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I AM:
Resistance and Ambiguity in the Constructions of Black British Men

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick
School of Health and Social Studies

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.
Definition of Terms

‘Race’: For the purpose of this research, I use the term ‘race’ to refer to one’s heredity traits such as skin colour, hair colour etc. as the defining feature as to who one is, i.e. white, black. However, ‘race’ is a scientifically contested term as it is also defined as a social construction that serves a particular ideological function in the interest of maintaining ‘control’ in the process of human social and political relations (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 388-389). Therefore I use this term with caution, as it is believed that it is ‘A FOUR LETTER WORD THAT HURTS’ (Fried 1975: 3).

Black: In this thesis I use the term black, as an organisational category, to refer to black British people of Caribbean descent. I use the term blackness interchangeably with black throughout the research. It is understood that the term black is used by many writers in a political sense to refer collectively to people of African, African-Caribbean and Asian descent in recognition of the fact that they experience structural and institutional discrimination because of their skin colour. However, black is a contested term which has been criticised for its focus on those of African descent and for including groups like South Asians who, in particular, may not accept the term (Bhopal 1995; Brah 1992; Maylor 1995, 2009; Mirza 1997; Modood 1988, 1992, 1994; Solomos and Back 2000).

‘The black community’: For the purpose of this research, I use the term ‘the black community’ to refer to black British people of Caribbean descent as a
collective organisational category. However ‘the black community’ is a contested term, as it implies a homogenous group of people, thus obscuring how, as individuals we are divided by class, gender, values, region and sexual orientation. Alexander (1996a: 32) observes the fact that on the whole, projections of ‘community’ have created the illusion of ‘fixity’ and ‘absolute identification’, premised on the correlation of ‘Community’ with ‘Race’. Like the above terms, the notion of ‘the black community’ is used with caution, as it is recognised that it can equally unite and divide a group of people.

**Asian**: In this thesis I use the term ‘Asian’ to refer to Asian British people from South Asia; that is of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan descent. Throughout this research, the term ‘Indian’ is used interchangeably with the term ‘Asian’ to refer to myself as the author of this research.
Abstract

This thesis examines how black masculinity is constructed, drawing on the accounts of black British men. It is based on field research in London, which consisted of a survey, participant observation, as well as interviews with ‘representatives’ of ‘the black community’ and black ‘individuals’, conducted in late 2007 and 2008. The research took place against the backdrop of ongoing violence where black males were portrayed as the main victims and perpetrators of knife and gun crime, as well as the main participants in ‘gang’ related violence and crime.

This thesis first maps the ways in which black men have been constructed within British society, with a focus on the present day. It then goes on to investigate the ways in which black British men as well as sections of ‘the black community’ respond to dominant constructions of black males in policy and media discourse. It finally considers the alternative ways in which black masculinities are constructed according to black men, namely a group of 20 men of Caribbean descent aged between 18 and 45.

This study relies on both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore how black men respond to and negotiate negative representations of black masculinity. In particular, the study relies on the use of visual methods, namely photographs along with in-depth interviewing to generate accounts from black men of the alternative ways in which black masculinity is constructed and how such constructions are arrived at in contemporary Britain. The use of photographs allows for the exploration of not only how
individuals see things but also how they see things differently, which can in turn invite new ways of seeing.

This thesis argues that stereotypical representations of negative, atavistic, and violent black masculinities as routinely portrayed by the British media continue to form a common theme in the construction of ‘the black British community’ and the Government responses to these representations. I identify that sections of ‘the black community’ play an active part in responding to these constructions and highlight how this can considerably affect the ways in which black males are represented. While institutions like the mainstream media, parts of the criminal justice system and senior politicians continue to represent black men primarily as victims and perpetrators of violence, this thesis highlights how black men engage in acts of resistance which invite us to think about the roles of resilience amid ambivalence in the construction of identities.
1. INTRODUCTION

The central concern of this thesis is with how black men construct a masculine selfhood in contemporary Britain. This thesis explores how black men respond to dominant constructions of black masculinity in British society. Their response to this dominant construction of black masculinity is two-pronged; it is not only about how black men see themselves, but also how they perceive black masculinity as constructed by a dominant British society.

At the same time, the thesis responds to contemporary concerns around black males in the UK that are highlighted in all forms of media, by the State, and within ‘the black community’. This is because the start of my research in 2007 coincided with a period during which media coverage of escalating knife and gun crime and ‘gang’ related activities featured with increasing regularity on the front pages of newspapers, on TV and in radio reports. More specifically, the belief that the main instigators of such crimes are black males underpinned public and policy debates. For example, British newspapers expressed these concerns through headlines such as ‘Blair blames spate of murders on black culture’ (Wintour and Dodd 2007), and ‘Black kids to blame for knife and gun murders, says Blair’ (Hall 2007). These concerns were also expressed by the police, when Chief Constable Peter Fahy (then head of the Cheshire Constabulary) pointed to the involvement of blacks in gun crime as ‘particularly worrying’ (Home Affairs Committee 2007: 19). Furthermore, similar concern was voiced by the director of a mentoring
organization for black males; Uanu Seshmi was cited as saying that black males were vulnerable to joining / being affiliated with violent ‘gangs’ (Womack 2007). Black males, it seems, have come to occupy a specific location in the public consciousness. In the media and policy debates addressed above, black masculinity is routinely presented as being in a state of ‘crisis’.

Consequently, black masculinity is presented in media and policy debates as a problematic issue in at least three ways. Firstly, as the above headlines suggest, not only has black masculinity come to be ‘dramatized’ and ‘demonized’, but it is also perceived as an identity that urgently needs to be ‘dealt’ with (Mercer 1994: 19). This sense of urgency is further amplified as black males are shown to be clustered on the lower rungs of society, on multiple levels of disadvantage. Thus, following the April 2007 headlines came the publication of the government-commissioned REACH report (DCLG 2007) which examined and sought to explain the situation of black males in relation to high rates of school exclusions, low educational attainment and high unemployment levels, as well as in terms of their disproportional presence in the criminal justice system.

Secondly, many of the headlines convey the message that issues such as the escalation of ‘street’ violence are specific to those individuals who fall into the categories ‘black’ and ‘male’. Black masculinity is imbued with negative connotations, and positive views as expressed by the media seem few and far between. This can then be perceived as forming part of a wider problem
concerning ‘the black community’. Yet more headlines which followed the April headlines included: ‘Without role-models, black youth is prey to underworld culture’ (Ojumu 2007), and ‘Black boys need role models not rappers’ (Womack 2007).¹ It may be argued that these headlines perpetuate the idea of ‘good’ blacks and ‘bad’ blacks, whereby ‘good’ black role models are needed to counteract the ‘bad’ blacks. Often, black rappers of the entertainment world, seen as glamourizing violence and a ‘street’ culture, are presented as epitomizing ‘bad’ blacks. Even the historic unveiling of Nelson Mandela’s statue in London (in August 2007) appeared to be overshadowed by a plea on Mandela’s part urging the UK’s leading black Britons (‘good’ blacks) to help combat violence and underachievement in inner city areas such as London (Mail Online 29 August 2008).

Thirdly, black males are seen as disrupting the normal functions of law and order which, in turn, suggests that they are in need of regulation and control. That is, extensive coverage in newspapers, TV, radio, and public policy reports, on the topic of (street) crime and violence conveys the message to dominant society that black Britons are part of a culture ‘whose ideas and ideals are unlike ours’ (Sacks 2002: 10), thus creating an Us (dominant white society) and Them (blacks) divide. The presence of black males as up to no good consistently serves as a reminder of how ‘we live in the conscious presence of difference’ (ibid). This ‘difference’, as Saint-Aubin (1994: 1056) observes, sees black men ‘compared to a [white] norm by which they are

¹ The purported lack of role-models and ‘positive’ black men has a wider significance given that these concerns have also been echoed on an international level such as in the United States (Noguera 1997).
judged lacking’. Ultimately, this ‘difference’ ‘can be experienced as a profound threat to [national] identity’ (Sacks 2002: 10), thereby reinforcing the idea that black males are in need of regulation and control if they are to be seen as British.

Therefore, this thesis concerns itself with contemporary depictions of ‘the threatening black male’, with the understanding that public discourses tend to construct and represent (street) crime and violence as primarily caused by or somehow related to those individuals who fall into the categories of black and male. In light of this, it seems that the socio-economic realities of black males tend to be side-lined by dominant society in favour of depicting ‘street’ crime and violence as ‘a black problem’ (Gilroy 2003). I consider these socio-economic realities while duly taking into account how ‘black’ crime has been represented in public and political discourse.

**Political and economic context of the study**

While this thesis is concerned with contemporary depictions of ‘the threatening black male’, it is important to locate the social construction of the black ‘Other’ in its political and economic context given that the debate extends further than the academy. As such there are different discourses which surround the question of ‘black criminality’. One of these discourses represents black males largely as perpetrators of (street) crime and violence where they are seen as responsible for the many problems and

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2 This thesis duly takes into account that there are other elements other than the image of ‘the threatening black male’ which make up dominant society’s construction of black masculinity which I examine later in the thesis beginning with Chapter Two.
disadvantages that they face, and are identified as the group in society that can play the most important role in overcoming many of the problems that they face. A separate discourse depicts ‘the black community’ in general, and in particular black males, as victims of wider socio-economic inequalities, racism, hate crime and violence. I will now turn to the political implications of the first of these two discourses because the representation of violent black masculinities as routinely portrayed by the media forms a common theme in the construction of ‘the black community’ and the Government responses to these representations.

In relation to the discourse that asserts that blame and responsibility for problems reside with black men and women themselves, it is important to take into account of the dual role that ‘the black community’ in general has been understood to hold. On the one hand, they are blamed for ‘black’ crime, and on the other hand, they are seen as having the power and the responsibility to counteract ‘black’ crime. For example, as a response to drugs, gun murders and ‘gang’ related activities within ‘the black community’, ‘leaders from black minority and ethnic communities were invited to join strategy groups such as Trident in order to address these issues’ (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 122). The notion that the black men and women are primarily responsible for ‘black’ violence and criminality is echoed by some of the men and women who identify as spokespeople for ‘the black community’. Lee Jasper, a ‘race’ campaigner and leading advisor to the then Mayor of London Ken Livingstone (Marsh et al. 2006: 164), has also partly attributed the

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3 Operation Trident was a Metropolitan Police Service unit that was set up in 1998. The initiative was set up to target gun crime in London with special attention being placed on crime relating to ‘the black community’.
internal practices of ‘the black community’ to the existence of ‘black criminality’. Jasper has also stated that part of the solution to reduce this criminality lies with members of ‘the black community’ cooperating with the police and wider state apparatus as demonstrated in this quotation:

‘This has been the reality for London’s black community for the past 20 years, resulting in a huge erosion of any restraining moral framework for those outside the black church…[Trident Independent Advisory Group] has had huge success in removing gangsters and their weapons from the streets and has begun to break down the supposed ‘wall of silence’ on drugs issues in the black community, my community, whose task is now to convince increasing numbers who are providing information to take the next step of giving evidence in court. We cannot sit by and hope this problem will go away. We must work with the police. If we do not act now we will reap the terrible harvest of living in fear of our own community’ (Jasper 2002).

As the above suggests, it seems as though the issue of ‘black’ crime can be attributed to black males who lack in moral restraints and so it is an issue of a lack of morals within ‘the black community’.

Indeed, the active role that ‘the black community’ has to play in combating the issues concerning black males has led to a creation of many organizations which cater specifically for black boys and young black men. These organizations include but are not limited to ‘The Windsor Fellowship’, ‘The National Black Boys Can Association’ and ‘The 100 Black Men of
London’. For Odih (2002: 101), the expansion of these organizations is representative of a ‘disturbing trend’ as they can be seen ‘as facilitating the increased surveillance and regulation’ of black males (ibid: 93) which sees ‘the provision of [black] male role models to remedy’ other black males through ‘mentoring practices’ (ibid: 91).

Against this political backdrop, it appears that ‘the black community’ in general, is identified by other members of ‘the black community’ and the State as in need of special attention. More specifically, it perpetuates the idea that black males in particular have difficulty integrating into mainstream society. This, in turn, further promotes the idea that these problems are specific to black males. According to Edwards (2006: 65), black males are presented as being in a process of ‘catching up’ with the rest of society. Moreover this further instills the idea of an Us (dominant, white) / Them (black) divide, in which the latter are seen as more violent, criminally inclined, in need of regulation – in a word, less civilized.

However, as I emphasize in this thesis, public and political concerns around black males and criminality are rarely discussed without also acknowledging how black males are victims as well. In this sense, it could be argued that the first discourse addressed above has increasingly pulled in elements of the second discourse, that is, the discourse that sees inequality and discrimination as responsible for the violence and criminality of some black males.

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The concept of 100 Black Men originated from the United States where African-American men, concerned about improving the conditions in their community formed an organization called 100 Black Men of New York. Since its initiation, in 1963, the organization has grown significantly where there are now 103 chapters and the 100 Black Men of London is one part of these chapters.
males. From an economic point of view, it is important to consider the social exclusions that confront black males on multiple levels, such as educational underachievement, high unemployment rates and incarceration (Home Affairs Committee 2007). In a 2007 speech, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair acknowledged that more often than not black males are innocent victims of knife and gun crimes. Within the recent history of the representation of black males as innocent victims, no case has attracted the public's imagination as did the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence.

While this idea of ‘black male criminality’ persists, it is juxtaposed in media and policy debates with the reality of hate crime against black men so that at the time of writing this thesis blacks are seen as both as perpetrators as well as victims of knife and gun crimes. However, I argue that it is this continuing construction of black males as criminals that confirms the underlying tension of their situation in Britain. Thus, it is the pernicious and persistent stereotyping and negative social labelling of black males within British society which leads me to address the importance of my study.

**Rationale for the study**

There are two main reasons as to why this study is both necessary and important. Firstly, a review of the literature on this subject points to the fact that the portrayal of black males as violent (‘street’) criminals is on-going. This continuity, as Hall (1987) and Gilroy (2003) have observed, has become frustrating because it points to a lack of change. Their writings thus convey this sense of frustration, signaling ‘here we go again’. As Stuart Hall stated, ‘I
have reluctance about entering once again into what seems to me a terribly familiar and recurring cycle...I regret to say that I feel we are still at some strategic point in that ever-recurring circle’ (1987: 45). On the other hand, Paul Gilroy (2003) stated that the ‘excessive law-breaking became something of a theme during the period of mass immigration…there is consistency in the way that it is always crime which tells the British people what racial differences add up to’. Moreover, in the current context, Claire Alexander has said that ‘the same stereotypes of black cultures of poverty, pathologised families, identity crisis, crime and hyper-masculinity, [...] have emerged in the recent debates, if now updated with a hi-gloss [...] cultural veneer’ (2008: 14).

As such, the authors point to how public discourses, and in particular, ‘much media content – both visual and textual – tends to create, perpetuate, and reinforce images that resonate with deeply held cultural biases and myths. It may be said that news is really a continuation of the old’ (Ross 2004: 33). Given that the discussion on black men in the UK and their association with violence and any other negative activities taking place in society has become a widely accepted norm, this topic needs to be investigated through another lens. Therefore, using a visual angle, this thesis explores black masculinity from the standpoint of black men and examines their perspective of the construction of black masculinity in the UK through visual representations of black men. This in itself can generate an in-depth understanding of the extent to which stereotypical representations of negative, atavistic, and violent black masculinities continue to shape and inform the material realities
of black British males. The use of visual data to investigate how black men perceive how they have been represented in all forms of media is a unique method of inquiry which I detail in Chapter Three.

Interestingly, in the summer of 2011, the urban unrest which involved young people of diverse backgrounds, young black men (and ‘black culture’ / ‘gangsta’ culture) were identified by many as the instigators of the violence on the streets of London and other parts of the country. Programmes such as Newsnight, which rarely feature black speakers, allowed members of ‘the black community’ to speak to the nation on how to counteract these problems. Yet again, media outlets such as television were used to highlight to the nation the ‘problem’, and in this case, the (continuing) problem of black males and ‘street’ violence. Although this research took place prior to these events, the occurrences in 2011 and subsequent coverage of them nevertheless demonstrate the relevance of this study.

The second reason as to why this research is important is because relatively few studies have critically analyzed how black masculinity is constructed and ‘lived’ in the British context (Alexander 1996a; Sharpe 2005). Thus, more research is needed to generate an in-depth understanding of the variety of constructions of black masculinity and the various ways in which these constructions are arrived at. The contributions made by Hall et al. (1978), and Gilroy (1982) did much to challenge deeply entrenched negative stereotypes around black criminality. Alexander’s (1996a) work, on the other hand, not only sought to break down widely held negative stereotypes of
black men, but also explored black men’s experiences as lived everyday in Britain. In the case of my thesis, visual methods are utilized to explore not only how black men might respond to and negotiate dominant constructions of black masculinity, but also, and more importantly, to examine the multiple ways in which black men construct a masculine sense of ‘self’.

Little is known and understood about the ways in which black masculinity is constructed, ‘lived’ and experienced from the perspective of black British men. Some previous studies have looked at black people, and in particular boys, as they relate to the education system and to their peers in academic settings (Mac an Ghaill 1988, 1994; Sewell 1997). A number of studies have also been conducted on black people in other settings such as the judicial system (Feilzer and Hood 2004; Hood 1992; Jefferson 1992; Nacro 2007; Walker 1988; Walker et al. 1989), health (Browne 1997; Fernando 1989), as well as the social welfare system (Cochrane and Sashideran 1995). However, insufficient attention has been paid to how black men construct their realities and lives, the meanings they give to their experiences, and to how they are seen and see themselves. This study therefore aims to fill this gap and in doing so, uses visual methods where images can be utilized to cultivate a more nuanced and enhanced understanding of the ways in which black masculinity is constructed.

**Using visual methods in the study of black men**

Given that this thesis is situated amid current concerns around black males and their ‘way of life’, it is important to consider the broader cultural
representations and discourses around black masculinity that characterize society’s thinking: that is, how are black men ‘seen’ in the popular imagination, such as in the arenas of sports, music and crime. This thesis uses visual methods as a way of gaining insight into how black men perceive dominant representations of black masculinities and identities in the UK. In particular, this thesis uses images of black men in popular culture and the mass media\(^5\) to investigate how black men might mediate between these popular constructions.

Of equal importance, through the use of photographs, this thesis considers the ways in which black men experience spaces and places within the mainly urban environments that they inhabit, more specifically London. The men were encouraged to use the ‘visual’ as a lens through which to explore themes relating to their self-perceived identities, aspirations and the realities of their lived existence. This study places emphasis on the use of visual methods, given that the visual, and in this case, the use of images, is able to capture the multiple and complex ways in which people articulate their lives. As Bolton et al. (2001: 503) observe, the visual is often able to capture more than what can be gathered from spoken words alone.

While several authors have questioned the impact that visual representations of black masculinity might have on black men (hooks 1992; Mercer 1994; Marriott 2000; Sharpe 2005), and in particular, images surrounding ‘the myth

\(^5\) Images of black men in popular culture and the mass media involves using content available in the public domain, such as advertising material, books, magazines, newspapers and images identified through Google.
of black criminality' (Gilroy 1982), my study uses visual methods to make visible the realities of black male experiences and to demonstrate, in relation to existing popular and academic theories of black masculinities, where there are inconsistencies between lived reality and representation of the subject and provide explanations for these inconsistencies (see Chapters Four and Five).

Aims and objectives of the study
The central aim of this thesis is to explore how dominant representations of black masculinity are constructed according to black British men, and how black men themselves construct a sense of ‘self’. Thus, the thesis aims to:

i. Explore dominant constructions of black masculinity in popular discourse;
ii. Examine the ways in which black masculinity has been constructed within the British context;
iii. Investigate how black men respond to dominant constructions of black masculinity;
iv. Explore alternative constructions of black masculinity.

In order to achieve these aims, the objectives to be carried out are:

i. An identification of dominant constructions of black masculinity as represented in popular discourse;  

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6 This comprises of images featuring black males in popular culture and the mass media which is explained with illustrations in Chapter Three.
ii. An analysis of the processes through which meanings of black masculinities have emerged and come to be problematized in the UK;

iii. A study of the extent to which dominant discourses around black ‘maleness’ is reinforced, internalized, negotiated, contested and resisted by black men

iv. A presentation of an alternative black masculinity, how it is arrived at and what significance this has for the black men who construct this sense of ‘self’.

Research questions

The following questions have guided and facilitated the research:

- How do representations of black ‘maleness’ in British society contribute to the construction and regulation of black male identities?

- How is (black) ‘maleness’ constructed by black British men as a result of their lived experiences?

Having explained the reasons as to why this research is both necessary and important, it is also worth mentioning the personal reasons behind this research so as to provide a more well-rounded account of what drives this thesis.
Background and motivation for the study

While this research is contemporary, my initial interest in this topic began long before. Mills once stated that ‘Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both’ (1959: 3). Given that the society in which I grew up plays an integral part in shaping my academic interests, it would seem fitting to say something about how these academic interests motivated me to write this thesis.

I was born and raised in a small town called Hayes, and the school that I attended, was primarily made up of white pupils and pupils of Indian and Pakistani descent. The ‘racial’ boundaries within the school environment were clearly marked from the outset; white pupils remained close to their ‘own’ groups, as did the Asian students. This, for me, generated a feeling of discontent and confusion, mainly because I did not understand the meaning behind this somewhat ‘conscious separation’. It was only until a white boy in my class told me to ‘go back to my own country’ that I came to realize our ‘difference’. This ‘difference’ gained more prominence as everyday interactions with my white peers informed me that Asians were generally seen as ‘uncool’, ‘teacher’s pets’, and even, occasionally, ‘dirty Pakis’. Thus, the stereotyping and negative social labeling left me with a longing to be in a different environment, where issues of ‘race’ and/or ‘colour’ were not as prominent.

I eventually found this different environment when as a young adult I came to live and study in Bristol for five years. Within Bristol, as a city as well the
University setting, ‘racial’ boundaries appeared blurred, and it was commonplace for people of all backgrounds to mix with one another irrespective of their ‘race’. And, depending on what social circle(s) one moved in, it was okay for white friends to use the term ‘dirty Paki’ in jest, and it was okay to laugh at white friends for being ‘rhythmically-challenged’ (again in jest and all in moderation!).

However, my black counterparts, namely the men, seemed to occupy an ambiguous position. This was in contrast to how I had initially perceived the positioning of black people. For the few that were present at my school in Hayes, they were often regarded as ‘cool’, ‘funny’ and ‘the winners’ on sports days. Along similar lines, as an adult in Bristol, I observed how the presence of black men was generally welcomed at clubs and parties, where it was seen as ‘cool’ for men to be hanging out with their black male friend(s), or it was ‘sexy’ for women to be dancing up close to their black male boyfriend. Outside of these social scenes however, most people I knew regarded black males in general as promiscuous, violent, thuggish, and/or as drug-dealers. These views reminded me of my experiences of school life. That is, they reminded me of how stereotyping and negative social labeling can hinder the ways in which people see us. These ‘ways of seeing’ can in turn influence our interactions with one another, and can ultimately determine the ‘type’ of relationships that we forge with one another (just as the conflicted relationship I had with my white peers at school). Furthermore, my observations led me to ask my black male friends the very question I had posed to myself at school: to what extent do people see ‘us’ as we choose to
‘see’ ourselves and vice versa (Cooley [1902] 2009). Crucially, this is also the question that is posed in this thesis, with the aim of ‘seeing’ beyond the ‘hype’ that is often associated with black men in dominant culture and exploring the actualities of black men’s lives.

While it is duly noted that definitions are easy and, indeed, help us to efficiently make sense of the ‘everyday’ things in life, they can nevertheless lead us to inflexible ways of thinking – much in the way that stereotyping can also work (Pickering 2001: 204). Stereotyping can reduce our efforts to know people, and lead us to see them not as they are, but as we think / represent them to be, i.e. ‘He’s not like most black men’, ‘He’s a typical black man’ etc. (Ross 2003: 29). These phrases tell us very little or nothing about that individual that has become the subject of stereotyping. Stereotyping can therefore demonstrate a disregard for others by not engaging with the fact that as humans, we are complex and multi-faceted individuals. This research, therefore, arises from a commitment to social justice by the researcher, which has its roots in early childhood and is at present advocated through ‘passionate scholarship’ (Mills 1959).

Outline of the thesis
Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is structured over five chapters. **Chapter Two** reviews the bodies of literature related to my research questions. The chapter commences by exploring some of the key theories developed in relation to black men and masculinities. Thus, the initial part of the chapter focuses on how black men and black masculinities
have been conceptualized and theorized. I consider the concept of black males as the ‘Other’, and in doing so, engage in a discussion around the politics of ‘the black male’ as ‘seen/being seen’. This idea is first explored through representations of black men in popular culture. I then draw on the works of Du Bois ([1903]1994), Bauman (1989), Bhabha (1994), and Pickering (2001) in relation to the concept of ‘Othering’. The latter part of the chapter explores several substantive themes concerning black men and black masculinities in the context of the UK. This begins with a critical investigation of the ways in which black males have been constructed predominantly as perpetrators of (‘street’) crime in the British context. I then explore what significance this particular construction of black males as ‘the threatening ‘Other’ might have for black British men. Finally, this chapter examines how the ‘lived’ experiences of black British males have been documented in existing works, and where my study is located in relation to these works.

Chapter Three discusses my chosen methodology and methods. I explain my reasons for using visual methods (photo elicitation) to capture the ways in which black masculinity is constructed. I also explain the ontological position guiding my approach, as well as addressing the ethical considerations relevant to my research. This chapter provides a justification for the chosen methodology which addresses why and how qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate for meeting the objectives of my research. This part of the research phase consisted of the following methods of data collection: collecting photographs, participant observation, in-depth
interviews using the photo elicitation method, and eliciting reflexive photography. This chapter also explains that the qualitative phase of the research followed a preliminary undertaking of quantitative research (in the form of a survey questionnaire) and the analysis of the data obtained. Thus, the use of a multi-strategy approach (where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized) demonstrates that quantitative research can usefully complement the qualitative aspect of my methodology. I also explain the merits of using each method, as well as acknowledging the issues that arose from their use. Additionally, this chapter draws out the implications of the specific challenges that the research presented for a British Indian woman conducting research with black British men. I consider how the relationship between the researcher and the researched both contributed to, and at other times hindered the research process. These discussions are highlighted with the purpose of providing a more in-depth understanding of some of the foreseen, as well as unforeseen interactions that took place and how these, in turn, influenced the research process, as well as the data gathered.

Chapter Four seeks to address the first research question on the ways in which black masculinity is constructed in contemporary Britain. In doing so, the chapter acknowledges that the discussion of this ‘type’ of construction must be two-fold; firstly, it must address how black men perceive constructions of black masculinity in British society as well as popular culture. Secondly, it must consider how black masculinity is constructed both in Britain’s media and by politicians and policy-makers. The first part of the
Chapter examines which images black men considered to be the most dominant constructions of black masculinity in the popular imagination as well as in ‘everyday’ Britain. This is followed by a discussion on the significance, if any, these constructions had for the men in question. Given the context in which this research is located and the fact that the study was carried out at a time when several young black males were killed in knife and other attacks, the image of ‘the threatening black male’ was a prominent topic. The second part of the chapter explores how black males have been portrayed or constructed in modern day Britain and in particular focuses on media and policy responses to these constructions. In this part of the chapter, while I examine the continuing construction of black men as ‘the threatening ‘Other’, I also explore the status of black males as both victims and perpetrators of (‘street’) crime, and consider more widely the implications that this ‘dual’ construction might have for black men in Britain.

Chapter Five is concerned with the central question of the thesis, namely how is black masculinity constructed by black British men? This chapter begins by examining the ways in which black British men challenge, contest, and resist negative representations of black masculinity in the UK, namely ‘the threatening black male’. This chapter also explores the extent to which black men feel a sense of ‘belonging’ in Britain. More specifically, by using illustrative examples, the chapter seeks to explain the space in which black males construct an alternative sense of ‘self’ and how such constructions are produced. I explore the ‘lived’ experiences of black men and how ‘self-reflexive’ moments can change the men’s perceptions of themselves. These
moments invite a rethinking of the politics of 'seeing/being seen', which is the focus of discussion throughout the chapters, particularly in Chapters Two and Four.

The thesis concludes with **Chapter Six**, by drawing together the themes of the preceding chapters, as well as evaluating them in relation to the research questions that were set at the start of the study. In particular, I focus on the concept of black males as ‘Other’ in order to summarize where the men in this study are positioned in contemporary Britain and what significance this might have for questions about the politics of ‘belonging’. Finally, the chapter considers the possible implications of the research, and addresses how this study could be used as a starting point for future research.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purposes of this chapter are to examine the literature that has explored the concept of the black male as the ‘Other’ and to consider how previous studies have investigated the experiences of black males in the UK. This chapter is split into three parts. In Part A, the discussion on the concept of the black ‘Other’ is two-fold. I begin by exploring the ways in which the black ‘Other’ is represented in the popular imagination. In particular, I look at the dominant representations of black masculinity in popular culture which consists primarily of black men in ‘supermen’ roles ranging from the star athlete and the black ‘gangsta’. I then move on to examine the writings that have examined what is meant by the process of ‘Othering’. In doing so I locate and outline they key works of authors who inform my understandings of ‘Othering’, namely Du Bois ([1904] 1994). In the light of these concepts, I consider how popular representations of black men open up the politics of seeing/being, and how these representations might impact how black men are seeing/being seen. In Part B, I examine the social construction of the threatening black ‘Other’. More specifically, I examine how black males have been portrayed largely as perpetrators of crime and violence in the British context. I consider this in terms of the black male as the ‘mugger’, the ‘rioter’ and the ‘gangsta’. Finally, in Part C, I review the studies that have explored the experiences of black males in the UK, and identify where my study is situated in relation to these studies. I also identify the gaps in these studies, and point out which of these gaps my thesis attempts to fill. Throughout this thesis, themes of invisibility /
visibility, Us / Them are addressed, as is the concept of the ‘Other.’ The latter constitutes the main theme explored in this chapter. On this note, I begin this chapter with a consideration of the concept of the black ‘Other’ in the popular imagination.

PART A
CONCEPTIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY AS THE ‘OTHER’

The literature on black men and black masculinities has tended to side-line the experiences of black men (Alexander 1996a), and define black masculinity in relation to whiteness (Sharpe 2005). Blackness occupies an invisible, yet deeply felt presence that ‘lurks’ in the background of white identity (Morrison 1992). Blackness has been ‘constructed and objectified as the silent and imagined ‘Other’ to ‘whiteness’ (Sharpe 2005: 11; see also Fanon 1970; Marriott 2000). Therefore, in this part of the chapter, I examine existing works that have explored how blackness has been constructed in the popular (white) imagination. More specifically, I focus on a re-thinking of the ways in which black males ‘could’ be seen, as opposed to how they ‘are’ routinely presented in popular culture, such as in entertainment and sports. While black masculinity is, at present, often seen as ‘desirable’ rather than ‘despised’ (Nayak 1997: 52) in popular culture, it is equally ‘feared’, both in its portrayal in popular culture as well as in society in general. This leads me to consider the popular construction of black masculinity ‘as threatening, dangerous and in need of control’ (ibid: 52). I will consider this construction more specifically within the British context, where the topic of ‘black male
criminality’ remains a contentious issue. First, however, I begin with an exploration of how ‘race’ and gender are played out in popular representations of black men, in what Hall refers to as ‘a racialised regime of representation’ (1997: 249).

2.1 Constructions Of Black Masculinity In The Popular Imagination

Within the literature on the politics of the representations of black masculinity in popular culture, a point on which many writers agree is how ‘the experience of being black in modernity’ is ‘an adventure in surplus or excess representations’ (Sharpe 2005: 16; see also Cashmore 2006; Hall 1997; Pieterse 1992). Here, Sharpe points to both to the ‘overrepresentation’ of black men in contexts such as sports and music and to the exaggerated and embellished nature of these representations. According to a number of writers, black men are seen to occupy the ‘role of black supermen in mass culture’ (Sharpe ibid.; Hall 1997: 263). For Pieterse (1992: 177), these ‘supermen’ roles predominantly see the black male as ‘the brainless athlete’, the ‘super-stud’ and ‘the bestial black’. These three types are important in that they symbolise that the ‘black male’s access to the white man’s world is conditional’ (ibid: 177). In other words, these three ‘types’ are celebrated by a dominant society, but ‘only on the condition that they do not

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7 While the aim of this chapter is not to reproduce essentialist notions of black masculinity in a discussion of ‘the brainless athlete’, ‘the super-stud’, and ‘the bestial black’, these three types have nevertheless ‘been the most thoroughly explored’ (Patterson 1998: 241). In other words, these ‘types’ point to the arenas in which black men appear most ‘visible’ or rather, ‘hyper-visible, namely in music and sport.

8 Interestingly, at times these three ‘types’ over-lap with one another. For example, ‘the (brainless) athlete’ can equally be perceived as a ‘super-stud’ and vice versa. ‘The bestial black’, while dangerous, can also be perceived as exotic and exciting, as in the image of the ‘black gangsta’.

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challenge the paternity of a white society that produced them and gave them their big chance’ (Cashmore 2006: 123).

Indeed, the idea of excessive representations of ‘the black male body’ in the form of the black (‘brainless’) athlete has been echoed by a number of authors (Carrington 2001; Soar 2001). According to Fanon (1970: 158), there is ‘one expression that through time has become singularly eroticised: the black athlete’. Alternatively, as Carrington puts it, ‘the (brainless) athlete’ ‘has become sexualised and transformed into an object of desire and envy’ (2001: 97). Moreover, the image of this ‘type’ is linked to a number of multi-million dollar campaigns and advertising deals. As Hall (1997: 231) observes, this feeds into a widely held notion ‘that sport is one of the few areas where black people have had outstanding success’ (1997: 231). Representations of ‘the black male’ as ‘the super-stud’ are also commonplace; these can be found in the work of George Dureau (Dureau 1985), Rotimi Fani-Kayode (Reid 1998) and more notably, Robert Mapplethorpe (1997) whose photography depicts the fascination with the ‘big black willy’ (Marriott 2000: 33; see also Gaines 1992; Mercer 1994; Morrisroe 1997; Nayak 1997). Yet the image of ‘the black male’ as ‘the super-stud’ is perhaps most visible in ‘black’ music videos (particularly in the genres of rap, hip-hop, and r’n’b and so forth). Such representations tend to ‘cement notions of black sexuality as raw, untamed’ (Nayak 1997: 63) and ‘hyper-sexual’. Furthermore, ‘the bestial black’ in the form of the ‘black gangsta’, also seen in music videos, has become a highly marketable identity, and, to that extent, a style that has also been incorporated into ‘white’ style. Thus the representation of the ‘gangsta’ is

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9 Although black females are often regarded as hyper-sexual, they tend not to be viewed as threatening because of their gendered status (Ahmed 1996; Nayak 1997).
symbolic of a representation that has somewhat become the ‘norm’ rather than a ‘novelty’, which in turn is also indicative in the ‘visual presence of the music-affiliated ‘street-style’ scene’ (Hall 1997: 256).

In this way, images depicting black males as athletic and ‘at the peak of their physical prowess’ (Hall 1997: 226), ‘strong’, ‘over-sexed’, ‘violent’ (ibid: 251), ‘thuggish’ and even ‘comedic’ have become normalised within popular culture. Since these images are by their very nature stereotypical, this leads to generalized representations of what it means to be black and male. This is coupled with the fact that many black men lack access to sufficient resources, whether economic, political, cultural, to show what it means to be black and male. It is for this reason that this study places emphasis on investigating the various ways in which black masculinity is constructed and ‘lived’ in the British context according to black British men themselves. As Sharpe (2005: 12) argues, ‘black men have continued to negotiate their identities from marginal positions on a daily basis; in relation to white culture, [and] in relation to themselves…’, which leads him to question the ‘extent to which the psyches of black men feel assaulted by the iconic role of black supermen in mass culture’ (ibid: 16).

Sharpe’s concerns over the representation of black men in different ‘types’ of ‘supermen’ roles are further echoed in Marriott (2000: 12), who writes, ‘But again, what of black men in all of this? What, if anything, can be glimpsed of

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10 It is noteworthy to mention music artist, Kanye West’s song ‘Jesus Walks’ in which he rhymes: ‘So here go my single, dog, radio needs this – They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus – That means guns, sex, lies, videotape – But if I talk about God my record won’t get played, huh?’. These lyrics express West’s experiences when he was struggling to get signed onto a record label. Initially, many producers in the music industry refused to play this song given that a black male singing about God and addressing matters about faith do not conform to the stereotypes associated with mainstream hip-hop in the way matters about sex and violence do, which are more easily marketable.
them in these alienating, confusing, images? What do black men see when they encounter, perhaps for the first time, a phobic image of themselves in white culture?’

On the one hand, Marriott poses the question as to how black men might be responding to dominant representations of black masculinity, and yet he appears to answer the very question that he poses:

‘In particular, it is, I think impossible to separate black men’s angry-anxious concern about being reduced to type-black types [sic]: imbecilic, oversexed, criminal, murderous, feckless, rapacious – from the many, and conflicting ways in which black men were and continue to be stereotyped in European and American cultural life’ (ibid: viii).

It may be duly noted that dominant representations of black masculinity reduce black men to ‘types’, and it is also the case, to reiterate, that many of these images (i.e. the ‘super-stud’) have become the ‘norm’. However, that is not to suggest that this study implies that each of these types is perceived by black men in the same way. For example, it can be argued that while one black man may perceive the image of the super-stud as offensive, another black man might not. My study, therefore, concerns itself not only with exploring how black men might respond to dominant images of black masculinity, but also with which types they respond to more so than others and why. For example, while the image of the ‘super-stud’ and the ‘gangsta’ are arguably just as hyper-visible as one another, it would be interesting to note which one of these images (if at all) might resonate more with a given black man and to explore the possible explanations for this resonance. What might the resonance of an image tell us about a given individual’s
experiences, and how those experiences have in turn influenced his sense of self and his understanding of the world around him?

In the literature on representations of black males in popular culture, scholars such as Gates Jr. (1988) and Wallace (1992) have ‘queried the hyper-visibility and invisibility of black men’ (Sharpe 2005: 16). They argue that – in Pickering’s (2001: 213) words – this hyper-visibility serves ‘two alternative yet complementary strategies’: it renders the ‘lived’ realities of what it means to be ‘black’ and ‘male’ invisible, whilst it also has the effect of treating black men’s ‘lived’ experiences as a foregone conclusion. They may be perceived to be ‘playing up’ to a given stereotypical image, regardless of whether this is what they understand themselves to be doing (ibid). Pickering (2001: 217) suggests that at times black men might ‘twist alienating stereotypes back on themselves in a playful, ironic, comic or affectionate manner, assimilating them for their own various political uses, as with the […] subversion of the stereotypical ‘nigger’ by attitude’. The implications of this are that many black men are judged against stereotypes even if they do not ascribe to ‘playing up’ to any particular stereotype.

As West observes, this invisibility is better understood not only in terms of how blacks experience it in relation to dominant (white) society but also in relation to one another. He comments that ‘invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of relative lack of black power to present themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes...’ (1993: 261).
This sense of invisibility is conveyed in Ellison’s [1952] book, *Invisible Man*, in which the protagonist of the novel, who remains nameless, illustrates the complexity in feeling invisible in the prejudiced and hostile world that he inhabits. He writes,

‘I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me’ (Ellison [1952] 2001: 3; *my emphasis*).

For Ellison, the recognition of distorting images of blackness – those projected through the eyes of (white) ‘Others’ – produces the burden of forcing oneself to contend both with the imposed contempt as well as with his imposed invisibility.

Given the lack of diverse, textured or complex representations of black men that attest to their ‘humanity and individuality’ (Sharpe 2005: 20), simplified and generalized depictions of ‘the black male’ have instead featured in the popular imagination. According to scholars, black men are repeatedly represented as the logical and legitimate objects of ‘surveillance and regulation’ (Odih 2002: 93), of ‘policing and punishment’ (Hall et al. 1978), and of ‘control and exclusion’ (Carby 1998). I will explore the above issues, that is, regulation, policing, control and exclusion, later in section 2.3 of this chapter.

In sum, the studies addressed above demonstrate how black masculinity has been used as a ‘site’ to project the fascination and fears of the dominant
(white) imagination. This is further exemplified in the several representations of ‘the black male: ‘violent, aggressive and animalistic’ (Mercer 1994b: 134); ‘a walking phallic symbol’ (Nayak 1997: 52); ‘emasculated’ (Edwards 2006: 65) or ‘suffering from an inferiority complex’ (Fanon 1970: 11). As such, the construction of these seemingly endless, as well as contradictory ‘types’ and the subsequent negative social labelling have not only served to publicly ‘dramatize’ and ‘demonize’ black men (Mercer 1994a: 19), but also influence how they are treated (Sharpe 2005: 20). Henry Louis Gates Jnr. makes a pertinent comment on this when he states,

‘every black man, as he walks down the street, carries with him, on the epidermis of his body, the burden of an historically steeped debased representation of savagery and animality – he is, as the critic Barbara Johnson states, ‘an already-read text’’ (Golden, 1994: 13, cited in Mirza 1999: 137).

The above quotation is profoundly illustrative of debates on the politics of ‘seeing/being seen’. To begin with, it characterises ‘the black male’s’ awareness of how he is being seen by society at large. This can be described as what Du Bois ([1903] 1994) termed a ‘double consciousness’ (which I detail in the next section). Additionally, to be seen as ‘an already-read text' implies that stereotypical knowledge of the ‘Other’, and in this case, black men, is based on ‘what is always ‘in place’, already known…’

(Bhabha 1994: 66) which consequentially treats the black ‘Other’ as a foregone conclusion. At the same time, the image of a black man, as he

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11 Bhabha’s (1994: 66) statement is pertinent in my investigation and therefore as well as being discussed in this part of the chapter, this quote will again be reiterated in the second part of the chapter (Part B).
‘walks down the street’ and is seen as ‘an already-read text’ suggests that streets are homogenous spaces. I argue that since the environments people move around in are not homogenous, this opens up possibilities of how black men might be highly conscious of ‘being black’ in certain places more than others (Douglas 1998). This study thus investigates the reasons as to where black men might feel a heightened sense of racial / ethnic consciousness in contrast to other places where ‘race’ is not so prominent and ultimately what meaning (i.e. positive or negative) this has for the men in question. I now move on to consider this sense of awareness of how one is ‘seen’, by first addressing the concept of ‘double consciousness’.

2.2 Black Men: The Politics Of ‘Seeing/Being Seen’

In this section, I consider the theories that have influenced my investigation and analysis, drawing particularly on the works of Du Bois ([1903] 1994), Bhabha (1994) and Bauman (1991; 1995; 1997). First, I will outline Du Bois’ concept of ‘double consciousness’ and discuss how it is used within my study. I will then consider how the presence and the stereotyping of the black ‘Other’ facilitates the estrangement of black men from wider society. Here, both Bhabha’s ideas on the black man as the stereotyped ‘Other’ and Bauman’s ideas on the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’ serve as a useful framework.

In her writings, Smith argues ‘for Du Bois as an early visual theorist of race and racism,’ pointing to how Du Bois’ influential concept of ‘double consciousness’, as well as his ideas around ‘the veil’ and ‘second-sight’ draw(s) on visual imagery to articulate a black identity (Smith, 2004: 25;
emphasis original). As Du Bois observed within an American context in 1903, double consciousness\textsuperscript{12} is the

\begin{quote}
‘sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder’ ([1903] 1994: 2).
\end{quote}

Double consciousness, then, may be described ‘as a kind of developmental pattern’ (Smith 2004: 31), whereby a black male is made aware that he is looked upon as ‘different’ by the gaze of the (white) ‘Other’. This ‘discovery of racism reveals a split and divided identity construct, in which the (newly racialized) ‘black’ subject is forced to see the gulf that divides self from idealized image’ (ibid: 32). That is, ‘the black male’ is forced to learn to view himself from the negative perspective of wider society, while he simultaneously strives to maintain his own (positive) self-definitions. This in itself generates a sense of ever-present twoness, where on one level, ‘the black male’ must learn to live with dominant society’s negative representations, daily, and somewhat as a matter of routine. Yet, at the same time he has to negotiate and endure conflicts between who he is as a person and how the wider society views him.

In this sense, double consciousness can be viewed as a ‘survival technique’ (Moore 2005: 752), whereby one can strive for a positive identity whilst

\textsuperscript{12} For Du Bois, the initial awareness of double consciousness occurred ‘in the early days of rollicking boyhood’ ([1903] 1994: 1). At the schoolhouse he attended as a child, a (white, female) classmate’s rejection of him, ‘peremptorily, with a glance’ (ibid: 1) singled him out from the rest of the other children. It was this moment which informed a young Du Bois with ‘certain suddenness that I was different from the others’ (ibid: 2).
simultaneously experiencing ‘mental conflict’ (ibid: 752). Black males are continually presented with the problem of whether to conform to or whether they might be able to depart from the identities the wider society has created for them. In Du Bois’ view, it is this on-going tension between imposed and self-defined identities that generates mental conflict. However, the key point for Du Bois was that while double consciousness involves an awareness of being perceived negatively, one need not be wholly determined by it. In other words, while this sense of ‘black otherness’ is ‘made apparent, visible, conscious’ by the gaze of the white ‘Other’ (Smith 2004: 33), ‘the black male’ can nevertheless learn to be resilient in the face of the prejudice and hostility and attain two positive identities (which I will explain further below). In this ‘merging’ of these two positive identities, Du Bois states that ‘the black male’ ‘wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity and closed roughly in his face’ ([1903] 1994: 2-3).

Du Bois’ statement is important, in that it conveys the ‘message for the (white) world that the image of self as ‘Other’ is one that Du Bois cannot fully assimilate which, in part, also explains why he feel his ‘two-ness’ (Smith 2004: 26). Not fully accepting the position of the ‘Other’ involves a form of resistance, but at the same time, according to Du Bois ([1903] 1994: 2), the
white ‘Other’ denies a black male’ a ‘true sense of consciousness’. As Du Bois comments:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, gifted with a second sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world’ (ibid: 2).

For Du Bois, ‘the veil’ is the sight at which ‘the black male’ is forced to see himself through the eyes of the white ‘Other’. Thus, ‘the veil’ renders black people invisible ‘by making misrepresentations of blackness overwhelmingly visible’ (Smith 2004: 40; emphasis original). Yet, in contending with this imposed ‘invisibility’, ‘the black male’ is also ‘gifted’ with ‘a heightened insight; - a second sight’ (ibid: 41). As Smith observes, this second sight marks ‘a moment of transformed awareness’ whereby this renewed vision ‘pierces the structures of racism construed as the natural order of things’ (ibid: 41). In other words, black people are able to see through the very visions that blind the white ‘Other’ from seeing past this false sense of ‘ideal wholeness’ that they attribute to themselves (ibid: 42). Thus, the ‘second sight’ enables ‘the black male’ to preserve a positive sense of ‘self’ that ‘keeps it from being torn asunder’ (Du Bois [1903] 1994: 2) as he has access to the knowledge that a sense of ‘self’ is never whole/unified.

Though Du Bois’ ideas have been immensely influential in analyses of ‘race’ more widely ever since (Gates and West 1996; Gilroy 1993), there are two main points to be made about the role of the visual in Du Bois’ account. Firstly, the use of the visual terms ‘double consciousness’, ‘the veil' and
'second sight' figure centrally in conveying how ‘racial identities are inscribed and experienced through the lens of a white supremacist gaze' (Smith 2004: 25). Secondly, this sense of always being ‘seen’ suggests that one is not able to experience an autonomous sense of self. I will now address each of these points in turn.

With regard to the first point, double consciousness suggests that ‘race’ ‘fundamentally changes and determines everything’ (ibid: 28). That is, it implies that ‘race’ is central to the experience of how black men construct a sense of ‘self’. The research presented in this thesis takes seriously the role of ‘race’ in public discussions and media coverage of knife crime. At the same time, it is important to consider factors that extend beyond ‘race’ in relation to how black men construct a sense of self. As Gilroy (1993: 127) argues, a black sense of ‘self’ does not just originate from where a black individual is positioned in society. Rather, double consciousness involves influences from a broader black Atlantic culture. For this reason, in my study I take into account the ways in which participants position themselves both within and beyond British society, by exploring how their knowledge and experience of other societies and cultures might affect their way of seeing. Moreover, it is equally pertinent to take into account additional factors such as how class or geography, for example, may shape how they position themselves. I will address this further in Chapters Four and Five.

Secondly, while Du Bois argues that the black male ‘long[s] to attain self-conscious manhood’ (ibid: 2) which is in effect denied to him, he takes for granted that a sense of autonomy cannot be achieved by black men. As such, ‘the black male’ cannot be ‘black American’ (or perhaps just ‘black’ or
‘American’) which would thus imply one true self – and/or rather, a unity or coherence between two identities that do not cohere, or that can only be made to cohere through a process of on-going struggle. Rather, he maintains a ‘split’ identity that is black and American. My engagement with the writings of Du Bois enables me to consider the extent to which the men in this study identify themselves as black and British, and whether or not these two facets of their identities are in conflict with one another.

Frantz Fanon (1970), writing several decades after Du Bois from the context of French colonialism, further emphasises how a ‘split’ between who a black male is – or feels himself to be – and how the wider society imagines him to be proves detrimental to ‘the black male’s’ psyche. Pickering (2001: 77) refers to this form of splitting as ‘dislocating experiences’. As he comments:

‘Who is this Other that is seen? It is not you, yet, you as Other are forced to see yourself as Other because that is the way you have been positioned in the eyes of others, and that positioning seems to be utterly fixed, fastened solidly into its place in an irrevocable scheme’.

The ‘dislocating experiences’ or ‘splitting’ as described above generate the dilemma – as Smith (2004: 33) puts it – of ‘what does one become when one sees that one is not fully recognised as Self by the wider society but cannot fully identify as Other?’ It is this uncomfortable positioning that appears ‘utterly fixed’ that, as Bhabha observes, is central to stereotyping. Bhabha (1994: 47) further describes stereotyping as an ‘arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation
through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of
the subject in significations of psychic and social relations’.

Stereotyping, in other words, reduces the representation of the subject as an
‘Either / Or’ (ibid: 75) while simultaneously denying the subject the possibility
of diversity which would liberate them from being reduced to a simplified
‘type(s)’ (ibid: 75).

Along similar lines, Hall argues that stereotyping can be seen as ‘part of the
maintenance of social and symbolic order’ (1997: 258). Pickering makes a
pertinent point on this, in that he argues that in the stereotyping process,
stereotypes ‘operate as distancing strategies for placing others in such a
manner that will serve to perpetuate certain normative boundaries of social
conduct, roles and judgements, separating what is seen as threatening and
disturbing from what is regarded as acceptable and legitimate’ (2001: 174).

As Hall (1997: 258) observes,

‘the ‘acceptable’ is what ‘belongs’ and the ‘unacceptable’ does not, ‘or
is “Other”, between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, Us and Them. This
facilitates the “binding” or bonding together of all of Us who are
“normal” into one “imagined community”; and it sends into symbolic
exile all of Them – ‘the Others’ – who are in some way different…’

An example of such a stereotype can be considered in the image of ‘the
threatening black male’. More specifically, this stereotype facilitates binaries
such as Acceptable / Unacceptable, Insiders/Outsiders, Us (white)/Them
(black), which I address more specifically within the British context in Section
2.3. This study engages with the binaries of Insiders/Outsiders’ and
Us/Them, as I argue that these binaries facilitate possibilities for interpreting constructions of black masculinity differently in order to generate more complex insights into how life is actually lived and experienced by black men (which is examined in Chapters Four and Five).

As such, it is this attempt to fix the representation of the black ‘Other’ as threatening that results in the ‘Other’ being seen as ‘an already-read text’.

In this sense, one will ‘look’ at the black ‘Other’ and the different (and more often than not, contradictory) ‘types’ that are associated with this ‘Other’. And it is in this very act of ‘looking’ that one does not ‘see’ the black ‘Other’ as an individual, that is, as a human being with an identity that is not reducible to stereotypical representations of ‘black otherness’.

The tension between ‘looking’ and ‘seeing’ is best represented in Fromm’s (1974: 343) metaphor of the snapshot:

‘Taking pictures becomes a substitute for seeing. Of course, you have to look in order to direct your lens to the desired object… But looking is not seeing. Seeing is a human function, one of the greatest gifts with which man is endowed; it requires activity, inner openness, interests, patience, concentration. Today a snapshot (the aggressive expression is significant) means essentially to transform the act of seeing into an object...’

This ‘snapshot’ 'kind of looking – looking without really seeing’ as Bauman observes, plays a pivotal role in the estrangement of the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’ (1995: 133). For Bauman, the idea of the ‘snapshot’, coupled with ‘estrangement’, are characterising features of modern city life; whereby notions of the ‘Other’ symbolises city encounters of ‘creaming off the
enticements of the other without committing oneself to give anything in exchange’ (ibid: 133). As such, the ‘Other’, and in this case, black men (and more specifically the black ‘thug’ / ‘gangsta’) functions as ‘a symbolic source of something exhilarating, vibrant…’ (Pickering 2001: 214). Pickering further notes, ‘All you have to do is sit back comfortably and enjoy the amoral vicissitudes of consumerist cycles of fashion’. Thus, ‘the most recent invention of ‘thematic’ shopping malls, with Caribbean villages [offering an array of exotic foods], Indian reserves [promising an abundance of Bollywood spices] and Polynesian shrines closely packed together under one roof’ (Bauman 1991: 58) serves as just one example of ‘ethnic consumerism’.

Another, and more pertinent example (also highlighted in section 2.1) which features nowhere so visibly is the ways in which the impact of ‘black music’ / ‘black style’ has spilled out in a number of consumer outlets. These range from ‘street-style’ fashion and in more recent years the number of ‘street’ / ‘urban’ street (including hip-hop, pop-locking, Zumba) dance classes that have been made available across several fitness centres so one can learn to ‘move’ like Usher and/or Beyonce. As such, these ‘types’ of classes symbolise ‘creaming off the enticements of the other’ whereby the significant emphasis is on mastering the art of ‘slick dance moves’ and ‘booty shaking’.

In relation to the above, there are at least three pertinent points to be made about these ‘consumerist cycles of fashion’. Firstly, venues like fitness centres represent places where the ‘sight’ of black men as ‘cool’ dance instructors is the ‘norm’ and one that consumers of these types of services
are accustomed to seeing. Furthermore, these places are representative of the ‘space’ in which performing dance moves to lyrics sung by the ‘black gangsta’ for example, is made fun, exciting, celebratory and above all, ‘safe’. Finally, these ‘enticements’ are a far cry from the ‘fear’ and ‘danger’, that the image of a ‘gangsta’ can have in urban spaces. As such, the representation of this image illustrates how black males can occupy extreme positions; either really ‘good’ or really ‘bad’ thus implying there is nowhere in between. This also suggests that while black males might experience a sense of inclusion in certain spaces (i.e. fitness centres), they might feel excluded from other spaces. As Pickering (2001: 216-217) warns, it is instructive to recognise that ‘exoticism’ of the ‘Other’ ‘as in ‘ethnic consumerism’ ‘is the other side of the coin of those surges when urban reserve and indifference are breached by a backyard defensiveness of ‘us’/‘them’ divisions’.

Pickering’s statement reflects how this study is located during a period of time in which the ‘Other’ (and in this case black men) occupies the precarious position of both being ‘celebrated’ as well as ‘condemned’. Edward Said (1978) observes that the ‘Other’ is sometimes threatening, sometimes ambivalent, and sometimes both. That is, we have already seen in examples of ‘the brainless athlete’, ‘the super-stud’, and ‘the bestial black’ (i.e. ‘gangsta’) how, on the one hand, the experience of being black in modernity is represented as exciting and exhilarating. On the other hand, the image of the ‘gangsta’ can equally be perceived as threatening and dangerous. In relation to the on-going concerns around knife and gun crime in (2007/2008), public discourses have questioned the role that ‘black music /
‘black culture’ (including ‘black rappers’ which are held to glamorise violence) plays in influencing ‘the black male’s way of life’ in Britain (Ojumu 2007; Womack 2007). In the REACH report (DCLG 2007), the authors express their concerns over the impact that the overrepresentation of black men in sport and music might have on black boys and young black men.

This study, on the other hand, concerns itself with how black males might respond to their portrayal in the British media, in the light of these (specific) crimes. Moreover, how do black males mediate between representations of black masculinity which is simultaneously celebrated and condemned (i.e. the ‘gangsta’)? More importantly, this research considers how black men might respond to, and negotiate with representations of them in mainstream media and material culture (Clark-Ibanez 2007: 170). In contrast to how much of Britain’s media portrays how black males experience urban environments, this study does not view urban places (and London in this case) as a homogenous space. Rather, London is like a kaleidoscope – there is so much in ‘London than it’s possible to uncover [how one person may experience one place compared to another]… Scratch a surface and another [experience] comes into view; scratch that…who can ever know it all’ (Evans-Bush 2012). The inherent multiplicity of the urban introduces possibilities for this thesis to explore the various ways in which black men experience different places and spaces within and around London.

Furthermore, this exploration can generate an in-depth understanding of which places are more profound in shaping and constructing the black
masculine ‘self’, and what places might create obstacles and hinder the well-being of black men which, in turn, throws up questions relating to the politics of belonging. As black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 70) notes,

‘as the “Others” of society who can never really belong, strangers threaten the moral order and social order... And yet, the “Other” is simultaneously held to be ‘essential for the survival of the social order, because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries’.

Pickering (2001: 213) suggests that the survival of social order relies on ‘aggressive manoeuvres against strangers’. Bauman (1997: 47) makes this explicitly clear when he argues that such manoeuvres comprise of ‘two alternative but also complementary strategies’ (1997: 47): either ‘assimilating them’ or ‘excluding them’ (a point that I will return to later in section 2.3 of this chapter). In relation to black men, this exclusion and hence a sign of not belonging can mean that within dominant society, the experiences of black men are rendered marginal, invisible, and/or as foregone conclusions. Nowhere does this seem to be more starkly visible than in the construction of ‘the threatening ‘Other’, as in, the construction of black males as largely perpetrators of violence which has been posited by popular discourses on a recurring basis (see Hall et al. 1978 for a landmark study of the social construction of the ‘black mugger’). As Sharpe (2005: 21) observes, the positioning of black men is pivotal ‘in Western society in emphasising the significance of belonging’. The next section thus considers this construction
of the threatening black ‘Other’ more closely, with in mind, the significance of (not) ‘belonging’.

PART B
BLACK MEN: THE POLITICS OF THE ‘OTHER’ NOT BELONGING

In the writings that record and analyse the presence of black people in Britain, a point on which many writers agree is how the forging of an identity which is both black and British remains politically contentious (Gilroy 1987; Hall et al. 1978; Hiro 1971; Solomos 1988; Modood and Berthoud 1997; Tomlinson 2008). The studies in question demonstrate how black males have frequently been constructed as perpetrators of crime and violence, whether this is in the form of the ‘mugger’, the ‘rioter’, or the ‘gangsta’. Taken as a whole, this literature suggests that for black British men a sense of belonging within British society is not something that can easily be achieved, if it can be achieved at all. It is important to discuss the construction of black males as perpetrators of violence because ‘street’ crime and the role of black males in it has been at the centre of media and policy debates over recent years, and indeed, during the period of time in which this study was conducted. Black males have also been acknowledged as victims. This in turn suggests an image of ‘the black male’ as ‘vulnerable’.

In this section, I use Bauman’s writings on the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’ (1989; 1990; 1997) as a lens for interpreting the historical experience of black communities in Britain. I then focus on how black males have been
constructed as perpetrators of crime and violence. Next, I turn to how the representation of black males as victims, and in particular the case of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, differ from the more frequent image of black males as perpetrators. I argue that even with the victim status the question of the black ‘Other’ as belonging still remains pertinent, if not more so.

The social construction of black males as both victims and perpetrators is important in at least three ways. Firstly, the construction of black males in British society has largely been, and continues to be that of perpetrators of ‘street’ violence. Thus the construction of black males in this way is distinct from how other (white and/or ‘racial’) groups (i.e. Asians) are represented as victims and perpetrators (Alexander 2000). Secondly, starting in the late 1990s, black males began to be constructed as victims, which marks a significant transition in the ways in which black masculinity is portrayed. Thirdly, it is important to consider the implications of this ‘shift’ in representation. This is because it forms part of a wider issue; that is, the questions that this ‘shift’ in representation opens up on the politics of ‘belonging’. What consequences might the recognition of a victim status hold for whether or not black males feel they belong in British society? The first of these points provides a suitable starting point for discussion.

2.3 Constructions Of Black Males As Perpetrators

The history of blacks in Britain and the subsequent political responses to immigration, as well as the inequalities blacks faced in housing, employment and public spaces in general, have been analysed and commented on from a
number of angles. Therefore, the purpose of this section is not to replicate existing accounts but to point out the disadvantages that black immigrants and subsequent generations had to face on multiple fronts. Rather, the purpose of the section is to analyse the social construction of ‘the black male perpetrator,’ and to address how this construction came into being through briefly considering its history. According to the literature (Hall et al. 1978; CCCS 1982; Gilroy 1987), the decade of the 1970s is particularly important in the history of this construction, as during these years the issue of black males in relation to crime took centre stage both in the media and with politicians and policy makers (which I detail later in this section).

This section begins with a consideration of the theories that have influenced my investigation and analysis. In particular, Bauman’s work on the estrangement of the ‘Other’ provides some conceptual tools for understanding the history of the construction of black males as perpetrators. I also draw on the lenses of Bhabha’s (1994: 66) ‘concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of [black] otherness’. This is premised on the idea that stereotyping attempts to ‘fix’ a particular mode of representation. The purpose of ‘fixing’, of rendering objects of knowledge and representation stable and in place, is to ensure that the construction of the ‘Other’ remains unchanged in order to maintain control over the ‘Other’. I begin with a consideration of Bauman.
The ‘Other’ as a lens for interpreting the historical experiences of black communities in Britain

In his discussion of the ‘Other’, Bauman (1997: 47) argues that the mode of domination and control over strangers comprises two distinct strategies: either assimilating ‘them’ through making the different similar and familiar until they become like ‘us’; or excluding ‘them’ – ‘confining the strangers within the visible walls of the ghettos’ (ibid: 48) and, so placing them ‘under the pressure of the modern order-building state’, ‘in a state of suspended extinction’ (ibid: 48). In explaining these strategies, Bauman (1989: 13) likens the control over ‘strangers’ to the modern ‘gardening’ state whereby the garden must be ‘kept in the planned shape by force…’ (ibid: 18) and anything that appears ‘out of place’ (Bauman 1990: 57) must be dealt with accordingly. Bauman uses the example of the notion of ‘weeds’ as the ‘thing’ that is unwarranted in the garden (ibid: 57). He further comments on the weeds that ‘There is nothing wrong with the thing itself. It is only finding it where it should not be which makes it repulsive and undesirable’ (ibid: 57).

Similarly, modernity, according to Bauman, fears nothing more than ambivalence, and so modernity (like the ‘gardening’ state) attempts to maintain the established order by ‘weeding out’ difference. While the strategies of assimilation and exclusion were briefly mentioned earlier (in section 2.2), they will now be given further consideration beginning with how Bauman’s thinking on exclusion might be used as lens for interpreting the historical experiences of black Caribbean immigrants in Britain. Bauman’s notions on the estrangement and exclusion of the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’ provides
a conceptual framework for the analysis of black men and the question of (not) belonging in Chapter Five of this thesis.

In line with the strategy of assimilation in Bauman’s account, when the first wave of immigrants arrived in Britain from the Caribbean\textsuperscript{13}, they were expected to assimilate into the British way of life, and in general, were regarded as a ‘law-abiding’ group (Hall 1987: 49; see also Gilroy 2003). However, their presence was also met by anxiety and hostility from the host society. There is a plethora of literature that has recorded and analysed this movement from the Caribbean and as such, it highlights two main things. First, several writers point to the racial hostility that confronted blacks on multiple levels; and second, how the politics of (non-white) immigration became an intensely debated topic amongst politicians and policy-makers (Gilroy 1987; Layton-Henry 1992; Sivanandan 1981).

The inequalities that black men and women faced in housing and employment were widespread, and have been documented in several works, including Rex and Moore (1967) and Ramdin (1987). Some writers also point to how the racial stereotyping of black people hindered their progress in the workplace, such as through denying promotion and thus keeping them in lower-paid jobs (Carter et al. 2000: 26). In the case of black men especially, Fryer (1993: 34) points out that some of these stereotypes of the black male

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\textsuperscript{13} The mass immigration of Caribbean people began with the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in June 1948, carrying 492 migrant workers from Jamaica.
‘Other’ included: ‘slow and lazy’, ‘hard to discipline’, and ‘more easily provoked to violence’.\textsuperscript{14}

However, the grievances of ‘black communities’ were largely ignored by the police. Eventually, the tension that had accumulated over the years resulted in ‘explosions’ of violence, beginning with the 1958 Nottingham and Notting Hill ‘race’ riots (Gordon and Rosenberg 1989). Ramdin (1987: 209) observes how Britain’s self-image as a society premised on tolerance and fairness came under pressure with the chain of events that ensued and the ‘sensational treatment’ that the riots received from the media. Tomlinson (2008: 23) points to how the violence that had escalated in the late 1950s led to a ‘period of intense political hostility to [non-white] immigration’. Popular discourses focused on a perceived need to control (black) immigration.\textsuperscript{15}

The 1960s was particularly important in that it ‘set the tone for future debate on the integration and acquisition of full citizen rights’ (Tomlinson 2008: 20). Enoch Powell, a Conservative politician, became a prominent figure in the debates around non-white immigration. His views were perhaps most forcefully expressed in his much quoted 1968 ‘rivers of blood’ speech, in which he argued that the increasing presence of Black (and Asian)

\textsuperscript{14} Racial stereotyping and negative social labelling were not confined to the workplace. Ramdin (1987) on the argues that talk of the ‘West Indian’ man’s prowess at sport and his (alleged) sexual prowess created a source of irritation and resentment on the part of white English workers who saw ‘West Indian’ men as sexual competition. On a related note, writers point to how certain working class white youths became notorious for displaying their hostilities towards black families. In particular, young black males became the target of racial violence, often at the hands of gangs of white racist youths. These violent racial attacks became common place, and the lone ‘coloured’ person passing a group of white youths was vulnerable to attack (Ramdin 1987).

\textsuperscript{15} It was argued in the media and amongst policy makers and politicians that the problem was not the presence of Caribbean people per se, but the number of Caribbean persons arriving into the country. Solomos (2003: 53) shows that while the ‘race’ riots may have helped to bring the topic of controlling (black) immigration to the forefront in parliament and the media, it was nevertheless ‘clear that both before and after the riots the question of control was integrated into the policy agenda’.

66
immigrants threatened British identity and culture. Powell proclaimed that Britain was ‘a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre’ (1968: 219) and even quoted a constituent by saying that ‘in fifteen or twenty years’ time, the black man will have the whip over the white man’ (ibid). According to Gordon and Rosenberg (1989: 4), Powell ‘helped to create a climate of racist opinion’ that was already held by some parts of the general population.

Returning to Bauman’s notion of exclusion, it is key here that Powell’s words not only conjured up images of violence, but also reinforced the idea that Britain was being taken over by ‘aliens’ / ‘strangers’. Powell’s speeches were given extensive coverage by the media and received a considerable amount of public attention. His ‘rivers of blood’ speech in particular occupies a somewhat iconic place in the on-going debate on ‘race’ and/or immigration. It seems, then, that the presence of the ‘Other’ continues to ‘arouse anxiety’ which, according to Bauman (1990: 59), makes exclusionary practices all the more necessary.

The latter part of the 1960s was also a period where the number of blacks being born and raised in Britain increased significantly (Tomlinson 2008). Solomos (1988: 99) has argued that the political debates surrounding the

This is evident in articles that echo Powell’s name, including even in the recent years: ‘White chavs have become black:’ David Starkey TV outburst provokes race row as he claims Enoch Powell was right’ (Hastings 2011), ‘A prophet yet an outcast: 100 years after his birth Enoch Powell has been vindicated on a host of crucial issues’ (Heffer 2012), ‘Diary: Why are we drowning in rivers of praise for Powell?’ (McSmith 2012), ‘Enoch Powell was wrong’ (Austin 2012).
second generation of blacks became synonymous with despair because of the lack of opportunities available to them, particularly in relation to employment. He further stresses that public concern over young black men had increased significantly by the early 1970s, not only because of the continuing lack of opportunities, but also because the concern was beginning to shift towards the involvement of blacks in ‘street’ crime, and more specifically in ‘mugging,’ thus reaching the point where Enoch Powell could publicly declare mugging to be essentially a ‘black crime’ (cited in Solomos 1988: 99).

Thus, the construction of black males as perpetrators of crime and violence can be seen as a key exclusionary strategy deployed by the host society. For Bauman (1990: 59), the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’ represents a sense of newness – in that not only are strangers new to the native’s ‘way of life’ but they are also unfamiliar with the native’s ways and means. The presence of the stranger threatens the native’s sense of security, as Bauman (1990: 59-60) argues, this ‘is not something one would forgive lightly’. I will now explore this construction of ‘the black male perpetrator’ with an emphasis on the broader question of the relationship between ‘race’ and crime, in order to illustrate the types of exclusionary practices that are devised in the interest of maintaining the Us / Them divide.

**Exclusionary practices against the black ‘Other’**

In his notion of the ‘gardening’ state, Bauman (1989; 1990) highlights that the ‘plan’ of the gardening posture is to ‘divide the vegetation into ‘cultured
plants’ to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated’ (1989: 18). In modernity, whatever cannot be assimilated must be excluded. According to Bauman, the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’ is ‘useful’ to the host population (1990: 58). This is because it is their position as outsiders, as the out-group, that ‘brings into relief the identity of the in-group and fortifies its coherence and solidarity’ (ibid: 58). Thus, it is the position of the ‘Other’ that enables the divides between of insiders / outsiders, Us / Them. As I discussed above, Enoch Powell’s speeches provide clear examples of how an Us / Them divide was reinforced.

However, as Bauman (1990: 60) observes, a characteristic feature of modernity is that ambivalence (that is, the uncertainty and insecurity that modern life exudes) tends to grow dramatically. This, in turn, suggests that the mechanisms of social order and control are subject to change and transformation. It is for this reason that these control mechanisms always remain under threat. That is, whatever is pushed out / excluded in the formation of the ‘Other’ can equally threaten to come back ‘in’. Therefore, radical ‘solutions’ are devised for the exclusion of the ‘Other’ in the interest of maintaining the in-group’s status quo (1990: 61), such Us (white) and Them (black). According to Bauman, these ‘solutions’ are made possible by two types of separation: territorial and spiritual (ibid). Territorial separation can be achieved by placing the ‘Other’ (the ‘weed’) in ghettos and deprived parts of the inner city (ibid). Spiritual separation, as Bauman asserts, is ‘achieved by rendering the victims themselves psychologically invisible’ (1989: 25).
It can be argued that one of the ways in which ‘radical solutions’ are achieved is through the creation of a ‘moral panic’. Given that my own research is located in a period in which discourses that pointed to black males as the perpetrators of knife crime and other attacks dominated the popular imagination, it is particularly important that I consider the concept of a ‘moral panic’ in this and the following section (section 2.4). As is demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five and the discussion that follows, the concept of a moral panic is a key constituent feature of the theoretical framework I use in analysing the construction of the ‘black male perpetrator’.

**Exclusionary practices: the creation of moral panics**

The concept of moral panic, as described by Cohen (1972: 28) refers to:

‘a perceived threat to socially dominant values or interests, the main protagonists of which are represented by the media in a stylised and stereotypical fashion, resulting in a spiralling escalation of the perceived threat, a manning of the moral barricades by right thinking people and the pronouncements of diagnoses and solutions by socially accredited experts’.

A classic example of a ‘threat’ or ‘the folk devil’ (Cohen 1972) constructed through the spiral of a moral panic is of the ‘black mugger’ – an image that Hall et al. describe as a ‘personification of all the positive social images – only in reverse: black on white’ (1978: 162). Hall et al.’s statement is pertinent in that it highlights the two key characteristics of a moral panic which ensure that the Us / Them status is maintained. The first of these focuses on how the black ‘Other’ is given to be seen as the instigator of
crime. The second of these focuses on how those who are stereotyped are never afforded the same kind of attention; never seen as holding the victim status in the same way that a ‘native’ might for example (which is elaborated in this section as well as in section 2.4).

The moral panic around the ‘black mugger’ that emerged in the 1970s exemplifies the first key characteristic of a moral panic, that is, the way in which the black mugger was ‘typically’ given to be seen – mainly comprising a Rastafari with Dreadlocks (Van Dijk 1998: 182). The issue of ‘mugging’ was constructed as a problem that is specific to Them (black) and not Us (dominant, white society). In this social construction of ‘the threatening black ‘Other’, the media, as well as the politicians and the agents of law enforcement tell us who is ‘normal’ and who stands at the outside of this ‘norm’ and in this case, black males (Pickering 2001: 184).

According to Cohen (2002: xi; my emphasis) the construction of a successful moral panic is dependent on three key elements:

‘First, a suitable enemy: a soft target, easily denounced, with little power…Second, a suitable victim: someone with whom you can identify, someone who could have been and one day could be anybody…Third, a consensus that the beliefs or action being denounced were not insulated entities…but integral parts of the society…’

As Hall et al. (1978) argue, the reasons why black males occupied the status of the ‘enemy within’ was because of ‘racial’ difference and because they

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17Bauman (1990: 62) asserts that in actual fact, there is little to distinguish the ‘Other’ from the native. It is for this reason that he states how ‘special dress or other stigmatizing signs’ can be prescribed to the ‘Other’ to make the ‘difference’ between the ‘Other’ and the native all the more visible. It can be said that the image of a Rastafari with Dreadlocks acts as an important signifier of ‘difference’ (Gilroy 1987: 65).
were seen as the social group which was experiencing low levels of educational attainment, the highest levels of unemployment and the deterioration of the inner-cities. Returning to Bauman’s concept of the ‘gardening’ state and the exclusionary practices of the ‘Other’ (1990: 61), these racial and structural inequalities can be described as a form of territorial separation from the dominant society. Black males were seen as the main instigators of mugging, while the victims were often depicted as helpless white women, and hence someone that the majority could either identify themselves with (in the case of white women) and/or saw as in need of protection (in the case of white men), thus producing empathy. The extensive media coverage of ‘mugging’ gave the impression it was a widespread problem. Mugging was presented in media and public discourse as a crisis, which in turn pointed to how black males were in need of regulation and control.

As a consequence of the desire to control and regulate the conduct of black males, the decades of the 1970s and 1980s mark a period of much police malpractice (Humphrey 1972). Thus, many of the writings point to the ‘sus laws’18 (stop and search) that came about in the 1970s, primarily as a means of policing black youth (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 473) in response to the moral panic around mugging.19 Writers, such as Benyon (1984) and Solomos

18 The ‘Sus Law’ meant that the ‘the police were empowered to stop and search citizens without burden of proof merely on the basis of suspicion (‘sus’) that they intended to commit a crime’ (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 473-474).
19 Solomos (1988: 102) has argued that the everyday confrontations between young black males and the police quite easily would ‘escalate into open conflict and acts of collective protest on the streets’ and primarily as ‘black communities’ saw the ‘sus laws’ as a legalised form of the victimization of black people (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 474).
(1988) point to how the fraught relationship\(^{20}\) with the police and ‘the black community’ finally came to a head in the urban riots that took place in the early 1980s, namely in Brixton, Bristol and Toxteth.\(^{21}\)

The second key characteristic of a moral panic in order for the maintenance of Us / Them is to ensure that those who are stereotyped as criminals are never afforded the same attention as the majority (which I also discuss further in section 2.4). In other words, no matter how severe the hardships they might face, these hardships will never be enough to warrant a moral panic.\(^{22}\) An implication of the ways moral panics are constructed means that if ‘the black ‘Other’ became a victim of a serious crime, it is unlikely that they will receive the same amount of attention as crimes against the dominant ‘Other’\(^{23}\). To do so would undermine the status of the dominant group, whose morals and values are given to be seen as ‘normal’ compared to those who have been ‘represented in ways excessively charged with negative symbolic value’ (Pickering 2001: 183), as is the case of ‘the black mugger’.

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\(^{20}\) This fraught relationship was exacerbated further by Operation Swamp 81, ‘a crime control operation employing officers in plain clothes to patrol the streets [namely Brixton] in pairs and to stop suspects’ (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 430).

\(^{21}\) The official response to the Brixton disorders was in the report by Lord Scarman (1981). Scarman acknowledged that the riots had arisen from complex socio-economic circumstances and therefore he placed much emphasis on the depravation in Brixton. However, writers have argued that Scarman downplayed the ‘racial’ element by ignoring the fact that continual harassment as well as racial hostility from the police had played a significant part in the urban riots (Hall 1987; Rollock 2009).

\(^{22}\) Hall et al. did much to challenge the stereotypes of ‘the black male perpetrator’ and thus highlighted class as a main signifier in representations of mugging. It can be argued that Hall et al.’s study (1978) also attempted to close the (territorial and spiritual) gap between the Us (dominant) / Them (black) divide by arguing how the experiences of black and white people in the inner cities were similar aside from the racism that confronted black people.

\(^{23}\) A classic example of this is how the refusal to see blacks as victims of discrimination as well as racial violence, and how issues of racism in general were downplayed during the 1958 ‘race’ riots under the premise that – as previously mentioned - it was not the dislike of black people per se, but the increasing numbers that were arriving into the country that was the problem.
It can be argued that one of the ways to ensure that the ‘Other’ is not afforded the same treatment as the ‘native’ is through spiritual separation. Indeed, in his discussion on territorial and spiritual separation, Bauman (1990: 61) places more emphasis on spiritual separation through which the experiences of the ‘Other’ are rendered invisible. This is because, to reiterate, whatever might be pushed ‘out’ always threatens to come back ‘in’. However, if the ‘Other’ is made to be continuously seen as a problem, their experiences will continue to be rendered invisible, or even as foregone conclusions. Thus, the themes around visibility / invisibility that were discussed at length at the beginning of this chapter emerge here as significant because while the image of the black ‘mugger’ is made hyper-visible, the experiences and hardships of blacks (i.e. non-criminals / victims) are made invisible.

In light of this, then, it can be argued that one of the ways in which rendering the experiences of people invisible is by making only certain experiences overwhelmingly visible. And as such, it not enough to just make certain experiences of theirs overwhelmingly visible, but also, these experiences should be seen as distinct as possible from the experiences of the host society. A classic example of this is how black males were presented as belonging to a ‘weak’ culture that comprised of ‘broken’ single parent families (Solomos 1988: 99). In this sense, not only does spiritual separation render the actual experiences of individuals invisible, but the more visible markers (e.g. single parent families) become a target for stigmatisation. This

24Bauman (1989: 25) argues that the strategies that involve spiritual separation take occur on a ‘more impressive scale’ as the effect of it can be that the host society becomes indifferent to the hardships of the ‘Other’. Bauman’s arguments on the importance of spiritual separation are also discussed further elsewhere (see 1990: 60-70).
stigmatisation subsequently means a sense of ‘indifference’ from the (black) ‘Other’. That is, members of the host society become indifferent to the ‘Other’ because the ‘Other’ is perceived as not adhering to the norms and values that ‘we’ live by, in this case those of the nuclear family and marriage,. As Pickering (2001: 208) asserts, indifference is ‘an ideal breeding ground for stereotyping’.

Another example of making the experiences of the ‘Other’ ‘hyper-visible’ is how there is now a voluminous body of literature on black males and their interactions with the police. Gilroy (1982: 48) has argued that whether it was in the form of the black ‘mugger’ or the black ‘rioter’ it had become the norm for the police, courts and politicians to associate black males with criminality while simultaneously failing to understand that black males were also victims of a system that was failing to support or assist them in any way. Thus, the decade of the 1980s saw the political debate on young black men become synonymous with images of black men as ‘rioters’ following the number of urban riots during this period. Hall has referred to this era of urban unrest as one in which Britain witnessed ‘an even more extensive alienation of the black population in this society, and urban unrest flows from that sense of deep injustice’ (1987: 48). The image of ‘the black male’ as a ‘rioter’, while not a prevalent image in the 1990s, the concern had nevertheless shifted to drugs and crime in ‘black communities’ (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 122). While these issues did not instigate a moral panic, images depicting black males as part of ‘gangs’ (Dabydeen et al. 2007: 122) was still a potent one as is in the current context in which this study is located (as discussed in the introductory
chapter and will subsequently be addressed in Chapter Four, Part B of this thesis).

Thus far, we have seen how multiple ‘solutions’ can be devised in order to ensure that the ‘Other’ is kept territorially and spiritually separate from the host society, such as through being allocated to particular locations which show signs of extreme depravation (e.g. Brixton), and through the knowledge and stigmatisation of the ‘Other’s’ way of life (i.e. family structures). However, to reiterate one of Bauman’s (1990: 60) points, control mechanisms always remain under threat and subsequently whatever is pushed out can continually threaten to come back in. I consider this further in the subsection below.

Exclusionary practices: knowledge of the ‘Other’ under threat

On the one hand, control mechanisms attempt to ‘fix’ a particular mode of representation, i.e. the stereotypical portrayal of ‘the black male perpetrator’, in a way that makes such representations difficult to change, contest, and challenge. And yet, in his discussion of the stereotype, Bhabha25 (1994: 66) argues that for a stereotypical belief to be perpetuated, knowledge of the ‘Other’ must be based on what is ‘always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated….as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved’. The notion that knowledge can be both ‘always in place’ and yet ‘must be anxiously repeated’ points to a contradiction: how can knowledge of the ‘Other’ that is always in place also

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25 Bhabha’s quotation was also mentioned in section 2.2 in a discussion on the politics of ‘seeing/being seen’.
require continual repetition? The repetition of stereotypes is an attempt to ensure that social control over the ‘Other’ is maintained. And yet, for knowledge to require continual and anxious repetition suggests that it is unstable and under threat.

The fact that knowledge of the ‘Other’ is simultaneously ‘always in place’ and under threat opens up the possibility of change. That is, it opens up new possibilities and new ways of seeing. These new ways of seeing can in turn lead to new meanings being established. In this sense, it opens up the possibility that the stereotype(s) of the ‘Other’ will be challenged and possibly shattered, which will bring about change in the social order leading to the emergence of new ways of seeing the ‘Other’ in society. This, then, undermines the belief that knowledge of the ‘Other’ is ‘always in place’. Thus, Bhabha’s statement can also be read as ‘always in place / always anxious’ in order to convey the contradiction – because the very forces that attempt to ensure that something always remains in its place are the very forces that are always anxious.

In other words, might the ‘always in place / always anxious’ function as a binary that counteracts the Us / Them binary to emphasise the fragility of the Us / Them divide? What is ‘always in place’, ‘already known’ can also be interrupted. That is, there can be – and, as I demonstrate in what follows, has been – a disruption of the representation of black males as perpetrators. The murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent political responses to the murder, and in particular, the Macpherson Inquiry,
disrupted the certainty – the ‘always in place’-ness – of the knowledge of the ‘Other’ that underpinned stereotypical representations of black men as largely perpetrators of street crime and violence.

2.4 Constructions Of Black Males As Perpetrators – *Disrupted* (?)

As Pickering (2001: 170) asserts, Bhabha’s (1994) analysis of the stereotype ‘shows that the fixity of the stereotypical Other is never absolutely achieved, never in place for all time’. In this sense, Bhabha’s thinking can serve as a useful framework for exploring how a lack in ‘fixity’ might counterbalance the effectiveness of Us / Them. The following discussion of the disruption of perpetrator status in this section is two-fold; firstly, I will present an overview of the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Secondly, and more importantly, I continue with an elaboration on the concept of a moral panic. Here I pay particular attention to Cohen’s (2002) argument on why the Stephen Lawrence case, while worthy of a moral panic, still did not constitute as a moral panic. This, then, raises questions on the extent to which the perpetrator status was disrupted and furthermore, what else this might tell us about the maintenance of the Us (white) / Them (black) binary. I begin with a consideration of the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Stephen Lawrence, a black male from South London, was 18 years old when he was killed in a racist attack by a group of young white men on the evening of 22 April 1993. After six years of persistent campaigning on the part of Stephen Lawrence’s parents, the proposal for a formal Inquiry was eventually accepted by the newly appointed Home Secretary, Jack Straw,
after the election of New Labour in 1997. The Inquiry, which was chaired by a retired judge, Sir William Macpherson, was published in February 1999, and is often referred to as the Macpherson Report. The report not only highlighted the failure of the police to secure justice for the murder of Stephen Lawrence but was also inundated with revelations of police incompetence and racism. As such, the Inquiry’s report set the tone and context within which it marked a dynamic shift in British public discourse; from routinely portraying black males as perpetrators to now also portraying them as victims.

While the Inquiry into Stephen’s death and the aftermath has been commented on from several perspectives, I focus here on Cohen’s concept of a moral panic because of its importance to the construction of black males as ‘the threatening ‘Other’. That is, in the previous section I identified that one of the key characteristics of a moral panic is how the ‘black ‘Other’ is not afforded the same victim status as the dominant ‘Other’. According to Cohen (2002: x), while it did not constitute as a moral panic, the Lawrence Inquiry was nevertheless worthy of a moral panic; not only because it generated widespread attention in the public consciousness, and garnered much media attention, but because it also ‘took a moral stand against the persistent racism it had identified’ (ibid: x).

Cohen argues that the murder itself and the failure to convict the perpetrators were overshadowed by the attention given to the police and the topic of

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26 As Hall (1999) and Bridges (1999) have commented, the report failed on several accounts. Hall (1999) argues that by putting the blame on the police force means that no individual officer was made accountable for the police errors in the investigation. Bridges (1999) points out that the Inquiry missed an important opportunity to challenge the policies and practices of the police in relation to stop and search. 

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‘institutional racism’. For Cohen, ‘the Lawrence case lacked three of the elements needed for the construction of a successful moral panic’ (ibid: xi), namely: one, a suitable enemy who is also a soft target, which the police do not make given their role in protecting the state and the public, and that fact they have ‘the power to deny, downplay or bypass any awkward claims about their culpability’ (ibid: xi); two, a suitable victim that people can identify with and as Cohen (ibid: xi) points out, ‘Clearly not inner-city young black males’; and three it needs to be seen as not just an isolated event but something that was integral to the whole society. However, as Cohen goes on to argue, because of the attention given to the police, this in itself reinforces the belief that it is not British society that has gone wrong but just one aspect of it – and in this case, the police. It is for this reason that Cohen goes on to conclude, ‘Clearly if there was no institutionalized racism in the police, there could not be in the wider society’ (ibid: xi).

An important speech given by the newly elected Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in 1998 on youth crime provides further evidence for Cohen’s perspective on why the Lawrence murder, irrespective of it being worthy of a moral panic, did not generate a moral panic:

‘From tomorrow kids can be picked up for truancy, young children alone in the streets can be subject to curfews, parents made responsible for their children’s behaviour. From April, anti-social behaviours can be taken to court and punished. Don’t show zero imagination, help us to have a zero tolerance of crime…When a black student, filled with talent is murdered by racist thugs and Stephen Lawrence becomes a household name not because of the trial into his murder but because of an inquiry into why his murderers are walking free, it isn’t just wrong; it weakens the very bonds of decency and
respect we need to make our country strong. We stand stronger together’ (Labour Party Conference Speech, Blackpool, 29 September 1998; cited in Back 2005: 27).

It is important here that Blair addressed the nation as ‘we’. This sense of ‘we’ can be understood as a way of promoting unity amongst British people. This is further exemplified in his acknowledgement of Stephen Lawrence as a (worthy) victim; which in turn is perceived by dominant society as something of an anomaly rather than one that is the ‘norm’. This acknowledgment of a talented black young black male, from a two-parent household, closes the gap between Us (white, majority) and Them (black, ‘Other’), thus giving rise to a sense of solidarity. Blair implicitly places blame on the police when he refers to the Inquiry and the fact that the murderers of Stephen Lawrence ‘are still walking free’. He does this without mentioning of how such ‘racist’ incidents are endemic in wider society. Interestingly, while the police may be blamed, their ‘street’ presence is encouraged as a way of displaying a ‘zero tolerance of crime’.

In his discussion of the stereotype, Bhabha (1994: 70) argues that the stereotype is ‘as anxious as it is assertive’. That is, there are always strategies in place to ensure that the status of Us / Them is maintained for the purpose of social control. Interestingly, while the Macpherson Inquiry was taking place, Operation Trident, a police investigation unit targeted at gun crime specifically within ‘the black community’, was initiated. With this in mind, to what extent then, can this sense of ‘we’ be taken as a fundamental

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27 While it is the case that Scarman did not acknowledge institutional racism as an issue following the urban disturbances in the early 1980s, he did nevertheless state that ‘It is unlikely, however, that racial prejudice can be wholly eliminated from the police so long as it is endemic in society as a whole’ (1981: 5.15)
change in the ways in which black males are positioned within British society?

Following the aftermath of the Lawrence case, while the concern of black males in relation to crime was given some voice, this was sporadic. Moreover, the concern had shifted more to black males in the context of education. This concern was met with a growth in the mentoring industry to cater for black males experiencing high levels of exclusion (Odih 2002).

With the recent proliferation of discussion and debate around knife crime, the image of the ‘black male perpetrator’ has resurfaced again. However, black males are also seen as the victims. Returning to Cohen’s (2002) first element needed for a successful moral panic – a suitable enemy who is ‘soft target’ – we have already seen how the image of a black male perpetrator is an ‘enemy within’, and how there has been a lengthy history of constructing black males as ‘muggers’ and ‘rioters’. In relation to the second element — a suitable victim – most of the victims have been reported as black. And, according to Cohen’s model, inner city black males do not make suitable victims, which, in turn, begs the question of the role that the black male as victim label has to play in the construction of black males in contemporary Britain? Thus it is this particular shift in the construction of black males as both victims and perpetrators that I investigate in Chapter Four (Part B).

Furthermore, with regard to the third element – where the series of incidents must be perceived as an epidemic as opposed to isolated incidents – the fact that knife and related crimes have garnered widespread attention and featuring regularly on the front pages of newspapers implies that black males
are, yet again, in need of regulation and control. At the same time, however, the status of the black victim suggests that they are also in need of protection. And so, as part of my analysis, it is important to examine how exactly (if at all) this protection is proposed and what the implications this might have on the construction of black male identities. This is important as it opens up questions on the politics of belonging, which I consider in Chapters Four and Five.

First, however, much attention has been given in this chapter so far to the ways in which the black ‘Other’ is seen by dominant society. The chapter would therefore be incomplete if it did not acknowledge the studies, though there are few, that have explored the experiences of black males in a British context. I now move on to the final part of the chapter.

PART C
CONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY: WAYS OF BEING ‘BLACK’

This part of the chapter reviews studies that explore how black male identities are forged in Britain. In doing so, I argue that the literature on the experiences of black males in Britain is limited in two main respects. Firstly, most writings have tended to focus on black males’ responses to racism and exclusion in the UK. Furthermore, these writings are primarily about ‘the outward appearances of the black male response’ (Mirza 1999: 138). That is, most writers have argued how these types of responses can also be described as ‘survival strategies’ as a response to living in a world dominated
by white men who render black males as ‘hyper-visible’. Secondly, very few studies tend to shed light on the alternative ways in which black male identities might be forged (Alexander 1996a; Sharpe 2005). This in itself suggests that the ability of black males to create novel, alternative definitions of black masculinities is restricted (Wright et al. 1998). Therefore, writings which suggest alternative ways of theorizing black masculinity ‘remain a marginal part of an already marginalised set of studies’ (Edwards 2006: 64). The first of these points provides a suitable starting point for discussion.

2.5 ‘Survival Strategies’ In The Constructions Of Black Masculinity

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasised that very little is known about how black males articulate a sense of ‘self’. This is because the varieties of ways in which black masculinity is constructed tends to be overshadowed by the literature that focuses on black males and their contentious relationship with the criminal justice system – namely the police. As highlighted in the previous section, there is extensive literature detailing the confrontations and conflicts between black males and the police. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is not to replicate existing accounts but to highlight two important points. Firstly, the arguably excessive focus on the interaction between black males and the police is at the expense of a broader consideration of the other types of relationships that black males forge with other aspects of British society. That is, beyond their engagement with the police, very little is known about how else black males might experience ‘street’ space. Previous works have tended to focus on black males experiencing a ‘crisis’ in identity
(Pryce 1979; Cashmore 1979; Cashmore and Troyna 1982). And as such, the ‘street’ represents the ‘space’ where their ‘crisis’ can be ‘seen’. For example, Cashmore and Troyna (1982), have argued that the deprivation experienced by black males in inner cities in the 1970s and 1980s led many to become ‘arrogant’ and ‘violent’ (ibid: 17). Terms such as arrogant and violent as used by the authors serve to shore up images of black males which render them as hyper-visible because of the images that have already been widely associated with black men i.e. the ‘mugger’, the ‘rioter’. Solomos (1982: 566), however, is highly critical of Cashmore and Troyna, arguing that both authors resorted to common-sense stereotypes about blacks and thus fail to provide a sense of what black males ‘are really like’.28

Secondly, writers such as Hall et al. (1978) and Hiro (1971) have pointed to how the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by black males not only seeing racial segregation as a ‘fact’ of life but also how many outwardly expressed their refusal to assimilate into the ‘British way of life’. Hiro (1973: 81) has argued that as blacks saw no visual signs of whites and blacks socialising with each other in social spaces, such as ‘street’ spaces and pub, their outsider status was confirmed. Ramdin (1987) argues that this sense of ‘outsider-ness’ resulted in many blacks outwardly expressing a rejection of British society. For Ramdin, the rejection of British society is illustrated through the popularity of Rastafarian movement in among black males in Britain, who he argues saw the movement as a symbol of freedom from the

28 There is an interesting corollary for the assumption that writers such as Cashmore and Troyna make about how people negotiate street space. It is written within the US context by Loic Wacquant (2002).
‘white man’s domination’ (also described as Babylon). Ramdin contends that this resistance to Babylon became ‘a lived experience. Their commitment was real, an open rejection of British society’ (ibid: 460).

Since the late 1980s, however, studies on black males have shifted to black boys in the context of British schooling, namely to teachers’ perceptions of their pupils and how pupils respond to them (Wright 1986; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Gillborn 1990). While my own research focuses on black men rather than black boys it nevertheless explores how black ‘maleness’ is constructed by black British men as a result of their lived experiences. School life is, of course, a key part of their lived experience. I therefore investigate in Chapter Four the extent to which schooling and education have played prominent roles in how black masculinities are constructed. A key study that has influenced my approach is Sewell’s (1997) work on black males and schooling, which I move on to next.

Sewell’s study is set against the backdrop of contemporary urban life, which is also a key feature of my study. Not only does Sewell (1997: 14) explore how black male identities are articulated – ‘an act in which both the teachers and boys are deeply implicated’ – he also addresses the extent to which media and material culture influence the boys. More specifically, Sewell argues that the media is a source of contradictory representations of black masculinity, which leaves ‘black boys vulnerable to cultural prejudice; where

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29 This sense of resistance is also the reason as to why Bob Marley’s music had an enormous impact on black males in Britain. His Redemption Song includes the famous lyrics: ‘Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds...’
on the one hand they are the darlings of popular culture, heroes of the street, and yet on the other, sinners in the classroom' (ibid: ix)\textsuperscript{30}

Sewell conducted his research in an inner-city comprehensive all boys’ school, with African-Caribbean boys. In his study, the black males, are made up of four types: the ‘Rebels’, the Retreatists, the ‘Conformists’, and the ‘Innovators’\textsuperscript{31}. The ‘Conformists, according to Sewell, are the majority, comprising of 41% of the boys. He describes The Conformists (who he claims are in denial of their racial identity) as displaying a somewhat ‘(Trevor) McDonaldisation’ persona; meaning that they act white and thus part of this conformity, according to Sewell, means they ‘sell their souls to the system to succeed’ (ibid: 220). According to Sewell, rather than taking pride in ideas around ‘blackness’ and ‘community’, these boys instead prioritise individualism and personal achievement.

In his critique of Sewell’s analysis of The Conformists, Mirza (1999: 143) asks, ‘But the question is, to succeed, are the boys ‘acting white’ or simply being strategic? I suggest it is the latter’. I argue that Mirza’s suggestion is a more plausible account because it opens up the possibilities of discussing the varieties in which black masculinities are constructed. Sewell’s account on the other hand, raises several issues. Firstly, to suggest that the boys are ‘acting too white’ also implies they are not acting black enough. The problem

\textsuperscript{30} In the case of my research, it investigates the extent to which black men feel that representations of black masculinity in all forms of media impact on the ways in which black males are perceived by wider society. This is particularly important given the current context in which this study is located; where black males have been implicated as the main victims and perpetrators of ‘street’ crime and yet, are also celebrated in areas such as music and sports. These topics are also addressed in Chapters Four (Part A) and Five. At the same time, I also consider the implications of Sewell’s analysis of black boys and young black men in Chapter Four (Part B, particularly sections 4.7 and 4.8.

\textsuperscript{31} Sewell describes ‘The Innovators’ as pro-education but anti-school. Similar findings were identified in the earlier works of Mac an Ghaill 1988.
with this train of argument is that it rests on a binary opposition between black/white, and suggests that the boys must choose a ‘side’.

Along similar lines, Sewell’s analysis of The Rebels and what it means to be ‘black’ is a telling one. While they make up the minority (18%), The Rebels are in stark contrast to The Conformists, in that they are seen as occupying an exaggerated phallocentric identity. That is, their outward responses suggest that they are hyper-sexualised and a part of this identity involves acting ‘macho’, having many women, fathering multiple children, owning flashy cars, and making lots of money (through illegitimate means). According to Sewell, material comforts and the many women is what the boys consider gives them ‘respect’ amongst their (black) peers. Sewell concludes that The Rebel’s ‘phallocentrism’ is ultimately ‘an attempt to recapture some degree of power and influence under subordinated conditions created by racism’ (1997: 143). Furthermore, in this self-destructive masculinity, ‘the physical dominates, and ultimately the black boys lose touch with their minds and inner selves’ (ibid: 220). Sewell’s analysis of The Rebels therefore points to the complexities involved in identity construction; that is how The Rebels are victims on the one hand, and yet appear active in their own demise.

At the same time, Sewell appears to lapse into common-sense thinking about the boys’ behaviour which demonstrates a readiness to accept stereotypes (which is by no means new in studies on black males)\(^32\). This is

\(^{32}\) Sewell’s findings can also be considered in light of the earlier works by Majors and Billson (1992). From an American context, the authors of Cool Pose argue that black males engage in acts of ‘hyper-masculinity’ as a response to the lack of power (in a white dominated world). These acts of ‘black’ masculinity can therefore be seen as empowering black men. They comment: ‘Cool Pose is a
clearly the case when Sewell makes the following statement: ‘black boys are “too sexy” for school’ (1997: 87). Nayak (1999: 89) is highly critical of Sewell’s analysis, arguing that if black boys are too sexy for school then does that imply that other boys are not? He goes on further to say, ‘perhaps these youth are somehow less ‘sexy’ when it comes to educational research?’ (ibid.). In Nayak’s view, the behaviour of other boys from other ethnic/racial groups is equally important before we ‘implode the assumption that particular social groups are ‘too sexy’ or otherwise for school’ (ibid: 90). Nayak’s argument is important because it also reflects an important gap in Sewell’s analysis. On the one hand, Sewell claims that the teachers play an important role in shaping how black masculinity is performed in the school, and yet, little is known as to what part their white and Asian counterparts might have to play. While it is duly noted that the study is not on white or Asian boys, the study was nevertheless conducted in a setting where boys from ‘other’ ‘racial’ groups are present. Perhaps, investigating the role of other pupils could have facilitated insights into the other ways in which black masculinity might be constructed, rather than accepting that the majority of the boys militate between the two extremes of denying their racial identity (The Conformists) or performing a ‘hyper-masculine/hyper-sexualised’ sense of ‘self’. Sewell’s presentation of these two extremes leaves little room for manoeuvre, and opens his study up to the criticism that it largely ignores the ritualised form of masculinity that entails behaviours, scripts physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control…It eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities. Being cool is an ego booster for black males comparable to the kind white males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs and bringing home decent wages’ (ibid: 4-5).
task of challenging his own assumptions about dominant constructions of black masculinity.33

The extreme forms of masculinity presented in Sewell’s study serve as highly visible markers as to what it means to be ‘black.’ The study does not pay attention to the more subtle and perhaps more profound ways in which individuals might negotiate their identities, an issue which is perhaps best illustrated in the works of Mac an Ghaill (1988). In his study, Mac an Ghaill challenges deeply entrenched stereotypes of black (and Asian) pupils within two different educational settings. He focuses on not only how the pupils respond to and negotiate racism, but more importantly the subtle ways in which the pupils engage in acts of resistance within the confines of school environments. Writing about one of the groups, who Mac an Ghaill refers to as ‘The Black Sisters’, he argues though these students reject the school system they value education. The following serves as an example of the ways in which the pupils resist the school environment:

‘Their resistance, which was rarely overt, included such behaviour as coming together late to sessions, completing homework late, refusing to partake in group discussion, and chatting together in their own languages and other such behaviour that challenged the school’s and the college’s daily routine and rules’ (1988: 27).

The above statement demonstrates how resistance can operate in ways that are not only subtle but also complex. These subtle acts of resistance also point to how resistance takes place on micro levels as well as on macro

33 Along similar lines, Majors and Billson (1992) identify particular ‘types’ of black masculinity that black males perform as a way of empowering themselves – such ‘types’ consist of ‘the cool cat’, ‘the black sportsman’ and the ‘sexualised black male’ (ibid: 138).
levels. While authors such as Sewell (1997) and Majors and Billson (1992) tend to advocate the idea that black men engage in overt forms of resistance through their ‘macho’ behaviour,’ given their focus on overt forms of resistance, these studies tell us less about the subtle forms of resilience and perseverance with which individuals attempt to deal with discrimination and inequality.

In my research, I investigate the more subtle ways in which black males might resist the dominant portrayals of black masculinity. I argue that not only can resistance be subtle but that it is also fluid in nature. In his analysis of power, Foucault ([1977] 1997) argues that power relations are always in constant flux through negotiation and resistance because power can be regarded as capillary in its structure, that is, as something that circulates through society, rather than as something one ‘owns’ or wields. While stereotypical representations of black masculinity are constructed by dominant society, they are contested and challenged through negotiation and resistance. However, resistance does not have to be by overt means. As my research is interested in the subtle and complex ways in which resistance can operate, the study lends itself to the possibility of finding alternative ways of theorizing black masculinity, which has been identified as a gap in the study of black men and masculinities (Edwards 2006; Marriott 2000; Sharpe 2005).34

34As Mirza argues, the literature on black males’ and their ‘outwardly’ responses to racism for example is endemic in many ‘progressive’ works on masculinity’ (1999: 139). She further goes on to say that for writers such as Sewell and Majors and Billson, ‘what would have been challenging is […] to find an alternative ‘third way’ to theorise black masculinity’ (ibid: 144). While Mirza herself does not quite spell out what this ‘third way’ might be, she does however, point to the works of Claire Alexander (1996a) as a useful starting point for the alternative ways in which black masculinity might be explored.
As we have seen so far, the few studies that have explored the experiences of black males focus on how black males respond outwardly to the effects of racism either by ‘conforming’ to what the authors present as a white subjectivity, or through performing an exaggerated, ‘macho’ identity. However, given that my research is premised on the belief that we are complex and multi-faceted individuals (see section 2.2 especially), it seems fitting then to explore the studies (Alexander 1996a; Sharpe 2005) that have sought alternative ways of redefining black masculinities. It is to these discussions that I turn to next.

2.6 Striving For Redefinitions Of Black Masculinity

While, in the previous section it was demonstrated that there have been studies on black boys, it is important to reiterate that my study focuses on black men. Along similar lines, the works of Alexander (1996a) and Sharpe (2005) also explore the lived experiences of black men. In the same vein, their studies do not explore the lives of black men within one particular institution but rather, also examine how black men mediate between their personal and social worlds. Of equal importance, both authors are less concerned about the ideas pertaining to how black males might perform exaggerated forms of a black male identity and care more for the complex ways in which black male identities are articulated by the men concerned. It is important therefore to explore their works and to consider more widely, the
ways in which their writings serve to help my own investigation and analysis and in this case, I consider Alexander’s study first.

In her ethnographic study on young black men (aged between 18 and 24), Alexander (1996a) explores how black men experience their everyday lives in terms of work, leisure and pleasure. She pays homage to the works of Hall et al. (1978) and Gilroy (1987) who she claims that while they ‘challenged’ and ‘dismantled’ stereotypes and thus ‘made clear what black youth were not, but did not explore what they were’ (Alexander 1996b) which is what her study attempts to do. Along similar lines, my own study also acknowledges the works of Hall et al. (1978) and Gilroy (1993) as were identified in the previous parts in the chapter, but also goes that step further in terms of investigating how black men continue to be constructed in modern day Britain as well as exploring the ways in which black men construct a sense of self and how this is arrived at.

Alexander’s work is important in that she demonstrates the complex ways in which black men play, overturn, transform and even fail to challenge the stereotypes that they themselves create as well as those created by others. While she admits that this was ‘not the alternative [she] had hoped to find, but it was a series of alternatives in which the outcome could not be predetermined. It was finally, this uncertainty, the ideas of identities in flux that was the only real constant’ (Alexander 1996b). In her works Alexander also uses the concept of double consciousness (Du Bois [1903]1994) to illustrate how the men in her study were always aware of how they were

35 One of the participants in Alexander’s study is of Indian descent and was included on the basis that he identified himself as ‘black’ and was always in the company of black people (1996: 26).
perceived (negatively) by dominant society but that is not to suggest that they were wholly determined by this (Alexander 1996a: 187). It is interesting to note that while Alexander (1996a: 187) comments that that double consciousness was a recurrent theme throughout her fieldwork it is a wonder why the important works of Du Bois is then only given a mention in the concluding chapter of her book. Like Alexander, I too argue that the concept of double consciousness is important to my investigation (as argued in section 2.2). However, given that I approach this study from a visual angle (as detailed in Chapter Three), I also acknowledge that black men occupy a precarious position in Britain where they are ‘celebrated’ and ‘condemned’ (as discussed at length in section 2.2) so it would be interesting to note the different places where the men in my study believe that they need to (if at all) play, overturn or challenge stereotypes. Unlike Alexander’s work, I place emphasis on the individuals as opposed to studying a group of black men. This is because in any given environment which involves studying a group of people, there are always others whose behaviours and expressions can overshadow the opinions of others, and in the case of my study, it focuses on how black masculinity is constructed based on the view of one individual rather than black men as a collective group.

What perhaps makes Alexander’s work important in relation to my own study, unlike previous works as mentioned in the previous section, is that she does not perceive black males as searching for power per se, but rather their identities are based on the search for control. This is best represented in her own words:
Most studies have, however, regarded black masculinity as an alternative to social status, rather than as an extension of it. 'Black macho' has been portrayed, therefore, as differing in kind rather than degree from the wider gender power relations within Society at large. Machismo becomes a symbol of, and a substitute for, the lack of power, rather than constituting an aspect of that power... Black masculinity is then perhaps best understood as an articulated response to structural inequality, enacting and subverting dominant definitions of power and control, rather than substituting for them' (1996a: 136-137).

While Alexander (1996a) does not seek to label black masculinity in any particular way but rather accepts that ‘being black’ (1996b) is open to new interpretations, she nevertheless implies that black masculinity is a response to structural inequalities that does not take into account the other influences that might impact on individuals, such as media representations and popular culture. Also, while my own research focuses on how black masculinity is articulated, it centres on black men’s lived experiences, as opposed to examining ways of ‘being black’. The notion of ways of ‘being black’ strikes me as bordering on essentialism.

In the case of Sharpe’s (2005) study, he looks at the multi-faceted ways in which black male identities are forged against the backdrop of black men who he refers to as ‘multiply othered’. More specifically, while Sharpe acknowledges dominant culture, he focuses on how black men have been othered from ‘the black community’. Along similar lines, and as has been expressed at length throughout this chapter, while my own study places emphasis on the concept of the ‘Other’, this is taken to mean within British
society which means that ‘the black community’ is a part of that and is not treated as a separate entity.

There are however, two pertinent points to be made about Sharpe’s study, and how I relate to these in my own work. Firstly, Sharpe argues that blacks like the rest of the population are divided in many ways, including in terms of their socio-economic positions and so he embraces the diversity in black men. In doing so, he explores the ways in which black men articulate a sense of identity through a visual angle. That is, his participants make use of photographs to illustrate the meaning they give to their everyday lives around domestic, community and paid-work environments (Sharpe 2005: 215). At the heart of Sharpe’s argument is that while black men occupy the position of being multiply othered, they also exploit the idea of ‘inhabiting a third alternative space’ (ibid: 229). That is, Sharpe points to the ‘ambiguities of ‘space’, ‘place’ and ‘belonging’ linked to the lived experience of black men. Sharpe also places emphasis on the hyper-visibility and invisibility of black males, thus providing a strong engagement with how binaries enable opportunities to provide in-depth accounts of the people that we study. Like Sharpe, this study also places emphasis on such binaries as was mentioned earlier, particularly in Part A of this chapter.

Like Alexander (1996a), Sharpe also suggests that identities as always in a flux, and ever-changing and that part of ‘being black’ according to Alexander is ‘necessarily incomplete, in a state of constant flux and reinvention, engaged in a continual process of “becoming”’ (1996a: 199). Sharpe explores this sense of identity in being in a constant flux and of becoming through visual images, and so my own use of methods (as discussed in the
next chapter) also explores how images may provide a more in-depth account of constructions of a black masculine sense of self is arrived at. However, before moving on to the next chapter, it is important to summarise this chapter.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explore the literature on black men and black masculinities that serve as a useful framework for the purpose of my own research. This particular field of study is rich in the discussions of the concept of the black ‘Other’ as was seen in the necessary evaluation of the works of Du Bois. In the second part of the chapter I examined the ways in which the social construction of black males as largely as perpetrators of violence could be theorised through the works of Bauman on his analysis of the ‘Other’ / ‘stranger’. I also examined the concept of a moral panic (Cohen 1972 / 2002) to consider how this concept can assist in my understanding of the ways in which black males are constructed in Britain in the present period which will be explored further in Chapter Four (Part B). In the final part of this chapter, I reviewed and identified the gaps on studies of black males in the UK. I also pointed to the gaps that my own study attempts to fill which was also voiced throughout this chapter. With this in mind, I now move on to the next chapter to explain how the research was carried out.
3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodology and the methods used to meet the objectives of the study. I use visual methods to explore how black British men construct a sense of ‘self’ in their everyday lives. The chapter (Part A) begins with an exploration of how visual methods (photo elicitation) is pertinent to the research aims of the study. In particular, I consider the merits as well as the limitations of using the method of photo elicitation. This research adopts a primarily qualitative approach, although some data was obtained via a survey questionnaire which was carried out prior to the qualitative data gathering. The reasons for adopting a multi-strategy approach will be explained. The chapter also explores the positionality of the researcher in relation to the participants, and in doing so, addresses the extent to which I perceived myself as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ with regard to ‘race’, gender and sexuality. This chapter (Part B) then moves on to a discussion of the methods adopted for this research and the research process which comprised six phases including the survey questionnaire; the selection of photographs of black males in popular culture and the mass media (based on the survey findings); participant observation; interviews with key informants representing ‘the black community’; in-depth interviews with individual black men using photographs as visual stimuli (photo elicitation); and reflexive photography, involving individual interviewees. Lastly, the chapter discusses the ethical issues that arose in the course of the research,
including some expected and unexpected challenges that I faced whilst collecting the data.

PART A

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how black men respond to dominant constructions of black masculinity and how, according to black men, alternative black masculinities are constructed. In order to meet these objectives, this study utilizes a multi-strategy approach. Given the broad meaning of the term ‘multi-strategy approach’, it is important to clarify how this approach is understood for the purpose of this research. According to Bryman (2004: 455), a multi-strategy approach is ‘when one research strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other research strategy’. In my study, quantitative research (self-completion questionnaire) was used to facilitate qualitative research. My reasons for adopting this strategy was because I needed to first identify the specific topics that would be relevant to discuss with participants. That is, what were the relevant questions to ask black men? As I detail in Part B, the questionnaire enabled me to identify some of the key issues and themes pertinent to the lived realities of the black men who took part in this stage of the research, and thereby formed a basis for subsequent interview research.

While this study utilizes quantitative research to uncover the specific topics to discuss with black men, it is nevertheless mainly qualitative in its approach.
The qualitative methodology\textsuperscript{36} adopted in the thesis consists of the following data-gathering methods: semi-structured interviews with key informants who ‘represent’ ‘the black community’ in London and with black individuals; visual methods, specifically photo elicitation as part of the interviews carried out with the black individuals; and participant observation (which I detail in Part B of this chapter). Before describing how I conducted the research in Part B of this chapter, in this part of the chapter I set out my rationale for choosing visual methods. Firstly, I address the significance of visual images in the construction of black masculinities. I argue that the key role of visual representations in shaping black men’s experiences of what it means to be black and male made visual methods a logical choice for this research. Next, I turn to the value of photo elicitation as way of co-creating knowledge with participants. I then outline the approach that the research carried out for this thesis adopted to photo elicitation. Lastly, I consider the limitations of using photo elicitation in relation to my study and how I sought to overcome these limitations.

3.1 The Role Of Visual Images In The Construction Of Black Masculinities

The opening chapters demonstrated the ways in which black masculinities have been and continue to be constructed within dominant western culture. The previous chapter highlighted the fact that these ‘constructions can take visual form’ (Rose 2007: 7) and in the case of black men, images of the black

\textsuperscript{36}Qualitative methods were selected for this study because, as Bryman (2004: 279-283) and Burgess (1988: 137-155) demonstrate, they are best suited to describing and analyzing the lived realities of research participants.
male body as ‘desired’ – whether this is in the form of ‘the black athlete’, ‘the super-stud’ or the ‘gifted dancer’ – are plentiful in a consumer-driven culture. In Sharpe’s (2005: 48) view, such ‘images are important, as they provide a direct interface between the social and personal world(s) of black men, and reflect the hyper-visibility and invisibility black men experience in wider society’. The question that arises is in what ways do black men themselves use the visual to make sense of their own lives? As I discuss later on in Part A, I use photo elicitation (which I detail later), as part of the qualitative interview in order to probe how black men respond to dominant images of black masculinity, and to explore how they construct an alternative sense of self.

Over recent years, black masculinity has been constructed as ‘hip’, ‘cool’, and ‘trendy’, and linked to sports and multi-million dollar advertising campaigns. Yet the construction of the black ‘gangsta’ lifestyle as depicted in music (i.e. rap and hip-hop) videos and film is characterised by violence. It has been argued that ‘At worst, these are internalized by impressionable young black people and/or mimicked by young white people’ (Sharpe 2005: 56). In the REACH report (DCLG 2007), as also highlighted in the preceding chapters, significant emphasis was placed on visual imagery to demonstrate the lack of visibility of successful black men in arenas such as business and commerce, leading the report’s authors to conclude that such images could serve as more ‘positive’ examples for black males. The report also highlighted the over-representation of black men in the arenas of sports, music and/or crime, and suggested that these excessive representations impact strongly on black boys and young black men. In other words, the
The report was concerned with the ‘negative’ influence that music artists such as rappers who glamorise the use of violence could have on black males.

Indeed, the mainstream media play a key role in disseminating stereotypical images of black males (Hall 1997). The publication of REACH (DCLG 2007) coincided with concerns around knife and gun crime and ‘gang’ related activities (predominantly) in inner London, in which black males were implicated as the main victims and perpetrators of these crimes. As such, the above issues garnered much attention in the British media and newspapers with headlines such as ‘How black boys with better role-models can escape a life of crime’ (Doughty 2007) and ‘Black boys need role models not rappers’ (Womack 2007) as indicated in an extract from Mail Online below:

![Figure 3a](image-url)
With the above factors at play, Sharpe argues that not only do the media tend ‘to ignore the complexity and range of identities that black men inhabit’ (2005: 57) but that ‘the bifurcation of ‘good’ blacks and ‘bad’ blacks still [continues to transpire] in the media’\(^{37}\) (ibid: 57). Thus, the binary opposition of ‘good’ black / ‘bad’ black leaves little space for more diverse and nuanced portraits of black men.

Furthermore, the portrayal of ‘good’ blacks / ‘bad’ blacks implies that such images simply exert either a ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ influence on black men. This, in turn, further perpetuates the idea that black males can only occupy extreme positions; either very ‘good’ or very ‘bad’. What about the complexity of human nature, and all of the positions in between good and bad? I suggest that responses to representations of black masculinity can be multi-faceted and plural in nature. For example, there is little known about how black males might respond to the image of black ‘gangsta culture’, or to what extent (if at all) black men see music artists such as P Diddy and 50 Cent as problematic figures. For example, might a black male adopt elements of P Diddy or 50 Cent’s style of dress whilst rejecting other messages such as becoming wealthy through crime? How might black men ‘negotiate mainstream media and material culture?’ (Clark-Ibanez 2007: 170).

\(^{37}\)At the same time, ‘current’ concerns around black males revolve around ‘problems’ pertaining to the structure of ‘the black family’ or the lack of male role-models for example. As illustrated in the previous chapter, these concerns are by no means new but resurface from time to time, in public discourses, as a matter of urgency. Thus, the lives and experiences of black men in the environments that they inhabit (London in this case) tend to be ‘routinely’ neglected in favour of what makes the headlines.
In short, visual images are powerful players in the construction of black masculinities, which meant that using visual methods was a logical choice for this study. According to Rose (2012: 4), the use of visual methods is important because ‘the modern relation between seeing and true knowing has been broken’. This is because we tend to ‘interact more and more with totally constructed visual experiences’ (ibid: 4) which Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2010: 257) warn, creates the impression ‘that this relationship between seeing and knowing is clear and evident, one that requires little or no elaboration’. However, in the case of my research, by asking black men to reflect on images like the ‘gangsta’ opened up the possibilities to uncover what figures black men actually find to be influential rather than accepting that these might be limited to popular cultural icons, like 50 Cent. Initiating a dialogue with black men by showing them images thus provided the participants the opportunity to reflect on and articulate their responses to representations imposed on them by dominant society. I will now consider in more detail why photo elicitation was particularly useful method for this research.

The value of photo elicitation in research on black masculinities

As already mentioned, I use photo elicitation in the context of the qualitative interview in order to investigate how black men respond to dominant images of black masculinity, and to explore how they assemble an alternative sense of self. Photo elicitation is particularly useful for capturing the role that the visual plays in how black males construct a sense of ‘self’ in contemporary
society. As Rose (2012: 306) argues, photo elicitation empowers the interviewees because it gives them a clear and central role in the research process as they are the ones that explain the images to the researcher. This study places emphasis on the researcher as ‘learner’ who adopts the role of the ‘pupil’ vis-à-vis her informants, whilst participants are positioned as the ‘teachers’, who enable the researcher to learn ‘aspects of their social world otherwise ignored or taken for granted’, by dominant society (Clark-Ibanez 2007: 194).

Using visual methods enables this study to prioritize the voices of black men and the images they choose to capture ‘a complex social world that is deeper than images that are frequently used to characterize them in popular media, such as gang activity’ (Clark-Ibanez 2007: 178; my emphasis). Whilst a number of studies have used visual methods to study other less powerful groups in society such as poor and homeless populations (Hodgetts et al. 2007; Klitzing 2004; Singhal and Rattine-Flaherty 2006) and children (Clark-Ibanez 2007; Gonzalez 2003; Joanou 2009; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010; Tinkler 2008), very few studies have used the method of photo elicitation when working with black people (Douglas 1998; Madar 2004) and in particular, black males (Madar 2003; Madar 2006; Sharpe 2005; Allen 2012).

A key feature of photo elicitation is that it allows participants to interpret the meanings of images in their own words. That is, visuals can allow for the subjects’ own styles of expression and interests to be articulated. This is particularly important when you are asking participants to make sense of their social environment, to critique definitions of black masculinity that are imposed on them through stereotyping, and to construct alternatives
definitions. So, through using visuals, the researcher can gain a more holistic and authentic account of participants’ social environments and their lived experiences within the different spaces that they occupy. That is, this process can capture participant’s styles of expression and use of language – how they speak as well as what they say – because participants are enabled to describe and analyse these in their own terms, rather than in terms chosen by the researcher.

Given that black men are rarely given the opportunity to discuss and critique prevalent images of black masculinity from their own perspectives and also to construct alternatives, such images may serve as useful prompts to investigate how black men respond to representations of black masculinities in British society and popular culture. However, as Pink (2007: 82) argues, it is not ‘simply a matter of asking how informants respond. Rather, we should be interested in how informants use the content of the images as vessels in which to invest meanings, and through which to produce and represent their knowledge, self-identities, experiences and emotions’. Thus, my research interest lies in understanding black men’s constructions and interpretations of the social world that they inhabit. My epistemological position is interpretivist, meaning that, ‘the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants’ (Bryman 2004: 266). In this sense, the concern does not lie simply with how black men respond to images of black masculinity, but more importantly, in the exploration of how ‘images gain significance through the way that participants engage and interpret them’ (Stanczak 2007: 12).
Furthermore, this research is located within the ontological field of constructionism. This is premised on the idea that the participants’ views and ideas are based on their own constructions of reality(ies) and therefore should not be interpreted to provide one single definition of ‘truth’ (Bryman 2004: 17). In terms of the images, this can be understood as meaning that the photographs themselves do not represent definitive truths or reality, but rather are used ‘as a tool to expand on questions and provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of [black men’s] lives’ (Clark-Ibanez 2007: 177; my emphasis).

This study shows a clear link between ‘visual culture’, ‘blackness’ and ‘visual methods’ (Sharpe 2005: 56). That is, as identified in this chapter thus far as well as the preceding chapters, prevalent visual images of black masculinity which depict limited definitions of black masculinity simultaneously conveys the gaping absence of the type of images that black men might use to construct their own masculinities. Thus, these excess images of black men in dominant culture also depict what Wallace (1992: 335) refers to as a ‘mostly invisible black visuality’. In this sense, it can be argued that the excess representations of black men in dominant culture and the lack of visual images that depict the realities of black men signals the binary of visibility / invisibility. On this note, I now move on to outline my approach to photo elicitation.
The approach adopted to photo elicitation in this study

As Lapenta (2011: 201) observes, an advantage of employing qualitative interviews is that this exchange, ‘although initiated and guided by the interviewer, aims to grant to an interviewee greater space for personal interpretations and responses. In the photo elicitation interview, this exchange is stimulated and guided by images’. My approach to photo elicitation was two-fold; in that the photo elicited interviews with black men comprised of photographs of black men in popular culture (which I will illustrate later in the chapter) that had been selected by me. The second approach was reflexive photography where the photographs were selected by the participants and sent to me by email\(^{38}\) in a follow-up to the photo elicited interviews. As such, the latter of these approaches can also be seen as a response to the photo elicited interview as participants are given time to go away, reflect on the conversation, and then provide images and the meanings that they hold for them later.

Regarding the first approach, showing participants images was primarily adopted as a means of stimulating a dialogue about their ‘place’ in British society and what it means to be black and male to them. As Woodward argues (2002), a sense of identity originates both in how others perceive, and treat us and how we as people believe ourselves to be positioned vis-a-vis others. In this research, questions such as what place do black men feel they occupy in British society, where they position themselves in relation to

\(^{38}\) In ‘Reflexive Photography’ the photographs taken or selected by the respondents are usually brought to an interview and discussed with the researcher on a one-to-one basis or even focus groups (Harper 1987).
majority society and in what ways visual images shown to as well as provided by them assist in conveying their ‘place’ in the social world are important in order to understand how they experience the spaces that they inhabit. As Pink (2007: 86) observes, in the photo elicited interview, ‘Conversation is filled with verbal references to images and icons’. By the participants thus stating what they see and how they see it can equally lead them to state what it is that they do not see and hence ‘refer to absent images’ (ibid: 86). This is particularly important in the case of black males, given the excess representations of black masculinities as expressed earlier, which is coupled with a gaping absence of how black men might articulate a sense of black identity.

Regarding the second approach to using photographs in this research, the purpose of reflexive photography was to encourage the participants to consider how they construct the black masculine self, rather than what they believe is usually assigned to them in a dominant society. While these issues were addressed in the in-depth interviews, this part of the research enabled individuals to reflect further on the topics that had been discussed. As Rose (2012: 306) observes, this process enables the participants ‘to reflect on their everyday activities in a way that is not usually done; it gives [the participants] a distance from what they are usually immersed in and allows them to articulate thoughts and feelings that usually remain implicit’. In a sense, the individual here is given ‘space’ alone to ‘periodically question the given conceptions of his experience, and so [even] look for new ones’ (Rajchman 1988: 109). By giving participants a visual voice, photographs can help to build a more coherent picture of how people give meanings to their lives and
just as importantly, to do so without the pressure of defining themselves in ways in which confined areas such as institutions, society or state may expect one to do so (Rajchman 1988: 117).

At the same time, the images provided by my participants were accompanied alongside written explanations. As Rose (2012: 326) observes, while ‘Images can present things that words cannot, [they nevertheless] need to be contextualized by words, and may remain excessively obscure if they are not’. In this sense, it is not simply about what our participants enable us to ‘see’ in the images provided, but also that the images enable ‘us to hear them’ (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010: 255). For example, more often than not, visual representations of black masculinity depict black men in a typical, one-dimensional way (i.e. ‘the black super-stud, ‘the gangsta’ etc.) and yet, images provided by black men could be seen as a way of disrupting the meanings that are usually assigned to their identities. It was crucial, then, that their interpretations of the images they provided were communicated through words, so that these disruptions were not missed. In a sense, these images could also be interpreted as ‘signs of resistance’ (David 2007: 225).

As we have seen, visual methods are most appropriate for a study that explores the lived realities of black men. And yet, any research that is qualitative in nature can be criticized because the research might be overly focused on what the researcher views as significant and important, thus culminating in bias. It is this issue of bias that I turn to next in considering the limitations of photo elicitation in relation to my study.
Limitations of the approach adopted to photo elicitation in this study

One place where bias can enter early on in the research process is with the selection of images to show participants. Advocates of photo elicitation have acknowledged the difficulty in knowing which images to select and present images to their participants (Clark-Ibanez 2007: 171). As mentioned earlier, in order to meet the objectives of my research I used images of black men in popular culture (from newspapers, magazines, and advertising material) as visual stimuli in the in-depth interviews. This was in order to identify ways in which black males felt that black masculinities were being portrayed within the British context. This raised questions about what they thought were the most common/uncommon images of black men in British society and, more importantly, uncovered how they were responding, if at all, to these dominant perceptions. While it is the case that dominant images of black males tend to centre on sports, music and crime, it was also important to identify what black males felt were the most uncommon images. I felt that it was important to ask black men themselves rather than relying solely on existing literature on the visual representations of black men. Thus, key decisions had to be made concerning the type of images to use, how to select them, and the order in which to present them to the participants. As Clark-Ibanez (2007: 171) observes, where the researcher chooses the images, these images might be limited to the researcher’s interests and therefore the images may lack meaning for the participants. Also, if the images are limited to the researcher’s interests this can also lead to ‘intrinsic biases’ (ibid: 171) in the questions that the researcher asks participants in the interviews.
One of the ways of overcoming this was by attending events (which I will detail later in this chapter) which enabled me to meet key informants and consider the possible topics and images that could be covered in the in-depth interviews. These events also involved participant observation where many of my target sample would be present. Burgess (1984: 79) asserts that the ‘value of being a participant observer lies in the opportunity that is available to collect rich data based on observations in natural settings’. In this way, the researcher is able to capture what topics are meaningful to the participants without having to probe like in an interview for example.

However, as this research took place against the backdrop of a ‘moral panic’ surrounding knife and gun crime (see Part B of Chapter Two), many of the events I attended were devoted to the topic of the role of black males in knife and gun crime in London. Therefore to rely solely on these events to frame questions would have resulted on too strong a focus on these particular issues. As Bryman (2004: 458) asserts, not everything that researchers might want to know about a social group that we are studying can be made ‘accessible through participant observation’. With this in mind, it is for this reason that the decision was taken to employ quantitative research (survey questionnaire) and as such, attending these events facilitated the opportunity to distribute the survey questionnaire to black males (which I discuss later in Part B of this chapter).

Beyond this, most researchers who adopt a (mainly) qualitative stance recognise that the values and biases of a researcher are also inevitably part
of the research process (Bryman 2004: 22). In light of this, I now turn to the position of the researcher; and in doing so, discuss the practical challenges that arose as a result of my position vis-à-vis the study’s participants.

3.2 Positionality Of The Researcher: Foreseeing Practical Challenges

As I argued in the opening pages of the thesis, what drives this research is ‘passionate scholarship’ (Mills 1959). This standpoint acknowledges that a researcher motivated by passion cannot remain entirely objective but must nevertheless always strive to be rigorous in their research endeavours. At the centre of this argument is that one must always remain vigilant about the motivation behind their study and what they hope to gain from the research. Rossman and Rallis state that research can help to provide solutions to problems, and thus label this as an ‘instrumental’ approach (2003 ibid: 19). The research can reflect a researcher’s commitment to social justice or provide an alternative understanding of social groups (e.g. black men) which might be misunderstood by wider society which means the research can be considered ‘symbolic’ and serve as a form of ‘enlightenment’ as it demonstrates an innovative way of communicating knowledge (ibid: 19). In this case, the research gives a visual voice to black men who use images to illustrate how an alternative masculine ‘self’ is constructed. This research strives to be a combination of the above three approaches but it is understood that while it might offer ‘insights, rather than solutions; but always insights have to precede solutions’ (Murphy 2001: xii).
Thus, it is not only ‘how’ (rigorously) you pursue research that matters, but equally important is ‘who’ you are which subsequently raises the question ‘by whom the research should be conducted’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 111). Inevitably, the closeness of the interaction between the researcher and the researched is integral to the research process. To claim otherwise would be to deny ‘how different elements of [our] identities become significant during research’ (Pink 2007: 24). Pink further stresses how ‘gender, age, ethnicity, class and race are important to how researchers are situated and situate themselves… [researchers] ought to be self-conscious about how they represent themselves to informants and they ought to consider how their identities are constructed and understood by the people whom they work’ (ibid: 24).

Being a British Indian woman was a significant element of my racial and gendered identity as a researcher, because this presented specific challenges that should not be underestimated. That is, I held the perspective of an ‘outsider’, as I do not share the experience of being ‘black’ or ‘male’.

However, it should be noted that black researchers have acknowledged that even being ‘black is not enough’ when building a rapport with (black) respondents (Beoku-Betts 1994; Sewell 1997; Young 2004). Other researchers accept the position ‘as the ‘halfie’ where the researcher is both marginalized from the culture of study and a part of the culture at the same time’ (Allen 2012: 446; see also Sharpe 2005).
Furthermore, researchers who could be considered as ‘outsiders’ as they are not part of the same ‘race’ or ethnicity as their black respondents have argued that individual characteristics can outweigh traits such as ‘race’ and ‘gender’ (Mac an Ghaill 1989; Alexander 1996a). On that count, I was aware that I shared some characteristics with my participants, namely I was of a similar age, a resident of London, a British national, an ‘ethnic minority’, and familiar with the experience of racial as well as gender stereotyping and discrimination. Given that both the researcher and the researched have a variety of characteristics, one cannot ‘simply [be] either an insider or an outsider’ (Dowling 2000: 33).

In his study, Venkatesh (2008: xiv) describes himself ‘as an outsider looking at life from the inside’. However, his relationship with his main informant, J.T., is not necessarily one between an outsider and an insider. Initially, Venkatesh is met with suspicion and hostility, as he was perceived as a rival ‘street’ gang member from ‘the Hispanic community’, only for it to transpire that he is an (Indian) American university student. At the same time, Venkatesh assumed that J.T. could not have had any formal education given his status as a gang leader. And yet, his perception of J.T. is disrupted when Venkatesh learns that J.T. has a college degree as well as having worked for corporations. Thus it is the respect that both men share for each other’s educational and professional backgrounds that enables them to establish a rapport. Ultimately, it is the characteristics of the researcher and the researched that cements the relationship between the two men. In a sense, Venkatesh cannot be described as an ‘outsider’, as J.T. allows Venkatesh to
‘hang out’ with him in order for him to better understand aspects of J.T.’s life. While Venkatesh is not an ‘insider’ in the community he studies, his position is ambivalent and is not simply an ‘outsider’.

A similar observation is made by Alexander (1996a) in her ethnographic account of young black men. While researching in an ‘almost exclusively male environment’, Alexander refuses to simplify her status as either an insider or outsider but rather describes her position as ‘ambivalent; a status which both facilitated and constrained aspects of research’ (ibid: 184). ‘Race’ for example, did not emerge as a barrier to Alexander’s research as she states that Asian women in relationships with black men were generally not confined to any particular racial or sexual stereotyping in ways that black and white women were. However, she also acknowledges that the perception of Asian women is subject to change ‘as the number of black-Asian relationships increase’ (Ibid: 186). In my own research, I found that a couple of the key informants or ‘representatives’ of ‘black communities’ held particular perceptions of Asian women. That is, they held the view that Asian women tended to fit into two categories: ‘the reserved’ (unlikely to pursue a sexual relationship with black men but likely to date white men) and ‘the rebels’ (likely to pursue a sexual relationship with black men) where I was perceived as the latter given the topic of my research.

In Alexander’s case, it is gender, and not ‘race’ that constrained aspects of her research. She admits that she was regarded as the group’s possession when she accompanied them to public outings which meant being prohibited
her from speaking to other men in nightclubs. She further states of her
relationship with the men, ‘We were about the same age and, having
negotiated a compromise on my dress sense (slightly shorter skirts, but no
tighter tops) they were happy to include me in their lives as a matter of
routine’ (Alexander 1996b).

Alexander’s experience of conducting her research demonstrates three
points. First of all, care was taken to ensure that Alexander was able to carry
out her research in a safe, supportive environment as the men in her study
looked out for her whenever she accompanied them to clubs. Second, her
style of dress and behaviour around other men were regulated by her
respondents in accordance with their norms of how women her age should
look and act. Finally, this demonstrates that participants too are active
agents in the research process and inevitably the behaviour of Alexander’s
respondents towards her, at different points, constrained aspects of
Alexander’s research.

Back (1993: 218) argues that ‘It is not a matter of trying to ‘overcome’ the
effects which the gender of the researcher has on a particular field situation,
but to explore how the participant observer’s gender identity becomes
intertwined with the process of knowing’ (1993: 218). The same may be
argued in respect of sexual and racial identities. According to Gill and
Maclean (2002), female researchers tend to be more aware of gendered
power relations between the researcher and the researched as this can also
impact on how their sexuality is perceived and sometimes judged negatively.
Going by my own experience, I felt that as the number of black-Asian relationships have increased over the years, so has the racial/stereotyping linked to this interaction. I was therefore aware that naïveté would not serve as a convincing trait.\textsuperscript{39} Prior to my fieldwork, a black male friend had offered some words of advice: ‘Remember, you’re researching black men, so no one is going to think you’re naïve. And another thing, you can’t dress like you normally do’.\textsuperscript{40}

Turning to the issue of how the researcher should dress in the field, Coffey has stressed the importance of women dressing appropriately in such circumstances. She argues that appropriate dress plays a vital ‘part of the impression management that is carried out during access negotiations and the establishment of acceptable field role(s)’ (1999: 64). When attending formal events and interviewing ‘representatives’ of ‘the black community,’ for example, I tended to dress conservatively, wearing mostly dark colours. My dress, though, was more casual when undertaking the in-depth interviews. However, dressing appropriately as well as conducting research in a professional manner does not always free one of unwanted attention and for a young, Indian, female researcher unforeseen incidents\textsuperscript{41} can still occur. In

\textsuperscript{39} Some male researchers, for example, point to how adopting the role of a naïve researcher has enabled smoother interactions with the respondents that would not have otherwise been possible if they had set themselves up as ‘experts’ or just simply ‘trying to fit in’ (Venkatesh 2008; Thurnall-Read 2010).

\textsuperscript{40} In other words, I would need to dress more conservatively rather than the usual casual ‘student’ attire.

\textsuperscript{41} Some female researchers have suggested wearing a wedding band in the hope of reducing any sexual tension during fieldwork (Warren and Rasmussen 1997). While I considered this option, I eventually decided not to do so; not only because the idea of concocting a story about a fictitious husband seemed unreasonable but also because (as Dubisch warns) attempting to conform to multiple identities within the field can create additional problems. In Dubisch’s (1995: 37) words, ‘In these multiple contexts, I found
this respect, the negative stereotyping around ‘race’, gender, age and sexual status confirmed the underlying tensions in the research process, as I will discuss in Part B of this chapter.

Given the problems highlighted above, I subscribe to neither an insider nor an outsider position because as Arendell remarks ‘the men assigned different and shifting identities to me’ (1997: 356). Thus, it is this very fluidity in the interaction between the researcher and the researched which problematizes the stability of the roles of insider and outsider. As Becker (2000: 250) observes, ‘to say someone is black or white or Asian does not tell you much about that person anyway’. How ‘interaction is built up from moment to moment’, in the research journey, is what matters (ibid). It is this type of iterative interaction that I now turn to in describing my position and relationships with participants in the field.

PART B
METHODS

This part of the chapter explains the methods that were used in this project. With the purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of black British men and the alternative ways in which black masculinities are constructed, the research consisted of six phases:

myself being multiple people, and I was often confused which person was the appropriate one, and perhaps more importantly – which one was really me'.
• a survey of 110 black British male respondents using a self-completion questionnaire;

• participant observation (participant-as-observer);

• eight semi-structured interviews with ‘representatives’ of ‘the black community’, carried out with the aim of building a more coherent picture of the representation of black men in British society;

• a collection of 21 various visual images featuring black males in popular culture and mass media which will be illustrated in this chapter;

• 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals. It should be noted that the survey in phase one was completed by all 20 participants prior to the interviews and that the visual images chosen in phase four in accordance with the survey findings were used as stimuli material;

• eight out of the 20 interviewees from phase five took part in a self-identity exercise in which they provided three to five images of places, objects, and influential figures who they felt represented their identities, and/or their ways of thinking, and/or the realities of their lived existence. These images were received via email, alongside an explanation of why these particular images had been selected by the participants.

In what follows, each of the six different phases listed above will be explained in the order in which they have been outlined above. As Burgess (1984: 31) asserts, it is misleading to present a neat and tidy account of data collection when in reality the process ‘is very different and infinitely more complex’. The following discussion of the data collection is two-fold in its purpose: firstly, I describe how I carried out my research, using multiple methods of data collection and outline how it helped to meet the objectives of the thesis. Secondly, I address the issues which arose from using this particular method, and discuss how these issues were managed. I present
the research journey in this way in order to emphasize that collecting data involves a ‘social process whereby interaction between the researcher and researcher will directly influence the course’ that the project takes (ibid: 31).

Phase One: Survey Questionnaire

While the purpose of the survey was to help identify the types of images suitable to use in the in-depth interviews, the other task involved devising questions that would be salient to my target sample. I therefore conducted brain-storming sessions to help decide what questions would be suitable to ask black men. As Denscombe (2007: 18) argues, brainstorming with participants can be an invaluable tool for improving the ‘validity of a subsequent survey questionnaire that produces quantitative data’. I held two brain-storming sessions with black men: one in London and the other in Bristol. Each session lasted one hour. The London session was organized by a black male friend at his house, during which a total of five black men (including my friend) took part. All men were aged between 25 and 30 and in full-time employment. The second session was held in a public library in Bristol’s city centre with four black males aged between 18 and 21 who I had identified through existing personal networks. All of these men were studying part-time at college, and two of them were also in part-time jobs.

In each of the sessions, the men debated which images of black men they considered to be the most common or otherwise in Britain, and provided reasons for their choices. The London group felt that the image of an unintelligent black male was the most common in British society, whereas the Bristol group concluded that it was of criminals. These sessions took
place against the backdrop of widely publicized concerns about on-going violent crime, with Britain’s media implicating black males as the main victims and perpetrators. The participants of these sessions felt it was imperative to ask questions about representations of black men in Britain’s media and popular culture. In their view, questions about media representation would help explore not only how black males saw themselves and one another, but also how they felt that British society as a whole views them. Following the sessions and subsequent consultation with my tutors, a total of 20 survey questions were devised (see Appendix A).

**Design of the self-completion questionnaire**

As Bryman observes, an attractively laid out survey is important to achieve a good response rate (2004: 137). One of the ways to achieve this is to start the survey with questions that are easy to answer, such as age or marital status. Complex first questions that require a lot of thinking or that appear too personal tend to result in lower or no response rates (Alexander 1996a: 24). In the case of this survey, the layout was as follows:

Questions 1-10 comprised personal factual questions such as age, marital status, education and occupation. This first segment was to showcase that there was great variation in terms of education and employment in the men that were surveyed.

Questions 11-15 asked participants about the key features characterizing the perception of black males in contemporary Britain. Subsequently, it was the data obtained from this set of questions, particularly questions 11 and 12 that helped with the choice of photographs as well as the order in which photographs were presented, as I discuss later in the chapter.
Questions **16-20** were about the personal lives and experiences of the participants, including questions around work and personal relationships.

Most of the survey consisted of closed questions. One advantage of using closed questions is that the questions are easier to answer than open-ended questions and in turn the survey can be completed more quickly. Clear instructions were given throughout the survey, informing the respondents that almost all of the questions could be answered by simply placing a tick next to the appropriate answer. Another advantage of using closed questions is that the answers can be pre-coded and inputted into computer software programmes such as statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS), thereby making it easier for computer-aided analysis.42

A third advantage of closed questions is that they can ‘enhance the comparability of answers’ (Bryman 2004: 148). For example, question 17 in the survey asks the respondents: ‘In which areas of your life do you feel you have experienced racial discrimination?’ They were then asked to tick all the boxes that were relevant to them, which included: education, employment, social life, private life, as a health service user, the criminal justice system, or none of the above. I was able to compare not only the areas in which racial discrimination had been experienced but also in which area(s) it had been experienced the most frequently across responses and was subsequently able to identify patterns that could be addressed in the in-depth interviews.

42 All of the survey results were input into SPSS and those most relevant to the purposes of this study are featured in Chapters Four and Five in the form of illustrations.
As it was important to identify emerging patterns from the survey, yes/no questions were avoided wherever possible. The thesis is concerned with developing an in-depth understanding of how black male identities are crafted according to black British men. Questions that require a yes or no answer do not reveal much about how a respondent feels about a particular topic. For example, question 19 in the survey asks respondents ‘How satisfied are you in these aspects of your life?’ The list of aspects includes family, friendships, education, career, health, relationship with spouse/partner, self. The responses required were set in a Likert scale whereby each respondent was required to rate his level of satisfaction for each of the aspects out of 5, where 1 was very dissatisfied and 5 was very satisfied. Thus, framing question responses in a Likert scale was useful in terms of understanding which areas might warrant further attention in the in-depth interviews. In turn, the responses in the interviews would build a more coherent picture of why the respondents might feel more satisfied in one aspect of their lives than in others. In this way, attempts were made to understand how certain areas of their lives impacted on their sense of ‘self’ more than others.

Having designed the survey, an opportunity presented itself when a gate-keeper, Thomas Crown. Thomas offered to help with the implementation of the survey. Gatekeepers, as Burgess (1984: 48) describes, ‘are those individuals in an organisation that have the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations for the purposes of research’. As a key member of a black-led organization, Thomas’s help was an advantage, as he could enable
access to a considerable number of potential participants. At the same time, Thomas also had questions for black men that he wanted included in the survey. Upon his suggestion, I noted down the questions that he wanted me to include:

Are your children born from the same woman?
If your children do not live with you, are you in a position where there are difficulties in getting access?
If you are married, are you happy in your marriage?
Describe how you feel about your marriage.
When was the last time you had sex with your wife?
How often do you have sex with your wife?
Have you ever had an extra-marital relationship or are you thinking of having one?

My initial reaction to these questions was one of shock. The questions appeared to be based on negative stereotypes of black males, particularly the ideas that black males father children from multiple partners and that they are incapable of sustaining monogamous relationships with women. There was also the ethical dimension of these types of question to consider, as it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that they do not 'intrude into areas which are believed to be private' (Bulmer 2001: 50). I informed Thomas that perhaps the respondents would consider the questions 'too personal', but he insisted that as someone on the 'inside' the questions were appropriate.
The dilemma posed was how to challenge Thomas’ views, given that as a black man, he claimed the status of ‘insider’. Relations of power between the gate-keeper and the researcher can present a fundamental challenge in the research process and these relations cannot be taken for granted as they are always in a state of ‘negotiation and renegotiation’ (Burgess 1984: 45). I later notified Thomas that his questions raised an ethical dilemma, as they were ‘too personal’ and I therefore could not include them in the survey. This was a difficult situation because of the strong possibility that he would withdraw from helping. However, he still agreed to assist, stating ‘well, it’d be too late for me to say no given that you’ve put so much work into it’.

**Survey implementation**

In total, 110 black British men participated in the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was first distributed at a seminar in Stone Park in the East Midlands\(^{43}\) with the help of Thomas Crown. The survey was also distributed at events 3, 4, 8, 11 and 12, all of which are highlighted in Table 3.1, at which the target sample was present. It was not convenient to approach people for survey questionnaires during an event, as quite often, the events consisted of a series of debates. Thus, I often arrived early or stayed behind afterwards to approach potential participants. In total, 12 surveys were carried out in these locations. Some of the participants also agreed to take part in the in-depth interviews. Most survey questionnaires however, took place at ‘street’ level in London and Bristol as I will discuss further in the subsection below.

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\(^{43}\) The exact location of the seminar is not provided, in order to ensure anonymity of the organizers as well as the survey respondents that attended this event.
Survey implementation – stone park

The purpose of the seminar at Stone Park was for black British men (predominantly of Caribbean descent) to gather together and discuss their views concerning ‘the black community’. The men attending the seminar arrived from different parts of the country, and the event itself was strictly for black males only. As women were not allowed at the event, Thomas distributed the surveys on my behalf. My responsibility was to deliver 220 surveys to the venue prior to the event and collect them once the seminar was finished so that I was not seen by any of the respondents. While over 200 men attended the seminar, 70 men participated in the survey. I was only able to use 45 of these as 25 of the survey questionnaires had been inadequately answered. Also, for reasons unknown, none of the men were willing to participate in interviews in spite of the fact that some of them had provided their contact details, and had thus suggested interest.  

Following the event, several calls and emails were sent to a number of black-led organisations and charities in London. In order to establish a level of trust and support, I had intended to discuss the research project face-to-face with the coordinators of these organisations before negotiating access to black males for the survey questionnaire as well as for individual interviews. Although I was successful in speaking with two directors, they did not want to assist further. At this stage of the research, I reconsidered my ‘field tactics’

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44 While it is accepted that formal access is fundamental, gaining access is also a political process. The coordinators of an organization, Thomas in this case, may seek to influence the ways in which the research takes place, and their endorsement of a project can influence respondents’ decision to or not to co-operate. Following the event at Stone Park, Thomas did not want to assist further in the research and perhaps the main reason for this was because his questions had not been included in the survey.
(Burgess 1984: 47) and the decision was taken to conduct surveys in London and Bristol at ‘street’ level.

Survey implementation – at ‘street’ level

Upon approaching potential participants in the ‘street’, I introduced myself as a University student at Warwick and informed them of the survey. To ensure that the correct sample was obtained, it was explained that the survey was specifically for black British men of Caribbean descent and they were then asked if they met these criteria. Of the men who did, only a few declined to take part citing that they were too busy but otherwise most were willing to participate. The advantage of personally distributing surveys is that the researcher is present should the respondents seek clarification regarding a question. This approach also enables the researcher to check that all the questions have been answered, and that none have been left out. The details of conducting surveys on a ‘street’ level are considered below, beginning with the journey in Bristol.

Having existing networks in Bristol enabled me to carry out surveys with a few black men. Once the ‘snowballing’ method had been exhausted, ‘accidental’ sampling was adopted. Sarantakos (2005: 163) describes this type of sample as ‘those people who ‘accidentally’ come into contact with the researcher’. In these instances, the researcher stands at any given location in a street and asks ‘people passing by to take part in the study’ (ibid: 164). I spent about six hours at two different locations within the City Centre; firstly, at the main entrance of Broadmead Shopping Centre and secondly, at
College Green. More time was spent at the latter, as more black men passed by here than at Broadmead.

The surveys carried out in London took place over a period of five days. At first, this was in areas close to my living accommodation. This included Euston Road (near the British Library), Islington (N1 Shopping Centre) and Oxford Circus (at the intersection of Regent Street and Oxford Street). Again, the method of ‘accidental’ sampling was used here. While some surveys were conducted on Euston Road as well as Islington, it proved difficult in Oxford Circus. Not many black men passed by and when one or two did, they were too busy. Upon approaching a potential respondent, he informed me that he was African and went on to offer some advice: ‘you need to go to Brixton, you’ll find loads of the Caribbean brothers there. You’re not gonna find many that come to the West End’. From this point on, given that there is a stronger presence of black men of Caribbean descent in Brixton I relied upon convenience sampling and indeed, Brixton ensured a good response rate. Some of the Brixton respondents suggested Elephant and Castle and Wood Green as other ‘convenient’ areas and so some survey questionnaires were conducted outside Elephant and Castle tube station and at the main entrance of Wood Green Shopping Centre. A couple of the survey respondents advised me to avoid areas such as Lewisham and Hackney, as they had heard that ‘those areas’ were ‘rough’ because of ‘gang’ crime.

In total, 39 survey questionnaires were carried out on the ‘streets’ of London and 14 in Bristol, with many respondents stating that they had enjoyed

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45 College Green is a public open space in Bristol
answering the questions.\textsuperscript{46} These interactions suggest that a good rapport had developed between the researcher and the researched. However, at points in the research I was called to challenge my own assumptions and biases. An incident in Bristol serves as an example here. On the same day that the surveys were to be conducted in Bristol, \textit{Metro} newspaper featured a report on a ‘gang’-related incident on its front page. Pictures of the ‘gang’ members, who were three young black men, had also been provided. As a result of reading this report, upon seeing a group of five young black men later on that day at College Green I hesitated in approaching them, perceiving them as threatening. One of them had a similar hairstyle to one of the ‘gang’ members pictured in the newspaper. While continuing to observe the group, I contemplated whether or not to approach them. Feeling guilty about making assumptions about them based on what I had seen in the newspaper, I decided to approach them about the survey. With the exception of one, all were willing to participate. The man with the ‘hairstyle’ assisted further by encouraging black males passing by to take part in the survey.

During this period of fieldwork, I attended events (as mentioned in Part A of this chapter) in which the question of who constitutes positive black role models for black boys and young black men in Britain were central issues for debate and discussion (such as events 2, 3, 4 , 9, and 14 in Table 3.1), and in turn these debates and discussions informed my analysis. The recent publication of the REACH report (DCLG 2007) too re-opened the debate about role-models. As previously mentioned, these and other types of events

\textsuperscript{46} When participating in the survey questionnaire, a few of the respondents pointed out that they had received more racism from Asians (namely Indians) than from people of other backgrounds.
(such as 1 and 13 in Table 3.1) facilitated opportunities for meeting potential participants. Equally important, these places are also where I conducted participant observations. I will now explain this method.

**Phase Two: Participant Observation**

Table 3.1 shows the 17 events that I attended between May 2008 and May 2009. Some of the participants of this study were present at particular events, thus enabling me to gain insights into how they were responding to the current debates around black masculinities. By observing the reactions of some of the ‘representatives’ and the ‘individuals’, I was able to examine the similarities and dissimilarities in their opinions. This informed my analysis of the different ways in which black men respond to dominant constructions of black masculinities. In this way, the method of participant observation created ‘an opportunity to collect different versions of events that are available’ (Burgess 1984: 79).

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<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>08 May 2008</td>
<td>Out Spoken Productions Presents: ‘Labelled’</td>
<td>Angel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Lilian Baylis Theatre</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11 May 2008</td>
<td>Richard Blackwood: Real Talk Seminars (Choice FM) ‘Youth Crisis: what are we going to?’</td>
<td>Bayswater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3*</td>
<td>02 June 2008</td>
<td>All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Youth Affairs, Foyers, and Child &amp; Youth Crime, House of Commons Chair: Dawn Butler MP</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4*</td>
<td>08 June 2008</td>
<td>Richard Blackwood: Real Talk Seminars (Choice FM) ‘Lost Generation: Can we save them?’</td>
<td>Bayswater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20 June 2008</td>
<td>‘You Decide’ Youth of Britain short film, British Institute, Funded by Harrow Youth Offending Team</td>
<td>Waterloo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>01 July 2008</td>
<td>Disarming Britain: a debate on tackling street weapons, Channel 4, Chair – Jon Snow</td>
<td>St. James Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8*</td>
<td>13 July 2008</td>
<td>Richard Blackwood: Real Talk Seminars (Choice FM) ‘Real Talk: Relationships – does love and respect still exist?’</td>
<td>Bayswater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15 July 08</td>
<td>REACH (DCLG) – Black Male Role Models Recruitment Launch – also present, Rt. Hon Hazel Blears (Labour)</td>
<td>London Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>16 July 08</td>
<td>Super diversity: TV’s newest Reality–looking at diversity around ethnic people in the media, Speaker: Trevor Phillips Channel 4</td>
<td>St. James Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12*</td>
<td>10 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Richard Blackwood: Real Talk Seminars – Choice FM Knife Crime: It doesn’t have to happen, you can make it stop</td>
<td>Bayswater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>17 Oct 2008</td>
<td>Launch: 10th Anniversary, Black Film-maker (BFM) International Film Festival, City Hall opening with a screening of The Disciple by Rodney Charles</td>
<td>London Bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>03 Nov 08</td>
<td>Invitation to REACH Role Models Announcement, Hosted by: Kwame Kwei-Armah &amp; Rt Hon Hazel Blears (Labour – Communities and Local Government)</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>13 Nov 08</td>
<td>Crème de la Crème (Black Organisation) Promoting a united front within the African and Caribbean Community</td>
<td>Shepherd’s Bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>24 Jan 2009</td>
<td>The National Black Boys Can Association National Conference for Black Boys and their Parents/Carers</td>
<td>St. James Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to attending some debates at the House of Commons, I also attended debates initiated by members of ‘the black community’, where ongoing violent crime in London was the chief topic of discussion (see events 2, 4 and 12). What was particularly interesting to observe at the black initiated debates is how the intervals of any given event created a space whereby (black) people promoted businesses and the organisations/charities in which they were involved. Some black male attendees distributed flyers, which were also handed out to me. Sarantakos (2005: 234) argues that the method of participant observation also enables ‘the collection of a wide range of information, even when this information is thought to be irrelevant at the time of study’. What is perhaps most intriguing is how this additional information in the form of flyers as well as the words that the people were using led me to look more closely into these particular organisations by conducting internet searches. These searches in turn led me to the names of other organisations. Phrases such as ‘to inspire’, ‘role-models’ and ‘empowerment programmes’ were used quite frequently by some members of ‘the black community’; terms that could also be found in the REACH report (DCLG 2007) initiated by the Government. Collecting this information enabled me to identify key patterns in the ways in which black men as well as members of

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>07 May 2009</td>
<td>Tackling Race Inequalities, Hilton Metropole Hotel Communities and Local Government (Labour)</td>
<td>Edgware</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 List of events attended in 2008/09 during fieldwork (*indicates events where I was able to distribute surveys or arrange interviews with participants).
'the black community' have reacted to the particular constructions around black masculinities in the recent years. The responses of black men and 'the black community' to dominant constructions of black masculinities are addressed extensively in the first of the analysis chapters, (Chapter Four, Part B; see also Table 4.5). In addition, my participation at such events led me to consider the wider implications of this study which are beyond the scope of this project but nevertheless, offer insight into other under-researched areas within the field of black masculinities. This points to another advantage of participant observation, namely that it can ‘also generate questions that can be used in future research’ (Burgess 1984: 79).

The discussion so far has focused on how participant observation was useful to the investigation. It is also important to note the type of role that I occupied at these events: that of the participant-as-observer. This role ‘involves situations where the researcher participates as well as observes by developing relationships with informants’ (ibid: 81). In this sense, the role allows for flexibility as the researcher’s identity is known and the researcher has the freedom to approach and speak with whoever she or he believes to be ‘relevant to the investigation’ (ibid: 82). While attending events I sometimes met people who had been present at previous debates. This enabled smoother interactions and for a rapport to develop. As they were already familiar with me, they were then happy to introduce me to other people relevant to the research project. In this way, these events also represent places in which attempts were made to gain trust.

47 The implications of this research have been discussed in the concluding chapter of this study.
However, as ‘observers are part of the context that is being observed’ (ibid: 80) they too need to demonstrate awareness of how they might be ‘seen’ by others and how this influences the research. While I tentatively took on the participant-as-observer role, it would be misleading to suggest that this remained consistent as that would oversimplify the different interactions that occurred at each event. Burgess (1984: 88) argues the very title ‘participant-as-observer’ implies ‘that the researcher simultaneously goes through similar phases with all members of the situation studied. An ideal type of situation is presented rather than an actual situation’. Moreover, there are factors such as age and class which will influence the research, and in this instance, ‘race’ plays an important part. Admittedly, some conversations were difficult to manage at events, as I suspected that I occupied the role of an uninvited guest.

An example of when ‘race’ emerged as a barrier was when a ‘representative’ enabled me access to a debate at the House of Commons (event 3), as well as introducing me to Yvonne Johnson, another ‘representative’ for a black-led organization. I hoped that I could interview her and/or she could assist in introducing me to potential participants for the in-depth interviews. Upon our introduction, Yvonne asked me, ‘What are you?’ Unclear as to what she meant by this, and assuming that she was asking ‘what are you doing here?’ I explained that I was a student as well as the reasons for carrying out the research. Yvonne again asked the same question, and again, I explained the purpose of the study but this time in more detail.48 Yvonne asked the same

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48Hammersley (1992: 32) argues that when researchers are ‘aware of the marginal status’ that they occupy in particular settings, it can feel necessary to explain more rigorously why one is there.
question for the third time and at this point I informed her that I did not understand her question to which she (slowly) replied ‘I said… what … are…you…coz you ain’t black’. Upon learning that I was ‘Indian’ Yvonne looked at me scornfully before walking away. While being tempted to leave, I nevertheless stayed to continue with the research by locating other potential interviewees.

Altogether, 28 black British men of Caribbean\textsuperscript{49} descent took part in the interviews. Eight of these men have been identified as the ‘representatives’ (aged between 38 and 55) and the other men make up the individuals. I turn first to the interviews in which the ‘representatives’ are considered.

**Phase Three: Interviews With The ‘Representatives’**

For the purposes of this study, the term ‘representatives’ refers to those who claim ‘insider’ understanding and ‘expert’ knowledge of ‘the black community’, and as such, hold important positions of responsibility in black-led organizations. In Britain, there has been a growth in black-led organizations and/or charities set up specifically to enhance the educational and economic opportunities available to black boys and men, as well to create space for the establishment of social networks. These types of organizations involved ‘representatives’ who can be ‘considered influential, prominent, or well informed’ (Rossman and Rallis 2003: 192) about the experiences of black people and in particular black men in British society. It was key, therefore, to understand what roles such ‘representatives’ play in

\textsuperscript{49}More specifically, all the men who took part in the interviews had both parents from the Caribbean.
enhancing the social, educational, economic, political participation of blacks in Britain and to explore what strategies they had utilised in order to counteract dominant (and predominantly negative) constructions of black males. In the majority of the cases, initial contact with the ‘representatives’ was established via telephone calls and email whereby I sent a letter explaining my research and the purpose of my study. I also relied on ‘snowballing’ techniques, where my respondents facilitated access to events (see Table 3.1 for the list of events attended) so that I could reach my target sample of ‘representatives’ (as well as that of black male individuals to be interviewed).

Two ‘representatives’ were interviewed in their places of work, while six interviews took place in various public places, with each interview lasting between 30 minutes to one hour. With the exception of one, all the ‘representatives’ felt uncomfortable with a Dictaphone being used and so hand-written notes had to suffice. At the same time, it would have been difficult to rely on the use of a Dictaphone, as the interviews were typically held in noisy places. While quieter locations would have been preferred, most ‘representatives’ emphasised that they were very busy and so the majority had allocated time for an interview in between meetings that they were attending in and around the City of London. While most of the interviews with the ‘representatives’ were unproblematic, three interviews proved difficult. These interviews were abandoned when I realised that the ‘representatives’ were using the interview to interrogate me, which I shall illustrate with an example below.
I had met one of the ‘representatives’, Max Carlton, at a couple of the events and he stated that he was happy to participate in an interview. The interview took place in his office. However, five minutes after my arrival, Max stated, ‘You know, a couple of men have seen you at events and think you’re a wolf in sheep’s clothing’. Puzzled by his remark, he offered to elaborate: ‘Look at the way you’re doing research. You come to an event and talk to men, and then you probably ask for their contact details. I’m not saying you’re a whore, but it’s like those women who sleep with men for money – but you go after men for research. It kinda makes you a research hoe’. An argument ensued which led to the termination of the interview.

As a consequence of such instances, time was taken out from attending events as well as contacting ‘representatives’ in order to reflect upon how such occurrences could, if at all, be avoided. However, as Moreno (1995: 176-7) warns, ‘In the field it is not possible to maintain the fiction of a genderless self. In the field, one is marked’.

Eventually, I began contacting ‘representatives’ again as well as attending events. It was hoped that 10 interviews would be carried out in total but this was not possible due to difficulties in accessing individual experts who were able to commit their time or who were willing to participate in the study. In contrast, it was easier to establish contact with ‘individuals’. The method of photo elicitation may partially explain why it was easier to recruit individuals for interviews. According to Hurworth (2003: 3), the use of photographs is ‘preferable to conventional interviews for many participants’. Prior to the in-
depth interviews, some ‘individuals’ admitted to having agreed to the interviews because they were intrigued about the choice of method. Their participation was based on curiosity about the type of photographs that they would be asked to consider. On that note, I now move on to consider the collection of the photographs followed by a discussion on the in-depth interviews with individuals.

Phase Four: Collection Of Photographs (For Photo Elicited Data)
Although ‘not a homogenous set of practices’ (Prosser and Schwatz 1998: 124), photo elicitation has been described by Prosser and Schwatz ‘as a single set of photographs assembled by the researcher on the basis of prior analysis and selected with the assumption that the chosen images will have some significance for interviewees’ (ibid: 124). Images of black men in popular culture and the mass media were assembled using content available in the public domain, such as advertising material, books, magazines, newspapers, and images identified through Google. As briefly mentioned in Part A of this chapter, the images selected were predominantly current to ensure that they would have some significance for the interviewees. Moreover, I relied upon the survey findings (phase one) to help guide the selection process. While the survey results will be discussed in the analysis chapters (Chapters Four and Five), it is necessary to highlight some of the preliminary findings here, in order to demonstrate how the survey results influenced the choice of photographs.
The survey findings revealed the attributes that the respondents felt were most commonly and least commonly associated with black men in Britain. The most common attributes included: ‘rhythmic/musical’; ‘athletic’; ‘highly-sexed’, ‘muscular physique’; ‘physically well-endowed’; and ‘aggressive’. Images likely to pertain more to the physical attributes of black men, such as in sports or music, were easy to find (Figures 3.1 and 3.3). As mentioned throughout, this research took place against the backdrop of on-going violence in which black males were seen as the main victims and perpetrators and where there was a strong insinuation that black American music stars were promoting a ‘gangsta culture’. For this reason, images linked to these dominant views were also collected, not only to convey how common these images are in mainstream society but also to reflect the ‘current’ climate in Britain (Figures 3.4 and 3.13). Amidst all of this, images of (the soon to be elected) Barack Obama were also a regular feature in Britain’s media and so this image was chosen to depict an ‘uncommon image’ (Figure 3.21). The survey findings revealed that the attributes that the respondents felt were least commonly associated with black men were ‘loyal to family’, ‘hard-working’, ‘intelligent’, ‘goal-driven’, ‘successful’, ‘honest’ and ‘career-oriented’.

Aside from the image of Obama, attempting to find images which conveyed a more private trait of a (black) individual, like ‘loyal to family’, was far more difficult to obtain. I spent a considerable amount of time looking through magazines and newspapers in search of such images. When ‘less common images’ were eventually found, these involved black boys within educational
settings, mainly schools, rather than black men (Figures 3.15 and 3.16). Finding an image of ‘a black family’ in a British magazine was a challenging task. An image meeting these criteria was eventually found in an American magazine (Figure 3.19).

Images of black men that were deemed by survey respondents to be neither necessarily ‘very common’ or ‘very uncommon’ were also chosen in order to avoid all the images seeming ‘stereotypical’ and more importantly, to ensure some diversity amid the two extremes of ‘very common’ and ‘very uncommon’ (Figures 3.10 and 3.14). Collecting all of three types of photographs (that is, very common, very uncommon, and neither of the above) was an important phase of the research, as these ‘images’ were salient in understanding how black men might be respond to, internalise, negotiate with, re-work, or resist the images in accordance with their own lives.

In total, 21 photographs were selected as a means of setting the foundations for the interviews through the photo elicitation method.\(^{50}\) This was considered to be a manageable sample to ensure there was enough time for the images be looked at, considered, and discussed. As the purpose of photo elicitation was to encourage reflexive thinking, a large sample may have proved distracting, as the respondents would not have had enough time to carefully consider the images. I now move on to discuss the photo-elicited interviews.

\(^{50}\) I do not analyze the images in any detail in this study. The purpose of this study is not to provide a content analysis of the images, as this would mean entering into a debate ‘around theories about representational practices of stereotyping’ (Hall 1997: 225). Neither is the aim to analyze the different ways that these images could be interpreted, but instead to explore how they are interpreted by the interviewees.
Phase Five: Photo Elicited Interviews

The 20 individuals are black men aged between 18 and 45. I chose this age range because, as discussed in the previous chapter, popular stereotypes of black males (e.g. ‘super stud’ or ‘bestial black’) pertain typically to young black male adults. Images depicting a black male as a ‘super-stud’ do not usually refer to black boys or older black men. In order to maintain a manageable sample, I felt that up to 20 was an adequate number of individuals to interview. A larger sample was likely to lead to difficulties in exploring, in any depth, their experiences of living in the UK because of the time involved and the volume of data that would have been produced. The purpose of these interviews was not to obtain snap shot views of the topics discussed, but rather to build an in-depth understanding of respondents’ views and experiences.

Initial contact with the individuals was established mainly through the snowballing technique, whereby respondents were encouraged to identify other individuals who would be interested in taking part in the study. Some respondents also informed me of events that I could attend, to enable me to meet more potential respondents, some of whom also agreed to take part in the research. Through the ‘snowballing’ method I was able to secure 10 interviews. Other respondents included two acquaintances and four men I met via friends. Lastly, four of the respondents were men I met when conducting the survey at ‘street’ level who agreed to contribute further to the study by participating in the individual interviews. Table 3.2 provides a profile of these 20 participants. Given that this study places emphasis on the
‘individuality’ of a black male, it seems fitting to provide some background concerning these men rather than just limiting it to information on the number of men that were interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and age group</th>
<th>Educational / Professional Qualifications</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Some individuality about the participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerome Taylor* (18-25)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>University Student Employed (part-time)</td>
<td>Wants to work for the MI5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Robin (18-25)</td>
<td>NVQ, Gym Instructor</td>
<td>Gym Instructor</td>
<td>Ideal woman: Jennifer Lopez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley Hunt (36-45)</td>
<td>A levels</td>
<td>Business Owner (not specified)</td>
<td>Enjoys volunteering work and working with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Wallace* (26-35)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Director (self-employed)</td>
<td>Likes to wear bright coloured trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leroy Brown* (26-35)</td>
<td>A levels</td>
<td>Director (self-employed)</td>
<td>Favourite Film: Matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Warwick* (36-45)</td>
<td>Master’s Degree Certificate in Management Studies</td>
<td>Financial Consultant (self-employed)</td>
<td>Likes organising networking evening for like-minded people (in business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Tosh* (26-35)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Youth coordinator (full-time) Self-employed (part-time)</td>
<td>Likes to collect photographs and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian Julio Pablo (26-35)</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>I.T. Financial Consultant</td>
<td>Influences: Father and 50 Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Che* (26-35)</td>
<td>GCSE’s / Professional</td>
<td>Music Artist (self-employed)</td>
<td>Favourite Country: Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Hunt* (18-25)</td>
<td>Postgraduate Diploma</td>
<td>Sales Advisor</td>
<td>Influences: Uncle, Will Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name and age group</td>
<td>Educational / Professional Qualifications</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Some individuality about the participants</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier Freeman (26-35)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Enquiry Officer for Metropolitan Police Student (part-time)</td>
<td>Wants to become a writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Burton (18-25)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Television Researcher/Freelance Journalist (self-employed)</td>
<td>Has a big collection of hats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Jacobs (26-35)</td>
<td>GNVQ</td>
<td>Stockroom manager (PT) Self-employed (PT)</td>
<td>Likes attending political debates and does a lot of voluntary work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Branson (18-25)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Undergraduate Student</td>
<td>Influences: Barack Obama / Richard Branson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm Littleton* (26-35)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Caseworker</td>
<td>Always has a toothpick in his mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Castle (18-25)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>University Student Employed (part-time)</td>
<td>Goes to church every Sunday with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian Anthony (36-45)</td>
<td>GCSE’s</td>
<td>Music Artist Publishing (self-employed)</td>
<td>Does not believe in working for someone else – happy being his own boss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxor-Cephren* (18-25)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Bank Clerk</td>
<td>Enjoys drawing sketches in his spare time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Lewis (18-25)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>Likes to listen to Grime, and enjoys studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Pryce King’s Cross (36-45)</td>
<td>A levels</td>
<td>Library Assistant</td>
<td>Loves spending time with his wife and five children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates those participants who also took part in the reflexive photography*

Table 3.2 In-depth (photo elicited interviews) – Research Participants Profiles
The majority of the interviews took place in a library in Islington, where I was able to secure a quiet study room. Some interviews took place in the interviewee’s place of work, all within easy reach of central London, and in one case, the interview took place in the respondent’s home. The length of interviews varied between one to two and a half hours. Before each interview began, participants were asked if they had any questions. I thought it was important to do this in case anyone was curious as to why an ‘Indian’ female researcher was carrying out a study on black men. Only a few of the participants questioned my motivation, and if so, I did not hesitate to explain. Following this, the format of the interview was explained to the participants. I informed them that while I had topics that I wished to cover, these would be put to them at any given point in the interview while they were viewing the photographs. I also explained where I had obtained the photographs from, and the number and nature of the images (i.e. 21 images of black males). They were also made aware that the images were numbered from 1 – 21 (Figures 3.1 – 3.21 for the purpose of this chapter) and would be shown in that order. Each participant was then made aware that one of the images contained sexually explicit content (Figure 3.6) and that if this made them uncomfortable the image would be excluded. No one asked for the image to be excluded. As one of the participants, Peter Warwick, remarked ‘I’m a grown man. I think I can handle it’.

While a Dictaphone was used to record the sessions, there was little if any indication of what the researcher sees, or feels, and so note-taking proved to be useful, especially in recording the observations of how the photographs
were being seen by the participants, which was unique to each individual. In conventional interviewing methods, researchers are more likely to make brief notes, but when interviewing with photographs, researchers can record observations that are slightly more detailed as it is less likely to distract participants who are immersed in looking at the images before them. I considered it important to record this information, as at times people can become so immersed in talking or listening to others that we can lose sight of how much can be gained from looking.

As Banks (2001: 87) observes, photo elicitation is a seemingly ‘straightforward method to understand and to utilize’. The use of photographs can lead to smoother interactions between the researcher and the researched than other methods because ‘direct eye contact need not be maintained, but instead interviewee and interviewer can both turn to the photographs as a kind of neutral third party’ (ibid: 88). The images were shown one by one to the participants, and in each case, the image would remain beside the respondent should they at any point want to go back to it later to make any further comments. Initially, most participants described the images before them in an unemotional way. However, as time went on, images for most of the participants became more challenging, in which case they admitted that the photographs had triggered an ‘intense involvement’ on their part and that this had not been anticipated. In a sense, the use of photographs stimulated the participants to thoughtfully consider their lives, their experiences and the meanings they gave to their sense of ‘self.’ Photo elicitation and the interactive probing involved in this respect ‘is not always
so straightforward in practice’ (ibid: 88). To demonstrate this point more fully, the different stages of the interviewing process is given more consideration alongside the illustrations.
Interviewing with photographs: initial stages

For the most part, the initial stages of the interview were relatively straightforward, as the participants were shown the ‘most common’ images of black men which included rhythmic/musical and athletic. Figures 3.1 – 3.5 are reflective of this. It was found useful to begin the discussions with photographs that were comprised of ‘everyday’ imagery as this helped to ease the participants into the interview.

Interviewing with photographs: middle stages

Interestingly, once the participants had gone through the phase of looking at the first few images, and had begun to look at the middle set of photographs (Figures 3.6 – 3.15). Most had begun re-arranging the photographs as a way of making sense of what they were being given to be seen. This, in turn, influenced how they chose to describe and thus analyze the images. Two of the participants went back to the beginning (Figure 3.1) to reconsider their
answers. Each participant admitted that it was uncommon for them to reflect on images that they were otherwise accustomed to seeing. Looking at the images enabled them to reflect on why they thought the way that they did and so ‘starting again’ proved useful in terms of ensuring more open, elaborate answers. Prosser argues that ‘the fragmentation of modern life makes it difficult to respond’ (2006: 5-6) to all of life’s complex detail, which in itself is a feature of contemporary life. However, the process of looking at photographs encouraged reflexive thinking in ways that a conventional verbal interview would not have done (ibid: 5-6). The advantage here is that the use of the photographs enabled the participants to give answers that had been ‘considered, rephrased, re-ordered, discussed and analyzed’ (Burgess 1984: 101), providing a more detailed account of their life experiences.

A notable feature in the interviews was how the images prompted a flood of memories for the men. Sentences beginning with ‘I remember when’; ‘I used to think like that but not anymore’; ‘This reminds me of a time when’; ‘Now I think’; ‘It’s changed since that time’; ‘This reminds me of (i.e. ex-girlfriend, friends, family)’ were common phrases amongst all participants. Discussing their memories of particular events, relationships and so forth proved to be useful, as phrases such as ‘I used to say that’ or ‘I used to be like that but not anymore’ enabled us to explore in the interviews what can be described as ‘self-reflexive moments’. These moments refer to instances that have played an influential part in shaping the way a participant thought about a particular topic and how that shaped an aspect of his life as a consequence. It is noteworthy that looking at the images also encouraged participants to
consider things that they felt remained unchanged. This invited questions around the perceived threat of black men, as well as racial discrimination (which I discuss later in Chapter 4, Part A).

While Figure 3.13 reflects the on-going violence reported by the media at the time the research took place, most participants had already acknowledged the topic before seeing this image. The different ways in which most of the participants reacted to this particular topic is telling. Indeed, participants’ reflections on this topic informed a significant part of the analysis.

Importantly, it is difficult for the researcher to position herself or himself as an outsider when participants do not treat them as such. In the case of my research, most participants did not converse about the on-going violence in London as though I was outside of it. Moreover, some did not perceive me as a researcher tackling ‘black issues’, as they did not see it as a black problem; rather, I was taking an interest in what was going on in ‘our’ society. These particular men acknowledged that like them I too was a ‘part’ of London, thus distinguishing me from ‘Asians’ from other parts of the country, or from abroad. For this reason, there seemed to be an expectation on their part that I was ‘clued’ up about certain incidents that were occurring in and around ‘our’ city. A number of the participants discussed this topic, often referring to particular instances with their sentences beginning ‘Oh yeah, you know that stabbing they reported the other day…’ It was important that I

51 During the course of fieldwork, I became more empathetic towards the participants. As more time was spent in the presence of black men I became more aware of the racial hostilities that can occur on a ‘street’ level on a daily basis. As Back (2005: 52; my emphasis) observes, ‘The fact that London is a multicultural and cosmopolitan city is now beyond question, but this brings no guarantees that one will not endure racial hostility’.
remained consistently up-to-date with the media coverage as the interview conversations would flow more easily when my response was ‘which one are you referring to?’ rather than answering ‘no’. While I am not ‘black’ or ‘male’, other characteristics such as geographical location and age significantly closed the distance between the researcher and the researched.

A further interesting aspect of the photo elicited interviews was how a range of emotions entered into the interviewing process, ranging from one extreme emotion to another: that is, from feeling a sense of racial injustice to feeling a sense of happiness (Figure 3.21). For Hurworth (2003: 3) the ‘unpredictable information’ that photo elicitation can produce is a key advantage. However, this can also create an atmosphere of discomfort for the interviewee as well as the interviewer. This occurred with one of the participants, Malcolm Littleton, who, upon seeing Figure 3.15 started discussing childhood memories of school. He later abruptly stopped mid conversation, and said,

‘I don’t like this coz I’m start having to talk about my past…I’ve got to go into things that I wouldn’t normally say…it’d be something that I would say to you on a more personal level, then you’d get to know me, then you actually start to know my character.

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52 While it was important that I remained up-to-date with the current news reports concerning the on-going violence in London, the example where I felt threatened by the young black male in Bristol (as discussed in phase one of the research) also demonstrates the drawbacks in ‘keeping up with the news’.

53 A discussion on racial discrimination will be developed more fully in the following chapter (Chapter 4 Part A).

54 These are examples of some of the emotions conveyed in the interviews.

55 Malcolm made additional remarks concerning this particular photograph. These are best represented in the following chapter (section 4.4) which is the first of the analysis chapters.
But then it’s just telling this stuff to someone and they just get up and go and I never see that person again and that’s a bit raw—I’m not saying—it just feels like—just a bit weird, like someone’s just done something with you, and then they just left like 100 quid on the bedside, it’s not a good feeling to have so I ain’t really gonna go into that too deep…”

It is instructive to quote Malcolm’s statement at length, because it says many things. Firstly, upon reflecting on his past, Malcolm suddenly became aware that he was revealing more than he had anticipated. He thus acknowledged the interviewee/interviewer relationship, backing away from discussing this particular topic any further. This awareness created a feeling of vulnerability, and therefore Malcolm was reluctant to engage in the topic further. Moreover, he equated this with a feeling of intimacy as he opened up about an important part of his life and felt that as he was unlikely to see the interviewer again, he would feel used.

The above incident also points to the power dynamics that can operate in the interview context. Power is significant here, as not only does power show itself in terms of how the ‘school system’ was for Malcolm, but also in how he feels vulnerable revealing his inner thoughts to someone he senses has the upper hand. This notion of power, control and ‘the systems’ in which power works was the most prominent feature in almost all the interviews and therefore forms a large part of the discussion in the analysis chapters. For now, I move on to outline the final stages of the interviews.
Interviewing with photographs: final stages

The last set of the images (Figures 3.16 – 3.21) reflect the type of images that the survey findings showed to be the least common in British society. At this stage, some of the participants commented on the order of the photographs. For example, Christopher Robin stated that he would have been ‘annoyed’ with me if I had shown these images at the beginning, as that would then mean that the interview would not have ended on a high note. In this way, some participants perceived these images as ‘positive’, in the sense that they pointed to black men being successful in different areas of their life. One participant mentioned that he would have been ‘disappointed’ if a picture of Obama had not featured, as he wanted to use the interview to explore what he described as his ‘real’ thoughts regarding Obama. Such instances suggested that the images had had an important impact in terms of how the participants had become deeply engaged in the process of looking at the photographs. Moreover, there was an expectation on their part that I show particular images, and some were conscious of the order in which these had been displayed.

However, for most participants, this stage marked the period in which they questioned the extent to which these ‘positive’ images were a ‘true’ reflection of how black men were perceived in British society and in turn, where they positioned themselves. In this sense, the images had prompted many of the participants to reflect on their experiences of being ‘black’ and ‘male’ in Britain, and assess the ways in which their experiences had changed over

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56 This is not to suggest that all participants perceived the image of Barack Obama as positive.
time. This process was thought-provoking for most participants. And this was illustrated in their responses as the interviews drew closer to the end. One participant described the interview process for himself as ‘very educational’, and another was uplifted by the emotions that the images had conjured up for him. The latter stated: ‘…I’m almost feeling a sense of…a sense of discovery in part…it’s really interesting actually…the experience of going through these [images] is a discovery…’ Lastly, one participant became deeply submerged in the process of looking at the photographs. His final comment was ‘you start to kind of look back and you start looking at things and you start seeing’. This illustrates how the images prompted events from the past to resurface, thus leading some of the participants to compare the past with where they felt they were in the present phase of their lives, and to make sense of their subject positions and everyday experiences.

As the interviews drew to a close and the Dictaphone was stopped, some participants used this space to reflect upon the rapport that had been established between the researcher and the researched. One participant, John Che, compared the interview to one that he had participated in a few days earlier. He stated that he preferred this one as I was perceived as someone ‘in the middle’ (neither black nor white) – not too close, but not too far either. Such an instance suggests that my status was neither that of an ‘insider’, nor of an ‘outsider’. After I pressed him further on why he preferred our interview, he commented on the ‘race’ of the other interviewer:
‘She was a black girl, and she was just acting like yeah, yeah I’ve heard you black men before. It’s like she knew what answers she wanted so she was asking the questions real fast you know what I’m saying. But yours was different, it went deep [pointing to the photographs] you know what I’m saying’.

On the one hand, John used the ‘race’ of both interviewers to distinguish why one interview was preferable over the other. On the other hand, he claimed that this particular interview ‘went deep’ because of the photographs, which begs the question of whether it was less about ‘who’ was carrying out the research than ‘how’ the research was conducted.

Following in-depth interviews, all 20 respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a reflexivity photography exercise, to which eight of them agreed. This is explained below.

**Phase Six: Reflexive Photography**

Initially, it was proposed that the participants would be provided with disposable cameras that they could use to capture images which they felt represented their sense of ‘self’. However, participants’ feedback about the use of disposable cameras was not encouraging. Most of the participants laughed at the thought of using disposable cameras, citing that disposable

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57It is worth noting that the phrase ‘you know what I’m saying’ can be taken to mean that people assume you understand what they are saying or are looking for confirmation that you understand what they are saying. Upon seeking clarification with John, he claimed that it was part of his speech as he had got into the habit of saying ‘you know what I’m saying’ after almost every sentence regardless of who he was speaking to and this was not his way of seeking clarification that the other person had understood him.
cameras were a thing of the past, with some questioning ‘who even uses them nowadays?’ or ‘do they even still make those?’ Some of the participants asked if they could take pictures on their phone, and then they would send the pictures to me via email. The overall concern was with privacy issues; that is, they did not want to take pictures of loved ones as the privacy of these people would be compromised. It became necessary, therefore, to devise an alternative strategy whereby the participants were asked instead to find images using the search engine in Google to illustrate their identities, what represented them, the ways they thought, and whom they regarded as influential figures.

The participants’ images were received by email, and were accompanied with the name that they had chosen for each image as well as text which explained what meanings these images had for them. The advantage of receiving these pictures accompanied with text via the internet is that not only are the participants given time to consider the images but the ‘quality of their answers might be improved as a result of them having time to think through the issues’ (Denscombe 2007: 188). While all eight participants sent the pictures via email, three of the participants preferred meeting in person, where they could discuss the images they had selected face-to-face. The participants also wanted reassurance that the photos would not be interpreted as encapsulating their entire sense of self because – as Christopher Wallace put it - there was ‘more to [them] than just a few photographs’. I assured them that this was noted, and that the purpose of

58 The images provided by the participants have not been referenced as these images were sent to me via my email account which I inserted into this thesis as opposed to searching for them via Google.
asking them not to select more than five images was that this was a manageable sample, and was not an attempt to simplify their identities.

While a good interview/interviewee relationship was established with almost all of the participants, this was particularly the case with those who participated in this phase of the research. This positive rapport was illustrated through the manner in which some of the interviewees addressed me when sending their selection of images via the internet. I was now referred to as ‘P’ or ‘Miss P,’ with some even staying in touch via email. Peter Tosh, who chose to discuss his selection of images in a follow up face-to-face interview, admitted that collecting pictures was a regular pastime, and that he never shared the images that he brought to the interview with anyone before. For this reason he insisted on being friends, which I agreed to, and since then, at times, Peter even refers to me as ‘sister’ or ‘sis’. Initially, Peter had been reluctant about participating in the research (as we do not ascribe to the same ‘race’), but the use of images and shared characteristics like ‘age’ helped to bridge this gap. Such instances, as Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001: 101) observe, remind one that there ‘are also ways to see, make sense of, and then see past the [‘race’ and] gender enactments we typically take for granted’.

Having completed my discussion of data collection, I now move on to explain the recording, analysis and interpretation of the data.
Fieldwork Data Analysis

Transcription

Although transcribing is a ‘slow process’ (Fielding and Thomas 2001: 136), it has the added value of (re)familiarising the researcher with the data. Listening to the interviews proved useful for two reasons. Firstly, by listening to the interviews again, I was able to re-live the moments, and not only note what was being said by the participants, but also take the ideas and thoughts that were not picked up or were excluded during the interview process. The additional notes that I had taken in the course of the interviews supplemented the interview transcripts. Secondly, the transcription process provided another opportunity to reacquaint myself with the ways in which the photographs contributed to the collection of the data. Following this, it was important to read and re-read the transcripts from time to time, as it was vital to uncover any significant quotes, to look out for patterns that arose, and any other material that would also support my argument that may have been overlooked during the first or second times that I listened to the recordings of the interviews.

As part of the process of continually reviewing the transcripts, I colour coded the central themes which emerged, such as discrimination and resistance. I also took into consideration the interactions, lived experiences, and ‘self-reflexive moments’ of the individuals, and how these shaped the discussion of the themes. The colour coding of the central themes was also noted on a separate chart sheet so that the similarities and differences between transcripts could be identified more easily. The images and the explanations
that were provided by some participants were also matched to the themes, and so are included under the relevant themes to be discussed. In addition to this, extensive note-taking also proved useful.

**Note-taking**

In his discussions on recording and analysing field data, Burgess (1984: 166-167) distinguishes between ‘substantive’ and ‘methodological’ notes, all of which are relevant to the note-taking that was carried out for the purposes of this research.

**Substantive notes**

These sets of notes ‘consist of a continuous record of the situations, events and conversations in which the researcher participates’ (ibid: 167). These notes were organised in the order in which the events took place. I indexed them with the date, topic, location and colour coded them according to the theme in which they would be discussed under. It was important to stick to this routine, as keeping such memos are one of the ‘most important techniques you have for developing your own ideas’ (Maxwell 1996: 12).

**Methodological notes**

These types of ‘notes consisted of personal reflections on my activities in the field’ (Burgess 1984: 172). As well as monitoring the events that were taking place and the progress of the fieldwork, I also recorded the foreseen and unforeseen challenges that the fieldwork introduced, which have been discussed in this chapter, as well as acknowledging the implications that
these challenges presented. These types of notes are valuable, in the sense that the researcher is then able ‘to engage in serious reflection and self-critique, rather than just mechanically recording events and thoughts’ (Maxwell 1996: 12).

**Fieldwork drawings**

In addition to the above, visual drawings also formed an important part of the analysis. Drawing on the insights gained from the fieldwork data alongside readings on black men and black masculinities, I compiled a series of diagrams to make sense of the ways in which black men have been constructed in dominant society. These may be seen in models one, two, and three. Model one\(^{59}\) attempts to illustrate how black men have been constructed in British society. Model two\(^{60}\) attempts to illustrate how black men are constructed in the present day in British society. Finally, I also produced a third model\(^{61}\) to illustrate where I believe the individuals of this study are situated in relation to the first two models. It was found that these models provided a useful framework to help shape this thesis, as will be illustrated in the analysis chapters which follows.

**Ethics**

This study has been guided by the British Sociological Association’s code of ethics. It has been further guided by the BSA Visual Sociology Study Group’s Statement of Ethical Practice in the selection of images, the practice of data

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\(^{59}\) See Appendix B for Model One  
\(^{60}\) See Appendix C for Model Two  
\(^{61}\) See Appendix D for Model Three
collection and presentation of the research. There is also a well-established framework for ethical scrutiny of research projects at the University of Warwick and approval from the Humanities and Social Studies Research Ethics Committee was approved with the upgrade of the research from MPhil to PhD. Prior to collecting the data, all potential respondents were provided with consent forms clearly outlining the purpose of the study and the ways in which the data would be anonymised, used and stored. This enabled them to make a decision as to whether or not they wished to participate in the study. As well as filling in a form which confirmed their participation in the research, emails were exchanged which confirmed their willingness to participate. In addition, before each interview, I assured the participant that his anonymity would be guaranteed. One of the ways this was achieved was that all respondents were given pseudonyms. Most of the participants of the in-depth interviews chose their own pseudonyms and these choices further informed my analyses. In some cases, some participants did not want to provide a pseudonym, and so it was agreed that I would be allowed to choose a name for them instead. In the case of one individual who stated, ‘why should I hide my name, I ain’t got nothin’ to hide’, it was agreed that we could decide upon a pseudonym for him together. As for the representatives, their fictitious names were all chosen by me.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the chosen methodology and methods for this research. I justified the reasons for adopting a primarily qualitative

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62 See Appendices E-G
approach, which built on a preliminary quantitative data collection. Furthermore, I argued the case in favour of a multi-strategy approach as the best means of collecting data in order to meet the aims and objectives of this research. In particular, I demonstrated the value of using particular visual methods (photo elicitation). At the same time, I highlighted the ethical issues relevant to the research; paying particular attention to my position in the field, which was neither that of an insider nor outsider. I also illustrated how power and positionality intersected in the relationship between the researcher and the researched, which presented me with bothforeseen and unforeseen challenges. Having completed my overview of the methods, I now turn to chapter four, the first of the two analysis chapters.
4. BACK TO BLACK: CONSTRUCTING, RECONSTRUCTING THE BLACK MALE

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part A explores how the participants from the in-depth interviews respond to constructions of black masculinity in British society as well as popular culture. The results of the survey in the form of tables and graphs are also illustrated here. The discussion is framed around images of the black male depicted as ‘the black super-stud’, ‘the black athlete’, ‘the intellectual black’ and ‘the bestial black’. All of the participants had at some stage felt constrained by particular constructions of black men in wider society. This, in turn, invoked discussions around racial discrimination, which are also addressed here. I pay particular attention to how the perceived threat of the black male is a source of major concern for the participants as it is the very reification of the black male as the threatening ‘Other’ that obscures the heterogeneity of black men’s experiences. The stereotype of the black male perpetrator places black males under surveillance and instills a continuing expectancy of harassment from the police.

Part B examines how black males have been and continue to be constructed in Britain in present day. Thus far, the previous chapters (One and Two) have highlighted how black masculinity has been projected as a ‘problem’ whereby black males have been predominantly perceived as perpetrators of violence – through examples of the black male as the ‘mugger’, the ‘rioter’, and the ‘gangsta’ for example. It was also argued that the image of the black
male as predominantly a perpetrator was briefly disrupted in Britain following the inquiry into Stephen Lawrence’s death. As a result of the inquiry and the case of Stephen Lawrence more generally, black males were increasingly acknowledged as victims of violence. Since 2007, however, although they continue to be acknowledged as victims, the construction of black masculinity has re-incorporated the idea that black men are largely perpetrators of violence and crime. This re-incorporation is exemplified in the speeches of senior politicians and the media attention given to black males in relation to violent killings that have occurred in and since 2007. This part of the chapter will explore this ‘victim/perpetrator’ dichotomy, and in doing so, recognizes that Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the ‘stereotypical ‘Other’ is pertinent to the study. This part of the chapter begins with a consideration of how black males have been constructed as both victims and perpetrators by dominant society. Secondly, it examines the problems that arise from this construction. Following this, I will introduce discussions around the ‘role-model / mentor intervention’ which was the previous (Labour) Government’s response to the current plight of black males in the form of the REACH (DCLG 2008) programme, and then the Capital (GLA 2010) scheme as initiated by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. Both of these interventions call for ‘good’ black men to help in setting a ‘positive’ example to black males who are more ‘vulnerable’ to a life of crime. This part of the chapter will also explore the tensions in these interventions, and consider that such a strategy creates the very problems it describes.
PART A

From its inception, this project sought to draw on how black men respond to constructions of black masculinity in popular culture. An initial aim was therefore to investigate what the individuals considered being the most dominant images of black men in British society and the implications that these constructions might have for them. All the participants had felt constrained by particular constructions, which in turn invoked questions about racial discrimination. Before examining individual responses in detail, this section begins with a presentation of some survey findings in order to set the tone and context for the topics that will be addressed in relation to the above.

4.1 Constructions Of Black Masculinity: Black Men Respond

The survey, conducted with 110 participants, was carried out to uncover the ‘type’ of images that respondents felt were most commonly associated with black men in British society (Table 4.1) and the ‘type’ of images that black men themselves most commonly associated with black males in British society (Table 4.2). The third Table (Table 4.3) amalgamates the results from both Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, to highlight the similarities and dissimilarities that exist between the responses. (Graph illustrations of the results, as featured in Table 4.1, are also provided throughout this section.)

In the light of the above, the findings will be discussed using Pieterse’s (1992: 177) conceptualisation of black male stereotypes – ‘the super-stud’, ‘the brainless athlete’ and ‘the bestial black’ as organisational defining
categories (see Chapter Two, section 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images associated with Black males</th>
<th>British Society</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmical/Musical</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highly-sexed</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muscular physique</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physically well-endowed</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good dress sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug-dealer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promiscuous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materialistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
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<td>Homophobic</td>
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<td>Funny</td>
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<td>Clean-cut</td>
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<td>Religious</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>Loyal to family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
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<td>Intelligent</td>
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<td>Goal-driven</td>
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<td>Successful</td>
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<td>Honest</td>
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<td>Career-oriented</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images associated with Black males</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmical/Musical</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good dress sense</td>
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<td>Religious</td>
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<td>Muscular physique</td>
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<td>Materialistic</td>
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<td>Violent</td>
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<td>Drug-dealer</td>
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<td>Loyal to family</td>
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<td>Clean-cut</td>
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<td>Physically well-endowed</td>
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<td>Goal-driven</td>
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<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career-oriented</td>
<td>34</td>
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</table>

**Table 4.1** Images that (dominant) British society most commonly associate with black men according to the participants (where those highlighted in red highlight the **physical attributes** and the those highlighted in dark **grey** highlight the **personal attributes**).

**Table 4.2** Images that participants most commonly associate with black males in British society (where those highlighted in red highlight the **physical attributes** and the those highlighted in dark **grey** highlight the **personal attributes**).
Images associated with black males (from most common to least common) | British Society (results from Table 4.1) |Respondents (results from Table 4.2) |
---|---|---|
Rhythmical/Musical | 96 | 71 |
Athletic | 93 | 87 |
Highly-sexed | 88 | 52 |
Muscular physique | 85 | 61 |
Physically well-endowed | 83 | 43 |
Aggressive | 80 | 51 |
Good dress sense | 79 | 69 |
Violent | 79 | 57 |
Drug-dealer | 77 | 49 |
Promiscuous | 75 | 41 |
Materialistic | 74 | 58 |
Charismatic | 65 | 43 |
Homophobic | 65 | 36 |
Funny | 58 | 70 |
Clean-cut | 48 | 47 |
Religious | 44 | 67 |
Loyal to family | 40 | 47 |
Hard-working | 37 | 56 |
Intelligent | 27 | 35 |
Goal-driven | 22 | 36 |
Successful | 21 | 54 |
Honest | 17 | 38 |
Career-oriented | 14 | 34 |

**Table 4.3** Compilation of survey results from Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 *(where those highlighted in red highlight the physical attributes and the those highlighted in dark grey highlight the personal attributes).*

At the same time, Pieterse’s conceptualisation has its limitations, and needs some modifications; for example, it does not include the stereotype of ‘the unintelligent black male’ which warrants further exploration as indicated in the tables above. Thus, in consideration of the above, the main images to be discussed are: ‘the black super-stud’; ‘the black athlete’; ‘the intellectual’ black’ and ‘the bestial black’. These are briefly outlined below:

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63 Indeed, all of these images occasionally over-lap with one another, i.e. ‘the black athlete’ can also be viewed as a ‘super-stud’ and vice versa.
‘The black super-stud’ – which includes paying close attention to attributes such as being highly-sexed, physically well-endowed (Graph 4.1), and promiscuous (Graph 4.2)

**4.1 The *physically well-endowed* black male**

![Graph 4.1](image)

**4.2 The *promiscuous* black male**

![Graph 4.2](image)
‘The black athlete’ – which often comprises of a black man with an impressive athletic build (Graph 4.3) and a highly muscular physique, and thus can be seen as a ‘super-stud’ and vice versa;

Images of black men as ‘super-studs’ and / or impressive athletes are widespread. As discussed previously (Chapter Two, section 2.1), these excess representations can be described as conveying the ‘hyper-visibility’ of black male bodies in popular culture.

‘The intellectual black’ – this focuses more on the personal traits of an individual such as intelligent (Graph 4.4), hard-working (Graph 4.5), goal-driven (Graph 4.6), successful, (Graph 4.7) honest and career-oriented (Graph 4.8) that are not as ‘visible’ or commonly associated with black men as the image of ‘the black athlete’ is for example;
4.4 The *intelligent* black male

Scores 1-5 where 5 is the highest

- Score 1 or 2: 34.6%
- Score 3: 39.4%
- Score 4 or 5: 26.0%

4.5 The *hard-working* black male

Scores 1-5 where 5 is the highest

- Score 1 or 2: 27.9%
- Score 3: 37%
- Score 4 or 5: 35.6%

4.6 The *goal-driven* black male

Scores 1-5 where 5 is the highest

- Score 1 or 2: 35.6%
- Score 3: 42.6%
- Score 4 or 5: 21.8%
‘The bestial black’ – which includes attributes such as being aggressive (Graph 4.9), violent (Graph 4.10), and a drug-dealer. Thus the image of the black male as ‘the threatening ‘Other’ also conveys a form of hyper-visibility, and is the most prominent part of the discussions, along with considerations of ‘the intellectual black’.

Equally important is the image of the black male as ‘the gifted musician/dancer’, but discussions on this construction will be interwoven with
the discussions in relation to the above four wherever relevant. This is because the interview participants always discussed this image in relation to one of the four constructions as outlined above rather than as a separate entity.

Before I describe how the men responded to the above constructions, I now address the topic of discrimination.
Black men and racial discrimination

Overall, the survey results revealed that the majority of the respondents had experienced racial discrimination (Graph 4.11), especially those aged between 26 and 45 compared to those younger or older than that age range.

(4.11) The percentage of participants who have experienced racial discrimination

![Graph 4.11](image)

(4.12) More specifically, a large proportion of black men were reported to have encountered discrimination in at least one area of their life, with the majority reporting having experienced discrimination in two or three different aspects of their lives (Graph 4.13). The areas in which discrimination had been at its highest were in the employment sector, social life and education (Table 4.4). Expanding on this, all the interview participants\(^{64}\) had experienced racial discrimination on multiple levels,

\(^{64}\) Kenneth Branson was the only interview respondent to claim that he had not experienced any form of racial discrimination.
namely within employment and social life/spaces, in which the latter also includes interactions with the police (which I will detail later in this chapter).

**4.12 The participants who have experienced the most racial discrimination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No experience of discrimination</th>
<th>Experience of discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-45</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46+</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.13 The number of areas in which participants have experienced racial discrimination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>none</th>
<th>one</th>
<th>two</th>
<th>three</th>
<th>four</th>
<th>five</th>
<th>six</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four ‘types’ of images as highlighted earlier (‘the black super-stud’; ‘the black athlete’; ‘the intellectual black’; and ‘the bestial black’) are now addressed in the order in which they have been outlined above. The discussion of each construction has two purposes; firstly, I will explain how the interview participants responded to a construction; and secondly, I will address the issues that arise and/or the discrimination which has been experienced as a result of that particular construction. It is important to present the findings in this way because ‘the relevant question then becomes not how images ‘look’, but what they can do’ (Pinney 2004: 8). In this sense, this will yield a more coherent picture of why certain constructions concern black men more than others and to consider more widely the implications that these may have for the way black men feel they are positioned in British society.

4.2 Responding To ‘Everyday’ Constructions Of Black Masculinity

As Saint-Aubin (1994: 1057) observes, one ‘has to only consider certain forms of contemporary music, video, film, and sports’ to see that the
commodification of black male bodies is common practice. The participants acknowledged the commonality of images such as ‘the black super-stud’ and ‘the black athlete’, in which case, the former of these is addressed first.

‘The black super-stud’

Almost all of the participants were largely dismissive of imagery depicting the high sexualisation of black males, with some citing it as ‘out-dated’ or ‘over-played’. It is for this reason that this particular construction did not form a central feature of the discussions. Some made a distinction between the US and the UK; with a few citing that this construction was ‘more of an American thing’. As Xavier Freeman said, ‘We are portrayed as promiscuous…But I wouldn’t say excessively in the British media, not more than David Beckham or somebody’. As the promiscuity of black men in Britain’s media was likened to that of the portrayal of David Beckham it was therefore not deemed problematic when it was considered that other, notably, white men were seen as receiving equal attention as black men in relation to sexual prowess.

Anthony Burton, on the other hand, discussed how he used to see himself as highly-sexed when he was younger, but this was not the case now. However, he pointed out that contrary to popular beliefs of black males as ‘over-sexed’ (or even, ‘hyper-sexual’) he did not perceive this image as ‘a black thing’ but because he was a ‘man’. He went on further to say, ‘every guy has a certain energy level for sex between the ages of 18-25 irrespective of race’.
In considering the stereotype of black men as ‘physically well-endowed’ some stated that the image (Figure 3.6) catered for white audiences, and a couple of the respondents claimed, ‘that’s just a figment of imagination’. In the case of one participant, Jerome Taylor, the stereotype was seen as humorous: ‘...it’s definitely laughable...um...and that’s it...some people can laugh at certain stereotypes about themselves.’

Leroy Brown commented that he had found that jokes around black men’s genitalia were particularly common in social spaces such as bars and clubs; and notably, amongst white men and women and particularly when they were drunk. He recalls a time when he was in a nightclub and having just walked into the gents a white male shouted over to him:

“Oh there’s no point looking at [my penis] mate yours is going to be bigger init yeah! If you can show me how to make my dick bigger I’ll teach you how to swim.’ [Leroy now speaking]: So when you’re both pissed, you don’t think too much. But that kind of thing is consistent...it’s not racism...but...are they serious?’

Leroy’s statement demonstrates that while he was able to ‘laugh it off’ he is unsure as to how to respond to these comments. While he does not claim to find it offensive or racist, he nevertheless expresses a level of discomfort, as he makes a distinction between how he reacts to this when he is drunk (in that he does not pay much attention to it) but once sober, he reflects on such
incidents as he is unable to pin-point exactly how to define these moments that he describes as ‘consistent’.

More noticeable than the construction of ‘the black super-stud’ however, were discussions around ‘the black athlete’, and so it is to this image that I now turn.

‘The black athlete’

The common and widespread image of ‘the black athlete’ was described as the ‘norm’ by most participants. However, for some men, the problem was not the image of ‘the black athlete’ per se, but rather, the ways in which the image is given to be seen; as though it is the sole definition of that individual’s identity. As John Che stated, ‘Say a black footballer does something good, he’s not in the papers but if Rooney does something good he’s all over, everywhere, the news, everywhere….’ To help illustrate this point, John pointed out that black footballers were more often than not recognised as only footballers and not given praise for other aspects of their lives such as their commitment and support to charities, which John felt were ‘good’ things that went largely unrecognised.

For Xavier Freeman, the commonness of the image meant that less diverse portrayals of black men were available in mainstream media. His take on the British press serves as an example here:

‘…I was trying to find something to read on the train to work…I decided to try different Broadsheets, so I tried the Telegraph, the
Independent, The Guardian, every single day for a week...Every reference I found to black people were either in relation to athletics, some sort of violence, or some sort of destitution...I didn’t find anything positive at all’.

It is noteworthy that the REACH report (DCLG 2007) also concluded that diverse images of black males are few and far between. The report also placed importance on showcasing these in order to counteract the images most commonly associated with black men, such as athletes or (street) crime. Thus, the ways in which members of REACH chose to advocate this ‘diverse’ portrayal is telling (as is discussed under sub-section 4.6).

A couple of participants commented that the stereotype of ‘the black athlete’ which includes black men being assumed as what Soar (2001: 38) describes as ‘physiologically superior’ sometimes played itself into social spaces such as the gym where the men reported to have received extra attention. As Leroy Brown told me, ‘even when you go to the gym, you see the eyes roaming to see if you live up to the stereotype’. Like the ‘super-stud’ persona, Leroy commented on how he just dismissed such occasions as well as he was used to them. Similarly, Christopher Wallace referred to such occurrences as boring as he recalls what a (non-black) friend said to him while training with Christopher at the gym: ‘argh, you don’t even need to train and you’ll be strong and I’ll spend like 10 months training, and you could just start training for two weeks and you’ll be bigger than me...[Wallace]: it’s ignorant...and at the same time it’s just funny...I was just like ok, cool, it was boring’.
In this sense, almost all of the participants appeared unfazed when reflecting on constructions of ‘the black super-stud’ or ‘the black athlete’. Yet when considering these ‘everyday’ images in the context of a qualitative interview, as opposed to seeing them on a billboard, these can also have the effect of reflecting on what meaning these images may have for that individual on a personal level, which I address in the next section.

### 4.3 Reflecting On Stereotypical Constructions Of Black Masculinity

In his book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972: 9) states, ‘We never look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves’. In the case of one of the participants, Peter Tosh, after viewing Figure 3.3, went back to the previous two images (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) for further consideration. After aligning all three images together, he stated: ‘I was always told [by others], either dance, yeah which I’m good at by default, music, which I’m good at by default, and I’m good at sports by default…’

![Figure 3.1 K SWISS Advert](image1)

![Figure 3.2 Trevor Nelson](image2)

![Figure 3.3 LeBron](image3)
Peter’s statement shows that while he recognizes that he is good at all of the above, he does not want to encourage this notion. In encouraging this idea, one can potentially lapse into ‘common-sense’ thinking that black men are ‘naturally’ and therefore ‘unsurprisingly’ good at sports and music. In turn, this can obscure the more personal traits of the individual, thus rendering them ‘invisible’, as the focus is given more to their physical attributes. It is unsurprising that Wallace states, ‘I am at war with music’ (1992: 325) as it contributes to a ‘mostly invisible black visuality’ (ibid: 325) whereby the high frequency (or even ‘hyper-visibility’) in which black males as sportsman as musicians/dancers are made visible leaves little scope to consider the alternative, or even a more diverse range of images of black men. This stance also reveals itself in the US President, Barack Obama’s publication, Dreams From my Father (2008), in which he states,

‘Still the feeling that something wasn’t quite right stayed with me, a warning that sounded whenever a white girl mentioned in the middle of conversation how much she liked Stevie Wonder; or when a woman in the supermarket asked me if I played basketball; or when the school principle told me I was cool. I did like Stevie Wonder, I did love basketball, and I tried my best to be cool at all times. So why did such comments always set me on edge? There was a trick there somewhere, although what the trick was, who was doing the tricking, and who was being tricked eluded my conscious grasp’ (ibid: 82).

The above quotation is profound, and there are three pertinent points to be made here. Firstly, for Obama to love basketball is just one aspect of who he is and reflects a pastime that he enjoys. However to be a black man who plays basketball can be perceived as an activity that black men would
naturally partake in, and hence a sport that potentially all black men are naturally good at, thus giving rise to black men as a homogenized group. For Obama, this potentially means not being seen or recognized for himself by others as the woman who questioned him about basketball may have made him feel that she is asking him a question based on ‘commonsense’ knowledge about black men in relation to sports. This serves as a reminder of how widespread and prevalent this image of ‘the black athlete’ is as it holds as much prominence for Peter in the present day as it did for Obama, who was reflecting on his adolescent years in 1970s America.

Secondly, images linking black men to music and/or sports insinuate that the black male conforms to a stereotype embraced by the dominant (white) group, as these ‘types’ do not challenge the ‘norms’ and ‘values’ of the majority. In this sense, images which are ‘familiar’ do not pose a threat, as they do not disrupt everyday constructions that can be, and are largely taken for granted, and remain unquestioned.

Thirdly, Obama points to this feeling as a ‘trick’. It can be argued that the trick is that it can set up a binary of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ stereotypes which only serve to present a ‘fixated form of representation’ (Bhabha 1994: 75). To elaborate, Obama states that those comments set him ‘on edge’ because to be ‘cool’, to love basketball, and, like or be good at music can be seen as ‘positive’ attributes of black men. However, the same ‘cool’ stereotype can at one and at the same time be ‘negative’ as one could be seen as only being good at sports and not anything beyond that. Obama, however, continues to explicitly state his wariness, thus recognizing this trick of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ stereotypes serving as a form of control; as ‘cool’ could easily mean he will
not be seen as ‘cool’ if he does not ascribe to the ‘types’ majority society is comfortable with. He thus acknowledges the conflicts that can arise from challenging as well as confronting these ‘trappings’ and goes on to conclude that even if one was to refuse such labels and thus, ‘lash out at your captors, they would have a name for that, too, a name that could cage you just as good. Paranoid.Militant.Violent.Nigger’ (Obama 2008: 85).

In considering the above, this kind of ‘tricking’ suggests that one should treat ‘good’ and/or ‘positive’ stereotypes with caution, as these are often closely interwoven together (as was discussed in Chapter Two, Part A). In Malcolm Littleton’s view, it was not possible to avoid being stereotyped in some way or another. His words echo Obama’s idea of stereotyping serving the function of ‘caging’ an individual, as Malcolm said to me, ‘…there’s hardly any room to move now because the stereotypes are just so you know, varied and kind of like, multi-various, they’re all over the place so even if you try and do something good you’re bound to slip into a stereotype…”

Xavier makes a pertinent comment on the dilemmas of stereotyping in relation to his workplace:

‘…I’m more educated than my line manager…I’m more educated than I believe he’ll ever be but sometimes I pretend to be stupid…I’m more computer articulate then he’s going to be anytime soon but he seems almost determined to teach me and I think what white people in the workplace don’t realise they’re doing sometimes, especially the older white people, they don’t realise they’re being really patronising and you’ve just got to either swallow it, or you’ve got a chip on your shoulder or an attitude problem so what you have to do is pretend not to notice’.
What is telling is how such stereotypes of black males are deeply ingrained in Xavier’s mind giving rise to some level of conflict. Xavier illustrates that he cannot inform his manager that he is ‘clued’ up in matters of work more than his manager realises or gives him credit for as he is conscious of how his actions might be judged. Thus, sometimes he continues to meet his manager’s low expectations of him, which suggests that this paves a greater path for his line manager to continue patronising him. Xavier alerts us to how power relations in the workplace can strongly influence individuals to negotiate forms of behaviour such as ‘playing dumb’ which in turn obscures Xavier’s intellectual abilities. Hence, in order to avoid being labelled as someone with a chip on his shoulder or ‘an angry black man’ even, Xavier pretends to be oblivious to the actions of his boss. However, therein lies another problem; this results in him substituting one ‘type’ for another, by appropriating the role of the ‘unintelligent ‘Other’ so that he is not perceived as the ‘threatening ‘Other’ and all the while he admits that this leaves him with the feeling that either action remains within the confines of a stereotype. Xavier therefore concludes: ‘You can never be you – you always have to be something inside their box’.

This immediately leads me to address how most of the participants provided examples whereby they had felt constrained within the context of ‘the intellectual black’ and/or ‘the bestial black’. In this sense, it was these particular constructions that the men at times found themselves wrestling with more so than others i.e. ‘the black super-stud’ and more so, because of the discrimination that they reported to have experienced in relation to the
stereotypical construction in question. I address these constructions that men at times have had to wrestle with in the next and final section of Part A.

4.4 Wrestling With Stereotypical Constructions Of Black Masculinity

In the previous section, some references were made to Obama. It is important to reiterate the context in which this research took place; which was at a time when Britain’s media was leading with articles on on-going violence whereby black males were implicated as the main victims and perpetrators of street crime, and at the same time on the other side of the Atlantic, Obama was running for president. Interestingly, this led some participants to draw comparisons between the US and the UK in two prominent ways; firstly, that the US embraced the intellectuality of blacks more so than the UK does so with black Britons, with some citing that the UK was still behind or that the UK was not ready for that change. Secondly, the reasons as to why many of the respondents did not find that constructions of black men as intelligent were common in Britain was because of the continual reminder of the image of black males as violent and no more starkly visible was this than at the times in which these interviews took place. I begin the discussion on the constructions of ‘the intellectual black’ or rather, the lack of it, as identified by the participants.
‘The intellectual black’

It seems that constructions of black men as ‘intelligent’ or ‘successful’ (in areas other than sports and music), as depicted by British society, were regarded as something of an anomaly by all the participants, with a couple of the men citing Tim Campbell (the winner of The Apprentice TV programme, first series) as an exception to the rule.

Expanding on this, some of the participants made pertinent comments on this in relation to racism, stating that it was obvious that black males were not seen as successful and in doing so, a couple of the men pointed to specific places in and around the city where they believed discrimination can be ‘obviously’ seen. As Peter Tosh said to me,

‘When I used to work for London underground, I used to be a ticket inspector…and all the people with me, the cleaners, the ticket guards you know, all the people on the sub-level – all black [men]. When you speak to them, they have degrees, highly educated but there they’re doing 12 hour shifts, and I’m like why is that?’

Peter’s statement shows how he distinguishes between what he ‘sees’ and what he eventually comes to ‘know’. That is, Peter points to what he regards as a common sighting in London underground stations; a significant number of blacks concentrated in lower-paid jobs. He then points to how it was only after interacting with his former colleagues that he came to learn of their academic qualifications; something that he may not otherwise have associated with someone in a cleaning job for example.
Peter questions this, before concluding that these types of jobs ‘do not reflect their qualification or their capabilities and I think this image (pointing to Figure 3.12) only reinforces that – be a ticket warden you know, be a ticket inspector…be a bus driver…just keep on serving the community’.

The fact that black men ‘serve’ as mentors in ‘their community’ – as in ‘the black community’ is indeed, an important topic which I begin to discuss in sub-section 4.6, and the subsections that follow. It is important to note that the act of helping ‘the community’ that one is a part of was not perceived negatively by Peter; rather, the issue was how black men were ‘typically’ allocated certain jobs, i.e. ‘serving’ the community, which in turn reinforces a stereotypical portrayal of black men as opposed to appearing as an autonomous being. Moreover, this even suggests further segregation from the labour market as Malcolm Littleton pointed out that even within such stereotypes additional stereotypes of black men are being forged, thus homogenizing them further, as he cited that the ‘stereotype of a traffic warden which is usually someone from Continental Africa, like Nigeria or something like that’.  

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65 British Iranian stand-up comedian, Omid Djalili has been known to make references to Nigerian traffic wardens as part of his comedy routines which in itself conveys the highly visible or even, ‘commonness’ of this image in and around the ‘streets’ of the city.
Beyond this, almost all the participants reported having experienced discrimination in employment with Bradley Hunt describing it as ‘rife’ and so it is their experiences in this particular field to which I now turn.

**Employment**

The most notable feature in discussions concerning employment was the type of barriers that most of the men felt they had to face when pursuing their goals. In particular, a number felt they were stopped at the first hurdle because of the ways in which they felt discriminated against in interviews with potential employers. The fact that this ‘type’ of discrimination can also be felt by a ‘single glance’ is a telling one. It is this ‘single glance’ that, according to Du Bois ([1903] 1994) informs the receiver that they are the ‘Other’ (‘them’), and hence not like ‘us’ (the majority). As Luxor-Cephren told me,

> ‘We’ve had the interviews on the phone, and you talk all nice, prim and proper and they’re like ‘yeah, great, we need you to come down’...and as soon as this black guy comes through the door, the smiles disappear, the tone changes, and you don’t get the job, it’s a no-brainer, you know what I mean’.

This type of incident captures two significantly contradictory moments; upon being heard Luxor-Cephren actually receives a warm reception from his potential employers. Upon ‘seeing’ him however, their ‘smiles disappear’ as he does not ‘look’ the way they presumed he would and if he had then perhaps their ‘tone’ would not have changed. The phrase ‘it’s a no-brainer’ acquires even more significance as it insinuates that Luxor-Cephren is
unsurprised by the unfair treatment. This begs the question of what kind of
person were the employers expecting to come ‘through the door.’ This is an
important question to ask because while their vision was disrupted upon the
sight of a ‘black guy’, it nevertheless remained unchallenged given the power
dynamics in the interaction between potential employee and potential
employer. Further still, did the ‘nice, prim and proper’ manner in which Luxor-
Cephren spoke conjure up an image of a male that was not black in the
minds of the employers? More so, how exactly, is a black man, born and
bred in contemporary Britain supposed to sound like? This question may also
be considered in light of a statement made by British historian, David Starkey
in the summer of 2011. Speaking on Newsnight (2011), Starkey suggested
that much of ‘black culture’ (i.e. influences from ‘gangsta rap’) was to blame
for the riots that took place that year. In order to draw a distinction from the
black youth that participated in the rioting Starkey acknowledged Labour MP
David Lammy as ‘an archetypal successful black man’ and in doing so, added, ‘If you turn the screen off so you’re listening to [David Lammy] on
radio you’d think he was white’.

By linking the words ‘successful’ and ‘white’, Starkey suggests that to be
regarded as a successful black male in Britain, the man should be well-
spoken; and to be well-spoken means one will ‘sound white’. In other words,
Starkey sets up an ‘us’ and ‘them’ binary, in which the ‘Other’, in this case
David Lammy, is and sounds just like ‘us’ (white) as opposed to ‘them’ (i.e.
‘the rioters’) who represent ‘the problem’ to the host society. This not only
denies black men an autonomous sense of ‘self’, but also homogenizes
whites (as well as blacks) since there is not one, single way in which a white person can or will sound, as this is dependent on class, region, accents and so forth.

Expanding on this, many of the other participants also felt that they had been rejected in interviews on the basis of their appearance. While they perceived themselves to be rather career-focused, this, they felt, was met with disappointment. This was because they were not provided with sufficient reasons as to why they did not qualify for the jobs they had sought while they believed that they met the criteria. As Martin Jacobs recalls, ‘I went for a position….for a company…I did believe I was the best candidate for the position but I believe that my skin colour and my gold tooth, they didn’t actually fit in with the image that they had for the company…’

Interestingly Robert Hunt also experienced a similar situation, whereby he felt his choice of hairstyle (‘dreads’) was not considered appropriate for the office environment.

What was also notable was when some of the participants, while seeking employment where the competition was predominantly with white (and sometimes Asian) men and the wages were substantially higher, that they faced much discrimination from prospective (white) employers. The different kind of treatment they received compared to their white counterparts was, for example, experienced in group interviews. As Jason Lewis explained, ‘I went for a job and I was the only black person there and the kind of questions they
asked me were completely different to what they asked the white people. It is much easier for them lot...they said they’d get back too and they never'.

This corresponds with a few of the other respondents who also experienced similar situations. A couple of them mentioned, for example, that following an interview they would contact potential employers for feedback as to why they were not successful in obtaining employment. However, they were never given any particular reasons, or would not receive any replies to explain the reasons for the outcome.

A couple of the participants had also experienced unhelpful behaviour when visiting career advisors (including when they were studying at University). Quite often, they found that the career-advisors were encouraging them to apply for jobs which the participants felt would not compliment their qualifications. In other words, they were encouraged to be less ambitious.

For a couple of the participants however, the problem was not only when seeking employment but also finding that when they were successful in obtaining a job, their employers always made them work harder than their white counterparts; and that this kind of treatment as Leroy Brown explained to me, was rather ‘rampant’

For a couple of the participants, however, their ‘blackness’ posed an issue because their presence at work was perceived as ‘threatening’. As Malcolm Littleton told me,
‘…it’s all cliché, but it still happens. Even in this building you’ll get in the lift and the woman will be like, ‘oh bloody hell, let me hold on to my bag’ and you’re almost you know, incredulous because it’s so clichéd that when somebody does that, you’re like, so people actually really do that and they do’.

Malcolm’s statement suggests that in encountering cliché moments such as these, they still continue to bring with them an element of surprise where Malcolm feels the need to rethink if what he experienced was actually ‘true.’ In this sense, while Malcolm is aware of how he perceives himself (i.e. not threatening, hence not criminal-like), his ‘blackness’ reminds him of the negative ways in which he can be perceived by wider society. This can be likened to what Du Bois ([1903] 1994) describes as double consciousness (as was detailed in Chapter Two, section 2.2). It seems, then, that this ‘twoness’ is ever-present as Malcolm points to the internal dialogue that he finds himself having when such a moment leads him to question if people ‘still’ behave in that way. It appears that the image of the ‘threatening’ black male is inescapable as Malcolm is reminded of how his appearance can be perceived as a problem even in his workplace. This marks a sense of invisibility, whereby ‘who’ Malcolm may be or what his job role may be are disregarded, as all that is noted is his ‘blackness’ instead. As he went on to say, ‘Again, all of these things that I’m saying to you, you have to think about what that does to your psyche…your mental state when you constantly having to engage with them on a day-to-day basis’.

This suggests that Malcolm is forced to split between what people think of him and how he perceives himself, as his own identities are consistently
being assumed by others and for the most part, it is one that is linked to violence; thus introducing ‘fear’ and ‘panic’. What is more, many of the participants pointed to how they were continually reminded of how significant this image of the ‘threatening’ black male is, and perhaps, it acquired more significance given the time in which this research is located. It is to the image of ‘the bestial black’ that I now turn.

‘The bestial black’

In contemporary society, the image of ‘the bestial black’ – violent, aggressive, delinquent, criminally-minded, ‘gangsta’, drug-dealer and so forth was identified as widespread and the ‘norm’ amongst many of the participants. Most claimed that this particular construction continues to have an impact on the social spaces that they inhabit (which I detail later in this chapter). First, however, I begin with a discussion of ‘the bestial black’ in popular culture, thus providing examples cited by the participants, whether this be in relation to music or films and television.

A couple of the participants pointed to the image of ‘the black gangsta’ in terms of music as a common commodity, catering for the (white) masses. As Julian Julio Pablo explained, ‘The stereotype is rap music, black music. But in actual fact, when you think about it, in America, the highest population of people actually listening to rap music is white…’

Julian regards most people listening to rap being white in America a fact’, and is therefore unable to accept that rap music equals black music. Like Julian, Xavier Freeman echoed similar sentiments,
‘...It’s an industry which is primarily dominated by white CEO’s who will sell you hip-hop, gangsta-rap, country and western or classical music. So gangsta rap is just a genre of their bag of tricks. And I understand the business well enough to know what sells to whom. Gangsta rap doesn’t sell to black people – never has because we don’t have the money for it as a demographic...It sells to white boys who live in America or white boys who live in the countryside or certain urban environments where they are more affluent, not necessarily inner-city. Someone like 50 Cent who’s a really easy target coz he’s there, he used to shoot people now and again, he used to steal, and he used to sell drugs, they’re not very positive, but the reward for having lived that lifestyle linked to being signed to multi-million-dollar contract is...’

Xavier’s statement firstly reveals how he points to ‘gangsta rap’ music appealing more so to affluent consumers rather than those concentrated in the inner cities (in America). He refers to 50 Cent as an ‘easy target’; a commodity to throw out to the consumer market, as he represents what is fashionable as a ‘gangsta’ – the type of lifestyle which can be perceived as ‘thrilling’ and ‘daring’ at the same time. Inevitably, this extends beyond ‘listening’ to music, as it promotes a particular lifestyle. Thus, in a market-driven world, the ‘Other’ as Pickering (2001: 209) stresses, represents ‘that which brings excitement and freedom as well as fear and danger’. Of all the participants, Kenneth Branson expressed that he felt this ‘type’ of lifestyle had a detrimental effect especially on black males, both in the US and UK, as he said, ‘...I think there is a direct correlation between the types of music that you listen to and how you behave...I’ve heard stories of gangs before they go out and do their drive-bys or whatever, they’ll be listening to rap music to hype themselves up’.
It may be that Kenneth felt that this music was particularly detrimental because it evoked memories of his past. He cites this ‘type’ of music as playing an influential part:

‘For example when I used to listen to rap music…my hair was tied back in a pony-tail, jeans were low, and I wasn’t motivated to go out and work hard…so I don’t listen to it as I think it’s gonna have an effect on me personally, I’m not sure about the effects it has on other people…’

None of the other participants reported this ‘type’ of music as having this kind of effect on them, or any other for that matter. However, it was not just the music, but also film and television where the participants provided specific examples of how black males as violent were depicted.

In the UK context, some of the participants quoted TV programmes and British films in which they felt black male actors were often typecast in roles that reinforced the violent black stereotype, and hence discussed how diverse roles for black males were most often lacking, with one of the respondents, Christopher Wallace stating,

‘In the British public, intelligence is not normally associated with black men, they don’t do that in the general public...If you see the films, kidulthood to adulthood…it’s…inner city life…you’re not going to have any British films which are like say, a Will Smith film, where you could be a doctor or a stockbroker…you’re not gonna get that…and when they normally do, do that they always balance it out with a negative one so if they do a show where a young male could be a doctor or something, they’ll probably have his brother who’s a drug-dealer or a gambler…’
What comes through in Christopher’s statement is how black males are often assigned to roles which involve the hardships of living in the poor streets of inner London where violence (as well as ‘race’ and class) takes the centre stage, and this can be seen in films such as Kidulthood; where, for example, the majority of the actors are young, black and male. However, Christopher makes a distinction between the portrayal of black males in the UK in comparison to the US quoting the actor Will Smith as an example to highlight the diverse roles that he has played in several films, and not the type that are limited to violence. Moreover, class seemingly plays an important role in Christopher’s example; he cites the fact that black males in Britain are more likely to play the role of young, violent men or drug-dealers in the inner city, whereas the US allows for diverse roles of black males in respectable jobs such as in medicine for example.

What was disconcerting for most of the participants were how such portrayals seemed ‘intentional’ in the sense that there was no distinction being made between was could be ‘seen’ and what constituted as ‘truth’. This is illustrated in the statement made by Luxor-Cephren (when looking at Figure 3.4)\textsuperscript{66}:

\begin{itemize}
  \item This image conveys an overlap of ‘the black super-stud’ and ‘the bestial black’. The former is illustrated with Snoop Dogg sitting amongst scantily clothed women. And, the latter is demonstrated more so linguistically given that the term ‘Doggfather’ rhymes with ‘Godfather’ which is an iconic film representing ‘gangsta life’ in which Hollywood actor Al Pacino starred in.
\end{itemize}
'You see, this is what I don’t like right – Al Pacino, he does a movie like Scarface right, he gets held as a genius. He does Godfather, great, wicked. They don’t attach that character to him in real life yeah, they just appreciate the fact that he can portray the role, does so convincingly and then he gets an Oscar for it. Black people do the same thing and its like, if it’s anything negative, yeah, that's what he's actually like, right'.

There are two important points to be made here. Firstly, Luxor-Cephren opens up a debate about what could be described as Ways of Seeing (Berger 1972). He thus challenges not only ‘what’ images depict, but more importantly, ‘how’ they are looked at. Luxor-Cephren’s statement proves essential for him as he is not simply concerned with the image that has been given to him to be ‘seen’ (Figure 3.4) nor the character being portrayed (Snoop Dogg); but rather, how these kind of images in popular culture are also what can be believed about black men in real life.

This view corresponds with almost all the participants who believed that such images played an important part in influencing how people perceived black men; that is, on a negative front (Graph 4.14).
As Martin Jacobs told me, ‘They might see a film like…for instance Adulthood…they see the way young black men are going on [now] and they believe that’s the way…it definitely affects the way people view things, definitely’.

Martin conveys not only how visual mediums can play a powerful part in influencing how people might view one another, but also makes reference to the ‘current’ climate. This particular construction was significant for most of the participants, as they had at some stage felt constrained by this image which invoked discussions around discrimination, especially in their interactions with the police (as will be detailed later in this chapter). For a couple of the participants, this also conjured up memories of school, where they reported feeling as though they were made to feel like ‘bad’ kids compared to their white counterparts which I discuss now.
**Educational settings**

What concerned the participants most ‘back then’ was how the bad behaviour of some black boys was looked upon as considerably different, if not worse than that of some white boys; when on the contrary the participants felt it was no different. This type of labelling of one’s behaviour can nevertheless have negative outcomes, as some participants recalled how this resulted in them being placed in lower sets compared to their white counterparts in secondary school, in spite of their own good performance in exams. As Dan Castle stated, ‘I feel like I’m quite bright. In school, I remember...with a lot of the black kids because of like behaviour...you couldn’t go up to another band [higher set] like if you had the results…’

Bradley Hunt stated that it was both in primary and in secondary school that he felt his mannerisms were often misunderstood, and he was therefore perceived as negative by the teachers. As he commented, ‘I was a very outspoken young man, and that can be misconstrued…’ In this sense, it is not necessarily the manners of the pupil that might pose as the problem but rather, the ways in which this might be interpreted as Bradley continued on to say, ‘It’s the norm to be loud, boisterous, passionate…’

Moreover, as opposed to educational settings, many of the participants stated that it was in their social lives/spaces where they were often reminded of the image of ‘the threatening black ‘Other’ as Anthony Burton told me, ‘everyday you’re reminded that you’re black’. When pressed further about this, he stated that this reminder comprised of women crossing over to the
other side of the road if they saw him approaching, women clutching their
handbags, and how hearing people press the central locks of their cars was
a frequent event. Jason Lewis echoed similar sentiments, describing them as
‘a bit annoying’. To elaborate, I move on to address the discrimination
experienced by the participants in relation to social spaces in London.

Social spaces

Other factors such as style and dress also play a pivotal role in determining
the degree to which the participants felt they were perceived as criminals
within particular social settings. This is best represented in the words of
Peter Tosh:

‘Going to the shops, I get followed around…I will get targeted because
of the way I look (pointing to his muscular arms as well as the tattoos
on both his arms, and then pointing to his shaved head and gold
tooth) not knowing who I am or what I do for a living…it still happens
today and it’s sad’ (my emphasis).

These spaces also convey how black males are perceived by police officers
on the ‘street’ (and as mentioned in chapter two, the relationship between the
police and black males remains a contentious topic). Important here is also
the ways in which the participants express how they have managed these
situations, and so it is to this area I now turn.

67 Jason Lewis used to find it ‘very annoying’ but having become accustomed to it he now just finds it
‘a bit annoying’.
The police

Some of the participants’ experiences of police hostility began as early as the age of 12. As Peter Warwick told me, he became aware as a child (aged 13), that ‘...the colour of [his] skin was a big problem in travelling, in moving around, in moving freely...’ In this sense, this image of the police had been ingrained since childhood with some of them even recounting stories of their fathers having suffered at the hands of the police. As Martin Jacobs told me,

‘I mean my Dad came back one time and he had a bruise around his eye...and he told us that the police had beat him up. From then I disliked the police...from that age there [aged 12] and the police haven’t done anything to make me think any better of them...’

In the case of most participants, in their view, black males were never seen as victims, but always as perpetrators. As Dan Castle put it, the attitude of the police is always ‘...shoot first, ask questions later’. Equally important were the ways in which they (emotionally) responded to discussions around ‘stop and search’ and this is explored further below.

Stop and search procedures

In the case of my participants, most had experienced stop and search procedures, citing such events as it is something that the police has to do to ‘keep [black men] on our toes I guess’ (Jerome Taylor); or, ‘I know their tactic is to speak down to you...but that’s how it goes’ (Peter Tosh); and Robert

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68 Martin Jacobs’ dislike towards the police is not just based on white police officers but black police officers as well who he claimed were worse because they behaved like they ‘got something to prove’.
Hunt who was stopped while driving his car commented, ‘I was pulled up obviously’. Their statements indicate that as black males, being stopped by the police is what they have come to reluctantly expect as the ‘norm’. Equally importantly, they expect provocation from the police in order that the police achieve the desired result – an aggressive or violent reaction from black men. Some of the participants provided examples of how (white) police officers have tried to provoke them by ‘blowing kisses’ or ‘winking at them’ or simply stopping them because they are ‘young’ and ‘black’ as was expressed by Jerome Taylor: ‘...like you wouldn’t believe it yeah P, there’s been times when I’ve been stopped because I fit the description. I’m sorry, but I know you’re chatting shit. I don’t fit the description of anybody – I’m young and I’m black and that’s about it...’

In his view, the police require a scapegoat; someone to place the blame, and hence black males are predominantly the target and yet, Jerome commented on how 2005 was a better year for him as the main targets in that period were seemingly Asian males given the 7/7 bombings in London in the summer of that year.

Beyond this, writers point to how ‘stop and search’ procedures mainly appear to be carried out on black males because of suspicion related to drugs (Jones and Singer 2008). Similar sentiments are echoed by the participants alongside other stereotypes. As Peter Tosh told me, ‘I get stopped all the time when I drive you know because I’m black, drive a nice car, they think
that I’ve stolen it, they think I’ve got drugs in my car, only when I show them my ID and what I do and speak to them in a certain way, then they realise…’

Peter’s statement reveals that he demonstrates a strong awareness of the many stereotypes linked to black men and crime, as he states that when he is stopped, already the worst has been assumed about him by the police. As such, the stop and search procedures for him have become part of the social ‘norm’. Secondly, he appears to have become accustomed to it as he has adopted a certain way of addressing this ‘common’ situation. That is, he speaks to them in a certain way which demonstrates how in his own way he ‘handles’ police interrogation and thus it does not result in conflict ‘when they realise’. This suggests that their vision of what they had presumed of a black male perpetrator based on factors such as ‘race’, ‘nice car’, amongst other things, was disrupted when he was not what they had imaged him to be. Likewise, Robert Hunt commented on ‘obviously’ being stopped and searched on a frequent basis, because of his car which has ‘tints and alloys which do create the stigma attached to drug-dealers…’

The emotional impact this can and does potentially have on young black men was expressed by some of the participants. As Martin Jacobs told me, ‘When you look at the actual justice system itself it don’t do me any favours. I’m actually doing well [referring to his job], they don’t realize any of this…they just thought I’m a bum. They don’t take into consideration how this will affect my life…’
This begs the question of whether they ‘don’t’ realize it or they do not seem to acknowledge this as it appears that a pre-judgement is being made. It further incorporates a theory of invisibility in the sense that the stereotype of the black male as up to no good is being seen but that is not how Martin sees himself or wants to be seen. He make it clear that he is in actual fact, contrary to popular belief, just getting on with his life, which is doubtful in the eyes of the police.

In some respects, this awareness of how one is seen (negatively) by dominant society, also conveys at the same time, how one does not need to be determined by it and this is illustrated in the participants ways of dealing with the police, irrespective of how they are seen by them. In particular, these incidents reveal how colour and gender act as primary signifiers for the justification of ‘stop and search’ procedures on black males in Britain. As some of the participants noted, it causes them to react in a way whereby they feel the need to justify that they are not criminals. As Dan Castle informed me,

‘I was actually stopped myself at Elephant and Castle tube station for alleged suspicions of drug possession...I don’t smoke drugs...I’ve never actually had direct contact with that...it’s really kind of like down-putting and I wasn’t maybe of a stronger character it can kind of like knock you back because you think...I’m trying to lead an honest life here, I’m trying to go to University, better myself, I’ve worked four years at University on my own, struggled, I work hard...it can crush
your spirits…by having like, things like that happen to you, it’s soul destroying’.

At the same time, Dan ‘managed’ the situation by insisting that the officer filled out the form (which became mandatory following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry) so that Dan had an official document stating his innocence. Dan admitted that the officer was reluctant to do the paperwork, yet still did so and this helped to ease the situation for Dan knowing that he had the right to make this request.

Robert Hunt, however, stressed the difficulties that could arise in managing similar situations; in particular he drew reference to the first time he was stopped by the police. He recalls two (white) police officers ‘provoking’ him by making derogatory remarks concerning his mother to which Robert retaliated by also using bad language and was subsequently arrested. This all took place in a police van, and was thus invisible from the public eye. As Robert explains ‘they [the police] definitely let loose whilst they was in the van and so did I’. He then went on to describe the outcome of this incident:

‘DNA sample, photographs taken, fingerprints and six hours held in a cell and that was that. So in that sense it was unfair because I think that’s why a lot of youths do go off the rails because they do feel targeted and at this stage I was only 18 and that was my first encounter that I did have with the police, or the law should I say. And it did have the potential to encourage me to rebel but I do have a lot of great people around me…so on those grounds and those grounds alone I kept on the straight and narrow to be honest’.

69 Another incident in relation to this incident in which Dan has been ‘stopped and searched’ is discussed in chapter six (sub-section ‘self-reflexive’ moments).
Robert points to the insults he bore from the police officers alongside the ‘unfair’ treatment he received at the police station. Drawing upon his experience, Robert also conveys empathy with other ‘youths’ who may have found themselves in similar situations and subsequently ‘go off the rails’. Therein lays the threat, as Robert admits that the incident potentially encouraged him to ‘rebel’ but given his strong relationship links he chose otherwise. While he recognises that he was ‘targeted’ and hence treated like a perpetrator, this does not mean that this would result in him conforming to the label(s) imposed upon him especially as he commented on how he had been stopped only two days prior this interview while driving his car. He remained unsurprised by this particularly because of the ‘current’ climate around the on-going violence. That is, this marks a period whereby increased stop and search procedures were taking place particularly in London including in underground stations for deterring knife crime.

Being targeted as a perpetrator however, extends beyond the participant’s experiences with the police and the stop and search procedures. For many of the participants, they not only reflected on this construction and their experiences of discrimination, but also the impact this had had on their sense of ‘self’. I consider the implications for the above in the sub-section which follows.

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70 Robert was stopped by the Police and was almost arrested when they found a ‘gun’ in his car only to transpire that it was a toy gun belonging to his five year old step-son.
Implications of stereotypes and discrimination for black men

When reflecting on the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’, what was most notable was the ways in which they described the different ways in which black men might respond to this particular construction. Malcolm Littleton stated, ‘…that doesn’t influence me in the same way as it might somebody else but it doesn’t mean that those images don’t have an impact so that has to be borne in mind’.

Malcolm makes a distinction between himself and someone else, thus highlighting that this particular representation of black males does not generate a homogenous response amongst black men. Malcolm continued to mention that the effect these images could have on black men was that some could conform to this stereotypical representation.

This view corresponds with what was echoed by most of the participants, as well as pointing out that this was not them. Thus, responses such as ‘that’s not me’; ‘everyone’s different’; ‘I can only speak for me’ were frequent. When Anthony Burton expressed how he addressed these constructions alongside the discrimination he encountered, he simply stated, ‘You’ve just got to learn to be thicker-skinned than that’. This suggests that a certain survival strategy or strategies are put into place and, indeed, points to ideas around resilience. Although Malcolm reiterated the same sentiments as Anthony, and emphasised the fact that violence was not part of his life, he went on to say,
‘What does that actually do to you when you’re just a straight, as it were, you never done anything [criminal-like] wrong in your life but you know you’re black...you look at yourself in the mirror and you know that you’re black and then when you look outside yourself, into the society in which you live for an image that is reflective of you, you’re given one of the things that I’ve just said – criminal, drug-dealer, whatever it might be, but that’s something that’s not actually reflective of you as a person, constantly’.

What comes through in Malcolm’s statement is that he points to how dominant, negative portrayals of black men as criminals is a constant feature of the (British) society that he is a part of, and a construction that he is constantly having to wrestle with as he concludes: ‘Like even though you know you’re not that, inside yourself you’re gonna have some kind of...a battle taking place because you’re trying to fight off what someone is telling you that they think you’re like’.

For Malcolm, such perceptions essentially say to him ‘you are’ the negative stereotype, and he therefore tries to ‘fight’ this off. As Du Bois ([1903] 1994) stresses, central to double consciousness is the survival strategies that one must utilize in order to preserve a ‘positive’ sense of self. More specifically, Malcolm’s statement in which he uses words such as ‘battle’ and ‘fight’, also opens up the debate as to what strategy/strategies, in particular, are employed, and how are they employed in order to ‘fight’ off the constant negative images of ‘the black male perpetrator’. This invites questions about resistance, which acquires more significance when it is considered how
Malcolm responded to Figure 3.15. This is best represented in his own words:

‘...I would say that it reminds me of my experiences at school and how that system tried to break me down – it didn’t work though because I’m still here. This system [his place of work] is trying to break me down, that’s not gonna work either...’

The above simultaneously conveys a form of vulnerability as well as a form of resilience on Malcolm’s part. Moreover, the ‘presence’ of the above image acts as a catalyst for Malcolm to address the ‘absence’ of security, and indeed, ‘the absence of social justice’ (Mitchell 2011: 99) that he felt not only at school but also at his current workplace. The above quotation is profound as the discussion around ‘the system’ as expressed by almost all of the participants was the most prominent feature of the interviews. Thus ‘the system’ referred to all the arenas which represent control and as have also been mentioned throughout this chapter, albeit within workplaces, interactions with the police, and even the media. While the above will be discussed in the final chapter, for now, I move on to the second part of this chapter which focuses on how black males are being constructed by dominant society in the current period, where again, the image of the black male as the threatening ‘Other’ serves as the prominent theme. However,

71 A reference to Figure 3.15 was also made in the previous chapter (see Part B, phase five of fieldwork) in which Malcolm Littleton expressed how the image had evoked unpleasant memories of school.
whereas the individuals in this study point to how they have been portrayed as mainly perpetrators, there is also the victim element as portrayed by dominant society that warrants attention, and what implications this might have as none of the men in these interviews conveyed that black men were depicted as victims. It is to the second part of this chapter that I now turn.

PART B

From its inception, this project sought to draw upon ‘current’ concerns around black males in the UK. An initial aim was therefore to understand the ways in which black masculinity has been portrayed or perhaps more accurately, constructed, both in Britain’s media and by politicians and policy makers. In recent years, there has been a shift in the construction of black males predominantly as perpetrators to the black male as both victim and perpetrator. The representation of black males as simultaneously comprising both is central to understanding how black masculinity is being constructed in Britain, and provides a suitable starting point for analysis.

4.5 Constructions Of Black Males As Victims And Perpetrators

In the opening chapters, I argued that representations of black males in British society have largely been that of perpetrators of violence. The murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, as Gilroy (2003) put it, ‘seemed to break this pattern’. It might be more accurate to argue, however, that the inquiry ‘into the matters arising’ (Straw 1997) from his death seemingly broke
this pattern. Since the inquiry’s publication on 24 February 1999, however, the relationship between black males and the criminal justice system has continued to be problematic. This is evident even in recent publications that echo the victim’s name: ‘Police and Racism: What has been achieved 10 years after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report?’ (EHRC 2009), ‘The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry 10 Years On: An Analysis of the Literature’ (Rollock 2009), and ‘The Macpherson Report – Ten Years On’ (Home Affairs Committee 2009). Thus reacquainting with Stephen Lawrence is not only a reminder of a black male as a victim, but more so of the ‘unfinished’ (McLaughlin & Murji 1999: 380) debate on the overrepresentation of black males as perpetrators of violence. This is perhaps most visible in the years in which this research is located.

In 2007/08 especially, knife and gun crime as well as ‘gang’-related activities have dominated the media, political and popular imagination. More specifically, race and gender have played a central role in much of the responses to the above whereby black males have been portrayed as not only the main victims but also as the main perpetrators of these particular crimes, thus reinforcing notions of black males as the threatening ‘Other’ thus creating a ‘moral panic’ (Cohen 1972). The conception of black males as ‘Other’ is therefore essential to understanding firstly, how ‘race’ and gender are at the forefront of explanations given about the rise in violent crime in recent years, and secondly, to consider the problems that arise from explanations which reinforce the view that these levels of violence are primarily caused by or somehow related to those individuals who fall into the two categories of black and male. In doing so, I particularly draw upon the

**The role of ‘race’ and gender**

As Pickering (2001: 21) observes, the concept of the ‘Other’ ‘can be used to support a range of different attitudes, from mild condescension to out-and-out hostility’. Irrespective of whether the ‘Other’ is an individual or a group, ‘a relation of ‘me’/’us’/’them’ always underpins the definition’ (ibid: 71). In relation to the current period in Britain, Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) have both argued that the responses by senior politicians as well as the media to the ongoing violence suggested that the violence predominantly arises from ‘the black community’. In this sense, the problem lies within ‘them’ (black) and not one that is specific to ‘us’ (majority society, white). This reinforces the sense of opposition between blacks and majority society, thus generating racial meanings from an accumulated tension between a series of neat binary oppositions – white/black, us/them, good/bad – whereby blacks are stereotypically perceived as causing the problems to an otherwise ‘decent’ (white) British society. In his analysis of the stereotypical ‘Other’, Bhabha (1994: 66) argues that the stereotype serves as ‘a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated…’ In relation to the ongoing violence, reasons given for the ongoing violence are based on what Alexander (2008: 14) describes as ‘commonsense ‘knowledges’ about black youth and crime’ which reinforces images of ‘the black male
perpetrator’, as well as ‘the stigma attached to single-parent black families’ and ‘the black community’ as a problem in general. I will now elaborate on ways in which ‘race’ and gender are used to reinforce notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

It is instructive to note the ways in which images of ‘the black male perpetrator’ can be interpreted. Following the shootings of three black teenagers in London in February 2007, it was not long before black masculinity, as a problematic issue, featured with increasing regularity on to the front pages of newspapers. After further killings reported in London in March and April of that year, when three teenagers were fatally stabbed, the victims were described in press reports as young, black, and male. Both Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) suggest that the ways in which the black victims and black perpetrators have been portrayed serves to blur the line between the victim and perpetrator, in an attempt to conclude that these problems arise specifically from those who come under the category of black and male. Thus, the construction of the black victim is closely connected to that of the black perpetrator and there is seemingly a failure to establish a clear distinction between which ‘type’ of black male is a victim and which ‘type’ of black male is a perpetrator as the very same persons can be both. For example, when Steven Bigby, a 22 year old black man, was stabbed to death in 2008, the press reported that ‘Man stabbed to death in Oxford Street was on bail for horrific acid gang rape’ (Mail Online 2008). He was also described as belonging to a ‘gang’, yet it was difficult to determine whether or not this was a gang related incident. Such reports of black males imply that
although they may be victims, more often than not, they are ‘caught up in a web of violence and retribution of [their] own making’ (Alexander 2008: 4).

Furthermore, Sveinsson (2008) asserts that the ways in which the victims and perpetrators are portrayed reinforces notions of black-on-black crime, particularly as more often than not these cases are assumed to be gang-related. However, he also goes on to point that Operation Trident publicizes ‘itself as investigating ‘black-on-black’ gun crime, which makes it unfair to point the finger exclusively towards the press’ (Sveinsson 2008: 26). According to Alexander (2008: 22), much of the blame for ‘the black male perpetrator’ has been ‘distributed evenly between the failures of ‘the black family’ as well as community and the attraction to rap and hip-hop music’. I would argue that this depends on whose perspective it is coming from. Certainly, the British media has given much attention to the influence of ‘black’ music on young people but senior politicians tend to focus more on notions around ‘the black family’ as well as community. In responding to the on-going violence, even Jack Straw stated that ‘absent black fathers’ were to blame: ‘…I’m afraid to say…it’s the absence of fathers…and as we know, lads need dads…and they’re more likely to be absent in the case of particularly, the Afro-Caribbean community’(Straw, 2007).

It seems, therefore, that to depict images of black males as victims from the outset suggest that they are more likely to be susceptible to a life of crime not because of circumstances of their own making, but because of ‘the absent father’ which in turn only serves to discredit ‘the black family/community.’ This is further amplified when the connotations are that because role models are lacking in their familial surroundings, black music
artists and the ‘street’ criminals become their main source of influence. However, as both Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) point out, several problems arise from suggesting that these issues are specifically linked to young black males, and as such, only reinforce the fact that ‘race’ and gender remain at the forefront of these explanations, which I address next.

The problem with ‘race’ and gender

Firstly, the responses to the ongoing issues serve to homogenize ‘the black community’. In doing so, it denies the differences such as class, that exist between individuals and within groups, whether they are African, Caribbean and/or black British people. Consequently, what binds these groups of people is ‘race’. Perceptions of skin colour are therefore used to reinforce the stereotypes of the ‘Other’. However, placing race and gender at the forefront of these problems is too simplistic a way of ascribing meaning to the complex relationship between violence and the lives of young people (Alexander 2008). Of the murders reported in London thus far, the victims and perpetrators have not been limited to black males only, nor have they necessarily been ‘gang’ related; rather, the victims and perpetrators have involved people from a diverse range of backgrounds, including white, Asian, Turkish, as well as young women (Alexander 2008: 14). More specifically, some of the high profile murders reported in 2008, for example, comprised young white males such as Jimmy Mizen (16), Rob Knox (18) and Ben Kinsella (16) with more deaths continuing to be reported in 2010 as well as 2011. Moreover, on-going violence, and especially youth violence, has
consistently remained an on-going concern and yet was not as widely reported in the press until 2007 (as also highlighted in Chapter One).

Thus far, the focus of this section has been on the ways in which black males continue to be stereotyped predominantly as perpetrators and the implications that this has for ‘the black community’. To situate contemporary stereotypes within their historical context, Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) argue that in many ways, the construction of the black threatening ‘Other’ is not so dissimilar to how ‘notions of blackness informed the construction of ‘mugging’ in the 1970s with the effect of criminalizing the black community’ (Sveinsson 2008: 12; see also Alexander 2008: 14). In this case, both authors pay homage to the widely quoted publication by Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978; see also Chapter Two, Part B, where I discuss Hall et al.’s publication and Cohen’s concept of a moral panic 1972). Yet, it is also the case that black males were not, by wider society, acknowledged as victims in the 1970s but rather, this acknowledgement came about after the Lawrence inquiry. Therefore, the question remains: what implications might the status of the stereotyped victim have in all of this in current day? On the one hand, it may be argued that irrespective of the victim status, constructions of black males continue to be predominantly as perpetrators of violence and so more focus is given to this stereotype. The image of the black male criminal is so potent that it is difficult not to reminisce how this bears resemblance to the 1970s. However, the predominant focus in the literature on the black male’s perpetrator status means that the other side of the ‘story’ gets overlooked. In other words, the impact that the black male’s dual status as victim and
perpetrator might have on the ways in which black masculinities are being constructed in Britain is overshadowed by the black male’s perpetrator status. This confirms the underlying tension of this dual status which I will address now.

**Tension in the dual status of black males as victims and perpetrators**

Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) focus on the ways in which black males continue to be labelled as criminals in turn obscures their dual construction as victims and perpetrators in two main ways: firstly, there is ‘the problem of history’ (Alexander 2008: 13); and secondly, there is the problem of the present. I shall begin with exploring the former.

Firstly, the stereotype of the black male as a criminal is undoubtedly common (i.e. the image of ‘the mugger’, ‘the drug-dealer’, ‘the rioter’, ‘the gang-member’), which also means that authors commenting on this subject tend to place significant emphasis on how history continues to repeat itself. In this sense, they posit that the ways in which blacks continue to be blamed is predictable. This is evident in their choice of words in expressing their views on the topic: *predictable* chorus...family breakdown, fatherlessness and chaos [is] served up again while rap and hip-hop are singled out for special blame’ (Gilroy 2003; *my emphasis*); ‘...many of the issues and arguments remain salient today [as they did 30 years ago]’(Shah 2008: 2; *my emphasis*); ‘Of course, the conflation of ‘gangs’, crime, errant masculinities and black cultures is a potent image, one replete with all the *certainties* of what passes for *commonsense*’ (Alexander 2008: 7; *my emphasis*).
Secondly, as more attention is given to how the present resembles the past, this results in less attention being given to the effect that the ‘victim’ status might be having in ‘current’ times. I am arguing that the focus on the stereotype on ‘the black male perpetrator’ as one that continues to be carried throughout time (i.e. from ‘the mugger’ to the ‘gang-member’) is a distracting premise to think critically from, as it means less attention is given to the effects of simultaneously labelling blacks as victims and perpetrators in the present period.

Pickering (2001: 70) warns that one of the trappings involved in discussions around stereotyping is that one can become so immersed in condemning stereotypes that this can result in engaging in nothing more than a ‘simply moralistic exercise’. More to the point, Bhabha (1994: 67; my emphasis) argues that to ‘judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its effectivity’. Thus, I argue that writers, and in this case, Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) can become so immersed in condemning one stereotype more so than the other (i.e. the perpetrator rather than victim and perpetrator), that the significance of the dual stereotype is dismissed. The focus on the dual status of the black male as victim and perpetrator is therefore important if we are to understand the effectiveness of this stereotype. For Bhabha (1994: 67), we can only understand how regimes of ‘truth’ are constructed by engaging with the effectiveness of the stereotype. Indeed, ‘Only then does it become possible to understand’ (ibid: 67) how these truths are made ‘productive’ (ibid: 67).

With this in mind, I now illustrate the importance of the dual construction of
the black male as both the victim and perpetrator in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of this stereotype.

**The effects of the dual status of black males as victims and perpetrators**

As previously stated, Alexander (2008) and Sveinsson (2008) tend to focus more so on the effects of the ‘perpetrator status’. More specifically, Alexander comments on a passage from the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair’s speech to support her claim that ‘the black community’ continues to be criminalised. While I do not in any way dispute her claims, I am nevertheless arguing that it is equally important to take into account that Blair’s speech also acknowledges blacks as victims (as well as perpetrators) and so that part of the stereotype should not be ignored. To elaborate, the passage that Alexander specifically refers to is provided below. In responding to the killings of three black male teenagers in February and March 2007, Tony Blair delivered a speech to the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce on 11 April 2007, in which he stressed that,

‘In truth, most young people are perfectly decent and law abiding…Most young black boys are not involved in knife and gun crime…The black community – the vast majority of whom in these communities are decent, law-abiding people are horrified at what is happening – need to be mobilized in denunciation of this gang culture that is killing young innocent kids. But we won’t stop this by pretending it isn’t black kids doing it’ (2007: 9-10; my emphasis).
In Alexander’s view (2008: 7), by linking the words ‘black kids’, ‘gangs’; ‘the black community’ Blair ‘serves to collectivise the problem as one specific to, arising from and potentially encompassing, the black community as a whole.’ In this sense, it can be argued that his statement creates a division of Us (majority, white) and Them (black).

On the other hand, arguments may also be made that by linking the words ‘vast majority’, ‘decent’, ‘law-abiding’, ‘killing young innocent kids’ as well as the words picked out by Alexander, the above passage simultaneously sets up another division, that is within and between the ‘Other’. In other words, Blair makes a distinction between blacks, that is, the ‘good’ blacks and the ‘bad’ blacks. This is the effect that victim and perpetrator representation can have as it creates a space by which different regimes of ‘truth’ are being constructed. That is, there are the ‘good’ blacks that are decent and law-abiding, do not ascribe to any kind of ‘gang’ culture and hence, might even be like ‘us’ (majority, white). Yet, this is coupled with the ‘bad’ blacks (Them) that more often than not are young, male, and likely to ascribe to a ‘gang’ culture or more simply, are criminally inclined (unlike Us). Thus, the ‘bad’ blacks, and the ‘problems’ that they present, is ‘indicative of the need for robust intervention’ (Sveinsson 2008: 33). This division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ blacks was particularly visible in the role-model / mentor intervention schemes that were initiated by the then Labour Government as a response to the on-going violence which I will address in the following section (4.6).
In considering the above, we see that the construction of black males predominantly as perpetrators, i.e. ‘the mugger’, ‘the rioter’ and so forth was more prominent prior to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999). It is for this reason therefore that I refer to this as the old model – the perpetrator model. I refer to it as old not because it is no longer pertinent, as clearly it is. However, the old model made a clear division between ‘us’ (white) and ‘them’ (black) and the acknowledgement of black males as victims was notably absent. However, post-Lawrence Inquiry, the notion that black males could be victims was acknowledged, which in turn problematized the old model as it is no longer just a case of Us and Them but also within and between them: ‘good’ blacks and ‘bad’ blacks. It therefore becomes necessary to introduce a new model, which I have termed the victim/perpetrator model. I refer to this model as the victim/perpetrator model (and throughout the remainder of this chapter the v/p model) because the construction of the black victim is closely connected to that of the black perpetrator. The line can become blurred between the two, as can the line between a ‘good’ black and a ‘bad’ black as the same variables are used to identify them (i.e. ‘good’ black not affiliated with ‘gangs’ but ‘bad’ black is likely to be involved in ‘gangs’).

Thus, the portrayal of blacks in the v/p model, as articulated above by Blair, other senior politicians and the media implies a crisis on the part of young ‘bad’ black males. According to the v/p model, their behaviour is out of control, thus creating a new sense of panic over what has happened (the

72 See Appendices B-D for all three models which were also mentioned in Chapter Three, Part B, where I explained how the fieldwork drawings helped to analyse my data findings.
death of ‘innocent’ blacks because of black perpetrators) and of what could happen next (more deaths of ‘innocent’ blacks because of black perpetrators). The v/p model thus reinforces the need for two types of intervention, both of which call for the policing and regulation black males. Firstly, the call for intervention justifies why ‘intensive police focus’ (Blair 2007: 10) is in order to bring black males back into line. This type of control on the ‘street’ links to the history of social control over blacks which has been widely practiced by the police in the form of SUS (stop and search) laws such as in the 1970s (and thus is reminiscent of ‘the perpetrator model’). Thus the surveillance and the criminalization of black males have and continue to serve as a platform to legitimize strong forms of intervention for ‘the black community’, most notably stop and search (as was also discussed in the opening chapters).

In Blair’s speech, we see that only moments before he speaks of blacks in relation to crime, he introduces the term fear, by stating, ‘…fear is a very real emotion. And it diminishes severely the quality of people’s lives’ (2007: 8). He specifically refers to the ‘fear’ of ‘gang’ culture that is ‘killing innocent young black kids’ (ibid: 10), which in turn signals to ‘the black family’ and more often than not, to the ‘lone black mother’ that it could be ‘your’ son next. This has the effect of putting the onus on (other than the police) the ‘good’ blacks, which brings me to my second point whereby black men are required to intervene in order to ‘mobilize’ and ‘denunciate’ the actions of the ‘bad’ blacks. Moreover, the v/p model illustrates how the introduction of ‘good’ blacks means that ‘good’ black men can also be ‘seen’ as actively partaking
in this dialogue. This point should not be ignored, as black men also contribute to how black masculinity is constructed, and it is thus necessary to consider the effect their participation might have, and as such, observe how ‘truths’ are made ‘productive’. I consider how the ‘truth’ about the black males as both the victim and perpetrator is made ‘productive in light of intervention schemes such as the REACH (DCLG) role-models scheme initiated by the then Labour government in 2008 and the mentors programme, Capital Men (GLA), introduced by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, in 2010 which I turn to next.

4.6 Repercussions Of The Victim / Perpetrator Perspective: The Role-Model / Mentor Intervention

As Pickering (2001: 72; my emphasis) observes, stereotyping the ‘Other’ is only ‘effective if it is reiterated and worked on, over and over…’ as otherwise it would make it difficult to keep making constructions serve as ‘truth’ as constructions of the ‘Other is inherently unstable’ (ibid: 72) and can be disrupted. Following the Stephen Lawrence inquiry (and hence the disruption of ‘the perpetrator model’), it was no longer politically correct, or acceptable, to not acknowledge black males as victims. However, the Inquiry also did something else: it reinforced the belief that the then Labour Government headed by Tony Blair represented a symbol of hope ‘that has not been evident under the previous Conservative governments’ (Rollock 2009: 10). More specifically, in the Inquiry, Macpherson commended Doreen and Neville Lawrence, as well as the Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Jack Straw
MP, whose united efforts ‘provided a springboard for the future’ (Macpherson 1999: 4.16). Macpherson continued, ‘We believe that the present Government and society as a whole do have the will to achieve that change. Let us all hope that the opportunity will not be missed. Joint action to achieve it can and must then follow’ (1999: 4.13). It can be argued that the initiation of the role-model / mentor intervention as advocated by senior politicians serves as an example of joint collaboration, in which members of ‘the black community’ work alongside the Government. Such collaboration could not be possible if black males were not also acknowledged as (stereotyped) victims. As Bhabha (1994: 77) observes, the stereotype ‘requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes’. In the v/p model, the black male continues to be stereotyped as the perpetrator, alongside ‘the same old stories’ (ibid: 77) of ‘absent black fathers’ and ‘the black community’.

Expanding on this, there appears to be a distilling of emotionality in highlighting the violence and the intervention simultaneously; and in particular, of two contrasting emotions: ‘despair’ and ‘hope’. The v/p model conveys despair (and hence blacks as a ‘problem’) because of the continuing violence. Senior politicians not only express their support for the role-model/mentor intervention (hope) but also stress the urgency for such schemes by using terms such as ‘victims’, ‘disaffected’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘at risk’ to describe the condition of young black males. What is particularly notable is

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73 Part of this joint collaboration involved the then Labour Government providing financial support of £1 million to help fund the first ever national role-model programme (DCLG 2008). Similarly, the Mayor of London’s mentoring scheme was given a funding of £1.3 million (GLA 2011).
the ways in which such descriptions reinforce not only the ‘us’ (majority) and ‘them’ divide, but also the division within and between the ‘Other’, and in this case, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ black men. More specifically, in expressing his support for REACH, Jack Straw states, ‘...because the problem for these communities is that not only are they – the black kids – much more likely to end up in prison, but they are also much more likely to be the victims of crime than the white or non-black sections of the community’ (Straw, 2007; my emphasis). Straw was also reported saying, that ‘the best examples for disaffected black youngsters are other black people who have made their way in society because they have a better understanding of the pressures in these communities’ (White 2007: my emphasis).

Along similar lines, Boris Johnson, in seeking to initiate his mentors programme, visited several parts of London to engage with ‘the black community’, encouraging them to express their frustrations and then asking black men to register as mentors with the hope of creating a change. Johnson introduced the topic of black males and crime by pointing to the worrying ‘statistics’ of the number of black youths dying because of knife crime/gang warfare. He went on further to add that, ‘We need to support young people, particularly those vulnerable to crime and violence, which is why tonight I am asking those adults in the room to volunteer their time primarily to black boys aged 10-16 at risk of offending’ (Johnson 2011).

74 Thus far, these meetings have taken place on 14 December 2010 (Croydon); 24 January 2011 (Waltham Forest Community); 02 March 2011 (Brent/Willesden); and 13 April 2011 (Tottenham Town Hall, Haringey).
Furthermore, the v/p model lends itself to creating a position for ‘good’ blacks who convey ‘hope’ in the form of role-models/mentors (blacks as a ‘solution’) and who are there to ‘inspire’. In responding to the ‘despair’ of ‘the black community’ therefore, the then Labour Government launched REACH (DCLG 2008) whereby 20 black male role models were recruited by a panel of black ‘experts’ as ‘positive pillars of the community’, thus signalling hope. Soon after, and with the help of black actors Boris Johnson recruited 1000 black men to act as mentors for inner city black boys and men. His ‘Time for Action’ (Black Mentors) programme, Capital Men (GLA), was hailed as ‘a force for positive change’. In spite of the differences, these two schemes share a number of important similarities, principally that the onus is on black men to take responsibility for the on-going violence and crime (predominantly in the inner city areas of London) in order to orchestrate a ‘positive’ change for the benefit of ‘the black community’.

Yet Cornel West suggests that one should be wary of those that attempt to depict ‘the black community’ in any particular way as ‘Any notions of ‘the real Black community’ and ‘positive images’ are value-laden, socially loaded, and ideologically charged’ (1993: 263). This is because it is difficult to determine ‘what the ‘real Black community’ is and what ‘positive images’ are’ (ibid: 263) when such questions are unlikely to generate a homogenous response. I now demonstrate how the construction of ‘good’ blacks in the role-model /

75 Those on the REACH panel included: Tim Campbell (winner of The Apprentice, 1st series); Simon Woolley (Director of Operation Black Vote); Leroy Logan (Superintendent of Metropolitan Police); Ozwald Boateng (Fashion Designer).
76 The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, secured the help with the Mentor’s programme with ex-England footballer Ian Wright and Ray Lewis, the Mayor’s Deputy and Director of the Eastside Young Leader’s Academy.
77 The programme reached its target of recruiting 1000 black men on 22 February 2011.
mentor intervention is ‘value-laden, socially loaded, and ideologically charged’ (ibid: 263) and, in effect, the ways in which the intervention is presented renders the ‘life’ experiences of black men invisible. In other words, it homogenizes black men, and ignores the fact that just like the rest of the population blacks are separated in terms of age, class, region, sexual orientation and so forth. Like the construction of the black victim and the black perpetrator, the ‘good’ black and the ‘bad’ black ‘are part and parcel of the same process of evaluation and judgement’ (Pickering 2001: 204) where the ‘good’ black is conceived of a man that has no criminal intent, takes pride in fatherhood and gives back to ‘his own community’ (hope) – three characteristics that are notably absent in the ‘bad’ black (despair). This illustrates how the role-model/mentor intervention works, in accordance with the v/p model in terms of helping to maintain a number of binary oppositions: victim/perpetrator; vulnerable/dangerous; strong/weak; good/bad; positive/negative; problem/solution as opposed to illustrating a ‘diverse’ portrayal of black men. I now move on to explain the ways in which the schemes simultaneously presented blacks as a ‘problem’ (bad blacks, negative, hence despair) and the ‘solution’ (good blacks, positive, thus providing hope).

**Black men as the ‘problem’ and the ‘solution’**

Role models / mentors can be described as ‘symbolic gestures’ because on the one hand the act of mentoring demonstrates signs of goodwill, as they have volunteered their time for other black males, yet on the other hand, they serve as a reminder of the ‘bad’ black men. In order for this stereotype
to be effective, this binary of good/bad, positive/negative was illustrated both visually and linguistically within the public domain.

**Visual constructions of the ‘problem’ and the ‘solution’**

Images were advertised for black men to act as role models/mentors for black boys and young black men, and were available in a range of public places such as various London underground stations; bus-stops, and newspapers, as well as social networking sites such as Facebook (see Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3).

These positive images can be perceived as counteracting the negative images depicted in the ‘victim/perpetrator’ perspective, and in doing so, may echo Tony Blair’s views mentioned earlier; that most black people are law-abiding citizens and therefore the majority are not involved in crime. Alternatively, it could also serve as a form of validation; that it is not Us, or a societal problem, but Them, a ‘black problem’. This viewpoint is further
perpetuated when it is specifically black men in the form of role models / mentors that can be seen as actively doing something about the problems; thus creating a divide between the 'good' black males and the 'bad' black males which reiterates the notion that black males are either a problem or that it is only they who can provide the solution.

Furthermore, the ways in which the 20 role models can be 'seen' is particularly telling. The REACH brochure (DCLG 2008) showed all of the men dressed in suits, with the majority of them wearing ties. This was a representation of what a 'good' black man looks like. Thus, the visibility of a black man in a suit makes an essential point; that is the extent to which black males can and will be tolerated in Britain – and it is in a suit that a black man will not be seen as threatening. However, the presentation of a man in a suit, and especially a black man in a suit, advocates the type of black men from, or who not only conform to the values of business and professional classes but also those men who insist on giving back to 'the community' are suitable role models for black male youth. Black working class men, or those who did not have a record for 'giving back to the community' would have been unlikely to be put forward as appropriate candidates for the programme because their image was not aligned with a particular normative vision of who a black man should be.

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78 Gilroy (1987: 58-59) argues how a 1983 Conservative Party election poster, which portrays a black man in a suit implicitly implies the 'type' of black man Britain is willing to accept and the 'type' that will not be accepted by a dominant British society, i.e. Rastafarian.

79 Conversely, the black males recruited in 2010/11 under Boris Johnson’s programme did not need to possess any particular academic or professional qualifications, with the only prerequisite being that the potential mentors would have to be black (African/Caribbean) males with a passion to mentor inner city black boys and black men.
**Linguistic constructions of the ‘problem’ and the ‘solution’**

The 20 REACH role models selected came from a diverse range of professional backgrounds (for example, a lawyer, a naval officer, a weather forecaster) as it was considered imperative to choose those black professionals that young black males could aspire to: that is, the type that would replace other role models that were assumed to be predominantly rap and hip-hop music artists, as well as the ‘black street criminal.’ In spite of highlighting their different occupations, the space by which they shared their stories also served as a way of regulating how the ‘life’ experiences of black males should be discussed: through the stereotypes that either you are a ‘good’ black because you did not end up in a life of crime; because you are a devoted father; and/or because you serve ‘the black community.’ As such, any other experiences remain invisible as the dialogue of these men remains within the context of ‘crime’, ‘family’, and ‘community’.

The following quotations serve as demonstrations of the above when considering some of the ways in which the REACH role models explained their motivation for being a part of REACH (as was seen in the brochure). For example Karl Sewell (DCLG 2008): states: ‘I am a Black man who has managed to achieve against the odds… I see the REACH project as an opportunity to make a difference’. What comes through in this statement is how it suggests that it is unlikely for a black man to achieve, irrespective of class differences that might exist between black men (and it is not quite clear as to how he measures success) but in essence, the message reads, ‘I did it and so can you.’ Another role-model, Clive Lewis (DCLG 2008) highlighted
his father as a major source of influence: ‘I know how difficult it can be to make your way through life as a Black man. My father guided me. Not everybody is as fortunate – maybe that’s where I can help’. It can be argued that the above statement suggests that the role-models can also act as replacement figures for ‘absent’ fathers, yet, the quotation also reinforces the notion that the reasons why some black males are perhaps not finding it easy to make it through life is because their fathers are absent, which brings to the surface yet another stereotype. Additionally, the idea of ‘the black community’ as homogenous is revealed in the following statement by one of the other role-models, Rob Neil (DCLG 2008), who states: ‘I want to assist in unlocking the true and exciting potential of our community. There’s an old African proverb that says ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ – I want us all to belong to that village’. This encourages the view that all black people must take responsibility for one another irrespective of the factors that might divide them. This includes taking responsibility for what are societal issues, such as knife and gun crime, as well as gang-related activities. As another REACH role model, Neville Bryce (DCLG 2008) states: ‘My school friend’s 20 year old son was shot dead by a gang in Camberwell while shopping this year. I cannot sit by and let needless killings continue’.

Thus far, it appears that irrespective of their differences as people, role-models tend to promote the very values that blacks continue to be judged by, that is crime, family structures and as a community facing several problems. By aligning themselves with and promoting these views, the mentors do not enter into a conversation on black males which steps outside of these
values. Here, we begin to see the effectivity of the v/p model; that is, if, by solely pointing to black males as perpetrators, then cooperation from ‘the black community’ would have been strongly unlikely. However, claiming black males as victims and perpetrators, opens up the space for ‘good’ blacks who want to help and essentially are seen as taking ownership of a problem (of violence) that is not specific to black people to begin with. Yet the intervention also promotes the idea that that there are many black males still trying to catch up or are in the process of catching up with the rest of society and here are the few men that have managed to make it and can make a difference by helping, volunteering, serving.

What is perhaps most worrying is how this idea that the responsibility for addressing the on-going violence and crime rests with black men is endorsed by senior politicians. While those such as Boris Johnson are seen as taking an initiative to support ‘the black community’ with what are essentially cost-effective, volunteer-led schemes, it can equally be argued that the government are absolving themselves of responsibility by encouraging black men to actively take charge. Yet, not only are many black people already (and in increasing numbers) providing support to ‘the black community’ but also, the ways in which these particular organisations cater for black males bear much resemblance to the schemes initiated by the Government, which

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80 With this in mind, it seems timely to suggest, albeit a different time period, that perhaps Scarman’s words did not go unnoticed in the wake of the Brixton riots: ‘Inner city areas are not human deserts; they possess a wealth of voluntary effort and goodwill. It would be wise to put this human capital to good use’ (1981: 6.7).

81 One of the participants from the in-depth interviews, Peter Tosh, (see section 4.4) expressed his sentiments regarding images which see black men as continuously serving ‘the community’ which in itself also points to the lack of diverse images of black men.
in itself raises similar, if not the same issues (that have been discussed thus far) which I illustrate in the following section.

4.7 A Little Less Conversation, A Little More Action: ‘The Black Community’ Responds

The number of black-led charities / organisations predominantly run by and for black males mainly in London has steadily increased over the last two decades (Table 4.5). For an overview of each charity/organisation’s ethos, missions and programmes involved, see Table 4.5, which is based on the information available on the internet. In addition, the government initiated role-model/mentor interventions have also been included in the table to point out the resemblance they share given that they all promote mentoring. Based on this information and alongside insights gained in the field, this section begins with a discussion of these organisations in relation to the government initiated role-model/mentor intervention, not only because of the similarities they share, but also because of the implications that these similarities might have.

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82 This list that I compiled is by no means exhaustive but the charities/organisations that feature have been chosen on the basis that I met and spoke (or attempted to speak to) representatives of some of these organisations at events that I attended during fieldwork (see Chapter Three, Table 3.1), as well as conducting an internet search as highlighted in the previous chapter (under sub-section ‘participant observation’). All the information compiled is based on what was available on each of the websites and this information was correct at the time in which this table was last modified, May 2011.

83 Each organisation promotes mentoring in different ways.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO / WHEN / WHERE</th>
<th>WHY / MOTO</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
</tr>
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| **Windsor Fellowship**  
1986, London  
Director: Conrad Sackey | Concern over the 1980s urban riots  
**Moto:** Enriching education, employment & citizenship | Diversity, Excellence, Community, Integrity, Leadership is in our DNA  
To prevent from exclusion & help in ethnic males to extend their talent |
| **The From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation**  
1996, London  
Director: Decima Francis & Uanu Seshmi | Concern over the youth, their exclusion and gang violence  
**Moto:** “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.” Martin Luther King, Jr. | Access to education & practical activities to enhance their life skills |
| **The 100 Black Men of Birmingham**  
1997, Birmingham  
(Inspired from the US)  
Director: Nigel Gardner | Concerns over the many challenges the African-Caribbean community have to face  
**Moto:** Real Men giving Real Time | Investment in youth is critical to the development of the whole community  
Mentoring youth plays a part in moving forward so that they can develop future leaders |
| **The Male Development Service – boys2MEN**  
1998, London  
Director: Melvyn Davis | Risk of social exclusion, to rediscover their potential, seeming vulnerable, to make the transition from childhood to adulthood and eventually fatherhood  
**Moto:** Good, better, best  
Never let it rest  
’Til your good is better  
And your better is best! | Main focus is mentoring / counselling/ help with youth offenders / domestic violence to help them become successful fathers overall & for those single mothers, absent fathers & to overcome social exclusion – become role-models |
| **The National Black Boys Can Association**  
1999, Birmingham (and all across UK, incl. London)  
(Video discussed in section 4.7)  
Director: Various persons | Concerned as wanting to break the vicious cycle of underachievement, unemployment, crime and punishment  
**Moto:** Raising the Academic & social aspirations & achievements of Black Boys | 1. Empowering Boys  
2. Empowering Parents  
3. Engaging Communities  
4. Engaging Mainstream Education  
It’s an empowerment programme |
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<th>WHO / WHEN / WHERE</th>
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| **The 100 Black Men of London**  
2001, London  
(Inspired by the US)  
Director: Ken Barnes | To tackle and bring about positive change in the black community  
*Moto:* Real Men giving Real Time | 1. Mentoring  
2. Education  
3. Economic Development  
4. Health & Wellbeing  
= four for the future with the focus on them becoming future leaders |
| **Eastside Young Leader’s Academy**  
2002, London  
Director: Ray Lewis (also part of Mayor’s Mentor Programme) | To provide educational & emotional support for youth that are vulnerable to social exclusion  
*Moto:* We fully expect to produce Britain’s first Black Prime Minister | To motivate Black boys to stay in class and on task – to make these young leaders become positive role-models in their schools, communities & consequently to go on and become men of influence in their chosen fields |
| **Beyond the Will Smith Challenge (BTWSC)**  
2002, London  
Director: Ms. Serwah (co-founder) and Kwaku (Chair) | Developing Potential + Raising Aspirations + Promoting Social Inclusion  
*Moto:* “Everyone has the power for greatness, not for fame, but for greatness, because greatness is determined by service.” – Martin Luther King | Concern for minorities, socially excluded persons, and disadvantaged groups |
| **Generating Genius**  
2005, London, Jamaica  
Director: Tony Sewell | Aimed to demonstrate that university-calibre students could be developed, irrespective of background.  
*Moto:* Tomorrow’s Technologist’s Today | A project to create the next generation of, doctors, engineers, and research scientists |
| **The Mens Room**  
2005, Birmingham (main)  
London, Leeds, Bristol, Manchester  
Director: Clive Lewis (also Chair of REACH – DCLG 2007) | Helping those from poor socio-economic groups and NEET groups  
*Moto:* Developing better men, husbands, fathers & leaders | Mentoring – sex education – fatherhood – Men’s health – Men in the Home – Understanding women – Leadership development |
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<th>WHO / WHEN / WHERE</th>
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<td><strong>The Hutchinson Foundation</strong>&lt;br&gt;2006, London&lt;br&gt;Director: Several trustees</td>
<td>To improve the life chances and break the cycle of underachievement and deprivation that has blighted the lives of young black British males for more than a generation&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>Moto:</em> Promoting positive role models to young black males in education</td>
<td>Providing financial support and leadership training for young African Caribbean males to become teachers with the objective being to expand the numbers of these teachers, thus increasing the provision of positive role models and influence to young black males</td>
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<td><strong>REALITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;2007, London&lt;br&gt;Director: Leroy Logan (also on the REACH panel); Trustee: Rob Neil (REACH society / role-model)</td>
<td>Concern over crime, particularly concerning black youth&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>Moto:</em> Raise Everyone's Awareness of Lives Lost in The Youth</td>
<td>Involving youth &amp; outreach workers to provide programmes for youth. Methodology = entice, encourage, enable, educate, enterprise, evaluate, equality.&lt;br&gt;7 Principles of Public Life = selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, Openness, Honesty, Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Synergy</strong>&lt;br&gt;2007, London&lt;br&gt;Director: Leila Thomas</td>
<td>Alarmed at the incidence of violence and disenfranchisement affecting young people of colour (as shown in the media)&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>Moto:</em> The Mentoring Resource Pool</td>
<td>Mentoring - this organisation was set up to help and encourage them towards success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REACH NATIONAL ROLE-MODEL PROGRAMME</strong>&lt;br&gt;2008, London and national&lt;br&gt;Panellists: Leroy Logan, Simon Woolley, Ozwald Boatang, Tim Cambell (and Hazel Blears)</td>
<td>Black males being over-presented in almost all walks of life, especially crime (influenced by rappers)&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<em>Moto:</em> Your potential realised</td>
<td>Mentors &amp; Role-models to show them the diverse opportunities available to them</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO / WHEN / WHERE</td>
<td>WHY / MOTO</td>
<td>WHAT</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REACH Society</strong></td>
<td>Concern over the Government’s decision to end the grant for the REACH role model programme</td>
<td>To inspire young Black Boys and young Black men to reach their potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010, London</td>
<td><strong>Moto:</strong> Building connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director: Donald Palmer, Rob Neil (REACH role-model), Dwain Neil</td>
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</tbody>
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| **Capital Men**     | Violence in the inner city areas of London | Mentors for African & Caribbean communities |
| 2010/2011, London   | **Moto:** Be a mentor (Aim: 1000 Black men) |
| Boris Johnson supported by Ian Wright / Ray Lewis |

| **Black Men in the Community (BMITC)** | Concern over the representation of Black men | Concern over the current climate and austerity and the disproportionate impact it is having on Black men |
| 2011, London | **Moto:** Our mission is to provide high calibre leadership and specialist support that will lead to the development of sustainable partnerships between new and existing Black led groups as part of a broader response to the immense financial opportunities and challenges facing Black men and their families in the UK |
| Director: Various Organisations, i.e. 100 Black Men of London, and more |

**Table 4.5** List of black-led organisations and charities / Government supported Intervention role-model/mentor schemes

**Similarities in black-led and government-led role-model / mentor intervention schemes**

Firstly, what is perhaps the most notable feature, is how these charities have arisen primarily out of negative circumstances; that is the under the premise of the threat of violence and the social exclusion of black males. In this sense, they signal to the *despair* of what has happened or what is happening
and what could continue to happen if ‘the black community’ do not act. These organisations act as a form of intervention to prevent more black males from experiencing hardships, thus signalling hope. Equally important, these organisations symbolise members of ‘the black community’ actively taking charge to better their social, economic and political status.

Secondly, the linguistic construction of the missions, statements, and ethos of each of these organisations are similar to not only those used in the government initiated schemes but they are also similar to one another. Some of the words used by the organisations to account for the negative circumstances black males find themselves in include ‘social exclusion’; ‘vulnerable’; ‘unemployment’; ‘crime’; ‘underachievement’. As a way of counteracting these negative circumstances, these organisations promote positive changes by using words such as, ‘raising academic and social aspirations’; ‘enhance their life skills’; ‘role-models’; ‘empowerment’.

Thirdly, as 2007 marks the beginning of the period in which media reports were detailing the rise of violent crime, this compelled ‘members of the black community’ to initiate schemes similar to that of the government which suggests that they are taking responsibility for their ‘own’. This stance reveals itself in a statement given of one of the organisers when explaining the reasons behind the emergence of the London charity, ‘Urban Synergy’. Founded by Liela Thomas, the statement reads: ‘Alarmed at the incidence of violence and disenfranchisement affecting young people of colour, she [Leila]
decided enough was enough and created an organisation to help support and encourage them to success’ (Thomas 2007; my emphasis).

The above statement also raises questions about the role of the media and how ‘the black community’ responded to the on-going violence. As the government initiated schemes demonstrated, it was following the stories highlighted in the media especially that led politicians to react and therefore the intervention ensued. There is evidence that the media too is having a powerful effect on the ways in which people from ‘the black community’ are reacting to the news. In discussing her motivation for initiating Urban Synergy for example, Leila puts forth that ‘People ask me all the time how and why I founded Urban Synergy…’ (Thomas 2007) and she then goes on to illustrate how the media played an essential role in determining her actions. In her own words:

‘…At the time it seemed that every other week there was a news story about the youth knife crime epidemic’ sweeping the nation…At a time where young black people are disproportionately being killed or affected by knife and violent crime, I believe that early intervention – by providing practical help and resources including positive role models – is the difference between a child who is labelled a failure and a child destined for success….It’s not just a parent’s responsibility to raise a child. It takes a ‘village’ also! …Urban Synergy has helped over 900 young people realise they have the potential to beat stereotypes…’ (ibid; my emphasis).

This statement has been quoted at length because it highlights many things. On the one hand, it is evidently clear that the Director (Leila) reacted to the
sensationalist news coverage around on-going violence. Like the government initiatives, she shares the same sentiments about encouraging ‘positive’ role-models which I pointed out earlier is open to scrutiny. At the same time, her choice of words, such as, ‘failure’, ‘success’, suggests that strong ‘positive’ black role-models are necessary as otherwise young blacks are likely to live up to negative stereotypes and hence, self-fulfilling prophecies. Again, this promotes the idea that blacks are either the ‘problem’ or the ‘solution’.

Fourthly, like the government initiated interventions, REACH, and Capital Men, these tend to emphasise the importance of ‘race’ and gender: they insinuate that the problems and therefore the responsibility for addressing them, rests with black males. Furthermore, they advance the view that ‘good’ black men are the most trusted persons to provide support and guidance in a non-judgemental environment whereby they can stress the importance of what black men could become if they are a part of these organisations. In other words, if they are mentored, black male youth will encounter a positive journey towards the ‘ideal’ (black) manhood which in essence usually means a life characterised by the absences of crime and violence; a life of familial and community service. This vision of ideal black manhood suggests that violence, crime, and absent fathers are problems specific to ‘the black community’. The organisations appear to replace these negative depictions with positive messages, centering around black manhood, fatherhood and ‘community,’ which is further reflected in the names that some of these organisations have chosen to adopt, such as, ‘The ‘From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation,’ ‘100 Black men of London’, ‘The Male Development
Service’ (formerly known as boys2MEN) and the ‘Mens Room’ – ‘Developing good fathers’ as illustrated in Table 4.5.

Given the similarities that seem to exist between these black-led organisations/charities and the government-led intervention schemes (REACH and Boris Johnson’s mentors programme – Capital Men), it is important to consider the implications of these existing organisations/charities.

**Implications for existing black-led role-model / mentor intervention schemes**

In line with the above, it is fair to suggest that the role model / mentors intervention devised by the Government appears to be somewhat mirroring what members of ‘the black community’ have been actively doing for a number of years. It therefore seems timely and relevant to question why such programmes have not brought about radical changes in the ways blacks are portrayed.

Regardless of their ‘good’ intentions, the connotations are nevertheless that black males require ‘special’ attention, which means further separating them from mainstream society. This separation is endorsed by senior politicians, who actively encourage black men to take the lead. The attempt to homogenise ‘the black community’ reinforces beliefs that only they can help one another. Such a stance reveals itself on the National Black Boys Can (NBBC) website, in which a video footage of a black boy, approximately aged 12, can be seen making the following statement:
‘…coz people think black people are like different just because of their skin and they…don’t take them personality wise, they take it skin wise like they might think that just because we’re black, we spread…havoc everywhere. But when we go to black boys can, we can like, prove ourselves to say that we’re normal human beings’.

Several issues arise from this statement: Who are these people that see black people as ‘different?’ And what impact does this have in the ways in which the boy perceives non-black people? What does he mean by ‘havoc’? And how does he prove that he is normal? By whose standards is this normativity being achieved? Does his presence at NBBC reinforce his belief that he can only trust black people and notably, black men to see him as a ‘normal’ human being? If so, this too can foster an environment for a prejudicing strategy itself as it encourages a child to accept it as ‘truth’ that only black people can perceive another black person as ‘normal’ and therefore racial prejudice is endemic amongst anyone that is not black! A final, equally pertinent point to make is that such an organisation arguably represents what can be described as a form of territorial as well as spiritual separation which was also discussed in Chapter Two (Bauman 1990:61).84 That is, NBBC symbolises a ‘place’ which caters for those individuals who are ‘seen’ as separate from dominant (white) society. As such, NBBC for the child, as the quote suggests, marks a place of belonging, and more importantly informs him of where he does not belong (mainstream society).

84 Bauman (1990: 61) identifies territorial separation as ‘parts of towns or areas of the country reserved for the habitation of people whom the native population refused to mix with…’ The spiritual separation can mean that the hardships and their experiences are rendered invisible. These types of separation were also discussed in Chapter Two, Part B.
As indicated above, black-led organisations seemingly represent a ‘safe haven’ for young black males, and since they continue to rise in numbers, the message from dominant society seems to read that black males must fend for themselves. It is unsurprising therefore that the question which remains unanswered is what has the government been ‘doing over the years to help create understanding, equity and justice for [these] groups of people’ (Tomlinson 2008: 4) when their own programmes appear to be mimicking and duplicating the black-led organisations. It may also be argued that it is only fair that the government devises schemes that are supported by members of ‘the black community’. This was illustrated by REACH and Capital Men, in which ‘representatives’ from ‘the black community’ were actively engaged with the State as well as their ‘own community,’ advocating for positive changes. However, this form of ‘representation’ raises issues which I explore in the fourth and final section of this chapter.

4.8 ‘Good’ Blacks Representing ‘The Black Community’

It is important to expand on these organisations, as some of their Directors/organisers (hence ‘good’ blacks who promote the ideals of ‘black fatherhood’ and ‘the black community’) occupy a dual role in responding to the government’s agenda on the one hand, and at the same time trying to offer alternative conceptions of black masculinities. However good their intentions might be, their efforts lend themselves to unintended consequences if the dialogue continues to be governed by the politics of ‘race’ and gender. That is, if the dialogue continues to be framed by all the negative connotations associated with ‘black maleness,’ like absent fathers
for example, than no one (irrespective of their ‘race’) is exempt from making prejudicial remarks. As Tajfel (1963: 8) writes, prejudice or even persistent unfairness are matters ‘of which we, are all capable in one way or another, when we assume our favourite posture as self-appointed judges of other people’s ‘nature’, ‘character’, ‘personality’, or what-not’ (ibid: 8). This stance reveals itself in the views expressed by Clive Lewis, Chair of REACH/Director of the Mens Room, which I address now.

As the Director of a charity which promotes fatherhood and being a father himself, it is not surprising that Lewis should feel compassionate about the subject and this is evidently clear in an article written by him in 2006. In ‘What is the future for this black boy?’ Lewis recalls an event that he witnessed while waiting at a train station in Birmingham involving a ‘young attractive white lady’ (Lewis 2006). He comments that aside from her beauty, he is intrigued by the fact that she is holding whom he describes as a ‘black (mixed race) baby. A boy. Probably 6-9 months old. This was the real reason that I was so intrigued’ (ibid). Having noticed that it is just the two of them, Lewis admits that a number of questions run through his mind: ‘Why is this lady here? Where is she travelling? Where is the black man who fathered her baby? Is he (the baby’s father) active in his upbringing?’ (ibid). While the image of a lone woman with her child in a public space is by no means an uncommon sight, the fact that the black father is absent from the scene

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85 At the time in which this chapter was being written, this article was available on the Mens Room website. However, the Men’s Room has undergone changes in which it now caters for a larger base, including white people and therefore most articles related specifically to black people are no longer available such as this one.
proves symbolic for Lewis as he questions the role, if any, the father plays in the child’s life.

As Tajfel (1963: 5) observes, ‘when we are uncertain about the identity or the features of something concerning us in our environment, physical or social, we try to guess. But what, if any, are the rules of guessing?’ For Lewis to engage in an act of guessing is not random; as guessing is often ‘strongly influenced by past experience, motivation, interests, needs, purposes’ (ibid: 5). Soon after the lady is joined by two other women (whom Lewis describes one as white, the other ‘oriental’), and he overhears the lady ask them,

‘Do you have ID? …The oriental lady promptly produced an ID card, showed it to the mother and popped it back. Then it suddenly clicked. This young mother had made arrangements to meet social workers at the station to hand over her son. My heart sank. I had no idea what this mother had experienced…But, I seemed to have grown attached to her as this 35-minute story unfolded’ (Lewis 2006; my emphasis).

After having watched the lady hand over the baby to the two women and they all part, Lewis again finds himself immersed in questions concerning the baby’s black father: ‘Where is he? Does he have other children anywhere? How is he facing up to the responsibility that his sexual encounter with the beautiful young lady has produced?’ (ibid).

This incident highlights many things. To begin with, Lewis admits that he has ‘no idea’ what the lady has experienced; after all, that child might not even have been her son. Assuming that the baby’s father is, in actual fact ‘black,’
Lewis appears fixated with asking questions that relate to negative stereotypes held of black men in relation to fatherhood; such as, not playing an active role in their children’s upbringing, not willing to face up to the responsibility of their offspring, as well as fathering children with multiple women. With this in mind, the comparison that can be drawn from the ways in which Lewis sees the lady compared to how he perceives the ‘black’ father is notable. Within 35 minutes, Lewis grows ‘attached’ to an ‘attractive’, ‘beautiful’ stranger and thus perceives her as a victim. This acquires significance when we consider that the father’s sense of integrity is doubted as Lewis adopts a certain sense of readiness to select and interpret the information in a manner which distorts or ignores information based on actual ‘facts’. Lewis concludes his article with, ‘We who have a passion to help young black men reach their potential face great challenges’ (Lewis 2006; my emphasis).

It is unsurprising that Tajfel (1963: 5) should state that in regards to problems of prejudice, these lie ‘within the framework of a much wider psychological question: How do we come to perceive the world the way we do?’ Lewis’ observations suggest that he perceives certain black men as still in the process of catching up with other black men and one of the ‘visible’ markers that indicate that a black man has achieved his potential is by him being a (non-absent) father like Lewis unlike the other black man who appears ‘absent’. While the ‘black’ father remains invisible from the scene observed by Lewis, there is a further ‘type’ of invisibility at play here. That is, of the ‘type’ of invisibility which prevents Lewis from acknowledging that like him, the (invisible) ‘black’ father too is a complex human being as opposed to
the foregone conclusion that Lewis assumes he is. Thus, the protagonist in Ellison’s Invisible Man warns that the trappings involved in blacks ‘representing’ other blacks are the failure to differentiate themselves from one another. As he comments, ‘For one thing, they seldom know where their personalities end and yours begins; they usually think in terms of ‘we’ while I have always tended to think in terms of ‘me’ – and that has caused some friction, even with my own family’ (Ellison [1952] 2001: 316; my emphasis).

In the light of this, it seems that the incident observed by Lewis represents a division within and between the ‘Other’, and in this case of a ‘good’ black (in this case, Lewis) judging a ‘bad’ black as the latter has failed to meet the former’s expectations on the ideals of fatherhood. Fields (1990: 100) argues however, that ‘an ideology is impossible for anyone to analyse rationally who remains trapped on its terrain’. As a consequence, this can lead to ‘loose thinking on these matters, [and in this case black men and ‘fatherhood’]’ (ibid: 99) which can translate into careless language being used ‘which in turn promotes misinformation’ (ibid: 99). Thus, Lewis began his article with, ‘I saw something that upset and troubled me today’ (Lewis 2006). More upsetting and troubling than the ‘black’ father who appeared ‘absent’, perhaps, is the way in which Lewis perceived, stereotyped, and cast judgement on a man whose identity will always remain unknown.

As a ‘representative’ for blacks, it can be argued that Lewis is responsible for portraying a more fair representation for ‘the black community’. Notably, his views are not so dissimilar to Jack Straw’s comments on ‘absent fathers’ (as was illustrated earlier in this chapter) in the ‘current’ climate. At this point it is
worth noting that Straw’s comments only came after he admitted that ‘representatives’ of the black community, like Trevor Philips, were concerned about the absence of fathers. In fact, he went as far as mentioning at least the names of more a few more ‘good’ blacks such as his friend Colin Powell to illustrate how some have made it. On that note, it is difficult to determine if those views expressed by Straw were his own, or based on what the ‘representatives’ had said, and if the latter, then for Straw to rely on the views of a couple of ‘representatives’ suggests a worrying premise to think critically from. What is perhaps more worrying is if the views of ‘representatives’ do not differ from those in the majority society. How fair, if at all, is the representation for ‘the black community’ in Britain when clearly, it is these people that the Government can be seen working ‘jointly’ with? Then again, this is likely to be unfair, as speaking about ‘black’ people specifically demonstrates that these are clear signs of homogenising people. Class and other forms of internal difference become insignificant, yet a wealthy person, like Trevor Philips, and one Jack Straw refers to, has been given the platform to speak for ‘the black community’. This acquires significance when it can be considered that Lewis is not the only one who has expressed his concerns around black fatherhood. While his article was not within the mainstream media, certain representatives have been given the opportunity to ‘represent’ ‘the black community’ in newspapers such as The Guardian. In the ‘current’ climate, it is clear that the subject of fatherhood remains a contentious issue amongst the ‘representatives’ who symbolise ‘good’ blacks making judgements upon ‘bad’ blacks, thus rendering the diversity of blacks invisible even further as will be demonstrated now.
‘Good’ black vs. ‘bad’ black (fathers)

As highlighted throughout this chapter, much of the blame for the on-going violence has been attributed to black males. Furthermore, one of the principal reasons why black males are seen as victims and perpetrators is because of the absence of their fathers. This point was made clearly by Ray Lewis (Director of Eastside Young Leader’s Academy as shown on Table 4.5) when showing his support for Johnson’s Capital Men:

‘This is the most unfathered generation in history, a whole generation of boys and young men who are missing out on a positive male role model at a really crucial time in their lives. The lack of a father figure sadly means these young men are often vulnerable, and as a result are at far greater risk of being impacted by youth crime – both as victims and perpetrators’ (GLA: Mayor’s mentoring programme my emphasis).

The second part of this chapter finishes where it began – that is, blacks being perceived as victims/perpetrators, vulnerable/dangerous, good/bad, positive/negative, problem/solution. Like Clive Lewis, Ray Lewis too is a black man and so the unflinching question that remains is why is he not acknowledging the differences between himself and other blacks but instead, allowing for the conversations to be regulated by ‘race’ and gender?

He and Clive Lewis, however, are not alone in this. During this time of on-going violence, black ‘representatives’ such as Tony Sewell (Generating Genius) and Simon Woolley (director of Operation Black Vote and REACH
panel member) were given space to respond and in most cases, the subject not only remained on notions around fatherhood, but each of these men condemned other black men for being ‘absent’. This is evident in the titles of the articles which were published mostly at the height of the on-going violence, and read as follows: ‘Scandal of the absent fathers’ – (Sewell 2007); ‘David Cameron86 is right: some black men don’t take responsibility for their children. Holding up role models will help change that’ (Woolley 2008a).

As well as condemning ‘bad’ black fathers, this space was also used to favour the government-initiated role-model/mentor schemes, as highlighted in the quote above and in the following two: ‘We all realize that when black fathers in broken families play little or no role in their children’s lives, positive male role models are crucial’ (Woolley 2008b), and ‘…what can we do when a young man does not have a father in his life? How can society nurture the development of young men before a culture of low esteem, low aspiration and, in the worst cases, drug abuse and violence robs them of their futures?’ (Lammy 2008).

Thus, not only was the on-going violence attributed to absent black fathers but so are the educational performances of black boys at school as advocated by Tony Sewell (2010a): ‘Black boys are too feminised: More than racism, the absence of father figures is the main problem holding back black kids in school’.

86 David Cameron’s comment only came after US President Barack Obama stated that black men in the US had to make more effort to be better fathers and so Cameron applied this in the British context
A notable feature is that as ‘representatives’ who can be seen to be serving their community and therefore doing ‘good’, why must it be represented against the backdrop of something negative? In other words, these men are portrayed as ‘good’ black men as they condemn the actions of the ‘bad’ black men. However, this is not just limited to their opinions on fathers, as it extends to their opinions on young black males too.

‘Good’ black vs. ‘bad’ black (young males)

What underpins this chapter especially (as well as the thesis) is the concern with the number of ways in which black males are constructed as delinquents and perpetrators of violence. As stressed earlier, the victim/perpetrator model is indicative of how black ‘representatives’ are actively involved in contributing to constructions of black masculinities. In the current climate, it is noteworthy that they do not seem to acknowledge the factors (such as class) that divide them; instead, they illustrate that they are ‘good’ by not only perpetuating stereotypes of other ‘blacks’ as bad and hence delinquents. There seems to be little or no space in between these ‘types’, as unlike these ‘good’ men, the insinuation is that these young men that are referred to as victim and perpetrators are ending up as self-fulfilling prophecies.

In his article ‘Master class in victimhood’ Sewell draws upon his experience of teaching black boys, who he describes as sitting at the ‘bad boy table’ (Sewell 2010b: 33) in a classroom. The boys were initially not willing to do the work, as they felt everyone was racially prejudiced against them. However, Sewell points out that he would offer a box of chocolates to those
who completed the tasks he set which results in the boys finding inspiration for completing their assignment. What comes through is not only how Sewell advocates bribery, but how he also goes on to say of the boys, ‘There we have it: the trauma of 400 years of racism, slavery and oppression overcome by the desire for a soft centre’ (ibid: 33).

In responding to the current violence, Labour MP David Lammy (2008), writing in The Guardian newspaper, draws upon his own experience of growing up in a single-parent household, which is then followed by his views on other young black males who might have grown up in a similar situation:

‘...yes to hard work and serving the community, and no to ‘the street’, to disrespecting women, and to bad attitude. It’s not flash: it’s about saying no to the simple things – like inappropriate personal dress – they are never going to get you a good job...The goal for the black community is full development. As Bob Marley said, it is ‘to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery’ – and break another soul free from those chains’ (ibid.)

Yet again, there is a clear idea of how black males should be, and more importantly how they should not be. However, what is inappropriate personal dress? If the goal for ‘the black community’ is full development, does that mean it is under-developed in some way? Finally, what is more worrying is how, like Sewell, Lammy suggests that black males are self-fulfilling prophecies as unlike Lammy, many have failed to emancipate themselves from mental slavery but he, himself, made it and hence the ‘good’ black.

An important question to ask, therefore, is whether the concern of black males can be discussed without stereotyping black males first? The problem
is that even while these men point out their concerns, this nevertheless suggests some form of ‘symbolic containment’ (Pickering 2001: 217) because as readers we are constantly reminded of stereotypes – as Lammy for example, suggests that black males find it difficult to say ‘no’ to the streets. Interestingly, this reference to ‘the streets’ has been echoed by another representative – Ken Barnes, who refers to himself as ‘The Hope Dealer’, not a dealer in dope, but a dealer in hope. Everyone needs hope’ (2007: 2). Certainly, sometimes stereotypes are subverted in order to give something that is negative a positive meaning. While they might disrupt the original meaning, this does not displace it, as the meaning continues to be framed by it.

At the same time, it would be misleading to assume that the stereotyping is centred on ‘good’ blacks vs. ‘bad’ blacks. It is far more complex than that. As the number of organisations has risen, there are other implications to consider. While most organisations use the same/similar words, such as ‘role-models’, ‘inspire’, ‘development’ this does not necessarily suggest that each organisation carries the same meaning. While they all have the aim of bettering the life chances of black males, each organisation’s Director will run their organisations in their own way. This is evident even in the REACH society organisation (REACH society 2010) who defines which ‘type’ of black man qualifies as not only a role-model but also which type of men run, or are allowed to be a part of these organisations:

‘Reach Society role models tend to be fathers who have successfully guided their children into adulthood; or they are actively doing so. Without exception, they will be trained in the unique EDILES
methodology for inspiring boys and young men to take responsibility for their development (REACH society 2010).

It can be argued that they might not always approve of other black-led organisations and their way of doing things. This potentially breeds competition, almost like who runs the most successful business in the ‘black role-model industry’ for example, and at the same time, this also creates another opportunity for the discussions to continue taking place within the framework of ‘race’ and gender. This can be considered when Sewell (2010b: 33-4) criticised REACH for being ‘desperate’ and ‘patronising’, and within the same article explained how his organisation was better. In this sense, it is not only about ‘good’ blacks versus ‘bad’ blacks, but also, how the ‘good’ blacks are reacting to one another, which I demonstrate further below.

**Good black vs. good black (men)**

In supporting the REACH programme, Woolley, director of Operation Black Vote, made a point of acknowledging that people would disapprove of the scheme, claiming that he and those who also took part would be ‘seen as ‘coconuts’ or community sell-outs. He thus responded in the Guardian newspaper by stating: We’re not...we aim to promote the value of good parenthood and cerebral and entrepreneurial endeavour’ (2008b). Again, the connotations are that they can either be seen as ‘good’ (promoting fatherhood, which again, is another discredited stereotype) or as ‘community sell-outs’. The question here is that if the differences between black males
were more widely encouraged and celebrated, would terms like coconuts emerge? As such, these terms only reinforce animosity and create more room for labelling, thus adding more labels to an already too long a list of stereotypes such as victim/perpetrator, good/bad, positive/negative, problem/solution, sell-outs or those who ‘wanna keep it real’ and so forth.

The same can be said when Joseph Harker, a (black male), writing for The Guardian (2008), mocked the REACH scheme and in particular the role of the 20 men that were selected as national role-models, when he sarcastically asked the question of what these men should be named as and then asks if it might be ‘Hazel’s House Negroes?’

Thus, the problem with these labels is that they all represent a set of ideas, or ideologies rather as to the type of black man one should aspire to be and/or ‘prove’ to others the ‘type’ of black man that he is. In the current climate, rather than addressing poverty and structural inequalities that hinder the life chances of black males, the conversation continues to be dominated by ‘race’. It may be argued that as well intentioned as the efforts of ‘representatives’ might be, they might also be reproducing inequalities by perpetuating the stereotypes of black males. And yet, a vital point to draw upon is that the authority of black ‘experts’ and ‘representatives’ to speak out and ‘represent’ in the first place relies on the homogenization of ‘the black community’. Indeed, this legitimacy of having the position of a ‘representative’ is made possible by racism to begin with. This also explains why this topic continues to take its place within the context of ‘race’ and gender. However, that is not to suggest there are no alternative ways in which these issues surrounding on-going violence cannot be thought of and
more importantly, without ‘race’ and gender being at the forefront of these themes which will be explored in the second and final analysis chapter which follows next.

Conclusion

As was seen in Part A, this chapter began with a consideration of how black men feel they have been constructed in British society, and this was discussed within the framework of ‘the black super-stud’, ‘the black athlete’, ‘the intellectual black’ and ‘the bestial black’. The findings revealed that indeed, it was the construction of ‘the bestial black’ that proved to be the major source of concern and perhaps more so, as the respondents from the in-depth interviews were only too aware of the consequences of this; that is how it positioned them in a place where discrimination seemed inevitable. This chapter revealed how the respondents experienced racial discrimination on multiple levels and the areas in which this concerned them the most was in the arenas of employment and social spaces, namely their interactions with the police which included in the ‘current’ period due to the on-going violence where black men have been depicted predominantly as the victims and perpetrators, which I highlighted especially in Part B of this chapter. Here, I explained how black males have been predominantly constructed as perpetrators of violence which I also referred to as ‘the perpetrator model’. However, this dynamic was disrupted following the Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence’s murder and subsequently the conclusions that were reached. This dynamic shift paved the way for the construction of black males from
perpetrators to both victims and perpetrators and hence the new model which I termed the victim/perpetrator model. Thus the label of the black male as a victim in British discourse, as I identified, came at a price. That is, there are several ways in which the line between victims and perpetrators became blurred and therefore has allowed for black males to be further stigmatised in British society, thus suggesting that this particular group of people are more difficult to socially integrate. However, it is important to consider how it has also created a space for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ blacks, judged by the same values – manhood (the men who make it irrespective of their circumstances), fatherhood, and ‘the community’. This binary of ‘good’ black and ‘bad’ blacks was evident in the role-model/mentors intervention. In this chapter I demonstrated that the Government has been taking the initiatives to promote and support the role model/mentor intervention to counteract the ‘victim/perpetrator’ dynamic. Yet I also demonstrated that upon a closer look, the Government have only instigated schemes that members of ‘the black community’ have been engaged in for a number of years. This led to the conclusion that there does not seem to be much difference in the ways these schemes are being initiated by black people and the Government, in which the latter relies on black men to actively take part in constructing how a black man should be, while also placing as much emphasis on how he should not be. This does not mean, however, that this cannot be resisted, (and whereby an alternative model, as in the third model is introduced), as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.
5. RESISTANCE AND AMBIGUITY IN THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK BRITISH MEN

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined this dynamic construction of the victim/perpetrator model by addressing in particular the responses from black men, and in this case, the ‘representatives’ and black-led organisations. At the same time, I showed that the views of the individuals who participated in the in-depth interviews are the most important, as they are the people who can provide insight concerning the inconsistencies that exist between their lived realities and the representation of the subject. In this second and final analysis chapter, I will examine closely the impact of the victim/perpetrator dynamic when considering the alternative ways in which black masculinity is constructed by black British men – here, a third model is introduced. This chapter will also include illustrations of some survey findings, and more importantly, some images provided by individuals in order to illustrate the alternative ways in which they construct a sense of ‘self’. This chapter makes a contribution to knowledge in the area as very little has been written about the lives and experiences of black men in the British context. The chapter aims not only to invite different ways of seeing how black men construct their life, but also how they have come to make sense of the world through their own eyes, and ultimately, where this positions black men within society as a whole.
This chapter concerns how alternative black British masculinities are constructed. As discussed in Chapter Four (Part A), participants perceived the portrayal of black male as perpetrator of violence to be the most prevalent image of black males encountered in popular culture, as well as within British society. Moreover, the men stated that they had at some stage felt constrained by this image, which invoked further discussions regarding their experiences of racial prejudice. At the same time, they\(^{87}\) challenged the image of the threatening black male. This chapter therefore asks: how did participants both challenge and resist this image? Secondly, given the outsider status implied by this and other images of them, to what extent do black men feel a sense of belonging in relation to Britain? Both these questions are important in that they invoke discussions around control and who possesses this. Control predominantly lay with white men, with participants stating that ‘[Britain’s] more geared towards the Caucasian persuasion…the power base is with the Caucasian male, there’s no two ways about it…’ (Bradley Hunt) and ‘It’s a white man’s world’ (Luxor-Cephren). More specifically, the (predominantly white) men in control are seen in terms of ‘the system’, which represents those institutions that have the power to exercise order and control over the masses. These include the media, the criminal justice system (mainly the police), and, the political arena, as well as those which come under the umbrella of the very rich and powerful. Class, therefore, also plays a pivotal role in ‘the system’, according to participants. Meanwhile, since the participants demonstrated a deep sense of distrust of ‘the system’ this inevitably raises the question of the

\(^{87}\) One of the participants, Kenneth Branson, did not challenge the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’.
degree to which they feel a sense of insider-ness within Britain. This chapter begins with a consideration of these questions, drawing on the lenses of Bauman’s (1990; 1991; 1995; 1997) conceptions of the ‘Other’ – ‘the stranger’ (which was also discussed in Chapter Two, particularly section 2.3), and Foucault’s ([1977] 1997) ideas of resistance. The conceptual resources provided by Bauman shed considerable light on how alternative black British masculinities are constructed. After addressing the question of belonging, the chapter then turns to the issue of resistance.

5.1 Black British Men: A Question Of Belonging

As Bauman (1991: 59) observes, the stranger is a pivotal figure in the modern social world as he is perceived as ‘a constant threat to the world’s order’. More often than not, strangers are perceived as those racially/ethnically different and thus ‘remain the permanent ‘slimy’, always threatening to wash out the boundaries vital to (white) native identity’ (ibid: 67; my emphasis). In this way, modern societies, in the search for order and control, construct boundaries and exclusionary practices whereby attempts are made to establish a clear and absolute division between Us (the natives) and Them (the strangers). This form of control is exercised in two ways: firstly, by assimilating them so as to become ‘irrelevant’ (Bauman 1995: 128) and fade ‘into the background one need neither notice nor care about’ (ibid: 128); and/or secondly, ‘to drastically reduce, or eliminate altogether, the element of surprise, and thus unpredictability, in the conduct of strangers’
The latter may be achieved in making strangers the target of stereotyping, whereby their actions may be seen (or visually portrayed) as ‘predictable’ and thus lead one to conclude that they are a self-fulfilling prophecy. A prominent example of this is the stereotypical portrayal of the threatening black ‘Other’. This stereotype takes a variety of forms, including the following: ‘the mugger’, ‘the rioter’, ‘the drug-dealer’, and ‘the gang-member’ (which were discussed at length in Chapter Two). All these variations have been emphasised at different points by dominant British society, such as the media, and/or even the police. These constructions of black males suggest that violence and aggression are specific to Them (black) and not Us (white), as illustrated thus far.

However, as Bauman (1991) has argued, a third kind of stranger exists: those which disrupt that pattern of predictability imposed upon them. These strangers occupy neither the position of those that have been fully assimilated, nor are they fully excluded. Instead, they exist ‘somewhere peculiarly in between’ (Pickering 2001: 204). In this sense, they are neither friends nor foes, nor Us, nor Them, and as such remain ambiguous, maintaining the status of both insiders and outsiders. For Bauman (1991: 58), they are ‘in principle, undecidables. They are the premonition of that ‘third element’ which should not be. These are the true hybrids… – not just unclassified, but unclassifiable’. According to Bauman (1991: 56), it is their presence that truly threatens the stability and order that modernity strives for as they are ‘neither/nor; which is to say that they militate against the either/or’. The experiences and identities of the men in this study are located
within this framework as a result ‘of the difficulty of conventionally placing them, of deciding where they’re at’ (Pickering 2001: 204). At times they appeared to be positioned ‘in a continual contact zone between belonging and unbelonging’ (ibid: 204). To demonstrate, I consider this in the light of how some of the men expressed their relationship to Britain (Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2).

Malcolm states that it is South London in particular that holds more resonance for him, and this is evident in his choice of words when expressing this particular ‘space’ in London, i.e. ‘enjoy’, ‘celebrate’. It is significant that Malcolm does not place emphasis on the ‘other’ side of the Thames, which not only represents central London but also his place of work. This is an important point to consider, as work is a place where Malcolm has experienced being perceived as an outsider – the threatening
black ‘Other’ (see section 4.4). Thus the image of the underground is profound, in that on the surface, it suggests that Malcolm feels a sense of insider-ness within London. Yet, his writing reveals how this sense of insider-ness is not wholly experienced by him. As such, his words invite ways of ‘seeing beyond sight’ – that is, his writing provides insights into the complexities that exist in how (urban) spaces and places are experienced by people. Without his words, the entire meaning that the image has for Malcolm would otherwise have remained unknown.

Of equal interest is that in Malcolm’s place of work, the people working alongside him are almost all white people. As most people come dressed in suits, Malcolm adamantly wears jeans and casual tops, and occasionally even a ‘hoodie’. In many ways, this suggests that this is Malcolm’s way of showing resistance for the establishment that he works in as he stated, ‘it’s funny that success comes in a particular package…just because you’ve got a suit that means you’re intelligent – no it don’t.’ More particularly, his experience of feeling like an outsider leads Malcolm to contemplate what a ‘home’ is meant to symbolise:

“What is a home – it’s supposed to be a place of comfort…warmth…all the things that make you feel good, safe, security, stability…I’m not made to feel that here…But there’s no question that it’s my home because it’s where I live, and where I was brought up and born here, and there’s lots of things about London I like…but still don’t feel

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88 It is worth considering Malcolm’s statement in light of the REACH (DCLG 2008) role-model scheme in which had all 20 role models dressed in suits (which were discussed in Chapter 4 in section 4.6) which would be seen by dominant society as more respectable then the way Malcolm chooses to dress.
completely comfortable.’ [Where do you feel comfortable?] ‘Good question which I haven’t the answer to yet’ (my emphasis).

Britain, for Malcolm, represents a place of belonging, as it is his birthplace and there is much in London that he enjoys. However, he is not completely at ease as ‘home’ also serves as the place where he is continually reminded of the negative images of black men. Equally, he is not fully prepared to accept this sense of un-belonging as he does not doubt that Britain is his home. For Malcolm, Britain simultaneously represents a place of belonging and unbelonging. Malcolm could be searching for another place where he may feel a complete sense of belonging but that place has not yet been found.

In Bauman’s (1991: 58-59) view, as strangers hold both the status of insiders and outsiders, they are in a position to question oppositions in ways that perhaps neither an insider nor an outsider could. In his own words, ‘They do not question just this one opposition here and now: they question oppositions as such, the very principle of the opposition, the plausibility of dichotomy it suggests and feasibility of separation it demands’. So, in the case of this research, while the participants ‘unmask[ed] the brittle artificiality of division’ (ibid: 59) by challenging the very markers that attempt to ‘Other’ them (i.e. the recurring representation of ‘the threatening black other’), they are also threatened by this very marker as it determines the extent to which they may feel a sense of insider-ness within British society. This is best captured in the words of Peter Warwick:
I'm here, I'm born here, I'm English, I'm British, so I'm not ethnic really... why should I be ethnic? Caribbean what? I've only been to Jamaica three times, on holiday. Some [white] English people have been there more times than me.' So why am I ethnic? Define ethnic. I'm not ethnic, I'm a British person, what's colour got to do with anything...so if I'm a minority how are you thinking of me? Why don't you think of me just as an English person?

Why do you see me closer to him [pointing to Figure 3.13] than close to yourself? So it's confirming to people that that's [again pointing to Figure 3.13] a problem' (my emphasis).

By linking the words ‘ethnic’, ‘Caribbean’ and ‘minority’, Peter suggests that such labels not only point to one's skin colour but also imply that he is not fully accepted as British in the same way as a white British person. Peter is unwilling to accept definitions of Britishness that link being British with being White, as such definitions exclude him. Returning to the idea of the stranger, it is the presence of the stranger that serves as a catalyst ‘both to reinforce and question the boundaries between the Self and Other’ (Marotta 2002: 43). Peter's statement is important, as he questions why a white person would consider Peter closer to a black person than a white person on the basis of skin colour. This suggests a form of invisibility, as Peter does not feel he is recognised as a person but rather, as a problem because of his blackness.
Expanding on this, Peter’s use of the above image not only demonstrates that he perceives that blackness is seen as a problem by majority society but it also reveals one of the prominent arenas in which blackness has come to be problematized: in the media. It is worth quoting a pertinent passage in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, in which one of the characters, Dr. Bledsoe, speaks to the protagonist of the novel about the control that the (predominately white controlled and run) media can have on the masses: ‘These white folks have newspapers, magazines, radios, spokesmen to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can tell it so well that it becomes the truth…’ (Ellison [1952] 2001: 143).

In the current study, Malcolm Littleton reflected on the role of the media in relation to the representation of black men as violent when he commented that ‘…it’s like what they say if you say a lie enough times you can start to believe it.’ However, for Malcolm the representation also had a different effect, as it led him to state, ‘So you have to question why does that lie continue?’ His words acquire more significance when he illustrates [Figure 5.3] the importance of always questioning what is given to be seen.

Massively a core part of my life/identity; I’m a thinker; thirst for knowledge; curiosity; power; don’t think I ever switch from thinking. ‘Race’ – can’t ever get away from it, it’s a part of your identity, not all of it. How the media operates; how it is used to shape what people perceive to be the truth, what
actually is truth; I think the media has always got an agenda – always at odds with certain groups in society. We’re in a media age – [Social] Media is King [Facebook, Twitter]. – Malcolm Littleton

Thus, Malcolm places significance on B.O.B. (an acronym for ‘Brains or Bust’), stressing the importance of being able to think for oneself and to not be persuaded by what the media depicts. If he were to believe the media to be accurate, then his brain might as well be ‘bust’. It can be argued that the emphasis on always questioning what we are given to see from forces such as the media generates a form of resistance. As such, Malcolm’s description of ‘B.O.B’ not only holds resonance for him, but conveys what became the most recurring feature in the interviews: the ways in which the men questioned, challenged and resisted stereotypical depictions of black men, in particular the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’. In doing so, they placed significant emphasis on the role of the British media in producing stereotypical representations, a point which I develop more fully in the third section of the chapter. It is the topic of resistance to which I now turn.

5.2 Resistance: They Don’t Really Care About ‘Us’

As noted earlier, in his analysis of strangerhood Bauman posits that the actions of strangers must almost always appear predictable in order to maintain control and order in the interests of preserving the native’s identity.

89 Interestingly, Fanon makes a similar point in the concluding chapter of Black Skins White Masks where he refuses to accept the position of the ‘Other’. He writes, ‘O my body, make of me always a man who questions!’ (1970: 232).
For Bauman (1991:67), ‘This can be attained by discrediting the stranger; by representing the outward, visible and easy to spot traits’. As such, these traits serve as benchmarks to reinforce the oppositions of Us and Them where the predominant belief is that such traits are specific to Them (strangers) and not Us (white). Oppositions then, as Bauman (1991: 56) asserts, ‘enable knowledge and action’. In contemporary Britain, where crime, as highlighted in the media, is often linked to black males, much of the blame has been attributed to particular genres of ‘black’ music, such as hip-hop and rap, and to the purported ‘absent black father’, thus stigmatising single-parent black families. Such stereotypical knowledge paved the way for senior politicians to take action by initiating role-model/mentor intervention schemes, catering specifically for black boys and black men as was illustrated in the previous chapter (Part B). Bauman (1991: 56) argues that while ‘oppositions enable knowledge and action; undecidables paralyse them’. In advocating that undecidables/strangers paralyse such knowledge (i.e. the image of ‘the threatening black ‘Other’), he suggests that strangers challenge the very stereotypical traits that are imposed upon them. The question this then raises is in what ways are these dominant beliefs challenged? This is an important question, because it is these very traits that are used to create distinctions between Us and Them. As Bauman (1991: 56) argues, ‘Undecidables brutally expose the artifice, the fragility, the sham of the most vital of separations’. The individuals in the current study resisted dominant forms of knowledge and provided alternative forms of knowledge about stereotypical representations of black men. As such, articulating alternative ideas may serve as acts of resistance. The men opened up
debates around ‘the black male perpetrator’, ‘black fatherhood’, and ‘black’ music by putting forward alternative ways of seeing and knowing. I will now discuss how the men resisted, as well as offered alternative knowledge in relation to the above three, and in that order, beginning with the construction of ‘the black male perpetrator’ (hence ‘the bestial black’) in the ‘current’ British climate.

Resisting knowledge / alternative knowledge

As mentioned previously, the participants pointed to ‘the system’ as being responsible for a perceived revival of the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’ to the point that it was seen as a commonplace image. This is best represented in the words used to express the on-going violence and its connection to black males: ‘been happening a long time, even before I was born…Guns are old and drugs is [sic] old (John Che); ‘This is not anything new, seen it all before.’ (Luxor-Cephren); ‘Poonam, this is common; this is common…so this is no longer shocking because the media have already set the term’ (Peter Warwick).

Furthermore, the general feeling amongst the men was that there was a long running, consistent tendency on the part of institutions like the media and the criminal justice system to interpret and portray blacks as criminally minded. Some of the participants provided a historical narrative to demonstrate their argument. As Adrian Anthony commented,
‘It’s perpetuation of rubbish that’s been branded around since Enoch Powell’s time…it’s just that now, we’ve come through to a different time – so in the 70s when they had the sus law, they could frisk you at any time right. They’ve just come back and stopped and searched and called it something else. 20 years later right, and 30 years later, they’re doing exactly the same thing, no change in its policy and no change in the people that it’s actually pinpointed at’.

Adrian draws particular attention to a re-branding of the justifications for controls imposed upon black males, thus demonstrating that he sees no progress having been made in policing or in the political arena. For him, the contemporary period is reminiscent of the 1970s, which he in turn links to the political figure Enoch Powell. For Adrian the culprits still remain the same, and as such the policies have not changed. His comments reflect his deep sense of distrust toward ‘the system’.

Similar sentiments were echoed by John Che, who stated that he had attended debates around the on-going violence only to discover that they were used as a platform to exercise more controls. As John told me,

‘The News of the World had a debate in Greenwich…I went there and walked straight back out because the people there they had on the panel was police and judges…the, how can you save the streets, how?’. They’re not doing nothing…they’re trying to just talk about locking kids up…they’re not talking about no trying to help no-one’ (my emphasis).

It may be argued that as the police represent law and order, a part of their occupation entails keeping the streets ‘safe’. However, for John, this image
of the police is contradictory. Whereas he perceives this social problem of on-going violence as one that requires helping young people who are perhaps more vulnerable, he points out that the police, on the other hand, are not looking to help but rather to control and punish. According to Foucault ([1977] 1997) prisons are institutions which are purposefully built to ensure control and punishment and where bodies are continually under surveillance. Therefore, prisons, the police, the legal system and even the media – all those representing control were regarded as institutions of distrust for the participants.

For this reason, John walked out of the event. He understood that while both parties were there for the same issues, their ways of viewing the problem differed significantly and his voice at such an event would have been overpowered by the panel.

For the participants, the media’s representation of the on-going violence was fuelled more by suspicion than ‘facts’. Adrian points to a significant number of murders that took place in Harlesden, which were not included in the headlines, leading Adrian to question ‘the system’ and in this case, the media’s agenda. He states:

‘If the media were truly 100% bothered by what was truly going on...In Harlesden, 12 years ago, the summer of that year, for one month, everyday somebody got killed in Harlesden. It was never reported in terms of national press. It went into local press – national press didn’t want to pick up on that because it was not newsworthy at the time for one area to have 30 deaths in a month’.
Adrian’s statement also raises the question as to why certain issues might constitute as moral panics and hence newsworthy like knife crime in the current period while others, such as rates of homelessness, alcohol abuse, do not.

Distrust was a prominent feature in the discussions around ‘the black male perpetrator’, and acquired more significance when ‘anti-system’ illustrations provided by some of the participants are also taken into consideration. These are featured throughout this section of the chapter (Figures 5.4 - 5.9).

Ah, a revolution. He was making changes for the people. He represents someone like me, rebelling against the system. At the same time, he’s not stupid.
– John Che

Figure 5.4 Che Guevara

Represents defiance against ‘the system’ and what I’m willing to and not willing to tolerate...a defiance against the rules...they don’t always have to be obeyed...how we bring up our children, how we are in relationships...how we spend our money...the government’s really conning us in terms of what they [financially] take from us. – Leroy Brown

Figure 5.5 Tank Man

Just one of many political prisoners I could have chosen, many of whom are not black. He just happens to have been the first who came to mind for this research. I admire his ability to not have been silenced by those who are trying to do so. – Jerome Taylor

Figure 5.6 Mumia
...the government/the systems wants everyone to be distracted always keep them busy, working, listening to music, radio blah, blah, blah. And that keeps you away from the real issues and problems and so on and so forth...Sometimes I’m not busy on purpose...for that simple reason that I am rebelling against what the system wants me to do...but I know my boundaries [for example, coming into work late one day but making up for the hours lost on another day]...I like power...I like to be in control [regarding work], I don’t like people controlling me...I don’t like being in a box, I like to live outside the box. – Peter Tosh

The above photographs not only signify distrust of ‘the system’, but also the absence of security. As Mitchell (2011: 99) observes, an interesting component of photographs is how individuals use images to not only show us what they ‘see’ (i.e. ‘the system’ working against them) but to convey what is absent (i.e. security, trust). The ‘anti-system’ images provided above thus illustrate ‘the absence of peace and security, the absence of social justice...’ (ibid: 99) In light of this, then, resistance gains more prominence as the photographs express the need for ‘action’ in order to see ‘change’ that otherwise many of the men see as lacking. In a sense, these images are in stark contrast to those that were used to promote the (REACH and Capital Men) role-model/mentor intervention schemes (see Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 in section 4.6). As such, images depicting black men as role-models/mentors and hence ‘father figures’, as well as helping their ‘community’, may be associated with representing a sense of security (and one that only your own ‘race’ may reassure you of). In the case of the participants however, their
'anti-system' images promote ideas of individuals taking control of their own lives. This advocates ways of having a free mind which is only possible if we do not let positions of authority confine us and determine who we are. These ideas then, problematize Foucault’s ([1977] 1991: 135) notion that we are ‘docile bodies’ as the participants are actively demonstrating resistance which in itself conveys the complexity in power dynamics.

Thus far, it has been seen that men found it predictable for black males to be depicted as violent by ‘systems of power’ (i.e. the media, political arenas). This then begs the question as to how black men themselves were ‘seeing’ these images in comparison to how dominant society constructs them (i.e. moral panic which was discussed at length in Chapter Two, sections 2.3 and 2.4 in particular). This is important because the ways in which the men commentated on the visibility of blacks was also a reflection on the invisibility of whites (men) which will be elaborated on in the following three subsections. Firstly, I address how the participants challenged this image, particularly with regard to the current period, by making particular references to the ways in which black males may be seen as the main perpetrators, which is in stark contrast to white men and how this influences how they (un)see these images. Secondly, I consider how the participants placed more emphasis on on-going issues such as structural inequalities and so the conversations transcended beyond ‘race’ and gender. Lastly, I will examine why the participants responses suggested that this portrayal of black men and amongst other inequalities was their way of understanding that that is how ‘the system works’ and suggested therefore that certain things were unlikely to change.
Ways of (un)seeing ‘the black male perpetrator’

While the interviews were conducted, both the tabloid and broadsheet press led with articles about on-going violent crime in which black males were simultaneously depicted as the main victims and perpetrators. For most of the participants, the increased visibility of blacks in the media opened up a debate about the ways in which blacks were depicted by dominant society compared to white men. As Malcolm Littleton said to me, ‘Like yesterday a [black] guy was shot inside a shop. It’s on the front page of the London paper…if a guy is shot – a white guy by another white guy, *is that gonna go on the front page? [Shaking his head] Probably not*’ (my emphasis).

What emerges in Malcolm’s statement is the ‘type’ of news that has been selected by editors for the front pages of Britain’s newspapers, which is indicative of two things. Firstly, in Malcolm’s view, this type of crime would not receive the same ‘type’ of attention if the actors involved were white. In this sense, it is not only what Malcolm sees on the front page of the newspaper, but also his recognition of what he would be unlikely to see on the front page. Secondly, Malcolm points to the ‘type’ of attention that is given to ‘the black male perpetrator’: that is, it is something that is deemed newsworthy that will grab the public’s attention. This sensationalist treatment suggests that it has the potential to garner support from the public and public bodies, like the police and to become a moral panic, warranting strong forms of intervention. Moreover, bearing in mind that the incident Malcolm refers to involved two black males, which reinforces the idea that particular types of crimes are specific to ‘the black community’, this in turn endorses the view of
‘black-on-black’ crime – a term which was strongly contested by most of the men. One of the participants, Bill Pryce, made this point pertinently clear:

‘…this black-on-black thing is rubbish. I’m a black person, I’m a black male and I don’t understand why they say black-on-black. As far as I’m concerned murder is murder…Somebody’s killed somebody…There’s a lot of people out there that think the same like me...Why not set up a special task force for white-on-white or Asian-on-Asian…what is black crime? Crime is crime…’

Bill questions why a task force is set aside for black people when this would not be the case for his white and Asian counterparts. Furthermore, he argues that he is not a lone voice on this matter, and that there are other people, and perhaps other black people, who do not understand why they are given differential treatment. This suggests that Operation Trident has the potential to fuel animosity amongst blacks.

Certainly, in the interviews, most of the men pointed not only to ‘the system’ but also to members of ‘the black community’ within Operation Trident, as well as the ethnic press, as endorsing notions of ‘black-on-black’ crime. In terms of the latter, Xavier Freeman commented,

‘…what The Voice and the New Nation will do is talk about all the black boys that were killed. And what they will do is instead of taking an issue which...is a problem with young people, they will focus on the impact it has on the black community and they won’t actually offer solutions but just moan about it a bit more...It’s a perpetuation of a stereotype based on a lack of imagination really...I don’t believe that the New Nation or The Voice are owned by black people anymore...how can you have a black media which is owned by people
who have another agenda…it’d be like the Nation of Islam being run by the American Government – it’s a contradiction’.

The above quotation corresponds to most of the views echoed by the participants: that is, the ethnic press predominantly reinforced stereotypes, perhaps more so because these papers are owned by white people. In this regard, Malcolm referred to the ethnic press as ‘a joke’. He went on further to say, ‘…people from the smaller cultures mimicking the behaviour if you like of the dominant culture to kind of fit in…Why you reproducing the thing that’s being used to keep you down, why would you do that?’

For Malcolm, the ethnic press symbolizes another form of control over blacks as exercised by ‘the system’. In this sense, ‘the system’ has created another avenue by which to exploit the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’ even further. An implication of this is that as more outlets become available to reproduce the images of violent blacks, lesser outlets become available to not only see black men in diverse ways, but also to discuss the topic of knife and gun crime in an alternative way. Thus, for some of the participants, this meant that this left other questions unanswered and the point made by Adrian serves as an example here: ‘Nobody investigates where it comes from and who is bringing it in. Could that be because those people are white? [Now speaking in a sarcastic and louder tone]: Ah dear me, [now smiling] should I have said that?’ Adrian suggests that by making ‘the black male perpetrator’ more visible, the more absent white is made to appear. He
also insinuates that whites also have a role to play but one that is invisible from the public eye.

Additionally, one of the participants, John Che, commented that while crime committed by whites did feature in the news, it often received scant attention compared to the treatment given to blacks. This is best represented in his own words:

‘In the News…one time they found a trunk full of crack in a petrol station – a white man…that was on for like two seconds. The black boy stuff now wosshhhhh! All up in the News, big spread, why?…They found a house with like how many…millions of pounds of worth skunk weed underneath the farm, two old people, like white people. That’s not in the papers – that’s not like, wow, like a big spread…but a black guy…buying guns, big spread, everywhere on the news, talking about it, big debates, how? Know what I’m saying’ (my emphasis).

Here, John not only makes a distinction between the ‘types’ of crimes committed, but also appears to suggest that the crimes committed by whites in this case are just as serious, and yet are not given a similar amount of attention. As John acknowledges, the extra attention given to news of black males involved in crime suggests that such a crime has all the right ingredients to instigate a moral panic and hence he mentions the debates that ensued. For John, the commonality of this very image is what weakens the construction of ‘the black male perpetrator’. Upon seeing an increasing number of images of black males and violence suggest that the other side of the story is not being shown and so what becomes important is not what is
visible, but rather what is not visible. This is made evident when John states as follows: ‘That shows that, they’re trying to put more constant images [of black males] when that’s not the main source…’

John’s statement suggests that the increasing visibility of blacks in the news serves as a tactic to deflect attention from the more important questions around the topic, such as where are the guns coming from, but these are masked by the image of black males as the main perpetrators. For some of the participants of this study, the current concerns around violence could not be understood without a consideration of how aside from blacks, whites and Asians were also involved in these acts of violence together. Martin Jacobs, for example, questioned why the emphasis was on ‘the black community’ as though members of the British public were living separate from the rest of the nation. Drawing upon his own knowledge of growing up in Hackney, he commented,

‘It’s not the colour ok…people tend to forget that there are Asian people involved, there are white people involved. There are white people that are being stabbed, there are white people that are doing the stabbing…these things you know, you got white people that are rolling with black people, everyone’s talking slang…It’s not a black problem you know, seriously it’s a community problem really and there’s not just black people in the community so yeah…”

Martin questions notions of community, noting that by mentioning the colour only reinforces the divide between people who are in fact engaging in the same acts irrespective of their ‘racial’ backgrounds. Beyond this, this also suggests that the relationships forged amongst people transcend factors
such as ‘race’ and gender. In this sense, notions of these crimes linked to ‘the black community’ is made redundant as ‘the community’ according to Martin are those people who share in common with you your geographical location as well as class. Structural and important considerations, like class are rarely given attention in media reporting, which instead tend to concentrate on linking (specific) crimes to black males. As Christopher Wallace told me, ‘You’re not going to have it in Mayfair, you’re not having it, you’re not having it, it’s just not gonna happen.’ The point to be made is that for the participants, in order to make sense of the on-going violence, they considered wider issues which went beyond factors such as ‘race’ and gender.

**Seeing beyond ‘race’ and gender**

Bauman (1991: 130) notes that ‘The city that emerged at the far end of modern development is anything but a homogenous space’. Each area is ‘qualitatively distinct’ (ibid: 130) from the other and the landscape of each area can often tell you who is welcome and who is not.

**Figure 5.8 Brixton Tube**

Brixton Tube – I have loved the atmosphere of the area, tube sigh which is known worldwide. Plus, it’s always fighting against the system i.e. Brixton riots plus its South London where I was born and live. Brixton is always on the edge in regards to music and the area i.e. Reggae/Indie and crime/drugs. – Christopher Wallace
While considering London, most participants insisted that as the on-going violent crime was linked specifically to inner city areas their concern lay with structural issues and therefore could not be limited to ‘race’. For Luxor-Cephren, the on-going crime was unsurprising simply because he insisted that certain areas were designed to be neglected. Moreover, he argued that in London divisions were maintained in the interests of those with power and control. This may be likened to what Bauman (1990: 61) describes as ‘territorial separation’, whereby areas such as ‘ghettos’ or ‘ethnic reserves’ are reserved for those groups that the dominant population wants little or nothing to do with. More specifically, Luxor-Cephren stated,

'It’s almost like zones that they created is like nets to catch different types of people, yeah. Zone 1 is like [now speaking with a posh accent as a way of emphasizing his point] ‘oh yes, you know, this is good, this is great…[now speaking without the posh accent] Zone 2 you’re not doing too bad and in zone 3 you just start going down, down, down, down. It’s just controls. Just different zones to control, you stay in that zone, we stay in that zone'.

To illustrate his point, Luxor-Cephren draws a map of London, and highlights the poorer areas. He likens this to the London underground map where zone one can be considered as the ‘best’ of London and where poverty and social deprivation are masked by tourist attractions. These zones reinforce the divide between social groups, both in terms of the rich and the poor as well as in terms of colour. Rose (2012: 299) makes a pertinent comment on this

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90 In the previous chapter, I suggested that black-led organisations/charities such as National Black Boys Can Association can be seen as places which symbolise a form of territorial / spiritual separation as these are specifically designed for black boys and young black men who have been excluded from main society (see section 4.7).
in saying that: ‘Not all spaces are equally safe to everyone; not everyone has
the power or resources to use towns and cities as they want; process of
depprivation, marginalization and privilege profoundly affect how urban
spaces are used and seen by different social groups’.

In terms of the divisions that modern structures tend to create, according to
Bauman (1991: 130) then, ‘One person’s home ground’ is for another person
a ‘hostile environment’. But what description can one give to an environment
that represents one’s home and equally, a place of hostility? This was
especially the case of Martin Jacobs who explains one of his experiences of
what it has been like growing up in Hackney: 91

‘Like in Hackney for instance, like it’s mad, there are certain rough
areas…especially when I was growing up…moving those people from
one area to another area and then knock down those flats and build
new flats that people have to come and pay to live in those flats so
they’re trying to obviously make Hackney become more diverse and
bring more money into Hackney. But it’s like, all they’ve done is
moved those troubled people from one place to another place. That’s
not solving the problem because those same people that were
causing trouble are now causing trouble in that area…so many parts
of Hackney that’s been neglected…’

Drawing on his personal experiences of growing up in Hackney, Martin
observes the changes, or rather the lack of changes, in his home
environment. He identifies that while space has been created to attract
people with more money, poor households lose out either way. For Martin,

91 While Hackney represents home for Martin, it is also where he has encountered a lot of police
harassment through the use of stop and search.
this is a result of failures on the part of the British government, which he does not trust to make any fundamental changes. He comments further:

‘We’ve got the MP for Hackney and she doesn’t know what she’s doing...When she has to come out...she says her little piece and then she goes back again...Dianne Abbott...she’s just a face she doesn’t do anything, honestly...I haven’t come across anyone that’s got something positive to say about her, whether they be white, whether they be black you know...’

Stating that Abbott is just ‘a face’ demonstrates that Martin questions her credibility as an MP. This type of viewpoint, whereby participants were not convinced that there was enough collective will in ‘the system’ to make the fundamental changes necessary within inner cities, was common amongst the participants. On that note, the general consensus was that this was how ‘the system’ works in which only a select few have the privilege, which did not include them. It is the participants’ understanding of the inner workings of ‘the system’ which I go on to explain now.

‘The system’

Bauman observes that a central aspect of modern life is the uncertainty that it exudes. ‘Only the few powerful enough to blackmail other powerful people into the obligation of a golden hand-shake can be sure that their home, however prosperous and imposing it may seem today, is not haunted by the spectre of tomorrow’s downfall’ (1995: 52). There are two main points to be made here. Firstly, the statement suggests that only those higher up in ‘the system’ have any power to influence chain of events to turn out in a certain
way. Secondly, Bauman highlights the importance of economics: money speaks. These two points will be developed further to build a more coherent picture of why the participants strongly rejected the construction of ‘the black male perpetrator’.

For some of the participants, the legal system, as well as interactions with the police has left a lasting impact in terms of influencing how they feel they have been positioned in society. Luxor-Cephren noted that the British legal system in particular played an essential role in telling him what place he occupies in Britain and in the eyes of the law:

‘I know that there’s things that I could do today that I could be in prison for next week yeah. I know there’s certain things people do every day but because they know certain people, nothing happens…so rather than me respect the law, I just understand that it works in a particular way that at the moment is against me. [Now taking a more serious tone] ‘Can’t no-one judge me, can’t no next man judge me, you understand, that’s just the way the system works yeah…I just strictly keep it to the fact that there’s two sides, and I know that if I’m on the other side, then everything’s alright, you know what I mean…It don’t even matter if you’re white, Asian, black, whatever’.

What comes through in Luxor-Cephren’s statement is that he treats it as ‘fact’ that there are only two sides to the law. For him, it is not the case that there are those who are on the right side of the law and those who are on the wrong side of the law, but rather that there are those who can act above the law and ‘get away’ with it and there are those who cannot. In other words,
there are those that would be able to escape conviction, whilst others would incur punishment. He believes himself to be in the latter position. At the same time, he insinuates the complexity in the power dynamic because it is not simply a matter of ‘race’. That is, he acknowledges that contrary to how he might be positioned, there are other blacks that would be able to ‘get away’ with criminal intent. This in itself illustrates that he does not promote the idea that blacks share a homogenous space in Britain. Against this backdrop, Luxor-Cephren claims not to respect authority figures, like judges, as he perceives such figures to represent an establishment that looks unfavourably upon him. He concludes, ‘And it does make you a worse person for it because it’s almost like you become your own judge and your own jury’.

Expanding on this, Luxor-Cephren went on to cite the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes\(^{92}\) to illustrate how for him, it serves as a reminder that the police act in ways that suggest they are above the law are thus, are able to get away with it.

Similar sentiments concerning the police were echoed by Martin Jacobs, who noted that his interactions with the police has made him extra vigilant when observing how the police conducted themselves, especially in his home environment. The following serves as an example,

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\(^{92}\) Jean Charles de Menezes was a Brazilian man who was killed by London Metropolitan police who had mistaken his identity for a criminal involved in the London 7/7 bombings.
‘See the police are funny you know...There are certain places in Hackney that sell drugs you know. They’ve been there for like 20 odd years, 30 odd years and you think to yourself ok, they’ve been there that long the police must know about it...there’s no way they cannot know about it...the police roll up and down on that road...this one particular place, it’s like about five minute walk away from the police station...but I don’t know, it’s like they’ve got double standards seriously...it’s like the people that are selling drugs, are they paying off the police or what is going on’.

Martin comments on his observations and what they reveal to him; that a drugs business has been operating within close proximity of the police station for a number of years and that the police have not attempted to put an end to it. He goes further by suggesting that the police could be personally benefitting from overlooking the drug-dealing in exchange for money, perhaps. Hence, Martin describes the police as having ‘double standards’.

However, perceptions of preferential treatment were not limited to those within the legal system. Luxor-Cephren also pointed to celebrity culture, drawing on the example of Paul McCartney to demonstrate how the media protected him when he was encountering his ‘messy’ divorce with Heather Mills. As Luxor-Cephren commented:

‘...the press are a very powerful force...its quite clear, how when someone has power how things go down. I mean look at Paul McCartney. Like that guy, like if that was anyone else yeah, it just could not have gone that way. Like the portrayal of him, like, there
were a lot of damaging things were said about him, yet none of it was highlighted at all'.

By linking a particularly rich celebrity and the media, Luxor-Cephren suggests Paul McCartney was able to escape bad publicity because he had the right ‘type’ of people on his side, unlike his former wife, Heather Mills. Thus, Luxor-Cephren concluded with ‘you know what yeah, it just goes to show when you’ve got money the world is your oyster’.

Thus far, what is being illustrated is how the line between good and bad become blurred the higher up in ‘the system’ people tend to go. And yet it is those who are used as scapegoats, including the poor that are not in favourable positions to defend themselves. Orwell makes a pertinent comment on this which is best captured in his classic 1933 publication, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. He writes,

‘Fear of the mob *[the poor]* is a superstitious fear. It is based on the idea that there is some mysterious, fundamental difference between rich and poor, as though they were two different races, like negroes and white men. But in reality there is no such difference. The mass of the rich and the poor are differentiated by their incomes and nothing else, and the average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit. Change places, and handy dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?’ ([1903] 2001: 127-28; my emphasis).

The above quotation makes an important point in revealing that whether one is rich or poor neither can be understood without the other, as the poor’s life conditions are in many ways determined by the rich. Not so dissimilarly, in *A
*Gang Leader for A Day*, upon learning the nature of Venkatesh’s research, one of the characters, Ms. Bailey says to him, ‘You want to understand how black folks live in the projects. Why we are poor. Why we have so much crime. Why we can’t feed our families. Why our kids can’t get work when they grow up. So will you be studying white people?’ (2008: 148). Venkatesh came to realize that he had to consider the role of white people, as Ms. Bailey wanted him ‘to focus on the people outside Robert Taylor [one of the housing projects] who determined how the tenants lived day to day’ (ibid: 148). At the same time, Ms. Bailey added, ‘But don’t make us the victim…We’ll take responsibility for what we can control. It’s just that not everything is in our hands’ (ibid: 148). Venkatesh is therefore made to consider the divide between the rich and the poor, white and black before he can begin drawing upon his conclusions on the black people living in the Robert Taylor homes.

Along similar lines, the responses by the participants in this study endorse the view that constructions of black British masculinities cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of British society. Dominant society has a responsibility towards those that are resisting the markers that are often used to discredit them. Yet the men saw no signs of this coming to an end. For this reason, as Robert Hunt stated:

‘Like we’re [Britain] just going round in circles, this [violence] ain’t gonna stop, it’s never gonna stop…like one guy who’s like hasn’t got nothing to eat, and the only way he’s gonna eat is if he robs someone
Robert’s statement is profound, in the sense that he bypasses all the
dominant debates that were being advocated in terms of ‘race’ and gender
and reframes the debates in terms of the persistence of poverty. Robert
likens violence to poverty, pointing to how neither of these social issues is
likely to stop because of the structural inequalities that generate them. He
supports the idea that issues such as gun crime or even the rise of ‘gang’
related activities cannot be understood in isolation, but instead must be
understood in relation to the structural landscape of Britain.

Any artist who isn’t just another major record
label’s cash cow usually appeals to me. Sizzla
more so as he sings about many of the things
that affect each and everybody, i.e. the
oppression placed on us via world/local politics
etc. not necessarily from just a Jamaican’s or a
black person’s point of view – Jerome Taylor.

In the light of this, then, these crimes are not limited to blacks, but are indeed
an aspect of British society. Thus far, what has been demonstrated is the
context in which the participants have considered the ‘current’ issue
concerning on-going violence which extend far beyond issues around ‘race’
and gender as advocated by senior politicians and community

93 Speaking in the third person
representatives of ‘the black community’ as discussed at length in the previous chapter. At the same time however, it is important to bear in mind that aside from the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’ there are other easily identifiable traits that are also highlighted in order to reinforce long-held stereotypes attached to black men; such as ‘absent black fathers’ and the influence of ‘black’ music. In the case of ‘absent’ fathers, one of the participants, Christopher Wallace, stated that contrary to the dominant discourse which tends to stigmatise single-parent families, thus insinuating that ‘absent black fathers’ are to blame, he believed that this would be a reason he was not prepared to readily accept. He explained further,

‘…it’s all down to an individual…I think if your dad is not there he can’t really have a bad influence on you so when you get up to do certain things it can’t really be down to your dad that you’ve done that because he weren’t there…if he’s not there, you’ve never experienced him there why should that make you any different? You’ve not experienced your father there so why do certain things…as humans we’ve always evolved to our surroundings. I don’t see why you can’t do that in that situation…you’ll naturally do that as a human being’.

Notions around the absence of an individual, and in this case, the father that is expected to play a prominent part in your life are questioned and challenged. This indicates that to make the claim that an absent father is to blame is effectively making an assumption that ‘if’ the father had been there, it would have been different. However, who is not to say that it might have actually been worse? In Christopher’s view, it is not the absent father that poses the problem but the father who is present but does not fulfil his parental duties that can have a detrimental effect on his child or children. As
Christopher puts it, ‘Sometimes your parents are really bad... I think it’d be more if he was there and he was a lay-a-bout, it’d be more his fault...’

Christopher himself also came from a single-parent household, but that is not to suggest that his father was absent as he too was present in Christopher’s life. The point to be made is that dominant society paints this picture of a single-parent household, often consisting of a ‘lone’ mother. Moreover, the term ‘lone’ suggests that she has no additional support whatsoever, and yet it is this particular image which was problematized by those men who offered different ways of seeing ‘the family’. As Peter Tosh said, ‘it depends on each individual case...the list could be endless’. It is to these factors around fatherhood that the chapter now turns which will be closely followed by notions around ‘black’ music.

‘The black family’

The concern around ‘absent black fathers,’ or ‘fatherless boys’ (Sewell 2009), remain a contentious issue in ‘the black community’. In the ‘current’ period, as the previous chapter highlighted, this concern was expressed by white and black actors alike, but more so by the latter. The likes of Labour MP David Lammy and director of Operation Black Vote, Simon Woolley, speaking for ‘the black community’ placed significant emphasis on the number of black males growing up in single-parent households. They stated that what was needed was the presence of strong male figures (as indicated in their support of the REACH, DCLG programme) to counteract the number of black boys and young black men becoming vulnerable to a life of crime.
And yet as Bauman (1997: 50) argues, we live in a period in which ‘The dominant sentiment is the feeling of uncertainty – about the future shape of the world, about the right way of living in it, and about the criteria by which to judge the rights and wrongs of one’s way of living’. Despite the ways in which ‘the black family’ was highlighted as an area of concern by particular ‘representatives’ of ‘the black community’ as shown in the previous chapter, family was regarded as a positive part of the participant’s lives (see Table 5.1 and Graph 5.1), with each person’s experience of family being diverse and unproblematic. The positivity experienced in terms of family was clear from the outset – from the surveys to the interviews. I begin with the survey findings as illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different aspects of Life</th>
<th>Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner/wife</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Aspects of life in which black men are most satisfied (based on scores 4 and 5 which indicate the most satisfied)
Graph 5.1 How satisfied black men are with family life (scores between 1 and 5 where 1 is least satisfied and 5 is most satisfied)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Influential</th>
<th>Scores of 5 and 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girlfriend/partner/wife</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisters</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 The most influential people in the participants' lives

At least half of the participants in this research came from single-parent households where the mother had been the main carer. In some cases, the mother was also regarded as the most influential figure in the men’s lives (see Table 5.2). While not all the participants discussed the politics surrounding ‘the black family’, some were open and frank about their own family life. A couple of the participants mentioned that they had spent most of
their young adult life where their fathers were no longer present in their lives. More specifically, this is because Martin’s father and Julian Julio Pablo’s father had passed away but both men held fond memories of their fathers. In the case of Martin, he had his father’s birth date tattooed on his arm as a way of honouring his memory.

In the case of a few other participants, some mentioned that (for various reasons) that they had grown up with absent fathers. Bradley Hunt stated that irrespective of his father being absent from his life, he considered his family life to be ‘blessed’ based on the relationship that he shares with his mother and siblings, adding that the presence each has on each other’s lives is ‘very fortunate’. In the case of Robert Hunt, in explaining what it felt like growing up without his father he explained that, ‘It was cool, I’m not gonna lie, it was cool. I didn’t know him so it wasn’t like he was in and out’.

Robert grew up without the presence of his father. It may be argued, therefore, that his father’s absence was not felt, as he never knew him which explains why ‘it was cool’. Yet, Robert indicates that it might have been problematic if his father had been ‘in and out’ of his life; the inconsistency linked to this would have made it more difficult for him to forge a meaningful relationship with someone who was present one moment and gone the next. Perhaps then it is not ‘cool’ as Robert recognizes that this would be unsettling for a child growing up; thus, his father’s absence also marks a point where Robert makes a distinction between himself and his significantly absent father when he expresses his excitement about becoming a parent.
(Robert’s wife was pregnant with their first child at the time of this interview).
He thus reflects on the importance of fatherhood and what it means for him when he says,

‘I just know with my son, nothing’s getting in between us, nothing…I just know how important it is…I like to be reserved and don’t really let people know how I’m feeling but when my son comes…I’ll open up my heart, I can’t put any barriers up with him. I can put barriers up with anyone else, but not with him. I’m just so looking forward to it, so looking forward to it…’

John Che, on the other hand, referred to his father as a ‘bum’ (lazy). Reflecting on his childhood, he pointed out how his father was consistently in and out of his life. He admitted that while this angered him, as he was consistently confronted with having expectations from his father which was then met with disappointment, the negative experience led to John placing more importance on the role of fatherhood (see Figure 5.10).

I’m a very father and son kind of person coz I didn’t have my dad around so I want to make sure I’m tight [having a close relationship] with my [three] sons. – John Che

Figure 5.10
Father and son

Beyond this, the remaining participants who spoke about being a part of a single-parent household described this arrangement as unproblematic. The main point to be made here was how the participants pointed to the fact that
single-parent household did not immediately suggest that there is only one parent involved in the child’s upbringing. Jerome Taylor explained how his parents had separated when he was a child and he was living with his mother but still saw his father on a regular basis. Upon describing his relationship with his father, he commented on how it was, ‘Perfect, it’s the best…Like my mum and dad still get on. If my dad comes to my house, my mum and dad will sit down and talk and they’re cool, do you get me? So I’ve never really felt like ‘ah, my dad doesn’t love me’, do you get me? I’ve never really had that problem’.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Christopher Wallace, who reflected on his own family life and stated, ‘To be honest, my parents are not together…I see him (his father) when I wanna see him. I can go over (to Dad’s house) whenever I want. To be honest, I’m pretty much my own individual’.

What comes through in Christopher’s statement is that while his parents are not together, he is able to maintain a relationship with both parents irrespective of the living arrangements. Equally importantly, he conveys a sense of autonomy by citing that he is his own individual, and hence does not feel a sense of dependency on his father, as he sees him whenever it suits him.

As has been highlighted throughout, apart from the blame being attributed to ‘the black family’, influences of ‘black’ music and/or ‘black’ musicians have been perceived as the source of blame for black males and their relationship
to (specific) crime. With regard to the ‘current’ climate, in particular, dominant society contends that black music/musicians promote a lifestyle characterised by sex and violence, glamourizing the use of guns and a ‘gangsta’ culture. This will be explored more fully next, with an emphasis on how many of the participants articulated alternative ways of seeing these particular images.

‘Black’ music / music artists (influences of…)

In considering the on-going violence, some participants reflected on how the music / musicians might influence all people, irrespective of ‘race’. As Jason Lewis told me, ‘I don’t blame the music…I listen to it everyday – it’s not affecting me at all’. More so than the music, some discussions were centred on black musicians. Many of the participants for example, seemed to share similar views concerning music artist, Snoop Dogg (Figure 3.4). As Anthony Burton says, ‘not many people know this, but Snoop’s a family man’.

In this sense, the participants offered alternative knowledge concerning how rap, r’n’b, and hip-hop artists have generally been depicted. Christopher Wallace commented that Snoop was like David Beckham – a brand. Most participants, however, made a distinction between Snoop Dogg’s public
persona and his personal life, in which the former was described as just an ‘image’ while paying more attention to Snoop as a married man with children. Some of the participants also commented on how they respected Snoop because of the charity work he was involved in – which includes helping children.

In considering the above, what comes through is that whatever is known may also be considered and known in a different way. Bauman (1991: 67) observes that the easily identifiable traits used to condemn strangers are often acknowledged on a wider scale in order to ensure that the strangers are shunned by natives. This, as Pickering (2001: 201) observes, operates ‘as a mode of domination’. Yet, this form of domination remains insecure, since what is secured by the definition is always threatened by what has been excluded…” (ibid: 210). Akin to Pickering’s statement, the point to be made here is that this form of domination cannot be taken for granted as it may also have a way of turning on itself. This may be considered in light of John Che’s statement in the context of understanding his friendship groups:

‘…like my Asian [and white] friends now…they just hang around all black people now. And I said, how comes you lot have black friends? She [Asian female friend] said well, my family disrespected black people so much as soon as I met a black person I liked them straight away. And then she got to know everyone else…and she started being around a black crowd…they’re the same, they’re just part of the family, its normal like…it happens all the time’.
What comes through in John’s statement is how relationships are forged that would otherwise be discouraged. For John, these types of friendship are being forged ‘all the time’ because of the constant negativity expressed of blacks and black men in particular. This, then, produces the counter effect as described by John: ‘...if someone says something [bad] about someone so much – so much, constantly – ‘argh, they’re this and that’ and then when you meet one [a black person] and they’re not nothing like that, you’ll like that person automatically. It’s natural…’

Pickering (2001: 205) argues that the presence of strangers opens up ‘a gap of ambivalence and irresolution in the taken-for-granted social relations of everyday life’. While the above conveys how relationships are being forged which problematize the notion of Us (white) and Them (black) the focus is on how black men as ‘strangers’ problematize this divide. However, it is also important to consider another intriguing feature of the interviews, namely the ways in which the participants expressed how certain relationships they had initially taken for granted entailed an element of surprise. This led the men to reflect on existing relationships as well as on the alternative ways in which they were beginning to see themselves. These have been described as self-reflexive moments and are developed more fully in the next section.
5.3 Self-Reflexive Moments

For Bauman (1991), strangers are valuable as they disrupt the everyday relations that appear familiar with something that is unfamiliar. However, Bauman’s discussions of these do not include the ‘native’ as ‘stranger’. Yet in this research, the participants’ interactions with others, notably white people, and those representing ‘the system’, served as a catalyst for them to address the question of difference, which I address now.

Rethinking the ‘Other’

As Pickering (2001: 204) observes, strangers are perceived as

‘disturbing because of the difficulty of conventionally placing them, of deciding where they’re at. They are neither socially peripheral nor symbolically central, but somewhere peculiarly in between. It is through their anomalous, hybrid position that they may upset any settled pattern, any assertion or appearance of fixed social arrangements’.

In the case of the participants of this study, some of the interactions they encountered disrupted, or even upset ‘the system’ that they often see as fixed. These moments had a profound impact on how they chose to view people. For example, it should be clear by now that all the participants feel a deep sense of distrust concerning ‘the system’, a point that even Luxor-Cephren made clear. This distrust of ‘the system’ included school, but because of his relationship with a tutor, this left a lasting impression on him.
Thus, Luxor-Cephren expressed this after viewing Figure 3.15.94 This is best represented in his words:

‘The best teacher I had at school was a gay, Austrian, German, teacher. Now how the hell...if you look at it, you would have thought this is probably the person you are least likely to get on with because of the history, whatever. The fact is, in the classes he showed that he cared, yeah. He could've easily come in, taught us at class and gone about his business but the fact of the matter is when we spoke to him, he showed a sign of caring so when he did lose it, like he did many times yeah, start shouting, you felt like you’ve let him down because you had that relationship with him. If you don't have that relationship with someone and they shout at you, you’re like, ‘fuck you then,’ and you walk out of the class and you won’t come back. But with him, there was a personal relationship...So that’s why I really like that, that phrase about how sharing feelings is boosting attendance because through people sharing feelings you get to know people better and the relationship will transcend...yeah’.

Firstly, the image is important for Luxor-Cephren, as it invokes positive memories of school. In particular, it reminds him of his relationship with his teacher; someone of authority that he respects irrespective of their ‘racial’ background but more importantly because of their individual characteristics.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Martin Jacobs, who claimed that he spent most of his childhood surrounded by black people, who continually

94 As was shown in chapter three (Part B) as well as chapter four (section 4.4) this particular photograph invoked bad memories of school for Malcolm Littleton.
reminded him that he and they were ‘black’, and his experience in a workplace played an essential role in how he went on to embrace certain relationships that he was initially reluctant to do. That is, prior to his experience at work, Martin placed his trust solely in blacks, but this changed when he entered certain places of employment:

‘I worked in retail for a long time and it enabled me to see loads of other people [from different backgrounds] how they took to me…I noticed that they saw me for me…they didn’t really notice my colour or anything like that…you just got to see that people are actually seeing each other for each other…not every single white person out there is racist you know, not every single Indian person out there is racist…’

Martin draws a distinction between two different types of environment; firstly, he points to how blacks are equally likely to highlight difference amongst people, and secondly, he praises the idea of working in an environment which is evidently mixed. In this sense, because everyone is from different backgrounds, there is no time for any one individual to ‘stand out’ because of the colour of their skin. For Martin, this interaction is preferable, as he is able to be appreciated for himself and not just seen as a black guy.

Although it was important for Martin to be in an environment with his co-workers where colour was not an issue, a couple of the participants recalled incidents where a white person had conveyed empathy towards them in incidents where the participants had been discriminated against by another white person. These incidents stood out as important for the men, as they admitted that the empathy they received had not been anticipated.
When stopped and searched by a white police officer for drugs outside the Elephant & Castle tube station, Dan Castle recalls another white actor being present who intervened in the incident:

'It was quite interesting coz at the time, when I was pulled over actually, there was a guy – a white guy come up to me and he said he was a solicitor...gave me his business card, and he was like, don’t worry, I’m gonna make sure he does everything properly...that was quite nice actually that he saw that I was being done wrong by and kind of like, stood up and spoke to the officer...’

While Dan encounters two people representing the legal system, both are in opposition to one another. On the one hand there is the officer who treated Dan unfairly, and on the other hand, there was the solicitor who came to ensure that Dan was treated accordingly. Furthermore, while Dan was stopped by the officer, the solicitor who was evidently nearby had observed this wrong-doing and came forward to intervene. What is intriguing is how exactly the solicitor had come to observe this situation, and what perceptions he held of another white person who represented the same establishment as him.

Julian Julio Pablo recalled an incident in which he received hostility from an elderly (white) lady, but admitted that he did not understand the reasons behind this hostility. However, he recalls that he spoke of this experience to a white man who Julian had hired to remove his belongings as he was moving homes, and illustrates his surprise that that the man identified this incident as

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95 This incident was also mentioned in the previous chapter, in which Dan described how he felt about being stopped and searched (see section 4.4).
racism: ‘I just thought it was strange, why would he say that? I thought a black person would tell me that. Not some Caucasian guy, with a pure British accent, born and bred in Oxford, driving a removal van, and says ‘alright mate was she racist’…’

What emerges in Julian’s statement is how he identifies the man’s reaction to the incident as ‘strange’. It may be equally argued that the reason it seems strange to Julian is because he himself assumes that a white male with a pure British accent would be unlikely to be empathetic to Julian’s experience. Thus, the situation proves strange for Julian because it serves as a catalyst for Julian to question difference. This acquires more significance when Julian assumes that only a black person would be able to identify racial hostility. Yet what was taken for granted actually produced an unexpected which in itself begs the question of what exactly is the native’s identity? Before I move on to highlight how some of the participants re-considered notions around ‘blackness’, there is one final point to be made in light of the above interactions that the men experienced with white people.

For Bauman, while modern structures attempt to create this vision of order, it is modern life itself that represents chaos and ambivalence. However, he distinguishes that in the postmodern era, as in the ‘current’ era, the presence of strangers and the ambivalence they exude need to be embraced as this ambivalence, this uncertainty, the pressures of living in the postmodern era it seems is here to stay. This is why Bauman (1991: 138) argues that the face of the stranger is ‘half-visible and blurred’ as what might seem familiar is
also, perhaps, unknown. It might well be argued that in the case of the incidents described by the participants above, that the native’s identity could also appear as ‘half-visible and blurred’ (ibid: 138) and hence difficult to classify?

In a sense, like the participants, the (white) people the men encountered are also the figures of modernity, whereby their presence opens up the debate for us to question ‘difference’. This acquires more significance when some of the participants reflected on their relationships with other blacks and how in some cases these too were being re-defined.

**Rethinking ‘blackness’**

According to Pickering (2001: 217), strangers are distinctive in that they ‘remind us of the risk entailed in the strategy of symbolic containment’. In other words, strangers ‘open up the politics of representation’ (ibid: 217) that stereotyping tries to prevent. For example, he (ibid: 217) argues that even the use of the term ‘nigger’ used as a form of affection amongst blacks, still conveys how meaning continues to be framed by the negative as the positive use of the word cannot undermine the original meaning. This acquires significance when it may be considered that this term is not only used as a form of affection amongst blacks but also as a form of abuse. To demonstrate, Alexander (1996a: 57) found that the black men in her study used the term ‘nigger’ as a word of both abuse and affection with one another. More specifically, she argues how the term defines black exclusivity amongst her participants as one of them tells her, ‘It’s alright black guys
going around calling each other nigger, but if a white guy calls you a nigger –
dead mother fucker!

I consider the use of the term ‘nigger’ in the context of this research as it was
discussed by some of the participants. Martin Jacobs challenges notions
around black exclusivity, claiming it to be hypocritical: ‘I know black people
that call themselves nigga…as soon as a white person or somebody else
says nigga everybody wants to [have a] go…and yet it’s so easy to say it
amongst yourselves…it’s just double standards and its hypocritical as well’.

Peter Tosh also acknowledged that the term was used by some black people
by subverting the meaning to create a positive meaning, and he pointed to
how he did not allow his black friends (or anyone) to use that term with him,
even as a form of affection:

‘…different emphasis will give it a different meaning…so one is a
derogatory term [nigger] and one is that is my brother [nigga]…we as
a people, we tend to take something and change its meaning to
benefit ourselves so we’re not offended by it so much, which is not a
good strategy, we should ban it totally but some people want to take
things and twist it for their benefit and they can do that and that’s fine
but…I don’t allow that…’

There are three main points to be made here. On the one hand, when
speaking about black people Peter uses the term ‘we’ as he feels this sense
of unity with those he shares a common history and experiences of racism.
However, he also makes an important distinction between himself and his
people where he makes it clear that he does not want to remain tied to a word that continues to be framed by negative connotations. In addition, while Peter does not approve of displacing the negative with the positive, at the same time he does not cast judgement on those that still choose to use it as he accepts the difference that exists between himself and other blacks.

While Martin admitted that he used the term ‘nigga’, he explains why he decided to stop using it:

‘...as I’ve got older...I started to make a stand against it because I thought to myself forget with the double-standards, I just say, don’t call me nigga...so if anyone calls me nigga I say don’t call me ‘nigga’ and just leave it as that. That way, I can have that peace of mind, because...yeah, that way it’s cool...at least if I get angry now, I’m justified in getting angry now so if someone calls me a nigga, if it’s a black person or a white person I react in the same way now because I’m not used to anyone calling me a nigga so there its cool. But if I’ve got certain white people calling me nigga and certain black people calling me nigga, it starts to get confusing because you start to forget who to get angry with because you’re so used to hearing it then...so I don’t let people call me that at all’.

What Martin conveys, and what was echoed earlier by Pickering (2001: 217) in his discussion on ‘symbolic containment’, are the risks involved in attempting to subvert meanings to create new meanings that nevertheless contain the original meaning. Martin admits that by using the term before, he used to experience anger as the word carried double meanings. However, he feels more at peace now knowing that he does not feel constrained by this type of language. This is close to Giddens’ (1987: 18) notions of ‘double
Giddens argues that researchers should be committed to going back and reviewing the concepts that people adopt, as meanings alter over time. This is important as the way concepts are used by people shapes the way they think, as well as how they choose to conduct themselves. Hence, in Martin’s case, he used to experience this sense of conflict, in which he would allow blacks to use the term ‘nigger’ and convey a different emotion and then upon hearing a white person refer to him with that language, he would become angry. However, refusing that term altogether has enabled him to change the way he treats black and white people – that is, more equally, irrespective of one’s colour.

The above examples demonstrate that the risk in using these terms is that it may create animosity amongst individuals and groups. The same may be said of other terms such as ‘coconuts’, ‘community sell-outs’, or ‘house negroes’ that have been used by black ‘representatives’ such as director of Operation Black Vote, Simon Woolley as demonstrated in the previous chapter (see section 4.8). In this sense, such name-calling points to how people are continually in the ‘habit’ of redefining what blacks are, what blacks are not, and how black should be and how black should not be when the question that might need posing is black like whom? In other words, such name-calling is neither helpful nor progressive as it continues to be framed by negative meaning just as it was illustrated in the previous chapter in the victim/perpetrator model (v/p model) that also gives rise to binary meanings like good black/bad black, positive black/negative black, blacks as a problem/blacks as a solution, black male role model/black absent father.
A further noteworthy point is that as well as the term ‘nigger’, the men did not use terms such as ‘coconuts’ either when referring to black people. This is a pertinent observation to note because their reasons for engaging in acts of name-calling only meant that it results in reducing people to easily identifiable traits such as ‘sell-outs’ for example. John Che warned that when black people engaged in using such labels, there was a risk of always feeling like you have to prove what you are and what you are not. In John’s words, ‘Black people are always trying to prove themselves’. It is illuminating to consider some of the statements that were made by the ‘representatives’ in the previous chapter especially with regard to the phrases some of them used in order to define what kind of black role model/mentor they were, i.e. Ken Barnes as ‘the hope dealer’ (see section 4.8) where this illustrates a ‘good’ black, (hence positive stereotype). In other words, he is not a drug-dealer ‘(bad’ black, hence negative stereotype).

Malcolm also insisted that he refused to engage in a dialogue that involved using stereotypical labels as like John, he spoke of how it could result in people trying to prove themselves. As he commented, ‘Who wants to go through their life constantly trying to prove to people that they’re not something that they think they are…that’s ridiculous’.

Luxor-Cephren makes a pertinent comment on this when he states ‘…I am, you get me like, that’s just how I see myself, I am…’ Luxor-Cephren’s statement is appropriate to consider here, as making the statement ‘I am’ insinuates that he does not feel the need to prove himself. That is, ‘I am’ is
ambiguous, and difficult to define, just as the stranger is as defined by Bauman (1991). Bauman (1991: 59) also goes on to say that the stranger represents ‘someone who refuses to remain confined to the ‘far away’ land or go away from our own...’ Akin to this description of the stranger, it is worth considering how Luxor Cephren elaborated on his statement of ‘I am’ (my emphasis):

‘And that’s why you get so many [black] people that have this whole conviction of ‘I am’. And you can’t tell me nothing. You can’t tell me how to live my life because if you don’t understand me, you don’t know me. You don’t want me here but I can’t go home’.

It may be argued that the above statement simultaneously incorporates a theory of visibility and invisibility. Firstly, Luxor-Cephren is reminded of his visibility as a ‘black man’ (or blacks as a group ‘in general’), which is why he proclaims ‘you don’t want me here’. Secondly, as an individual, he suggests feeling a sense of invisibility as he tenaciously posits, ‘you don’t understand me’ and therefore ‘you don’t know me’ which can also be taken to mean that you do not ‘see’ me. And thirdly, he declares that he ‘can’t go home’ (see Figure 5.11).

The sphinx in the front of this photo was erected by Khafre, aka Cephren. Its nose was destroyed by those from the west who came to pillage the land in late 1800’s or early 1900’s. In the background you can see a pyramid. The sphinx represents our strength to me, and shows that even through the
adversities we remain. The sheer magnificence of these statues will not allow for them to crumble, and that is indeed how I feel about myself whilst I occupy this land. – Luxor-Cephren.

For Bauman (1997: 54), postmodern strangers ‘are – by joyful or grudging, but common, consent – here to stay’. In this way, ‘I am’ acquires more significance because ‘I am’ is far removed from the idea of being told ‘you are’ (typically) a perpetrator of violence in this instance. Further, ‘I am’ is profound in the sense that because it is ambivalent it opens itself to endless possibilities of who that person is, who they are (not) becoming, and furthermore, who they could become. ‘I am’ therefore signals that Luxor-Cephren refuses to come under an easily identifiable definition or label(s) that is often ascribed to the identities of black men and the image that he sketched himself is perhaps a symbol of this (see Figure 5.12).

Luxor is a place in Egypt of great significance...The Luxor logo derived from the philosophy that letters/words are not always necessary in order to communicate. I am deeper than any language and more eloquent than any diction. (Luxor-Cephren; my emphasis)

Figure 5.12 Luxor

In consideration of the above, this concept of ‘I am’ is considered in the fourth and final section of this chapter. It is appropriate to use this phrase in relation to the participants because of the ambiguous position that they exude. That is, they are neither Us nor Them, but somewhere in between, as is indicative in the phrase ‘I am’. Moreover, as ‘I am’ is far removed from
being seen and therefore told ‘you are’, this in itself symbolises how ‘I am’ also acts as a form of resistance to definitions/labelling. In acquiring this ambiguous position, the men therefore, do not fit into the victim/perpetrator model but rather are part of a third (and hence alternative) model, compared to the previous two models that were highlighted in Chapter Four. For this reason, this chapter finishes with a discussion of the concept of ‘I am’.

5.4 The Search For ‘I Am’

In his analysis of strangers, Bauman (1997: 47) argues that modern structures attempt to create this vision of order, ‘where certainty and clarity should have ruled’. Strangers, however, disrupt ‘this vision for order’, as they represent that third element that cannot be controlled. For Bauman, the greater the control that is exerted upon strangers, the more strategies are employed in order to make them seem predictable, the more unpredictable it is that they become – in effect, ‘Difference produces what it forbids, making possible the very thing that it makes impossible’ (ibid: 55). In the context of this research, and in this final phase of the chapter, I argue that by resisting dominant forms of knowledge and in providing alternative knowledge (as discussed in section 5.2) has played an essential part in constructing alternative black masculinities. That is, the more the men have resisted, the more ambiguous they appear. This section promotes the concept of ‘I am’, whereby I examine how the concept of ‘I am’ is in the process of being or has been achieved by the men. The focus is therefore on how the men demonstrate the alternative ways in which they have come to construct their own sense of ‘self’. This is discussed in three main areas, which I have
labelled: reflections of a choice, ways of being: influences and choice, and places of choice. All of these will now be discussed in the order in which they have been outlined.

**Reflections of a choice**

According to Frith, the media can play ‘an ever-more important role in contributing to people’s sense of themselves and where they belong’ (1999: 21). In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the media plays an important role in the ways in which it depicts the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’, as it has influenced the ways that politicians and even ‘representatives’ for ‘the black community’ have reacted to the on-going violence (see especially Table 4.5). In the case of men in this study, some stated that they intentionally did not read the British press because they mistrusted the news, especially when the insinuation was that the crime was specific to blacks. Rather, they reflected on what was more important to them, and made their decisions accordingly. As Robert Hunt stated, he did not want to ‘belittle’ his thoughts by reading the press, and Jason Lewis commented, ‘I don’t really read what the press say, I just see the headlines…I’m just focused on Uni and athletics’. The point to be made here was that the men did not want to engage with news available from mainstream media but instead, prioritized other forms of reading material such as particular books. On a similar note, Adrian also conveyed his mistrust of newspapers, pointing to them as mechanisms of control:
'If you’ve not been taught and your whole perspective has been given to from newspapers, from books which have been doctored to say certain things right, and a belief in those things…if you have that it’s going to be very difficult for you to change and the only way for you to change is to get away from all the things that bind you in society and actually start walking outside the box and looking at things a bit more in-depth than superficially, as we do'.

Adrian illustrates other ways of obtaining knowledge other than from newspapers and books and as such, conveys that he does not feel confined in the way that society would have him so. In a sense, he points out that so long as he can think and walk ‘outside the box’ he can be free in his own mind.

Conversely, Xavier Freeman insisted on continuously reading the press, even if there were continuous negative stories concerning black men. This is because he used this space to challenge what he was reading which he considered as beneficial to him: ‘That’s my advantage, I look for things. Because I didn’t used to look for things and I read an essay saying this, this and this and since then…’

In Peter’s view, the negative depictions of black men in the media as well as the discrimination he experienced growing up in Britain which he described as negative led him to find alternative ways which resulted in him feeling content. These alternatives have included challenging the media news by posting videos on Facebook around various topics concerning social injustice. In his own words, ‘It’s been a negative experience but that has
motivated me to look for alternatives that now, which puts me in a position where I'm very happy with how I look at myself and how I look at other people in terms of who they are and what they represent.'

Thus, placing emphasis on reading, thinking, and continually questioning what society tells them was an important feature of the interviews. As such, this enabled the men to contemplate how they had chosen to respond to dominant views. For this reason, too, Jerome Taylor provided an image (Figure 5.13) in order to demonstrate that he is a deep thinker.

The human body and mind works on levels other than those that are seen physically. What is good/bad mood? What is a good/bad thought? I think as well as growing physically, you have to grow in terms of what your mind can conceive.

– Jerome Taylor

**Figure: 5.13** The human body and mind

On a similar note, as shown earlier on in the chapter, Malcolm also provided an illustration that he had named ‘B.O.B’ (an acronym for ‘Brains or Bust’) which illustrated that Malcolm could never switch off from thinking (Figure 5.3 in section 5.1). He also informed me that he considered it necessary to carry a notebook with him as quite often he found himself writing notes on events, conversations and so forth that inspired. This in turn led him to express his interest in pursuing a career in screen writing as he did not see himself staying on at his current job. This conveyed how Malcolm
was on the path of trying to achieve certain goals and so his workplace represented a temporary stop until he managed to obtain what he wanted.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Xavier Freeman who commented that he was not yet settled in a career that suited him, as he said his passion for reading also conveyed his passion for writing. This is best represented in his words:

‘...I want to be a full-time writer, that’s what I want to do...I’m very varied, I’ve done re-works/adaptations of Shakespearian novels...at the moment I am working on some crime fiction. It's along the lines of Raymond Chandler...Walter Mosley, its more Walter Mosley...My book, that I'm working on is based on immigrants coming over from the Windrush and becoming a detective...’

What comes through in the above examples is that while the men were already in full-time jobs, they were also continuing with other interests with in mind that they would pursue professions which included not only being in control but also being their own boss.

A couple of other participants also expressed how they had not intended to stay in their current jobs or were in between jobs; in these instances, some cited other sources of influence, which helped in their decision-making. Such influences, namely people, were of those whose perspective the men admired, and thus wished to apply it to the choices that they wanted to make about their own lives. As such, these choices revolved around their own work
Ways of being: influences and choice

In the previous chapter, significant emphasis was placed on how the role-model/mentor intervention aimed to depict the type of black men that would be considered as suitable role-models/mentors for other black men with the focus being on the ideals of fatherhood and serving ‘the black community’ for example. No consideration was given to individual characteristics of a person but instead they had to be black and male and more importantly ‘seen’ to be serving ‘the black community’. In this sub-section, I discuss the ‘type’ of people that were considered as influential figures to the men and explain reasons for their choice. What is important throughout is how the men placed significant emphasis on the characteristics that are unique to that influential person in question.

Martin, for example, expressed the fact that he found himself engaging more in politics more and for this reason had begun attending debates where he could meet like-minded people. Upon being asked what made him choose this route, he cited Martin Luther King as his source of influence:

‘I read Martin Luther King’s autobiography. It just made me change the way that I thought about myself...how many people go out there know that they’re gonna get beat up but still stand for a cause...that’s just courage. I just think people need to be re-educated and just need
prominent figures to actually stand up and say their piece and actually try and make a difference…'

What emerges in Martin’s statement is how he conveys his admiration for Martin Luther King as he sees him as courageous. Also, Martin Luther King, for Martin, represents someone who made a difference and fought for social in order to make changes for the greater good.

As was shown in the previous chapter, dominant western culture seems to reinforce the idea that black males tend to look up to black musicians and sports-stars, and even then, this is generally perceived negatively. For example, REACH (DCLG 2007) researchers concluded that black boys looked at music artist 50 Cent for inspiration which was viewed negatively because of his glamorisation of violence. However, does that not in itself constitute a prejudicing strategy? Can it be argued that there may be other ways in which 50 Cent’s persona can be perceived? According to Pickering (2001: 219), ‘By representing transience and ambivalence, the stranger suggests an alternative to hidebound convention and hard-and-fast boundaries, encourages more flexible ways of seeing, and reawakens the dilemma which stereotyping strives to forget’. In the light of this, it is important to consider why Julian Julio Pablo cited 50 Cent as someone he found inspirational:

‘I know it’s strange because I’m not like the guy, I’m not thuggish, I don’t go around with a big chain or anything like that but I’ve seen how he grew up, and he had nothing…I don’t wanna be a rapper but…I wanna be as successful in my career [Julian was working as a
financial analyst in the City at the time of this interview] as they [50 Cent and Jay Z] are because they started off…with a setback worse than mine and they’ve worked their way upwards. At the end of the day…they had to use pure strength and pure confidence and belief…And you’re average Joe on the street, who says I wanna get it, he doesn’t necessarily get it because he lacks that hunger and you can’t really train someone to be like that, you can’t train someone to be hungry. You either have it or you don’t, that’s the thing…those guys are hungry…”

Julian conveys how he admires the ‘hunger’ that 50 Cent gravitates towards success, thus highlighting characteristics that are unique to those individuals concerned rather than just dismissing him as a music artist that comes across as nothing more than just ‘thuggish’.

Likewise, Robert Hunt cited Hollywood actor Will Smith as a source of influence, and again this was based on Robert admiring Will Smith’s perspective on life. As Robert notes,

‘Like, something Will Smith was saying, you’ll never encounter a problem that hasn’t been dealt with….you’re not the first person to have this problem…and there’s so much people that have written about their problems and have written…solution to that problem…he understands that he is in control of his destiny. Once you come to that understanding, and you’re so focused on it…when you’re so focused, you can move mountains, it’s so true… with Will Smith, he just understands his purpose, he understands what he’s good at and he cultivates it every day and again he does have a lot of knowledge. He does dedicate a large portion of his time to learning so I think that’s what it is about Will Smith and he understands that he’s an individual
who has unlimited potential...he definitely markets that ideology of self-development and seeking your own destiny and focus. That's what I like about Will Smith, nothing else. His films are alright'.

In this regard, Robert admitted that he spent more time reading books by influential thinkers, which in turn contributed to him being more focused on his daily chores. This, he also conveyed in the illustrations that he chose to provide:

An engine is made up of many parts that enable the car, boat, plane, etc. to steadily arrive at the desired destination. I aim daily to have full integrity, like an engine, it steadily helps me to get to my desired destination, even when I have appeared to stop moving – Robert Hunt

Figure 5.14 Engine

An ant displays self-leadership and looks out for the overall performance of their team/family. An ant claims no specific position (a cleaner one day, a food collector the next) but remains humble. I personally live my day-to-day to try and adhere to these. – Robert Hunt

Figure 5.15 Ant

‘An eagle displays the purest form of diligence. An eager desire, budgets time, full concentration in tasks, monitors and guards performance. This is precisely the way I approach tasks hence my enthusiasm to quickly respond to your [the researcher’s] emails’ – Robert Hunt

Figure 5.16 Eagle
It is noteworthy that Robert does not concern himself with the negative stories making the front pages of newspapers at the time about black men, but rather remains focused on meeting his life goals. As he commented, ‘I just feel like… I can just be me… I will dictate what happens in my life… I have to make it happen, regardless if I’ve got hair down to my ankles…’

Irrespective of the fact that Robert has endured racial discrimination in the workplace because of the length of his hair, this will not prevent him from growing his hair long. This is because Robert wishes to be the one who is in control of his life, and it is he that decides how he lives his life, as well as how he wishes to represent himself to the outside world, regardless of whether or not they accept him for who he is.

Akin to Robert’s statement, it is important to highlight Bauman (1997: 57), in that he claims that a feature which characterizes modernity is ‘individual freedom which transcend both national and ethnic/tribal limitations’. For Bauman (ibid: 57), ‘The chance of human togetherness depends on the rights of the stranger, not on the question of who – the State or the tribe – is entitled to decide who the strangers are’.

In the context of this research, it is in this state of ‘strangerhood’ that the men are located as many appeared to be striving for an autonomous sense of ‘self’. It is this sense of ‘self’ which Bauman (1997: 57) claims the State tries to deprive individuals of in the interests of power and control. And yet, as one of the participants, Leroy Brown illustrates that he is not prepared to readily
accept this form of control. He demonstrates this by pointing to how he refuses to live by the conventional means by which the State would require him to do so. Instead, he conveys this sense of autonomy that he is striving for, which in itself shows no signs of stopping. This is best represented in his choice of images and words as provided below:

This is because the Matrix is my favourite film. Simply because it represents what I feel goes in in reality. And the reason I say that is because people have been conditioned to live a certain way. They believe that they have to work a 9-5...They’re basically told what to do and they accept it. And that is I’d say, 95% of people when in fact it...where you can decide a lot of the rules you live by and I feel for me this is a good image because it’s something that I’ve really embraced over the last couple of years since doing a lot more research in terms of personal development, your outlooks on life and for me I feel like this is a kind of image where now I’m now seeing the world for what it really is and how we’re really conditioned to live under one particular set of rules...(Because of this control - career) I feel my...being able to decide when I work, how I work, I dictate how much money I make, who I contribute to...so on a more professional basis. Personally, I think I still need more work, (laughing) but we’re getting there. – Leroy Brown

I came across across the wall-man picture and thought of myself as I’m at a stage in life where I feel I’m on the verge of big success but there are a few things still holding me back from achieving it... I feel progress is made...you always want more...I think you should reach for more (keep setting goals)...so that image will always be there. – Leroy Brown
Thus far, the concept of ‘I am’ has involved exploring how the men have contemplated pertinent matters. At the same time, this section has also examined the important considerations the men have given to the choices that they have, and continue to make in their day-to-day lives. With these in mind, I move on to the last phase of the exploration of ‘I am’, which involves examining how else ‘time’ is spent by the men in places other than at work, or within the confines of an institution.

Places of choice

Ideas around freedom or striving for an autonomous sense of ‘self’, rather, was also expressed in terms of how men like to spend their spare time. As Bauman (1995: 127) observes, modern (city) life, and the complex ways in which it is experienced by people may be mixed with ‘exhilarating adventure and becrippling confusion’. Hence, it becomes all the more important to steer ‘towards a subtle balance’ (ibid: 127). In the case of the men in this research, some of them expressed how the stresses of everyday busy city life meant that it was necessary to take some ‘me’ time out and be in places other than the city, as conveyed in the illustrations below.

That’s a star…it represents me because I see myself as a star – as a beacon of hope as a guide (for his daughter, young people and anyone else that needs help). Something that lights in the darkness, full of optimism, beautiful, elegant…I like stars…you don’t get to see them here [in London] but when you go some places like Devon for instance you see the
skies, it's nice and black and you see the stars. It makes you humble you know it makes you realize it's beautiful out there. You get caught up all here and it's all busy, busy, rush, rush, work, work – Peter Tosh

I chose that because it is a place of therapy for me. It helps me unwind from all the kinds of shenanigans of life. I feel completely at peace and it's a place where it's like a retreat for me, somewhere I can just go and forget what's going on around me. Just be at peace with myself and yeah, music is that. – Leroy Brown

The Earth’s a big place, I just wanna see it. Nowhere in particular, what makes one place any better than the next? Funnily enough I think I notice the stars a lot. – Jerome Taylor

Having considered the above, I now move on to the conclusion of this chapter, which is then followed by the sixth and final chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated ways in which black men convey forms of resistance, especially with regard to the image of ‘the black male perpetrator’. In doing so, they considered this image beyond ‘race’ and
gender as something that is notably absent from those black men who choose to ‘represent’. While the participants did not dispute that there are and will be black men involved in crime, this is no more so than for anyone else, irrespective of one’s (‘racial/ethnic’) background. This is because the men placed more emphasis on the material realities of individuals, and class maintained a prominent status in these discussions. As such, the men pointed to how the structure of society poses more of a problem than members of society themselves. It is instructive to consider the point that Murphy makes in relation to Orwell’s influential publication *Down and Out in Paris and London*. As Murphy comments, ‘But if Orwell were still around he might well feel uneasy about his country’s future – less because of the mob’s potential for destruction than because of the techniques being devised to control it’ (2001: xv).

As shown throughout the chapter, the participants provided insights into how they see control and power operating. For Bauman, it is them, the strangers, and in this case, the participants of this study, that remind us that the very order that modern structures try to impose on ‘us’ are the very ones that we need to be wary of. As such, modern structures that strive for this vision of order, instead, create the chaos, uncertainty and ambivalence amid our surroundings. As strangers remind us of this, Bauman (1997: 55) insists that we learn to live with strangers.

These men represent the figures of modernity, and because they are neither Us nor Them they maintain the status quo of ambivalence. Hence, ‘they
become a target of stereotyping because they are by definition elusive to definition’ (Pickering 2001: 204). However, in targeting them and subjecting them to controls, also means that this will be met with resistance as illustrated in examples by the participants. Moreover, the men also provided insights into alternative ways of seeing and being, and hence this translated through their own lived experiences. I therefore end this chapter with a reminder of the conception of ‘I am’, which essentially, marks the presence of strangers as ever-present, irrespective of the techniques (i.e. stereotyping) devised to control ‘them’. And, indeed, as Bauman (1997: 55) asks, ‘The question [then], is no longer how to get rid of the strangers and the strange, but how to live with them – daily and permanently’. 
6. CONCLUSION

The overall aims of this thesis were to explore and examine the lived experiences of black British men. The thesis set out to uncover the extent to which the daily lives of black men are shaped by British society’s perceptions of them, and more specifically, the extent to which their experiences are shaped by the imposition of particular, stereotypical black masculinities. This thesis demonstrated how black men respond to dominant perceptions of them. More importantly, this thesis provides insights into the complex and multi-faceted ways in which black men create alternative black masculinities by paying close attention to their ways of seeing, their ways of thinking, and ultimately, their ways of being.

At the same time, the thesis takes into account that the research presented here depicts a specific time and place in Britain (namely London) in which knife and gun crime as well as ‘gang’-related activities dominated the media headlines, political agendas and popular imagination. Of particular importance was the fact that the overwhelming majority of public responses pointed to black males as the main victims and perpetrators of these particular crimes. This research was motivated in part by the awareness that there have been few attempts to look at the experiences of black British men. Rather, the realities of the everyday lives of black men are often overshadowed by stereotypical conceptions of black masculinity in the popular imagination, that is, ‘the black super-stud’, ‘the black athlete’, ‘the bestial black’ (or ‘gangsta’).
As mentioned in the earlier chapters, these popular conceptions of black masculinity give rise to what Wallace (1992: 335) has described a ‘mostly invisible black visuality’ (as was discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.1) where the overrepresentation of black masculinity in sport and music obscures the ways in which black men might use the visual to make sense of their own lives. I also noted that it is interesting how many writers point to the binary of visibility / invisibility but very few studies have actually approached a study on black men from a visual angle. Thus, in recognition of this gap, I set out to answer the two main research questions raised at the start of this thesis:

How do representations of black ‘maleness’ in British society contribute to the construction and regulation of black male identities?

How is (black) ‘maleness’ constructed by black British men as a result of their lived experiences?

Using the data gathered, I addressed the above two questions in Chapters Four and Five. In this final chapter, I will summarise how the above questions were answered in the following way: firstly, I will provide a summary of the conceptual contribution that my study has made. Secondly, I discuss the method of my investigation, focusing on my use of visual methods. In particular, photo elicitation enabled the possibility of answering the research questions in ways that would not have been possible through conventional interviewing. Thirdly, I outline the principle findings in my study. Lastly, I address the implications of this study for policy and future research.
Conceptual contribution made by the study

The writings of the theorists W. E. Du Bois ([1903] 1994), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Zygmunt Bauman (1989; 1990; 1991; 1995; 1997) strongly influenced my approach to analysing black masculinities. Whilst Du Bois enables a consideration of how visual imagery articulates a black sense of identity, Bhabha draws attention to the idea that the stereotyping of the black ‘Other’ facilitates the estrangement of the black ‘Other’ as well as being open to contestation and change. Bauman’s ideas on the stranger are important because strangers unsettle the stereotyping process which attempts to maintain the Us (dominant, white) / Them (black) divide. Strangers refuse such binaries – which in turn throws up the question of belonging ‘in relation to the nation and the modern nation-state’ (Pickering 2001: 212).

In what follows, I address how the above three key thinkers have influenced my conceptualisation of the social construction of black masculinities in the UK. I then outline the key contributions made in this thesis; in which I provide alternative ways of theorizing black masculinity in relation to the dominant discourses that surround black masculinities.

In relation to the construction of black males in dominant society, this thesis proposes a three-model framework for conceptualising how black males are represented in dominant society (in the case of the first and second model), and where I suggest that the participants of my study might be positioned in
relation to dominant society (in the case of the third model). The three-model framework consists of:

i. The ‘perpetrator’ model (old model)

ii. The ‘victim/perpetrator’ (v/p) model (new model)

iii. The ‘alternative’ model (a counterbalance to the above models)

The above three-model framework allows for an in-depth understanding of the ways in black males have been constructed within the British context. Together, these models represent how the constructions of black men in British society are characterised by issues of control, challenge, complexity, change and continuity. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to show the relevance of these issues; that is, I have demonstrated the different types of control mechanisms that are devised in the interest of maintaining an Us / Them divide. An example of this is in the multiple ways in which the black ‘Other’ is given to be seen as a criminal (the ‘mugger’; the ‘rioter’; the ‘gangsta’). This points to the continuity in the ways in which black males have been portrayed. And yet, this continuity is met with change which, in effect, demonstrates how knowledge of the threatening ‘Other’ can be challenged. In the case of black men, the participants also challenged the construction of the black male ‘perpetrator’. This led to insights into the complex ways in which they articulate a masculine sense of ‘self’, particular the finding of the subtle and fluid ways in which resistance works (as was also discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.6 of this thesis). Also, participants

96 The three-model framework was discussed in Chapters Four (Part B) and Five.
provided alternative forms of knowledge which in itself invited new ways of seeing. This highlights the complexity in identity construction – one which is denied in models one and two. With this in mind, I begin with presenting an overview of the first and second model with the emphasis on control, continuity and change.

**Changes in constructions of black men: first and second model revisited**

While the thesis began by outlining the relevant literature on black men and the concept of ‘Othering’, Chapter Two (Part B especially) highlighted the characterising features that help define the first model. This model points to how black males have been constructed largely as perpetrators of street crime and violence. This construction can be considered against the backdrop of Bauman’s (1989: 13) notion of the ‘gardening’ state which excludes the ‘Other’ in the interest of maintaining social order and control. As Bauman suggests (1990: 58), the ‘Other’ is useful as it is the ‘Other’ – the ‘outsider’ that ‘brings into relief the identity of the in-group’ (ibid). Thus it is this very position of the ‘Other’ that serves to maintain the Us (white, dominant) / Them (black) divide. One of the ways identified as maintaining this control was to show how the ‘Other’ represents a problem. I argued that the continuing construction of black males as perpetrators (i.e. ‘the mugger’, the ‘rioter’, and the ‘gangsta’) served as a justification for attempts to monitor and police the conduct of black males (i.e. the ‘sus laws,’ particularly in the 1970s and 1980s).
However, Bauman (1990: 60) also points to how whatever is excluded and pushed out can equally threaten to come back in. Along similar lines, in his discussion of the stereotype, Bhabha (1994: 66) argues that the stereotype of the ‘Other’, i.e. the black male perpetrator is one that is ‘anxiously repeated’ (ibid). This anxious repetition signals that the stereotype remains under threat because nothing ever remains entirely ‘fixed’ and is therefore subject to change. In line with this thinking I demonstrated how the first model was disrupted following the Inquiry into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence (see Chapter Two, section 2.4). The disruption of the first model thus marked a significant change, in that the construction of black males as perpetrators shifted to the construction of black males as victims of violence as well.

Here, we began to see the emergence of the second model, which is at the centre of the arguments laid out in Chapter Four (Part B, particularly section 4.5). In this chapter, I placed emphasis on Bhabha’s (1994: 70) assertion that the stereotype is ‘as anxious as it is assertive’, meaning that while the victim status is present, the stereotype of the black male as perpetrator continues to be potent. That was not to suggest however, that the victim status is less important. On the contrary I outlined how the emergence of the second model, that is, the victim/perpetrator model (v/p model) is far more complex than its predecessor. I showed this in two key ways:

The perception of black males as the main instigators of crime and violence (as well as victims) sets up an Us (white) / Them (black) distinction, which in effect, continues on from the first model; and
The perception of black males as the main instigators as well as victims of crime and violence also sets up a distinction within and between black persons, in which the victim / perpetrator binary gives rise to a series of additional binaries such as good / bad, negative / positive, role models / absent fathers.

I also pointed to the importance of this shift from the old model (perpetrator) to the new one (victim/perpetrator) because, as Bhabha (1994: 67) argues, it is important to examine the effects that a stereotype can have. In this respect, I examined the effects that the dual construction of black males as both victims and perpetrators might have on the construction and regulation of black males imposed by the modern State.

In Chapter Four, I also demonstrated how the second model differed from the first model. I pointed out the following key distinctions between the two models:

The development of the second model increased the regulation of black males not only in the form of policing (which was also present in, and continues from the first model) but also in the form of regulation from within ‘the black community’ through the heightened importance of role-models and mentoring in discourses about the causes of black male criminality, and through a proliferation in the number of role-model/mentoring schemes which was discussed at length in Chapter Four (Part B, particularly sections 4.6-4.8)\(^\text{97}\).

\(^{97}\) See also Table 4.5 for a list of black-led organisations offering mentoring services which have increased in the recent years (particularly since the early 2000s).
Furthermore, the emergence of the second model increased the number of distinctions between ‘good’ ‘blacks (i.e. mentor, ‘representative) and ‘bad’ blacks (i.e. perpetrator, ‘absent’ father). These distinctions reinforced divisions between black males. Moreover, the distinction retains the focus on ‘race’ and gender, whereby these two dimensions of identity are seen as the main determinants of criminality and violence. ‘Race’ and gender are privileged over other modes of explanations, such as structural inequalities related to class or geography.

Given that the dominant modes of representation do not remain entirely ‘fixed’ and therefore are subject to change and transformation, I showed that the transition from the first model to the second model demonstrates how dominant modes of representation both continue, (i.e. the over-representation of black males as perpetrators), and are also subject to change. Of equal importance, I also demonstrated how these two models are also challenged; a point I explore further in relation to the second research question with an emphasis on the third model.

**Inhabiting alternative spaces – journeying towards the third model**

While the previous two models demonstrate how the Us / Them divide was maintained despite the recognition of black males as victims of crime and violence following the highly publicised murder of Stephen Lawrence, it was also highlighted how the third model (Chapter Five) serves as a counterbalance to its predecessors and is thus even more complex. I explained how this notion of Us / Them is challenged using Bauman’s (1991)
ideas on a third kind of stranger. Bauman theorises a ‘third element’ which should not be (ibid: 58). In Bauman’s view, these strangers disrupt the notion of Us / Them because they are ‘neither/nor; which is to say that they militate against the either/or’. I located the participants as ‘the third element’ and illustrate their neither/nor position in the third (alternative) model. I explained in Chapter Five that the reason these men represent ‘the third element is because they exist in this continual contact between belonging / unbelonging – that is, they have not fully assimilated, nor are the fully excluded. More specifically, I showed how black men engage in subtle acts of resistance which invites us to think about resilience amid ambivalence in the construction of identities.

Therefore the key contribution made in my thesis is that ideas of the ‘Other’ and resistance link together previously unlinked concepts of ‘strangerhood’ and ‘resilience’, thereby constituting new knowledge. That is, I demonstrated throughout Chapter Five how the men are continually in this state of belonging / unbelonging, while routinely resisting negative, atavistic, violent constructions of black masculinity. In particular, I stressed how this continuous state of in-between-ness coupled with acts of resistance places them in an ambiguous position. And, it is because of this ambiguous state that ‘they are by definition elusive to definition’ (Pickering 2001: 204). It is for this reason that I explained in Chapter Five (section 5.4) that this ambiguous state sees the men in search for ‘I AM’. As a result of its ambiguous nature, ‘I AM’ opens itself to endless possibilities of who that person is, who they are not becoming, and furthermore, who they could become. ‘I AM’ is a striving
toward autonomy. Therefore ‘I AM’ cannot be defined because it is far removed from the idea of being told ‘you are’. In this sense, the concept of I ‘AM’ throws up the question of autonomous agency in the construction of ‘self’.

As previously highlighted, Du Bois ([1903]: 1994) suggests, that a sense of autonomy is denied to black men as they are ever-presently in a place of twoness where they strive to maintain positive self-definitions against the backdrop of negativity. However, the men in this study are located in this state of ‘strangerhood’ where, rather than striving for a positive sense of ‘black’ identity, they strive ‘just to be’. This was represented best in the words of Luxor-Cephren as demonstrated in section 5.3.

Another key contribution that has been made in this thesis concerns questions around the ‘native’. That is, in his ideas of the stranger, Bauman does not entertain the possibility of the ‘native’ being located in ‘strangerhood’. However, as demonstrated in section 5.3, the self-reflexive moments of participants were moments where they recounted particular interactions with white people. These moments acted as a catalyst for the men to address questions of difference. During these moments, the black men are not ‘Other’ (in a state of unbelonging), nor are they not (un)other (in a state of belonging), but rather they pose important questions that relativise and de-naturalise the identity and the ‘belongingness’ of the white ‘Other’.
Whilst Bauman (Chapter Two, Part B) asserts that the ‘gardening state’ serves to keep order by ‘weeding out’ difference in order to establish a clear Us (white) / Them (black) divide, he also emphasises that the third type of ‘strangers’ do not neatly fit into this neat binary of Us / Them. However, what Bauman does not do, and what this study is beginning to do, is to examine the impact on both the host group (whites) and the strangers (blacks) who compromise the modern State’s efforts to homogenise the population. This is one of the key contributions made by my thesis; and it is important because these ‘self-reflexive’ moments which revealed the ways in which both black and white actors interacted with one another are symbolic of how they disrupt any stable meanings and understandings of the environments that we inhabit as well as the inhabitants that we share these ‘spaces’ with – including the presence of the ‘native’.

It is interesting to note that while the black men in my study viewed images of (only) black men, the absence of others, notably whites enabled them to reflect on the white ‘Other’ as well as question this notion of difference. In this sense, this process of questioning generates an in-depth understanding of the interactions that people encounter that cannot simply be reducible to an Us / Them binary – which is precisely what is advocated in my third model – thus making it distinct from its predecessors. Given that the use of images enabled a more enhanced and nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which people interact with one another in different spaces, it is on this note that I now move on to present an overview of my method of investigation.
Summary of method of investigation

Given that this research set out to explore how representations of black masculinity in British society contribute to the construction and regulation of black male identities, it was first important to find out what type of representations would have meaning for the participants. It is for this reason that a multi-strategy approach was utilized where quantitative research (survey questionnaire) facilitated the qualitative research. The survey questionnaire helped to identify the topics that would be relevant to ask black men. While quantitative research was utilized the study was nevertheless mainly qualitative in its approach. Methodologically, photo elicitation interviews were chosen as the best means of exploring how black men respond to, negotiate and resist dominant images of black masculinity. I interviewed black individuals using the photo-elicitation method to develop a deeper understanding of the extent to which dominant discourses around black masculinity are internalised, negotiated, and resisted by black men, to uncover the ways in which black men construct an alternative sense of masculine ‘self’, and to investigate what significance such alternative constructions have for the men concerned.

Given that this research took place in the context of public debate over ongoing crime and violence in London in which black boys and young black men were singled out as victims and perpetrators, several events and public discussions organised by statutory agencies and black community organisations. Some of these events served as occasions on which to carry out direct observation and also provided opportunities to speak with as well
as interview ‘representatives’ of ‘the black community.’ These occasions helped me to assess the impact that dominant representations in relation to crime and violence of black males were having on ‘the black community’ in general. As we have already seen in Chapter Four (Part B) especially, attending events also informed a significant part of my analysis as it enabled me to see how they were responding to these constructions and how these places operated as breeding grounds for sections of ‘the black community’ to promote mentoring organisations.

The impact that the increasing emergence of black-led organisations and ‘representatives’ of ‘the black community’ can have on the ways in which black males are portrayed in wider society was a central concern in this chapter. I argued that what appears as a scathing attack by dominant society on ‘the black community’ and their ‘way of life’ (based on ‘common-sense’ notions around ‘absent’ black fathers, lack of role-models and so forth) inevitably leads those who are being stigmatised towards the search for security. Therefore, these black-led organisations represent places born of exclusion as much as they represent places of security for blacks. However, this sense of security is premised on people sharing common values centred on ideals of manhood, fatherhood and community responsibilities. This inevitably paves the way for black male ‘representatives’ to speak out in public forums where such values are promoted.

However, the visibility of ‘representatives’ is all the more significant because quite often they are speaking out in the context of on-going debates and
discussions about the ‘causes’ of black males’ criminality and violence. Consequently, this leaves the space wide open for ‘representatives’ to criticise those black males who fall outside its political, cultural or moral boundaries (as was demonstrated in Chapter Four, section 4.8). And, this attack comes because of the differences the ‘representatives’ see between themselves and the ‘bad’ blacks, whether these are young black men or ‘absent’ black fathers or those unwilling to give their time to serve ‘the black community’. As such, these ‘differences’ are not based on any ‘reality’ but rather, how a black man should be (should not be) But, the question remains: black like whom? Beyond this, if these organisations and ‘representatives’ comprise of places which provide security and yet, are particular about the type of black a black man should be, then it seems that this comes at a price – in that this sense of security and autonomy cannot be simultaneously achieved.

**Principle findings in the study**

The second research question was explored in Chapter Four (Part A) and more prominently in Chapter Five, where I also introduced the third model. Overall, the third ‘alternative’ model shows how the research uncovered a complex and multi-faceted understanding of black men. In responding to dominant constructions of black masculinity in the popular imagination, this discussion will be two-fold: firstly, I will focus on the black men’s acknowledgement of dominant images as being commonplace and the issues that arose from this sense of ‘knowing’. Secondly, I will address why certain images and in this case, ‘the bestial black’ (‘the black male as the
main perpetrator of violence’) and the ‘intellectual black’ held more resonance than other images (i.e. the ‘super-stud’) for the black individuals concerned.

Chapter Four (Part A) revealed that for the most part representations of ‘the black athlete’ or those that depicted ‘the super-stud’ were recognised by the men as commonplace and as such, were perceived as the ‘norm’ rather than as anomalies. Both Chapter Four and Chapter Five emphasised how the men acknowledged that ‘black’ music, dance, and images of the ‘gangsta’ comprise of a highly marketable identity that ‘everyone’ seems to enjoy – irrespective of ‘race’.

However, there was also the recognition that the power of ‘street-style’ images, including ‘the gangsta’, as well as images of black men as impressive athletes, and as highly sexualised, still manage to overshadow alternative and the diverse ways in which the participants think about and present themselves in their everyday lives. These images also hide the barriers that black men confront in places where they experience racial discrimination as a matter of ‘daily’ routine. This was particularly in the case of employment and within social spaces (including interactions with the police).

To elaborate, constructions of ‘the bestial black’ (‘the black male perpetrator’) was seen by participants as a ‘hyper-visible’ image. This was because of the racial hostility and discrimination the men had faced in relation to this image, such as in their encounters with the police. Chapter Four (Part A) considers
this point in detail, in relation to Robert Hunt and Martin Jacobs’ accounts of their experiences with the police.

The other side of the coin, ‘the intellectual black’, which symbolises the characteristics of intelligence and achievement was seen as an image that is overshadowed by dominant (negative) images, like ‘the threatening black Other’. This in itself threw up questions of invisibility. However, this is not to suggest that the men felt a sense of not belonging in British society. On the contrary, and as I emphasised in Chapter Five, the men showed strong signs of refusing to be Othered. Therefore, it was for this reason that I insist that the men are located in ‘strangerhood,’ whereby they exist in a state of belonging and unbelonging. In particular, I emphasised that this state of belonging/unbelonging is also characterised by resistance.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this state of strangerhood also depicts the complex and multi-faceted ways in which this sense of belonging/unbelonging manifests itself in ‘everyday’ life for the men concerned. For example, if the image of the London Underground (see Chapter Five, section 5.1) given to me by Malcolm Littleton had been provided without Malcolm’s words, one could easily assume that the image itself is symbolic of Malcolm feeling a sense of belonging to London. However, his words\(^98\) alongside the image point to the tension in this sense

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\(^98\) As has been emphasised throughout this thesis, the accompaniment of words alongside photographs is important as the meaning that the image may remain obscure if they are not (Rose 2012: 326)
of belonging and therefore gave importance to a sense of unbelonging as well.

Based on the lived experiences of black men, I highlighted in Chapter Five that the men pointed to key ways in which they refuted dominant representations of black masculinity. In particular, I addressed how the men resisted images of ‘the threatening black Other’ by positing the idea that ‘the system’ (i.e. media) exercises control over the masses that determines the ways in which people are portrayed. They also resisted ‘common-sense’ knowledge of black families, offering alternative ways in which people and their ‘way of life’ could be perceived that did not necessarily need to be seen as problematic.

Furthermore, my study also showed how that the spaces that black males live in are not homogeneous. The men in this study pointed to how urban spaces are broken up into complex layers and there is no telling of the interactions that one might encounter or the relationships that we might forge with the ‘Other’, whoever this ‘Other’ might be. Whilst the heterogeneous and unpredictable nature of urban space and the ‘Others’ they find in it can produce uncertainty, the men I interviewed invited new ways of seeing, new ways of knowing, new ways of being within this context of uncertainty. As Pickering points out, if we can learn to accept uncertainty then ‘we may realise that it is possible to live without certainty, to entrust our lives to contingency, and to distrust the dogmas of belonging’ (2001: 222). With this in mind, I will now address areas of inquiry which warrant further scholarly investigation.
Implications for further research

This research has highlighted some interesting aspects which lead me to address the implications of my research findings for the conceptualisation of the ‘Other’ in the field of men and masculinities. In understandings of the (black) ‘Other’, there tends to be a binary opposition between black men and white men, between black and white masculinity, and indeed between black and white cultures more widely (Edwards 2006). However, this thesis highlighted that interactions with the white ‘Other’ served as a catalyst for the black participants of this study to address the question of ‘difference’ (see Chapter 5 on ‘self-reflexive moments). Thus, these interactions signalled a destabilising of the certainties that are often linked to the (white) native’s identity. This suggests that the study of masculinities, in contemporary times also encompasses taking a step in the direction of understanding masculinities beyond ‘race’. As Edwards (2006: 78) argues, the task of ‘colouring in questions of masculinity, or in short, rendering them something other than black and white’ requires a mode of investigation that also attends to commonalities and differences in relation to socio-economic positioning and geographies of inclusion/exclusion – factors that can be related to – but are by no means strictly determined by – ‘race’.

A final note about the thesis

At the heart of it, I wanted to explore and examine the ‘lived’ experiences of black British men – beyond the ‘hype’ that is propagated in dominant discourse and visual representations. This study therefore attempted to
understand black men’s lives, aspirations, and how they understand their social world with greater subtlety and depth than is usually given to them. It was important to provide this understanding because while many studies have challenged and dismantled the stereotypes about black men – these works either tell you what black men are not or they tell you about the ways black men are ‘being black’. And yet, rarely do studies provide insight into the variety of ways in which they might ‘just be’ – and on this note, it is hoped that this study has made a step towards this direction.
Appendices

Appendix A: Self-completion questionnaire

Living in the UK:

Black Caribbean Men’s Experiences in Britain
Guidelines

Most of the questions can be answered by ticking one or more boxes
Some ask you to write in your preferred answer if you feel none of the boxes really represents the answer you want to give
When you have answered one question, always go on to answer the next question unless instructed otherwise
Please try to give the most accurate answer that you can to each question

1. What is your age?
   □ 18-25  □ 26-35  □ 36-45  □ 46-55  □ 56-64  □ 65+

2. What is your ethnic group?
   □ Black or Black British – Caribbean
   □ Black or Black British – African
   □ Black or Black British – Other (please specify) ………………………………
   □ Mixed or Mixed British – White/Black Caribbean
   □ Mixed or Mixed British – White/Black African
   □ Mixed or Mixed British – Other (please specify) …………………

3. What is your current marital status?
   □ Single  □ Cohabiting  □ Separated  □ Widowed
   □ In a relationship  □ Married  □ Divorced  □ Other (please specify)

4. Do you have any children? □ Yes □ No
   (If no, please go straight to question 5)
   (a) How many children do you have? ……………………………………………
   (b) What age are your children? ……………………………………………
   (c) Do they normally live with you? □ Yes □ No
5. Please state your level of education:

- [ ] GCSEs
- [ ] NVQ
- [ ] GNVQ
- [ ] BTEC
- [ ] AS/A Levels
- [ ] HNC
- [ ] HND
- [ ] Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA/BSc)
- [ ] Postgraduate certificate
- [ ] Postgraduate Diploma
- [ ] Masters degree (e.g. MA/MSc/MBA)
- [ ] MPhil
- [ ] Doctorate (PhD)
- [ ] Professional (e.g. MD/JD/DDS)
- [ ] Other (please specify ………………)
- [ ] No formal qualification

6. Which of the following best describes your current situation? (Please tick all that apply)

- [ ] Employed → ○ full-time ○ part-time
- [ ] Self-employed → ○ full-time ○ part-time
- [ ] Voluntary work (unpaid) → ○ full-time ○ part-time
- [ ] Unemployed and looking for work
- [ ] Unable to work due to disability or ill health
- [ ] Caring for my home and family/dependents → ○ full-time ○ part-time
- [ ] Student → ○ full-time ○ part-time
- [ ] Long-term unemployed
- [ ] Never worked
- [ ] Retired
- [ ] Other (please …………………………………………………………………….)
7. What is your main occupation?

*Please state: .................................................................

8. How do you spend most of your weekends/spare time? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- Internet
- Watching TV
- Gardening
- DIY
- Theatre
- Pets
- Listening to music
- Opera/Ballet
- Playing games
- Reading
- Parties
- Photography
- Watching sports
- Clubs
- Country walks
- Cinema
- Restaurants
- Playing sports
- Dinner parties
- Travelling
- Sightseeing
- Concerts
- Green Issues
- Politics
- Pubs
- Keeping fit/gym
- With loved ones
- Bars
- Cycling
- Other (please specify)
- Cooking
- Motoring

9. What clubs/societies do you regularly* attend? *(Please specify which type)*

- Churches and/or Religious Groups
- Youth Organisations
- Sports and Fitness
- Music, Arts and Dance *(please specify which type)*
- Environmental Organisations
- Political Organisations *(please specify)*
- None of these
- Other *(please specify)*
10. What media do you use as a news source? *(Please tick all that apply)*

**Section A: Newspapers**

- ☐ The Independent
- ☐ The Sun
- ☐ Guardian
- ☐ Mirror
- ☐ Telegraph
- ☐ Daily Mail
- ☐ The Times
- ☐ Daily Express
- ☐ Metro
- ☐ New Nation
- ☐ The Voice
- ☐ Other *(please specify)* ……………….

**Section B: Television**

- ☐ BBC 1
- ☐ BBC 2
- ☐ ITV
- ☐ Channel 4
- ☐ Channel 5
- ☐ BBC NEWS 24
- ☐ CNN
- ☐ Sky News
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Other *(please specify)* …
- ☐ None of these

**Section C: Radio**

- ☐ BBC Radio 1
- ☐ 1 Xtra BBC
- ☐ BBC Radio 2
- ☐ BBC Radio 3
- ☐ BBC Radio 4
- ☐ BBC 5 Live
- ☐ Virgin Radio
- ☐ BBC Radio 5
- ☐ BBC 6
- ☐ Other *(please specify)* ……………….

**Section D: Internet**

- ☐ BBC News online
- ☐ News now
- ☐ New Nation Digital
- ☐ Voice Online
- ☐ Black UK Online
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Other *(please specify)* ……………….
11. In your opinion, what is the most common image associated with Black males in (British) society? Please rate each of the following out of 5 where 1 is very uncommon and 5 is very common:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funny (Good sense of humour)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Athletic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promiscuous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working (in the workplace)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good dress sense</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean-Cut</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscular physique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career-oriented</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-dealer</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Loyal to family
Highly-sexed
Homophobic
Goal-driven
Physically well-endowed
Rhythmic/Musical
Charismatic
Materialistic
Honest
Other (please specify)………

12. In light of the above, what is the most common image(s) that YOU associate with Black males in British society? (Please tick all that apply)

☐ Funny (Good sense of humour)
☐ Career-oriented
☐ Athletic
☐ Drug-dealer
☐ Promiscuous
☐ Loyal to family
☐ Religious
☐ Violent
☐ Highly-sexed
☐ Homophobic
☐ Successful
☐ Goal-driven
☐ Hard-working
☐ Physically well-endowed
☐ Good dress sense
☐ Rhythmic/Musical
☐ Clean-Cut
☐ Charismatic
☐ Intelligent
☐ Materialistic
☐ Aggressive
☐ Honest
☐ Muscular physique
☐ Other (please specify) ………………...
13. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
(Tick 1 box only)  
“Images of Black men in popular culture and the mainstream media influence people to view Black males in a negative way”

14. To what extent do you agree that the ethnic press reproduces images of Black men as produced in mainstream media? (Tick 1 box only)

15. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
(Tick 1 box only)  
“Images of Black men in popular culture and the mainstream media shapes the way Black men see themselves”

16. How important is it for you to be in a relationship with a woman from your own ethnic group? (Tick 1 box only)

17. In which areas of your life do you feel you have experienced racial discrimination? (Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Education
- ☐ As a health service user
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ The criminal justice system
- ☐ Social life
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Private life
- ☐ Other (please specify) …………
18. Which of the following have been the most influential figures in your life? Please tick each of the following out of 5 where 1 is not very influential and 5 is very influential:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother(s)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A relative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girlfriend/Partner/Wife</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrity (please specify)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

19. How satisfied are you in these aspects of your life? Please tick each of the following out of 5 where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship with spouse/partner</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
20. Do you have any criminal convictions?  □ Yes  □ No

Additional information: Please use the box below for any comments that you may like to make about this questionnaire.

Please check that you have answered all the questions that apply to you.

Thank you very much for your help. We are grateful for the time you have taken to complete this questionnaire.

The End
Appendix B: Fieldwork Drawing – Model One

Perpetrator Model ('old' model)

1970s (mugger) – 1980s (rioter)
early/mid 1990s (drugs/’gangsta)
Us (dominant, white) / Them (black)
Appendix C: Fieldwork Drawing – Model Two

Victim / Perpetrator Model (‘new’ model)

Stephen Lawrence Inquiry – dynamic shift (from perpetrators to now also victims of crime and violence) – Operation Trident
2000s – drugs, guns, knives, ‘gangs’
N.B. Change of dialogue: violent aggressive yet vulnerable and at risk too.
Us (dominant, white) / Them (black)
Division within and between the black ‘Other’ (i.e. ‘good’ black vs. ‘bad’ black)
Increased regulation: policing from the State and policing from within ‘the community
Increased visibility of black ‘representatives’ working jointly with the State, i.e. role-model/mentor interventions
Alternative Model (counterbalance to Us / Them)

Locating the participants in this model
Neither fully assimilated nor fully excluded
Refusing the Us / Them Binary
Characterising features: resistance and ambiguity
Resilience and ‘strangerhood’ amid ambivalence in the construction of identities
Ways of Seeing – Ways of Thinking – Ways of Being
Appendix D: Consent form for interviews with ‘representatives’

14 March 2008

Dear (Representative)

I am a 2nd year PhD student at the University of Warwick, in the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (CRER). The Centre is committed to understanding experiences of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the UK, and to the promotion of equal opportunities and social justice.

My PhD aims to explore the identity/identities and lived experiences of Black Caribbean men in the UK and is being supervised by Dr. Khursheed Wadia (CRER) and Dr. Cecily Jones (Department of Sociology & Director for the Centre for Caribbean Studies).

While research on Black and ethnic minority communities is extensive, the identity/identities of Black Caribbean men in the UK remain under-researched. My PhD project aims to contribute to the insufficient knowledge in this area of study.

I believe that one of the ways in which my understanding of the group I am studying can be increased is by recognising and speaking with someone like yourself who has contributed significantly in supporting members of Black and ethnic minority communities. I would be very grateful if you could please spare me some time to meet with you at a place and time convenient to you.

Your help in all of this will be very much appreciated, and I look forward to hearing from you very soon.

Yours sincerely,

Poonam Madar

Doctoral Researcher
Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations
University of Warwick
Coventry
CV4 7AL
E-mail: P.Madar@warwick.ac.uk
Tel. 07988 703 231
10 March 2008

**Information and Consent Form**

*Name and affiliation of Researcher:* Poonam Madar, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations – University of Warwick  
Supervisors: Dr. Khursheed Wadia & Dr. Cecily Jones

**Title of Project** – *Living in the UK: Black Caribbean Men's Experiences in Britain*

**Aims of the Project:** The prime aim of this research project is to explore the experiences of Black Caribbean males in the UK. While research on Black and ethnic minorities is extensive, the identity/identities of Black Caribbean men in Britain remains under-researched and hence there is little understanding of the lived experiences of Caribbean men in the UK. My PhD project aims to offer a significant contribution to scholarship in this area.

**How you can help:** You will be asked to complete a questionnaire (no longer than 5-7 minutes) based on your own perceptions of Black Caribbean male identity/identities and lived experiences in the UK. You may be asked to contribute further in a personal interview lasting no longer than 1 hour.

All the information collected and recorded will be anonymous in order to protect the confidentiality of every participant. The information you give will not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher and her supervisors named above. Further, all efforts will be made to ensure that each participant cannot be identified as a respondent of the study and personal details as such, will not be accessible to anyone other than Poonam Madar.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice and or negative consequences.

**Participant Consent**

I confirm that I have read and understood the information outlined above.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time and that if I decide to withdraw I can request that any information I have provided is not used for the purposes of this or any other research project carried out by the researcher named above or by any other person.

I understand that details of the survey will only be accessed by Poonam Madar and her supervisors named above, and that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study and personal data as such will not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher named above.

Please tick and sign the box below if you are in agreement with the above and thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey.

I agree to take part in the above study [ ]

Respondent Code Number ___________________  
Date ……………………………………

Doctoral Researcher  
Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations  
University of Warwick  
Coventry  
CV4 7AL  
E-mail: P.Madar@warwick.ac.uk  
Tel. 07988 703 231
Appendix G: Consent form for photo elicited interviews

Information and Consent Form

Name and affiliation of Researcher: Poonam Madar, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations – University of Warwick
Supervisors: Dr. Khursheed Wadia & Dr. Cecily Jones

Title of Project – Living in the UK: Black Caribbean Men’s Experiences in Britain

This interview involves exploring Black men’s views on images of Black males in popular culture.

All the information collected and recorded will be anonymous in order to protect the confidentiality of every participant. The information you give will not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher and her supervisors named above. Further, all efforts will be made to ensure that each participant cannot be identified as a respondent of the study and personal details as such, will not be accessible to anyone other than Poonam Madar.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice and or negative consequences.

Participant Consent

I confirm that I have read and understood the information outlined above.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time and that if I decide to withdraw I can request that any information I have provided is not used for the purposes of this or any other research project carried out by the researcher named above or by any other person.

I understand that details of the interview will only be accessed by Poonam Madar and her supervisors named above, and that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study and personal data as such will not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher named above.

I am happy for the researcher to record and take notes of the interview whilst it is taking place.

I understand that a summary of the interview can be made available from the researcher if I should request this.

Please tick and sign the box below if you are in agreement with the above and thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.

I agree to take part in the above study ☐  Respondent Code Number Date
..................................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................................

Doctoral Researcher
Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations
University of Warwick
Coventry
CV4 7AL
E-mail: P.Madar@warwick.ac.uk
Tel. 07988 703 231
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