



# Entanglements of Race and Opportunity Structures; Challenging Racialised Transitions for ‘the Lost Generation’

Temidayo Eseonu<sup>1</sup>

Received: 20 May 2021 / Revised: 6 November 2021 / Accepted: 10 November 2021 /  
Published online: 25 November 2021

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2021

## Abstract

Young people are increasingly referred to as the ‘lost generation’ because a series of worldwide crises has meant they are at a greater risk of marginalisation from the labour market. However, these risks of marginalisation have been felt more disproportionately by racially minoritised young people. This article challenges the dominant thinking and practice in youth employment policy and service delivery by examining how the entanglement between race and opportunity structures constrains racially minoritised young people’s transition to employment. It argues that race structures disadvantage racially minoritised young people in the labour market, focusing primarily on employers’ recruitment practices. This article pays particular attention to the role of employees in employment support services in dismantling race structures. Using qualitative data from a research project in the UK, this article concludes that employer engagement is a channel through which employees within employment support services can dismantle race structures. Through relationships with employers, employees within employment support services can mitigate risks of marginalisation for racially minoritised young people.

**Keywords** Transitions · Race · Ethnic penalties · Marginalisation · Youth employment

## Introduction

In recent decades, young people have faced a series of crises, from the 2008 economic crisis to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Walby (2015, p.14) defines crisis as ‘an event that has the potential to cause a large detrimental change to the social system and in which there is lack of proportionality between cause and consequence’. Crisis as theorised by Walby (2015) pays attention to the underlying social systems where if unstable, short temporal events can produce large disproportionate changes.

---

✉ Temidayo Eseonu

<sup>1</sup> Stockport, UK

Several crises have disproportionately changed conditions in the labour market away from ‘full employment and relatively rapid, smooth and uncomplicated school-to-work transitions’ (Roberts 2009, p.357). Over a decade after the 2008 global economic crisis, young people have disproportionately borne the brunt of the economic recession, with poverty levels for the young remaining higher than in pre-recession times (McInnes et al., 2014). The last decade saw a generation of young people being referred to as a ‘lost generation’ because, despite the economic recovery, there have been slow and insecure education-to-work transitions (Antonucci et al., 2014).

Research has shown that while some young people may recover following crises, others suffer long term from unemployment and underemployment in the labour market (Droy et al. 2019). With the COVID-19 pandemic, this generation is at risk of experiencing the same patterns of fractured transitions<sup>1</sup> into employment. Transitions occur in contexts of change and continuity (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). By transitions, I mean the different routes young people take into employment (Roberts 2007). Well-documented changes to the labour market, such as increases in precarious work, low wages, low skill and underemployment, contribute to the fractured transition of young people into employment (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; MacDonald 2011; Roberts 2020). These social changes have increased the risk of marginalisation of young people from the labour market (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). This article argues that the risk of marginalisation is amplified in a racialised society like the UK for some young people because the risks are broadly distributed in ways that reflect racial hierarchies (Furlong and Cartmel 2007).

For some young people, there has been continuity in terms of the persistent racial inequalities in employment outcomes. Li and Heath (2020, p.863) refer to the ‘stickiness’ of unemployment for racially minoritised (RM) people after periods of economic crises. Racially minoritised is a term coined by Gunaratnam (2003, p.17) ‘to give some sense of the active processes of racialisation that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a minority’. I use this term instead of ethnic minorities or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic labels. Racialisation here is taken to mean the process through which socially constructed racial categories (labels), initially assigned by the state, are grounded in histories of oppression which then manifest in social institutions that leads to racial hierarchies where those at the top of the hierarchy receive economic, social and political rewards (Omi and Winant 2015; Feagin 2006; Bonilla-Silva 1997).

In the current crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the young in the UK are bearing the brunt of job losses. The number of young people unemployed for more than 6 months has doubled from the start of the pandemic, the highest rate recorded in 5 years, with young people accounting for over half of those unemployed (Wilson and Papoutsaki 2021). Their analysis of unemployment in the COVID-19 pandemic shows that ‘the fall in employment rates has been four times greater for young Black people than for young white people, while the fall for young Asian people has been nearly three times greater’ (Wilson and Papoutsaki 2021, p.4). Long-term

---

<sup>1</sup> Moving from one status position (such as leaving education or employment) without securing a job (Yates et al. 2011).

unemployment, one of the potential consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, increases the future occurrence of unemployment and lower subsequent earnings in employment (Droy et al. 2019). For RM young people, the consequences are magnified. RM people's careers lag behind their counterparts, they are less likely to be successful in finding re-employment, and their earnings suffer as a result of previous periods of unemployment (Li and Heath 2020).

Like the generation of young people transitioning to employment after the 2008 economic crisis, the COVID-19 crisis has led to this generation of young people being referred to as a 'lost generation' (Tamesberger and Bacher 2020). As attention turns towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is an opportune time to reflect on youth employment policies that can adequately support young people, particularly RM young people's transition to work. This crisis presents an opportunity to challenge underlying systems in society in a way that is positive for RM young people (Walby 2015). Therefore, we must take note of race as a potential marker of disadvantage that can make RM young people more vulnerable to marginalisation in the labour market. While youth studies have traditionally acknowledged that the impact of race on RM young people's experiences was quite distinct, it has maintained that the disadvantages were due to their positioning within class structures (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Consequently, the impact of young people's positioning due to race structures has not been an explicit focus of inquiry within youth studies. As part of efforts to rectify this gap in youth studies, this article attends to the ways in which race and racism intersect with other markers of disadvantage or privilege that make racial identities pertinent to transitions into employment (Harries et al. 2016).

This article makes the case that race structures influence RM young people's transitions into employment. The study of transitions asks that we pay attention to the structural issues that contribute to fractured transitions and highlight the complex interaction between agency and structural constraints (MacDonald et al. 2001). While there is an ongoing sociological debate on agency and structure (see Martin and Dennis 2010), in this article, agency is viewed as a constituent of structure (Sewell 1992). The premise of this article is that the entanglement of race and opportunity structures constrains RM young people's transition into employment. In particular, this article focuses on who ought to be responsible for supporting RM young people's transition, shedding light on what should be included in youth employment policies and service delivery. Wright (2012) argues that there is substantial scope to investigate how employees within employment support services can use their agency to challenge racialised transitions to employment. Therefore, this research's analytical lens examines racialised transitions and highlights how employees in employment support services can exercise their agency in supporting RM young people's transition into employment.

This article uses data from a case study in the UK gathered from focus groups with young people and interviews with employees from a local council's employment support service. The views of young people, including RM young people mostly of South Asian heritage, on youth employment support needs were gathered through a co-creation initiative (Youth Views). The young people's views were then presented to employees from the employment support service to improve service

delivery. Substantiated by empirical evidence, this article concludes that supporting RM young people's transition into employment requires engagement with employers to tackle the racialised structural disadvantages experienced by RM young people in the UK labour market.

## Racialised Transitions; Entanglements of Race and Opportunity Structures

Furlong and Cartmel (2007) argue that changing employment conditions have promoted individual responsibility for transitions into employment which often masks processes of social reproduction. Similarly, employment support services have individualised 'personal responsibility' for finding jobs at the core of its design (Wright 2012). With the rolling back of the state, neoliberalism has led to the downscaling of unemployment risks to those who are unemployed (Swyngedouw in Peck 2002, p.339). Individuals' success or failure in the labour market is conceived as an internal individualised characteristic' (Nunn 2018, p.168). Therefore, employment support services are focused on ensuring that those who are unemployed enhance their employability to increase their chances of success (Nunn 2018). Employment policies have been criticised for overestimating the extent to which individuals can control their life course without taking into account structural constraints outside of the individuals' control (Johansson 2007; Haikkola 2019; Fletcher 2019; Sunnerfjell 2020). Individuals' failure to gain employment is not always considered a symptom of structural or systemic conditions such as discrimination in the labour market. Within youth studies, structural conditions that frame young people's transitions are discussed as opportunity structures, the push and pull forces<sup>2</sup> that determine the employment routes to which young people have access (Roberts 2009). For the present purpose, this article assumes that the pull forces of employers' recruitment practices in supporting transitions are influenced by race structures, contributing to the fractured transitions of RM young people into employment.

RM young people's fractured transitions to employment are attributed to individual characteristics: lack of merit and ability rather than structural disadvantages embedded in institutions, laws, policies and ideologies (Hirji et al., 2020). The neoliberalisation of race has meant racial inequalities in employment outcomes have also become individualised (Goldberg 2009). Consequently, considerations for supporting transitions into employment fail to recognise race as an organiser of historical and contemporary racial inequalities (Yoon 2017). In particular, it fails to recognise the impact of racialisation and race structures on RM young people's fractured transitions to employment (MacDonald et al. 2001). Racial hierarchies created as a result of racialisation become race structures. Race structures are defined as

---

<sup>2</sup> Push forces include family origins, education and race, while pull forces include labour market processes and employers' recruitment practices (Roberts 2009).

mutually sustaining cultural schemas (rules of social life<sup>3</sup>) and sets of human and non-human resources that empower and constrain RM young people's ability to exert some degree of control over the social relations in which they are enmeshed (Sewell 1992). These social relations impact the rewards and penalties that RM young people experience. The presence of race structures in the labour market has seen RM people marginalised from the labour market. Marginalisation occurs because racialised schema in social relations determines how members of one group treat members of another group (Collins 2000). In the labour market, marginalised groups are 'people the system of labour cannot or will not use' (Young 1990, p.53). The government's race disparity audit shows that RM groups are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and earn the least (Cabinet Office 2017).

With the persistent and enduring racial inequalities in employment outcomes, this article posits that race structures are central to understanding the differential experiences for RM young people's transition to employment. Building on the premise that youth employment policies and service delivery 'may function only to reproduce, or further entrench, social inequalities and vulnerability to ongoing liminality and risk' (Leonard and Wilde 2019, p. 3), this article seeks to challenge the current dominant thinking and practice in the governance of youth employment for RM young people. The argument thus far is that race structures limit RM young people's successful transition into employment.

Race and ethnicity scholarship provides empirical evidence of how race structures constrain RM young people's transition into employment. The lack of social capital (not having potentially useful contacts or being unable to glean information about job opportunities) and human capital (for some RM groups) as well as being more likely to live in deprived areas with high unemployment rates make it harder to find work (Patacchini and Zenou 2011; Battu et al. 2011; Berritella 2012; Feng et al. 2015). This empirical evidence supports Furlong and Cartmel's (2007) assertion that racial differences result from their positioning within class structures. However, the intersection of race and class makes RM young people more vulnerable to fractured transitions. Previous research tells us of the ethnic differences in access to job-specific information and labour market participation through networks and job searching (Verhaeghe et al. 2013).

Furthermore, despite evidence that RM groups in the UK are more likely to have university qualifications than their white British counterparts, they are less likely to get jobs (Algan et al. 2010). One pertinent explanation is that discrimination against RM groups is an ethnic penalty that can account for the inequalities in employment outcomes after considering other characteristics such as educational background and local unemployment rates (Khattab and Johnston 2013). Heath and Di Stasio's (2019) meta-analysis of field experiments on racial discrimination in the British labour market between 1969 and 2017 concludes that discrimination is likely a major explanatory factor for RM people's disproportionately and enduringly

<sup>3</sup> Rules are 'society's fundamental tools of thought including the various conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools' (Sewell 1992, p.8).

high unemployment rates. The field experiments involved sending matched fictitious job applications to advertised job vacancies, differing only in identifiably white and non-white names (Heath and Di Stasio 2019). These experiments showed that RM people were more at risk of discrimination. While equal opportunities legislation in the UK is intended to mitigate this risk, the legislation does not eradicate or protect RM people against employers' discrimination (Ashe et al. 2019).

To summarise, RM young people experience racialised transitions which have implications for RM young people's ability to find jobs and their material futures.

Having demonstrated how race structures outside of RM young people's control contribute to fractured transitions, this article suggests that employment support services that solely focus on individual responsibility are insufficient to support RM young people into employment. While employment support is a service that always needs individuals to exercise agency in job searching or developing skills, RM young people's success in the labour market requires the dismantling of race structures in the labour market. However, the question of who is responsible for dismantling these race structures emerges. Drawing inspiration from Wright (2012), this article posits that employees within employment support services have a role to play in dismantling race structures. Therefore, this article aims to answer the question: what role can employment support services play in dismantling race structures to challenge racialised transitions?

## The Study

The research in this article used a case study methodology. The data presented is from focus groups with young people (Youth Views) and semi-structured interviews with employees in an employment support service (Creswell 2013). Youth Views was a short-term co-creation initiative embedded within a research project, the case study of a local council's employment support service efforts to support young people into employment (Flyvbjerg 2006; Yin 2009). In the North West of England in the UK, the employment support services of Ethos Metropolitan Borough Council (EMBC) were chosen using a 'least likely' rationale because they appear to be least likely to exclude RM young people from participating in public services design/delivery (Flyvbjerg 2006). The area EMBC is responsible for has a large proportion of RM residents, a larger proportion than in the city region as a whole. EMBC's local economic assessment in 2019 showed that RM people had lower employment rates than their white counterparts, and the 16- to 24-year cohort had higher unemployment rates than Greater Manchester and England.

EMBC's employment support services offer consists of different services. The core service offer is the Skills for Employment, partly funded by the European Social Fund for those unemployed and over 19 years old. This service provides job search support, interview techniques, confidence building, mentoring, help with CV and cover letter writing, pre-employment and work placement opportunities. The service also allows people to gain basic skills and vocational qualifications (credited and unaccredited). They also offer a Careers Advancement Service to support career progression and National Careers Service for general careers guidance. They also

run a service funded by the council to complement these funded services, providing support to those considered ineligible for the other programmes.

Youth Views worked with young people (aged 16–25) to understand their employment support needs and to determine how the council could help their transition into employment. The project was carried out over 6 months, from February 2019 to July 2019. Fifty-four young people (thirty RM young people, mostly South Asian heritage and twenty-four White young people) participated in the Youth Views project. There were seven focus groups, and they lasted between 75 and 90 min, with three to seventeen participants in each focus group. Discussions in the focus group were focused on capturing the needs young people have when seeking employment and how best the service could support them. The focus group discussions were loosely structured around three questions: (1) as a BME young person, are there specific services that the council should be providing; (2) what can you do to make the most of the service; and (3) how likely is it that you will get a job? EMBC's service employees were present at some of the focus group discussions. At the end of Youth Views, the wrap-up meeting with EMBC's service management team discussed how employment support services could be improved to support youth employment needs. At this meeting, support needs and recommendations were presented through a short video clip featuring some of the RM young people and my analyses of the focus group discussions.

Five individual semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide. They lasted between 45 and 120 min and helped to understand the context in which employment support services are delivered: opportunities, challenges and barriers to service delivery. Most of the interviews were audio-recorded with transcripts produced. Transcripts were shared with interviewees to confirm they were happy with the way their answers were recorded.

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis. The codes were developed through a reflexive analysis approach; the codes can 'evolve, expand, contract, be renamed, split apart into several codes, collapsed together with other codes, and even be abandoned' (Braun and Clarke 2019, p.7). The codes became more interpretive and conceptual as I was analysing—I moved beyond surface explanations of the data to question implicit (latent) meanings of the data (Braun and Clarke 2019).

## Findings

This section discusses the findings from the analyses of data from focus groups and interviews that help answer the research question: what role can employment support services play in dismantling race structures to challenge racialised transitions? The findings presented in this section are my interpretation of the relevant data gathered from the research (Braun and Clarke 2019).

Some RM young people's experience supported the evidence previously discussed in the literature review section on how race structures contribute to fractured transitions. For example, one participant shared his job searching experience, having a White sounding name and then showing up for interviews where employers were

shocked because he was Black. He attributed this to why he was not getting employment offers after attending interviews. However, RM young people in this case study did not appear to be fully aware of how race structures impact their transition into employment—the majority of them were confident of their ability to transition into employment successfully. Given the neoliberalisation of employment support and race, which focus on individualisation, it appears this neoliberalism agenda has been internalised by the participants in the Youth Views project. Another indication of the internalisation of individualisation, discussions of racialised transitions did not initially occur in the focus groups with only RM young people. To prompt a conversation on race structures, in the focus groups where there were only RM young people, I, as the facilitator, introduced a statistic about the racial inequalities in employment rates. This topic was not presented in the focus groups with white and RM young people as I did not have the depth of relationships with the young people to know whether this topic would be handled with sensitivity by white young people towards RM young people. On introducing this topic in the only RM young people focus groups, the RM young people started to speak about discriminatory experiences in accessing and participating in the labour market, with many drawing from their own or familial experiences. The excerpt below from one of the focus groups with RM young people aptly summarises what RM young people felt was the main issue when transitioning to employment:

We feel that the main aspect that affects the employability levels for BME<sup>4</sup> people is the actual bias of the employer, so the employer needs to be more tuned in to how they can change their view of employing BME people.  
(Female, South Asian)

Once experiences were shared, discussions turned to how EMBC can challenge racialised transitions into employment. Many saw EMBC playing a role in the demand side of the labour market, working with employers to reduce discrimination in recruitment practices.

Examining EMBC's employment support services' offer, working with employers to reduce discrimination was not a key component. Instead, EMBC's employment support services' core offer is typical of active labour market policies (ALMPs) and fit into the broad and overlapping categories of ALMPs. These categories are training programmes (classroom and work experience), job search assistance programmes and employment programmes (including supported internships and apprenticeships, traineeships, apprenticeships, subsidised employment schemes). Also worthy of note is that only one actor who is of a South Asian heritage mentioned the racialised disadvantages faced by RM young people during the interviews with employees within employment support services. All these employees have extensive experience working within employment support services but had not readily discussed racialised disadvantage as a factor in successful transitions into employment for RM young people. In the interviews, some of the service employees were aware of employers' discriminatory practices reinforcing what RM young

---

<sup>4</sup> Black and Minority Ethnic.



people felt was a reason for their fractured transitions. While the service employees were aware of racial tensions between white and non-white groups in this locality because of its history of riots around racial inequalities, this awareness did not translate into knowledge of and action to dismantle race structures. With the seeming lack of consideration of race structures by employees and in the services offered, it is unlikely that race structures are being dismantled. Thus, racial inequalities in employment outcomes continue to be reproduced.

At the start of Youth Views, the team was worried that young people would request services that they did not have the funding to deliver, and this concern about the lack of funding was brought up again in the post-project discussions. When I presented the suggestions to improve service delivery to EMBC's service management team, I highlighted that RM young people wanted the service to tackle employer bias and discrimination. Some practical suggestions to tackle discrimination were provided and included a 'no discrimination' campaign within their locality and employees within employment support services challenging racialised employers' practices. However, the team was unsure about whether this was within their remit. The senior manager on the team reflected on the role of the employment support service can be expected to play:

Was it (the service) about changing individuals and getting them ready for employment, or was it about changing employers' mindsets? (Senior manager, employment support services)

Ultimately, the funding for services determines what role employment support services can play. In this case, the funding for the different streams in the service offer did not include tackling ethnic penalties levied at RM young people, specifically employers' discriminatory practices. The service targets set by funders of the service shape how EMBC's employment support services are delivered, thereby serving as constraints to what employees can do. Where policymakers and commissioners of services are not considering tackling ethnic penalties as part of its funding structure, it is unlikely that any concrete steps at the service delivery level would be taken to incorporate changes that will address racialised needs when delivering services.

## Discussion

From this case study, RM young people's transition into employment requires engagement with employers to tackle discrimination in the UK labour market. Yet, EMBC's service does not seek to dismantle race structures and is further inhibited by funding that does not allow for changes to service offer. Employees within EMBC's employment support services have not exercised their agency in this context to attempt to dismantle race structures in the labour market that are detrimental to RM young people (Wright 2012). Is the expectation that employment support services take appropriate steps to dismantle race structures unrealistic? This section theorises what steps employment support services can take to challenge racialised transitions, taking the view that there is scope for employees within employment

support services to exercise their agency through employer engagement. The caveat to this theorisation is that the success of employer engagement is dependent on employers' willingness to engage, which is in turn impacted by local labour market conditions (Card et al. 2010; Russell et al. 2011). Employers are more likely to engage with employment support services when the demand for labour is high.

Employment support services usually have a two-pronged approach: employer-facing activities and supporting the unemployed. Employer engagement is the activities service providers undertake to actively involve 'employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labour-market participation of vulnerable groups' (van Berkel et al., in Ingold 2018, p. 707; Ingold and Stuart 2015). In promoting the labour market participation of RM groups, street-level organisations such as the council's employment support services can play a critical role in employer engagement (Ingold 2018). Employees within employment support services involve employers as partners to seek ways and create conditions within which RM young people can transition into employment (Ingold 2018). van der Aa and van Berkel's (2014) research demonstrates how employer-facing activities can be an appropriate channel for dismantling race structures. Their research highlights employer-facing activities that can support marginalised groups into employment; public procurement mandates that require employers to employ certain groups, financial incentives and recruitment and in-work support services. However, a note of caution with employer-oriented approaches is that focusing on employers' requirements may legitimise 'discriminatory behaviour which is a significant cause of the inequalities some groups face in the labour market' (Fletcher 2004, p.127). As discussed in this article, this discriminatory behaviour is relevant to RM young people.

To mitigate the risk of legitimising discrimination, this article states that employees within employment support services can assert their agency to dismantle race structures, thereby benefitting RM young people. Sewell's (1992) view of structures is that they are dynamic and not permanent because he sees human agency as the glue to the joining of schemas and resources that form structures. Where it is human agency that has joined schemas and resources, agency can also join schema and resources (whether old or new) in different ways. Employees can start to dismantle race structures via employer engagement. When designing employer-facing activities, employees can use their knowledge of how race structures function and their access to human and non-human resources to challenge racialised transitions (Sewell 1992). These employees can mobilise human resources, e.g. knowledge about discriminatory practices and a commitment to tackling discrimination to intervene or overcome aspects of employers' recruitment processes that are discriminatory. They could also utilise non-human resources, e.g. budget allocation, to tackle discriminatory practices. When participating in employer-facing activities, employees can keep in mind objectives such as addressing discriminatory practices. They can recognise that in employer engagement, 'participation in collaborative exchanges with individuals in other agencies and organisations is pivotal in realising both their personal and organisational objectives' (Williams 2002, pp. 106–07). Employer engagement involves building and maintaining trusting inter-organisational relationships with employers (Ingold 2018). In the spaces of employer engagement, employees exercise agency so that employment support services can start to dismantle race structures.

## Conclusion

Race structures have been around for centuries and have structural stability, and there is no reason to assume that attempts to interrupt or minimise its effects will be easy (Seamster and Ray 2018; Meghji 2020). Yet, in the wake of the global #Black Lives Matter movement, which has shone a spotlight on race structures, it is important to consider how the reproduction of inequalities can be stopped.

Therefore, it is important to study transitions and not just in terms of class structures but also race structures. This article highlights how the entanglements of race, class and opportunity structures shape the period of the life in which RM individuals' life chances are established (MacDonald et al. 2001). In particular, this study of transitions provides a glimpse of the structural reasons that can explain such different outcomes for RM young people as they reach adulthood and perpetuate inequalities in employment outcomes (Macdonald et al. 2001). The core argument thus far is centred around challenging the idea that fractured transitions are solely due to individuals' failings without due considerations of failings in the labour market, failings that arise from race structures such as discriminatory practices, which in turn limit the labour market participation of RM young people. In seeking to understand whether employment support services can support RM young people's transition into employment, this article concludes that employees within employment support services have a role to play through employer engagement in challenging racialised transitions.

As minimal empirical work on how race and youth are constituted in contemporary youth studies (Harries et al. 2016), this article seeks to add to our understanding of how racialisation impacts RM young people's transition into employment. This study has generated analyses of theoretical and policy relevance. This article has contributed to an under-researched area on racialised transitions of RM young people to employment. It has widened the focus of youth transitions into employment by discussing the impact of race on RM young people's experiences of the labour market. Like Russell et al. (2011), this article has shown that employment support services need to acknowledge the complexity of the cultural, social and economic matrix in which RM young people's lives are embedded. While the findings from this study cannot be generalised, they can be replicated in similar contexts to the one described in this research (Denzin 2010). Single case studies such as this study make room for developing, testing and spreading robust suggestions for challenging racialised transitions into employment (Flyvbjerg 2006). With young people at the 'crossroads of social reproduction' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, p.139), focusing on employer-oriented approaches that target discriminatory practices can avoid the present generation of RM young people becoming a 'lost generation'.

**Data Availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Ethics Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional ethics review committee.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

## References

- Algan Y, Dustmann C, Glitz A, Manning A (2010) The economic situation of first and second-generation immigrants in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. *Econ J* 120(542):F4–F30
- Antonucci L, Hamilton M, Roberts S (eds) (2014) *Young people and social policy in europe: dealing with risk, inequality and precariousness in times of crisis*. Palgrave, Basingstoke
- Ashe S, Borkowska M, Nazroo J (2019) *Racism Ruins Lives*. <https://tinyurl.com/yyj4bmpz>. Accessed 26 April 2020
- Battu H, Seaman P, Zenou Y (2011) Job contact networks and the ethnic minorities. *Labour Econ* 18(1):48–56
- Berritella M (2012) Modelling the labour market of minority ethnic groups. *J Policy Model* 34(3):389–402
- Bonilla-Silva E (1997) Rethinking racism: toward a structural interpretation. *Am Sociol Rev* 62(3):465–480
- Braun V, Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol* 3(2):77–101
- Braun V, Clarke V (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qual Res Sport Exerci Health* 11(4):589–597
- Cabinet Office (2017) Race disparity audit. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/680802/Revised\\_RDAEFAF\\_Feb\\_18.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/680802/Revised_RDAEFAF_Feb_18.pdf). Accessed 16 February 2018
- Card D, Kluve J, Weber A (2010) Active labour market policy evaluations: a meta-analysis. *Econ J* 120(548):F452–F477. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2010.02387.x>
- Collins PH (2000) *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 2nd edn. Routledge, New York
- Creswell JW (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*, 3rd edn. SAGE Publications, Los Angeles
- Denzin NK (2010) Moments, mixed methods, and paradigm dialogs. *Qual Inq* 16(6):419–427
- Droy L, Goodwin J, O'Connor H (2019) Liminality, marginalisation and low-skilled work: mapping long-term labour market difficulty following participation in the 1980s Government-Sponsored Youth Training Schemes. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332566966\\_Liminality\\_Marginalisation\\_and\\_Low-Skilled\\_Work\\_Mapping\\_long-term\\_labour\\_market\\_difficulty\\_following\\_participation\\_in\\_the\\_1980s\\_government-sponsored\\_youth\\_training\\_schemes\\_YTS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332566966_Liminality_Marginalisation_and_Low-Skilled_Work_Mapping_long-term_labour_market_difficulty_following_participation_in_the_1980s_government-sponsored_youth_training_schemes_YTS). Accessed 20 August 2021
- Feagin JR (2006) *Systemic racism: a theory of oppression*. Routledge, New York
- Feng X, Flowerdew R, Feng Z (2015) Does neighbourhood influence ethnic inequalities in economic activity? Findings from the ONS Longitudinal Study. *J Econ Geogr* 15(1):169–194
- Fletcher DR (2004) Demand-led programmes: Challenging labour-market inequalities or reinforcing them? *Eviron Plann C Gov Policy* 22(1):115–128. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0329>
- Fletcher DR (2019) British public employment service reform: activating and civilising the precariat? *J Poverty Soc Justice* 27(3):407–421
- Furlong A, Cartmel F (2007) *Young people and social change: new perspectives*. Sociology and social change, 2nd edn. McGraw-Hill/Open University Press, Maidenhead
- Flyvbjerg B (2006) Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qual Inq* 12(2):219–245
- Goldberg DT (2009) *The threat of race: reflections on racial neoliberalism*. Malden, Mass; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
- Gunaratnam Y (2003) *Researching “race” and ethnicity: methods, knowledge and power*. Sage, London
- Haikkola L (2019) Shaping activation policy at the street level: governing inactivity in youth employment services. *Acta Sociol* 62(3):334–348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699318784341>
- Harries B, Hollingworth S, James M, Fangen K (2016) Reconstituting race in youth studies. *Young* 24(3):177–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308816641010>
- Heath AF, Di Stasio V (2019) Racial discrimination in Britain, 1969–2017: a meta-analysis of field experiments on racial discrimination in the British labour market. *Br J Sociol* 70(5):1774–1798

- Hirji F, Jiwani Y, Mcallister KE (2020) On the Margins of the Margins: #CommunicationSoWhite—Canadian Style. *Commun Cult Crit* 13(2):168–184
- Ingold J (2018) Employer engagement in active labour market programmes: the role of boundary spanners. *Public Adm* 96(4):707–720. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12545>
- Ingold J, Stuart M (2015) The demand-side of active labour market policies: a regional study of employer engagement in the work programme. *J Soc Policy* 44(3):443–462. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279414000890>
- Johansson H (2007) Placing the individual at the forefront: Beck and individual approaches to activation. In: van Berkel R, Valkenburg B (eds) *Making It Personal: Individualising Activation Services in the EU*. The Policy Press, Bristol, pp 67–85
- Khattab N, Johnston R (2013) Ethnic and religious penalties in a changing British labour market from 2002 to 2010: the case of unemployment. *Environ Plan A* 45(6):1358–1371
- Leonard P, Wilde R (2019) Getting in and getting on in the youth labour market: Governing young people's employability in regional context. Policy Press, Bristol
- Li Y, Heath A (2020) Persisting disadvantages: a study of labour market dynamics of ethnic unemployment and earnings in the UK (2009–2015). *J Ethn Migr Stud* 46(5):857–878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1539241>
- Macdonald R, Mason P, Shildrick T, Webster C, Johnston L, Ridley L (2001) *Snakes & Ladders: In Defence of Studies of Youth Transition*. *Sociol Res Online* 5(4):1–13
- Macdonald R (2011) Youth transitions, unemployment and underemployment. *J Sociol* 47(4):427–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783311420794>
- McInnes T, Aldridge H, Bushe S, Kenway P, Tinson A (2014) *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York
- Martin P, Dennis A (eds) (2010) *Human agents and social structures*. Manchester University Press, Manchester
- Meghji A (2020) Just what is critical race theory, and what is it doing in British sociology? From “Brit-Crit” to the racialised social system approach. *Br J Sociol*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12801>
- Nunn A (2018) Do employment services need to be neoliberal? In: Sultana R, Thomsen R, Hooley T (eds) *Career Guidance for Emancipation*. Routledge, New York, pp 166–182
- Omi M, Winant H (2015) *Racial formation in the United States*, 3rd edn. Routledge, New York
- Patacchini E, Zenou Y (2011) Neighborhood effects and parental involvement in the intergenerational transmission of education. *J Reg Sci* 51(5):987–1013
- Peck J (2002) Political economies of scale: fast policy, interscalar relations, and neoliberal warfare. *Econ Geogr* 78(3):331–360. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4140813>
- Roberts K (2007) Youth transitions and generations: a response to Wyn and Woodman. *J Youth Stud* 10(2):263–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260701204360>
- Roberts K (2009) Opportunity structures then and now. *J Educ Work* 22(5):355–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080903453987>
- Roberts K (2020) Regime change: Education to work transitions in England, 1980s–2020s. *J Appl Youth Stud* 3(1):23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-020-00004-6>
- Russell L, Simmons R, Thompson R (2011) Ordinary lives: an ethnographic study of young people attending entry to employment programmes. *J Educ Work* 24(5):477–499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2011.573773>
- Seamster L, Ray V (2018) Against teleology in the study of race: toward the abolition of the progress paradigm. *Sociol Theory* 36(4):315–342
- Sewell WH (1992) A theory of structure: duality, agency, and transformation. *Am J Sociol* 98(1):1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1086/229967>
- Sunnerfjell J (2020) Rendering the hidden visible: subjected to “work on the self” in a local labour market measure. *J Organ Ethnogr*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-04-2020-0012>
- Tamesberger D, Bacher J (2020) COVID-19 Crisis: how to avoid a 'lost generation. *Intereconomics* 55(4):232–238
- van der Aa P, van Berkel R (2014) Innovating job activation by involving employers. *Int Soc Secur Rev* 67:11–27
- Verhaeghe PP, Li Y, Van de Putte B (2013) Socio-economic and ethnic inequalities in social capital from the family among labour market entrants. *Eur Sociol Rev* 29(4):683–694
- Walby S (2015) *Crisis*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Williams P (2002) The competent boundary spanner. *Public Administration* 80(1):103–124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00296>

- Wilson T, Papoutsaki D (2021) An unequal crisis: the impact of the pandemic on the youth labour market. [https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IES-Report\\_12Feb2021\\_-FINAL.pdf](https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IES-Report_12Feb2021_-FINAL.pdf). Accessed 10 May 2021
- Wright S (2012) Welfare-to-work, agency and personal responsibility. *J Soc Policy* 41(2):309–328. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279411001000>
- Yates S, Harris A, Sabates R, Staff J (2011) Early occupational aspirations and fractured transitions: a study of entry into “NEET” status in the UK. *J Soc Policy* 40(3):513–534
- Yin RK (2009) *Case study research: design and methods*. Sage, Thousand Oaks
- Yoon ES (2017) Neoliberalizing race? Diverse youths’ lived experiences of race in school choice. *Res Educ* 97(1):76–94
- Young IM (1990) *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton University Press, Princeton