff across professional service and academic roles at 10 institutions, gave voice to 'staff of colour' (Arday, 2022a; pp. 518). The participants reported encountering systemic racism, leading to them feeling exploited and de-humanised, and reported commonality in being recruited to precarious contracts (fixed-term or zero hours contracts) leading to job insecurity and a lack of career progression. Unsurprisingly, daily experiences of racism are having a significant negative impact on the mental health of 'Black and minority ethnic' staff, and this is perpetuated by ineffective support systems within the university and in wider society (Arday, 2022b; pp.79).

The review of the literature to this point has shown how the use of Critical Race Theory can be used to challenge accepted norms, relating to colonialism and neo-liberalism, that are pervasive throughout UK HEIs. This challenge has shown that whiteness remains entrenched in UK HEIs and as such this has led to me focusing on the provision of advice by white advisors in my research questions. The thinking expands further in my research questions, in that, if white advisors are unaware of the capital, habitus and ideologies they hold, as a result of living and working in fields that are underpinned by colonialism, then how might this impact on advice to Black students and subsequent student outcomes?

3.4 Decolonising the University

In recognition across the sector that whiteness is engrained in UK Higher Education, there have been many attempts to address this through decolonising the institution. It is easy to think that decolonising universities relates specifically to adapting the curriculum so that it is more representative of the voices of the Global Majority. However, decolonisation is much deeper and more complex than 'adding more women and scholars of colour to reading lists' and there needs to be an understanding, and challenge to, the way in which knowledge is constructed and legitimised within Higher Education (Saini and Begum, 2020, pp. 217). Understanding questions relating to why education exists, who is it for and who are

the decision makers, can lead to empowerment in education as opposed to simply having a more diverse curriculum (Adi and Thomas, 2021). Whole-institution approaches, using CRT as a framework to underpin an institutional change programme, have therefore seen success in closing awarding gaps. A good example of this is provided by McDuff et al (2018). Here, the researchers employed CRT as a framework to help colleagues challenge deficit thinking, and as a way of explaining the complex and multi-faceted nature of the ethnicity awarding gap. The team introduced institutional KPIs, a cross-institution steering group, an inclusive curriculum framework relevant to all disciplines and a range of briefings, workshops and discussion spaces for students and staff. The result was a substantial narrowing of the awarding gap from 29 to 11 percentage points.

The Race Equality Charter (Advance HE, 2020) has been introduced to provide a framework to support universities to embrace such institutional change. The charter advocates for institution-wide approaches and requires HEIs to commit to guiding principles relating to race equality and institutional culture. Although based on sound principles, interviews with staff across several UK HEIs, on the impact of the Race Equality Charters (REC), has highlighted that although the REC for their institution received publicity and backing from senior leaders, there was scepticism about the true level of buy-in and whether it would lead to institutional change (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). In addition to this, some Race Equality Charters continue to avoid the issue of whiteness and take a 'colour-blind' approach which ignore racialised experiences (Madriaga, 2020). These analyses highlight that policy making, within a framework of whiteness, can be a product of interest convergence (Bell, 1980), whereby the development of policy will only be supported when it aligns with the interests of the white powerful elite. In this situation, initiatives intended to decolonise the university have inadvertently led to racism being further embedded in the institution (Doharty et al., 2021).

In order then for institution-wide approaches to succeed, it is necessary for staff across the university to have a genuine interest and understanding of whiteness and CRT can be used to facilitate this. Achilleos et al. (2021) have used CRT as a framework to critically reflect on the learning, assessment and support processes within a Youth and Community Work Programme at a University in Wales. The

researchers were themselves practitioners who led and developed the programme, two of whom identified as 'white, middle-class women' and another who identified as a 'Brown person' (Achilleos et al., 2021; pp.7). The results uncovered areas of racial oppression and discrimination within the programme and enabled the researchers to improve their critical consciousness and reflect on the influence of white privilege within the student and staffing body, leading to several recommendations to improve practice. Similar research at a Higher Education Institution in London, used CRT as a framework to disrupt the narrative relating to race in Higher Education (Brazant, 2023). The initiative involved the creation of an online toolkit co-authored by academics specialising in the fields of anti-racist practice and Critical Race Theory, which led to a series of workshops designed to engage colleagues in sensitive topics such as whiteness, in a safe and supported environment. Staff from 'marginalised groups' were enabled to share their lived experiences of racism in education whilst white colleagues felt able to share their thoughts openly without attack (Brazant, 2023; pp.10). Staff engaged in the project reported having been on both a personal and professional journey and appreciated the opportunity to develop critical consciousness in relation to learning and teaching design.

The shared success of these initiatives seems to relate to staff investing considerable time in developing their critical consciousness. This contrasts with an initiative at another UK HEI designed to 'improve the racial literacy of staff' (TASO, 2022; pp.9). Within this initiative a toolkit was developed to enable staff to develop cultural competency, via self-directed learning, and transfer this into the development of culturally diverse module materials and assessment. The findings were that the intervention had a negative effect on the performance of 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' students who saw a decrease in attainment post-intervention (TASO, 2022; pp.14). The decrease in attainment was also seen amongst white students studying the re-designed module. This is a timely reminder that topics such as cultural competency, and associated interventions, cannot be taught in a two-page guide and require significant investment and engagement from colleagues.

This aspect of the literature review has had a strong influence on my research questions as white advisors will regularly advise students on navigating University policies and procedures. It is therefore important that we look closely at the work of

advisors, as part of whole institution change programmes, and understand the influence of capital and habitus on the advice they give. It is also a nod to the transformational nature of the research: if advisors are aware of structural barriers created by policies and procedures then empowering them to challenge these norms could lead to long-lasting change for Black students. In summary, racial equality in Higher Education will only be achieved through dismantling the political and power structures that perpetuate white supremacy. Individual initiatives such as employing more 'people of colour' in senior positions and making reading lists more inclusive are positive first steps but won't be enough to see lasting change in themselves (Ono-George, 2019; pp. 504). The key, it seems, is engaging all staff in problematising and challenging accepted norms, through whole-institution approaches, and involving practitioners in critical reflection to uncover and challenge hidden ideologies.

3.5 Academic Advising and awareness of whiteness

If the key to addressing the awarding gap is challenging whiteness across the University, it is important to address these issues beyond just the traditional learning and teaching spaces. In the UK, Higher Education providers employ staff in professional service roles to provide information, advice, and guidance to support students through their study journey. Practitioners provide support to students using advocacy, mentoring, and coaching skills, and a positive relationship between student and practitioner has been shown to have a positive correlation with a student's self-reported personal gains as well as academic outcomes (Graham and Regan, 2016). Research has also highlighted the importance of recognising difference in the student body and adapting guidance practices to meet the needs of students from different backgrounds (Mu and Fosnacht, 2019).

Although there is academic literature to show the positive impact that student support provision has on outcomes for students in UK Higher Education, the research is limited when applying a Critical Race Theory lens to such practice. In fact, when conducting Boolean searches using the terms 'student support' and 'critical race theory' I have found just two articles of relevance from the UK (Achilleos

et al., 2021; Brazant, 2023). As discussed in the previous section, these articles refer specifically to learning and teaching environments as opposed to academic advising and I have, therefore, turned towards research conducted by colleagues in the United States for this section of the literature review. I will first look to understand the experiences of students from the Global Majority, followed by the beliefs and attitudes of white educators. Finally, I will look to what might be done to enable change amongst the academic advising community.

Research in the US has highlighted the prescriptive nature of advice provided to 'multiracial' students, with assumptions being made about the students' ability and right to be studying at the institution (MacDonald, 2014, pp. 11). The narratives provided in this research provide powerful evidence of students being told to follow certain courses of study due to their ethnicity, having to adapt to systems and processes to succeed, and experiencing persistent assumptions from staff that they might not succeed, purely based on their ethnicity. Similar narratives from 'Black male college students' at an Urban US university highlighted how students felt advisors encouraged them to take easier courses due to assumptions made based on their ethnicity (Johnson et al., 2019; pp. 781). The students also reported difficulties in building relationships with the advisors due to a lack of availability and in building trust when advisors failed to direct them to programmes, initiated by the University, to provide support to Black students. Finally, focus groups carried out with 'students of color' in a US college identified microaggressions in the forms of differing body language and behaviours directed to students of different ethnicities and a lack of care or understanding in relation to structural barriers faced by 'students of color' (Matthews et al., 2023, pp. 1). Understanding first-hand the voice of students from the Global Majority provides powerful evidence of the problem and why a focus, in the research questions, on the outcomes of Black students is key.

If we have evidence from the voice of students that the problem exists, then what evidence do we have in relation to white advisors' understanding of the problem? There is a gap in the literature with regards to the experiences of white advisors in relation to advising students from the Global Majority. I have therefore looked to research conducted across other education roles to understand how white educators are tackling race and racism in their practice. In a seminal article, which has inspired

my proposal to research the practices of white advisors, Picower (2009) found that white pre-service teachers brought with them experiences that shaped the way they viewed and understood race and that these hegemonic ideologies could negatively impact student outcomes. Following on from this Picower (2013), looked at how trainee teachers could be supported to understand that education is highly politicised and the outcomes of this. She found that when teachers were educated in this way, they were empowered to challenge oppression and felt more connected and supported in doing so.

More recently, research conducted with trainee teachers showed positive evidence of 'transgressive white racial knowledge' where the teachers views were progressive and challenged norms relating to topics such as whiteness in society (Crowley, 2016; pp. 1019). However, when relating the theory to their own lives and experiences these teachers distanced themselves from the implications of racism and showed less knowledge and confidence in relation to how they might challenge societal structures relating to racism in the classroom. Similarly, research conducted with trainee teachers who have an academic background in critical race theory, found these teachers still had deeply entrenched beliefs that marginalised students and continued to provide discourses that displayed lowered expectations of 'African American' children (Nash and Miller, 2015, pp. 196).

These findings provide support to the concept of white fatigue in which white individuals disengage from the antiracism debate as they feel that they are not, as an individual, racist. However, they are failing to engage with debates relating to structural and institutional racism which means the more challenging concepts within anti-racism are left unchallenged (Flynn, 2015). Similar views have been uncovered in research conducted with white academics following their attendance at a series of anti-racism workshops (Reinke et al, 2023). The interviews uncovered dominant thoughts that racism lies in the hands of individuals and a lack of understanding of structural barriers that lead to institutional racism. The research also highlighted the significance of personal racialised histories which were influencing how the educators responded in conversations relating to race, reminding me of the importance of habitus in influencing how advisors may relate to and support Black students.

With the problems clearly defined, researchers in the US have applied a Critical Race Theory lens to academic advising to come up with several recommendations. Firstly, advisors must have an awareness of their own attitudes and beliefs, and be able to challenge these beliefs, to provide culturally responsive advising (Carnaje, 2016). To do this, advisors must engage in critical reflection to understand how their racialised privilege and positionality can influence their relationships with students (Lee, 2018). Advisors cannot be passive observers and instead need to engage in anti-racist behaviours, disrupt whiteness in the institution and challenge inappropriate behaviours (Sarcedo, 2022). The importance of affirmation (acknowledging and validating a student's experience as opposed to questioning it), support (treating students as unique individuals and respecting their needs) and advocacy (for example, speaking out against institutional policies that perpetuate whiteness) are key attributes required of culturally sensitive advising (Lee, 2018).

In summary, whiteness within the institution is a key factor behind the ethnicity degree awarding gap in UK Higher Education and the voice of students and staff from the Global Majority provides evidence that the problem continues to persist. To challenge such whiteness, white educators must critically reflect on their own white privilege and engage with anti-racist behaviours to disrupt the widely accepted norms within the institution. In doing so, educators such as advice and guidance practitioners, will be enabled to advocate for the needs of Black students, provide affirmation in relation to their place in the institution and effect positive outcomes for Black students.

Chapter 4: The Research Proposal

This chapter sets out the research I am proposing, makes explicit reference to the research questions and provides a reminder of the title of my dissertation:

“Understanding the impact of whiteness on academic advising in UK Higher Education, using critical discourse analysis.”

The driving factor behind my research proposal is a desire to contribute to closing the ethnicity degree awarding gap in UK Higher Education. Given my positionality I have focused on advice and guidance practice (given I work within a student support setting) and specifically the practice of white advisors (given that I am myself white).

The use of Critical Race Theory as a lens has enabled me to understand the problem (the ethnicity degree awarding gap) from a different perspective. The literature review has highlighted the entrenched nature of whiteness within UK Higher Education and how it can lead to hidden ideologies and structures that might perpetuate the awarding gap. The literature review has also highlighted that everyone within the institution has a responsibility in relation to closing the ethnicity degree awarding gap, although the literature to date is lacking with regards to the practices of white advisors in UK Higher Education. Identifying this gap in the literature, combined with my positionality, has led me to focus my research questions specifically on the practice of white advisors and how this may impact on outcomes for Black students. Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1977) is also included as a necessary framework for understanding the habitus and capital that might influence the practice or ideologies of the advisors. I have therefore made sure to explicitly refer to habitus and capital in the research questions.

I first started developing the research questions in stage one of my Masters studies and, looking back, the questions lacked any reference to the conceptual underpinning of the topic:

“What advice and guidance skills are utilised by student support staff when supporting Black students to overcome barriers to successful study?”

“What strategies do student support staff utilise to engage with Black students to encourage a sense of belonging?”

As I reflected on my positionality, I realised the importance on focusing the research on white advisors and this is now explicit throughout each question. Discussions with my tutor on the module E822, following feedback from TMA02, led to the explicit inclusion of Bourdieu’s (1977) concepts of habitus and capital, to ensure that the conceptual framework was embedded in the questions. Finally, the literature review cemented my understanding of the applications of Critical Race Theory within Higher Education and therefore the importance of including the concepts of whiteness and hidden ideologies. My final research questions are:

Does advice and guidance, delivered by white advisors, impact on outcomes for Black students in UK Higher Education?

- What capital (Bourdieu, 1977) do white advisors possess and make use of when supporting Black students?
- To what extent is habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) displayed by white advisors and what impact does this have on Black students?
- What ideologies do white advisors hold and how aware are they of the impact these ideologies might have on Black students?

Chapter 5: Research Design, Research Methods and Methods of analysis

5.1 Research Design

The overall design frame I propose to use is that of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is an approach to analysing discourse to understand how language plays a role in perpetuating inequalities in society (Farrelly, 2019). Importantly, CDA purports that the language used in interactions will be purposefully chosen to deliver specific outcomes, although this choice may not be conscious (Mullet, 2018). The relevance then, to my proposal, is that the discourse between an advisor and a student (during the provision of advice and guidance), could have significant implications on outcomes for that student, depending on what information the advisor chooses to share, and how and when they share it (Lee, 2018).

CDA is well known for its use in analysing policy documents (Fairclough, 2001) or wider policy landscapes (McCaig, 2018). For example, policy documents will be written by specific authors with a particular worldview or political persuasion. Whatever the author's stance, it will be evident in the policy and will therefore lead to behaviours or acts that could marginalise certain groups (Fairclough, 2001). The specific focus in the literature on using CDA to analyse political documents or speeches, was a reason for me originally considering the use of Conversation Analysis (CA) as a design frame instead of CDA. CA is specifically aimed at analysing the interaction between individuals during a conversation (Hutchby, 2019) and so seemed a good fit with regards to my proposal to analyse conversations between white advisors and Black students. However, Conversation Analysis is to be used in determining what is happening in a conversation and how it is happening, as opposed to why (White, 2019). Missing the 'why' was a crucial reason for me to turn back to CDA, as my research proposal is focused on uncovering normative practices, during conversation, that are having unintended consequences in student outcomes.

In retuning to CDA, I still had a misconception that the design frame was only relevant for the analysis of written texts. Although CDA refers to text as a necessary component, further reading has enabled me to understand that within CDA, 'text' can take many different forms including speech, written word, sound and images

(Farrelly, 2019). There is also a distinction between text and discourse, where discourses are ways of viewing the world that relate to social practice (Farrelly, 2019). Within my research proposal, the relevant discourse would be whiteness in UK Higher Education. Awareness and visibility of the discourse is then provided through the analysis of the text, which in this case is a telephone conversation between an advisor and a student.

As the name suggests, CDA has clear links with Critical Race Theory, with an important aspect of both being the notion of critique. In Critical Race Theory, criticality relates to the identification of taken-for-granted practices that are perpetuating inequities for under-represented groups. With regards to CDA, critique allows the researchers to uncover hidden ideologies or discourses within texts which could lead to particular actions or behaviours (Farrelly, 2019). It therefore seems appropriate to use CDA as the overall design frame for my research proposal. It is important to note that the 'critical' in CDA does not necessarily have to relate to a negative ideology. As Wodak (2001) highlights, any social situation can be investigated critically: if we focus purely on those situations we believe to be problematic, we are at risk of missing the opportunity to challenge (or critique) normative practices. This is an important reminder in relation to my research proposal in that we must not assume that the practices of white advisors are all problematic. The research could uncover practices that white advisors use to support Black students to overcome institutional barriers and this learning could also be used to inform change at a practitioner and institutional level.

5.2 Research methods, analysis and validity

As discussed in Mullet (2018), CDA is not in itself a research method. The research methods chosen must therefore align with the principles of CDA in supporting the analysis of a problem from a critical perspective. To support researchers in undertaking CDA, Mullet (2018, pp. 120) has proposed a 'General Analytic Framework for CDA' which I intend to follow in structuring my research design.

The first stage of the framework involves selecting the discourse which, in my research proposal, will be the influence of whiteness on academic advising and how it impacts on outcomes for Black students. As discussed in previous chapters, the criticality here relates to the influence of white privilege on the habitus of white advisors and how this may impact on the advice they give to Black students.

The second stage involves locating and preparing the data sources and this relates to the first of my chosen research methods: document analysis. In the University within which I work, conversations between advisors and students occur primarily by telephone or email. All telephone calls are recorded and so the recordings and transcripts would be the documents I propose to analyse. As the documents were co-created by the advisor and student themselves (through the act of having a conversation) they would be considered primary sources. This gives the research validity as, to analyse why an advisor is communicating content in a certain way, it is important to analyse the conversation itself and not a second-hand interpretation of the conversation (Finnegan, 2006).

As discussed in Rapley (2018) using documents as a source of data can lead to a huge array of available data and therefore confusion in where to start with the analysis. Within the University in which I work, hundreds of phone calls are made every day and as a result the available data set could seem overwhelming. To overcome this, I would set strict parameters from which to draw data from. Firstly, I would look to analyse conversations from the most recent month in the current academic year. Advisors undergo comprehensive training and professional development and so the recency of conversations would provide efficacy in analysing the most up to date approaches, policies, and procedures the advisors are using when providing guidance to students. Secondly, the research would be restricted to guidance provided by white advisors in line with the proposed research questions and only those advisors who had consented to being part of the research. Finally, having identified the conversations through date and advisor, I would divide the conversations into cohorts according to the ethnicity of the student. The conversations to be analysed would be those with Black students, in accordance with the research questions, but I would also include some conversations with

students of other ethnicities to provide comparison and evidence as to whether advisors adapt their conversations depending on the ethnicity of the student.

The third stage of the framework proposed by Mullet (2018) requires an exploration of the producer of the text. As the proposal here is to use text created through guidance conversations, I would introduce a second research method involving narrative interviews with participating advisors. As discussed in Soler (2013) narrative interviewing is a way of providing a story of an individual's everyday life in relation to their social context. The interviews would aim to uncover the habitus and capital held by the advisors along with their knowledge and understanding of white privilege.

The unstructured nature of narrative interviews can mean that participants find it difficult to tell their story as the questioning is limited (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016). However, this limitation can also be seen to provide validity to the research, in that it helps to prevent the beliefs of the interviewer or researcher being imparted on the individual being interviewed (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2012). There are other limitations to using narrative interviews in that the results are not generalisable, and the process is such that it can only be used in small-scale investigations (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Given that I am proposing a small-scale investigation to understand the practices of individual advisors I am confident in that these specific limitations will not challenge the validity of the research. Finally, ethnographic approaches such as narrative interviewing can empower participants to critically reflect on their practice (McArdle and Mansfield, 2007) which aligns well with the transformative nature of Critical Race Theory.

Stage four of Mullet's (2018) framework involves coding the text and again there are a variety of methods available for use. I aim to use a theoretical or top-down approach to Thematic Analysis which involves identifying themes from the literature and research questions and then identifying these themes (codes) within the texts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A traditional approach to thematic analysis involves reading through the transcripts of the conversations and highlighting themes that emerge from the data or using computer software to code large bodies of text (Maher et al., 2018). However, coding of only the written transcript can lead to nuances in tone, pauses or silences in the conversation being missed and I would

therefore propose to make use of live coding which involves coding directly from the audio recording (Parameswaran et al., 2020). As discussed in Rapley (2018), the analysis of what is not said can often be just as illuminating and I feel that live coding would provide a way of understanding why an advisor may choose not to raise a particular issue during a conversation with a student.

The remaining stages of the framework set out by Mullet (2018) involve analysing and interpreting the data that has been coded. At this stage the data will be analysed for ways in which the producer of the text, in this case the advisor, might impart their own ideologies on the student receiving the advice. Mullet (2018) divides the analysis into two sections: internal and external relations. The internal relations would refer to analysing the aims of the text, the positionality of the producer and associated power relations that are playing during the conversation. External relations relate to the way in which the production of the text is influenced by social practices and norms.

Although the framework proposed by Mullet (2018) is presented in a linear fashion, it is important to note that, in the analysis, the researcher can move back and forth between different stages. For example, coding might be refined as particular themes emerge from the resulting analysis. The ability to be flexible in this way is an important element of reflexivity as it ensures that anyone involved in the analysis is repeatedly checking how their positionality and subjectivity may be influencing the research process (Olmos-Vega et al, 2023). Another element of the analysis which supports reflexivity is engaging in collaborative analysis of the data and I propose to involve the advisors in the coding and analysis stages. Although this can add complexity in relation to the practical and inter-personal aspects of data analysis, it can enhance reflexivity by providing multiple perspectives to the analysis (Cornish et al., 2014). Involving advisors in the analysis is also necessary if the research is to be transformative in nature. That is, engaging in the analysis will help advisors to reflect on their practice and provide evidence of hidden ideologies they may be unaware of (Hunt and MacPhee, 2020).

5.3 Ethical considerations

It can be easy to think that ethical consideration happens at the start of the process, that is, completing thinking and paperwork relating to ethical approval required to progress with the research itself. However, the idea of ethics in practice shows that ethical considerations are required throughout the research process, up to and including how the findings are disseminated (Hopkins, 2007). To structure my thinking and encourage ethical consideration throughout the whole process, I have made use of the ethical framework developed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009). The framework draws on four philosophical perspectives (external/ecological, consequential, deontological, and relational) which has helped me to consider the various aspects of my research from different angles, adding integrity to my proposal.

From the external/ecological perspective, the organisation within which I work is a UK Higher Education Institution which prides itself on the inclusive nature of its provision. The department within which I work is Student Services which includes teams of advisors who provide Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to students on all aspects of their studies. The principles of IAG focus on providing student-centred IAG, empowering the individual to make informed decisions and avoiding assumptions based on the individuals background (Hill, 2019). There is therefore a risk that advisors participating in the research could feel that their values and good practice are being challenged by the proposals. To mitigate against this, I would clearly explain the intentions of the research, from the outset and in the dissemination, and confirm that although one of the aims relates to transforming practice this does not mean that current practice is wrong but that we might be able to make improvements.

In addition to the above, I am a senior leader in Student Services and therefore have a position of superiority over the advisors. This can create power dynamics that could threaten the integrity of the research (Costley et al., 2010). To counteract this, I would ensure that advisors are reassured that the outcomes of the research would not impact on their employability in the role. I would aim to do this through ensuring anonymity of participants and supporting the advisors to talk generally about their participation in the research. I also need to ensure that I do not abuse my position by

making unreasonable demands on advisor's time (BERA, 2019). The focus of the advisors would remain their day-to-day work in supporting students and so I would aim to protect their time by making use of recorded calls as opposed to relying on observations. Day to day practice will not be disrupted by the data collection phase but the content of the recordings still provides a primary source, ensuring the quality of the evidence (Finnegan, 2006). Using data from 'real-life' calls requires consideration in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation (Gov.uk, 2023). My proposal would be to gain consent from advisors to make use of their recordings. If an advisor consents, then call recordings and emails would be added to a data set available for analysis and may or may not be used in the research.

The consequential perspective focuses on the benefits of the research to the individual, organisation, society and the researcher. With regards to the benefits to individual advisors, the aim is that the participatory nature of the research would have a transformative effect on practice through enhanced understanding of hidden ideologies (Hunt and MacPhee, 2020). An important consideration in relation to this is the avoidance of harm to participants and ensuring a duty of care (BERA, 2019). The use of Critical Race Theory could raise topics around race and white privilege that are challenging for participants to hear, and the findings could challenge an individual's identity. To provide support in this area I would ensure that participants could access independent psychological support (the university provides free counselling sessions through the Human Resources department). I would also ensure that, as part of the consent process, the participants understood the topics that could be unsettling to them by sharing research to date (for example Picower, 2013).

The benefits to the organisation would be the potential to improve outcomes for Black students. I would be hesitant to say here that the research would result in closing the awarding gap as it is small-scale and would focus on the practices of a small number of advisors. However, the research could lead to further studies which are scalable and would have wider reach across the advisor community. The benefits to society are similar in that the research would raise awareness of normative practices that could impact negatively on Black students. Hidden ideologies and normative practices that have unintentional consequences are

present across society and so raising awareness of this can only be a positive. Finally, in completing the literature review I have already experienced benefits in broadening my own understanding of Critical Race Theory and how hidden ideologies can have unintentional consequences on the outcomes of students. I would expect to further develop my knowledge as well as finding new ways to challenge normative practices in a professional setting.

The deontological considerations relate to the rules and duties required of an ethical researcher. An important aspect of this perspective is reciprocity, that is, ensuring that the participants are aware of the implications of the research, the expectations of them, and the benefits they will receive (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). To support this, I would prepare an information sheet explaining why I am conducting the research, the process involved (including an estimation of the time commitment) and the way in which personal data would be stored and processed. I would then hold a group discussion, for participants interested in being involved, to give further details of the research and a space to discuss the theoretical concepts behind the research. This discussion would also include an exploration of the benefits of the research, in relation to professional development, to the advisors themselves. In line with the BERA (2019) guidelines I would make it clear that participants could withdraw their engagement in the research at any time and give details of how to do this.

Finally, the relational/individual perspective relates to the inter-personal relationships held between the participants and the researcher. An important principle here is respecting an individual's autonomy (British Psychological Society, 2014). In the context of my research, respecting the knowledge and skillset of the advisors and therefore not interfering with conversations during the research will be key. One way in which to avoid interfering with conversations is to make use of recorded phone conversations as opposed to observing the advisor in a live setting. Observations have the advantage of being able to see the sources that advisors are drawing on when providing guidance. However, the approach would challenge the credibility of the research. Given my positionality of being a senior leader within Student Services, and the fact that the advisors would have been informed of the intentions of the research, it could lead to the advisors being hyper-vigilant to what they are saying and therefore deviating away from their standard advice (Cohen et al., 2018). I would

also look to involve the participants in determining what data can be shared in the write-up, for example, excerpts from telephone conversations and how the research should be disseminated.

The language used within Critical Race Theory can be challenging and hard-hitting which has the advantage of challenging normative practice but, as a result, colleagues across the institution could react negatively if the findings challenge the stated values of the institution. To mitigate against this, in the dissemination of the research findings, I would look to deliver a series of seminars starting with a basic underpinning of Critical Race Theory to enable colleagues to understand the terminology and develop competency in understanding concepts such as whiteness. Leading on from this, I would hold a seminar covering the research and findings before moving on to 'problematism sessions'. In these sessions, colleagues and students could come together to challenge the status quo with regards to policies and processes, which would then feed through to changes that can make a real difference for Black students.

Narrative critical reflection

My studies throughout the Masters in Education have transformed my thinking in relation to the causes of the ethnicity degree awarding gap in Higher Education. At the start of the Masters I had no knowledge of Critical Theory and, although at times I was on a steep learning curve in developing my thinking in this area, the learning has been truly eye-opening and has changed my worldview in undertaking research in this area. I have developed in many areas of my knowledge and practice and here I reflect on two of those areas: my knowledge and understanding of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and dissemination of my findings.

With regards to my knowledge and understanding of CRT, I came into the dissertation module (E822) thinking that I had developed a good understanding of the theory from the modules EE814 and EE815. It wasn't until I started writing the topic section of the literature review that I really started to understand the entrenched whiteness within Higher Education and how this might impact on outcomes for Black students (Appendix 2, example 1). The learning has been challenging at times, particularly in relation to understanding that there were aspects of my practice that were likely to be perpetuating whiteness in Higher Education. Understanding the underlying causes of the ethnicity degree awarding gap and the influence of colonialism and neo-liberalism within Higher Education has, at times, led me to question my role in Higher Education and whether this is a field that I wish to continue working in. However, further reading enabled me to see that 'giving up' would be an act of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) and would not help to resolve the problem. Instead, I have taken encouragement from the transformative nature of CRT and am feeling passionate and driven with regards to taking my learning forward with regards to my work, as well as helping colleagues to transform their own practice.

I have had many thoughts about how I could support colleagues to transform their practice, and the participatory design within the research proposal reflects this. However, I had always thought about dissemination being relevant only to a small-scale investigation where there would be results from the research to share. As I was undertaking an extended literature review, my writing within the dissertation focused on how I would go about dissemination if I were to go ahead with the research.

Discussions with my tutor, following submission of a draft chapter, enabled me to understand the importance of sharing my learning to date with colleagues (Appendix 2, example 7). Although I have not undertaken the research I could take an auto-ethnographic approach to sharing my learning and this would be a way of highlighting the issues that persist within Higher Education. This realisation has already led to working with colleagues to design professional development sessions, to be delivered across Academic Services, in relation to developing cultural competency and how this relates to practise.

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Appendix 1.

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth



NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking 'in-person' data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research.

For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all "no" you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

Section 1: Project details

a.	Student name	Susie Hancock
b.	PI	[REDACTED]
c.	Project title	Understanding the impact of whiteness on academic advising in UK Higher Education, using critical discourse analysis.
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Anita Pilgrim
	Qualification	Masters in Education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

e.		Masters in Childhood and Youth
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	Inclusive Practise
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	n/a
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	n/a
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk for advice on travel.</i>	United Kingdom

Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research? ¹	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. ²	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

¹ You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can be obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

² This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with

4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? ³		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? ⁴		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (<http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/>).

identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

³ Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

⁴ Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

Appendix 2. Reflection grid

Category	Feedback received, targets achieved and areas of development worked on	How did this shape my dissertation
<p>Knowledge & understanding Targets, reflections or feedback relating to knowledge of current debate and issues in your specific area of focus; drawing out concepts and themes; choosing a focus area for your dissertation; identifying and overcoming ethical issues.</p>	<p>Feedback from TMA01 “explain the race terminology you're using, and why you are choosing to focus on Black students rather than Black, Asian and minority ethnic students”</p> <p>Reflections following discussions with my tutor and fellow students on the forum with regards to appropriate use of terminology.</p> <p>Target: undertake further reading on the capitalisation of ‘Black’ and ‘white’.</p>	<p>Example 1. This was a lightbulb moment! I had good reasons for focusing on specifically the outcomes for Black students as this is the most significant awarding gap in the Office for Student measures. However, I had noticed from extensive reading of relevant journal articles that the terminology used was varied and there was different practice in capitalising words such as Black and white when referring to ethnicity. Discussions with my tutor helped me to understand the importance of explaining my use of terminology within the introduction and of researching how other authors had approached the issue. Discussions with fellow students on the forum gave me confidence in my approach and that terminology was an issue that needed to be called out explicitly.</p>
<p>Critical analysis and evaluation Targets, reflections or feedback relating to justifying or challenging your personal perspective; interpreting and critically analysing evidence and methodologies from your own and others’ research; analysing and evaluating themes and issues; sourcing and critically reviewing a wide range of publications; creating an academic argument using synthesis; comparing and connecting practice and theory.</p>	<p>Feedback relating to critical analysis of literature: TMA01 “Maybe the literature review is a bit list-like?” Draft submission “your account of Critical Race Theory is in blocks: this makes it descriptive rather than analytic.”</p> <p>Reflections following tutorial on 10th May (Towards Submission 2 Writing up your extended proposal) whereby the tutors highlighted the importance of critically evaluating the literature rather than simply describing it.</p> <p>Feedback from TMA02 There is a minor issue here in that you are not very clear exactly what 'methodology' is. You do know what all the parts that go into methodology do - it's just the title over the top of them that you need to think about.</p>	<p>Example 2. In writing the conceptual framework I had used bullet points to separate out the different tenets. On reflection, in writing the first draft of the conceptual framework I was still developing my own learning on Critical Race Theory and so my writing had become a set of notes as to what CRT was as opposed to a critical reflection of the theory.</p> <p>Example 3. In attending the tutorial, I was then able to reflect on my first draft and understand how I could refine my writing and bring critical arguments into the explanation as opposed to having a critique in a separate section.</p> <p>Example 4. Although I understood what the methodology was behind my research proposal I realised, following feedback from TMA02, that I had not had to write in-depth about either Critical Race Theory or Bourdieu before. I therefore set a</p>

	<p>Target: Further reading required on both Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu to develop my confidence in writing about these concepts in an informed way.</p>	<p>target for myself to undertake extensive reading in this area to tackle the conceptual framework. I discovered that there wasn't a set definition for Critical Race Theory but there was a set of central tenets that theorists agreed on. I therefore based my discussion around these tenets and that enabled me to explain and critique the theory in detail.</p> <p>Example 5. With regards to Bourdieu, I had struggled to understand the practical applications of Bourdieu. I found two articles that helped me to apply the concepts in a Higher Education setting (Ayling, 2019; Heffernan, 2022) and determine that the theory was still relevant in a modern-day setting. Discussions in the forum showed that other students had similar concerns and so sharing my findings within the discussion helped me to refine my arguments further.</p>
<p>Links to professional practice Targets, reflections or feedback relating to: designing and/or applying research methods; developing ideas from previous research and frameworks; reflecting and making adaptations during the research and writing process; addressing problems in research design; identifying implications for practice and professional debate; challenging your own assumptions; managing workload and personal motivation.</p>	<p>Discussion with my tutor following feedback from TMA02 where it was identified that the research questions were lacking any relation to the conceptual framework ("a bit bland!").</p>	<p>Example 6. This conversation really brought home to me the importance of taking the time to develop the research questions. I had started developing this research proposal in the first module of the Masters (EE814) and although I had a clear vision of the topic and problem, I hadn't articulated this clearly in the research questions. Including reference to specific concepts such as whiteness, habitus and capital, helped me to gained specificity in the questions and draw a distinct link between the conceptual framework and the research proposal.</p>
	<p>Feedback from draft submission "Have a think about dissemination. Could you give a seminar to which you invite university staff from all categories including academics? This might allow for input from academics in the field in the university?"</p>	<p>Example 7. Until this point I hadn't thought too much about writing about dissemination as I was thinking this would be more relevant if I had undertaken a small-scale investigation (as opposed to an extended research proposal) where I would have results to shr. In reality, I had been thinking about dissemination in relation to my learning and how I could share this more with colleagues in relation to developing practice across the university. The conversation helped me to make this more explicit in the research design chapter.</p>
	<p>Perfectionism and feedback from tutor to have a break!</p>	<p>Example 8. The process of studying the Masters as a whole has made me realise that I have perfectionist</p>

		<p>tendencies which can lead to me overworking aspects of my writing. Discussions with my tutor enabled me to realise that I was ahead of schedule and that rather than ploughing on and trying to get a final draft completed, as soon as possible, I could take a week off. This enabled me to get clarity of thought and identify the areas within my writing that would benefit from refinement.</p>
<p>Structure, communication, presentation Targets, reflections or feedback relating to using academic style and referencing; presenting, managing and sharing information in different modes; communicating concepts, findings and ideas for different audiences.</p>	<p>Feedback from draft submission “You don’t have to have a Chapter 4 if you don’t feel it’s useful. The chapter structure is offered as guidance, it’s not a requirement”.</p>	<p>Example 9. I went ahead with chapter 4 to make the research questions explicit, but this feedback gave me the confidence to switch the order of the conceptual framework and topic sections of the literature review. Prior to this there was some overlap in my draft chapters between content in the ‘topic’ section and the conceptual framework as I found that I was describing some of the theoretical underpinning in the topic section so that the reader could make sense of the terminology. Bringing the conceptual framework forward in the order of the dissertation resolved this issue.</p>
	<p>Feedback in draft chapters on grammar, for example, the use of semi-colons and nouns and verbs (practise/practise).</p>	<p>Example 10. I have always been aware that my use of grammar is not a string point of mine! My tutor’s feedback helped me to identify some obvious errors in my writing and rectify these – I will forevermore be careful of overusing or misusing semi-colons in my writing! The conversation with my tutor also helped me to identify techniques with regards to proof-reading. I had found that I was becoming blind to the content having re-read sections multiple times. Printing off the dissertation allowed me to read it with fresh eyes and spot some obvious errors or areas requiring further explanation that I had previously missed.</p>