

A Phenomenological Exploration of the Holistic Experiences of Students of African Descent at a Post-1992 University in England

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Social justice, Equality, Inclusion, Social mobility



My background...



- **Associate Professor in Learning and Teaching**
- Deputy Head of Subject Group Business Systems & Operations
- Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
- Co-Lead - Inclusion, Diversity and Special Education SIG, Centre for Education and Research
- **Centre for the Advancement of Racial Equality**
- Deputy director of the Systems, Analytics and Business Intelligence (SABI) Research Group
- External Examiner for Open University & Staffordshire university
- QAA Assessor
- Contributing Writer to Times Higher Education | Author | EDI Trainer

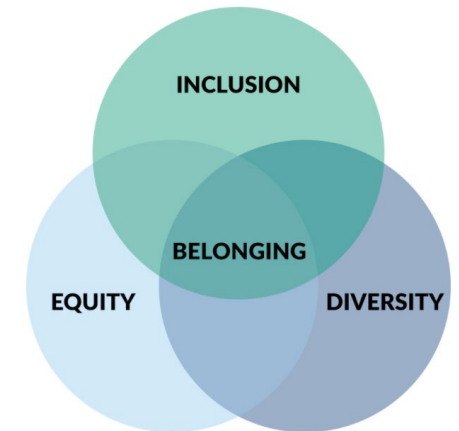
Dr Patrice Seuwou

Selected Publications:

- Seuwou, P (2023) Ten Actions Universities in the UK can take to improve the experiences of their Black students *Times Higher Education*. (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/ten-actions-improve-experiences-black-students-within-uk-universities>)
- Seuwou, P, Sarwar, D, Pilkington (2023) The Lived Experience of Black International Students at a Post-1992 University in England: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Academic Resilience, INTED 2023 conference
- Seuwou, P, Sarwar, D, Pilkington (2022) A Phenomenological Exploration of the Holistic Experiences of Students of African Descent at a Post-1992 University in England, ICERI2022 Proceedings ISBN: 978-84-09-45476-1
- Dzineku, C & Seuwou, P (2022), 'Action to improve diversity and inclusion for Black students and staff' *Times Higher Education*. <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/action-improve-diversity-and-inclusion-black-students-and-staff>>
- Seuwou, P, Dodzo, N., Osho, Y., Ajaefobi, W., Sarwar, D, Pilkington, A & Daye, M (2022), Exploring the Factors that Impact on BAME students Attainment at a Post-1992 University in England, *Studies in Education journal (under Peer review process)*
- Seuwou, P, Dodzo, N., Osho, Y., Ajaefobi, W., Sarwar, D, Pilkington, A & Daye, M (2022), Widening Participation in HE: Exploring the Factors that Impact on BAME students Attainment at a Post-1992 University in England, *Proceedings of EDULEARN22 Conference 4th-6th July 2022, Palma, Mallorca, Spain ISBN: 978-84-09-42484-9*
- Seuwou, P., Ajani, R. (2022) 'Experiences and Challenges of Africans Diaspora in Great Britain and their Role in the Future Development of Africa', *African Development Perspectives: A Holistic Reflection*, Austin Macauley Publishers

Background & Motivations

- Higher education (HE) has the potential to improve the lives of the disadvantaged by enhancing social mobility (Vignoles and Murray, 2016).
- Key reformers: Wilhelm von Humboldt (1810); Cardinal John Henry Newman (1852)
- The 1963 Lord Robbins Report
- The 1997 Lord Dearing Report
- The 2021 Sewell Report: Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities
- Substantial inequalities still persist throughout the student lifecycle
 - 679,970 international students (UK Parliament)
 - A single cohort of international students contributes £30 billion net.



Teaching Boot and Shoe students
Northampton College of Technology c.1950's



Technical drawing
Northampton School of Art 1959



Senior Typing Class, 1960
Northampton College of Technology



Students relaxing by the Brampton
Building, School of Health 1992



CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

*Once upon a time the
University would have served
the county
of Northamptonshire's needs....*

Within the last ten years, we've seen...

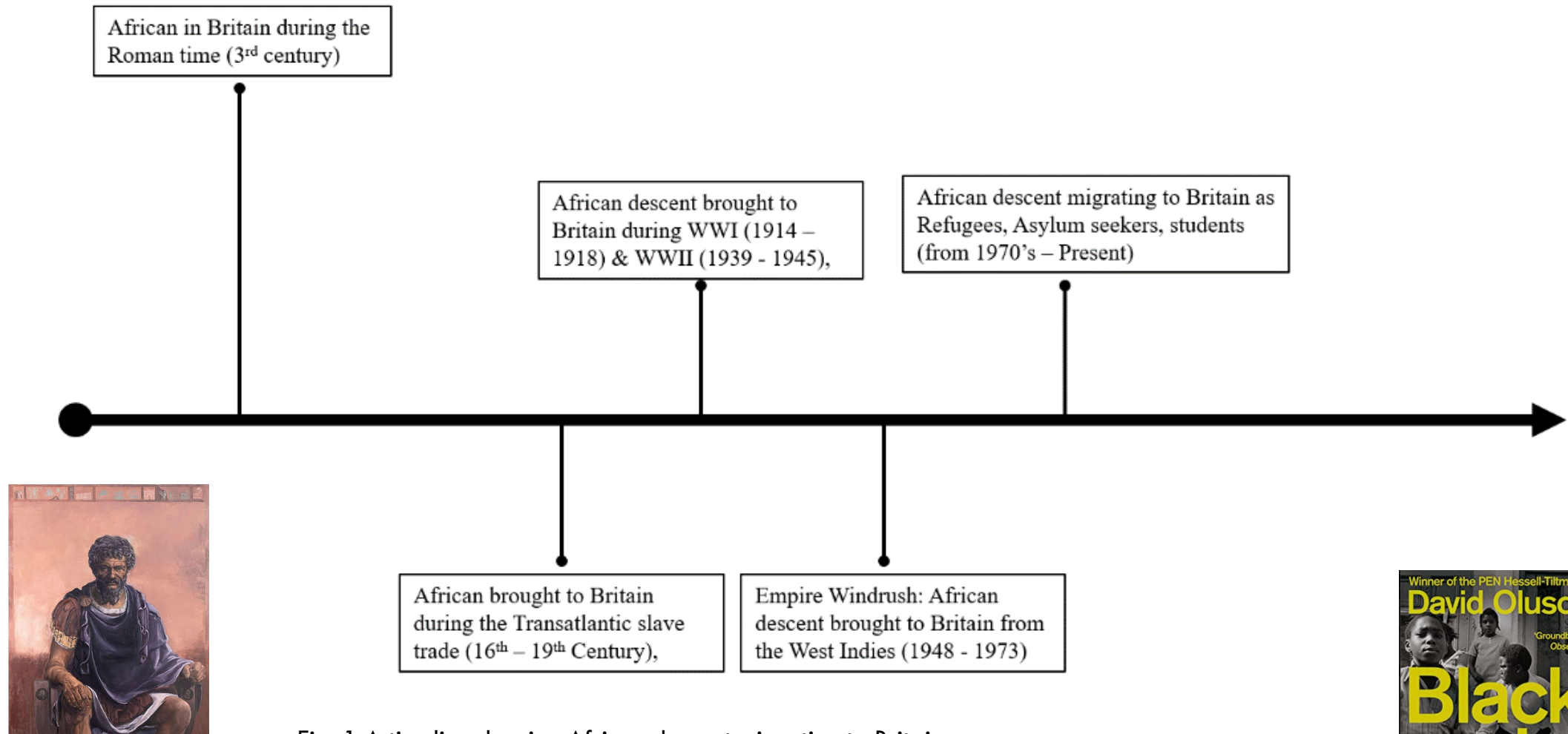
- Increasing competition
- A growing number Black students on campus coming from London



Our UK domiciled FT undergraduate students identify ethnically as 55% white, 28.7% Black and Black British, 7.3% Asian and Asian British, 6.3% identify as other ethnicities or as being of mixed ethnicity, and the ethnic identity of 2.3% is unknown.

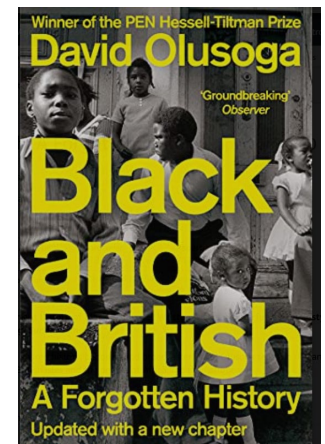
A timeline showing African descent migration to Britain

Inspired from the work of historian **David Olusoga** (2017)



AD 193, **Lucius Septimius Severus**

Fig. 1 A timeline showing African descent migration to Britain (Seuwou & Ajani, 2022)



According to the 2021 Census, the total population of England and Wales was 59.6 million, and 81.7% of the population was white.

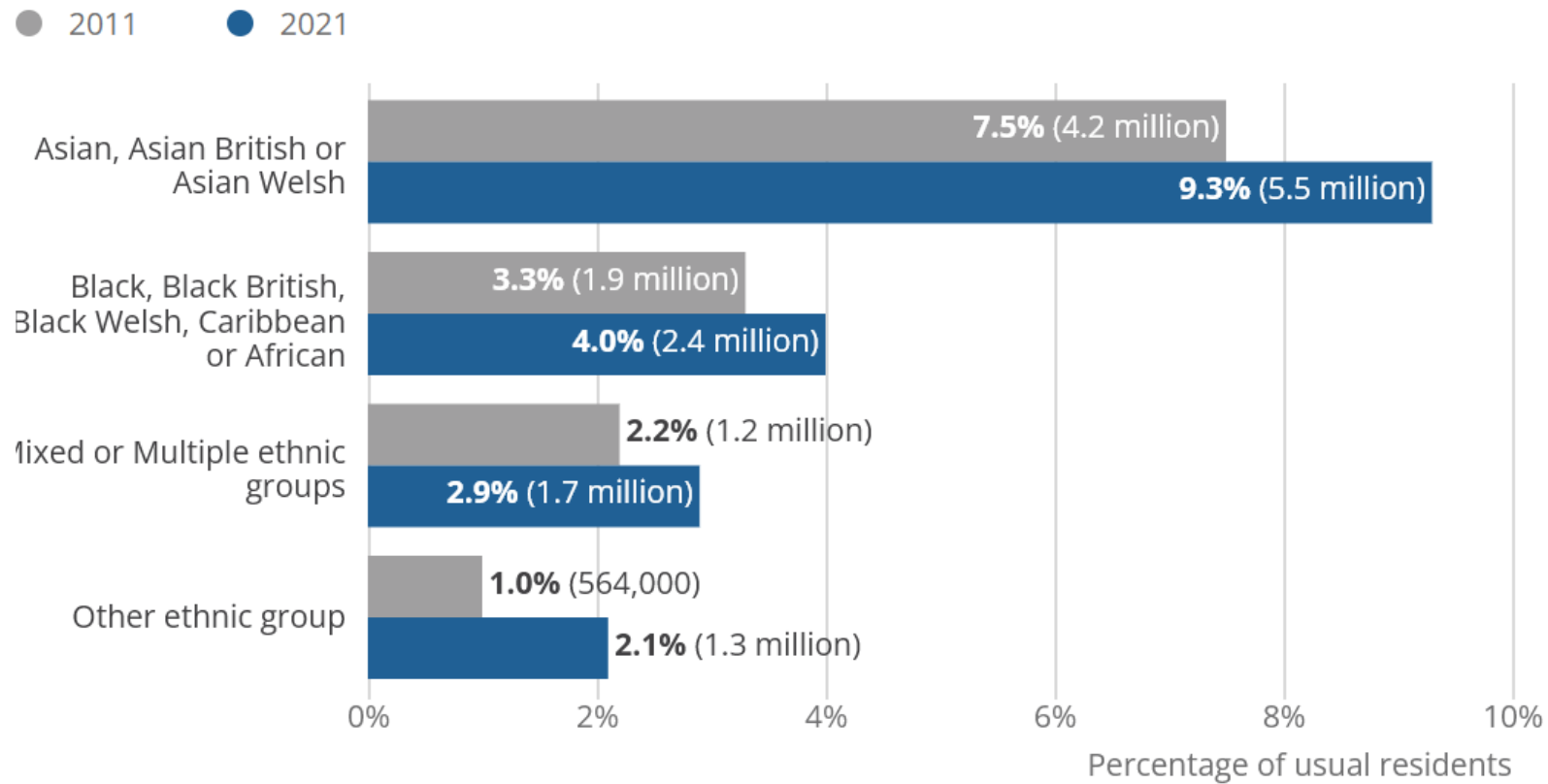


Fig 2. Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021
Ethnic group distribution (high-level categories), 2011 and 2021, England and Wales

Some stats on Black related issues in Britain

- 24,000 Professors in the UK
- 160 are Black
- 50 are Black Women

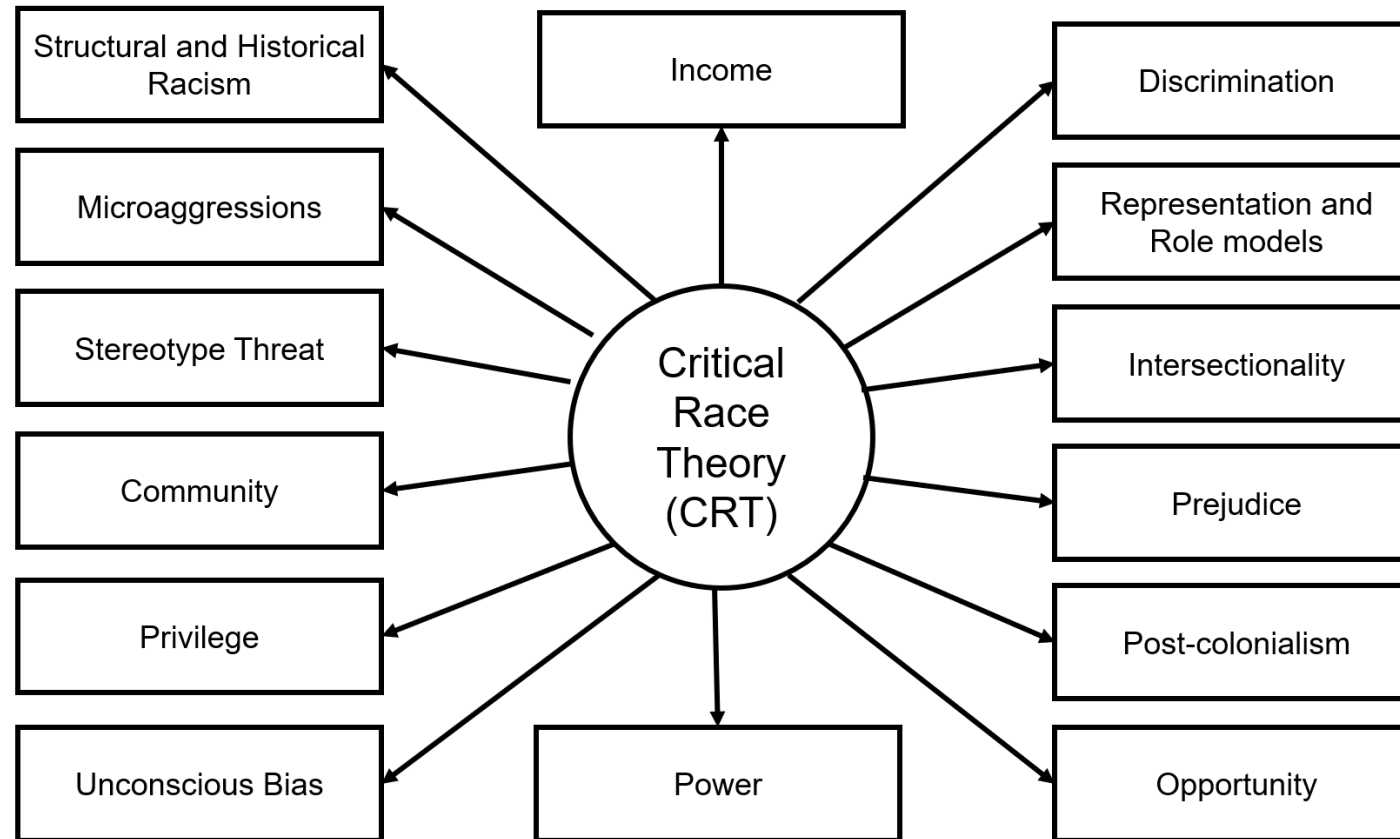
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- **Life expectancy** is lowest for Black men at birth and age 65.
- **7.1% Unemployment rate** (Black) Vs **3.1%** (White)
- Black men face a much higher chance of being **incarcerated** and are overly represented among prisoners
- At the end of September 2021, **15 per cent** of those remanded in custody were Black.
- **24.3%** of Black households are **single-parent families**.
- Despite making up only **13%** of London's total population, black Londoners account for **45% of London's knife murder victims, 61% of knife murder perpetrators and 53% of knife crime perpetrators**.
- Education – **GEM Award Gap**
- Hair industry

Methodology Overview

- **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**
- Concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience and the meaning of that experience as expressed by the individual in his or her own terms, without any pre-defined categories (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). – Borrowed from Psychology
- **Ontological position:** Social Constructivism
- **Epistemological position:** Interpretivism
- **Qualitative**
- **Sample Selection**
 - Purposive: African descent students (Post 92 Uni)
 - Homogenous - sharing similar characteristics
 - Size - 14 participants: data collection
- **Data Collection Method**
 - In-depth interviews with participants at all levels (Undergraduate & Postgraduate levels)
- **Ethical issues**

Theoretical Framework



a cross-disciplinary intellectual and social movement of civil-rights scholars and activists who seek to examine the intersection of race, society, and law

Fig. 3 An Illustration of the key building blocks of the Critical Race Theory
Adapted from Adrienne et al, 2017)

Theoretical Framework

(Habitus * Capital) + Field = Practice

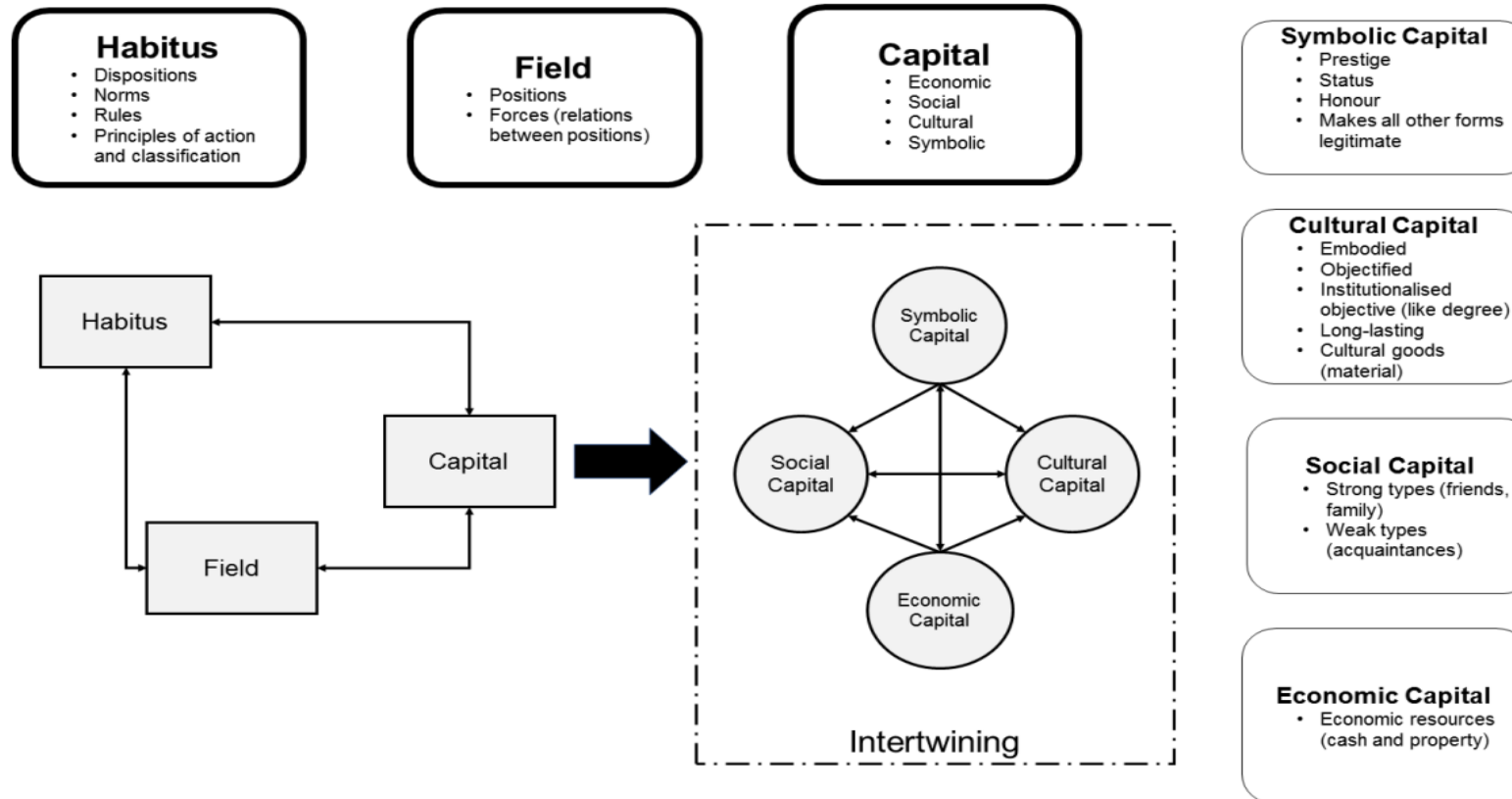


Fig. 4 Pierre Bourdieu Key concepts Adapted from Greenfell (2014)

Theoretical Framework

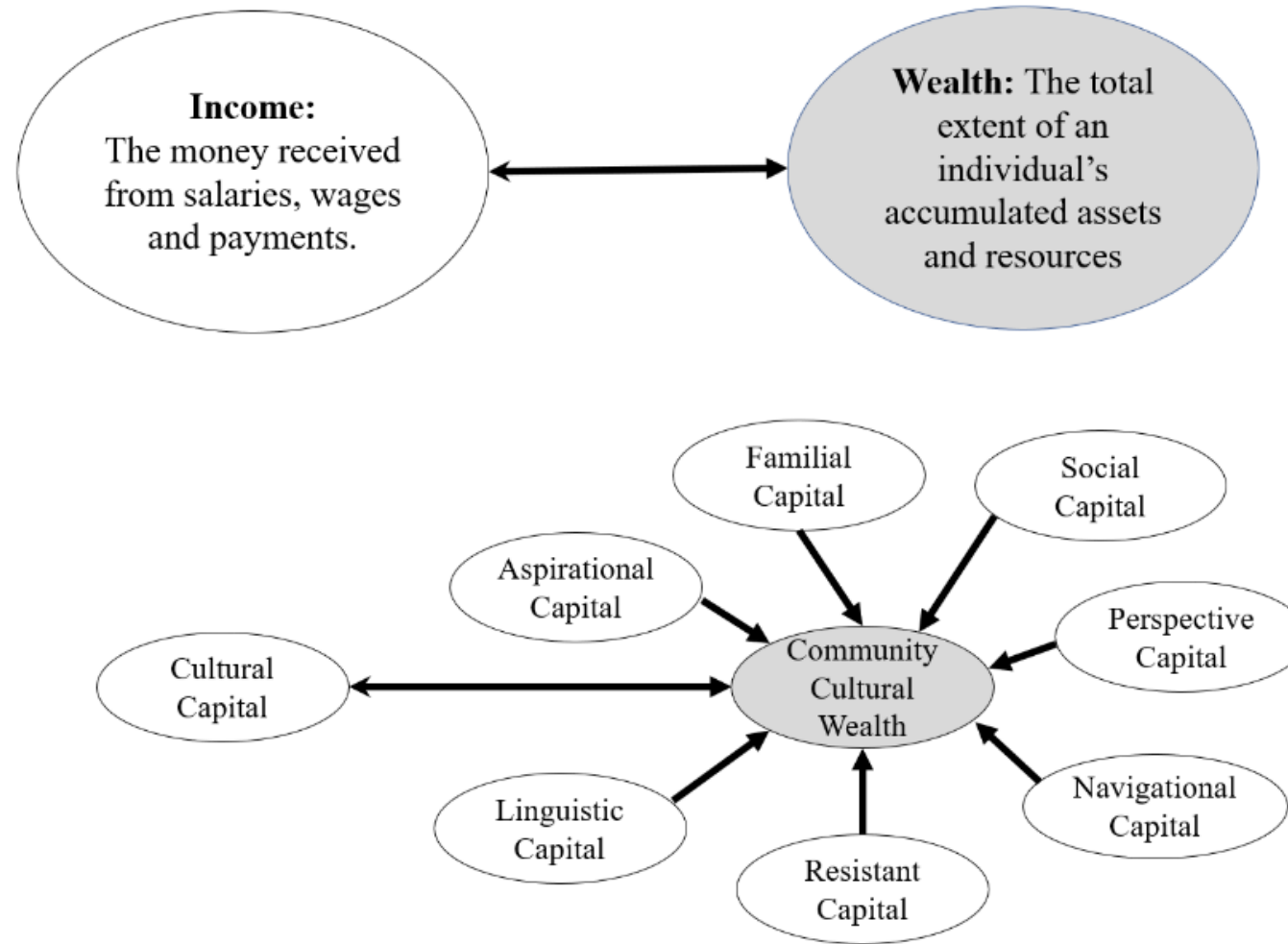


Fig. 5 A model of community cultural wealth. Adapted from: Yosso, (2005)



Black communities: Not a homogenous group

- Black British students born in the UK (2nd 3rd and 4th Generation)
- Black British students born in Africa (1st Gen)*
- Black British students born in the Caribbean (1st Gen)
- Mixed race and Other Black background
- African Students
- Caribbean students

Challenges Faced by Black Students in HE

- Racism and discrimination
- Financial difficulties
- Deficit model
- Cultural adjustment
- Different education systems and assessment standards for international students
- Accommodation living black
- Academic misconduct offences
- Access to university services
- Mental health issues



Video

[Yale Study Shows Pre-School Teachers Single Out Black Boys The Most! \(1:36 mins\)](#)

Prior educational experiences affect their knowledge base

- Negative learning **experience** during their **primary** and **secondary** education impact on learning
- Not academically challenged enough compare to White pupils
- Low expectations of their academic abilities
- **Low aspiration**
- **Lack role models**
- Constantly **treated unfairly** by teaching staff and other white students – *White Privilege*
- Consistently experienced racism, **discrimination**, **micro-aggression**

Discrimination, racism and Self-doubt

- Black students continuously experience, **fight against and bear emotional scars from racism**, which can lead to **increased anxiety** and **poor mental health outcomes**.
- **Less favourable** treatment due to ethnicity
- No perception of **overt racism** (note of caution)
- Modification of personal behaviour **to 'fit' in**
- **White students or staffs talking over you.**
- **Code-switching**



[Subconscious racial bias in children](#) (3.54 mins)

Effect of long Commuting

- Lack of accommodation locally
- Cost of accommodation
- Need to live with family member
- Care responsibilities

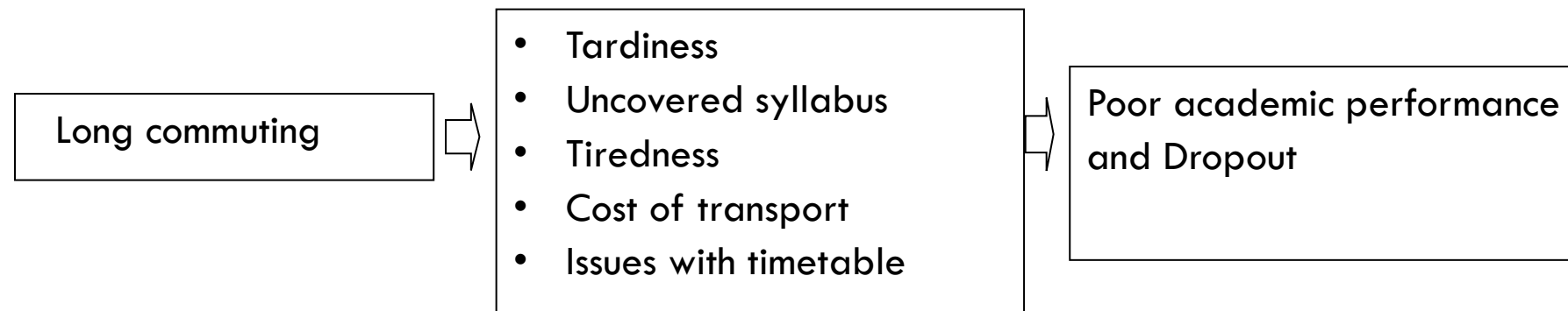
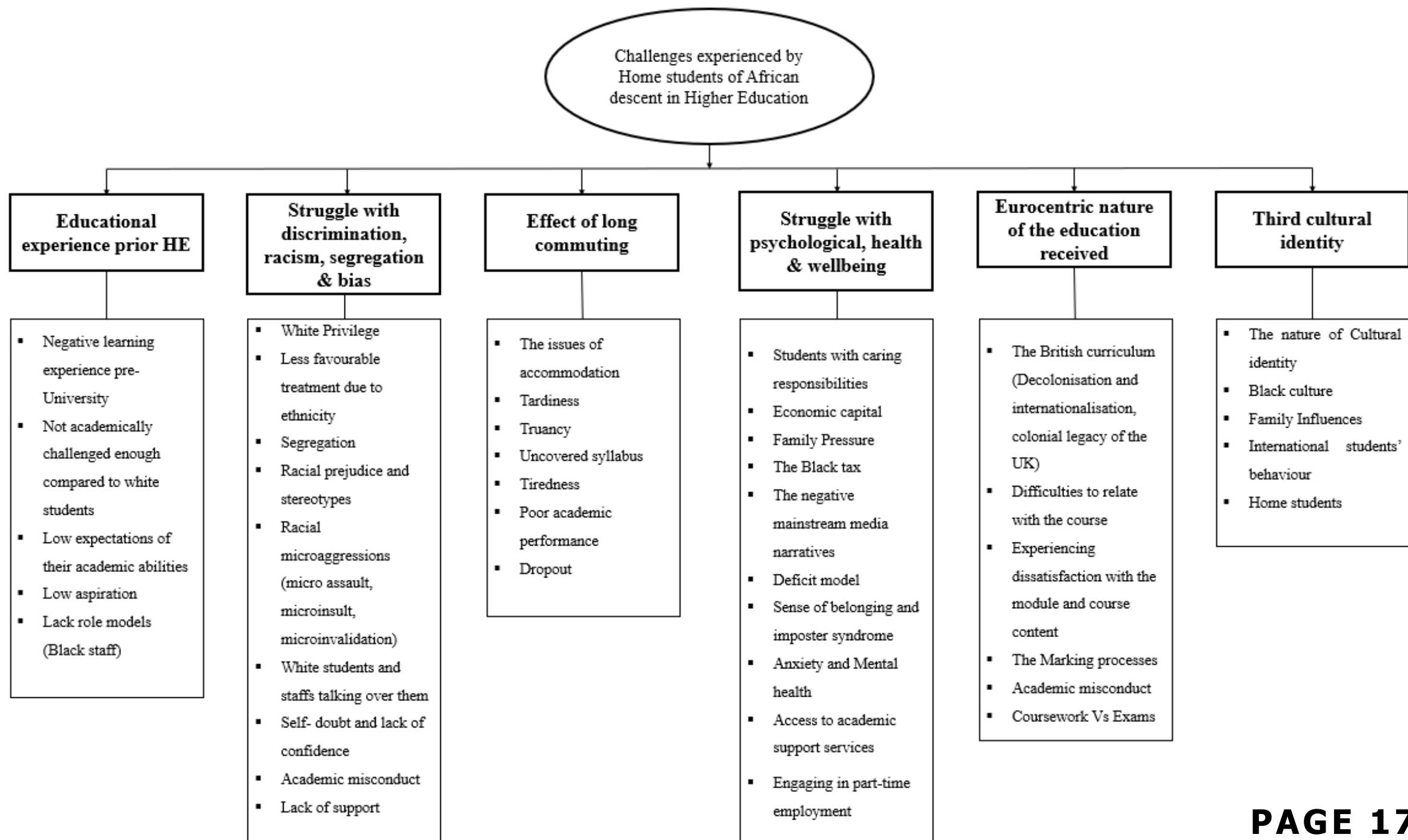


Fig. 6 Effect of long Commuting



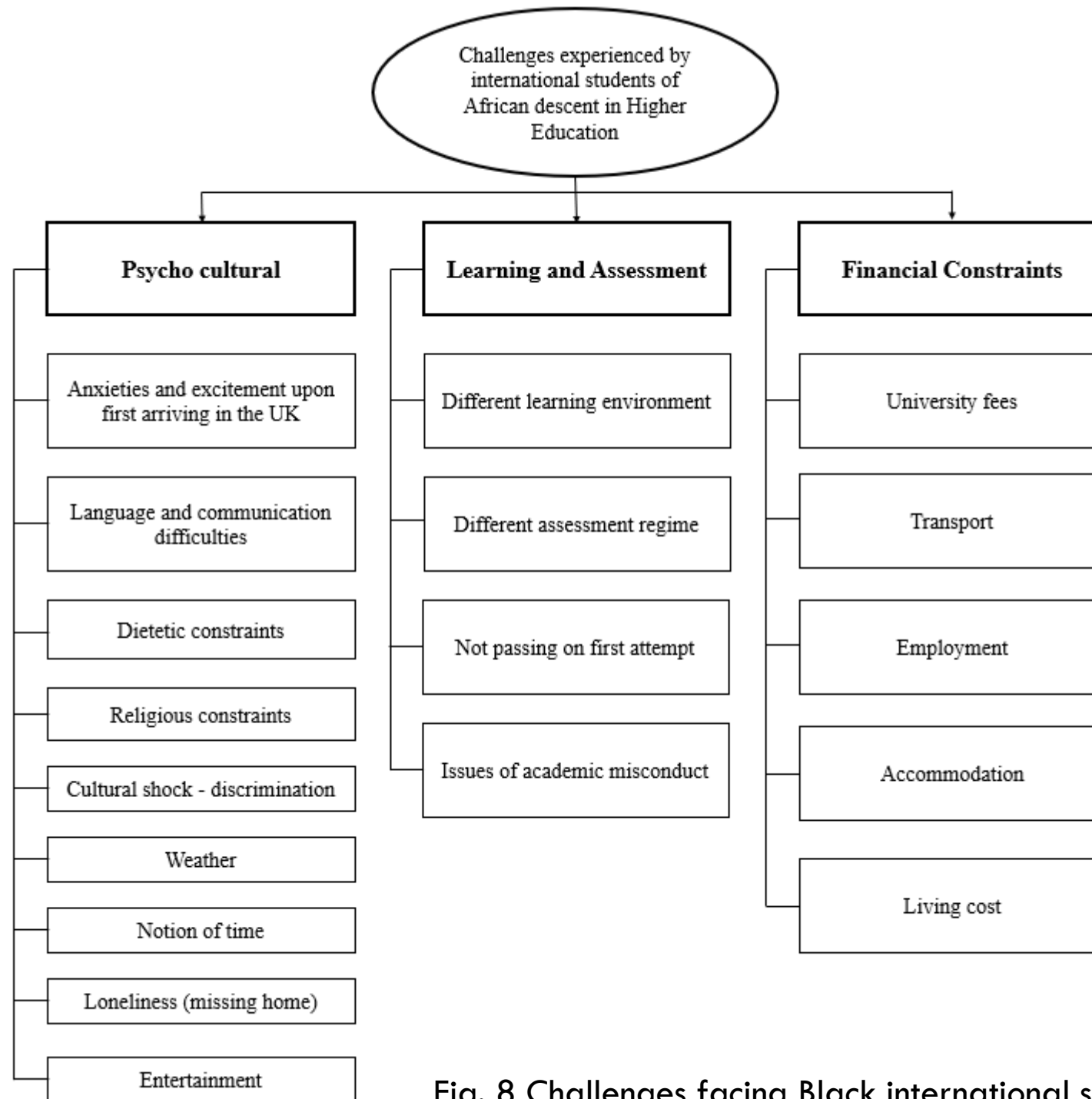


Fig. 8 Challenges facing Black international students

Met has 'nowhere to hide' after damning Casey report, say campaigners

20 March 2023



📍 Louise Casey arriving at Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre for the press briefing of her review on 20 March. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images



- Dame Louise Casey's 300-page report found institutional misogyny, racism and homophobia persists within Britain's biggest police force.
- The report was commissioned by the Met in the wake of the kidnap, rape and murder of [Sarah Everard](#) by the serving police officer Wayne Couzens.
- Andrea Simon, director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, said: "This damning report leaves the Met nowhere to hide when it comes to the depth of its problems with institutional misogyny, racism and homophobia.
- "There is however a long history of such revelations about the Met – including on undercover policing stretching back to the 1980s and beyond, to the findings of the [Macpherson report](#), and numerous police inspectorate reports since – we demand that today's report finally initiates a tangible shift in the operation of policing in the UK. If not now, then when and at what cost?"

From Macpherson to Sewell

- The **Macpherson report** (murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1999) acknowledged institutional racism and initiated top down change which in the absence of a bottom up movement proved short-lived.
- **David Lammy review** (Criminal Justice Systems, 2017)
- The **Sewell report** questioned the prevalence of institutional racism and delegitimised the demand for change emanating from the Black Lives Matter movement (March 2021, Dr Tony Sewell)
- What is remarkable over the period as a whole is the **lack of urgency in promoting race equality**

Decolonisation/Internationalisation of Curriculum



- Decolonising goes beyond just changing the content of university curricula. It's about adding voices in a way that connects to existing debates.
- Have marginalised voices been erased or hidden in plain sight?

In March 2016, students at Oxford University called for the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes and for education to be decolonised.

Black People Representation in the Media



Key Observations

- Black students find it **difficult to relate to the large proportion of course content and references used on some programmes.**
- Students sighted examples of what they considered as intentional and unintentional **'microaggressions' prior to coming to university and during their time at the university.**
- A noticeable **lack of Black staff representation** in most departments
- Academic support services **not diverse in staff**, however, very helpful to those who see them.
- Links between **family responsibilities, socio-economic background** and effects of **commuting** on attainment

Socio-cultural needs unmet

Participants identified barriers that they believed impacted upon their ability to engage fully with the rigours of university study

All three barriers or factors can be explained through relatedness and autonomy.

1. Experiencing **dissatisfaction** with the **module and course content**,
2. Having **caring responsibilities** Engaging in **part-time employment**.
3. The mainstream **media narratives**

Links between family responsibilities, socio-economic background (“**black tax**”)

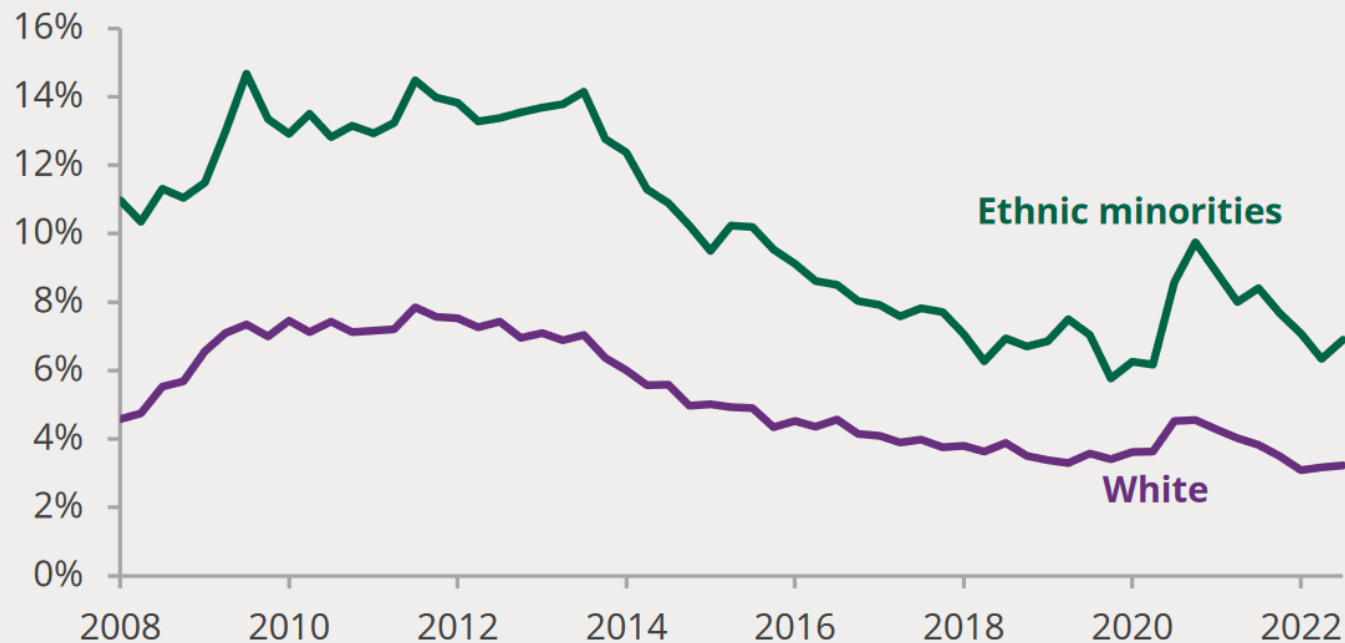


Job Applicants With 'Black Names' Still Less Likely to Get Interviews

Employers aren't treating identical resumes equally, new research finds.

Unemployment rate by ethnic background: UK, 2008-2022

People aged 16+, not seasonally adjusted



According to Diversity UK, the employment rate for ethnic minorities is only **62.8%** compared with an employment rate for White workers of **75.6%** – a gap of over 12 percentage points.

Fig 9. Source: ONS, UK labour market, August 2022

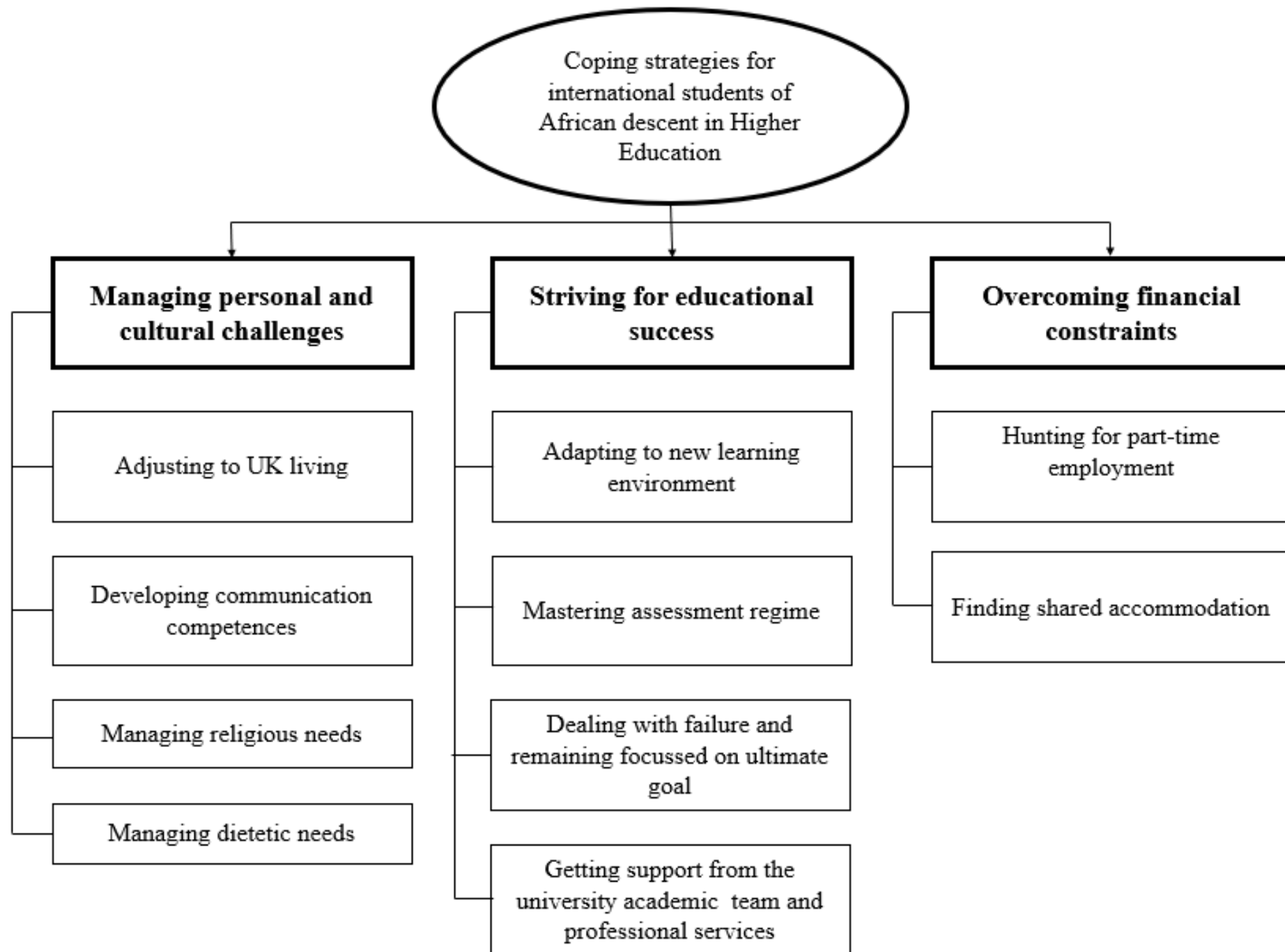


Fig 10. Coping strategies for international students.

Ten actions to improve the experiences of Black students within UK universities

1. Dealing with classroom and accommodation segregation
2. Increase the number of Black staff members and role models on campus
3. Decolonise your curriculum
4. Create a system for reporting discriminatory and racist behaviour
5. Work towards achieving a Race Equality Charter award
6. Provide funding for race-related research
7. Develop a support scheme for international students
8. Promote difficult conversations at all levels
9. Implement reciprocal mentoring schemes
10. Celebrate diversity



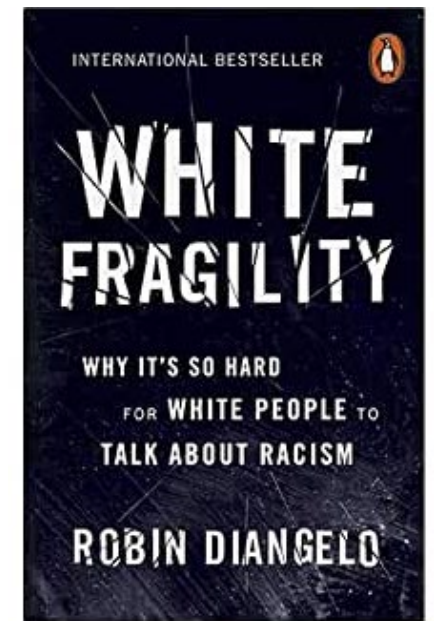
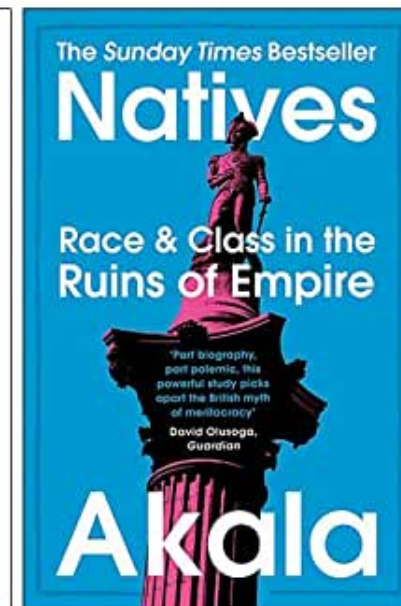
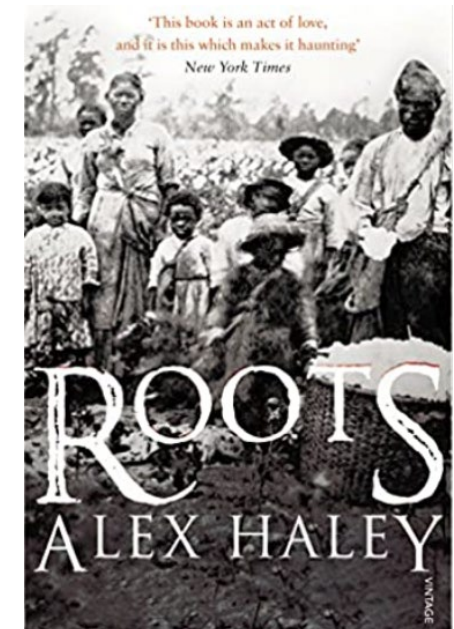
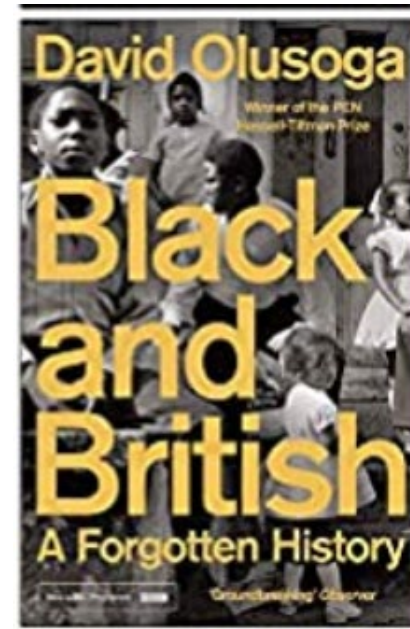
Ten actions lecturers can take to boost black students' belonging

1. Educate yourselves on race-related issues, history and culture
2. Make an effort to pronounce black students' names
3. Engage in difficult conversations with black students about life experiences and belonging
4. Dispute the idea that black students are a monolithic group
5. Promote inter-racial dialogue in student groups
6. Provide informal settings where black students can exchange ideas
7. Do not view black students as having a deficit
8. Identify and develop each student's gifts and potential, regardless of race or background
9. Consider anonymous marking
10. Ensure your curricula are inclusive and represent black experiences positively



The Journey to Allyship: Where to Begin

CARE Antiracism bookcases and book club



Union Black: Britain's Black Cultures and Steps to Anti-racism

- Santander Universities UK has partnered with The
- Open University and
- FutureLearn



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*Thank you
for listening*

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