EXPLORING THE COUNTERNARRATIVES OF THE FEW: SUCCESSFUL BRITISH AFRICAN CARIBBEAN MALES WHO HAVE ATTENDED ELITE UNIVERSITIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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There is extensive research on the intersectionality of class, gender and ethnicity and its influence on the underachievement and high exclusion rates of British African Caribbean (BAC) boys in secondary education. Yet the relationship between ethnicity and higher education (HE) is somewhat more complex. Research indicates that a higher proportional percentage of BACs and ethnic minorities attend HE in the UK than the proportion of the White peer group. However something very interesting is unearthed when the types of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that BME groups attend is examined. Four times more BACs attend post-1992 universities than all of the ‘old universities’ (Race to the Top, 2012) and between 2010-2012 less than 5% of all students entering Russell Group and Oxbridge universities were BAC (Boliver, 2013). With well over two thirds of all BAC students attending only three universities in central London there is reason to give pause and speculate as to why they choose and/or end up primarily attending a few universities. Much research has addressed this subject. However minimal research explores the experiences of BAC men who have attended elite UK universities.

Research questions:

1. How do Black males experience and think they are perceived at elite HEIs?
2. What tools/capitals/extra credentials do BAC men perceive themselves to possess - and how do they exercise these during their HE years and early careers afterwards?

Methods:

BAC males' were interviewed about their experiences attending Russell Group and Oxbridge universities. Four to five months after graduation participants were re-interviewed about their early career experiences.

Literature/ research aims:

To explore how ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, class and capitals (economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital: Bourdieu, 1986) impact BAC males’ constructions of their identities and their ability to succeed in elite HEIs and employment afterwards.

Analytical framework/ research findings/ contribution to knowledge:

BAC men’s experiences attending elite universities are explored to shed light on factors they identify as having enabled them to succeed where very few others have. Participants’ thoughts on their ‘capitals’ as well as their possible perceptions of individualised responsibility for their success/failure are discussed and analysed. Worldviews and belief systems that may have assisted these students’
achievements are also examined. The presentation concludes by discussing what can be learned from these BAC men's experiences and suggests possible policy implications of the research.

Keywords:

Counternarratives; ‘Race’/Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Higher Education; Capital(s); Credentialing; Aspiration; Mobility; Worldviews; Meritocracy; Misrecognitions; Employability