

Training While Black: Exploring The Experiences of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists

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Artificial Intelligence Declaration

Artificial intelligence tools, including Microsoft Copilot (version GPT-4, Microsoft, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>) and Grammarly (Grammarly, Inc., <https://www.grammarly.com/>), were used as copy-editing and proofreading aids during the preparation of this thesis, supporting accessibility needs, language accuracy, sentence refinement, and formatting. All conceptualisation, analysis, interpretation, and writing presented in this thesis are my original work

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Abstract

There is a limited body of research that centres Black trainee educational psychologists' (TEPs) experiences within professional training, and a particular paucity of work that examines these experiences through a psychosocial lens. While existing studies in educational psychology (EP) have addressed diversity and inclusion, they have often attended to race at the level of policy, representation, or individual encounter, rather than as a cumulative, relational, and intrapsychic process. This thesis responds to this gap by exploring how Black TEPs make sense of their training experiences within institutional contexts shaped by racialised power.

This thesis reports on a qualitative psychosocial study examining the experiences of Black TEPs undertaking doctoral training programmes in England. The study employed principles from the Free Association Narrative Interview Method (FANIM), generating twelve in-depth interviews across two phases with six qualified Educational Psychologists, reflecting retrospectively on their training experiences. Analysis was conducted using Reflexive Thematic Analysis, informed by psychodynamic theory. As a Black TEP undertaking the research, I adopted a reflexive stance, acknowledging the co-constructed nature of the research encounter and the researcher's interpretive role in meaning-making.

Via the analysis, a series of themes were developed that illuminate how training was experienced and negotiated at intrapsychic, interpersonal, and systemic levels. These comprised Assimilated Histories, Model(ling), Self–Other Management, Other–Self Responsibilisation, Speaking the Problem, Progress(iveness), Lone(ly) Souls, Tough Gratification, and Seeking Solidarity.

The thesis contributes to educational psychology by extending what is thinkable about Black experiences of EP training. It offers a psychosocial interpretive lens for

engaging with what may lie beneath the surface across individual, relational, and systemic levels, shaping racialised experience. The findings carry implications for how Black TEPs navigate self-in-role, highlighting the ongoing and unresolved work of attending to these experiences within institutional contexts.

Table of Contents

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DECLARATION	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES	IX
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	X
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 THE RESEARCH	1
1.2 THE KEY CONCEPTS	2
1.2.1 <i>Race & Racialised Experience</i>	2
1.2.2 <i>Black/Blackness</i>	3
1.2.3 <i>Anti-Blackness & Racism</i>	3
1.2.4 <i>Whiteness</i>	4
1.2.5 <i>Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP)</i>	4
1.3 THE BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	4
1.4 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
1.5 THE RESEARCHER	7
1.5.1 <i>Practitioner-Researcher</i>	7
1.5.2 <i>Researcher Positionality</i>	8
1.6 THE RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES	8
1.7 THE THESIS STRUCTURE	9
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	10
2.1 METHODOLOGY	10
2.1.1 <i>Approach: Systematic Narrative Review</i>	10
2.1.2 <i>Researcher Positionality</i>	11
2.1.3 <i>Literature Review Question</i>	12
2.1.4 <i>Search Strategy</i>	12
2.1.5 <i>Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria</i>	14
2.1.6 <i>Selection Process</i>	16
2.1.7 <i>Critical Appraisal Approach</i>	18
2.2 OVERVIEW OF EVIDENCE BASE	18
2.2.1 <i>Characteristics of Included Studies</i>	18
2.2.2 <i>What the Evidence Base Reveals About the Field</i>	20
2.2.3 <i>Critical Appraisal Summary Table</i>	22
2.3 THEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE	26
2.3.1 <i>Navigating Racial Identity in Predominantly White Spaces</i>	26
2.3.2 <i>The Eurocentric Curriculum as a Site of Racial Harm</i>	28
2.3.3 <i>Isolation, Hypervisibility, and the Cost of Being the Only One</i>	30
2.3.4 <i>Structural Barriers and Systemic Gatekeeping: The Reproduction of Whiteness in Applied Psychology Training</i>	32
2.4 CRITICAL REFLECTION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE LITERATURE	35
2.4.1 <i>Strengths of the Existing Evidence Base</i>	35
2.4.2 <i>'Needs' of the Existing Evidence Base</i>	37
2.4.3 <i>Summary of Key Findings</i>	39

2.5 CONCLUSION	40
2.5.1 <i>Research and Practice Implications</i>	40
2.5.2 <i>Gap Statement</i>	40
2.5.3 <i>Research Question</i>	41
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	42
INTRODUCTION	42
3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM	42
3.1.1 <i>Ontology & Epistemology</i>	42
3.1.2 <i>Intersubjectivity, Defended Subjects, & Institutional Affect</i>	44
3.1.3 <i>Orientation and Design</i>	45
3.2 RESEARCH METHODS	46
3.2.1 <i>Participants</i>	46
3.2.2 <i>Recruitment</i>	47
3.3 DATA COLLECTION: FANIM	48
3.3.1 <i>Implementing FANIM</i>	49
3.3.2 <i>Recording, Transcription, and Reflexive Documentation</i>	51
3.4 REFLEXIVITY	51
3.4.1 <i>Researcher Positionality & Professionality</i>	53
3.4.2 <i>Process Notes</i>	54
3.4.3 <i>Research Reflexive Diary</i>	55
3.4.4 <i>Psychosocial Supervision and Reverie Group</i>	56
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS: RTA	56
3.5.1 <i>The Six Phases of RTA</i>	57
3.5.2 <i>Phase 1: Familiarisation</i>	58
3.5.3 <i>Phase 2: Coding</i>	59
3.5.4 <i>Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes</i>	59
3.5.5 <i>Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes</i>	60
3.5.6 <i>Phase 5: Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes</i>	60
3.5.7 <i>Phase 6: Writing Up</i>	61
3.5.8 <i>Psychodynamic Theoretical Lens</i>	62
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS & QUALITY ASSURANCE	62
3.6.1 <i>Non-maleficence, Beneficence and Power Dynamics</i>	63
3.6.2 <i>Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw</i>	64
3.6.3 <i>Confidentiality, Representational Ethics & Data Protection</i>	64
3.6.4 <i>Quality Assurance: Credibility, Transferability, & Rigour</i>	65
3.7 PEN PORTRAITS	66
3.7.1 <i>Ashé</i>	67
3.7.2 <i>Demi</i>	68
3.7.3 <i>Jourdan</i>	70
3.7.4 <i>Nene</i>	71
3.7.5 <i>Noelle</i>	72
3.7.6 <i>Sharai</i>	74
3.8 CONCLUSION	75
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS (PART ONE)	76
INTRODUCTION	76
4.1 ASSIMILATED HISTORIES	77
4.2 MODEL(LING)	81
4.3 SELF-OTHER MANAGEMENT	85
4.4 OTHER-SELF RESPONSIBILISATION	90
4.5 SPEAKING THE PROBLEM	94

4.6 CONCLUSION	99
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS (PART TWO)	101
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	101
5.1 PROGRESS(IVENESS)	101
5.2 LONE(LY) SOULS	107
5.3 TOUGH GRATIFICATION	112
5.4 SEEKING SOLIDARITY	116
5.5. CONCLUSION	121
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION	123
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	123
6.1 HOW THE FINDINGS ADDRESS THE RESEARCH QUESTION	123
6.2 CO-CONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF THE FINDINGS	125
6.2.1 <i>Arriving Already Racialised</i>	125
6.2.2 <i>The Relational Economy of Race</i>	128
6.2.3 <i>The Consequences of Critical Consciousness</i>	132
6.2.4 <i>Endurance, Agency, and the Limits of Resilience</i>	135
6.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD	139
6.4 LIMITATIONS	141
6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING, POLICY, AND PRACTICE	143
6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS	145
6.7 DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT	148
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	151
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	151
7.1 BEGINNING THE RESEARCH JOURNEY	151
7.1.1 <i>Self-in-‘Researcher Role’</i>	151
7.1.2 <i>Defendedness in the Researcher as Data</i>	153
7.2 BEING THE RESEARCH	154
7.2.1 <i>Participants and Ethical Tensions</i>	154
7.2.2 <i>Writing While Black: The Page as an Affective Space</i>	155
7.3 BECOMING THROUGH THE RESEARCH	156
7.3.1 <i>Feeling Mash-Up</i>	156
7.3.2 <i>Ending as Beginning</i>	158
REFERENCES	161
APPENDICES	183
APPENDIX 1: REFLEXIVE RESEARCH DIARY EXCERPT (LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS)	183
APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT - POSTER	184
APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT - WEBSITE ADVERTISEMENT	185
APPENDIX 4: INITIAL PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS: VISUAL FORMAT	187
APPENDIX 5: EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPT ORGANISATION IN EXCEL WORKBOOK	189
APPENDIX 6: TREC APPROVAL LETTER	190
APPENDIX 7: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET: SUPPORT RESOURCES & SERVICES	191
APPENDIX 8: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS: DETAILED PROSE FORMAT	192
APPENDIX 9: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	195
APPENDIX 10: PARTICIPANT SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE	197

List of Tables & Figures

Table 1. Literature Review Search Terms	14
Table 2. Criteria for the Literature Review Sources.....	15
Table 3. Critical Appraisal Literature Summary	22
Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram	17
Figure 2. Race Reflections Reflective Model	53
Figure 3. Process notes using Race Reflective Model (Demi).....	55
Figure 4. Example of iterative review of theme labels alongside relevant codes.....	60
Figure 5. Overview of Themes	77

List of Abbreviations

AEP	Association of Educational Psychology
BAME*	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BME*	Black and Minority Ethnic
BPS	British Psychological Society
CYP	Children and Young People
DClinPsy	Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
DCoP	Doctorate in Counselling Psychology
DECP	Division of Educational and Child Psychology
DECPsy	Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
DfE	Department for Education
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
FANIM	Free Association Narrative Interviewing Method
HCPC	Health and Care Proficiency Council
PEP	Principal Educational Psychologist
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SaLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SNR	Systematic Narrative Review
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

*The terms BAME and BME are used as they appear within the reviewed literature.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Research

This thesis explores the experiences of Black trainee educational psychologists (TEPs) navigating their doctoral training in England. It arises from a combination of personal experience, professional curiosity, and a growing reflexive awareness that a wealth of knowledge was being felt but often remained unspoken, both within my own training context and across the wider professional landscape.

As a Black woman completing my training in educational psychology, I became increasingly attuned to subtle and not-so-subtle dynamics that shaped how I moved through doctoral spaces. These included the emotional labour of navigating predominantly white learning environments, the pressure of managing how my presence was interpreted by others, and the quiet negotiations involved in protecting myself from racialised expectations. Over time, these experiences accumulated into what Dewey (1910) calls a “felt difficulty”, a tension that disrupted my assumptions and demanded deeper inquiry.

This thesis is, in part, a response to that tension. However, it is not autoethnographic. Rather than centring my own experiences, I use them as a lens through which to ask more nuanced questions about how Black TEPs make sense of their training. I am interested in what happens both above and below the surface, the moments that are spoken and those that are not; the discomforts, silences, hesitations, and visceral responses that are harder to articulate, if articulated at all.

My aim is to explore how Black trainees’ experiences are shaped within a professional field that is predominantly white, while being careful not to cast Blackness and whiteness as binary opposites. Instead, I focus on how anti-Blackness, subtle,

institutional, relational, and affective forms part of the psychosocial terrain through which Black trainees navigate their doctoral journeys.

Drawing on interviews with newly qualified educational psychologists reflecting retrospectively on their training, this study offers a practitioner–researcher, reflexive exploration of what it means to “train while Black”.

1.2 The Key Concepts

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify the terms used throughout this thesis and the stance from which I approach them.

1.2.1 Race & Racialised Experience

In England, race is recognised under Section 9 of the Equality Act 2010 as a protected characteristic, encompassing colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins. Racialisation describes the process by which groups are defined by race, in which racial meaning is imposed on identities to reproduce social hierarchies. The belief that humanity can be divided into distinct biological races existed alongside the commodification of people and the expansion of capitalism (Robinson, 1983).

In this thesis, race is understood as a social and historical construct, rooted in colonial and imperial ways of organising the world, rather than a biological descriptor (Kinouani, 2022). Racialised experiences are understood as encounters shaped by race across three dimensions: intrapsychic (internal feelings and unconscious processes), inter-psychic (relationships, interactions, and affective exchanges), and systemic (institutional norms, policies, and structural patterns). Together, these dimensions reflect the depth, emotionality, and nuance central to understanding what it means to navigate training through a racialised lens.

1.2.2 Black/Blackness

This study unapologetically centres the experiences of people racialised as Black. Whilst I acknowledge the significant heterogeneity within Black communities, UK policy, demographic reporting, and much of the existing literature commonly aggregate individuals of African, Caribbean, and Black British heritages (Mirza, 2018). Following Hall's (1992) framing of "new ethnicities", Gilroy's (2000) concept of diasporic identity, and Omi and Winant's (2015) theory of racial formation, Black is understood as a political and racialised position shaped by shared encounters with institutional structures, histories of exclusion, and processes of minoritisation. It is used here as a socially constructed and institutionally embedded category that reflects how racialisation operates within UK higher education and professional psychology training. I capitalise Black in recognition of shared histories traceable to Africa, however distant, and its articulation as a political identity (Kinouani, 2022).

Blackness, as used in this study, refers not to a fixed cultural or biological identity but to a racialised location, a position within social and institutional structures shaped by histories of colonialism, diaspora, and ongoing processes of exclusion (Hall, 1992; Gilroy, 2000; Kinouani, 2022). 'Black/Blackness' is therefore used reflexively and analytically to examine how racialised experiences are produced, represented, and negotiated within professional doctoral training.

1.2.3 Anti-Blackness & Racism

Anti-Blackness refers to the structural positioning of Black people as an Other within racial hierarchies, manifesting institutionally as erasure, misrecognition, excess scrutiny, and emotional disregard (Wilderson, 2020; Kinouani, 2022). It is the foundation upon which racism stands. Racism is understood here as a system in which race allocates resources, recognition, and legitimacy in ways that privilege proximity

to whiteness whilst subordinating Blackness, operating not solely through exceptional acts but through the ordinary functioning of institutions (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Macpherson, 1999). In this study, these dynamics are understood to be structurally embedded within educational psychology training in England.

1.2.4 Whiteness

Whiteness, as used here, does not refer to white individuals but to the dominant norms, values, and institutional arrangements that structure educational psychology as a profession in England (Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2009). It operates through Eurocentrism, positioning white, European ways of knowing and behaving as the ideal standard. In this study, whiteness is treated as an institutional atmosphere that impacts how Black trainees are positioned, perceived, and evaluated throughout training.

1.2.5 Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP)

A TEP is a trainee enrolled on the professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology, a three-year programme combining academic study with supervised placements across local authorities, schools, and community settings. Qualification requires registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

1.3 The Background & Context

Educational Psychologists (EPs) apply psychological theory and research to support the learning, wellbeing, and inclusion of children and young people (CYP) within complex educational systems, working collaboratively with schools, families, and other professionals. In England, the pathway into the profession has transitioned. Prior to 2006, training typically involved a one-year master's level qualification, and previously all entrants came directly from teaching backgrounds. However, as the scope and complexity of the role expanded, professional training transitioned to a three-year funded doctoral programme integrating academic study, supervised

professional practice, and doctoral research (Department of Health, 2016). This shift reflected recognition that EPs increasingly operate within multidisciplinary systems addressing special educational needs, mental health, and wider social inequalities affecting CYP. Contemporary training programmes are accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and approved by the HCPC, with graduates eligible to register as practitioner psychologists upon completion.

Despite the widening of entry routes beyond the teaching profession, the demographic composition of the EP workforce has remained predominantly White (Lyonette et al., 2019; HCPC, 2023). Training cohorts are small and highly competitive, with limited annual places available nationally. Within such contexts, patterns of racial representation intersect with professional socialisation processes, shaping how trainees encounter and experience training environments. These dynamics became particularly visible in the wake of the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. The renewed public reckoning with anti-Black racism prompted increased reflection within British institutions, including psychology and education. Health Education England called on doctoral psychology programmes to address racism and ethnic discrimination more directly (HEE, 2020), while the BPS later established its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Board as part of broader commitments to decolonising psychology (BPS, 2022). Alongside revisions to the HCPC Standards of Proficiency (2023a), which place renewed emphasis on EDI as core professional competencies, these developments signal growing institutional recognition of systemic inequities within the profession.

Workforce data reflect the persistence of these disparities. Between 2016 and 2020, approximately 85% of successful applicants to EP training courses in England racially identified as White, while Black applicants accounted for around 7% of intakes,

positioning many Black trainees as a numerical minority within training cohorts (Association of Educational Psychologists, 2023; 2023a; Office for National Statistics, 2021). These patterns indicate that Black trainees are likely to enter professional training environments that remain predominantly White, shaping the social and institutional contexts within which their professional identities are formed. While recent institutional commitments to EDI signal growing recognition of structural inequities, questions remain regarding how far such commitments have translated into meaningful change for racially minoritised trainees within professional training environments (Ahsan, 2022). In this context, I seek to explore how Black trainee educational psychologists experience and navigate doctoral training.

1.4 The Theoretical Framework

This research approaches training through a racialised lens, and in doing so, attends to dynamics that do not always appear openly. Eurocentric professional norms, Anti-Blackness, and wider structural inequalities operate as real features of the landscape Black TEPs navigate, whether or not they are consciously recognised. This position aligns with the view that social structures exert causal influence even when unobserved (Bhaskar, 1975). Yet these dynamics are not only external; they can be internalised, shaping feelings, identity, and professional self-experience in ways that may be (partially) unconscious.

To hold both the external and internal simultaneously, a framework was needed that could account for the reality of structures and the complexity of subjectivity. Psychosocial perspectives offer this synthesis, recognising that individuals are shaped by their social worlds while also actively negotiating them through affect and defendedness (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This view resists splitting the psychological from the social and acknowledges that institutional cultures, like

individuals, have relational undercurrents that sit beneath what is spoken and develop defended patterns and emotional climates of their own (Frosh, 2003).

From this perspective, experience alone cannot be taken at face value. Silences, contradictions, and hesitations carry analytic weight alongside explicit narratives, and institutions are read not only through policy but through affective and relational dynamics. Knowledge in this study is therefore understood as interpretive and partial: constructed through the encounter between participant, researcher, and the wider training context. These commitments underpin how this study was designed, how data were generated and interpreted across intrapsychic, relational, and structural levels. A fuller account is provided in Chapter 3.

1.5 The Researcher

1.5.1 Practitioner-Researcher

As a practitioner–researcher in applied psychology, I prioritise proximity to professional experience, recognising that knowledge is generated within practice contexts and shaped by relational, emotional, and institutional conditions (Cooper, 2009; Archard et al., 2025). Conducting this research alongside the demands of doctoral training and professional practice inevitably shaped the scope and pace of the study, reflecting the practical constraints often inherent in practitioner inquiry. Researching within my own profession also raises ethical considerations, particularly where I share aspects of identity and professional background with participants. Rather than treating insider positioning as a bias to be minimised, it is approached here as a resource for generating practice-based knowledge, while remaining attentive to reflexivity and methodological rigour. To support this transparency, I adopt an active researcher voice throughout the thesis and use first-person pronouns to clarify the

researcher's role and analytic positioning (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These considerations are explored further in the following section on researcher positionality.

1.5.2 Researcher Positionality

I identify as a Black woman and a Black TEP. My racial identity has been both a source of pride and, at times, a site of contestation when viewed through the lenses of wider institutions. From an early age, I navigated different narratives about race, history, and belonging. Attending a Pan-African Saturday school alongside formal schooling shaped by England's Anglocentric national curriculum exposed me to competing interpretations of history and identity, which I found confusing and oriented me to question whose knowledge is legitimised and how power operates within educational narratives.

This positioning inevitably informs the research. As a Black TEP researching the experiences of Black TEPs, I share aspects of identity and professional background with participants. This proximity offers opportunities for deeper recognition and understanding, and raises the possibility of over-identification or interpretive caution when engaging with participants' accounts. To address this, reflexivity is treated as an ongoing methodological practice throughout the research process, enabling transparency about how my assumptions, experiences, and responses shape the study. Initially, my motivation for undertaking this research is a live tension encountered within my own training that prompted sustained curiosity about how Black trainees experience and navigate their doctoral educational psychology training.

1.6 The Research Aims & Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore how Black trainee educational psychologists experience and navigate professional doctoral training in England. Using a racialised psychosocial lens, the study examines how structural, relational,

and affective dynamics shape Black trainees' journeys through predominantly white training environments. Rather than treating experience as transparent, the research attends to both what is spoken and what remains unspoken, the silences, hesitations, and emotional responses that may interpret how anti-Blackness operates within training spaces. Through reflective TEP accounts, the study seeks to understand how these dynamics influence identity, belonging, and professional formation, and to generate practice-near insights that can inform more equitable and emotionally attuned training environments.

1.7 The Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One introduced the research study. Chapter Two reviews literature on Black trainees' experiences within applied psychology doctoral training. Chapter Three outlines the methodology, detailing the critical realist psychosocial framework, data collection and analysis used for the study. Chapters Four and Five present the study's findings organised thematically through the analysis of participants' accounts. Chapter Six discusses these findings in relation to existing theory and literature, their implications for policy, professional practice, and future research. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with final reflections on my experience of conducting this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reports a literature review of research that is directly relevant to the focus of the present study (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Siddaway et al., 2019). An initial scoping search specific to Black TEP experiences returned one directly relevant study (Wright, 2020), indicating a need to broaden the scope. Consequently, I developed a guiding review question to synthesise literature on Black and racially minoritised trainee experiences across UK applied psychology doctoral programmes. In this chapter, I outline the methodological approach and search strategy adopted, critically appraises the included studies, synthesises findings thematically, and concludes with a psychosocial interpretation of the evidence base and its implications for the present study.

2.1 Methodology

2.1.1 Approach: Systematic Narrative Review

I adopted a narrative review, informed by systematic principles, to identify, evaluate, and synthesise literature relating to the experiences of Black and racially minoritised trainees within UK applied psychology doctoral training. This approach combines the rigour of systematic review methodology with the interpretive flexibility of narrative synthesis, offering a framework suited to a body of literature that is methodologically diverse, predominantly qualitative, and situated within complex sociocultural contexts (e.g., Oloko, 2025).

The systematic elements involved a structured and replicable search strategy, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a transparent screening and selection process, principles associated with the credibility and impartiality of systematic reviews (Macdonald, 2003; Mallett et al., 2012; Rother, 2007). Critical appraisal of

methodological quality was undertaken to enable robust assessment of the evidence base's strengths and limitations.

The narrative component reflected the qualitative and psychosocial orientation of this study. Given that much of the literature comprises reflective scholarship interview-based studies, or exploratory qualitative research, narrative synthesis allowed for nuanced engagement with the relational, emotional, and structural dimensions embedded within the texts. Thematic synthesis was employed to construct themes capturing patterned meanings across the literature, supporting examination of how racialised experiences were articulated, negotiated, or rendered partial within academic and professional discourse, including where research did not explicitly name racialisation or may inadvertently reproduce racial hierarchies (Rodgers et al., 2009; Sukhera, 2022).

This approach integrates systematic procedures with interpretive, theoretically informed narrative synthesis (Mallett et al., 2012; Siddaway et al., 2019; Sukhera, 2022).

2.1.2 Researcher Positionality

As outlined in Chapter 1, my identity as a Black trainee educational psychologist positions me as both researcher and subject-adjacent within the field under review. This positionality informs how the literature is engaged with and synthesised, particularly in attending to the relational, affective, and institutional dynamics of training that may be implicit or marginal within existing accounts. Insider familiarity enables sensitivity to implicit meanings, tensions, and embodied knowledge, while also necessitating ongoing reflexivity regarding resonance, identification, and interpretive emphasis (Probst, 2015; see Appendix 1). Throughout this review, I have critically examined how prior experiences and assumptions may shape decisions about

inclusion, analytic weighting, and theoretical framing. A systematic narrative review (SNR) is congruent with this stance, recognising researcher subjectivity as integral to qualitative knowledge construction rather than a limitation to be minimised (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This reflexive orientation underpins the synthesis and psychosocial interpretation developed across the chapter.

2.1.3 Literature Review Question

As outlined in Chapter 1, Black trainee experiences within UK applied psychology doctoral programmes are shaped by relational, institutional, and racialised processes that accumulate across the training journey. Understanding how these processes appear, or do not appear, within published research is important for contextualising the present study. Whilst narrative reviews accommodate broader review questions than fully systematic designs (Cook et al., 1997), the SNR approach utilises a guiding question to structure and focus interpretive analysis. This review therefore seeks to address the following:

What does the existing literature reveal about the experiences of Black trainees on professional applied psychology doctoral programmes in the UK?

This question emerged from initial scoping searches and shaped the search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytic approach that follow.

2.1.4 Search Strategy

An initial scoping review was conducted between July and September 2024 using Google Scholar to map the breadth of literature relevant to the review question. The search string “experiences of Black trainee educational psychologists UK” returned approximately 28,600 results; an advanced search using the exact phrase “Black trainee” reduced this to 287. Review of titles and abstracts indicated that one

study directly addressed Black trainee educational psychologist experiences (Wright, 2020). The scoping stage suggested that literature examining the experiences of racially minoritised trainees was more substantively developed within clinical and counselling psychology training contexts. On this basis, search parameters were widened to include applied psychology doctoral training and racially minoritised groups more broadly as a scoping strategy, without assuming equivalence across training routes or racialised experiences, while subsequent stages prioritised disciplines most directly engaging with the review question.

Structured database searches were subsequently conducted using PsycINFO (n = 91), SCOPUS (n = 71), and a refined Google Scholar search (n = 287), selected for their relevance to psychological scholarship, yielding approximately 449 records in total. Searches combined four concept blocks using Boolean operators (AND, OR), with truncation (*) applied throughout (see Table 1). Database-specific search strings were adapted in accordance with individual platform thesauri and field conventions. A supplementary ERIC search conducted in early 2026 returned one paper (Akilapa, 2024); although this did not meet the inclusion criteria, it is referenced where contextually relevant.

Date parameters were initially set at 2010–2024 and subsequently expanded to 2006–2026 to capture literature emerging following the introduction of doctoral-level Educational Psychology training in the UK (BPS, 2006), allowing time for early cohorts to produce research outputs, while also including studies situated within pre-Equality Act (2010) socio-legal contexts. Snowballing and citation tracking of key authors yielded one additional paper (Paulraj, 2016), retrieved via Google Scholar and identified through citation in secondary sources. Remaining doctoral theses were

identified through aforementioned database searches. Searches were conducted iteratively between July 2024 and March 2026.

Table 1. Literature Review Search Terms

Concept	Search Terms (combined with OR)
Population	"Black" OR "racially minoritised" OR "global majority" OR "people of colour" OR "ethnic minorit*" OR "BME" OR "BAME"
Training Context	"trainee*" OR "doctoral" OR "training program*" OR "professional doctorate" OR "postgraduate"
Professional Field	"educational psycholog*" OR "clinical psycholog*" OR "counselling psycholog*" OR "applied psycholog*"
Experience Focus	"experience*" OR "identit*" OR "navigat*" OR "belonging" OR "racis*" OR "discriminat*" OR "marginalis*"

2.1.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed iteratively, informed by the research question and by the practical realities of a limited evidence base. Initial criteria were refined following the scoping stage, which indicated that restricting the review to Educational Psychology alone would yield insufficient literature to support a systematic narrative synthesis. The criteria were therefore broadened at the search stage to encompass applied psychology doctoral training contexts more generally, before being subsequently delimited to disciplines where literature most directly addressed racially minoritised trainee experiences.

Although the inclusion criteria initially encompassed professional qualifying applied psychology doctoral programmes, studies relating to forensic, health, and occupational psychology training routes were excluded at the selection stage. This decision reflected findings from the scoping review, which indicated that relevant literature engaging substantively with race, training experiences, and professional

formation was concentrated within Educational, Clinical, and Counselling Psychology contexts. These disciplines share a broadly comparable three-year, full-time, cohort-based doctoral training model, supporting more meaningful analytic comparison. Other applied psychology routes, which differ in structure, mode of study, and professional socialisation, yielded limited material that directly addressed the review's central research question and were therefore excluded to maintain analytic coherence and depth within the constraints of the review.

Table 2 presents the final inclusion and exclusion criteria alongside the rationale for each decision. Given the sparse empirical literature in this area, unpublished doctoral theses were included alongside peer-reviewed journal articles, as theses frequently offer greater methodological transparency and analytic depth. Two studies identified during searching (Akilapa, 2024; King-Yin Chan, 2025) were assessed against these criteria and excluded: Akilapa (2024) was situated within an Education Doctorate rather than an applied psychology programme, and King-Yin Chan (2025) did not employ a racially minoritised-specific trainee sample. Akilapa (2024) is referenced in section 2.4.

Table 2. *Criteria for the Literature Review Sources*

Inclusion Criteria	Rationale	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Black and/or racially minoritised trainee experiences (e.g., BAME, BME, global majority)	Maintains racial specificity rather than generic diversity discourse	General diversity research without specific focus on race	Does not address the racialised experiences central to this review
Professional qualifying applied psychology doctoral programmes (Educational, Clinical, Counselling Psychology)	Comparable training structures: scientist-practitioner model, placements, professional qualification	Non-qualifying programmes (e.g., MPhil, PhD, taught masters, Education Doctorate)	Different structural context; not directly comparable to applied psychology doctoral training
		Other applied psychology doctoral training	Differing training structures, modes of study, and professional

		routes (e.g. Forensic, Health, Occupational Psychology)	socialisation; not directly comparable
UK-based studies	Relevance to UK training context, policy landscape, and specific racial dynamics	Non-UK / international contexts	Training structures, demographics, and racial histories differ substantially
Published or submitted 2006–2026	Captures contemporary training contexts shaped by post-Equality Act 2010 policy and professional regulation	Pre-2006 publications	Training context and professional regulation differ prior to this period
Peer-reviewed articles, unpublished doctoral theses, or substantive reflexive/practitioner accounts in peer-reviewed journals	Ensures quality whilst accessing rich detail often unavailable in published articles alone; accommodates the reflexive tradition in this literature	Conference abstracts, unpublished reports without peer review, opinion pieces without empirical or theoretical grounding	Insufficient methodological transparency or scholarly grounding
English language	Researcher language capacity and UK training context	Non-English language publications	Outside researcher language capacity
Trainee or recently qualified psychologists (within 2 years of qualification)	Maintains focus on training experience rather than qualified practice	Studies focused solely on qualified practitioners with no trainee data	Qualified practice experience is a distinct context from doctoral training

2.1.6 Selection Process

Records identified through database searching ($n \approx 449$) were combined with two additional records identified through snowballing and targeted grey literature searching. Following removal of approximately 216 duplicates, 233 unique records were screened at the title and abstract level. At this stage, 185 records were excluded for not meeting the initial inclusion criteria, leaving 48 records for full-text assessment.

Full-text review resulted in the exclusion of 36 records for the following reasons: non-UK context ($n=6$); focus on qualified practitioners or training routes outside applied psychology doctoral programmes ($n = 21$); samples not centred on Black or racially

minoritised trainee experiences (n = 5); and other reasons where inclusion criteria were not met (n = 2), with a further two studies (Akilapa, 2024; King-Yin Chan, 2025) excluded on programme and sample grounds, as outlined above. Twelve studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final narrative synthesis. The study selection process is summarised below in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Figure 1).

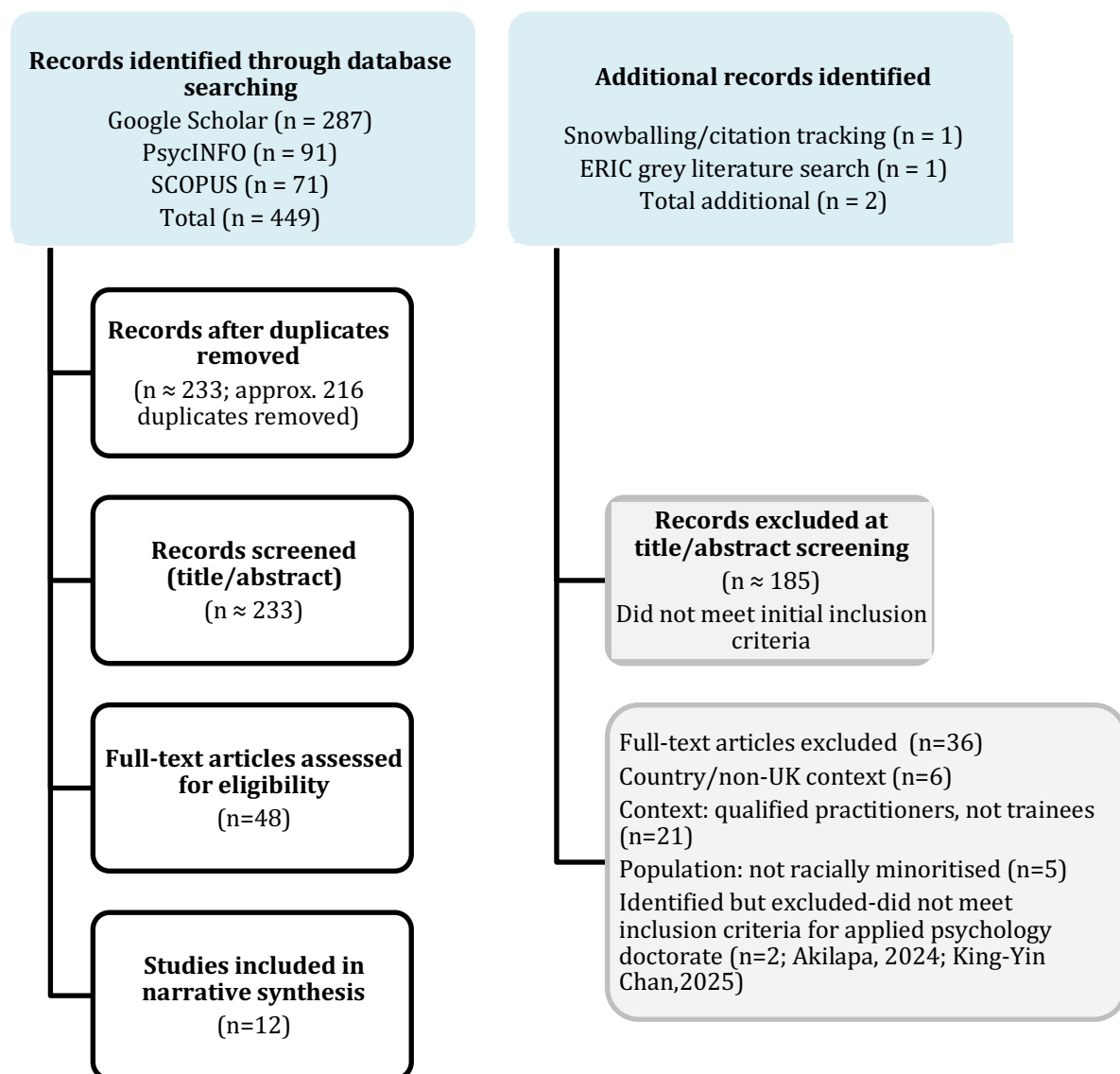


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

2.1.7 Critical Appraisal Approach

Given the predominantly qualitative and reflexive nature of the included literature, Walsh and Downe's (2005) quality appraisal framework was selected as the primary critical appraisal tool. This framework evaluates qualitative research on its own epistemological terms across seven domains: clarity of scope and purpose; appropriateness of design; transparency of sampling strategy; rigour of data collection; evidence of researcher reflexivity; ethical dimensions; and credibility and transferability of analysis and findings. These criteria align with the methodological diversity of the literature, including both formal qualitative studies and reflexive or autoethnographic accounts.

Where papers employed recognised qualitative methodologies, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) Qualitative Checklist was additionally drawn upon as a secondary lens, offering further scrutiny of methodological transparency and analytical rigour.

For reflexive and autoethnographic contributions, adapted criteria were applied assessing: coherence of purpose and argument; depth and transparency of reflexivity; theoretical grounding; and the contribution of insider knowledge to the field. This distinction is made explicit in the appraisal table (Table 3) and is acknowledged as a limitation in terms of comparability across paper types.

2.2 Overview of Evidence Base

2.2.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

Twelve articles, including journals and doctoral theses, met the inclusion criteria for this SNR (see Table 3). All were UK-based, reflecting the geographically specific focus of the research question. The literature spans two decades, from Adetimole,

Afuape & Vara's (2005) foundational reflexive account to Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena's (2025) empirical study. Seven of the twelve papers were published from 2019 onwards, reflecting a discernible increase in scholarly attention to racialised experiences in applied psychology training, a shift contextualised within several included studies by the murder of George Floyd and the renewed momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement (Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2025; Wright, 2020).

The evidence base is methodologically diverse. Nine papers employed formal qualitative methodologies: four used IPA (Rajan & Shaw, 2008; Shah et al., 2012; Daloye, 2022; Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2025); two used Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Falcon, 2022; Dunira, 2024); one used Thematic Analysis (TA) (Paulraj, 2016); one used Constructivist Grounded Theory (Peart, 2023); and one used mixed methods (Meah, 2022). The remaining three papers were reflexive accounts or autoethnographic in nature (Adetimole et al., 2005; Prajapati et al., 2019; Wright, 2020). Sample sizes ranged from $n = 1$ (Wright, 2020) to $n = 50$ (Meah, 2022, Phase 1 questionnaire). Variation in how participant populations are defined is notable: five studies used Black-specific samples (Adetimole et al., 2005; Paulraj, 2016; Falcon, 2022; Dunira, 2024; Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2025), whilst others recruited under Black & Minority Ethnicities (BME) (Shah et al., 2012; Daloye, 2022), Black, Asian & Minority Ethnicities (BAME) (Prajapati et al., 2019), or broader ethnic minority categories (Meah, 2022). This distinction carries methodological and political significance and is returned to in the critical commentary.

The evidence base is dominated by clinical psychology training, with eight of the twelve papers focusing on experiences with training in this field (Adetimole et al., 2005; Rajan & Shaw, 2008; Shah et al., 2012; Paulraj, 2016; Prajapati et al., 2019; Falcon, 2022; Dunira, 2024; Peart, 2023). Two address counselling psychology

(Daloye, 2022; Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2025), and two focus specifically on educational psychology (Wright, 2020; Meah, 2022), a meaningful increase from the single EP study identified in the original scoping, though still a marked underrepresentation relative to the profession's distinct training context and the rationale for the present study.

2.2.2 What the Evidence Base Reveals About the Field

The paucity of research in this area is not incidental, it is itself informative. The near-absence of empirical literature addressing the experiences of Black and racially minoritised trainee psychologists, alongside the limited EP-specific evidence, is a consistent feature of the studies reviewed. Ongoing efforts to widen diversity access to the profession have been used to deflect rather than address criticisms of psychology as a predominantly White, Eurocentric, and discriminatory institution (Daloye, 2022; Wood & Patel, 2019). The scarcity of research in this area can therefore be understood not merely as an oversight, but as a manifestation of the very structural and institutional racism the included studies describe.

The dominance of clinical psychology within the studies reviewed and the underrepresentation of educational psychology raise questions about power dynamics in knowledge production. Clinical psychology has a more established history of engaging critically with race within UK training (Patel et al., 2000), and its professional forums, particularly the *Clinical Psychology Forum*, have provided a relatively accessible platform for practitioner-led reflexive accounts. Educational psychology, by contrast, appears to have cultivated fewer such spaces. Wright (2020) explicitly notes that whilst estrangement conversations are well established in clinical psychology, they are discussed considerably less within educational psychology, despite the discipline's deep entanglement with histories of scientific racism and eugenics. Meah

(2022) represents a recent step towards addressing this gap, though her sample encompasses broader ethnic minority categories rather than centering Black trainee experiences specifically. This relative silence in the EP literature may reflect the profession's investment in a self-image as child-centred, systemic, and progressive, which can obscure its own racialised structures and assumptions.

Theoretically, the evidence base is also limited. While several included papers draw on racial identity development models, critical race theory, or postcolonial theory, many of which engage psychoanalytic and relational ideas, these perspectives do not consistently mobilise a psychosocial framework that brings intrapsychic, relational, and institutional dimensions into sustained dialogue. Consequently, the psychosocial orientation, concerned with the interplay between social structures and the inner world of the trainee, remains under-represented within this literature. This is notable given the relevance of psychosocial perspectives for understanding how racialised experiences are internalised, defended against, and negotiated within training relationships. Across the evidence base, clinical and counselling psychology research is relied upon to illuminate trainee experiences in the absence of EP-specific research, foregrounding ongoing questions of transferability across professional contexts with differing structures and training cultures.

2.2.3 Critical Appraisal Summary Table

Table 3. Critical Appraisal Literature Summary

Author(s) & Year	Study Type	Scope & Purpose	Sampling & Design	Data Collection & Reflexivity	Ethics	Analysis & Credibility	Overall Quality
Adetimole, Afuape & Vara (2005)	Reflexive account	Clear aim to document insidious racism in DClinPsy training; reflexive rather than empirical scope; England, UK	No formal sampling; n=3 Black female authors reflecting on own training; self-selected insider account	Reflective writing; no formal data collection; high personal reflexivity; no participant data	No formal ethics section; reflexive transparency present	No formal analysis method; thematic structure evident; cyclical identity model generated; pioneering contribution	Moderate. Lower on hierarchy of evidence; high epistemological value as foundational insider account. Walsh & Downe (adapted)
Rajan & Shaw (2008)	Empirical qualitative	Clear aims; explores professional and personal impact of training for BME trainees; DClinPsy; England, UK	Purposive national recruitment; n=8 all female; self-selecting sample; BME not Black-specific	Semi-structured interviews; IPA (Smith, 2003); researcher positionality partially addressed	Ethics approval implied; not formally reported in article	IPA applied; three superordinate themes; credible findings; limited reflexivity section	Moderate-High. Methodologically sound; limited by all-female sample and BME breadth. Walsh & Downe + CASP
Shah, Wood, Nolte & Goodbody (2012)	Empirical qualitative	Clearly stated aim; builds on Adetimole et al. (2005) and Rajan & Shaw (2008); DClinPsy; England, UK	Purposive; n=9 BME trainees; diverse ethnic composition; all female bar two; single training site limitation	Semi-structured interviews; IPA (Smith et al., 2009); some reflexivity; critical psychology lens stated	Ethics approval reported; informed consent obtained	IPA applied systematically; five superordinate themes; credible analysis; limited reflexivity section	Moderate-High. Methodologically grounded; BME not Black-specific; limited reflexivity. Walsh & Downe + CASP

Paulraj (2016)	Empirical qualitative (doctoral thesis)	Explores Black trainees' make sense of identity within DClinPsy training; Black-specific focus; England, UK	Purposive; n=12 self-identified Black DClinPsy trainees; England-based training programmes; geographic convenience sampling	Semi-structured interviews; Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); critical realist ontology; social constructionist epistemology; reflexivity explicitly addressed	Doctoral ethics process confirmed; reflexivity and insider positionality acknowledged	TA applied using six-phase Braun & Clarke framework; findings centre Blackness as most salient identity dimension; cyclical identity negotiation process identified	High. Black-specific sample; epistemological alignment with present study's critical realist framework; robust TA. Walsh & Downe + CASP
Prajapati, Kadir & King (2019)	Reflexive account	Reflects on BAME trainee experiences of racism in DClinPsy; recommendations for providers; England, UK	n=3 BAME female trainees from different courses; no formal sampling strategy; practitioner reflection	Practitioner reflective writing; no formal data collection; reflexivity present through authored standpoint	No formal ethics section; reflexive transparency present	No formal analysis; thematic structure evident; valuable as contemporaneous practitioner account	Moderate. Valuable practitioner reflexivity; limited by absence of formal method and BAME sample. Walsh & Downe (adapted)
Wright (2020)	Autoethnographic	Explores estrangement as a Black TEP; traces hauntings of scientific racism in EP; calls for 'conscientization'; England, UK	n=1 (author); autoethnographic; single LA placement in north-west England	Reflective diary; poetic transcriptions; postcolonial theory; CRT; psychopolitics framework; explicit reflexivity	Ethics not formally reported; reflexive and methodological transparency high	Theoretically rich; postcolonial and CRT analysis; conscientization as analytic framework; highly credible within paradigm	High (adapted criteria). Only EP-specific paper; theoretical depth exceptional; sole account limits scope. Walsh & Downe (adapted)
Daloye (2022)	Empirical qualitative	Explores BME trainee CoP experiences; builds on Shah et al. (2012) and Rajan & Shaw (2008); England, UK	Purposive; n=5 BME trainees; 4 institutions; self-selected; BME not Black-specific	Semi-structured interviews; IPA; critical realist ontology and phenomenological epistemology; insider/outsider researcher position stated	Ethics approval stated; informed consent obtained	IPA applied; five superordinate themes; limited by word count restrictions; partial findings reported	Moderate-High. Methodologically sound; limited by BME breadth and partial findings. Walsh & Downe + CASP

Falcon (2022)	Empirical qualitative (doctoral thesis)	Explores Black men's experiences of training and practising as CPs (BMTCP); Black male-specific focus; intersectionality lens; England, UK	Purposive; n=13 (6 BMTCPs, 7 BMCPs); national recruitment via social media and professional networks; all male	Semi-structured interviews; RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021); critical realist ontology and epistemology; reflective diary; explicit reflexivity; Black male insider position	Ethics approval confirmed (University of Exeter); informed consent obtained	RTA applied rigorously; three themes; intersectionality foregrounded; strong credibility measures; CASP used for lit review	High. Black male-specific sample; robust RTA; strong reflexivity; only study centring Black male experience. Walsh & Downe + CASP
Meah (2022)	Empirical mixed methods (doctoral thesis)	Explores ethnic minority TEP and EP training and practice experiences in England; EP-specific focus; UK	Phase 1: online questionnaire (n=50 applicants, TEPs and EPs); Phase 2: semi-structured interviews (n=5 EPs & TEPs); pragmatist paradigm	Questionnaire + thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); Pragmatism; insider researcher position stated; some reflexivity	Ethics approval confirmed; informed consent obtained; anonymity protected	Thematic analysis applied to Phase 2; questionnaire data descriptively analysed; findings well-structured	Moderate-High. Only mixed methods EP study; broader ethnic minority rather than Black-specific sample. Walsh & Downe + CASP
Dunira (2024)	Empirical qualitative (doctoral thesis)	Explores Black trainees' experiences of reflective practice groups during DClinPsy training; England, UK	Purposive; n=13 Black trainee CPs; 7 training institutions; first 12 to 24 months post-training	Semi-structured interviews; RTA; critical realist ontology; social constructionist epistemology; Black feminist epistemology; explicit reflexivity	Ethics approval confirmed; informed consent obtained	RTA applied; 4 themes with 10 subthemes; strong credibility measures; reflexive journaling and bracketing	High. Black-specific sample; robust RTA; multiple epistemological frameworks; strong reflexivity. Walsh & Downe + CASP

Pearl (2023)	Empirical qualitative (doctoral thesis)	Explores adaptive challenges for Black DClinPsy trainees and course trainers involved in EDI; dual perspective; England, UK	Purposive; n=20 (10 Black trainees, 10 course trainers); national recruitment; constructivist GT sampling	Semi-structured interviews; Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014); social constructionist epistemology; explicit reflexivity; bracketing interviews	Ethics approval confirmed; informed consent obtained	Constructivist GT applied rigorously; one joint theoretical model; five core categories; strong credibility checks	High. Only study capturing both trainee and trainer perspectives; robust GT methodology; Black-specific trainee sample. Walsh & Downe + CASP
Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena (2025)	Empirical qualitative	Explores Black trainee CoP experiences on UK doctoral programme; Black-specific focus; England	Purposive; n=8 self-identified Black/Black British African or Caribbean trainees; 6 UK universities	Semi-structured interviews; IPA; critical realist ontology; phenomenological epistemology; Yardley (2000) quality criteria; explicit reflexivity	Ethics approval confirmed; open access publication	IPA applied; four superordinate themes; Yardley criteria applied explicitly; strong credibility	High. Black-specific sample; most recent; robust IPA; strongest methodological transparency in corpus. Walsh & Downe + CASP

2.3 Thematic Synthesis of Literature

The following section presents a thematic synthesis of the twelve included papers, identifying four themes through iterative reading: (1) Navigating Racial Identity in Predominantly White Spaces; (2) The Eurocentric Curriculum as a Site of Racial Harm; (3) Isolation, Hypervisibility, and the Cost of Being the Only One; and (4) Structural Barriers and Systemic Gatekeeping: The Reproduction of Whiteness in Applied Psychology Training. Each theme is introduced, synthesised across studies, and subjected to critical commentary. These themes are not discrete; they are mutually linked and frequently co-occur within the accounts of individual participants and authors.

2.3.1 Navigating Racial Identity in Predominantly White Spaces

Across the literature, one of the most consistently reported experiences is the profound challenge of maintaining a coherent, affirmed sense of self within training contexts that are structurally and culturally organised around Whiteness. This theme captures the ways in which Black and racially minoritised trainees describe an ongoing, effortful, and often destabilising process of identity negotiation, not as a developmental milestone, but as a condition of survival within the profession.

Synthesis of Findings

Adetimole et al., (2005) provide one of the earliest accounts describing a cyclical model of identity development in which trainees move through phases of conformity, suppressing Black identity to assimilate, followed by disagreement, and finally re-establishment of a more integrated Black professional identity. Crucially, this is not a linear progression but a cycle traversed repeatedly across different training contexts. Paulraj (2016) corroborates this, finding that Blackness functioned as the most salient dimension of identity for clinical psychology trainees, with its negotiation

experienced as ongoing and shaped by racism, subjugation, and social inequalities as live, present-tense forces.

Shah et al. (2012) extend this through the concept of the 'cultural chameleon', the development of a versatile capacity to code-switch and calibrate self-presentation across contexts. Whilst adaptive, participants described this as exhausting and asymmetrical: a form of self-monitoring not required of White trainees. Bicultural capabilities were instrumentalised by training contexts rather than genuinely valued. Prajapati et al., (2019) add the dilemmas of integration that arise when racial and professional identities feel irreconcilable, sharpened by training environments that adopted a colour-blind approach, discouraging acknowledgement of race under the guise of professional neutrality, and thereby silencing the trainee's ability to name their own experience.

Falcon (2022) contributes a distinctive dimension by centering Black male experience. The findings described the burden of the 'threatening' stereotype, a racialised projection onto Black men that required active management and pre-emptive self-regulation within training environments. This intersectional experience of race and gender created a specific form of identity labour not captured in studies with predominantly female samples. Dunira (2024) found that reflective practice groups, ostensibly developmental and safe spaces, frequently became sites of identity threat rather than support, with Black trainees describing experiences of being silenced or under-protected within these spaces.

Wright (2020), drawing on Fanon's concept of the Black body inhabiting a White soul, describes estrangement from a professional identity not built for or around her. For Wright, identity negotiation was inseparable from a broader reckoning with what educational psychology has historically been and whose interests it has served.

Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) similarly found that negotiating Black identity was a central and ongoing preoccupation of training, experienced simultaneously as a source of pride and professional vulnerability.

Critical Commentary

The consistency of this theme across eight of the twelve studies, spanning two decades, three professional training contexts, and diverse methodologies, lends it considerable credibility. However, the literature is less attentive to variability within identity negotiation, the conditions under which it is more or less acute, and the factors that mediate it. The predominantly female composition of most study samples, addressed by Falcon (2022) as a significant gap, means that gendered dimensions of racialised identity negotiation have been underexplored. The use of BME or BAME categories in several studies also risks obscuring distinctions between the experiences of Black trainees and those of other racially minoritised groups, whose identity negotiations, whilst overlapping, are not identical.

2.3.2 The Eurocentric Curriculum as a Site of Racial Harm

I identified a second theme that concerns trainees' experiences of the applied psychology curriculum as a racially exclusive space, one that not only fails to reflect or validate the knowledge, histories, and experiences of Black trainees, but is experienced as harmful through that exclusion. In this analysis, the curriculum is understood not as a neutral repository of professional knowledge, but as a racialised text that reflects and reproduces particular epistemic priorities.

Synthesis of Findings

Prajapati et al. (2019) are among the most explicit in naming the Eurocentrism of clinical psychology training, describing a curriculum heavily shaped by psychological theories developed primarily from Western, Educated, Industrialised,

Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) research populations. Although these theories are presented as universal, they are rooted in culturally and racially specific contexts. They describe double standards in how cultural practices are evaluated: White, Western therapeutic frameworks treated as normative and evidence-based, whilst non-Western traditions are positioned as requiring justification. Rajan and Shaw (2008) similarly found that ethnocentric theories directly impacted the training experience, with participants describing feelings of exclusion in response to teaching material that rendered their backgrounds and families invisible or anomalous.

Sobogun and Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) and Daloye (2022) both identify Eurocentric curriculum content as a distinct sub-theme, with participants describing the absence of Black and African perspectives as a form of erasure. Several participants described the additional burden of feeling required to fill this gap themselves, bringing Black perspectives into seminars from their own personal and cultural resources, without institutional recognition. Meah (2022) extends this into the EP context, with participants reporting lack of diversity in curriculum content and teaching staff as a barrier to belonging and professional development, and describing Eurocentric bias not only in course content but in placement settings and assessment criteria.

Wright (2020) situates curricular Eurocentrism within a deeper historical context, tracing what she calls the 'hauntings' of scientific racism and eugenics within educational psychology. She argues that the discipline was built in part upon pseudoscientific theories of racial hierarchy that, whilst no longer explicitly endorsed, continue to shape its assumptions and institutional culture. For Wright, the Eurocentric curriculum is not the result of neglect; it is the contemporary expression of a historically racist epistemological foundation. Adetimole et al. (2005) echo this, describing the

invisibility of Black cultural knowledge within training as a systemic assumption of inferiority embedded in what is taught and what is omitted.

Critical Commentary

Seven of the twelve papers contribute findings relevant to this theme, offering a consistent evidence base. However, the majority of studies rely on trainee self-report data (e.g. interviews, focus groups, and written reflections), capturing experiences of curricular exclusion without directly analysing curricular materials themselves. A systematic content analysis of applied psychology doctoral curricula, analysed alongside qualitative trainee accounts, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how curricular content is experienced and interpreted in training contexts. Sobogun and Nkansa-Dwamena (2025), writing most recently, note that the Black Lives Matter movement has prompted some curriculum reviews, although participants expressed scepticism regarding their depth and sustainability. A further limitation is that most studies describe Eurocentrism without fully theorising the mechanisms through which curricular exclusion becomes psychologically harmful, a gap the present study's psychosocial framework is positioned to address.

2.3.3 Isolation, Hypervisibility, and the Cost of Being the Only One

A third theme that pervades the literature is the experience of profound isolation, simultaneously social and psychological, compounded by the paradox of hypervisibility. Black and racially minoritised trainees consistently describe being one of very few, or the only, non-White person in their cohort, placement, or department. Rather than rendering them invisible, this numerical absence places them under a particular form of scrutiny: required to represent their entire racial group, manage others' discomfort, and perform competence under conditions their White peers do not appear to face.

Synthesis of Findings

Daloye (2022) identifies the need to belong as the most prominent theme in their analysis, with participants describing loneliness and a persistent sense of not belonging as defining features of training. Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) similarly found that participants described lacking belonging as one of the most pervasive and painful dimensions of their training experience, with self-organised Black peer networks serving as protective resources in the absence of institutional provision. Meah (2022) corroborates this within the EP context, with participants reporting discrimination, microaggressions, and a lack of visible ethnic minority representation on training courses and within local authority services.

Adetimole et al., (2005) describe hypervigilance, a state of heightened alertness to racial dynamics, as a direct consequence of isolation. Their account conveys the cognitive and emotional labour of constantly scanning for racial threat, monitoring one's own behaviour for fear of confirming stereotypes, and managing cumulative microaggressions without institutional support. Prajapati et al., (2019) describe the racial spokesperson burden, being positioned as the representative of an entire group, as both isolating and professionally infantilising, a constant reminder that the trainee is seen primarily as a racialised body rather than an individual professional in formation.

Falcon (2022) found that Black male trainees experienced a specific form of isolation rooted in the intersection of race and gender, ostracised and bullied in ways that compounded their minority status within an already White-dominated profession. Dunira (2024) identifies a particularly acute dimension of this theme: reflective practice groups, which should function as containing and developmental spaces, were experienced by Black trainees as relationally unsafe, spaces where they felt silenced,

under-cared-for, and unprotected rather than supported. This finding extends the isolation theme beyond the social and into the ostensibly therapeutic structures of training itself.

Wright (2020) theorises her experience of isolation through the concept of the 'outsider within', occupying a professional space whilst never fully belonging to it. Shah et al. (2012) found that the presence of safe, supportive contexts, through peer relationships or sympathetic supervisors, was experienced as protective, suggesting that isolation is not an inevitable feature of training but a product of institutional arrangements that could be altered.

Critical Commentary

This was evident across nine of the twelve papers. Its consistency across two decades and three professional training contexts suggests it reflects structural features of applied psychology training rather than idiosyncratic individual experiences. The literature is less strong on examining variability, the conditions under which isolation is more or less acute, and the factors that mediate or exacerbate it. All included studies capture experience at a single point in time, making it difficult to assess how isolation changes across the duration of training. The literature also does not fully account for how isolation intersects with other identity dimensions, class, migration background, disability, sexuality, which may significantly shape how racialised isolation is experienced and managed.

2.3.4 Structural Barriers and Systemic Gatekeeping: The Reproduction of Whiteness in Applied Psychology Training

The fourth theme operates at the most macro level of analysis, examining the structural and institutional mechanisms through which racialised inequalities are produced and reproduced within applied psychology training. Whereas the preceding

themes attend primarily to the experiences of Black trainees once within training, this theme addresses the broader systems of access, power, and institutional organisation that shape who enters the profession, how they are assessed and supported, and what kinds of change are, and are not, made possible.

Synthesis of Findings

Sobogun and Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) identify a range of structural and socioeconomic barriers disproportionately affecting Black applicants, including the high financial cost of independent route training, reliance on unpaid placement hours, and the absence of funded training routes comparable to those available in clinical psychology. These structural inequities were experienced as racialised barriers, forms of gatekeeping that, while not explicitly coded by race, operate to exclude those from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, among whom Black candidates are disproportionately represented. Meah (2022) extends this into the EP context, with participants identifying barriers to accessing the training course and describing a lack of ethnic minority representation on tutor teams and within local authority services as both a structural and symbolic exclusion.

The supervisory relationship emerges across several studies as a key site of structural power and, frequently, racialised harm. Shah et al. (2012) found that participants described power differentials within supervision, with the question of whether to raise race and culture issues experienced as fraught with professional risk. Participants preferred supervisors to initiate conversations about race, reflecting the asymmetry of power in the supervisory relationship. Adetimole et al., (2005) describe supervision as a context in which insidious racism was both enacted and invisible to the supervisor. Dunira (2024) found that reflective practice groups, a structural feature of DClinPsy training, were experienced as sites of institutional harm rather than

support, with trainers and course structures failing to create conditions of safety for Black trainees.

Pearl (2023) makes a distinctive contribution by examining adaptive challenges from the trainee perspective within the DClinPsy system. Trainees described entrenched and cyclical constraints, institutional restrictions, competing contextual demands, and what Pearl terms 'Attacks': destabilising racialised experiences within the training system. Participants described the system as resistant to change, with meaningful progress contingent on institutional willingness that was frequently absent. Pearl's theoretical model, 'Journey in the DClinPsy System', captures the cumulative nature of structural harm, moving from constraints and attacks through residual psychological and social costs, towards sustaining factors and possibilities for change. Notably, Pearl's inclusion of course trainer perspectives reveals that even those involved in EDI work faced systemic resistance, suggesting that the reproduction of Whiteness operates at every level of the institutional structure.

Wright (2020) situates this structural analysis within a longer historical frame, arguing that educational psychology's complicity in systems of social control, including the use of psychometric testing to justify the segregation and misclassification of Black children, has never been fully reckoned with, and continues to shape the institutional culture into which Black TEPs are inducted. The persistence of the same structural barriers and the repetition of the same recommendations across two decades of literature suggest the problem is not one of knowledge; the profession knows what its Black trainees experience, but of institutional will.

Critical Commentary

This theme represents the most theoretically developed area of the literature. However, the methodological limitations of the evidence base are most constraining

here. The reliance on trainee accounts, whilst invaluable, does not fully capture the perspective of training programmes or institutional gatekeepers. Peart (2023) represents a partial address of this gap, the only study to include both trainee and trainer perspectives, and his findings suggest that systemic resistance to change operates at multiple institutional levels simultaneously. However, a fuller structural account would require institutional ethnography, policy analysis, and workforce data beyond those used in the existing literature. The structural claims are supported by experiential evidence that is consistent across studies, but this points to the importance of attending to the institutional context of EP training as a frame within which individual trainee experiences are situated.

2.4 Critical Reflection and Psychosocial Interpretation of the Literature

This section offers a critical reflection on the evidence base reviewed, drawing on a psychosocial lens to illuminate what the literature reveals, and what it leaves unexamined, about the racialised experiences of Black trainee psychologists in the UK. For each dimension of the evidence base, its ‘strengths’ and its ‘needs’, a psychosocial interpretation is offered alongside critical commentary, attending not only to what the studies document but to what their gaps, silences, and conditions of production may themselves disclose. The section concludes with a summary of key findings and their significance for the present study.

2.4.1 Strengths of the Existing Evidence Base

The literature spans two decades and three applied psychology training contexts, providing a degree of cumulative credibility that individual studies alone could not achieve. Methodological diversity, from IPA to autoethnography to Constructivist Grounded Theory, reflects the range of epistemological positions from which racialised experience can legitimately be approached. The inclusion of reflexive

accounts (Adetimole et al., 2005; Prajapati et al., 2019; Wright, 2020) alongside empirical studies enriches rather than weakens the corpus. Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) represent a methodological step forward: a Black-specific sample, robust IPA, and explicit quality criteria applied with transparency. Peart (2023) makes a distinctive contribution as the only study to incorporate both trainee and institutional perspectives, beginning to illuminate the structural conditions within which Black trainee experiences are produced. Falcon (2022) addresses a significant gap as the only study centring Black male experience, demonstrating that gender intersects with race in ways the predominantly female corpus could not access. Dunira (2024) extends the evidence base into reflective practice spaces, revealing that racialised harm penetrates even ostensibly developmental institutional contexts. Across the literature, the consistency of four themes, identity negotiation, curricular exclusion, isolation, and structural gatekeeping, across diverse professional contexts and methodologies lends the findings considerable weight. Whilst not meeting the inclusion criteria for this review, Akilapa's (2024) autoethnographic account of completing a doctoral degree in education as a Black Nigerian woman resonates closely with the applied psychology literature, suggesting these experiences extend into the educational fields within which trainee EPs work daily.

Interpreted psychosocially, the presence of this literature, produced largely by Black and racially minoritised insiders, often under the structural constraints of professional doctoral training, may suggest that trainees have consistently sought to be seen and acknowledged. There is a steeliness to this body of work: an apparent capacity, on the part of those who produced it, to hold both the value of their profession and the authenticity of their experience within it, what Klein (1946) might characterise as a depressive position, a both/and orientation that sits with complexity rather than

resolving it defensively. The consistency of themes across two decades and multiple contexts may, however, point to something more defended at the systemic level. The persistence of the same findings and recommendations across studies spanning 2005 to 2025 might suggest that the field risks occupying a more paranoid-schizoid position: splitting the image of a 'good', inclusive profession from the 'bad' racialised harm its own literature documents, and keeping them institutionally apart.

2.4.2 'Needs' of the Existing Evidence Base

Empirical research centring Black trainee educational psychologists remains extremely limited: Wright (2020) and Meah (2022) represent the only EP-specific studies, with Meah's sample encompassing broader ethnic minority groupings rather than focusing specifically on Black trainee experience. Clinical psychology dominates the literature (eight of twelve studies), raising questions regarding the transferability of findings to EP training, which is characterised by a distinct institutional structure, professional culture, and relationship to the education system. Across studies, the use of umbrella categories such as BME or BAME risks homogenising racially minoritised experiences and obscuring differences in heritage, migration histories, racialisation, and professional positioning. No study adopts a longitudinal design, leaving unanswered questions about how racialised experiences shift across the arc of doctoral training. While Peart (2023) begins to address the absence of institutional perspectives, his sample is limited to staff already engaged in equality, diversity, and inclusion work and cannot be taken as representative of wider organisational cultures. Finally, the corpus is notably feminised: although gender is occasionally noted, it is not theorised in relation to how racialised experience is expressed, interpreted, or responded to within training contexts.

From a psychosocial perspective, these gaps can be understood not only as empirical absences but as raising questions about the institutional and epistemic conditions under which certain forms of research are produced and legitimised. The near-absence of EP-specific research may reflect features of professional culture and research orthodoxy that shape what is considered appropriate, feasible, or credible to study, particularly in relation to race. The production of this literature falls predominantly to researchers who are themselves racialised, suggesting that responsibility for articulating and evidencing racialised experience is unevenly distributed within the field. Rather than locating this solely at the level of individual motivation, a psychosocial reading situates this pattern within institutional arrangements that may implicitly position race as a special interest rather than a core professional concern.

At the level of knowledge production, the tendency to aggregate racially minoritised experiences may mirror organisational strategies that manage difference through simplification, reducing the demand for nuanced or differentiated institutional responses. The feminisation of the evidence base invites further reflection on how professional norms shape who feels authorised or compelled to speak about racialised vulnerability, and who is able to remain silent. While the EP workforce is predominantly female (approximately 79%; Lyonette et al., 2019), this does not sufficiently account for the absence of Black male trainee voices. Within EP training, Black male experience may be rendered, as Falcon (2022) argues in relation to clinical psychology, an “absent presence”, shaped through intersecting institutional, relational, and symbolic processes. In line with a core psychosocial assumption that the individual and social are mutually constitutive (Frosh, 2003), the needs of this evidence

base extend beyond methodological gaps, pointing instead to a field still negotiating how to hold its own racialised dynamics in mind.

2.4.3 Summary of Key Findings

Across the twelve included studies, a picture emerges of what it may mean to train as a Black or racially minoritised psychologist within UK applied psychology doctoral programmes. Racialised identity is experienced not as incidental to professional formation but as central to it, requiring ongoing negotiation within institutional contexts organised, often unconsciously, around Whiteness as an unmarked norm. Curricular content, supervisory relationships, and professional assessment structures are each experienced as sites where that norm is reproduced, rendering Black trainee perspectives simultaneously hypervisible and epistemically marginal. Isolation and the absence of belonging recur across all studies, alongside the emotional and relational labour of navigating these dynamics without adequate institutional support or acknowledgement. The persistence of these patterns across two decades, three training contexts, and twelve studies, and the persistence of the same unheeded recommendations, suggests that what is documented here is not individual misfortune but structural reproduction.

Interpreted through a psychosocial lens, these patterns may be understood not as isolated individual experiences but as predictable expressions of training within institutions that have not yet fully examined their own racial assumptions, at the level of culture, curriculum, and the unconscious dynamics that shape professional relationships. The literature attests both to the resilience of those who have documented these experiences and to the persistence of the structures that make that resilience necessary.

2.5 Conclusion

2.5.1 Research and Practice Implications

The gaps identified in this review illuminate the necessity and particularity of the present study. Whilst Meah (2022) represents a recent step towards addressing the EP-specific gap, her sample encompasses broader ethnic minority categories rather than centring Black trainee experience, and Wright (2020) remains the only study to do so directly. Research empirically centring the experiences of Black trainee educational psychologists is therefore critically needed, not only because the population remains under-researched, but because the EP context may generate racialised experiences that are qualitatively distinct from those documented within clinical or counselling psychology training. The trainee EP occupies a unique institutional intersection: simultaneously embedded in a university-based psychology programme and deployed into schools and local authority contexts whose own cultures and histories carry their own racial weight, a double bind that Akilapa (2024) illuminates from the adjacent field of education.

2.5.2 Gap Statement

Drawing on Rustin's (1998) formulation of psychosocial inquiry as a 'negative practice in a positive structure', the present study attends to what escapes acknowledgement, what is missing, occluded, or difficult to name, within an ostensibly well-structured profession. It asks what remains unexamined within a field that formally espouses inclusion, holism, and relational attunement. A psychosocial lens offers a distinctive contribution not yet fully realised in the literature: an approach that attends simultaneously to the trainee's intrasubjective experience, the internalisation and management of racialised structures, and the unconscious institutional dynamics

through which such experiences are shaped and organised. It is at this intersection of the psychic and the systemic that this study seeks to make its contribution.

2.5.3 Research Question

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights an under-examined aspect of professional training. While Black trainees' experiences have been explored in clinical and counselling psychology, comparable empirical work within educational psychology remains limited (Atkinson et al., 2021). An exploratory design is therefore appropriate for addressing complex, previously unasked questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), particularly those concerning the interplay of intrapsychic processes, racialised identity, and institutional structures (Frosh, 2010; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Consequently, one broad, open-ended research question guided the study:

What are the experiences of Black trainee educational psychologists navigating their doctoral training in England?

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach designed to address this question.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework underpinning the study, demonstrating its alignment with my ontological and epistemological commitments (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Crotty, 2003). I describe the research paradigm, methods, data collection, reflexive practices, analytic approach, and ethical considerations that informed the study, alongside reflections on how methodological decisions developed over time. The chapter is organised to reflect the sequence through which the research unfolded in practice, which slightly differed to the guideline structure (APA, 2018). In particular, reflexivity and analytic processes are foregrounded as integral to both data generation and interpretation. Pen portraits are included at the end of the chapter, as they were constructed following data collection and analysis and serve to introduce participants prior to the Findings chapters that follow. As in other parts of the thesis, I continue to write in the first person to acknowledge my positioning within the research process.

3.1 Research Paradigm

3.1.1 Ontology & Epistemology

The research paradigm shapes assumptions about the nature of reality and the kinds of knowledge that can be produced about it. Understanding and articulating my research paradigm was a complex and evolving process throughout the research. On the one hand, a psychosocial and critical realist orientation was consistent with established psychosocial research traditions (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013). On the other, as the research developed, I became increasingly aware of the limits of neat methodological categorisation when engaging with the layered, affective, and historically situated experiences described by participants. These considerations

informed how I came to articulate the study's ontological and epistemological positioning, which I outline below.

Ontologically, I draw on a critical realist tradition (Bhaskar, 1975), which holds that enduring social structures and mechanisms, including institutionalised forms of anti-Blackness, Eurocentric norms, and the racialised dynamics of educational psychology, exist independently of individual recognition and are therefore real. This stance allows me to acknowledge that Black TEPs are navigating conditions that precede and exceed their individual experiences, even when those structures operate independently of individual awareness or intention within training environments.

Epistemologically, I draw on a critical realist psychosocial orientation, emphasising that knowledge about lived experience is mediated through unconscious, affective, relational, and social processes, including how structural racism is experienced, defended against, internalised, and negotiated (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Hollway & Froggett, 2013). Knowledge, therefore, cannot be taken at face value; it must be interpreted, attending closely to contradiction, affect, emotional tone, and what remains unspoken. The psychosocial does not replace critical realism; rather, it enables me to examine the subjective, relational, and unconscious dimensions through which structural forces become psychically experienced. Further, a psychosocial framework is specifically transdisciplinary; drawing on knowledge frameworks that are traditionally seen as distinct so that “the knowledge that results is always a hybrid knowledge and combines features and themes that are not usually assembled on the same epistemological plane” (Stenner & Taylor, 2008, p. 431).

Alongside this, I found myself resisting a fixed or exclusive location of the research within a critical realist ontology and epistemology, echoing earlier approaches that position the psychosocial as an ontological or epistemological stance

in its own right (e.g. Smith, 2024). Throughout the study, I repeatedly described my analytic process as one of ‘mashing approaches together’, a formulation that later resonated strongly when I encountered Persadie and Narain’s (2022) articulation of ‘Mash-Up epistemologies’. Their framing of Caribbean knowledge traditions as counter-colonial, hybrid, affective, and syncretic ways of knowing foregrounds relational and embodied meaning-making, closely echoing my experiential analytic practice. While Mash-Up was not adopted as a formal methodological framework, it is returned to reflexively in the Discussion and Conclusion.

3.1.2 Intersubjectivity, Defended Subjects, & Institutional Affect

At the centre of my paradigm is the principle that meaning is co-constructed through intersubjective encounters. Psychosocial research assumes that individuals are shaped by both internal psychic life and external social realities (Hollway & Froggett, 2013). This includes unconscious processes, which I treat as legitimate and influential dimensions of how experience is organised and expressed (Kvale, 2003; Stamenova & Hinshelwood, 2018). Rather than assuming that participants offer wholly rational or transparent accounts, I work with the idea of the defended subject (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), recognising that individuals may unconsciously protect themselves from anxiety or intrapsychic conflict. Therefore, this requires moving beyond literal accounts toward the “in-between” spaces of experience, those shaped by feeling, conflict, and unconscious communication. Importantly, my own subjectivity is not bracketed out but becomes a resource through which meaning is interpreted, what Hollway and Jefferson (2013, p. 159) describe as using the researcher’s subjectivity as an ‘instrument of knowing’. Psychosocial inquiry assumes that the researcher, too, is a defended subject shaped by history, positionality, and unconscious processes (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

As I am seeking a psychosocial understanding, I also understand institutions and systems as affect-bearing entities (Frosh, 2010; Menzies Lyth, 1988). From this perspective, organisations can be approached as if they possess their own emotional economies, defences, anxieties, desires, and forms of communication that operate collectively and symbolically. I adopt this lens when interpreting participants' accounts: I attend not only to what trainees felt and expressed but also to what the system, the doctoral training context, the profession, the wider EP institutional landscape, appeared to be "communicating" through its practices, omissions, and silences. This allowed me to read institutional behaviour in psychosocial terms, as patterned, affective, and sometimes defensive. By integrating the defended subject with the idea of defended institutions, I am working in a paradigm that recognises that Black trainees' experiences emerge at the intersection of psychic life and institutional affect (Wright, 2024). This dual attention supports a reflexive, ethically attuned analytic stance in which I remain accountable both to participants' meaning-making and to the broader emotional and structural dynamics shaping the professional training environment.

3.1.3 Orientation and Design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative design to examine how Black trainee educational psychologists understand and narrate their training experiences. An exploratory approach is appropriate given the limited empirical research in this area and supports openness to experiences that may be uncertain, defended, or difficult to articulate. Qualitative inquiry allows attention to complexity, emotional texture, and the contextual nature of participants' accounts (O'Reilly et al., 2025).

Consistent with the critical realist psychosocial epistemology outlined above, I approach participants' narratives as shaped by both conscious and unconscious

processes. Accounts are therefore understood not simply as factual reports but as meaning-making practices through which experiences are organised, defended, and communicated. This orientation encourages attention to contradiction, hesitation, and affect within participants' narratives. To support this depth of exploration, the study uses principles from FANIM to generate data and RTA to analyse and interpret participants' accounts. Both approaches align with a psychosocial framework by recognising that meaning is co-constructed through relational and interpretive processes (Khan et al., 2026). Together, these methods allow careful engagement with the emotional and relational dimensions of Black trainees' experiences within educational psychology training.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Participants

Six Newly Qualified Educational Psychologists (NQEPs) who self-identified as racially Black participated in this study. All had completed a doctoral training programme in England and qualified within the past two years (September 2023–2025). This timeframe ensured participants had completed training while remaining sufficiently close to their TEP experience to reflect on it in detail. The two-year window was selected with the recognition that NQEPs often begin to assume additional professional responsibilities, such as supervising, during early career practice. Including participants within this period therefore supported reflections grounded primarily in their training experiences rather than later professional developments. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to identify individuals able to provide rich and relevant insights aligned with the research aims (Kelly, 2010). Some homogeneity was maintained to support analytic depth, including qualification timeframe and training within England, where doctoral programmes follow broadly

comparable professional standards. Other demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic background, varied across the sample, allowing for a range of experiences and perspectives. These inclusion criteria were applied purposively to ensure participants were relevant to the research aims and positioned to reflect in depth on their training experiences retrospectively.

3.2.2 Recruitment

Recruitment began with informal scoping conversations with two newly qualified EPs and one trainee nearing qualification. These discussions helped gauge interest in the study and facilitated early word-of-mouth circulation within professional networks. This initial engagement supported momentum prior to formal recruitment. The target sample size was four to six participants, consistent with psychosocial qualitative research that prioritises analytic depth over breadth (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Archard, 2020). Recruitment posters (Appendix 2) were circulated through several professional networks, including educational psychology doctoral programmes in England, the Trainee Educational Psychologist Initiative for Cultural Change (TEPICC), LinkedIn, and an advertisement on a networking website for educational psychologists (Appendix 3). This approach enabled the study to reach potential participants through established professional communities while maintaining voluntary participation.

Seven individuals initially expressed an interest in participating. One individual was placed on a waiting list and later joined the study after an original participant withdrew due to a change in professional circumstances. Prospective participants received further information about the study, including an initial participant information sheet provided in a shortened visual format (Appendix 4) and were given the opportunity to ask questions before confirming involvement. Further details regarding

informed consent and participants' right to withdraw are provided in Sections 3.6.2 and 3.6.3.

Interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams. This approach enabled participants to engage from environments of their choosing, supporting a sense of safety, containment, and confidentiality (Hollway, 2015). Virtual interviewing also allowed me to remain attentive to psychosocial dimensions of the interaction, including hesitations, slips, and silences that may signal defended or affectively charged material. Attending to these moments aligns with the principle of participants as 'defended subjects' within psychosocial research (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Online interviewing further required reflexive attention to the affective and embodied dynamics of the research encounter (Redman et al., 2010, p.217; Archard & Reilly, 2022).

3.3 Data Collection: FANIM

In keeping with the psychosocial paradigm, a data-collection method was required that could access both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of participants' experiences. The FANIM offered an appropriate approach. FANIM is well established within psychosocial research (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008, 2013) and is designed to move beyond conscious, well-worn narrative accounts by inviting free association within a narrative frame, allowing meanings to emerge that may sit outside participants' consciously organised or scripted understandings. Free association allows emotional, symbolic, and defended meanings to enter the narrative, revealing elements of experience that structured interviews often inhibit (Joffe & Elsey, 2014; Archard & O'Reilly, 2023; 2024). Unlike semi-structured interviews that utilise researcher-led questioning, FANIM prioritises participant-led storytelling (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013). It reduces the pressure to provide logical or linear explanations

and instead invites movement between memories, images, feelings, and reflections. This makes FANIM particularly suited to research involving defended subjects, where contradictions, hesitations, or shifts in emotional tone are not treated as ‘noise’ but as meaningful expressions of how experience is organised and protected (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). For this research, focusing on Black TEPs, I viewed these associative and affective contributions as crucial to understanding participants’ experiences of racialisation within training contexts.

Although data collection and analysis are presented as discrete stages, analytic and interpretive work began within the interview encounter itself. Using FANIM required ongoing attentiveness to affect, relational dynamics, hesitations, and shifts in emotional tone as interviews unfolded, with my own responses forming part of the meaning-making process. Decisions about when to remain silent, when to reflect participants’ words back, and when to invite further association involved interpretive judgement rather than neutral facilitation (Archard & O’Reilly, 2022). Reflexive process notes and immediate post-interview reflections supported early analytic engagement with defended or affectively charged material. In this way, data generation was not treated as a preparatory stage but as an integral component of the analytic process.

3.3.1 Implementing FANIM

To conduct the interviews, I followed the core principles outlined by Hollway and Jefferson (2013) and refined by Archard (2020): ask open-ended questions; elicit a story rather than discrete answers; avoid ‘why’ questions, which encourage rationalisation; and use participants’ own phrasing to preserve their meaning-frame. In line with these principles, I avoided over-planning or adhering rigidly to an interview schedule, as this would risk slipping into a semi-structured format (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Instead, I invited participants to follow their own “association

pathways” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Each first interview began with a single, open-ended Gestalt question: “Starting wherever you like, can you tell me about your experience of being a Black trainee educational psychologist?” This formulation decentered my own agenda and allowed participants to begin with what felt most significant to them. Often their narratives moved fluidly between training experiences, earlier personal histories, and relational or institutional encounters, demonstrating the associative patterns FANIM is designed to elicit. These narratives were rarely linear or tidy; instead, they reflected the layered and sometimes conflicted nature of racialised experience.

A second interview was conducted with each participant to revisit their initial narrative. Here, the aim was not verification but elaboration. I invited participants to clarify or expand on the initial codes I had constructed, reflect on affective responses, and return to moments that appeared defended or curtailed. This two-stage process supported co-meaning-making between participants and me, creating greater transparency and allowing further free association, which in turn provided deeper insight into unconscious material over time.

Throughout the interviews, I remained aware that question-formulation and timing significantly influence what can be spoken (Clarke & Hoggett, 2019). Interrupting too early, asking directive questions, or signalling approval can limit associative flow (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). For this reason, I kept my presence as unobtrusive as possible, what Hollway and Jefferson (2013, p.34) describe as the researcher being “almost invisible.” ‘Why’ questions were avoided entirely, as they tend to evoke rationalised responses that obscure unconscious or affective meanings (Clarke & Hoggett, 2019). Instead, I used brief prompts formed directly from participants’ own language, typically to encourage further elaboration or hold space

during pauses, allowing for silence and refraining from comments that would be akin to the therapeutic interpretations of the consulting room (Archard, 2021; Archard & O'Reilly, 2021; Archard & O'Reilly, 2022a; Archard et al., 2025a; Long & Eagle, 2009). These methods ensured that the emerging narrative belonged to the participant rather than becoming shaped by my assumptions or expectations.

3.3.2 Recording, Transcription, and Reflexive Documentation

All twelve interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The automatic transcription feature provided an initial transcript, which I subsequently reviewed line-by-line for accuracy. I ensured that verbatim features, pauses, hesitations, filler sounds, tonal shifts, were captured, as recommended by Hollway & Jefferson (2013). These features often contain important affective or defended meanings within psychosocial work. During transcription, I made reflexive notes documenting my emotional responses, immediate interpretations, and moments of resonance or discomfort. These notes formed part of the analytic process, supporting transparency around how my subjectivity contributed to meaning-making and aligning with the psychosocial commitment to reflexivity.

3.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to psychosocial research because the researcher's subjectivity is understood as inseparable from the production of knowledge (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). While reflectivity involves looking back on experience to evaluate practice, reflexivity goes further, interrogating how the researcher's subjectivity, including unconscious processes, actively shapes the production of knowledge itself (Meek, 2003). Rather than assuming neutrality, I approached reflexivity as both an ethical and methodological commitment, examining how my emotional responses, assumptions, and positionality shaped interactions with participants and

interpretations throughout. This supports transparency and integrity (Yardley, 2017) while ensuring unconscious influences are acknowledged rather than obscured (Etherington, 2004; Patnaik, 2013), though I remained cautious not to let my reflections overshadow participants' narratives (Parker, 2015).

Following Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) notion of the researcher's subjectivity as an "instrument of knowing," I treated moments of resonance, discomfort, and uncertainty during interviews and analysis as potential indicators of unconscious communication, signals that could illuminate both participants' defended positions and my own. This stance was particularly important given the emotionally charged nature of exploring racialised experiences within educational psychology training.

To support this reflexive work, I drew on several structured practices: individual research supervision; a psychosocial peer supervision (reverie) group; a research diary; a race-reflective tool (Kinouani, 2022) [see Figure 2]; and process notes written immediately after each interview. Together, these provided spaces to process affect, interrogate assumptions, and identify possible defence mechanisms, both mine and participants'. Reflexivity, therefore, functioned as both a methodological tool and a protective container for working with the emotional intensity of the material.

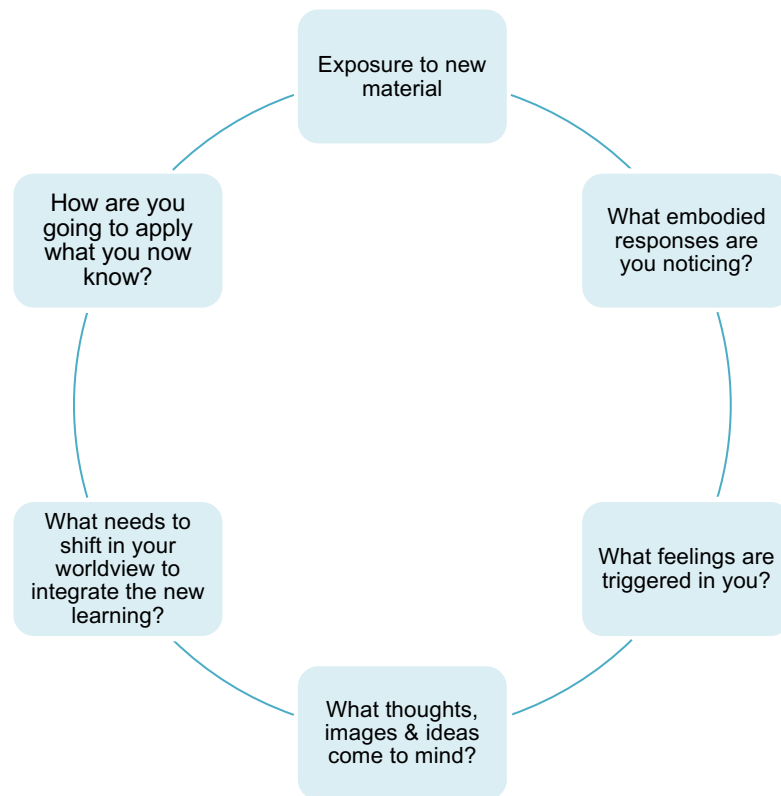


Figure 2. *Race Reflections Reflective Model*

3.4.1 Researcher Positionality & Professionality

As a Black TEP currently practising in the field, I occupied an insider/outsider position throughout this research (Mercer, 2007). As an insider, I shared a racialised lens with participants and could attune to the nuances of their training experiences; some accounts were immediately familiar, requiring little contextual translation. At times, this proximity meant I was not only a researcher but someone intimately connected to the systems being examined. Yet I was simultaneously an outsider: as the researcher conducting interviews, I held a degree of positional authority, potentially placing me in a one-up position (Schein, 1999); yet as a trainee at a different point in time, I was simultaneously one-down, having not experienced training under the same conditions as participants. This insider/outsider tension created ongoing reflexive work, navigating the risk of overidentification while avoiding the detached neutrality of being "almost invisible" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 34). I managed this by

grounding interpretations closely in the data and treating analytic insights as provisional and reflexive rather than authoritative.

Rather than attempting to resolve this entanglement, I acknowledged it as analytically productive. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2013), I understood myself as an "instrument of knowing", with emotional and somatic responses functioning as data in their own right. My values, identifications, and emotional investments were therefore monitored through reflexivity rather than suppressed, consistent with both psychosocial and RTA traditions, which recognise meaning as co-constructed rather than discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

Professionally, although I have not undertaken formal clinical training in psychoanalytic therapy, my prior academic training, professional experience within psychoanalytically informed contexts, and current doctoral programme, which draws on psychodynamic theory, provided a conceptual foundation for this interpretive approach, informing my sensitivity to the affective and relational dimensions of participants' narratives.

3.4.2 Process Notes

After each interview, I recorded process notes (Figure 3) capturing my immediate impressions, emotional responses, and notable features of the interaction, such as changes in tone, hesitations, or phrases that stood out as symbolically charged. This aligns with Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) recommendation that researchers document the "feel" of the encounter while it remains vivid. These notes contributed to developing a scenic understanding (Lorenzer, 1986; Olesen & Weber, 2012), helping me attend to relational dynamics that might otherwise be lost. I regularly brought process notes to supervision to explore how the interaction and my responses might

reflect unconscious processes operating within the interview relationship. I also drew on these notes when constructing participant pen portraits (see Section 3.7)

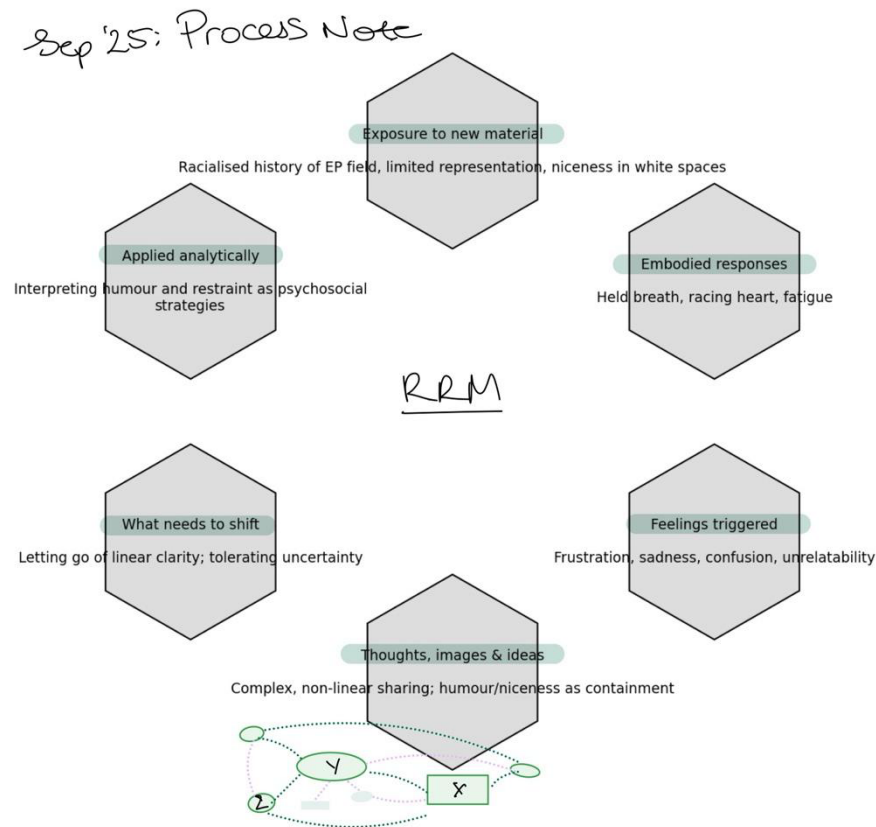


Figure 3. Process notes using Race Reflective Model (Demi)

3.4.3 Research Reflexive Diary

I kept an electronic research diary throughout the study, recording reflections, emotional reactions, drawings, and free-written associative notes arising during interviews, transcription, supervision, and analysis (Appendix 1). Revisiting the diary iteratively helped me differentiate between my own projections and participants' meanings, track shifts in my thinking, and identify patterns for supervisory discussion. Reflexive engagement is embedded throughout the thesis through analytic interpretations and the use of reflexive tools, supporting transparency in the research process (Elliott et al., 2012; see Figure 3).

3.4.4 Psychosocial Supervision and Reverie Group

Supervision played a critical role in sustaining reflexivity. My monthly research supervision, conducted by a psychosocially trained supervisor at the Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust, provided space to examine my positioning, consider projective processes, and reflect on defended moments in both participants and myself (Archard, 2020; Elliott et al., 2012; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Supervision also supported work with participant “pen portraits”, deepening my understanding of the psychological landscapes shaping each narrative.

Alongside this, participation in a psychosocial reverie group allowed me to explore emotional undercurrents in a collective setting. These sessions helped surface avoidance, defence, and overwhelm linked to my subjectivity, offering a shared reflective space to process the complexities inherent in this research.

3.5 Data Analysis: RTA

When selecting a data analysis method, alignment with the study's ontology, epistemology, and data collection approach is essential (O'Reilly et al., 2025). Although discourse analysis was considered, given its focus on how language constructs social meaning and power relations, it was ultimately less suited to the aims of this study, as some discursive approaches prioritise meaning-making at the level of language and may offer more limited access to affective, defended, and extra-discursive dimensions of experience (Saville Young, 2024). By contrast, the psychosocial orientation adopted here understands subjectivity as relational, defended, and shaped by unconscious as well as structural forces (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), aligning more closely with the use of FANIM to elicit associative, non-linear narratives that attend to what exceeds conscious articulation (Hollows, 2021).

RTA was therefore selected as the most appropriate analytic approach. RTA offers flexibility for interpretative work and explicitly positions the researcher as an active meaning-maker (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a, 2021b, 2023). This aligns with the psychosocial paradigm, which emphasises reflexivity and recognises knowledge as co-constructed through relational and unconscious processes (Khan, 2025; Mabhena, 2026). Unlike approaches that seek neutrality, RTA treats researcher subjectivity as integral to "knowing practice" (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p. 1), where analytic decisions are informed by theoretical commitments and reflexive engagement (Elliott et al., 2012). RTA also supports the development of latent themes through the use of theoretically informed interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019), enabling interpretation beyond descriptive accounts to interrogate defended positions and socio-cultural dynamics. Its flexibility further supports integration of psychoanalytic theory and researcher reflexivity, providing methodological coherence (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), and produces actionable insights with applied relevance (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012), an important consideration for a professional doctorate. Transparency was maintained by following Braun and Clarke's (2023) recommendations for methodological coherence, ensuring trustworthiness and credibility.

3.5.1 The Six Phases of RTA

I followed RTA's six phases, which served as flexible guiding principles rather than prescriptive steps, designed to support analytic coherence (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The term 'phase' is deliberately used to counter the misconception that RTA operates as a rigid, linear sequence (Nowell et al., 2017; Xu & Zammit, 2020). Instead, these phases reflect RTA as a "progressive and recursive process" in which analytic movement is fluid rather than fixed (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 36).

3.5.2 Phase 1: Familiarisation

Familiarisation began during data collection and continued recursively throughout analysis, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) emphasis on immersion. After each first interview, I revisited audio recordings and initial transcripts to note preliminary observations, emerging patterns, and potential psychodynamic processes, which informed imminent codes shared in the second interviews (Tracey, 2010). Process notes captured affective responses immediately after each interview.

Intentional familiarisation deepened after data collection. I began by listening to each interview in its entirety before transcription, attending to narrative flow and noting my own thoughts and affective responses. I completed transcription (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013): using automatically generated transcripts from Microsoft Teams as a starting point, I proofread each against the audio, correcting inaccuracies and adding notations for pauses, intonation, and non-verbal cues (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I then listened again while reading each transcript, deepening familiarity and identifying remaining inaccuracies. Throughout coding and theme development, I regularly returned to transcripts and audio to ensure interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives.

To consolidate familiarisation, I created pen portraits for each participant, serving as interpretative profiles combining transcript evidence, process notes, and reflexive observations (see section 3.7 below). These were not descriptive but reflexive exercises, capturing how I experienced and interacted with each narrative, and serving as a bridge between raw data and interpretative analysis (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

3.5.3 Phase 2: Coding

Coding marked the transition from immersion to systematic analysis. Insights from pen portraits informed the generation of preliminary semantic and latent code labels (Clarke, 2018). Latent coding was particularly important, enabling interpretation beyond surface meaning to explore unconscious processes, defended positions, and relational dynamics central to a psychosocial framework (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). I used a guiding question: “does this help answer my research question?”, to maintain analytic focus. Codes were applied iteratively, with similar labels reviewed, refined, and merged; for example, "feeling isolated" and "lack of connection" were consolidated under "sense of belonging", reflecting the shift from descriptive to interpretive coding.

Transcripts were converted into a Microsoft Excel ‘workbook’, with each participant assigned a separate tab and each sentence placed on its own row to support line-by-line engagement (Appendix 5). A dynamic drop-down code list developed as patterns were constructed. Coding proceeded one participant at a time to preserve narrative integrity before cross-case analysis. Across all participants, approximately 180 initial codes were refined to around 90 after consolidation. Reflexivity remained central: I revisited process notes and pen portraits to interrogate how my interpretations and emotional responses shaped coding decisions (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Psychosocial supervision was used to support analytic rigour and reflexivity, enabling sustained questioning of unconscious processes influencing interpretation (Elliott et al., 2012).

3.5.4 Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes

This phase marked a conceptual shift toward identifying broader patterns of meaning. Rather than mechanically aggregating codes, I actively constructed ‘descriptive initial themes’, provisional patterns capturing something conceptually

significant about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35), guided by my psychosocial lens and theoretical positioning (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), and prioritising latent meanings over surface-level semantic similarities. An additional Excel column recorded provisional theme labels alongside relevant codes, with filtering functions enabling iterative review of clustered codes (Figure 4).

1	Speaker & Time	Transcript	Semantic Codes (descriptive)	Latent Codes (Interpretive-RTA)	Descriptive Initial Theme	Interpretive Theme
2	KBF 1:44	Starting wherever you like, can you tell me about your experience of being a Black trainee educational psychologist?		defen		
3	ASHE 1:46	Mmm.				
4		Massive question, to begin with.	Massive definition: Bulky and heavy	defendedness; defense mechanism; defense mechanism; self-protec..	ing positioned by the stion	Racialised experience as excessive and hard to contain
5		Um.		defense mechanism (humour.		
6		Do you know what it's one that I didn't think a lot about actively whilst training.	conscious decision; intentional	defense mechanism	Not thinking as an active stance	Defended distancing from racialised identity in training
7		I feel like I might have chosen to not think about it as much because it's something that being a black person in general you think about your race a lot.	conscious decision; intentional	defense mechanism; self-protection; KBF sensing overwhelm "a lot"	Managing racial salience	Psychic regulation through avoidance
8		Urm, living in the UK because it just has such a significant impact is what I've found anyway in my experience.	geographic location	sense of time; historical texture	Locating experience within place	Racialised subjectivity shaped by historical context
9		In terms of like the course I feel like the moment you said that question I thought about a recent experience I had where it was actually quite comical to me.	humour	defendedness; defense mechanism used to contain - if i don't laugh i'll cry	Using humour to respond to experience	Affect managed through defended humour
10		It was quite strange.				

Figure 4. Example of iterative review of theme labels alongside relevant codes

3.5.5 Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

I critically reviewed 'interpretative themes' to ensure they captured meaningful patterns rather than superficial links, working iteratively and interpretatively in line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance. I questioned each theme's coherence, boundaries, and central organising concept, merging overlapping themes, refining boundaries, and discarding those lacking analytic depth (Clarke, 2018). Again, reflexive journaling and psychosocial supervision were essential for interrogating my assumptions, affective responses, and for resisting the premature definition or closure of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Elliott et al., 2012).

3.5.6 Phase 5: Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes

This phase was revisited multiple times given RTA's recursive nature (Byrne, 2021). Defining themes required moving beyond provisional labels to articulate each

theme's central organising concept, forming a coherent narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2019b, 2022). Through iterative supervisory discussion, I opted for names that played with language to reflect psychosocial dynamics and, where appropriate, acknowledged psychoanalytic ideas (e.g. Lonely Souls became Lone(ly) Souls), balancing conceptual depth with clarity (Byrne, 2021; Clarke, 2018).

3.5.7 Phase 6: Writing Up

Conventional qualitative methodologies often fragment individual experiences through coding and categorisation (Taylor & McAvoy, 2015), risking the loss of narrative complexity and coherence. The psychosocial approach adopted here resists this by attending to the gestalt or "meaning frame" of each account (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 34), foregrounding how different elements of a narrative interrelate and recognising meaning as co-constructed through the relational dynamics between researcher and participant. It was this commitment that shaped how themes were written up.

Themes were therefore presented at the level of the entire dataset, reflecting both RTA's emphasis on patterns across the data and my interpretative role as the consistent analytic thread (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022). Individual voices were preserved through interview extracts illustrating each theme, ensuring participants' experiences remained visible within collective patterns. Although not statistically generalisable, the themes were developed to capture processes and meanings that may recur in similar contexts, consistent with qualitative and psychosocial aims. My interpretative role was continually attended to during this phase as part of maintaining analytic rigour.

3.5.8 Psychodynamic Theoretical Lens

Throughout the research, and particularly during analysis, psychosocial and psychodynamic theory informed how I attended to unconscious, relational, and affective processes (Rustin, 1998; 2010). In this section, I make explicit how specific psychodynamic concepts were used to formalise and deepen interpretations of participants' material and my own researcher positioning. Drawing on Object Relations theory (Klein, 1946; Winnicott, 1953), I examined relational dynamics within training contexts, considering how internalised relationships might influence interactions with supervisors, peers, and institutions. I also reflected on defences against anxiety (Freud, 1937; Klein, 1946) and how they manifest in narratives, such as splitting or projection, particularly in response to racialised experiences. Group Relations theory (Bion, 1961) further informed analysis of systemic anxieties and institutional dynamics. These lenses were applied across the dataset using participant extracts to exemplify unconscious and systemic patterns. Critics have noted that psychoanalytic interpretation risks positioning the researcher as an "expert" claiming privileged insight into meanings participants may not explicitly articulate (Archard, 2020, 2021); the implications of this are explored further in the Discussion chapter.

3.6 Ethical Considerations & Quality Assurance

Ethical approval was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Directorate of Education and Training Research Ethics Committee (TREC) (Appendix 6), with full adherence to TREC conditions and the standards of the BPS (2021) and HCPC (2024). Quality assurance was guided throughout by principles drawn from Hollway and Jefferson (2013), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Yardley (2017). These frameworks are not discrete concerns in psychosocial research; ethical

practice and methodological rigour are mutually constitutive, enacted through the same commitment to reflexivity, transparency, and relational responsibility.

3.6.1 Non-maleficence, Beneficence and Power Dynamics

Inviting participants to share personal experiences can evoke unexpected emotions, particularly within FANIM interviews where unconscious material may surface unpredictably (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). To uphold the principle of do no harm, interviews were conducted with care and concluded with a structured debrief rather than abruptly ending, avoiding what Barbour (2007, p. 92) describes as "grabbing the data and running". In line with good practice in psychosocial interviewing, attention was given to participants' experiences of being interviewed, recognising that meaning-making and emotional processing may continue beyond the formal recording (Archard & O'Reilly, 2022b). Space was therefore provided for reflection once recording stopped, and information sheets included details of additional support resources and services (Appendix 7).

Power dynamics were actively considered throughout the research, recognising that interviews are shaped by the researcher's role, identity, and investment in the topic (Kvale, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2022). As a Black trainee educational psychologist interviewing Black educational psychologists' experiences of training, I could not occupy a 'neutral' or 'invisible' position, and this shared positioning was acknowledged rather than minimised. To support participants' sense of control, interviews were scheduled at times chosen by participants and conducted virtually, allowing them to participate in familiar, comfortable, and private settings. I sought to be an "almost invisible" interviewer through a quiet, empathetic, and non-directive FANIM, enabling participants to associate freely and determine the focus and pace of the interview, despite my visible and situated presence (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 34). I also

made explicit that there were no right or wrong ways to engage, framing participation as collaborative rather than evaluative.

3.6.2 Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw

All participants received a more detailed information sheet (Appendix 8) outlining the study's purpose, the involvement required, and where to access support. They all confirmed their participation via email, signed a consent form (Appendix 9), and completed a screening questionnaire (Appendix 10) before the first interview. Care was taken with wording: technical phrases such as "researching unconscious and defended processes" were avoided to prevent intimidation or undue influence (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The TREC-approved description, such as a "psychosocial exploration of Black trainee educational psychologists and how unconscious influences may affect their training experiences", balanced transparency with accessibility, ensuring participants understood the research without unnecessary complexity (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

The right to withdraw was communicated in the information sheet, reiterated at consent, and repeated before the second interview. Participants were reminded they could withdraw entirely or request the removal of any data up to the point of anonymisation, and were informed they could pause, take breaks, or reschedule if needed. All participants confirmed understanding and chose to remain in the study with their full dataset.

3.6.3 Confidentiality, Representational Ethics & Data Protection

Pseudonyms were used for participants and for anyone named in their accounts and identifying details such as training institutions or local authorities were removed from transcripts and replaced with neutral markers in capitals (e.g., TRAININGINSTITUTION). Given the small size of the Black TEP community within

the profession, careful attention was paid to the risk of deductive disclosure, understood as the possibility that individuals familiar with the field may infer a participant's identity despite the removal of direct identifiers (Saunders et al., 2015). All participants were informed of this risk and confirmed their consent to the use of their data at the end of each interview. Beyond anonymising transcripts, representational decisions in the write-up were made reflexively, attending to which experiences could be reported without increasing the likelihood of identification.

Representational ethics required transparency about how participants would be portrayed in analysis and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Participants were reminded before, during, and after interviews that findings would reflect my interpretations rather than objective truths, and that themes would present a dataset-level overview rather than individual case studies. They were offered autonomy over their pseudonyms and informed that anonymised extracts might be included in the thesis. Contact details for the Quality Assurance Officer and research supervisor were provided as clear channels for concerns.

All data were stored on a password-protected device with institutional firewalls. No hard copies were produced. In line with TREC requirements, data will be retained for no longer than ten years and securely deleted thereafter.

3.6.4 Quality Assurance: Credibility, Transferability, & Rigour

Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation: participants were interviewed twice, process notes and a research diary were maintained, and psychosocial supervision and reverie group informed analytic decisions throughout (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2017). Reflexivity was central to transparency and honesty. I critically examined how my positionality, including identity, privilege, and lived experience, shaped interpretations (Treharne & Riggs, 2015; Willig & Stainton-

Jones, 2017). Tools such as Race Reflections (Kinouani, 2022) (and personal supervision supported this ongoing practice, ensuring analysis was coherent and authentically attuned to the psychosocial nature of the research.

Dependability was maintained through detailed documentation, process notes, supervision reflections, and research diary entries, enabling an audit trail of procedural decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rigour was demonstrated through sustained reflexivity and the deliberate choice of a psychosocial approach, which demanded both methodological integrity and significant emotional labour given my shared identifiers with participants (Yardley, 2017).

Respect is integral to psychosocial research and was enacted through reflexivity (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). This meant resisting deficit positioning and acknowledging my influence on the research trajectory, ensuring interpretations were ethically attuned and situated within a relational understanding of power and identity. Sensitivity to context was enacted through supervision and cyclical theme development, ensuring interpretations were organic rather than imposed through categories (Yardley, 2017). The second interview and member reflections ensured participants felt heard and that interpretations were responsive to their realities. Transferability and the broader implications of these findings for Educational Psychology practice are addressed in the Discussion chapter (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2017).

3.7 Pen Portraits

This section concludes the methodology chapter by introducing the six participants who contributed to the study. Each portrait weaves together pseudonym meanings, demographic information, and my reflexive experience of the interviews. Drawing on transcript material, process notes, and reflexive observations, the portraits

are not intended as objective descriptions but as interpretive accounts shaped through the research relationship (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). In writing them, I attended to how participants spoke about their routes into educational psychology training, their relational experiences within professional systems, and their reflections on identity at the intersection of race and professional becoming. My own responses, emotional, embodied, and interpretive, are included where they illuminated the research encounter. Discussing participant portraits in supervision offered a valuable opportunity to reflect on my own positioning and assumptions through another's subjectivity (Schwaber, 1992). Given the relatively small number of Black trainees within the educational psychology profession, particular care was taken when constructing these portraits to minimise the risk of participant identification, as outlined in the ethics and quality assurance section above. All participants are anonymised using pseudonyms, with identifying details altered. These portraits provide orientation for the participants whose narratives inform the analytic themes presented in Chapters Four and Five.

3.7.1 Ashé

“Ashé” was the pseudonym chosen by the participant. The name derives from Yoruba cosmology and refers to spiritual energy or life force, often understood as the power to make things happen or bring change into being. Ashé identified as a Black British woman of Caribbean heritage in her early thirties who had trained on a London-based programme.

Across our interviews, I experienced Ashé as open and reflective when speaking about her experiences. She described identifying with being an “overachiever” and frequently used vivid metaphors to convey how professional environments felt to her. Two images remained particularly striking: wearing a “tight

mask” and inhabiting a “suffocating uniform”. As I listened, I noticed a bodily response of claustrophobia, imagining the restricted breath and tension that might accompany being required to appear composed and uniform within professional spaces. I wondered whether the mask and uniform symbolised the external expectations of the educational psychology environment, reflecting a professional presentation that privileges neutrality, emotional restraint, and conformity, while limiting space for more complex expressions of self.

Ashé also reflected on her positioning as someone others frequently turned to for support, describing what she called an “auntying” dynamic. Hearing this, the phrase “agony aunt” came to my mind, evoking both wisdom and an unspoken expectation of emotional labour. I found myself wondering about the cost of occupying such a role, and who might hold that position for her. During one moment in the interview, as she spoke about sadness, I found myself repeating her words, “it is sad”, and nodding. A brief silence followed as we looked at each other across the screen, which I experienced as a moment where the “mask” seemed to loosen slightly. Afterwards, I questioned whether my response reflected a shift into a more therapeutic stance and whether I might have been seeing aspects of my own experience reflected in her account. Reflecting later, I wondered whether this immediate self-questioning echoed the same vigilance Ashé described: an uncertainty about when it is safe to lower the mask. Her narrative prompted me to reflect on my own identification with being an overachiever and supporter of others, presenting as capable and composed while remaining uncertain about how to ask for support myself.

3.7.2 Demi

“Demi” was a pseudonym selected by the participant. The name is often used as a shortened form of longer names and can carry connotations associated with

“crown” or “royalty”. Demi identified as a Black British man of West African heritage in his thirties who had trained on a London-based programme.

During our interviews, I experienced Demi as caring, attentive, and intentional in how he spoke about his practice. He expressed pride in becoming an educational psychologist and in the possibility of making a meaningful difference through the role. Alongside this commitment, he reflected on an ongoing tension—both during training and afterwards—about how to fully inhabit his professional identity within a field where representation of Black male EPs remains limited. Listening to this, I sensed the frustration and uncertainty that can accompany wanting to enact change while having few visible models to guide how this might be done.

Demi spoke thoughtfully about how cultures of “niceness” within professional spaces can sometimes obscure more difficult conversations about race and power. His reflections resonated with my own experiences of navigating niceness as both relational glue and a potential barrier to honest dialogue. I found myself wondering whether expectations of niceness might carry particular pressures for Black men, especially within contexts where stereotypes of threat or aggression can shape how they are perceived.

At times during the interview, Demi’s voice softened and his reflections moved between several ideas that initially appeared seemingly disparate, meaning that the links he was drawing were not always clear to me in the moment. I noticed my own expectation for clarity and reminded myself that uncertainty can form part of the co-construction of meaning in qualitative encounters. When he apologised for interruptions, I reassured him that it was okay, while internally noticing moments of frustration. I felt guilty and impatient having this response, particularly as he appeared deeply committed to contributing to the research. Reflecting afterwards, I became

aware of how quickly I prioritised relational harmony through reassurance, perhaps enacting the very dynamics of “niceness” we had been discussing.

3.7.3 Jourdan

“Jourdan” was a pseudonym selected by the participant. The name is often associated with the River Jordan, meaning “to flow down”, evoking ideas of movement, transition, and change. Jourdan identified as a Black British woman of West African and Caribbean heritage in her early thirties who had trained on a London-based programme.

Throughout the interviews, I experienced Jourdan as quietly confident, determined, and grounded. I noticed a contrast between the assured person sitting in front of me and the person she described herself as being during training. Jourdan recalled her first day on the course as deeply impactful due to the lack of representation. During the interviews, she reflected that she had not fully processed aspects of her training experience at the time and noted that towards the end of the course she “couldn’t recognise herself”. As she spoke, I imagined the cycle of a flickering flame: initially burning brightly, dimming momentarily, before returning to its brightness. I wondered about the experience of that dimmed flame, standing in a darkened room, unable to see one’s own reflection, the disorientation creating a sense of fragmentation. Holding this image, I felt sadness and loneliness. At the same time, I also felt pride as I experienced Jourdan in the present: confident and assured, returning to her brightness despite the experiences she described.

Jourdan reflected that she sometimes felt she had “sold herself short”, a phrase that stayed with me because of the historical and relational meanings it seemed to evoke about value, recognition, and belonging. When she described a placement meeting in which a racial slur directed at a Black child was repeated (in full) by a senior

member of staff, and Jourdan's discomfort, being the only black person in the room, was not acknowledged or followed up on, I was left with a sense that Jourdan had felt unseen and unheld in that professional space. I noticed feelings of anger and injustice arising in me. I became interested in how this anger appeared to circulate across the situation, lodged not only in the incident being described or in Jourdan's experience, but also in the lack of regard or response from those in positions of professional authority. Across both interviews, I also noticed Jourdan frequently used the phrase "a lot" to describe her experiences. I heard this as a possible linguistic container for the cumulative emotional labour of navigating racialised dynamics in training, placement, casework, and professional relationships.

3.7.4 Nene

"Nene" was a pseudonym chosen by the participant during a light-hearted exchange between us after the interviews had ended. The name has West African origins and is often associated with meanings linked to "mother" or "grandmother", evoking ideas of care, wisdom and generational continuity. Nene identified as a Black British woman of Caribbean heritage in her forties who had trained on a London-based programme.

I experienced Nene as humorous, personable and knowledgeable. She described frequently being positioned in leadership roles during training and beforehand. At times she was seen as the "mother" of the group, an identity she held with both pride and apparent ambivalence. While she valued recognition of her care and wisdom, she also reflected that this positioning could feel distancing, particularly when tied to assumptions about age or difference. When I later explored the meaning of the name she had chosen, I noticed possible parallels with this maternal positioning and began to wonder whether humour might have functioned as a way of holding more

complex experiences, such as feeling less easily relatable within the cohort, navigating assumptions about age in relation to competence or progression, or managing unspoken comparisons with younger peers. These thoughts remained tentative and reflexive, offered as a way of sensing the layered meanings that humour and naming practices might carry within her training experience.

At one point Nene shared an account that I experienced as sad. I noticed myself rubbing my thighs, a gesture I recognised as self-soothing. When I named feeling sadness, I experienced her as quickly shifting the conversation. I later wondered whether this movement might have reflected a form of protection—towards herself, me, or the interaction. I found myself thinking about the work of making difficult emotions manageable for others and wondering where the sadness was being held, and whether it might have been held between us.

During our first interview, Nene often spoke broadly and drew on others' experiences when describing training. After the recording ended, she shared that she had intentionally held back some experiences because she did not want to take up too much time. Her comment stayed with me and prompted reflection on what may have remained unspoken and whether the research space had felt safe enough. Across both the interviews, I was struck by her movement from describing herself as “really grateful” to be on the course to increasingly asserting her place within it, recognising both her strengths and her right to belong. Her reflections led me to consider how identities in training, professional, personal and racial, remain dynamic and evolving.

3.7.5 Noelle

“Noelle” was a pseudonym I selected from two options offered by the participant. The name, meaning Christmas in French, evokes ideas of birth, renewal and quiet strength. Noelle identified as a Black British woman of Caribbean heritage

in her late twenties who had trained on a London-based programme. I experienced Noelle as emotionally attuned, open and generous in sharing her narrative. She often reflected on her experiences through psychological ideas and frameworks, describing an intention to remain reflexive and to learn from what might lie beneath immediate awareness. I experienced her as willing to sit with difficult or uncomfortable emotions, naming them with a vulnerability that felt significant. At times, humour appeared alongside painful recollections. I interpreted this juxtaposition as a way of softening the weight of these moments while maintaining connection in the telling of them.

Throughout the interviews, Noelle spoke quickly and fluently. I experienced her accounts as a steady outpouring, as though something long held was being released. I noticed feelings of protectiveness within myself and an urge to offer reassurance or comfort. This prompted reflection on my own desire for spaces within training where experiences of race could be shared openly and held with care. Noelle frequently used phrases such as “you know” or “you know what I mean”. I understood these as invitations to shared understanding and trust, yet I also felt mindful of the risk of over-identifying. While part of me felt that I did recognise what she meant, I was conscious of maintaining a reflexive stance rather than assuming understanding. I accidentally ended our second interview prematurely while transitioning to the debrief. The abrupt ending left me feeling guilty, particularly following the depth of Noelle’s sharing, as I became aware that I may have repeated a familiar pattern of immediate disengagement in response to racially charged emotional disclosure. It prompted reflection on the responsibility of holding and representing such narratives with care. Noelle’s description of being drawn into a “vortex” of racial awareness during training stayed with me long afterwards, leading me to consider how professional learning

spaces, and perhaps this research, can both illuminate and intensify experiences of racialised consciousness.

3.7.6 Sharai

“Sharai” was a pseudonym collaboratively chosen between the participant and me. She invited me to suggest a name; I initially selected one, then revised it with her consent. The name Sharai is associated with a powerful goddess connected to transformation, time, and fierce compassion. Sharai identified as a Black British woman of Caribbean heritage in her early thirties who had trained on a London-based programme.

In our interviews, I experienced Sharai as thoughtful and articulate, often drawing on concepts such as containment, intersectionality, and systemic dynamics to make sense of her experiences. Her speech was measured and deliberate, which I initially interpreted as careful reflection. As the interviews unfolded, I found myself wondering whether this carefulness might also reflect the vigilance that can accompany navigating racialised professional spaces. At times, I recognised echoes of strategies familiar to me: the careful calibration of tone and language to avoid misinterpretation or unintended harm—work that can require considerable emotional energy.

One image that stayed with me was Sharai’s metaphor of the “butter churn”, describing how shared experiences are processed collectively, while the product of that process, her “Black butter”, remains distinct. I understood the churn as a shared mechanism through which experiences are worked and reworked, while the butter symbolised the particular meanings shaped by racialised difference. The labour-intensive process of churning butter also evoked for me the often unseen emotional work involved in making sense of such experiences. I found myself reflecting on how

environments can shape this process: warmer conditions softening, colder conditions hardening. I noticed feeling “soft” in the interview space, yet also aware of moments in my own professional journey where I have felt hardened in response to racialised dynamics. While Sharai spoke about carefully shaping her words, I became more conscious of the moments in my own journey where silence has felt both protective and imposed. Her narrative invited me to sit with these tensions rather than resolve them.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework and decisions that shaped the study, demonstrating coherence between my ontological and epistemological positioning, research methods, analytic approach, and ethical commitments. By detailing how data were generated, interpreted, and reflexively attended to, the chapter establishes the methodological conditions under which participants’ accounts were engaged. The pen portraits that conclude the chapter provide contextual orientation for the findings’ themes presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Findings (Part One)

Introduction

This chapter and the chapter that follows present the findings of the analysis undertaken for this study, detailing the themes identified through close engagement with the interview accounts. Across both chapters, interview excerpts are used to ground and illustrate the analysis. The overarching research question guiding the study concerned how Black TEPs experience their training. From the analysis of the interview material, I identified nine overarching themes (see Figure 5); this chapter focuses on five.

These five themes are: Assimilated Histories, which addresses the ways in which the past ‘haunts’ the present continues to shape the present; Model(ling), which considers the positioning of trainees as representatives and the labour of navigating this; Self–Other Management, which explores the precautions taken to maintain safety, professionalism, and belonging; Other–Self Responsibilisation, which examines how responsibility is conferred and internalised; and Speaker of Problems, which captures the spokesperson paradox, whereby trainees become positioned as representatives of racial issues while simultaneously bearing the emotional and relational costs of speaking. Each theme was constructed across participants’ accounts, drawing on multiple extracts from interview transcripts to evidence shared patterns. Transcript references accompany each excerpt for transparency, using the format of participant pseudonym and line number (e.g., Ashé, 1234). Where participants are named in the surrounding text, only transcript line numbers are provided.

The analysis reflects my ongoing grappling with making sense of Black TEPs’ experiences. I resist settled or overly resolved explanations, avoiding an expert-led

stance that might colonise the interpretive space. My approach moves beyond purely intra- or intersubjective readings, drawing at times on transubjective understandings of unconscious processes (Frosh et al., 2024; Wright, 2024) and a flexible use of psychodynamic ideas rather than a single theoretical tradition. As stated earlier, reflexivity is central: I position myself as a co-constructor of the data and continue to write in the first person to make my analytic presence explicit.

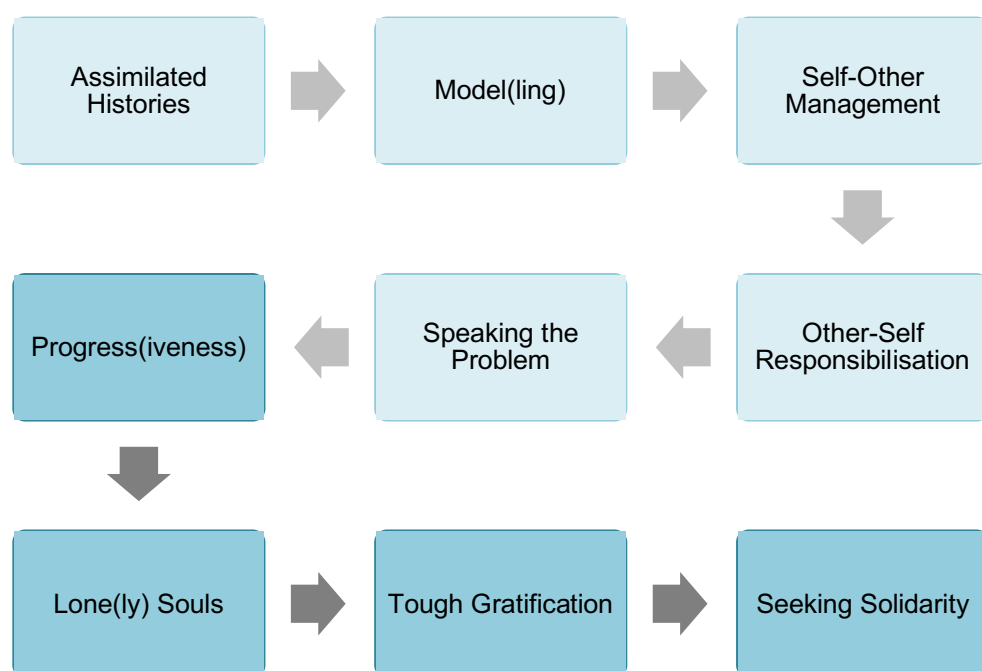


Figure 5. Overview of Themes

4.1 Assimilated Histories

This theme, Assimilated Histories, captures how Black trainees enter EP training at the convergence of wider social, historical, and institutional legacies, including colonial histories and the racialised foundations of psychology. As I sat with the interview material, I noticed how participants' accounts carried haunting echoes of colonial and racialised histories, shaping anticipation even before training formally began. I became aware of my own pull towards these moments, and how they

resonated with my embodied sense of entering psychological spaces marked by non-neutral histories. My interpretation here reflects this co-constructed positioning.

Across accounts, what came across strongly was that history was not a distant backdrop but an active presence:

It's been my lifetime of the same experiences, but I'm the tip of the iceberg...It's generational for me growing up, hearing all about...what my ancestors and close family have experienced in terms of racism and the weathering that comes with it, and then go further and further back, 400 years of slavery. (Ashé, 939-942).

As I engaged with this excerpt, I felt myself drawn to the weight of the phrasing, a sense of history as something carried rather than merely known. I interpreted this as signalling how racialised histories shape not only familial narratives but also the internal atmosphere with which trainees enter professional training. Noelle echoed this, reflecting that “it's the tension and the pain of being a Black person that you carry, and it's probably intergenerational” (1233). I noticed feelings of both recognition and discomfort: recognition in the familiarity of “carrying”, and discomfort in how such burdens are often unnamed within professional spaces.

Other participants situated their experiences within broader institutional histories. “We know the profession's historically racist”, Noelle said, offering what felt like a matter-of-fact acknowledgement of a wider terrain that trainees must navigate. I found myself recognising how these histories create a landscape trainees learn to read long before formally joining it. This resonated with my awareness that the EP profession does not stand outside the structures that formed it. Demi's account pushed this further, drawing attention to Britain's post-war racialised education policies. He recalled, “the ESN [educationally sub-normal] school...[using] tests...designed to put

people in hierarchies to maintain the power and domination of one predominant group” (1071–1072). As I sat with this, I noticed a tensing in myself. His words reminded me that such educational practices produced psychic and affective consequences that continue to reverberate, shaping where trust is extended or withheld within institutions.

Across accounts, I read how early racial socialisation shaped expectations of who belongs in psychological spaces, long before participants entered training. Sharai reflected on the first time she encountered a Black psychologist in childhood:

I remember as a child the first time I saw a Black psychologist being shocked because my periphery... it wasn't normal or the norm... they say you have to see what you want to be and I wasn't seeing it around because I didn't know I could be it... but when I understood that this neighbour of ours was a psychologist and he was a Black man, I was in awe of him. (30–36)

Sharai's sense of awe stayed with me. I read it not simply as admiration, but as the registering of an absence: an internalised expectation, built over time, that people who look like this do not ordinarily hold psychological expertise. I noticed how this moment of recognition carried both possibility and rupture, revealing how early and quietly racial hierarchies are absorbed. Sharai elsewhere reflected that “race is socially constructed and...carries negative implications” (22–25), which I understood as capturing how these early messages resurface later as anticipation about what Blackness might mean within professional training. Her accounts suggested that trainees are not only navigating a course, but a historical terrain that speaks before they do. I interpreted this as a shared structural condition, in which the scarcity of Black psychologists operates as a powerful organiser of racial socialisation, positioning Black professional presence as exceptional rather than ordinary.

Demi's description of entering training after being exposed to a "horrible racial" (1056) incident in teaching brought another dimension of the immediacy of racialised harm intersecting with the historical frame. His impression that leaders did not "look out" for him seemed to echo the larger pattern he earlier described where lived experience can crystallise wider social dynamics. My own unease resonated with the vulnerability of entering institutions while uncertain of protection or support, contributing to an anticipatory stance towards training environments. Nene similarly wondered whether her earlier experiences of not being accepted onto the training were shaped "around my blackness" (25). I interpreted this not as signs of insecurity within Nene, but as material of how wider contextual racialised histories shape the narrative of blackness and thus, Black trainees. These meanings, I felt, appeared to originate in accumulated histories that remain present in what Gordon (2008) calls 'ghostly matters': residues of the past that structure present affect and expectation. In this sense, the past did not appear distant or resolved, but lived through anticipation, (dis)trust, and the conditions under which belonging was imagined.

In developing the theme of Assimilated Histories, I came to understand participants' accounts as describing how colonial residues can live not only within institutions but also within the expectations people carry into them. Narratives about the scarcity of Black psychologists, racialised educational policies, and prior encounters with anti-Blackness appeared to inform how participants imagined their place within the profession before entering it. I understood these accounts as reflecting forms of historically situated knowledge: politically aware, affectively attuned, and responsive to professional conditions. Participants were not arriving to training to be repaired, but arriving already reading the terrain. The next theme, Model(ling),

explores how these anticipations were encountered, reproduced, or disrupted once participants were inside training.

4.2 Model(ling)

Model(ling) captures a dual process through which participants were implicitly positioned as ‘models’, representatives for Blackness within a profession where they are underrepresented, while simultaneously modelling their own ways of navigating racialised spaces often without representational guidance. The parentheses in Model(ling) signal this tension where participants appeared to oscillate between being positioned as a ‘model’ and actively constructing their own ‘modelling’ practices in response to the conditions around them. This phrasing signals a movement between external positioning, through internal negotiation, to the development of self-generated modes of practice.

This dynamic seemed to surface immediately for many participants, particularly at the point of entering training. Three participants described instinctively scanning the room on the first day to assess racial presence and absence. Sharai reflected:

To capture my experience...I have quite vivid memories of the first day of going into the building where I trained to see the rest of my cohort and being enlightened and maybe relieved that I wasn’t the only Black trainee. (6–9).

Others similarly described anticipation shaped by questions of racial presence, “who I’m going to be training with...disheartened...to see it was just me” (Jourdan, 41-65); “...thinking...who else there is going to be black...” (Nene, 22). I interpreted this early scanning as a response to the racialisation of educational and professional spaces, as though the racial landscape of the room would shape both what was possible and what might be risky. Participants appeared acutely aware not only of themselves, but of how they might be viewed, evaluated, or isolated, an experience I understood through the

lens of double consciousness and racialised self-surveillance. I noticed a quiet tension for me, as though visibility might simultaneously offer reassurance and intensify exposure. I wondered whether the structural scarcity of Black trainees could also give rise to subtle group-level dynamics, not as a matter of individual intent, but as an effect of being positioned within systems that permit only limited racial presence. In this sense, entering training as one of only a small number of Black trainees may unconsciously evoke processes of comparison, differentiation, or pressure to occupy the position of the “acceptable” or “good” representative. I understood these dynamics not as something generated by participants themselves, but as reflecting how institutional arrangements can mirror historical logics of selection and ranking within predominantly white spaces.

As training progressed, participants described an intensification of racialised visibility. When Noelle reflected, “I didn’t realise how Black I was until I started training as an EP,” I understood this not as a discovery of identity, but as an amplification of how Blackness became more observable, consequential, and scrutinised within the training environment. Participants described monitoring their tone, emotional expression, and presence in response to this scrutiny. Demi captured how evaluation could become collective rather than individual, noting that “being a minority means that you’re more scrutinised on what you do and and if one member of your group does something, the more [the] likelihood that [the] whole group [is] seen in [a] negative light...” (1429). I noticed a physical tightening in myself, sensing the pressure of being read not only as an individual, but as representative. For some, this visibility generated pressure to embody a form of Blackness that felt acceptable or professional within institutional norms. Noelle described wanting to “push against the parts of me that make me Black,” questioning whether this reflected “an internalised racist thing,” and

asking, “Is white the aspiration?” (1051–1064). I felt a painful expectation to split, in which aspects of Blackness were disavowed or tightly managed in pursuit of professional legitimacy, and the fear that aspects of oneself, might be professionally risky. These dynamics, for me, linked to a racialised ‘model minority’ term in the sense that safety or success was contingent on excellence, composure, and a proximity to whiteness.

Participants frequently described being positioned as model representatives for the wider Black community. Jourdan reflected:

I’m the only voice for Black people and people are looking at me for the answers...the discussions are too much...and these are really confronting situations and on top of that a lot is going on within society racially and a lot of the conversations are being had, but it’s not really being met with the level of care. (92–124)

Listening to Jourdan in the interview, I felt an overwhelming sense of despair. I noticed a silent dependency, “intentional or not”, placed upon her, the model, to absorb, process, and hold the emotional weight of racialised discussions. This expectation appeared largely unacknowledged, leaving unspoken questions about how such demands are experienced internally. Participants described experiencing a double standard tied to race and gender. Sharai reflected that “historically, there’s a pressure with Black women, especially, [to] behave and present themselves in a certain way to be more acceptable” (253), while Nene recalled being told by her mother, “you have to work ten times as hard as them to get to the same place” (1181). Ashé similarly described being supervised by a Black woman who “would throw around words like Black excellence a lot, [causing] a lot of pressure around that” (122). I understood these reflections to illustrate how expectations attached to being a ‘model’ can be both

externalised and internalised, shaping standards of behaviour, competence, and emotional composure. When Ashé stated, “I’ve always been an overachiever” (123), I read this less as indicative of how representational pressures can become organised around achievement as a means of securing legitimacy and safety. In this sense, excellence appeared to function as a stabilising response to scrutiny, rather than a purely individual disposition. Being positioned as a model, then, did not simply involve representing others, but also navigating heightened demands within whiteness-dominated institutional contexts.

Despite increased awareness of anti-racist practice within the profession, participants described a lack of modelling around how to navigate anti-Blackness in practice. Demi described repeated exposure to statistics and terminology relating to racial inequity and disadvantage, without tangible guidance, leaving him holding distressing knowledge without tools for action: “we’re not doing anything to help equip us to change that” (1018–1022), while Ashé noted that “there is such little representation in leadership” (111). Noelle similarly questioned where trainees were meant to look for a “blueprint” for navigating race-based conversations, not only from Black role models but also from non-Black allies: “how do you get that balance right when there’s nobody in those settings to aspire towards or even compare?” (1067–1078). Demi’s uncertainty around whether to challenge racialised processes, whether to be direct, gentle, or silent (165–176; 575–595), highlighted both confusion and the emotional weight of working within this gap. This gap appeared to function as an ambiguous space in which trainees were encouraged to engage with anti-racism yet felt unsupported to enact this work in ways that felt safe or effective. I understood this as pointing to a disconnect between intellectual awareness and practice, where racial knowledge is present but relational and organisational support is limited. Further, in

the absence of visible models or clear frameworks, participants described constructing their own internal strategies. Some spoke about “picking up” skills independently and attempting to practise ethically despite limited confidence (Demi, 231–234), while others sought therapy as a space to process and make meaning (Sharai, 446–450; Noelle, 344). In this respect, these self-modelling practices were creative and necessary responses to institutional absence, yet also emotionally demanding to sustain. While they sometimes enabled growth, they also located responsibility within the individual rather than the system, a central feature of Model(ling), wherein participants navigate external expectations of representation while internally generating the psychological structures needed to cope.

Model(ling) captures how participants were simultaneously positioned as models while developing their own ways of navigating racialised spaces. Operating within conditions of limited representation, institutional silence, and heightened visibility, trainees negotiated authenticity, safety, competence, and resistance as they sought to meet professional expectations. This duality set the conditions for the relational negotiations explored in subsequent themes.

4.3 Self-Other Management

Self-Other Management captures the relational and emotional labour participants described as necessary to maintain safety and professionalism within training spaces. This theme discerns how trainees monitored and adjusted themselves in relation to others, while simultaneously making sense of how peers, supervisors, and institutions responded to them. Participants described carefully managing how they spoke, acted, and expressed emotion, often in anticipation of being misread, stereotyped, or causing discomfort. I came to understand these practices as reflecting a form of relational vigilance: a heightened attentiveness to interpersonal dynamics

and emotional atmospheres. Trainees appeared not only to regulate their own behaviour, but also to absorb and contain the affective tensions of professional interactions. Ashé articulated this when describing how assumptions can quickly be attached to Black women in the professional environment:

It's just the way that as a Black woman, I feel like it's easier to throw the assumption or a label of like, oh, she's not a team player...or even questioning neurodivergence because of a difference around socialising...another reason for my awkwardness...is because I feel like I do have to wear a mask. (69)

I interpreted this “mask” not as deception, but as a protective strategy shaped by awareness of racialised misinterpretation, through which self-management functioned to preserve professional standing while minimising relational risk

Across accounts, ‘niceness’ emerged as a key relational currency within training spaces. This was not simply understood as warmth or collegiality, but as a regulatory practice that implicitly circumscribed what could be said, challenged, or held emotionally. Demi reflected on how his attempts to be “nice” often limited his capacity to address difficult issues, “I know that my attempt to be nice...sometimes I don't...say things that could challenge or adequately deal with things...it's almost a way to protect yourself and also not to offend” (986–999). Here, niceness appeared to function as a form of self-protection, reducing exposure to conflict while also constraining authentic expression.

Participants questioned whose interests acts of niceness ultimately served. Demi reflected that politeness often “works well for those who are... more powerful...to make sure that you don't really do anything to rock the boat” (982–983). I interpreted this as an implicit critique of niceness as a stabilising mechanism that preserves

existing hierarchies, including racial ones. Demi further observed that “everybody’s nice in this profession...but nice is so misleading” because it can coexist with racial blind spots and harm (570–577). He noted that training courses may select trainees who are “so nice...softly spoken...excellent pro-social skill”, raising concerns about political sameness and limited challenge (320–331). Jourdan echoed this, reflecting on how presenting as a “nice cohort” can mask underlying tensions (983). I understood these accounts as illustrating how niceness operates as a moral ideal within professional spaces, splitting conduct into what is deemed ‘good’, compliant, pleasant, non-disruptive; and what risks being positioned as ‘bad’, challenging, emotionally explicit, politically direct.

Within this economy, niceness appeared to offer conditional safety, but at the cost of emotional containment and voice. As I reflected on these narratives, I became aware of their resonance with my own experience during training. I recognised an internalised pressure to remain agreeable, manage tone and affect, and to avoid occupying the position of the “difficult” or “angry” Black trainee. This did not feel like an active choice, but rather a form of anxious self-surveillance, where deviation from niceness risked being read as excessive or unprofessional. I understood this as a form of defended accommodation, in which niceness functions as an affective mask that suppresses anger, grief, or discomfort in the service of relational safety. While protective, sustaining this position felt exhausting. In this sense, niceness began to resemble a form of ‘toxic positivity’, foreclosing conflict while intensifying internal strain. I curiously questioned whether the labour of maintaining harmony was evenly distributed, wondering whether it fell more heavily on those already navigating heightened visibility and vulnerability.

Noelle's account offered a vivid illustration of the vigilance involved in anticipating racialised misrecognition. She described a group conference in which a white professional attributed "rustling noises" to "the Black people in the room." Her immediate internal response "I'm not making any noise...I'm not one of these disrespectful Black people" (272–301), captured an expectation to regulate herself, to be well-behaved and professional. I understood Noelle's response as revealing how Black trainees are positioned not only as individuals, but as potential representatives of a homogenised group identity. Humour featured in her narration, and seemed to function as a protective manoeuvre, making the experience speakable while containing its affective intensity. Beneath this, an oscillation between identification and dis-identification. While aligning herself with the Black professional present, Noelle also seemed to distance herself: "I'm not one of them". It appeared to be a form of defended racialised projective identification response, where the warding off of a stereotype, here, experiencing (some) Black people as noisy/messy/unruly encourage Noelle's emphasis on punctuality, compliance, and "beating the stereotypes". This reflected a hyper-vigilant form of self-regulation aimed at pre-empting dismissal or punishment. When she concluded, "it felt like a lot of weight...I'm the representative here", the cumulative burden of anticipatory labour became explicit. During the interview, I became aware of my own affective responses of protectiveness and confusion, which I treated as analytically meaningful, sensing that Noelle's oscillation between identification and distancing was subtly re-enacted within the research encounter. This reinforced my interpretation of her account as an internalised response to a broader racialised relational field within training.

Participants' accounts suggested that self–other management was actively negotiated within supervisory and peer relationships, where vigilance became a

condition of participation. Ashé described noticing how her perceived competence was being mobilised within supervision in ways that risked devaluing a peer, “Whatever was being projected...onto me about being able to be competent and efficient with the work to degrade someone else...I didn’t want to be involved in it” (131). I interpreted this as an instance of self–other management, where Ashé regulated her participation to avoid being recruited into a racialised hierarchy of competence. Her restraint functioned as emotional regulation, maintaining relational safety while resisting a model-minority positioning. Jourdan’s account further illustrated how supervision could intensify the demand for vigilance under the guise of recognition. Her placement supervisor encouraged her to remain in a pupil referral unit (PRU) setting, framing this as a strength linked to her Blackness and perceived capacity to relate to pupils (475–479). I understood this positioning as requiring Jourdan to absorb racialised distress for the sake of the profession and others, while suppressing her own emotional responses. There was little space to acknowledge the nuances around the perceived ‘strength’ that implicitly required a dissociation because of the resonance with her own racialised representation and experiences. Noelle expressed:

No one else is going to know about this experience or know the relevance of that, and I think it's experiences like that that make it even more painful as a black EP, because...you're thinking no like, this could be my...little nephew... (813-817).

Across these accounts, supervision emerged as a site where participants managed how they were seen, what they absorbed, and what they withheld. Self–other management was enacted through emotional containment and ongoing vigilance, labour that sustained professional relationships while remaining largely beneath the

surface. Rather than alleviating vigilance, supervisory spaces often reproduced the conditions that necessitated it.

Overall, I discerned a shift from participants managing themselves in relation to others, to others implicitly assigning responsibility to them. What began as vigilance, monitoring behaviour, emotion, and impact, gradually took on the shape of obligation: to protect peers, contain discomfort, support pupils, or uphold institutional values around race. This movement marks a transition into the next theme, where responsibility becomes more explicitly displaced onto Black trainees within professional and institutional contexts.

4.4 Other-Self Responsibilisation

This theme represents how responsibility around race became both externally conferred onto trainees and gradually internalised through repeated relational encounters. Across interviews, participants described being positioned as sites for organisational anxiety, learning, and moral regulation in relation to race. I understood this as a process of other–self responsibilisation: a dynamic in which expectations initially located in the environment were simultaneously placed upon the trainee and, over time, internalised. This responsibility was rarely negotiated explicitly and was often taken on without adequate support. I interpreted this as a form of enforced containment, through which trainees absorbed responsibility in order to preserve relational harmony and institutional equilibrium, frequently at an emotional cost.

Participants' accounts suggested that responsibility in relation to race was unevenly distributed within training contexts, and that this asymmetry shaped how responsibility was taken up internally. Noelle described a sense that engaging with race-related conversations was not optional for her, contrasting this with what she viewed as the “luxury” afforded to white peers to opt in or out of such work (1192–

1205). I understood this as a structural imbalance in choice, where racialised visibility constrained the possibility of disengagement. It conveyed an ongoing negotiation between agency and obligation: while representation could feel meaningful, it was accompanied by an unspoken expectation to speak, explain, or respond on behalf of others. It illustrated how responsibility becomes internalised through repeated encounters in which race is made salient and silence feels consequential rather than neutral.

A similar asymmetry was evident in Nene's account, where responsibility extended beyond representation into emotional and relational labour within the cohort. Nene described being "named the mum of the group in training," laughing as she recalled the label (303). I noticed her laughter and wondered whether it functioned as a way of easing the discomfort of a role that she later resisted. Nene clarified that she did not want to be seen as "the mum", associating it with being "frumpy", yet went on to describe how she repeatedly soothed, fixed, and explained for others because she felt she was "naturally good at it" and stepped in when peers struggled. She spoke particularly about a white, middle-class, younger peer whom she described as the "complete opposite" of herself, noting that the peer herself framed their relationship in this way and relied on her support. I wondered whether Nene's capacity for care was freely chosen, or whether she had been subtly positioned into a nurturing role that was then relationally reinforced. Being seen as "good" appeared contingent on her ability to act as a container for others' discomfort or confusion around difference. This dynamic reflected an internalisation of responsibility, where emotional labour became normalised and rewarded, while the asymmetry of whose needs were prioritised remained obscured.

Nene also illustrated how responsibility around race was actively conferred within supervisory relationships, noting that her relationship with a placement supervisor had at times felt as though she was “supervising her sometimes” (305). This dynamic became particularly evident during a placement meeting about embedding anti-racist practice, attended by a senior leader from a parallel service:

The PEP said, we’ve got seven minutes to talk about anti-racist practice,... and while we were on the call they said they were going to do questions and answers. I was thinking, the PEP [will be] responding. She started sending me private messages saying, ‘Can you respond?’ And I’m thinking, you’re the head of the service, I’ve been here three weeks and I’m a trainee...Someone asked how this work actually looks in practice. [The PEP] kept messaging me: ‘Can you respond? Can you respond?’ So I did. But I thought, is it that you don’t want to speak about race because you’re the head of the service? Or are you pushing that all on the Black girl to deal with? (165–182)

I interpreted this as a moment of supervisory responsabilisation, where institutional anxiety around race appeared to be displaced onto Nene through hierarchical pressure rather than explicit consent. Responsibility seemed to be assumed, positioning Nene as both agentic and container: responsible, yet structurally constrained. As she recounted this, I became aware of my own affective responses of anxiety and injustice, which I treated as meaningful mirrors of the pressure she described. The supervisor’s discomfort appeared to be managed by delegating racial labour downward, allowing institutional equilibrium to be preserved. Supervisory contexts thus intensified other–self responsabilisation, transforming experience and competence into obligatory forms of self-governance.

Sharai's account offered a differently inflected experience. She described representation as affirming, rooted in the impact of seeing a Black female psychologist and recognising that such visibility made possibility imaginable:

So, I felt like I had to represent as well. There was a pressure, a responsibility to represent. I remember, as a teenager or in my early twenties, seeing a Black female psychologist on TV who looked young, and it was this shock... fascination... like, wow. Maybe I could actually do it because I can see somebody in the role. So those were nuggets of motivation for me to continue pursuing my dreams, to become a psychologist. (37–45)

I understood this as representation functioning as a source of identification and pride, while also generating a sense of responsibility that Sharai willingly took up. Her account suggested that affirmation and responsibility were closely entwined, with motivation gradually giving rise to a felt pressure to represent “as a minority” within the profession. Ashé's account revealed a related but differently configured burden. She described feeling an internal responsibility to advocate for a racially similar peer whom she perceived to be subtly devalued by supervisors, stating that she felt she “should be standing up” for her fellow trainee while simultaneously recognising the risk of challenging senior authority (132–133). Ashé described this conflict as deeply uncomfortable and later noted that she had intentionally moved the experience out of her awareness. I interpreted this as a protective withdrawal from a position where moral responsibility was felt, but structural support was absent. The resulting paralysis reflected the weight of representational burden carried without relational safety. These accounts supported my understanding of other–self responsabilisation as a relational process shaped by institutional scarcity, where responsibility is not simply chosen, but

produced through unequal access to visibility, choice, and support, often taking the form of an internalised sense of responsibility to advocate for others.

Across accounts, I came to understand peer responsabilisation as quietly extending the reach of self–other management. Trainees appeared to monitor not only their own emotional regulation, but also an implicit sense of duty to educate, protect, or intervene for others. I wondered how this responsibility accumulated over time, often without recognition or support, and how easily it slipped into obligation. As this burden intensified, a tension accompanied it. The work of containing, translating, and protecting felt increasingly difficult to hold internally. For some participants, relational attunement eventually collided with a need to name discomfort or inequity. In these moments, silence appeared less sustainable, even as speaking carried its own risks.

4.5 Speaking the Problem

This theme captures a recurring tension across participants' accounts: the felt necessity to speak alongside the perceived danger of doing so. Participants described moments where concerns were strongly present but carefully withheld, reshaped, or abandoned in anticipation of relational, professional, or racialised consequences. When speaking out did occur, it was often followed by anxiety, rupture, or repositioning, with the speaker subtly marked as the problem within the group. I understood this as a crisis of voice within a defended system, in which naming discomfort threatens equilibrium and is managed through the displacement of difficulty onto those who speak.

Across participants' accounts, speaking about discomfort or injustice was experienced as jeopardous. Nene's reflections illustrated how fear of consequences became internalised, shaping decisions about whether and how to speak. She stated,

I don't want to lose my place because I've opened my mouth...having to deal with those things on my own and that not being very containing but then seeing other people on the course not doing as much work and still getting a doctorate at the end of the day. (104)

She later described withholding a formal complaint because she was “scared of the repercussions” (136). I felt moved by sadness and fear while listening to her. It appeared that unethical discomfort was held privately, with Nene anticipating that raising concerns would reposition her as the problem rather than prompt accountability on the part of those with institutional authority. Nene contrasted her own carefulness with observing peers who appeared to exert less effort yet would “still get a doctorate”, pointing to a perceived asymmetry in whose mistakes or resistance were tolerated, and whose voice carried professional risk. Within this context, silence emerged as a protective strategy. Anxiety generated at a systemic level appeared deflected into the trainee, where it was absorbed through self-silencing as a means of preserving place and belonging.

Nene offered an example that illuminated how correction itself could be re-read as threat. During a seminar discussion, another trainee made an incorrect inference about someone's religion. When those who corrected the assumption, including Black and Asian trainees, spoke, they were later experienced as “aggressive” despite being “very calm” in Nene's view (404–409). Nene described feeling “shocked” by how confidently the incorrect assumption was expressed, and how quickly correction was reframed as hostility. As she recounted this moment, her laughter felt layered, conveying disbelief, discomfort, and recognition of a familiar pattern. I understood this as showing how error is more easily accommodated when voiced from positions of normative authority, while dissent from minoritised trainees is more readily

problematised. Nene reflected that anger appeared to be projected onto those who spoke, alongside an unspoken expectation that they respond with empathy. A similar dynamic was evident when Nene described attempting to name feeling upset by racially inappropriate comments, only to be positioned as “the angry Black female” (956). When a peer became tearful and spoke of “feeling attacked”, supervisory attention shifted away from Nene’s experience, positioning her as emotionally problematic. Nene later reflected, “It was really clear how unimportant my feelings are to you guys” (950). I felt a deep sadness in relation to this account, as though the act of speaking reorganised the group dynamic, turning the speaker into the disturbance while leaving the conditions that produced distress intact. Silence, here, appeared to become a necessary, if costly, form of self-protection.

Participants also described experiences where speaking resulted in being problematised, such that the speaker became the site of difficulty rather than the issue being named. Jourdan reflected that her voice “got really lost”, yet when it was heard it became heightened almost exclusively around race: “you’re now positioned as this...Black woman who is just talking about race basically consistently” (950). I understood this as a paradox of hypervisibility and erasure. Jourdan appeared unheard in her fullness, whilst simultaneously over-heard in relation to Blackness. Speaking about what mattered to Jourdan was reframed as excessive or intolerable, suggesting that racial discourse itself was being disavowed and returned to her as a personal flaw. Ashé’s account further illustrated the cost of this positioning. She described often becoming “the person that’s going to name the elephant in the room” (680), particularly in spaces where race was present but unspoken. She noted an unspoken expectation that when race surfaced, “people look to you immediately to be the spokesperson” (684–685). Although Ashé did not always feel safe to speak, she

described eventually doing so because others would not, “we ended up playing into those tropes...she was able to be the victim...and there was minimal [support] on my end” (906). In this scenario, discomfort was generated by naming inequality being projected back onto the speaker, allowing the wider group to preserve a sense of innocence. Listening to Ashé, I noticed feelings of frustration and fatigue, which I read as echoing the emotional cost described. The speaker became positioned as the problem while structural dynamics remained unaddressed. These accounts suggested that speaking not only carried risk, but actively reorganised relational dynamics, turning critique into character and voice into liability.

Demi’s account captured a related double bind: speaking risks being pathologised, while silence risks complicity. During placement casework, he described recognising that a racialised barrier was shaping a school’s relationship with a child yet feeling unable to voice it directly. “I didn’t utter it, I didn’t speak those words, but I knew it was happening”, he reflected, adding that he could only articulate this insight to a fellow peer who shared the setting (578). When he said, “I still carry that” (610), I felt the weight of what remained unspoken. I understood this as a representational burden: holding insight without a viable pathway to articulate it safely or effectively. Demi articulated this conflict explicitly when he questioned how to speak in ways that would “do justice” and “bring about change”, before concluding, “I don’t know” (589–596). I read this uncertainty not as personal deficit, but as reflecting the absence of shared relational frameworks for naming race without consequence. His hesitation appeared shaped by awareness of racialised stereotypes, “who can speak, who can’t speak” (1161), alongside fears of being positioned as disruptive or angry. At the same time, Demi acknowledged the risk of silence. He reflected on how not speaking could render him complicit in norms he did not agree with, while also recognising his own

blind spots (1452). He emphasised the importance of conversation as a route towards collective learning (1456–1460). What emerged was a professional paradox, where anti-Blackness could be named abstractly, yet remained difficult to acknowledge within everyday institutional practice. The anxiety attached to this contradiction appeared displaced into individuals like Demi, who were left holding both the knowledge and the risk. In this sense, the demand to speak co-existed with conditions that made speaking fraught, reinforcing what I came to understand as a spokesperson paradox.

Participants also described how voice was monitored, curtailed, or sanitised within institutional contexts. Demi referenced the profession's conspicuous silence following global racialised violence, asking,

Have you not noticed the silence of the profession when it comes to what's happened in Palestine? It's said nothing. That's a classic case of racism in operation. This profession talks so much about social justice, about speaking for the voiceless, and yet there's a shutdown. If you reflect, this mirrors what happened to Caribbean people in the sixties and seventies. It's happening internationally now, with real consequences worldwide, but you're silent. Whether that's because of influence, pressure from government, media, or other powerful forces... what does that say about psychology if you can't talk about that or feel supported to do so? (1399–1420).

Demi's frustration appeared directed at the contradiction between a profession that positions itself as socially just and its reluctance to speak when doing so carries political risk. I found myself wondering what such silence protects against, and how not-speaking may function defensively to avoid anxiety, scrutiny, or being positioned as a 'bad object'. Nene echoed this sense of constraint, describing how topics such as

Gaza felt taboo in professional spaces: “I’m not going to open my mouth... I still am not safe enough to voice these things authentically” (775–781). She described a culture of fear around “rocking the boat” or “upsetting people”, where political and racial discourse was sanitised under the guise of professionalism. I understood this as voice under surveillance: speech implicitly regulated by what is deemed neutral, appropriate, or safe.

This theme traces speaking as a relational act saturated with risk. Participants described how voice was monitored, redirected, or rendered problematic, particularly when it named racialised discomfort or inequity. Where speaking threatened relational harmony or institutional equilibrium, silence often felt safer, though not without cost. This resulted in a tempered disillusionment, not only with individual interactions, but with the profession’s capacity to tolerate and work with racial discomfort. Speaking the problem revealed how voice could become a site of exposure and vulnerability, repeatedly colliding with training environments that espouse justice while struggling to contain its implications.

4.6 Conclusion

The first five themes delineate how the participants, as Black trainees, navigated training environments structured by racialised visibility, limited representation, and uneven distributions of safety and responsibility. These themes trace a movement from being positioned and monitored, towards managing complex self–other dynamics, internalising responsibility, and negotiating the risks of speaking. These processes are understood as relationally and institutionally produced, emerging through repeated engagements across peer, supervisory, and organisational contexts. While participants demonstrated considerable reflexivity, awareness, and adaptive capacity, this often involved additional labour undertaken with limited explicit support

and frequently at emotional cost. Collectively, the themes establish a psychosocial context for Part Two, which examines how these dynamics are negotiated, contested, or re-worked over time.

Chapter 5: Findings (Part Two)

Introduction

This chapter reports on the themes which relate how participants navigated the later stages of training following cumulative experiences of visibility, responsabilisation, and constrained safety. Across the themes of Progress(iveness), Lone(ly) Souls, Tough Gratification, and Seeking Solidarity, participants described movement rather than resolution. Experiences of endurance, inwardness, and fragmentation gradually gave way to greater reflection, integration, and awareness of self-in-role. While institutional and relational limitations remained, participants articulated more deliberate negotiations of who they were within the trainee role and how racialised experience shaped the responsibilities they carried. These themes illuminate how psychological survival within training involved not only psychological cost, but also meaning-making, professional identity, and tentative orientations toward relational and systemic change.

5.1 Progress(iveness)

This theme speaks to a tension across participants' accounts between the field's progress, understood as its espoused commitment to anti-racist, inclusive, and reflective practice, and how such progressiveness was experienced in enactment. Educational psychology positions itself as a profession capable of tolerating discomfort, engaging critically, and working thoughtfully with difference (BPS, 2023; HCPC, 2024). Yet participants' accounts suggested a gap between these espoused values and the reality of racialised experience in training. I understood this gap as "progressiveness", reflecting how individuals and systems that see themselves as ethical and anti-racist may become defensive when racial assumptions or practices are challenged (DiAngelo, 2018). Participants' accounts illustrated how espoused

progressive discourse can coexist with defended processes, where these responses can be understood as attempts to preserve a benevolent professional identity while managing anxiety, threat, or guilt evoked by race.

Several participants described early training experiences characterised by optimism, safety, and trust in the profession's progressive image. Nene recalled "initially being really happy to be there" (27), describing how a cohort that felt "quite diverse in terms of ethnicity" allowed her to feel "quite comfortable...seeing some of that sameness" (31–37). Ashé described an early supervisory relationship that felt containing rather than undermining, "I can tell that you're okay with getting on with things, but also, I am your supervisor, so let me supervise a bit" (219–222). For Noelle, early optimism was accompanied by an intensification of racial awareness, "I've never before had to think about my race to the extent that I had to once I started the training...Race seems to be the thing that we are going to hone in on" (14–32). Sharai described similar ambivalence, noting discomfort alongside pride, "There wasn't really shying away from...talking about your race, your culture or your ethnicity" (17–20). Nene described a gradual development of confidence to speak, shaped by relational signals, "It took me a little while to warm up with the cohort to know if I can and can't speak...I felt a lot of permission from [a staff member]" (367–370). For me, these comments suggested a tentative trust in the profession's self-presentation as progressive, grounded in visible diversity, permission to speak, and moments of relational attunement. I understood this as an early investment in a progress narrative, where educational psychology was felt to be increasingly able to receive Blackness rather than defensively manage it.

Participants described a gradual erosion of this sense of safety over time. Ashé reflected that although one early supervisory relationship felt supportive, this experience did not generalise across training spaces:

It didn't really come to fruition...even when I would explicitly ask to be treated like a trainee...there were instances where I'm having to communicate directly with the PEP about things that my supervisor should just be doing...I think there is a level of unprotection for Black trainees...I think it links to that trope...strong black woman. (223–230).

Hearing this, I sense disappointment, as moments of support raised hope that was later undone. I wondered whether racialised expectations of strength assumed resilience, allowing needs for support to be overlooked or deemed unnecessary. Noelle articulated this disjuncture through the uneven distribution of choice around engaging with racialised discourse:

It's the privilege of being able to opt out of situations...say, yeah, I really want to talk about race today, but I don't want to talk about it tomorrow...you can say...I've got another priority today or, that was a nice discussion, but put a lid on it...You then as a Black TEP...continue having to think about it because you are it...you are the hot topic...that's quite hard. (595–603).

I read this as reflecting the selective operation of progressiveness, where race was engaged when controlled, yet deflected when unsettling, functioning as a defended performance of openness that managed anxiety through withdrawal rather than sustained engagement. Progressiveness, in this sense, could appear as a smile: welcoming on the surface, yet capable of 'baring its teeth', tightening or withdrawing when challenged.

Demi described his concern about the fragility of anti-racist commitments, “When the winds change and it’s no longer about the anti-racism season...we’re already seeing signs of that...there’s a real...big worry” (89–95). Noelle extended this by questioning who sustains reflective labour when momentum wanes, “But then who’s going to do the reflections? Who’s going to make the change?...it feels like it has to be black people that support black people...allies are allies, but then they can drop out” (586–590). I read this as progressiveness operating as a fragile stance, where racial discomfort prompted withdrawal and shifted responsibility for reflection unevenly. Across these accounts, I understood a recurring tension between equality as ethos and equity as practice. Beneath surface acknowledgements, participants carried emotional and relational labour that remained largely unrecognised. At times, I wondered whether this exhaustion also reflected a wider systemic emotional state — a profession committed to anti-racism in principle, yet struggling to ‘metabolise’ anti-Blackness without retreat (Wright, 2024; Davids, 2011).

Participants also described how initiatives framed as progressive could reproduce harm when defendedness was activated. Ashé reflected on an affinity space, designed as a supportive group for historically minoritised trainees, which gradually became constrained by anxieties, “Other types of marginalisation were brought into the space, which obviously there’s some legitimacy there...but I just felt the conversation moving further away from what it was supposed to be” (19). This shift led Ashé and others to leave and convene a separate space. She described the process as “comical”, noting how closely it mirrored wider societal patterns, “the training experience really just is a reflection of wider societal issues” (23). When Black and Brown trainees raised concerns about this within the wider group, Ashé described how emotional tension came to centre “white guilt, [which] was helpfully named...But

again, it was put onto the black...or brown trainees to have to manage what was happening within the room...that was their opportunity to be an ally and it was missed” (27–35). I understood this as suggesting that spaces established as markers of progress could, through defended forms of progressiveness, reproduce harm when anxiety and guilt were not metabolised relationally. When Blackness became the focus of attention, anxiety appeared managed through a widening of focus, diffusing responsibility rather than sustaining engagement. These processes operated largely implicitly, leaving their impact unnamed and requiring non-white trainees to notice, interpret, and manage the resulting disturbance.

Jourdan’s placement experience highlighted how formal structures could exist without offering relational containment. She described feeling unable to seek support around racial dynamics in placement supervision, noting that she “didn’t really feel massively protected” and instead had to involve the training institute (442–443). Reflecting on a joint multidisciplinary meeting in which her supervisor was present, Jourdan described how a white colleague repeated a racial slur while recounting an interaction with a young person. She recalled feeling disoriented and distressed by the moment, noting:

He went on to say the N-word...I was so discombobulated...I thought [my supervisor] might have said something... she didn’t say nothing...I was quite surprised...afterwards I said to her...that made me feel really uncomfortable. I had to bring it up. That wasn’t really met with compassion. (387–412).

Jourdan’s expectation that her supervisor would interrupt the exchange or acknowledge it afterwards appeared unmet, leaving the incident forgotten within the supervisory relationship. Although supervision was formally present, this silence

suggested a form of colour-blind relating, in which racial harm could occur without being named or worked with relationally. This moment appeared to mark the limits of progressiveness in practice: despite a professional context that positions itself as reflective and anti-racist, the capacity to respond faltered when discomfort emerged, leaving Jourdan unprotected within the space. Noelle's placement experience further illustrated this limit. After agreeing to name "race and adultification" in a report, her supervisor later refused to sign it off due to discomfort, resulting in what Noelle described as a colour-blind account that omitted race entirely (785–808). Suggesting, progress was sustained at the level of principle and language, but withdrawn when racial naming required institutional backing and carried risk.

Participants articulated frustration with the pace and consistency of systemic change. Demi questioned whether progressive values translated into practice, "There are policies or guideline updates, but are they being practised?" (224–226). Noelle wondered whether race became a periodic, "tokenistic", rather than sustained focus: "Something we come back to because someone thinks, shit, we've not spoken about it in a while?" (496). Demi identified curricular gaps, "I still don't think there's enough embedding of anti-racism" (97–99), "You have all these lovely words...but you don't put your money where your mouth is" (Demi, 1442–1445). Noelle captured the emotional impact, "All this learning...all this good that could be done is really undone...[it] is just hard" (823–829). I understood these reflections as expressing a depressive position in relation to progressive ideals, where hope is sustained yet repeatedly dampened by inertia, inconsistency, and emotional cost.

Across this theme, progress was visible in language, policy, and intention, yet progressiveness appeared fragile, enacted rhetorically but inconsistently held relationally. The gap between espoused values and lived experience prompted what I

experienced as a painful realisation: that the training environment was not always able to do what it claimed. When participants could not be fully received, experiences were internalised and carried implicitly. I understood this inward turn as withdrawal to survival, a response to environments that struggled to tolerate racialised discomfort without defendedness. It is this turning inward and its emotional and relational consequences that shaped the experiences explored in the next theme.

5.2 Lone(ly) Souls

Lone(ly) Souls captures what I interpreted as the cumulative emotional and psychological impact of navigating training without sustained recognition or containment. I noticed participants turned inward, where repeated experiences of misunderstanding, responsibilisation, and constrained expression appeared to be metabolised individually. While uncertainty and self-questioning are common in professional training, I understood participants' narratives as revealing a racialised loneliness when doing so. This loneliness was both interpersonal, felt within cohorts, placements, and supervisory spaces; and intrapsychic, requiring aspects of the self to be split off, muted, or managed privately. Participants appeared to carry shared 'knowing' that was insufficiently mirrored or received within the professional field, resulting in heightened internal labour. Lone(ly) Souls therefore captures not withdrawal as disengagement, but as adaptation: a way of surviving environments that struggle to symbolise or identify racialised experience.

Jourdan's account carried a quiet but persistent sense of dislocation. As the only Black trainee in her cohort, she described an absence of relational anchoring, "There was nowhere ever to really like turn" (1321). I understood this not simply as a lack of representation, but as an experience of lone visibility, where singularity forecloses ease of identification and belonging. Jourdan went on to describe a gradual

hiving off of aspects of herself across contexts. She reflected on feeling like she had “two different personalities”, noting that while she held leadership roles within family and friendship networks, she became significantly quieter within training spaces because she did not feel “fully comfortable” (158–169). When she said, “I don’t even feel like I’m being me, and actually that’s really exhausting” (936–938). I heard the weariness of sustained self-monitoring. I interpreted this as a fragmentation between an authentic sense of self and a professional self shaped by racialised scrutiny. Ashé articulated a related but distinct experience, describing the difficulty of conveying this fragmentation to those without similar histories, “It’s hard to express...to people who don’t have similar experiences” (26). Her metaphor of wearing a mask that becomes “tight in your neck” conveyed to me both hypervigilance and bodily strain. I read Ashé’s masking not as inauthenticity, but as a protective manoeuvre, a form of adaptive splitting that allows participation while safeguarding the self. These accounts reflect fragmented selfhood as a response to environments experienced as insufficiently containing, where belonging is negotiated through psychic compromise, sustaining both participation and loneliness.

Participants’ accounts led me to construct rumination and self-questioning as forms of solitary psychic labour. Where experiences could not be metabolised relationally, they were repeatedly revisited and turned over internally:

You’re constantly second guessing yourself...was I aggressive... am I an angry Black woman...have I just fulfilled every stereotype that people want me to fulfil...it’s things like that that you think I can’t be second guessing every single move that I make...you do end up really deeply having to reflect... (Noelle, 311-313).

I understood this as a form of vigilance directed towards an internalised racialised gaze, in which actions are retrospectively scrutinised for their possible meanings, as participants remain caught in an ongoing negotiation with stereotyped expectations. Ashé similarly spoke of the exhausting vigilance involved in maintaining a mask, and composure, describing an anxious anticipation that “the shoe [will] drop” (81–82) if anything slips. When effort did not yield connection, she recalled returning home distressed that she was unable to connect with others present, feeling positioned “perfectly in the middle somehow” (291–298). Listening to her, I felt sadness at how much affective labour she held alone, and wondered what was present but beneath the surface impacting connection, it seemed that the experience offered little clarity in return. Sharai’s account echoed this pattern where the labour of emotional over-attunement was processed largely in isolation. Following an interaction on placement during a needs assessment meeting, the school’s deputy head teacher was reported to “not want conflict, and she put her hands up in this defence.” (296). Sharai described replaying the exchange repeatedly, examining her own reflexivity before concluding that the discomfort was not hers to carry:

I just couldn’t connect the dots...the word conflict stuck with me because it wasn’t an argument...it wasn’t heated...I knew it wasn’t personal to me... I had to replay it in my head a few times... finding other ways to process it, let it go, to think it through, like, look at it from different angles and give myself compassion (304–325).

For Jourdan, repeated experiences of racial insensitivity within placement supervision appeared to contribute to a similar inward turn. Following earlier incidents in which racial harm had gone unacknowledged, she described a later occasion in which her supervisor used a racial slur about an Asian community while recounting a case. This

moment did not prompt Jourdan to seek discussion or repair within supervision, “it was very strange...I wasn’t able to vocalise how I felt about that...I couldn’t really ask her about certain things.” (417-442); instead, it reinforced her sense that racialised experiences could not be safely taken up in the supervisory space. I understood this accumulation of a sense of unprotected experiences as contributing to rumination and self-regulation, where meaning-making had to occur alone.

Participants described feeling alone despite being embedded within professional networks. Jourdan used visual language to convey absence, describing the online training space as, “four walls... [I was the] only Black person in this room” (800–802). For me, this evoked a sense of enclosure rather than connection, one that bordered on imprisonment, where visibility intensified isolation rather than alleviating it. Demi similarly reflected on occupying a marginal position, noting that he would, “always be a bit of an outsider” because of his appearance (1256), a feeling intensified by being “a minority within a minority within a niche profession” (1368). This pointed to layered exclusion, where belonging is repeatedly deferred rather than secured. Noelle extended this sense of isolation beyond training, speaking about being one of the first in her community to pursue a doctorate. She described pride alongside pressure, noting she had “something to prove” (302). Here, professional identity appeared difficult to reflect on or share within personal worlds, narrowing opportunities for relational recognition.

Ashé foregrounded isolation within institutional relationships. She described the “insane” level of self-advocacy required during training (207), which I understood as lone labour in the absence of sustained support. Jourdan returned to the emotional cost of being the only Black trainee, describing exhaustion and a longing for the psychic relief of not being alone (548–606). Nene spoke of “having to kind of deal with

those things on my own,” naming this as “not being very containing” (Nene, 104). Rather than adaptive self-reliance, these accounts reflect necessary self-management in contexts where distress could not easily be processed with others. Ashé described moving quickly into self-protection: “I skip past how I feel to get stuff done” (182). I understood this as defended mobilisation, where affect is deferred to enable progression through training, at the cost of delayed processing. Ashé described feeling “unprotected” and went on to note that her apparent competence reduced the support she received by supervisors seemingly assuming that, “I actually don’t have to do it...because I present as capable” (212). Jourdan reflected on “being Black and a woman...stops me from asking for help” (437–438). I interpreted such comments as revealing how assumptions of resilience displace needs. Strength becomes misrecognised as self-sufficiency, leaving trainees to manage uncertainty and distress alone. Ashé’s reflection on wanting to be “left alone” (912) felt less like withdrawal and more like a bid for regulation, solitude functioning as self-protection, refuge and isolation. In this way, being a lone(ly) soul came to reflect not isolation by choice, but survival within environments that struggled to hold vulnerability alongside competence.

Across this theme, loneliness was not simply about an absence of people, but as the psychosocial consequence of repeated misrecognition or the absence of recognition. Participants were required to carry racialised experience, affect, and self-regulation inwardly, producing solitude as both adaptation and cost. Yet this inward turn also created space for reflection, meaning-making, and survival. It is within this solitude, shaped by necessity rather than preference, that the next theme is located.

5.3 Tough Gratification

This theme captures tough gratification as growth forged not through ease or relief, but through sustained effort, strain, and survival. Across participants' accounts, pain and progress were held together. Training was described as emotionally wearing and at times diminishing, yet also formative, confidence-building, and transformative. What was gained was not comfort or resolution, but an expanded sense of what could be endured, integrated, and carried forward. Development unfolded through effort rather than ease, where something was taken from the self even as capacity was built. For me, this signalled a shift toward a more integrated, depressive position: the capacity to think in 'both/and' terms rather than split experience into success or failure, gratitude or resentment. Tough gratification therefore names learning that is hard-won, slow, and emotionally complex.

Within this theme, gratitude emerged not as naïve appreciation, but as something shaped and complicated by strain. Nene initially described feeling "grateful for getting onto the course" (22), reflecting on the role Blackness might have played in accessing training. For me, this gratitude seemed bound up with precariousness, holding tightly to access itself. Over time, Nene's relationship to gratitude shifted. Drawing on a public reflection by Nadiya Hussain discussing expectations of migrant gratitude and achievement, she observed:

When you're a British subject, we were taught you should be grateful. You should be grateful for what the Empire has done...you're taught it's not necessarily that you've earned these things you've achieved, it's that people have given it to you...opportunities that have been given to you...not necessarily that you've earned those things. (Nene, 598–610).

Here, gratitude appeared less benign. It functioned as an internalised demand to remain thankful even when effort, competence, and endurance were obscured. Gratitude carried a moral pull toward acceptability within systems that do not fully anticipate Black presence. Following this, however, Nene articulated a more assertive position, “So I deserve to be here... I should be here” (627; 630), even as she acknowledged the ongoing pressure of “always proving” herself. In this moment, gratitude was renegotiated. Appreciation and entitlement began to coexist. When Nene reflected that gratitude might come from “a sense of not really belonging” (631–633), I heard both loss and growth: the wearing down produced by repeated marginality, and the strengthening of agency through surviving it. What stayed with me was the reclaiming of the right to be present and to take up space.

Participants’ accounts suggested that agency took shape gradually through repeated exposure to discomfort and constraint. Jourdan described becoming, “More used to my positioning as the only black person,” noting that while the experience did not become “easier”, she became increasingly familiar with the “uncomfortable feelings...talking about race...about black people” (149–153). What stayed with me here was Jourdan’s growing capacity to remain present in spaces that continued to feel misattuned to her. Rather than signalling detachment, her words conveyed a developing tolerance for difficulty, an ability to stay engaged, to speak, and to carry discomfort without retreating. Sharai articulated a related shift, describing how representational burden was gradually reworked into pride. When mistaken for a translator, she reflected that the parent “maybe...hadn’t come across a black EP before”, and used the moment to assert “I am an EP. And I’m black” (341–347). Here, professional identity and Blackness were brought together rather than managed separately. Sharai’s response suggested an integration that felt agentic. Demi’s

account further complicated this picture. He described training as “Very constructive...very useful”, emphasising the acquisition of “Very powerful...skill-based” competencies (24–35). Alongside this, Demi spoke about his racialised identity within the profession in terms of feeling “wanting and puzzled. Disappointed.” These reflections sat side by side, holding professional growth alongside unresolved racial disillusionment. For me, this highlighted agency as embodied and effortful. Development unfolded through learning how to stay intact, speak when possible, and live with parts of the self that remain insufficiently recognised by the system.

Participants also offered a nuanced re-working of a notion of (personal) resilience, locating it within endurance, choice, and cost rather than celebration. Ashé spoke about resilience as an openness to experiences that are both meaningful and painful. “I’m quite interested and invested in like awakening experiences, even if it comes with a bit of pain” (Ashé, 279). Her words suggested an orientation toward growth that accepts discomfort as part of becoming more psychologically aware within the field. Resilience here appeared bound up with exposure, a willingness to remain engaged even while recognising the emotional toll involved. Jourdan also described resilience as something felt retrospectively. She reflected on training as:

A very difficult and exhausting experience...but I feel like I had that moment of realisation of...how proud I am of being a black woman...[training] made me appreciate it even more...you might be placed in this situation again, but you might be able to be more...confident...in comparison to beforehand. (685–693).

What stood out here was the temporal dimension: pride and confidence emerged only after survival and integration. The sense of gratification was real, but it was earned

through (self-) sacrifice. Noelle echoed this framing, describing resilience as the ability to tolerate uncertainty and pain without guarantees. “It was a steep and quick learning curve...it was...quite painful” (Noelle, 166). Her reflection on “journeying...not knowing...trying not to be too disheartened” (392), placed resilience as an ongoing psychic task rather than a fixed attribute. As I sat with these accounts, I noticed my own ambivalence toward resilience, pride interwoven with grief, and became aware of how often endurance is required long before it can be recognised as strength.

Participants described training as simultaneously wearing and formative, holding exhaustion and growth together in ways that suggested movement toward a more integrated stance. Jourdan described training as “a tricky three years”, noting that “Actually a lot of positives” co-existed with the exhaustion of being a Black trainee (546–548). What lingered for me was her insistence that “It wasn’t all bad”, spoken alongside the acknowledgement of “Not being true to yourself” (966–967). This capacity to acknowledge benefit without erasing loss felt significant. It suggested an ability to hold ambivalence, to appreciate development while naming what was sacrificed in the process. Noelle articulated a similar tension. She reflected on learning “so much” and feeling “more equipped” (45; 67), while also expressing a pull toward “ignorance is bliss”, wishing at times that her “eyes weren’t opened” (Noelle, 67–69). Noelle’s description of training as “Both wonderful for growth and development, but also absolutely exhausting” (1141), captured the essence of *tough gratification*. Growth here did not arrive gently or without consequence. When she reflected that “Maybe it’s necessary to have that level of pain or anger...to continue to be like a social justice advocate” (Noelle, 1372–1375), I heard a reluctant accommodation of cost as part of staying ethically and emotionally engaged. The emotional tenor of this

theme resonated with a poem that captures the losses and hurt often carried in the service of growth and learning:

Sometimes you must hurt in order to know,

Fall in order to grow,

Lose in order to gain,

Because life's greatest lessons are learned through pain (anon, n.d)

The gratification described here felt hard-won rather than triumphant, grounded in loss, insight, and the ongoing effort to remain present without needing experience to be redeemed.

As participants came to recognise both the costs they had absorbed and the agency they had forged, their accounts began to gesture beyond individual endurance. Holding pain and progress together sharpened an awareness that survival alone was insufficient. While tough gratification enabled growth, confidence, and integration, it also illuminated the limits of coping in isolation. What emerged was a quiet longing for something relational, shared understanding, mutual recognition, and systems capable of holding complexity without displacement. This turn, from solitary endurance toward the possibility of relational and institutional change, shapes the final theme.

5.4 Seeking Solidarity

Seeking Solidarity marks a shift in the findings from endurance toward tentative hope. Following the cumulative strain, fragmentation, and inwardness described in earlier themes, this theme leans into moments of imagining, creativity, and relational possibility. Drawing on a notion of play, I understood solidarity here not as a solution or endpoint, but as an emergent space where trainees cautiously test out more authentic ways of being with others (Winnicott, 1971). Participants' accounts reveal how the conditions for play are repeatedly interrupted by racialised misrecognition and

institutional anxiety, yet also how small openings nevertheless arise. These moments, often fleeting, fragile, and relational, allow for curiosity, humour, shared meaning-making, and cautious hope. Rather than resolving tension, *Seeking Solidarity* attends to what becomes possible when experience is held with others and meaning is co-constructed rather than endured alone.

Participants described institutional conditions that constrained the capacity for exploration, play, and professional becoming. Jourdan described repeated experiences of misrecognition within settings, “I had been mistaken for...a social worker a couple of times...my peers are not being mistaken for social workers” (342; 365). I understood these moments as narrowing who a psychologist is allowed to be seen as, and by extension, how freely one might inhabit a professional identity. Such misrecognition carried more than inconvenience; it shaped how confidently and creatively Jourdan could move within professional spaces, reducing the sense that professional identity could be safely explored without support from others. She instead described needing to correct, advocate, and carefully manage her positioning within the space. Demi’s reflections illuminated a different kind of constraint. He described his discomfort when expected to rely on psychometric tools whose racialised histories sat uncomfortably with his values. “I really don’t like psychometrics... I dread... even tremble... very deep anxiety about what if?” (388–429). Alongside this anxiety, Demi expressed a desire to ‘play’ with alternative approaches that felt more ethically aligned, often describing this as something that required collaboration and relational permission rather than individual conviction alone. What appeared repeatedly in his account was the tension between personal conviction and institutional demand for certainty, efficiency, and standardisation. This dynamic seemed to constrain opportunities for creative practice and thoughtful risk-taking, even as Demi identified

moments where individual supervisors briefly reopened space for experimentation. Ashé and Noelle described how institutional approaches to racial learning could feel intrusive rather than holding. “It was devastating... the way we had to experience and talk about racism” (Ashé, 260); and “learning suddenly, all this racism surrounds you is a painful experience” (Noelle, 46; 52). These reflections suggested learning environments where exposure exceeded containment. Engagement with race felt overwhelming rather than exploratory, limiting curiosity and growth. I read this as reflecting how misrecognition, institutional anxiety, and unmodulated engagement with race constrained the conditions required for play, experimentation, and professional becoming, even amid stated commitments to development.

Despite these constraints, participants described fleeting yet meaningful moments where relational risk and authenticity became possible. Sharai recounted a consultation in which she intentionally softened professional formality:

I went a bit rogue...maybe before we proceed, we just need to have a conversation, like let's just call it a conversation...It was just me and the parents. I just said...I sense that there's some worry...let's lay them on the table...would it be helpful for me to go through the process...he said yeah...I tried to demystify some of the myths...and just being me, I hope that they could just see like I was being me...I also disclosed that I am dyslexic... (Sharai, 95-107).

I experienced these moments as carefully managed openings, brief relational spaces where Sharai integrated personal and professional identities without abandoning either. These small acts of “as-if” experimentation allowed connection and shared meaning, even if only momentarily held. I understood this as a moment of tentative play, a softening of professional rigidity that allowed something new to be created.

Humour also surfaced as a way of softening intensity and creating tolerable openings within emotionally charged or racially complex interactions. “It was actually comical to me...not because it was light, but...when you’re Black, you have less space to hide your feelings...always keeping yourself in check” (Ashé, 9–24). Nene expressed a similar response, “I shouldn’t laugh... I was shocked she said that. It was a big thing at the time, but I’m laughing now because of the shock of it” (415–416). I understood humour here not as minimisation, but as a form of provisional play that regulated intensity and softened constrained encounters, allowing momentary space to breathe, connect, and reclaim a degree of agency. Sitting with these accounts, I felt admiration for the creativity and courage involved, alongside awareness that such openings rested heavily on the participants themselves rather than on consistent institutional support.

Participants described relational containment as a bodily and emotional experience rather than an abstract concept. “I just felt contained and even though it didn’t fix it...being able to sometimes name and acknowledge [things]” (Sharai, 374). Noelle explicitly linked containment to supervision, contrasting earlier experiences with later ones, “First and second year...supervision was quite containing...not having that to the same degree in third year [was a shock]” (92). Nene similarly reflected on moments where individual supervisors offered holding even when wider systems did not, “My second and third year placements...were very contained by supervisors, but the system wasn’t very accepting of me” (142). The fragility of safety within training spaces was captured by Demi’s question, “Are we safe?” (1152). For me, these statements suggested that participants were reaching for ‘safety enough’: relational holding that could allow uncertainty, exploration, and risk without immediate threat. I came to understand solidarity here as inseparable from containment: spaces where

experiences of visibility, racialised scrutiny, and emotional labour could be processed without being displaced onto those already carrying the most. In Winnicottian terms, such containment creates the conditions under which play becomes possible, not as carefree expression, but as the freedom to experiment, imagine, and be more fully present with others.

Participants also looked forward, imagining what the profession could become. Demi expressed a hope for reflexive accountability, “Almost self-critical analysis of the system in itself, and should work in order to...continue to change it in a way that’s more reflective, more critical and hopefully for the better...” (1162). Ashé highlighted curricular gaps, particularly around nuanced identity dynamics, “Colourism came up for me... it’s not spoken about on the course... racism and other forms of discrimination are, but colourism doesn’t come up” (133–134). Jourdan reflected on how unprocessed experiences resurfaced long after training ended, “I know this is probably going to take years... there were things I had forgotten about... and I was like, oh yeah, that happened” (1071), and imagined dedicated spaces for shared reflection, “Maybe more opportunities to have reflective conversations with people experiencing similar things...” (1138). Noelle spoke movingly about the healing potential of attuned space to speak about racialised experiences and feeling genuinely heard:

That is huge, I think...for a Black person to be like someone heard my voice...They’ve heard it, they’ve reflected back....Like that doesn’t happen for lots of black people ever, right?...How do you heal the hardship?...the experience of being listened to and heard heals that so, so much...it’s so special. (1527–1544).

Sharai named therapy as external containment, “Therapy was a lifeline” (Sharai, 446–447), and Nene envisaged spaces oriented toward both reflection and change, “Spaces where we could reflect, talk about our experiences of training and how we are going to change the profession” (1262). Listening to these accounts, I felt both hope and sadness. Hope lay in participants’ visions for racially attuned supervision, nuanced curricula, psychological safety, collective repair, and therapeutic spaces where Blackness could be recognised as central rather than incidental. Sadness emerged from how distant these possibilities often felt from current training realities, and how rarely such spaces were reliably held.

In closing, *Seeking Solidarity* captures not an endpoint, but an opening. Across participants’ accounts, solidarity appeared as something tentatively discovered rather than guaranteed, taking shape through provisional gestures, shared reflection, and moments of recognition that disrupted isolation. For me, these moments resembled fragile potential spaces, briefly held environments where something new could be imagined. The desire for connection did not replace the endurance described in earlier themes; it grew out of it. Having survived, reflected, and integrated, participants began to imagine ways forward that might distribute labour more fairly, hold difference with greater care, and allow future trainees to be less alone.

5.5. Conclusion

In bringing together these later themes, I became increasingly aware of how growth and survival were intertwined. Working with participants’ accounts, I noticed my own emotional position shifting from anger and sadness toward a quieter, more complex stance, one that did not resolve difficulty, but held confusion, loss, endurance, and emergence together. Participants’ reflections required me to sit with ambivalence, recognising the harms experienced alongside the capacities forged through navigating

them. Writing this section involved careful attention not to romanticise resilience or locate responsibility solely within individuals. Instead, I remained oriented toward the relational and creative ways trainees adapted within environments that often struggled to hold racialised experience. What participants appeared to be seeking was not simply inclusion, but safety, recognition, and shared holding, conditions necessary for authenticity, play, and belonging.

In developing the analysis reported in chapters 4 and 5, I came to understand trainees' experiences as shaped by the interplay between intrapsychic, relational, and systemic processes. Central to this was a developing awareness of self-in-role: how personal history, racialised identity, and (unconscious) expectations shaped how trainees inhabited professional roles, and how those roles, in turn, shaped a sense of self. This prompted me to reflect on my own positioning, and to wonder whether the profession itself may be negotiating aspects of its self-in-role, grappling with responsibility, anxiety, and its capacity to hold difference without displacement. Overall, the findings invite ongoing reflexivity not only at the level of the individual trainee, but across relational and institutional contexts, where shared responsibility and collective holding may become possible.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter considers the implications of the study's findings for the profession of educational psychology. I have intentionally avoided a simple summary of the findings. Instead, I reflect on what they may reveal, situate them within theory and existing research, and consider their significance for EP training, professional practice, and future inquiry. I have organised the chapter so that it moves through these layers sequentially. The chapter opens with a direct response to the research question, before moving into four interpretive sections, each corresponding to a cluster of findings themes, where I develop meaning through engagement with theory and the wider literature. A synthesising section then integrates the study's findings with the wider theoretical literature. The chapter closes with a reflexive consideration of the study's conceptual contributions, its limitations, its implications, the tensions involved in formulating recommendations, and the pathways through which the findings may be disseminated and taken up within the profession.

6.1 How the Findings Address the Research Question

The study's guiding question asked what the experiences of Black trainee educational psychologists are as they navigate their doctoral training in England. In analysing what participants shared, and in reflecting on my own interpretation of their accounts, I identified four interconnected findings, each illuminating a different dimension of that navigation, and each flowing into the next.

The first is that participants arrived at training already shaped by histories of racialisation, colonial, familial, and institutional, which training environment interacting with and activating these histories rather than interrupting them. I read these histories, held within the theme of Assimilated Histories, as psychically live material, carried into

training and immediately put to work by the structures and relational dynamics participants encountered on entry. Anti-Blackness, in this sense, did not begin at the training door; it was already inside.

The second finding, as I interpret it, is that training environments, unconsciously and implicitly, placed a disproportionate and largely invisible relational and emotional labour onto participants. Their accounts describe a contradictory positioning, captured in the theme of Model(ling): simultaneously visible as 'model minorities' whose presence was framed as evidence of the profession's progress, and yet absent, training without Black role models, without culturally attuned supervision, without curricula that reflected their histories or identities. Across the themes of Self–Other Management, Other–Self Responsibilisation, and Speaking the Problem, what emerges is a persistent labour of racial management: monitoring their own affect, absorbing others' discomfort, bearing the weight of representation, and navigating the double bind of advocacy. This labour operated structurally as well as interpersonally, was rarely acknowledged by the institutions, and was patterned, cumulative, and costly.

The third finding is that the development of critical consciousness produced psychosocial cost rather than relief. For me, as participants came to recognise a gap between the profession's espoused anti-racism and its enacted realities, what I read across the theme of Progress(iveness), created isolation rather than liberation, generating fragmentation, rumination, and a self-questioning that I understand, through the theme of Lone(ly) Souls, as reflecting in part the partial absorption of the institution's own pathologising gaze. Seeing a system clearly, when the system has difficulty seeing itself, is its own form of harm.

The fourth finding is that participants developed forms of agency, meaning-making, and solidarity that resist easy categorisation. These responses were arduous and not always visible, operating beneath the surface of what the training environment would have recognised or named. Across the themes of Tough Gratification and Seeking Solidarity, participants reframed resilience on their own terms and sought, often imperfectly, spaces of holding and connection. I am careful not to read them simply as resilience. To do so would risk returning the burden of navigating anti-Blackness to the very people most affected by it. What participants developed was something more authorial: a remaking of professional selfhood under conditions that made such remaking necessary. For me, this study's ending is not about resolution but movement, something remains possible, though not without cost.

The following four sections develop each of these findings in dialogue with existing theory and bodies of research.

6.2 Co-Constructing the Meaning of the Findings

6.2.1 Arriving Already Racialised

Across both Assimilated Histories and Model(ling), my reading of participants' accounts suggests that EP training did not initiate their encounter with anti-Blackness; rather, it intensified dynamics already psychically and socially familiar. The racialised histories participants carried into training were not distant background influences. They were actively shaping how participants anticipated being perceived, how they prepared themselves for professional scrutiny, and how they made sense of entering a profession that has historically offered little psychic or structural space for Black subjectivity.

Fanon's (1952/2008) theorisation of the corporeal schema offers a way to interpret these narratives. While Fanon's work emerged from a specific historical

moment of formal colonialism, his theorisation of the psychic and embodied effects of racialised power remains instructive for thinking about contemporary forms of coloniality. His account of a racialised self-consciousness organised around the gaze of the Other offers a way of interpreting the anticipatory vigilance, embodied awareness, and racial self-management described by participants. From my interpretation, this labour can be understood as a practised orientation that precedes and is further refined within training, shaped through years of navigating institutions not designed with Black presence in mind. Wright's (2020) autoethnographic account of EP training, drawing similarly on Fanon, traces how the "hauntings" of scientific racism remain felt in the body and psyche of the Black trainee EP. Participants in my study appeared to echo this: what training activated was already embedded.

Harro's (2010) Cycle of Socialisation extends this reading by situating these unconscious psychological processes within the structural reproduction of racial hierarchies. Before participants ever reached training, they had already absorbed messages, through family, community, schooling, and broader societal discourse, about who belongs in professional psychology and whose knowledge is legitimised. The literature from across applied psychology training reflects these same patterned experiences. Sobogun and Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) describe Blackness as an ongoing preoccupation for Black trainee counselling psychologists, functioning simultaneously as a site of pride, vulnerability, and constant negotiation. Paulraj's (2016) work with Black trainee clinical psychologists similarly finds that Blackness remains the most salient identity dimension under conditions of racism. These consistencies suggest that the dynamics evident in my participants' accounts are structural features of the profession rather than idiosyncratic to individual trainees or programmes.

Within Assimilated Histories, participants' accounts of intergenerational psychic material required careful interpretive work. Here, I draw on DeGruy's (2005) concept of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, not as a clinical diagnostic category, but as a frame for understanding how collective racial trauma circulates affectively across generations, shaping self-concept, anticipatory fear, and hypervigilance in contemporary professional settings. When read alongside Davids' (2011) conceptualisation of internal racism, the psychic absorption of racial hierarchies that can manifest as self-doubt, overcompliance, and the internalisation of inferiority, I envision a picture where participants work to manage an interior life shaped by racialised forces that long predate both their training and, in some cases, their own lived histories. My interpretation is that participants' encounters with training were filtered through these deeper layers of internal and intergenerational socialisation, shaping how training was experienced.

The theme, Model(ling), captures how these inherited histories were activated upon entry into the training environment. The bracketed suffix '(ling)' signals two interconnected processes: being positioned as models, symbolic evidence of the profession's diversity progress, and the active, effortful labour of modelling a desired professional identity under conditions that offered limited structural containment. Participants were positioned as representatives of what the profession could become, yet the conditions that would make that representation meaningful were largely absent, a paucity of Black supervisors, limited cultural attunement in curricula, and pedagogical frameworks that rarely engaged with race as a live professional concern. My interpretation here is supported by Meah's (2022) mixed-methods study, which identifies similar structural gaps, underrepresentation on EP training and in local authority services, suggesting this is not a feature of individual programmes but of the

profession's broader systems. Kovel's (1970) notion of aversive racism offers a way of understanding the unconscious dynamics underpinning this positioning. In his account, racialised others become containers for the disavowed anxieties of systems that espouse equality while remaining structured by hierarchy. In this sense, participants' positioning as "models" can be read as an invitation to contain the profession's discomfort with its own whiteness, projecting an image of diversity without requiring substantive institutional reorganisation. This mirrors the dynamics identified by Adetimole et al., (2005) in their reflexive account of Black clinical psychologists' experiences, particularly the simultaneous invisibility of Black cultural knowledge alongside the systemic assumption of its inferiority. That similar dynamics appear in my participants' narratives two decades later underscores the persistence of these patterns within applied psychology, which is itself something worth sitting with.

Taken together, Assimilated Histories and Model(ling) illuminate the literature review theme of 'racialised identity under siege'. From my reading, this sense of 'siege' does not originate within EP training but is inherited and reactivated there. Without conscious, structural attention, training risks reproducing rather than disrupting these dynamics. In this way, EP training appears embedded within wider racialised structures, and participants' experiences reflect this broader inheritance.

6.2.2 The Relational Economy of Race

Across the themes of Self–Other Management, Other–Self Responsibilisation, and Speaking the Problem, my interpretation points to what I have come to think of as a 'relational economy': a largely unspoken set of transactions through which the emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal work of navigating anti-Blackness was routinely redirected onto participants. From my perspective, this relational economy did not stem from conscious intent. Rather, it emerged within a training environment

where the unconscious racialised dynamics circulating in wider social systems were also present, albeit unrecognised. In this context, these dynamics were, in my interpretation, quietly reproduced through the ordinary relational rhythms of training.

Within Self–Other Management, what stayed with me most was the level of vigilance described. Participants spoke of continuously monitoring their affect, calibrating their speech, and adopting what they referred to as “niceness” to manage potential perceptions. I interpreted these strategies not as personality traits but as responses to a relational field in which they were unconsciously positioned as containers for the group’s racial anxiety. The effort not to become “the problem” felt to me like a ‘countertransferential’ response to projective pressure within the training environment. I understood the vigilance participants described through Bion’s (1961) concept of valence, later applied by McRae and Short (2010) to racialised group processes. Valence refers to the unconscious disposition within a group that renders certain individuals more available to receive projected material. In this context, my interpretation is that participants’ vigilance was a response not to any inherent quality within themselves, but to the unspoken racialised expectations circulating in the group. Their self-monitoring was therefore not oversensitivity but a realistic, if exhausting, response to dynamics the environment itself had produced. This connects to the accounts of being “consumed by empathy”, which I understood as participants holding space for others’ discomfort with race while carrying the weight of racial harm themselves. This reflects a form of racial labour: the invisible work disproportionately undertaken by Black people in predominantly white spaces (Kinouani, 2022) and echoes the “cultural chameleon” dynamic identified among BME trainee clinical psychologists, marked by code-switching, adaptation, and emotional regulation as survival strategies (Shah et al., 2012).

McRae and Short's (2010) integration of Kleinian concepts further clarifies the unconscious dimension of the relational economy. Projective identification describes how groups locate disowned, anxiety-laden material in particular members. In predominantly non-Black cohorts, where race remained largely unspoken yet affectively charged, participants' racialised visibility created valence for this role. Under conditions of collective anxiety, what Bion (1961) termed 'basic assumptions' can intensify these dynamics, with groups moving into emotionally driven states where scapegoating, silencing, or distortion of minoritised members' contributions becomes more likely. McRae and Short's Rainbow Group vignette illustrates this vividly—the Black member's contributions ignored, reframed as emotional, or erased from the group's collective memory. Kovel's (1970) description of aversive racism situates this within a wider ideological pattern: environments that espouse equality while unconsciously reproducing hierarchy create fertile ground for diffuse racial labour. Recent work by Dunira (2024) on Black trainee clinical psychologists in reflective practice groups echoes these processes, documenting vigilance, identity threat, and a constant awareness of how one's racialised presence is being received.

The movement I trace from Self–Other Management into Other–Self Responsibilisation reflects a gradual intensification of this relational economy. The labour of managing others' discomfort shifted into a felt responsibility to educate, mediate, and reassure non-Black colleagues and supervisors. Participants described being turned to for racial interpretation or positioned as racial spokespersons. This responsibility was not freely taken up; it was conferred through cues—silence, expectation, deference—that made refusal difficult. Rajan and Shaw (2008) document this positioning as “racial expert” imposed on BME trainees and the split between “expert/non-expert” within participant cohorts. I interpreted and juxtaposed

participants' references to "bearing the burden of representation" as the affective texture of this experience: the sense that one's voice, reactions, and presence were read as 'thee' representation for their racial community. hooks (1989) notes that marginalised individuals are frequently positioned as sites through which dominant groups seek racial understanding; Lorde (1984) critiques the expectation that oppressed groups carry the responsibility of educating others; and Kinouani (2022) shows how ostensibly anti-racist spaces can reproduce these dynamics by quietly assigning interpretive labour to racialised individuals. Viewed through this lens, the first two themes reflect a relational process through which racial labour became normalised within the daily life of training.

Speaking the Problem is where I understood this relational economy reaching a critical point. Participants described voice itself becoming racialised, the act of naming racial harm was received not as a professional contribution, but as a racialised performance to be assessed, managed, or contained. The cautious silence that followed for many was not an absence of experience but a strategic response shaped by what had been learned about the interpersonal and institutional cost of speaking. I interpreted this as voice under surveillance, where speaking from a minoritised position in predominantly non-Black spaces can carry a transgressive charge, irrespective of content or intention (hooks, 1989). This parallels an examination of the "threatening stereotype" where Black male trainee clinical psychologists described their contributions being pre-read through tropes of danger or excess, meaning defensiveness could arise before they spoke (Falcon, 2022). Similar dynamics have been reported in reflective spaces, where Black women describe being "shut down", ignored, or treated as though their contributions are too risky for the group to engage (Dunira, 2024).

I draw on these studies not to map gendered findings onto my participants, but to show that across Black trainees, racialised surveillance of voice shapes how speech can be received regardless of content, and to highlight that speaking invited scrutiny, while silence offered a degree of safety. DiAngelo's (2018) concept of white fragility helps account for the institutional dimension of this pattern. When responses to racial challenge centre organisational discomfort rather than the concern raised, the structural effect is to make speaking more costly than silence. I interpreted this as a double bind of advocacy: participants felt expected to speak about race, yet penalised, interpersonally or institutionally, when they did so. McRae and Short's (2010) exemplifies this dynamic: naming race producing silence, dismissal, or pathologisation. This can be understood as silencing through erasure: group processes that render Black voice simultaneously necessary and inadmissible (Alderfer, 1997; Wells, 1990). My interpretation is that this operates as a core mechanism within the relational economy of race, shaping whose voices are recognised, and on what terms.

6.2.3 The Consequences of Critical Consciousness

The themes of Progress(iveness) and Lone(ly) Souls trace the relationship between clarity and cost: what becomes visible to participants as they grow more attuned to the racialised dynamics of their training environment, and what that visibility then demands of them. For me, these themes reveal how harm is produced not through overt hostility, but through the quiet distance between the profession's stated values and its enacted practices. While Progress(iveness) precedes Lone(ly) Souls, I placed it here to represent the cumulative impacts of the preceding themes.

At the centre of Progress(iveness) is a form of racial harm that operates through good intentions. Participants repeatedly encountered anti-racism as performance:

curricular statements that stopped short of substantive change; supervisors who nodded to the relevance of race but avoided engaging with it; and peers whose solidarity remained symbolic. My interpretation resonates with DiAngelo's (2021) argument in *Nice Racism*, where she suggests that well-intentioned professionals often reproduce racial harm through comfort-seeking, superficial gestures and the centring of their own feelings. The harm here is not reduced by its unintentionality, if anything, it becomes harder to name, and therefore harder to challenge. The persistence of harm within training, despite explicit commitments to equity, can be understood as reproduced through the unconscious life of institutions. The gap participants described between espoused anti-racist values and their lived reality reflects more than inconsistency; it points to institutional defences that protect comfort, coherence, and self-image in the face of racialised anxiety (Frosh, 2003). Such defences operate through familiar psychological mechanisms, including splitting, idealisation, denial and projection, which allow institutions to manage the disturbance posed by racial difference while leaving underlying power relations intact (Lowe, 2014). What I interpreted across participants' accounts as institutional fragility can be read as moments where preserving institutional stability was prioritised over reflexivity. These dynamics are consistent with 'metaracism': the reproduction of racial inequality through ostensibly race-neutral structures that disavow their own role in producing harm (Kovel, 1970). Research within applied psychology training make a similar point, describing entrenched "cyclical harm" of Black DClinPsy trainees and course trainers, in which recommendations for change recur without meaningful uptake (Peart, 2023); and the same pattern was noted nearly two decades earlier (Rajan & Shaw, 2008). The persistence of these dynamics across time, and their presence within participants'

accounts, reflects metaracism not as anomaly, but as embedded organisational structure.

Lone(ly) Souls captures the psychological and relational aftermath of recognising the limitations of the training system, an inward turn shaped by the ongoing labour of navigating racialised environments and by the lack of relational spaces that could reliably hold or make sense of those experiences with them. Here, “lone” does not simply denote solitude; it describes becoming a lone figure within a system that has not fully anticipated the weight of being the only, or one of very few, Black trainees. One participant advised against being the only Black trainee on a course, describing it as “too much to carry.” I understood this not only as numerical isolation but as signalling an institutional oversight: representation offered without the structural support needed to sustain it. This is a loneliness produced in proximity. Participants trained alongside peers and tutors who appeared to share similar professional values yet often remained unseen in ways that mattered. Their hypervisibility, as visible markers of “diversity”, sat alongside a quieter invisibility of their subjectivity and needs. This inward turn can be understood as a group state in which individuals retreat into self-reliance when collective spaces cannot offer psychological safety (Lawrence et al., 1996). Seen through this lens, I interpreted participants’ inward turn not as withdrawal born of fragility but as an adaptive response; when the training environment could not hold racialised experience, holding oneself became the only viable form of containment.

This pattern can also be understood through early and ongoing processes of racial socialisation, which often teach racialised individuals to approach racial stress with discretion and to double-check their own perceptions before speaking (Harro, 2010). These strategies have historically protected against misrecognition or

retaliation. In this light, the system generates the conditions of harm, while prior socialisation prepares individuals to carry its impact quietly. Within Lone(ly) Souls, the internalised self-questioning that participants described, the recurring uncertainty about whether an interaction “really” was racial, can be read through this frame. I interpret these flickers of doubt not as personal hesitation, but as a learned and often protective response to environments that have repeatedly minimised or misread racialised experience. This process can be understood as the internalisation of racialised institutional messages, where self-doubt and over-accommodation function as strategies for safety in contexts where direct challenge has historically carried risk (Davids, 2011). Here, the harm is not only external; it also gently erodes confidence in one’s own meaning-making, mirroring the institution’s own avoidance.

Progress(iveness) and Lone(ly) Souls illustrate the consequences of developing a clear-eyed understanding of the profession from within it. Participants became increasingly able to see the gap between what the profession espoused and what it enacted, while the profession appeared less willing or able to see itself with the same clarity. In that gap, participants became lone figures, not because they lacked peers, but because they carried an insight the system was not prepared to hold alongside them.

6.2.4 Endurance, Agency, and the Limits of Resilience

The themes of Tough Gratification and Seeking Solidarity sit in deliberate tension with what precedes them. My interpretation is not that they undo or resolve the dynamics traced throughout this chapter, but that they offer a necessary counterpoint: participants’ experiences were not solely defined by strain or marginalisation. Alongside the costs, participants described meaning-making, agency, and connection.

The analytic care required here is to hold these capacities without allowing them to obscure the structural and relational conditions that made them necessary.

Tough Gratification carries an inherent contradiction. Participants conveyed genuine pride in completing a demanding doctoral programme, and real satisfaction in their developing professional competence. Yet this gratification coexisted with a weariness that felt distinct from ordinary tiredness, shaped by sustained demands of navigating racialised training contexts. I interpreted this not as individual fragility but as the cumulative impact of navigating training through a racialised lens: managing projections, performing professionalism, and carrying relational weight across the duration of the programme. Participants' descriptions of being "worn down" pointed to a form of attrition that is seldom named within the profession and that accrues gradually rather than arising from discrete moments of difficulty. This weariness resembles processes described in the literature on racial weathering, where prolonged exposure to racialised stress produces cumulative depletion over time (Geronimus, 1992; Geronimus et al., 2006). It also echoes accounts of high-effort coping captured by John Henryism, in which sustained composure, over-functioning, and perseverance are demanded in environments not designed to offer reciprocal support (James, 1994). Crucially, these frameworks allow the "worn down" quality of participants' accounts to be understood as structurally produced rather than individually located.

Within this context, participants' engagement with the idea of resilience was reflective rather than accepting. While recognising their own strength, they were attuned to the risks of resilience operating as an institutional coping narrative, one that locates difficulty within the individual while leaving organisational conditions unexamined. As Kinouani (2022) argues, resilience discourse, when applied to racialised individuals in structurally unequal contexts, can act to deflect institutional

accountability. Participants did not reject resilience outright but questioned the terms under which it was expected and celebrated. In this sense, resisting the resilience framing functioned as a form of agency, a refusal to countenance the conditions that rendered such endurance necessary. The emergence of agency required careful interpretive attention. For some participants, often later in training or shortly after qualification, a subtle shift occurred in how they related to their professional identities. After years of being positioned as representatives, mediators, or containers, they began to articulate their professional selves on their own terms. This was not framed as triumph or resolution, but as tentative and provisional. Lorde's (1984) notion of the "transformation of silence into language and action" captures this quality: not freedom from constraint, but the careful assertion of selfhood alongside it.

Seeking Solidarity is where I locate the study's most future-facing implications, while also encountering the limits of familiar psychoanalytic frameworks. Participants spoke about seeking, and sometimes finding, spaces where their defended selves could rest: places where racialised experience could be voiced without reprisal, and where professional identity did not need to be performed for an audience. Winnicott's (1960) concept of the holding environment offers one way of making sense of the significance of these spaces. Holding refers to a relational context of sufficient stability, attunement, and containment to allow the self to be present without constant vigilance. Psychosocially, the relative absence of such conditions within training appeared to heighten the value of spaces participants created or sought elsewhere. At the same time, interpreting these dynamics solely through the lens of containment risks obscuring the depth and durability of racialised power within institutions. Consistent with this, Sobogun and Nkansa-Dwamena (2025) document Black trainee counselling psychologists forming peer-led support networks in response to institutional contexts

experienced as unable or unwilling to engage with racialised harm, while Shah et al. (2012) identify similar practices among BME clinical psychology trainees. Read together, these accounts suggest that solidarity emerges not as a supplement to institutional provision, but as an adaptive response to training environments structured by white, Eurocentric norms. Winnicott's (1971) account of play adds a further, if tension-filled, dimension. Play describes a space in which the self can be exploratory, alive, and present without excessive defence. I saw traces of this in participants' accounts: moments when race could be named without tension, when conversations with peers felt spacious, or when participants glimpsed a professional identity less constrained by self-monitoring. These moments were fragile and provisional, and I remain cautious of reading them as evidence that training environments can simply become more benign through greater reflection or care. Rather, they point to how Black trainees carve out conditions of relative safety within institutions that continue to reproduce racialised harm. In this sense, seeking solidarity appears not as a remedy for racism, but as a necessary, creative, and constrained form of survival alongside it.

Across these accounts, participants navigated a persistent tension between performing the professional self-required by the training environment and inhabiting the professional self they were becoming. For many, that tension was never fully resolved within training. hooks' (1989) description of the margin as a space of both deprivation and radical possibility feels fitting here. Participants occupied a position shaped by structural inequity, yet they also carved out spaces for imagining and practising alternatives. These marginal spaces did not offer resolution or integration but allowed participants to remain partly inside and partly outside dominant professional norms, exercising what might be understood as a form of strategic ambivalence. In these spaces, connection, understanding, and self-definition were

possible, even if only intermittently. These acts of endurance and agency do not negate the structural dynamics traced throughout this chapter. They illuminate how participants navigated within them, and where they found room, however limited, to breathe.

6.3 Contributions to the Field

Across the limited but growing literature on the experiences of racially minoritised trainees in applied psychology, studies that centre Black TEPs in particular remain scarce (Apontua, 2020; Wright, 2020; Sobogun & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2025). By focusing on this under-examined area, my research contributes new knowledge to the EP field and opens conceptual, methodological, and practice-relevant ground for future research to extend.

The first contribution is one of specificity. In this study, I chose to centre the experiences of Black TEPs, not to exclude others, but to create room for a focused and thoughtful engagement with Blackness as its own site of inquiry. Too often, discussions of race in EP training fold Black experiences into broader categories such as “BAME”, “ethnic minority”, or “global majority”, which can unintentionally flatten the considerable differences that exist across racialised groups. My intention was to challenge habitual forms of racial grouping and create a space for considering Black racial identity. This approach reflects a commitment to understanding anti-Blackness as a distinct form of racialisation with its own psychological, relational, and institutional contours. By working with this level of specificity, the study provides focused accounts of how anti-Blackness operates within EP training. Rather than an act of narrowing, this choice is a methodological invitation to hold Blackness with depth and care, recognising it with its own sustained, rigorous attention within the field.

The second contribution is epistemological. This study contributes to educational psychology research by extending psychosocial approaches to race into the specific context of Black trainee educational psychologists' experiences. While there is a substantial body of psychosocial and object relations–informed scholarship examining racism, exclusion, and hatred within educational and social contexts (e.g. Clarke, 1999; 2003), such perspectives have been less frequently applied within educational psychology training research. By adopting a critical realist psychosocial research paradigm, this study attends simultaneously to structural, relational, and intrapsychic dynamics, moving beyond analyses focused primarily on conscious meaning-making. This study shows how psychosocial concepts such as projective identification, valence, and internalised racism can render visible aspects of training experience that are often difficult to articulate. At the same time, working with critical realism involved ongoing epistemological negotiation, and did not resolve neatly. I treat this tension as part of the contribution itself, illustrating both the possibilities and the limits of applying critical realist psychosocial approaches to racialised training experiences within educational psychology.

The third contribution is conceptual. Across the interviews, I noticed that experiences often described elsewhere as isolated incidents, a difficult supervisory exchange, a microaggression, a curriculum omission, accumulated over time in ways that shaped participants' overall experience of training. The idea of 'cumulative racial labour' emerged as a way of gently naming this pattern: the ongoing emotional, cognitive, and relational work participants carried across contexts and moments, often without recognition. This framing aligns with professional guidance acknowledging that discrimination operates explicitly and implicitly within psychology (BPS, 2025). My aim is not to impose a definitive label but to offer a language that may support a more

nuanced understanding of how racialised experiences can build, layer, and take shape over time.

The final contribution concerns agency. Alongside the challenges participants described, the study also illuminated the deliberate ways in which they navigated and made sense of their training environments. These practices, authorship, boundary-setting, principled refusal, and holding relational complexity, extend beyond what is typically captured by the term “resilience”. My intention is not to romanticise these efforts, nor to overlook the structural conditions that made them necessary, but to recognise the steadiness and clarity with which participants acted within those conditions. Their agency was not always overt, but was enacted in subtle, deliberate ways: rooted in self-knowledge, in care for their own integrity, and in a quiet but firm challenge to dynamics that sat uneasily with them. By attending to this complexity, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how Black TEPs navigate, interpret, and subtly reshape their training environments.

6.4 Limitations

In keeping with the epistemological commitments of psychosocial research, I understand limitations not as methodological flaws but as the boundaries within which knowledge in this study was generated. These boundaries shape what was possible to see, to articulate, and to interpret, and naming them is part of a transparent account of the conditions under which this analysis was produced.

A first limitation concerns the nature of researching unconscious processes. Within a critical realist psychosocial framework, I treat participants’ accounts as simultaneously conscious narratives and expressions of defended, relational, and affective dynamics. However, unconscious material remains necessarily partial and inferential; it can be traced through form, tone, contradiction, and affect, but there is

paucity and/or uncertainty in accessing it directly. What I offer, therefore, are interpretations made possible by the analytic frame rather than definitive accounts of participants' internal worlds. This is an inherent limitation of psychosocial inquiry, reflecting both its strength and its epistemic modesty.

A second limitation relates to the time-bound nature of the FANIM. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise that FANIM benefits from extended engagement over time, as prolonged and repeated encounters allow associative material to emerge gradually as conscious sense-making loosens. Within the constraints of a doctoral project, I conducted two interviews with each participant, each approximately one hour in duration. While this design enabled depth, reflexivity, and the emergence of new material between phases, it could not replicate the more extended temporal conditions envisaged in their original articulation of the method. Some unconscious, defended, or more slowly emergent material may therefore have remained inaccessible within the available timeframe (Cartwright, 2004).

A third limitation concerns the interpretive nature of RTA. RTA positions the researcher as an active meaning-maker rather than a neutral observer. The themes and psychosocial interpretations presented here are constructed through my theoretical commitments, analytic decisions, and positionality. While I engaged in rigorous reflexive practice, including journaling, supervisory discussion, and transparent documentation of analytic choices, the findings represent one possible reading of the data. Another researcher, with different commitments or social positioning, may have generated different emphases or interpretations.

A fourth limitation relates to the co-constructed nature of the researcher–participant relationship. As a Black trainee within the profession I am studying, my positionality shaped the emotional, relational, and transferential field of the interviews.

While this shared racialised positioning enabled a depth of trust and openness that may not otherwise have been available; the limitation lies in the interpretive bounds this co-construction may have introduced. It remains possible that some material was withheld, softened, intensified, or assumed as mutually understood because of our shared experience, and therefore left unexplored or unarticulated within the interviews. The data are therefore inseparable from the relational dynamics in which they were produced.

Finally, a further methodological limitation concerns the centrality of language and narration within this study. Narrative and psychosocial approaches understand language not merely as a vehicle for reporting experience, but as a medium through which meaning is actively produced (Gee, 2014). Participants' accounts, therefore, offer access to how experiences were narrated, organised, and made meaningful within the interview context, rather than to experience in any unmediated sense. Additionally, participant accounts were retrospective, shaped by hindsight, subsequent professional development, and changed relationships to training. While retrospective narration allows for reflection and integration, it may also smooth, reinterpret, or reframe earlier experiences. The analysis should therefore be understood as engaging with narrated sense-making rather than contemporaneous records of training experiences.

Together, these limitations clarify the boundaries of the knowledge generated while remaining consistent with the study's psychosocial, qualitative, and interpretive commitments.

6.5 Implications for Educational Psychology Training, Policy, and Practice

The implications of this study arise not from claims of generalisability, but from the analytic patterns constructed through psychosocial interpretation. These patterns

illuminate how anti-Blackness is enacted, reproduced, and negotiated within EP training. The implications, therefore, concern the systems, practices, and cultures of EP training, rather than the experiences of all Black trainees.

A first implication concerns how racial harm tends to be conceptualised within educational psychology training environments. While EP-specific literature remains limited, wider applied psychology and institutional discourses that shape training cultures frequently frame racial harm as episodic, for example, as a problematic supervision moment, a difficult placement encounter, or an insensitive comment, rather than as a cumulative or structurally embedded process (Shah et al., 2012; DiAngelo, 2021; BPS, 2025). My analysis suggests something more cumulative: a structured redistribution of emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal labour onto Black trainees across the full arc of training. This is consistent with the recognition in wider psychological policy debates that individual-level understandings of bias are insufficient for addressing structural inequity. The BPS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board (2025), for example, recently emphasised that unconscious bias initiatives often fail to generate meaningful organisational change and that outcomes must be prioritised over individual behaviour-change narratives. This aligns with my findings: racial harm cannot be mitigated through isolated interpersonal interventions alone; what is required is an institutional shift that prevents such cumulative labour from being produced in the first place.

A second implication is the burden created when critical consciousness develops in the absence of structural holding. Participants described how increased awareness of anti-Blackness within the profession isolated rather than empowered them. The BPS statement (2025) similarly highlights that approaches focused solely on individual awareness, such as unconscious bias training, lack evidence of

sustained behavioural or organisational impact and may fail to address the structural conditions that (re)produce inequity. For EP training, this finding suggests that cultivating critical reflection and reflexivity within trainees cannot be separated from building institutional structures capable of containing and responding to the knowledge such reflection generates, while also recognising the influence of wider social, political, and professional contexts in which training institutions are embedded.

A final implication relates to curriculum and policy. The controversy surrounding unconscious bias frameworks, including limitations in evidence, concerns about behavioural impact, and the risk of reinforcing the idea that inequity is solely the product of individual psychology rather than institutional practice, raises questions about how anti-racism and anti-blackness are taught within EP programmes. While professional guidance notes that unconscious bias training alone does not lead to meaningful organisational change and should be embedded within wider, outcome-focused strategies (BPS, 2025), for EP training, this suggests a need to move beyond awareness-raising toward critical engagement with structural racism, defended organisational processes, and psychosocial mechanisms shaping the profession.

6.6 Recommendations

This study invites careful reflexivity on how educational psychology training programmes seek to address anti-Blackness. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, the findings foreground the limits of approaches that rely primarily on awareness-raising and individual insight, and raise questions about how responsibility for change is located within training systems. In this respect, the concerns identified here resonate with the British Psychological Society's position that unconscious bias initiatives alone show little evidence of producing sustained organisational change,

and should be embedded within broader institutional and structural strategies (BPS, 2025). The discussion that follows, therefore, does not set out what programmes should do, but outlines areas that warrant attention where initiatives aimed at supporting Black trainees are introduced, while remaining mindful of the tensions, defences, and unintended consequences such efforts may entail.

The recommendations that follow are offered with a degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, there are clear expectations that educational psychology training programmes endeavour to be inclusive, equitable, and responsive to racialised harm. At the same time, this study cautions against the assumption that articulation, reflection, or increased awareness alone can resolve the systemic and relational dynamics described by participants. Writing recommendations from within these tensions felt uncomfortable, not least because minoritised individuals are frequently positioned as those expected to name, explain, and solve the very inequities they experience. I therefore approach these recommendations as provisional points for collective thinking, rather than prescriptive solutions.

Across the findings, there is a strong case for training programmes and institutions to attend more carefully to the psychosocial conditions of training. This includes noticing how racialised emotional and relational labour becomes distributed within cohorts, supervision, and placements, and how Black trainees may be positioned as sites of projection and subsequently expected to contain anxiety, act as interpretive resources, or symbolise institutional progress. On the one hand, increased institutional reflexivity around such dynamics may generate greater awareness and responsibility. At the same time, this study suggests that without structural accountability, reflexive initiatives risk being absorbed into existing cultures in ways that leave underlying power relations unchanged.

Similar tensions emerge in relation to reflective practice. Reflection and reflexivity are often positioned as unequivocal ‘goods’ within educational psychology training, and there is value in creating spaces for thinking about race, power, and professional identity. Yet participants’ accounts also indicate that reflective forums can become sites where racism is rehearsed, displaced, or metabolised without leading to meaningful change. Concerns about the limits of reflective and awareness-based approaches in professional training are echoed in adjacent fields, where qualitative research has similarly documented how training cultures may reproduce racialised harm despite explicit commitments to inclusion (McCallum & Clarke, 2025). In this sense, reflection may operate defensively, offering a sense of progress while deferring concrete action. The implication here is not that reflection should be abandoned, but that reflexivity needs to be held alongside questions of authority, decision-making, and institutional responsibility, rather than treated as an end in itself.

Finally, future research offers both promise and risk. Longitudinal psychosocial research could deepen understanding of how racialised experiences in training unfold over time, including how agency, defence, and meaning-making shift across stages of professional formation. Alongside extending psychosocial and critical realist approaches, future work might engage with decolonial and culturally situated frameworks—such as Mash-Up epistemologies (Persadie & Narain, 2022) and Black epistemologies, including Black feminism (e.g. Mngaza, 2021), that foreground relational, embodied, and historically situated ways of knowing in Black educational psychology contexts. Such approaches may offer ways of building on or complicating existing paradigms, without assuming that alternative epistemologies resolve the difficulties they seek to address. At the same time, further research can function as a retreat from action, a pull towards theory when the implications of existing knowledge

feel too unsettling. Holding this tension requires resisting both the flight to action and the retreat into further analysis. Rather than seeking closure, this study leaves open questions about what educational psychology training is prepared to confront, sustain, and change, and what may remain defended, deferred, or unresolved— held as a thinking space (Lowe, 2014).

6.7 Dissemination and Impact

Dissemination is understood here as a continuation of the relational and ethical commitments underpinning this study. Participants shared their experiences generously and, at times, with considerable emotional labour. It is therefore important that the knowledge generated is not confined to the thesis alone, but reaches academic, professional, and community contexts with the capacity to engage thoughtfully with its implications. Dissemination will occur across four interconnected and overlapping pathways, reflecting the applied and relational nature of educational psychology.

One pathway is academic dissemination. Publication in peer-reviewed journals will enable the findings to contribute to the wider knowledge base on race, professional training, and psychosocial processes within applied psychology. Journals such as *Qualitative Research in Psychology* and the *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy* provide a fit for the methodological and theoretical orientation of the study, offering space for reflexive and psychosocial analyses of race and institutional dynamics. Profession-aligned journals, including *Psychology of Education Review* and *Educational Psychology in Practice*, also offer routes for reaching educational psychology audiences concerned with training, supervision, and professional culture. Academic dissemination also increases the visibility and

legitimacy of psychosocial approaches within educational psychology, supporting future researchers who may wish to work in similarly reflexive ways.

A second pathway is practice-facing within the educational psychology profession. Training programme directors, course teams, and placement coordinators represent a key audience, given the study's focus on the psychosocial conditions under which training takes place. My hope is to share the findings through educational psychology training programmes across England, with an invitation to reflect on how racialised dynamics, power, and relational labour are experienced and managed within training structures. Where possible, dissemination will prioritise dialogic formats, such as seminars, invited talks, or programme development conversations, rather than written reports alone. This approach mirrors the relational epistemology of the study and supports collective reflection without positioning the research as offering technical solutions.

A third pathway is placement- and service-facing. Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) and related clinical contexts, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), play a central role in shaping trainees' day-to-day experiences and professional socialisation. Given that many of the relational and structural dynamics documented in this study were located within placement settings, dissemination within these environments is essential. I will share the findings within my current EPS placement, including the service's development day, as part of the service's stated commitment to anti-racist practice. This offers an opportunity for colleagues to consider how the study's insights relate to supervisory arrangements, service culture, and patterns of racialised labour. Beyond this, the work will be made available to other EPSs and clinical teams engaged in reflective organisational work.

The fourth pathway is community-facing. The findings may be of relevance to Black trainee and qualified educational psychologists, as well as with aspiring trainees. Sharing the research through existing community spaces, including Black practitioner networks, affinity groups, peer-support forums, and relevant online communities, helps ensure the work remains accessible to those who may not routinely engage with academic journals but who may recognise their experiences within the dynamics described.

In this context, impact is understood not simply in terms of policy outputs, but in how commitments to equity are enacted, negotiated, and experienced within everyday training and professional practices. While this study cannot enact structural change in itself, it contributes by articulating forms of racialised experiences that often remain unnamed, reframing individualised “difficulty” as structurally produced, and offering a psychosocial language through which educational psychology training can be more critically reflected upon. Alongside academic publication, sharing a practice-oriented account through *The Psychologist* offers a further route for engaging the wider profession in reflection and dialogue, supporting impact through accessible narrative rather than empirical prescription. In this sense, dissemination operates as an invitation to collective thinking, holding a mirror, or perhaps reflecting B(l)ack, to the profession.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the strands of a project that has been as emotional as it has been intellectual. Rather than offering tidy closure, I use this closing chapter to reflect on what it was like to conduct the research, including the apprehensions, tensions, insights, messiness, and shifts in my thinking and positioning as I navigated being a Black TEP and a psychosocial practitioner-researcher. Through diary excerpts held within an analytic frame, I trace how my thinking has developed over time and how it shaped my understanding of myself, the system, and the possibilities for future trainees and the profession.

7.1 Beginning the Research Journey

7.1.1 Self-in-‘Researcher Role’

This research began, as most research does, with a question, but it also began with a feeling. Long before the project took academic shape, I had been carrying an unsettled internal weight: a mixture of apprehension, vigilance, and a quiet curiosity about whether what I was feeling in training was mine alone. When the time came to choose a research focus, I oscillated between considering exploring adolescent racialised experiences and examining the trainee journey. What finally anchored me in my choice was the recognition that I could not ignore my own trajectory as a Black trainee EP navigating a profession that often felt both inviting and excluding at the same time.

Before the study formally commenced, I found myself asking questions that were not abstract, but rooted in my own embodied unease. Did other Black trainees feel safe to express themselves? Did they feel competent, confident, or like they belonged? These questions arose because I rarely experienced any of those things

with ease. My reflexive disposition, my tendency to think and feel intensely, meant that I spent much of the early research phase wondering whether my experiences were “just me” or whether they revealed something relational, systemic, or unspoken within the training environment. At the same time, I was cautious. I did not want to collapse Black trainee experiences into a singular or homogenous account, nor assume that what I felt was universal. The tension between my personal experience and my desire not to overgeneralise became an early methodological dilemma: how could I explore the terrain without overlooking difference? How could I allow complexity without retreating from the possibility of shared patterns?

Choosing a psychosocial approach offered me a way through this dilemma. It created space for the possibility that what I was feeling was not simply “in me” or “in others,” but something circulating between people and systems: a relational, affective, psychosocial field that could be studied, interpreted, and understood. What this research approach offered me was an opportunity to look beneath the surface, into the shadows, the silences, and the emotional undercurrents of training. It allowed me to consider that the weight I felt, the fear, anxiety, pride, strength, and ambivalence, might not be mine alone. In the early stages, I felt like an eager but naïve child, and a desire to name the elephants I could sense but had not yet found the language for. I wanted to contribute something of value to the field, even if that meant stepping into the discomfort, facing the mess, and acknowledging that I was both a participant in and an observer of the very dynamics I hoped to study. Beginning the research journey required me to locate myself explicitly, not beside the topic, but inside it. That positioning became the foundation for the rest of the research.

7.1.2 Defendedness in the Researcher as Data

In the early stages of this project, I felt a quiet but persistent apprehension. I worried about how my research would be received by peers, by training institutions, and by the wider EP field. Naming anti-Blackness openly felt risky. I worried that I would be positioned as the “bad object”: angry, ungrateful, or unnecessarily provocative after being granted entry into the profession. That anxiety was amplified by several early interactions. Sharing my topic sometimes prompted suggestions to broaden beyond Black trainees, questions about whether there was “enough” material to sustain such an inquiry, or comments framing the work as “political.” While often delivered with curiosity, these responses left me unsettled. I found myself shrinking, second-guessing the legitimacy of my focus and, by extension, the legitimacy of my own experience.

The apprehension lodged itself in my body before I could articulate why: a tightening in the chest, a subtle vigilance, a fear that felt both personal and inherited. Over time, I began to understand that these sensations were not merely embodied or individual; they were relational. At the same time, I found myself unsure how to account for them, wondering how much this fear belonged to me, my history, and my positioning, and how much it was being evoked through the system within which I was conducting the research. For instance, the labelling by others of my research as “political” began to stand out to me as more than a neutral descriptor. I increasingly came to view it as a kind of relocation: a way of shifting race away from everyday professional responsibility and into a more abstract, distant domain. In psychosocial terms, I have come to understand this response as potentially defensive, an interpretation rather than an objective fact, pointing to an institutional discomfort that I could feel, but not fully know, in real time. Recognising this allowed me to treat my

embodied responses not as obstacles to the research, but as tentative data in their own right (Devereux, 1967). They also offered clues about the wider field's unease, its possible defences, and its limits, while also drawing my attention to my own discomfort as part of the interpretive field. Attending to this internal landscape became foundational to how I shaped the research itself.

7.2 Being the Research

7.2.1 Participants and Ethical Tensions

The interviews became more than data-collection events. As participants shared their histories, labour, disillusionment, sharpening understandings of themselves within training, and endurance, the 'rooms' took on a containing quality, generous, honest, and emotionally spacious, allowing uncertainty, contradiction, and reflection to be voiced without pressure to resolve them. All the participants described the interviews as offering a rare space to reflect on their training experiences through a racialised lens, something noted they had not previously had time or permission to do, and or were still making sense of. There was a particular quality of recognition that felt significant to me: the sense of stepping briefly into a room where the racialised experience could be named and centred on our own terms. The interview 'room' came to feel containing to me, allowing anger, pride, ambivalence, grief, humour, and contradiction to be held without pressure for coherence or resolution. This felt, for me, intimate and expansive. In those moments, I was not only the researcher. I was, in many ways, a seventh voice shaped by the same field and navigating very similar terrain. There was a kind of relief, the quiet reassurance that I was not alone in what I had felt, feared, and carried, and yet that relief arrived with its own heartbreak: the knowledge that what I carried had also lived in others' bodies, shaped by the same field.

With this recognition came ethical tension. I worried about whether I was using Black experience as material, or whether the research risked reproducing the very dynamics it critiqued, extracting labour under the guise of research. I began to question whether I was, in Fanon's terms, wearing a "white mask", using frameworks not necessarily built with Black experience in mind to make those experiences academically legible. I do not have a tidy answer. At different points, I felt as though I was both helping and hurting, perhaps in different ways and at different times. I also grappled with how to hold participants' experiences without exploiting it. The interviews were not therapy, yet at times they felt therapeutic. This raised further questions: Was I too gentle? Too protective? Too drawn in? Was I inadvertently positioning participants, or myself, as wounded? Navigating these tensions required continuous reflexivity, and they became part of what it meant and felt like to be the research.

7.2.2 Writing While Black: The Page as an Affective Space

Writing this thesis was its own psychosocial encounter. Blank pages drew a blank mind; some days brought tears, others pride, motivation, or depletion. As I drafted, edited, softened, and reshaped my sentences, I began to notice that I was not only writing for myself, I was negotiating with an imagined reader, a reader whose comfort I had quietly internalised and whose approval I had begun to prioritise. I monitored my tone. I softened my critiques. I questioned my interpretations. I asked myself whether I was being too direct, too emotional, too sharp. These are familiar struggles in doctoral writing, but mine carried a particular charge. I cared deeply about how my words would land, for participants, for myself, for course teams, for institutions, for the profession. I found myself protecting multiple dynamics at once, trying to be fair, considerate, and empathetic. Yet in doing so, I realised I was reenacting the very dynamics the participants described: the self-other management, the careful

calibration of tone, the pull toward silence at the edges of discomfort. I was being “nice”, but niceness risked becoming its own form of quietening. And I kept returning to the same question: if not me, then who?

Structurally, I struggled too. I did not always know intuitively how to shape the thesis. I searched for templates and found that they constrained me. I wrestled with dominant academic conventions of structure, tone, and authority, often characterised by linearity, emotional distance, and claims to objectivity, wondering whether making the work creatively my own would be read as defiant, resistant, or overly politicised. As Lorde (1977/1984) reminds us, “we have been socialised to respect fear more than our need for language”, a socialisation I recognised as I navigated the writing of this thesis. The caution in my writing reflected not only the familiar discipline and uncertainty of doctoral work, but also the imprint of the very dynamics I was analysing. In this sense, writing became another site of defended communication: not a detour from the research, but a continuation of it.

7.3 Becoming Through the Research

7.3.1 Feeling Mash-Up

The research process was marked by intellectual, relational, and at times lonely tensions. Psychosocial research was not simply a method for me, but an ontology and epistemology—a way of knowing that sought to remain attuned to affect, embodiment, and the inner worlds of participants and researcher alike. From early supervision, I became aware that this positioning did not fully land. My supervisor’s view was the ‘dialect’ of ‘psychosocial’ associated with Hollway and Jefferson’s work was not an epistemological orientation in its own right, but rather a branch of psychosocial studies which placed considerable stock in a critical realist philosophy of science (Redman,

2016). This framing was conceptually coherent, rigorous, and well-established. And yet, something in me resisted.

The difficulty was not one of comprehension. I understood the lens being offered. Rather, it did not fully meet my axiology. Critical realism, for all its structural clarity, did not quite hold the emotional and embodied register I was trying to honour, both in participants' accounts and in myself. I felt caught between the authority of text and the authority of experience; between self-in-theory and self-in-'researcher role'. Bion's (1962) distinction between 'knowing about' and 'knowing' became increasingly salient. I was seeking a form of knowing that involved an embodied sense, where something previously held in tension could become thinkable, lived with, and metabolised.

These tensions surfaced within supervisory conversations, producing moments of rupture and repair as we grappled with the politics of knowledge production: whose ways of knowing are protected, whose are rendered risky, and how power circulates in decisions about what can be held or relinquished. Beneath methodological debate sat deeper questions around authority, inheritance, and the colonial legacies embedded within psychological theory and training.

I oscillated between trusting my supervisor's authority of theory and trusting my own authority of experience, quietly hoping for fusion—some leeway to play, to create, to challenge. In one supervision, I tentatively offered, "maybe my research is a mash between perspectives". Later, my supervisor shared, "mash-up as method", a transnational epistemology through which cultural syncretism disrupts normativity and colonial regimes of knowing (Persadie & Narain, 2022). For me, a 'mash-up' holds a triple entendre: in Caribbean terms, something good - when the DJ has mashed up

the dance; something new, created through the mixing of many rhythms; and a feeling of being worn, tired, and depleted. All meanings resonated.

Reflecting psychosocially, the epistemic struggle between us mirrored an oscillation between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions: moments of splitting into good and bad ways of knowing, not simply as avoidance of pain, but as a means of managing it and remaining psychologically alive; alongside a developing capacity to stay with complexity without foreclosing it. What initially felt like an idealistic optimism on my part—flexibility, possibility, a desire to mix and make something new, met what I experienced as constraint and direction. Through discomfort and doubt, this encounter deepened my need not only to integrate, but to recognise breaks, tensions, and moments of simplification as part of the creative labour of knowledge-making, rather than its failure.

I remain, in many ways, mash-up, both shaped by the generative work of attempting to bring different rhythms together, and tired from the unresolved creative uncertainty this required. Yet this mash-up was necessary: a breaking apart as well as a mixing, through which systems of knowing could be encountered not as all-knowing authorities nor obstacles, but as wholes grappling with the same difficulty from different positions, where creativity, care, and survival coexist with rupture and repair (Klein, 1946/1975).

7.3.2 Ending as Beginning

I arrive at the end of this thesis still forming, a blend of identities, histories, psychologies, and frameworks, and still holding an honest uncertainty about how this work will be received. I began this journey as a trainee carrying a question I was afraid to ask aloud, unsure whether naming what I sensed so strongly would unsettle others or unsettle me. Now, as I begin to transition to the Educational Psychologist role, I do

not hold a perfect picture of what comes next. But I hold a clearer sense of what I am working toward. For me, this research clarified that fear is not a pathology. It is not simply “within me”. It is a reasonable response to conditions that remain uneven, demanding, and at times defended.

In pursuing this research, I listened to how participants do far more than survive their training. They remade themselves within it, shaping identities, boundaries, and practices in environments not always built with them in mind. While researching, I found that I was remaking myself, too. The work re-shaped my understanding of the system: not in a naïve way, but in one that moved me from holding it as a monolithic authority towards recognising it as inhabited by people who are also learning—sometimes awkwardly, sometimes defensively, sometimes together. I kept returning to the image of the learning pit: that difficult descent into uncertainty that makes new understanding possible. And I found myself wondering who might be willing to enter that space with me, not to rescue from the edge, but to descend alongside, to tolerate the discomfort and/or pain, to mash-up perspectives in service of something more thinkable.

For me, transformation is relational. You cannot have one pole without the other; Blackness and whiteness are co-constituted positions. The change this thesis gestures toward cannot rest on Black trainees alone. It requires non-Black colleagues, supervisors, course teams, and institutions to examine what they carry, what they protect, and what they have yet to see. We already have the infrastructure, reflexive spaces, supervision, group process and teaching. What remains is the willingness to use them for transformation rather than maintenance. This thesis is not an ending. It is the beginning of a practice I hope to keep building, in supervision rooms, in training

spaces, in EPS teams, and in the wider field I am choosing, imperfectly but deliberately, to help (break apart and) reshape.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Reflexive Research Diary Excerpt (Literature Review Process)

March 2026: Literature Review Reflexive Notes

The initial scoping search returned one study directly addressing the experiences of Black TEPs (Wright, 2020). As a Black TEP conducting this search, that return carried emotDuniraweight, sadness, loneliness, and yet also something like empowerment. To search for one's own professional experience and find it held by a single voice is to encounter, in real time, the very absence the literature describes: the sense of being unseen, of occupying a professional space whose knowledge structures do not yet fully hold you.

Reading Wright (2020), I felt the lone-ness of her autoethnographic position and found myself hoping she knew she was not alone, whilst recognising, in the same moment, that her not being alone was precisely the problem. That there were others, in other disciplines and other programmes, who had documented similar experiences brought both solidarity and conflict: relief at the consistency, and grief that the consistency existed at all.

There were also more unsettling questions. Was my experience real? Was I imagining it, too sensitive, reading too much into things? This rumination of intrusive thoughts, the pull towards self-doubt, is itself, I came to understand, a racialised phenomenon: the internalised pressure to discount one's own embodied knowledge. The loneliness of the search became data. The empowerment came from recognising that Wright, Falcon, Dunira, and others had refused that pressure, and that their refusal made space for this study.

Appendix 2: Participant Recruitment - Poster

Are You A NEWLY QUALIFIED EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST?

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust



RESEARCH TITLE

**Training While Black:
A Psychosocial Exploration
of Black Trainee Educational
Psychologists**

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This research explores the experiences of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) in England, addressing individual and systemic factors through a psychosocial lens. It amplifies marginalised voices, aiming to enhance understanding and foster more inclusive, supportive training frameworks.





TAKING PART: INTERVIEW

- x2, 1-hour Free-Associative Narrative Interviewing Method (FANIM)
- Participant-led conversation.
- Audio recorded and transcribed.
- Psychosocial approach (working with the unconscious).
- Use of psychodynamic analysis and interpretation.
- Follow-up check-in after one week.

PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

- Newly qualified educational psychologists (NQEPs)
- Graduated in 2023 or 2024 in England
- Racially identify as Black
- Retrospectively reflect on personal and professional training experience(s)





INTERESTED? CONTACT ME

Hi, I'm Karimah, I'm a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). I am conducting this research for my Doctorate course in Educational Psychology.

If you are interested in participating or getting more information please contact me by
September 2025 via:
[**kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk**](mailto:kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Appendix 3: Participant Recruitment - Website Advertisement

[Blog](#)[Events](#)[Community](#)[Boost](#)[EP jobs](#)[About](#)

[← all blogs](#)

Project: Training while Black – a psychosocial exploration of Black TEPs



May 8, 2025
2 minute read

Black and Minority Ethnic Communities,
black in psychology,
doctoral training, project
+ 3 others

share



by [Karimah Borck-Fraser](#)

The project aims to explore the experiences of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists in England through a psychosocial lens. I am interested in intra-, interpsychic and systemic dynamics contributing to training experiences.

Project Focus

The landscape of educational psychology in England has been historically shaped by complex narratives of race, intelligence, and professional representation. While other psychology fields have explored racial and ethnic experiences, the specific landscape of educational psychology training remains relatively unexamined.

This research seeks to explore experiences of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) through a psychosocial lens, acknowledging that professional experiences are not merely individual psychological journeys but are fundamentally interconnected with broader societal, cultural, and systemic contexts.

This project aims to explore the nuanced, often unconscious interactions between personal experiences and wider social dynamics during professional training. The hope is to contribute to more equitable and inclusive training frameworks.

How you can participate

I am seeking Newly Qualified Educational Psychologists who:

- Racially identify as Black.
- Graduated in 2023, 2024 (or will be in the summer of 2025).
- Completed your training in England.
- Are willing to retrospectively reflect on your personal and professional training experiences.

If you would like to participate or know someone who would be interested, please see below for my contact details for further information and to request a consent form.

Please note that contacting the researcher will not automatically register you as a participant.

Involvement

Two, 1-hour Free-Associative Narrative Interviewing Method (FANIM) interviews with the researcher, which are participant-led conversations. These will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis using a psychosocial approach. Interviews are conducted on Microsoft Teams.

Researcher

Karimah Borck-Fraser is a Trainee Child, Community and Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

Please contact me ([Karimah](#)) or my research supervisor and Deputy Course Director for Research, [Dr Lisa Bostock](#), for further information or if you have any concerns.

Ethical approval has been granted by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) .

Research Question

What are the experiences of black trainee educational psychologists?

Deadline

Friday 30th May 2025



Black and Minority Ethnic Communities black in psychology doctoral training
project race and identity research trainee educational psychologists



About Karimah Borck-Fraser

Karimah is a 2nd year Trainee Child, Community and Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. She is a member of Trainee Educational Psychologists' Initiative for Cultural Change (TEPICC). Karimah has an interest in psychosocial and systemic psychology and systemic approaches to supporting the educational experiences of children and young people, particularly as it pertains to their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH).

[View all posts by Karimah Borck-Fraser](#)

Appendix 4: Initial Participant Information Sheets: Visual Format

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Research Participant RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET



WHO AM I?

Hi, I'm Karimah, I'm a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). I am conducting this research for my Doctorate course in Educational Psychology.

You can contact me via:
kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk

RESEARCH TITLE & AIM

Training While Black: A Psychosocial Exploration of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists

This research explores the experiences of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) in England, addressing individual and systemic factors through a psychosocial lens. It amplifies marginalised voices, aiming to enhance understanding and foster more inclusive, supportive training frameworks.





TAKING PART: INTERVIEW

- x2, 1-hour Free-Associative Narrative Interviewing Method (FANIM)
- Participant-led conversation.
- Audio recorded and transcribed.
- Psychosocial approach (working with the unconscious).
- Use of psychodynamic analysis and interpretation.
- Follow-up check-in after one week.

PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

- Newly qualified educational psychologists (NQEPs)
- Graduated in 2023 or 2024 in England
- Racially identify as Black
- Retrospectively reflect on personal and professional training experience(s)





BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

By having a dedicated space to be heard and valued, it is hoped that sharing your experiences, it will be empowering. Your insights help create change for future trainees of global majority groups, contributing to research that can guide training institutions toward more inclusive and equitable practices.



LOCATION

- Online interviews via MS Teams.
- Held in a quiet space for recording purposes.
- No preparation or materials required unless for accessibility needs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation will remain confidential, except if you nominate someone to check on you during the interview(s) in case of distress. I will discuss the research with my Research Supervisor, but they will not know interview content unless concerns about risk arise, in which case you will be informed of any disclosures.



DATA PROTECTION

At the end of the interview, you will select a pseudonym to protect your identity. This will be used in all written materials and stored data, including the audio recording. Recordings will be deleted after transcription.

All participation data will be securely stored for 6 to 10 years, in line with Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Data Protection Policies.

RESEARCH APPROVAL

The Ethical Review Board at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and my placement Educational Psychology Service have approved this research, confirming it meets ethical standards to safeguard participants' safety and wellbeing.



DISCLAIMER

Participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw anytime during the interview or within two weeks after. However, withdrawal is not possible once your transcript has been anonymised. No reason is required to withdraw.

TAVISTOCK AND PORTMAN TRUST RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the proposed research, please contact:
Trust Quality Assurance Officer: Paru Jeram, academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk; or
The Supervising research Lead: Hannah Lichwa, hlichwa@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix 5: Example of Transcript Organisation in Excel Workbook

Speaker & Time	Interview Text (sentence)	Semantic Codes (descriptive)	Latent Codes (interpretive-RTA)
2 KBF 1:44	Starting wherever you like, can you tell me about your experience of being a Black trainee educational psychologist?		
3 ASHE 1:46	Mmm.		
4	Massive question, to begin with.	Massive definition: Bulky and heavy	weighted; layered; complex
5	Um.		
6	Do you know what it's one that I didn't think a lot about actively whilst training.	conscious decision; intentional	defense mechanism
7	I feel like I might have chosen to not think about it as much because it's something that being a black person in general you think about your race a lot.	conscious decision; intentional	defense mechanism; self-protection; KBF sensing overwhelm "alot"
8	Urm, living in the UK because it just has such a significant impact is what I've found anyway in my experience.	geographic location	sense of time; historical texture
	In terms of like the course I feel like the moment you said that question I	humour	defendedness; defense mechanism used to

Appendix 6: TREC Approval Letter

The Tavistock and Portman 

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Karimah Borck-Fraser

By Email

24 March 2025

Dear Karimah,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'Training While Black: A Psychosocial Exploration of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including modifications to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC for review.

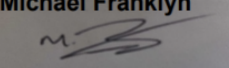
Failure to obtain prior approval for such changes may result in academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn


Academic Governance and Quality Officer

T: 020 938 2699

E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheet: Support Resources & Services

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Support Resources

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET



BLACK MINDS MATTER

A registered charity connecting Black individuals and families with free 1:1 talking therapy.

<https://www.blackmindsmatter.uk.com/>

EQUALITY ADVISORY AND SUPPORT SERVICE

The Helpline advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, across England, Scotland and Wales.

<https://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>





BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY (BEEP)

is a network for trainee and qualified Educational Psychologists with an interest in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) issues, working with BAME communities, professional issues and educational psychology practice.

<https://edpsy.org.uk/interest-groups/black-and-ethnic-minority-educational-psychology-beep-network/#:-:text=BEEP%20is%20a%20network%20for,issues%20and%20educational%20psychology%20practice>

ADVISORY CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION SERVICE (ACAS)

Gives employees and employers free, impartial advice on workplace rights, rules and best practice. They also offer help to resolve disputes.

<https://www.acas.org.uk/>





BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNICS IN PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHOLOGY NETWORK (BIPP)

provides a community for registered and prospective mental health professionals who self-identify as Black African or from the diaspora, Caribbean or mixed heritage to acquire social, emotional, psychological and developmental support.

<https://www.bippnetwork.org.uk/#:-:text=The%20BiPP%20network%20provides%20a,emotional%2C%20psychological%20and%20developmental%20support.>

Appendix 8: Participant Information Sheets: Detailed Prose Format

Participant Information Sheet

Training While Black: A Psychosocial Exploration of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists

This information sheet provides the necessary background information about this research project. The information will need to be thoroughly read and considered in order to give informed consent for participation.

Who is doing the research?

My name is Karimah, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. This research is part of my course requirements and will be supervised by Dr Lisa Bostock.

What is the aim of the research?

This research explores the experiences of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) in England through a psychosocial lens, addressing a significant gap in professional knowledge. Despite the British Psychological Society's (BPS) and Educational Psychology Services' (EPS) commitments to anti-racist practices, limited research focuses specifically on the training experiences of Black TEPs. This research uses a psychosocial approach to examine the interplay between individual psychological experiences and systemic factors, including unconscious processes, institutional dynamics, and racial narratives. The research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of diversity, representation, and professional identity within educational psychology training by amplifying marginalised voices, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and supportive professional frameworks.

Who has given permission for this research?

The Ethical Review Board of the Department of Education and Training at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, with whom I am completing my training, has provided ethical approval for this research to proceed. With this approval, my full research proposal has been considered, and it has been decided that this research project meets the necessary ethical standards to protect the safety and wellbeing of all participants who are involved.

Who can take part in this research?

I am seeking newly qualified educational psychologists (NQEPs) who graduated in 2023, 2024 (or will be graduating in 2025) in England. Participants must racially identify as Black and be willing to retrospectively share their personal and professional experiences as trainee educational psychologists.

What will be involved in taking part?

If you take part, the steps will include:

- You will be asked a few questions about your experiences of being a Black Trainee Educational Psychologist.
- You will engage in 2, 1-hour, free-associative narrative interviews.
 - Initial interview (1 hour)
 - A second interview (1 hour) will be conducted at least 2 weeks after the initial interview. The researcher will share reflections or themes with you from the initial interview.
- The conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed (written up), and I will use a psychodynamic approach to analyse and interpret the data to derive themes.

As the conversation will be led by what you choose to share, there is a potential that you may share things that have been difficult for you, and that the conversation could feel challenging. If this is the case, you can choose to end or pause the interview, or I will stop it if necessary. In the event of becoming distressed, pre-agreements included in the Screening Questionnaire will be followed. If a named adult has been noted I will contact them, signpost you to support resources and then check in with you a week later.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that you will feel empowered by sharing your experiences in training at a doctoral level and that you will benefit from a space where you can feel listened to and heard. In providing important information about your lived experiences, you are also adding to a so-far limited research base that training institutions can use to help others with similar experiences, as well as themselves.

Where will this research take place?

There will be 2 interviews, each lasting approximately an hour, that will take place online via MS Teams. To ensure a secure connection, the interviews will be conducted using a laptop rather than a phone. They will also take place in a quiet space so that the conversation can be recorded. You do not need to bring anything with you for the interview unless it fulfils your/accessibility needs.

What will happen to the interview recording?

At the end of the interview, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (an alternative name) to maintain your anonymity. This pseudonym will be used in all written reflections and analyses of your interview, as well as for any other stored information, including the saved audio recording. The audio recording will be kept in a password-protected folder, and once it has been transcribed, the recording will be deleted. The transcript will be included in the final research write-up.

All records related to your participation will be stored and handled appropriately for a period of 6 to 10 years, in accordance with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Data Protection and Handling Policies.

Will taking part be kept confidential?

If you participate in the research, your involvement will not be shared with anyone, except if you nominated an individual to check on you if distress occurs during the interview(s). Please note that I have a Research Supervisor with whom I discuss the nature of my research - they will not be informed of the content of the interview(s) unless there are any concerns about a risk to you or others raised in the duration of our conversation(s). If this is the case, you will be informed who will be told, and the nature of the disclosure.

Disclaimer

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during the interview without providing a reason. Additionally, you have a two-week period after the interviews to withdraw. Please note that GDPR specifies that participants have the right to withdraw consent at any time: [How should we obtain, record and manage consent? | ICO](#). However, this depends on the data processing stage. Once personal data have been fully anonymised, withdrawing consent is challenging to manage. Therefore, I have agreed with my supervisor – and M4 research lead – to give a reasonable timeframe for withdrawal to enable anonymisation to take place. Nevertheless, I will consider this on a case-by-case basis, balancing both rights of participants and risks to the project: [Withdrawing consent — UK Data Service](#).

Further information and contact details:

If you have any questions about any part of the research, please get in contact with me and let me know.

Email: kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Phone Number: 07 700 000 000

Supervising Research Lead Email: Dr Lisa Bostock lbostock@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research.

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee	
If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the proposed research, please contact:	
Trust Quality Assurance Officer: Paru Jeram, academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk	The Supervising Research Lead: Lisa Bostock, lbostock@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix 9: Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Qualitative Research for Doctoral Course: Child, Community and Educational Psychology

Research Title:	Training While Black: A Psychosocial Exploration of Black Trainee Educational Psychologists
-----------------	---

In giving my consent, I state that:

- I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.
- I understand what is being proposed and the procedures that will be involved in this research.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw (stop taking part) at any time until 2 weeks after each interview without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.
- I understand that my involvement in this study, and the data gathered, will remain confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in this study will have access to the data.
- I understand that my interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- It has been explained to me how long this data will be saved for and what will happen to it after this time.
- I understand that the findings from this research will be written up as part of a thesis and may be disseminated in presentations and/or published as a peer-reviewed journal.
- I understand that my data will be anonymised to reduce the chance of people linking the data to me. This will involve using pseudonyms (alternative names) for you, and anyone else spoken about. However, due to the small number of people involved in the research, it is possible that people who know you well, may be able to identify you from answers given.
- I understand the limits of confidentiality, and confidentiality will be breached if the researcher is concerned about my safety, or the safety of someone else, they will have to let someone know.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the research which has been fully explained to me.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):.....

Participant's Signature:.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):.....KARIMAH BORCK-FRASER.....

Researcher's Signature:.....

Date:

Thank you for completing the participant consent form.

Please email your form to Karimah, the researcher, at kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk. You can expect a confirmation email within 3-5 working days. If you do not receive confirmation by that time, please follow up to ensure that Karimah has received your email. For any additional questions regarding the research, feel free to contact Karimah at the email address above or using the contact details provided on the [Participant Information Sheet](#).

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee	
If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the proposed research, please contact:	
Trust Quality Assurance Officer: Paru Jeram, academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk	The Supervising Research Lead: Lisa Bostock, lbostock@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix 10: Participant Screening Questionnaire

Participant Screening Questionnaire

Please complete the questions and return to Karimah, the researcher: kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk

1. What Black ethnic group(s) do you identify with?

- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ African
- ☐ Caribbean and African
- ☐ For another Black ethnicity background, please specify:

2. What is your nationality?

3. How would you describe your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other, please specify

- ☐ Prefer not to say

4. What is your age category?

- ☐ 21-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 50+

5. Where in England was your training institution?

- ☐ South-East England
- ☐ South-West England
- ☐ London
- ☐ Midlands
- ☐ North-East England
- ☐ North-West England

6. When did/do you qualify as an EP?

- ☐ 2023 ☐ 2024 ☐ 2025

7. I would like the researcher to send me a one-page summary once the research has been completed:

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Should the interview be prematurely ended due to distress, would you like to provide contact details for an individual the researcher can contact on your behalf?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

If 'Yes', please include below:

9. Is there anything else you feel the researcher should know?

(This may include, but is not limited to, accessibility requirements; preferred days/ timings for interviews; and dates you are unavailable for interviews.)

Thank you for completing the screening questionnaire.

Please email your form to Karimah, the researcher, at kborckfraser@tavi-port.nhs.uk. You can expect a confirmation email within 3-5 working days. If you do not receive confirmation by that time, please follow up to ensure that Karimah has received your email. For any additional questions regarding the research, feel free to contact Karimah at the email address above or using the contact details provided on the [Participant Information Sheet](#).

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee	
If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the proposed research, please contact:	
Trust Quality Assurance Officer: Paru Jeram, academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk	The Supervising Research Lead: Lisa Bostock, lbostock@tavi-port.nhs.uk