

The phenomena of Black youth crime and how Black youths are portrayed in the media in the United Kingdom: Whether the portrayal can be considered exaggerated, or if the moral panic is in some way justified?

By
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Abstract

Black youth crime and the portrayal of black youths in the media have generated considerable publicity in recent years. The recent fatal knife and gun crimes in London involving black youths were highlighted by the media which in turn produced a moral panic surrounding the issue.

The intent of this study is to present an argument for or against the perception that black youths are portrayed negatively in the media and the moral panic surrounding black youth crime is exaggerated. Literature and qualitative research by way of four unstructured interviews regarding six sub factors which are, the media portrayal of black youths, negative role models amongst the black community, the underachievement of black youths in school, single parent families, social class and black culture, were analysed and discussed in order to reach a valid conclusion.

Conclusions are drawn that the media do in fact portray black youths in a negative way but on the other hand, with support from statistics and relevant literature, black youth crime is a serious problem and therefore cannot be dismissed as a moral panic exacerbated by the media.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to explain the phenomena of black youth crime and how black youths are portrayed in the media in the United Kingdom and whether the portrayal can be considered exaggerated, or if the moral panic is in some way justified.

Crimes statistics show black youths, particularly young black males, commit a disproportionate amount of crime, however the media is known to sensationalise news stories and make vast exaggerations. Drawing on existing work regarding black youth crime and the representation it acquires in the media, Hall et al's (1978) *Policing the Crisis* study demonstrates how the media shapes public views regarding a particular group in society. The 1970s moral panic surrounding muggings was blamed predominantly on young black men. The media represented them as 'muggers' and a threat to society which resulted in alienation and marginalisation of this particular group. Subsequently, there was over policing of black youths in the UK. Although Hall's (1978) study of the media and black youths showed how the media targets certain groups in society, behind every moral panic there tends to be an element of reality.

In recent years there has been vast media coverage involving black youths and crime. Particularly in 2006 and 2007 there was a spate of fatal stabbings and shootings amongst black youth. For example, the deaths of Kodjo Yenga and Adam Regis in March 2007. These two murders were of huge interest to the media as it was during a period where black youth crime in London was highlighted. Kodjo Yenga was stabbed through the heart just five days after being interviewed on television about knife crime and its prevalence. Just days after this murder, Adam Regis was stabbed to death on the streets of East London on his way home after meeting with friends. These are only two examples of black youth crime that made its way into the media in 2007. There had in fact been over twenty murders involving black youths in London alone in 2007. These statistics show an issue with black youths and their involvement in criminal activity- but is crime amongst the black community really as bad as the media emphasises? This dissertation will seek to answer the question.

Firstly, the literature review will consider relevant literature regarding the topic of black youth crime and the representation of black youths in the media. This chapter is divided into sub headings which are: the organisation of the media and moral panics; lack of father figure and black positive role models; the underachievement of young black males in schools, social class and black culture. This account will then describe and analyse the methodology used in acquiring the data. The method used was unstructured interviews, the advantages and disadvantages and the reasons why this approach was chosen will be discussed. The results section follows the methodology chapter. Findings obtained during the unstructured interviews will be presented. The discussion, which will interlink with the findings and existing literature, precedes the conclusion of the research question. .

1.0 Literature Review

The perceived high rate of black youth crime in the UK has generated much discussion in recent years. The question as to why so many young black men commit a disproportionate amount of crime has frequently been asked. The media is also known for portraying certain groups in society in a way that generates fear and produces stereotypes and labels.

1.1 The Organisation of the Media and Moral Panics

As the media and black youth crime forms the root of this account it would be necessary to gain an understanding of why black youth crime is such a big issue and why it is highlighted so much in the media.

News agendas and news values ultimately decide what is to be broadcasted and in what particular order. 'There are twelve news structures and news values that shape crime news' (Jewkes, 2004). Under the news value 'threshold' it is stated that in order for something to be deemed newsworthy it has to meet a certain level of significance. The media create moral panics according to their criteria of news values.

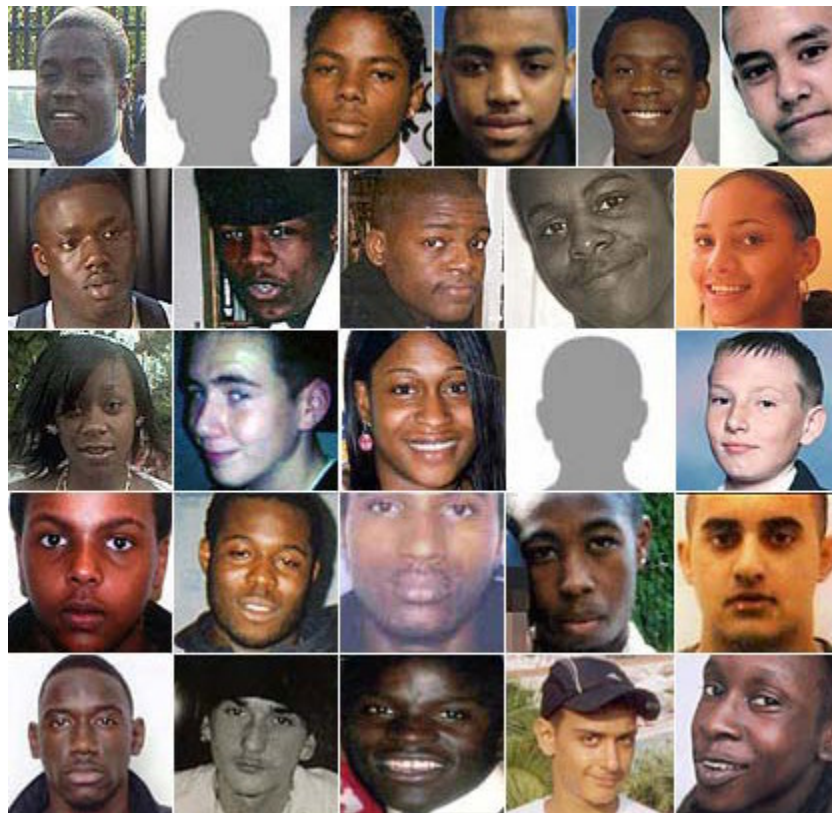
'Once a story has reached the required threshold it may have to meet further thresholds to stay on the agenda, the story is often kept alive due to the creation of new thresholds, some stories are used as 'fillers' during quiet news periods and tend to be reported in waves, suggesting a widespread social problem rapidly approaching crisis point' (Jewkes, 2004, p.41).

The media has been accused of sensationalising events surrounding violent black youth crime, attaching a level of drama making it newsworthy. This reporting of crime and deviance plays a vital role in shaping the public's perception of crime and its perpetrators.

'Eighty six percent of white homicide victims are killed by other whites, and most homicide victims know each other. But the least frequent killings-homicides between strangers, and interracial homicides-received the most coverage' (Dorfman, 2001).

In 2007 knife and gun crime amongst black youths in the capital generated vast media coverage. Over twenty black youths were victims of knife or gun attacks in London.

These are the pictures of 26 teenagers murdered in the capital in 2007



Referring to the collage, the majority of the victims are of African-Caribbean origin. The deaths of Kodjo Yenga and Adam Regis of West and East London respectively and three south London black youths, James Smart-Ford, Michael Dosunmu and Bill Cox were central to the media reporting of knife and gun crime amongst the black community. Yenga, 16, died Wednesday the 14th of March 2007. He was stabbed through the heart on Portland Road, Notting Hill. Five days before his untimely death, Yenga was interviewed about the prevalence of knife crime. He stated, ‘Stabbings are getting worse but the media is also making it bigger than what it is. I don't think it happens all the time but it happens quite a lot’ (BBC News, 2007). Three days after the death of Yenga, Regis, 15, was killed on Saturday 17th of March. He was also stabbed to death on the streets of East London. In February 2007, ‘James Smartt-Ford, 16, was shot and killed at Streatham ice rink on the 3rd of February. Michael Dosunmu, 15, was murdered in his home in Peckham on the 6th of February. The third teenage killing was of Bill Cox, 15 who was also shot in his home in Clapham on the 14th of February’ (Black Youth Empowerment, 2007). The Media’s intense reporting of gun and knife crime in the black community gives the impression it is solely a ‘black’ problem.

Like many large industries, the media is governed by the ever familiar socio-economic class of person, that being white, middle class, and middle aged men. Their views on society may differ from those not part of this demographic. ‘It is widely expected that those who work in the media have some degree of influence in terms of what potential stories they select and how they organise them, defining or amplifying some issues over others’ (Jewkes, 2004, p.60).

In Stuart Hall's *Policing the Crisis* (1978), the concept of the moral panic theory was reused in relation to the furore surrounding muggings in the 1970's. 'Hall et al shows how the media, working with images from a New York ghetto, defined the incidence of street robberies in Britain's inner cities as an outbreak of a new dangerous kind of violent crime' (Muncie, 2004, p.120). As the panic surrounding mugging intensified, mugging became almost solely a problem with black youths. In the 1970s the media and police force instigated the 'mugging' panic surrounding young black men. These men were said to be the cause of a spate of muggings that occurred during this period although official statistics had shown such crimes had decreased. The media portrayal of young black men as muggers generated fear of black men and also resulted in an over policing of this particular group.

Labelling theory argues, 'Behaviour may be labelled criminal but it is not this behaviour in itself that constitutes crime' (Muncie, 2004, p.117). Due to the moral panic, youths have been labelled as deviant and a threat to society.

'Labelling theory proposes that we focus our attention not on the behaviour of offenders, but on the behaviour of those who label, react to and otherwise seek to control offenders. Labelling theory argues that it is these efforts of social control that ultimately trigger the processes that trap individuals in a criminal career' (Agnew, 2004, p.295).

The label of 'criminal' placed upon black youths in society leads to society defining their acts as criminal and extending this judgement to them as people. Having been labelled, there is an expectation that this criminality must be expressed. With this attached stereotype, the general population will perceive them to be criminal and treat them accordingly. This produces unanticipated effects: the label of 'criminal' is intended to prevent individuals from participating in criminal activities but it actually creates the very thing it intended to stop. It produces a self-fulfilling prophecy which is defined as 'a false definition of a situation, evoking a new behaviour that makes the original false assumption come true' (Burke, 2005, p.286).

A study conducted in the USA established that actual behaviour is not the sole factor in determining whether a deviant label is conferred. Other variables such as appearance, demeanour, ethnic group and age were all considered.

'Piliavin and Blair (1964) looked at police encounters with juveniles and found that arrest decisions were based largely on physical cues, manner, dress and general appearance from which the officer inferred the character of youth. Structural factors such as gender, social class, ethnic group and time of day were also significant' (Burke, 2005, p.145).

This study demonstrates that the recipients of deviant labels are not always as a consequence of deviant behaviour.

Moral panic and labelling theories state public's views on crime and certain groups within society are influenced by media portrayals and labels. This notion is challenged by realist theorists, who state that crime statistics should be taken at face value and should be taken seriously. Right realists state that individuals have a choice

in life and can be prevented from deviant and or criminal behaviour. They seem to solely focus on street level criminality and totally disregard white-collar crime. This implies that street level crime, which is primarily committed by youths, is more prevalent than it actually is. Right realists also ignore cultural, social and economic factors that can have a major influence in criminal behaviour.

Left realists, however take into account these factors. 'Left realists recognise street crime as an inevitable outcome of social and political deprivation' (Laufer, 2007, p.208). They state 'crime must be taken seriously', something should be done about it. They acknowledge that crime has a specific cause, 'crime can best be explained with reference to the process of relative deprivation and marginalisation' (Muncie, 2004, p.141). Muncie also argues 'access to the labour market is seen as vital to the working class and black underclass in particular' (Muncie, 2004, p.141). If the labour market is not accessible young people become marginalised. 'Left realists state that criminal subcultures materialise as an adaptation to marginalisation' (Burke, 2005).

1.2 Lack of Father Figure and Negative Role Models

Single parent families appear to be 'commonplace' in poor black communities. The lack of father figures is argued to be a contributing factor to involvement in crime amongst young black males. 'The Commons Committee, which is investigating young black people and the criminal justice system, was told 57% of black Caribbean children grew up in lone parent households, compared with 25% of white children, (BBC, 2006). These statistics provides insight into the level of single parent families black Caribbean children grow up in, in comparison to their white counterparts.

Talcott Parsons (1937) 'masculine identity theory' proposes that the main social role for an adult male is breadwinner whilst the female role is more domestic. 'As the former is consequently absent from the family home for much of the time and cannot therefore function as a masculine role model for his children' (Burke, 2005, p.105). The result is that both sexes tend to identify more with their mother. The male child seeks disapproval from the mother, for example, his aggressive and destructive nature provokes a negative reaction from the mother. The male child perceives these characteristics to be masculine.

Parson identified a male's role in society as the breadwinner. In single parent families commonly found in poor black communities, there is no adult male, no father figure, so the female is the sole and primary carer, hence the male children identify more with their mother. Black males living in poor communities are subject to behavioural expectations, for instance being 'tough' and committing certain crimes are expected from young males in certain communities. These deemed 'masculine' characteristics trigger a certain reaction from a mother.

Conservative party leader, David Cameron also identified family breakdown as a contribution to black youth crime. 'I profoundly believe that family breakdown is at the heart of so many of these problems and it's when families break down that the gangs can sometimes take over' (Cameron, 2007, Cited in BBC Caribbean, 2007).

Studies regarding single parent families and involvement in crime have shown a strong relationship between the two variables.

‘According to one study, children raised in single-parent families are one-third more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour; O’Neill found that, holding other variables constant, black children from single-parent households are twice as likely to commit crimes as black children from a family where the father is present. Nearly 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes, as do 43 percent of prison inmates’

(Mortimer, 2005).

According to O’Neill’s findings there is a distinct correlation between single parent families and crime.

Sportsmen and musicians, particularly rap artists, are considered the most prevalent role models amongst young black men and women. There seems to be a cry for more positive and academic role models that the youths can aspire to emulate instead.

A study conducted in the USA, by Dr. Assibiy-Mensah, with 4,500 black youths ranging from 10 to 18, during January 1994 to December 1995, from towns and cities in 22 states aimed to identify common role models within the black community.

‘The major finding of this study was the overwhelming choice of athletes or sports figures as role models for all groups ranging from 85% of the 10 year olds to 98% of the 18 year olds, movie or television stars accounted for the second highest category for non-sports role model personalities. None of the children indicated an educator as his role model’

(Assibiy-Mensah, 1997, p.244).

The findings from this study show African-Caribbean youths tend to aspire to emulate sportsmen and musicians, who many consider to be negative role models. As Assibiy-Mensah identified, none of the children indicated an educator as their role model, but for what reason? ‘Their reluctance to choose academics or educators as role models may be explained by their lack of information on the cadre of African-American males in academia’ (Assibiy-Mensah, 1997, p.245).

The lack of positive role models in black communities has caused great concern and a new generation of role models, distinct from sportsmen or rap stars, are needed to combat the issue of crime in the community. ‘Black youngsters need a new generation of role models, drawn from the legal profession, business and education, to counter under-achievement and involvement in crime’ (Womack, 2007).

1.3 The Underachievement of Young Black Males in School

‘Black Caribbean children and young people have the largest number of exludees and the highest rate of exclusion. Black pupils in general are over three times as likely as white pupils to be permanently excluded’ (Stephenson, 2007, p.66). Further literature states ‘only 25% of African-Caribbean boys get five good GCSE’s compared with 51% of the population as a whole. Black men are also under represented in the traditional professions of law, medicine, finance and teaching’ (BBC, 2004). These statistics provide insight into the level of underachievement with regards to black males. Black males seem to be under represented in education and employment. This

is supported by Cross who states, 'It is now commonplace to observe that the children of Britain's non white population occupy a marginal role in education, employment and other spheres of social and economic life' (Cross, cited in Cashmore and Troyna, 1982, p.35).

Although these statistics indicate a lack of achievement amongst black youths in education, conflicting literature suggests statistics do not reflect the whole truth. 'The analytical weakness of work on multi-cultural education in this country is based on a refusal to view the education system as a whole' (McLean, 1981, p.21). Reasons as to the perceived underachievement of black males in school suggest a causal relationship between the labour market and underachievement in school. This was evident in the riots of 1981 where unemployment in the black community was high in the areas of Brixton, Moss Side and Hoxtheth.

'As long ago as 1969, the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration had warned that 'the seeds of racial discord' would be sewn if British-born black youth were continually denied 'equal treatment. What is more, the Select Committee suggested that these 'seeds' were especially likely to bloom in a context of worsening and prolonged unemployment' (Troyna, 1984, p.155).

As African-Caribbean migrants flooded the UK shortly after the Second World War, expectations were high and they believed their children would benefit from far greater education. The migrants soon found themselves to be victims of racial abuse and discrimination. 'Evidence of educational underachievement amongst their children may have disturbed their belief in the doctrine of equality of opportunity' (Troyna, 1984, p.115). A considerable number of black parents believe the educational system is structured to hinder the progress of black and ethnic minority youths. Clarke (1982) supports this claim by suggesting: 'it is an important step to realise that the supplementary school exists to help children not because they failed to achieve through the system, but because the system is racist, and has failed them' (Clark, 1982, p. 126). Furthermore Ken Livingstone stated: 'London was now reaping a "bitter harvest of street violence and gun crime" partly because of the impact of low attainment, exclusion and racism on black pupils' (Livingstone cited in, Cassidy, 2002). The notion of schools being institutionally racist can be criticised by the apparent 'achievement' of south Asians pupils. 'On the other hand, there are those who maintain that the educational achievement of South Asian pupils undermines the claims about institutional racism' (Troyna, 1984, p.157).

1.4 Social Class

Judging by the Media's reporting of youth crime, those further down the social class spectrum are known to commit a disproportionate amount of crime.

'Predominantly young men with and over-representation of youth drawn from minority ethnic communities, low income, low educational achievement, poorly paid employment (if any) and strained family relations are the standard defining characteristics of young people most frequently found in custodial institutions'

(Cunneen and White, 2002, cited in Goldson and Muncie, 2006, p.18).

Reasons as to why young people of this social group commit a disproportionate amount of crime are varied. There is a view that youth offending is less likely to be a relatively non problematic part of a normal transition to legitimate adulthood for those who experience multiple factors of social exclusion. The 'underclass' are a group that encounter multiple factors of social exclusion. The underclass theory is defined as 'groups in socially isolated neighbourhoods have few legitimate employment opportunities and this increases the chances that they turn to illegal or deviant activities for income' (Burke, 2005, p.287).

The term underclass is not directed at those in poverty, but people at the margins of society, people that are often violent and can only maintain a job for a short period of time if any. 'The habitual criminal is the recognisable member of an underclass. He lives off mainstream society without actively participating in it' (Murray, 1996, p.33). Criminal activity to members of the underclass is non problematic and seems to be a part of everyday life according to this statement by Murray (1996). The underclasses appear to be excluded from mainstream society. The job opportunities available to them are limited because many lack the skills and qualifications required. Nowadays, work is at the forefront of life, without work it is difficult for individuals to gain the respect of others. 'There is more to work than just making a living' (Murray, 1996, p.19).

Youths that are part of the underclass have multiple factors of social exclusion and other social problems. These factors include: single parent families, housing issues, poor schooling and exclusion from school. This exclusion from society is why trouble occurs. Without participation in society youths have too much spare time, which some use to commit petty offences.

Travis Hirschi (1969) made a significant contribution to the understanding of social control theories. Hirschi identified four essentials of the social bond: attachment, commitment, beliefs and involvement. 'These four variables, though independent, are also highly interrelated and are given equal weight. Each helps to prevent law breaking activities in most people' (Burke, 2005, p.209). Those with weak social bonds are more prone to become deviant.

This study by Hirschi (1969) can be related to the underclass. The members of the underclass are known to have multiple factors of social exclusion, very similar to weak social bonds, therefore criminality will be more prone amongst this group.

Hirsch's findings were based on a large-scale study, with over 4,000 adolescents from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds, so it has strong empirical support. However not everyone with weak bonds to society leads a criminal life. It considers criminality amongst adolescents with weak bonds to be habitual.

There is a growing black underclass that exists in America's inner cities, known as ghettos. 'The social mobility has been accompanied by geographical mobility wherein the better-off have fled to the suburbs. In taking businesses and job opportunities with them they leave a poor black underclass stranded in the inner-city' (MacDonald, 1997, p.16). In relation to the supposed criminality of the black underclass, 'it is not the inherent pathology of a black culture of poverty but rather the combined cultural

impact of social change, particularly the social isolation that shifts in the black population have ensured' (MacDonald, 1997, p.17). The black underclass situated in the inner-cities became detached from middle-class residents that fled to the suburbs. 'Ken Auletta (1982) argued that a sizable number of North America's poor never assimilate into society, but remain trapped in an underclass characterised by a dependency on state benefits, denial of work ethic and failed morality' (Muncie, 2004, p.137). According to Muncie (2004), 'for some, the underclass refers to sections of the black community who are welfare dependent' (Muncie, 2004, p.137). The relationship between the welfare state and crime has strong empirical support. Findings generated from studies regarding the link between the availability of welfare and out-of-wedlock births is substantial. Thirteen studies surrounding this topic area were conducted.

'Of these, 11 found a statistically significant correlation. A study conducted by Dr. June O'Neill for the U.S Department of health, holding constant a wide range of variables, found that a 50 percent increase in the value of AFDC and food stamp payment led to 43 percent increase in the number of out-of-wedlock births' (Mortimer, 2005).

Additional research by Shelley Lundberg and Robert Plotnick supported research findings of Dr. June O'Neill. 'The findings from their study found an increase in welfare benefits of \$200 per month per family increased the rate of out-of-wedlock births among teenagers by 150 percent' (Mortimer, 2005). These studies show welfare contributes to a rise in single parent families, which subsequently leads to an increase in criminal activity.

Robert Merton's Anomie/Strain theory implies that individuals turn to illegitimate ways of achieving goals as a response to social limitations placed on accessing goals legitimately. These social limitations may include their class status, unemployment and area in which they live. 'Individuals are more likely to pursue monetary success using whatever means are necessary, including crime' (Agnew, 2003, p.171).

Merton's theory is divided into two parts, the first part being 'anomie' theory. 'Anomie theory seeks to explain why some societies have a higher crime rate than others. 'It focuses on the relative emphasis placed on cultural goals and the institutionalised norms for achieving these goals' (Agnew, 2003, p.178). Merton claims, societies that place great importance on achieving goals such as acquiring material goods and low emphasis on the rules for goal achievement will have a higher crime rate. These societies are characterised by a state of anomie. The goal seeking activities of such societies appear to have few rules and regulations. Consequently, individuals may attempt to achieve such goals by any means necessary, including involvement in criminal activity. Merton's anomie theory can be applied to some black communities that view achievement as the acquisition of material goods. The individuals driving flashy cars, wearing the latest designer clothing and boasting expensive jewellery are the role models people aspire to emulate. Due to social limitations placed on individuals achieving their goals legitimately, crime may be an alternative method used in order to gain material rewards.

The second part of Merton's theory is 'strain' theory, which states that lower-class individuals are under substantial 'strain' due to the hindrance on achieving 'success

through lawful means. Merton states that, conformity, retreatism, ritualism, innovation and rebellion are five ways in which individuals can adapt to strain in their lives.

1.5 Black Culture

Black culture has been influential and prominent in mainstream society for decades. The slang terminology used by young black males has almost become socially acceptable and is widely used by our White and Asian counterparts. The fashion industry has benefited largely from black culture. Examples of black fashion include 'saggy' jeans and hoodies. These are two controversial fashion items as hoodies have recently been banned in shopping centres and schools as it appears to promote deviant behaviour. 'Saggy' jeans are a style that is prominent amongst black youths. Its controversy derives from the fact prisoners wore their trousers low as belts were forbidden. This look is now considered to be 'cool' amongst certain groups in society. 'Bling', formally known as jewellery is considered a sign of wealth. Some Rap artists boast about the amount and cost of jewellery obtained. The negative connotation associated with rap music does not emit a positive message to the youth who may equate acquiring material goods such as jewellery with success.

The Hollywood film industry has sought inspiration from 'black cultures' and black lifestyles. The 2007 movie *American Gangster* which starred black actor Denzel Washington, although based on a true story, portrayed black males as gangsters and drug dealers. There is a recurrence of derogatory stereotypes in cinema concerning black culture. Films such as *Boyz, n the Hood*, *Menace II Society* and *Clockers* also portrayed black males, particularly youths in a negative light. These films, focusing heavily on violence and criminality, fuel the perception of a 'black culture' as violent. 'In 2007 the former Prime Minister claimed the spate of knife and gun murders in London was not the cause of poverty, but a distinctive black culture' (Wintour, 2007). This statement came under intense scrutiny by black community leaders who accused him of ignorance and blaming knife and gun crime solely on black youths.

'Mr. Blair's remarks are at odds with those of the Home Office minister Lady Scotland, who told the home affairs select committee last month that the disproportionate number of black youths in the criminal justice system was a function of their disproportionate poverty, and not to do with a distinctive black culture'

(Wintour, 2007).

This statement supports the view that those further down the social class spectrum commit a disproportionate amount of crime.

Subsequent to the death of Adam Regis in East London 2007, Pastor William Lamphey who works with vulnerable youths in the area stated:

'Youth culture played a big role in the violence on the streets. I think it is the general culture of the youngsters, their behaviour, the way they conduct themselves. When you see them, the way they dress, they are telling you back off, I'm a hooligan, I'm aloof, you can't talk to me'

(BBC News, 2007).

Pastor Lamphrey states that delinquent behaviour is associated with youths in general, not only black youths, but the culture does not seem to be a pleasant one to others.

Early British sub cultural theory can be used to explain more about black culture. Peter Wilmott (1966) carried out research into teenagers in East London. 'He found that adolescent offending behaviour was simply part of a general lower working class subculture. Teenagers became involved in petty crime simply for the fun and togetherness of the shared activity experience' (Burke, 2005, p.116). Wilmott's study supports the notion that youth culture is one which incorporates crime. The crimes they are said to commit are not necessarily the most violent crime, but it may be seen as a way of passing time. It was also found that adolescent behaviour was part of a lower working class culture which again supports the view that lower social groups commit a disproportionate amount of crime. This study however does not specify on black culture.

Ken Pryce (1979) conducted a study of Afro-Caribbean youngsters in St Paul's, Brixton. 'The first group of Afro-Caribbean's to arrive in the UK came with high aspirations and ambitions but found themselves consigned to a force of cheap labour. Their children were subject to racial discrimination which resulted in 'endless pressure' (Burke, 2005, p.116). Pryce identified two types of adaptations to this 'pressure': the first was to be law abiding and conformist, the other was to adopt a rebellious attitude. Second and third generation Afro-Caribbean's were more likely to adopt the second response.

There are two distinct explanations to black youth crime in the UK and the underclass theory. There is a growing black underclass in the UK; much of the deliberation surrounding this issue is a question of structure versus behavioural/cultural accounts as the determinate cause.

'There is a view that changes in economic structure (such as the reduction in the number of manual jobs on offer), institutional structures (such as poor education especially in declining urban areas) and the lack of appropriate facilities (such as nursery schools accessible to single mothers) deny a section of the population the opportunity and resources to compete for jobs' (Smith, 1992, p.7).

In structural explanations of the underclass, various forms of social exclusion, poverty, material deprivation and patterns of inequality are highlighted. Family structure plays a very important part in shaping a child's behaviour. There will be strong tendencies for single parents of young children to belong to the underclass. Children growing up with no father figure are already disadvantaged; this combined with other factors of social exclusion may lead to delinquent behaviour.

On the other hand, there is a view that the underclasses have lost the will to compete in society. Structural explanations say nothing about the reasons for the growth of an underclass. Behavioural/cultural factors such as attitudes to work or marriage and childbearing ultimately determine people's economic power which in turn may relegate some to the underclass. Behavioural accounts argue that provision of state welfare erodes individual responsibility and controls that prevent individuals from

delinquent behaviour for instance, stable families, positive role models and religious beliefs do not exist. Males stripped of roles as breadwinner and workless now had little to offer women and children. If they weren't earning and providing for the family, what use are they? 'Males in this social category were only seen to be able to offer erratic affection violence and child abuse' (Campbell, 1993). During this period many women relied heavily upon the welfare state as the men had nothing to offer. Many young males were now stripped of the informal controls of employment and family responsibilities that were previously expected of them. Poorly educated and unskilled, these young males were an unattractive proposition to females. With no female looking to get involved with these young men and no family of their own, what implications did this have on them? This was a big factor in their involvement in criminal activity

2.0 Methodology

In order to gain further knowledge regarding black youth crime in the UK, primary research, by way of unstructured interviews was conducted. A number of topics and issues were put forward to the interviewees regarding black youth crime and its representation in the media. Unstructured interviews are defined as ‘an interview in which the interviewer typically only has a list of topics or issues, often called interview guide, that are typically covered. The style of questioning is usually very informal’ (Bryman, 2001, p.545). The unstructured interviewing method was considered the most effective way of obtaining data as prompts and probes could be used in order to extract more information related to a range of topics and issues. The depth and quality of response from unstructured interviews are more substantial than any other interview technique, for example, structured interviews: ‘Structure interviews may not provide the depth and quality of response needed’ (Hagen, 2000, p.184). As the research topic is based on black youth crime the interviewee is required to express their views on the subject area, structured interviews do not allow for prompting, they require a set of questions which in turn requires closed-ended responses, ‘for example the analogy to true or false. Unstructured interviews on the other hand generally provide for open-ended responses to questions’ (Hagen, 2000, p.184).

2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages

The interviewing technique is a very attractive method of gaining information regarding a particular topic area. ‘It provides for personal contact between the researcher and the subject’ (Hagen, 2000, p.185). The face to face situation may bring about a higher response rate due to the personal nature of the interview. Confusions regarding questions can easily be eradicated; this is not possible with other research methods such as mail surveys or questionnaires. Interviewees with literacy problems can have the questions read to them; this again is not possible with certain other research methods.

Despite the advantageous features interviews possess there are obvious disadvantages to this method of research. Interviewer bias may cause distorted findings. The interviewer could interpret data differently to how the interviewee states, in order to obtain the desired outcome. He could give clues to the interviewee as to what answer he or she should be giving, again to obtain the desired outcome. More general disadvantages of interviews are that they can be very time consuming and costly.

2.2 Transcription and Audio Recording

Regarding unstructured interviews, there is an importance on audio-recording and transcribing the interviews. ‘The interviewer should be on high alert to what is being said - it is best if he or she is not distracted by having to concentrate on getting down notes on what is said’ (Hagen, 2000, p.184). The interviewees’ responses to questions are detailed therefore not all information can be noted. Also the physical cues of the interviewee and the way in which they respond to questions should be noted. This would not be possible without audio-recording, therefore audio-recording is compulsory. Recording and transcribing interviews has various advantages: ‘it allows more thorough examination of what people say in interviews’ (Bryman, 2001, p.330).

The recording can be replayed repeatedly; quotes that were initially missed can be identified when replayed. If further research is to be done regarding the same topic, the data can be reused and new and different perspectives can be interpreted. However, transcribing the data can be very time consuming. Recording equipment must be of high standard, so as to not impair the quality of the audio.

2.3 The Interviewees

Two probation officers from Leicester and two social workers from North London were interviewed using the unstructured method regarding the topic of black youth crime and the representation of black youths in the UK. The probation officers were chosen because they have significant contact with youth offenders going through the system so may provide useful data. The social workers from North London were interviewed in order to gain another perspective on the research question and because London has a far greater black youth population in comparison to Leicester. Both positions of employment involve considerable contact with delinquent youths.

2.4 Ethical Issues

During the interviews, ethical issues had to be taken into consideration. There is the requirement of informed consent that the participants should give before conducting the research. Participants must be fully debriefed about the nature and procedures of the research and must give their consent. Participant confidentiality must also be taken on board – the information given during the interviews must remain confidential and not presented to those not directly involved in the study. The interviewees will remain anonymous throughout this account for reasons of personal safety and privacy.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Media Portrayal

When asked about the portrayal of black youths in the media the majority of interviewees stated similar answers. (P1) states:

“The gun related crime in particular for London, to be fair the way the media are portraying it, it seems like its only black guys that are carrying guns, but that is simply not the case” (P1)

(P1) refers to the recent spate in gun and knife crime in the capital, arguing that it is not merely black young males carrying knives and guns but the media portrays it in such a way. This statement is further backed up by (P2) who argues:

“Yes I do, I do feel that they portray black youths in a negative way. I’m fairly sure that they have been stabbings involving white youths but that information, there pictures don’t seem to get into the newspapers or television so I think there is a portrayal of black youths and there has been for years”. (P2)

This statement provided by (P2) can be supported by Stuart Hall’s *Policing the Crisis* study (1978) where it was concluded that, ‘the media, working with images from a New York ghetto, defined the incidence of street robberies in Britain’s inner cities as an outbreak of a new dangerous kind of violent crime’ (Muncie, 2004, p.120). These images increased fear of crime and black males amongst the community. Mugging was seen as a crime committed solely by black youths even though published statistics from that era had proved otherwise. Both (P2) and Stuart Hall (1978) identified images as being instrumental in the negative portrayal of black youths. An image of a black youth in the act of mugging may emit a more powerful message than the words: “black males commit a disproportionate amount of muggings”. Individuals then associate that image with crime, thus creating a moral panic surrounding black youths.

To counter the arguments made supporting the view that the media portray black youths in a negative way, (P3) suggests:

“I do believe that the media portray black youths in a negative way to some extent but I think also on the other hand it is justified because a crime is a crime whether its black crime or white crime” (P3)

Moral panics occur for a reason, so there is some truth as to the extent of black youth crime. This is further supported in literature on moral panic theory. Realist theorists argue crime and crime statistics should be taken seriously, as the statistics show, black youths and youths in general do commit a disproportionate amount of a certain type of crime. According to the literature Left Realists claim ‘crime must be taken seriously’, therefore should not be ignored. This argument counters the statements by (P1) and (P2) who suggest the media are unnecessarily targeting black youths. (P4) on the other hand provides a very different account than previously mentioned:

“I think the media are not too hard on our black youth. The media has been good on trying to shed some light on the issue but the media is a weapon of social control” (P4).

Here it is suggested the media be harder on black youths and the media has actually highlighted the issue of black youth crime, which to an extent is evident from recent reporting of gun and knife crime. If the media had not reported the issue so intensely, it might have been overlooked by the public. The development of Operation Trident in 1998 was a direct result of gun crime in London amongst African-Caribbean males. According to Trident ‘75% percent of London's gun crime involves the victim and suspect both coming from the capital's black communities’ (Stop the guns, 2004). The creation of Trident as a direct result of gun crime in the black community shows a problem exists amongst the black community contradicting the perception of black youth crime as an unjustified moral panic. (P4) however also makes a very interesting statement suggesting “the media is a weapon of social control” (P4). The media is a very powerful weapon which can be used to harm certain groups in society. (P4's) claim coincides with certain arguments made by Labelling theorists.

‘Labelling theory proposes that we focus our attention not on the behaviour of offenders, but on the behaviour of those who label, react to and otherwise seek to control offenders. Labelling theory argues that it is these efforts of social control that ultimately trigger the processes that trap individuals in a criminal career’ (Agnew, 2004, p.295).

The fact the media frequently reports on crime committed by lower classes supports the notion that it is used as a method of social control. (P4) also states:

“They report news in a sensational way. It all derives from the political agenda, political atmosphere - what the government is saying. They locate crime in a certain area, usually poorer areas so the middle class feel safe” (P4).

As mentioned in the literature review, the media is governed by the ever familiar socio-economic class of person; whose views on society differ from other groups. The portrayal of youths therefore maybe misrepresented due to this cultural misunderstanding.

3.2 Role Models

The results from the interviews suggested that the typical role models that our youth aspire to emulate do not send a positive message to the community and may actually be harming the community. There seems to be a demand for role models that have achieved through education. There is a view that the lifestyles of sportsmen and musicians are so distant from the average individual's lifestyle that it would be irrational to aspire to follow in their footsteps. It was mentioned that these role models, musicians in particular dabble in illegal substances and this is highlighted in the media.

“We cannot dismiss the fact that a lot of, not all, musicians dabble in drugs and you can't disassociate them with drugs”. (P3)

It could be argued that famous musicians that do openly take or refer to drugs in their work are indirectly promoting the use of illegal substances. Illegal drug use is considered to be a deviant act within society.

The negative portrayal of sportsmen and musicians has maybe affected their status as positive role models to the youth. (P1) argues:

“The media portrayal is often almost of the negative side, aside from their sporting achievements they get a lot of bad press” (P1).

The media do not highlight positive aspects of a celebrity’s lifestyle. For example, the charities they support and other positive schemes they are involved with. Too often the media are concerned with an individual’s private life. (P1) provided an analogy of this situation:

“Its often not the good things you hear about like for example the charities they support, schemes for the youngsters, you’ve got the whole Ashley Cole scenario, him cheating on his wife, this is seen almost typical of black men anyway so obviously in some respects it is almost negative because they are so called role models” (P1).

This statement refers to an incident whereby a black professional Premier League footballer was caught cheating on his wife, as mentioned in the quote, this is seen as typical amongst black men, therefore reinforcing the stereotype. Although adultery is not a criminal offence it is considered to be deviant in mainstream society.

During the interviews it became evident that individuals that have achieved through educational means should be promoted as role models.

“There are other fields or professions that blacks can aspire to or have the ability to aspire to but a lot of the youths today, the culture we live in see music and sport as the only visible avenues as a way out of poverty, to me this is false in a way, there’s not enough emphasis put on education I think education is fundamental” (P3).

This claim is further supported by relevant literature. As stated in the literature review, ‘Black youngsters need a new generation of role models, drawn from the legal profession, business and education, to counter under-achievement and involvement in crime’ (Womack, 2007). Education is of great importance; the argument being; the more educated the better the role model.

3.3 Underachievement of Black Youths in School

The underachievement of young black males has become a growing problem in the UK. In the literature it was reported that ‘only 25% of Afro-Caribbean boys get five good GCSE’s compared with 51% of the population as a whole’ (BBC, 2004). Reasons as to why black pupils underachieve in school were put forward by the participants. (P1) states:

“Well you have the typical sayings, lack of role models, the thing with black kids is that, they seem to lack patience and drive and the support from home, they always seem to be trying to find the quickest way of achieving things” (P1).

This statement is supported by Robert Merton’s anomie/strain theory. Central to Merton’s anomie theory is the view that ‘individuals are more likely to pursue monetary success using whatever means are necessary, including crime’ (Agnew, 2003, p.171). Celebrity role models, for example rap artists, are constantly being portrayed displaying very expensive jewellery, clothes and driving the latest cars. As such individuals are common role models within black communities; youths aspire to acquire such material goods. With the social barriers preventing them from doing so, crime is an alternative option to education that many undertake in order to achieve their goals. It could be argued that education is too long a process therefore crime is a quick way to gain monetary success.

The argument as to the education system being institutionally racist occurred many times during the interviews. (P4) argues:

“Black youths suffer emotionally from school which I think is linked to criminal activity. The teachers target black youths, in a negative way, they leave school frustrated because they can’t get good jobs. A lot of offending around anger – violent offences is repressed feelings of pain through school”. (P4)

This statement supports the view that black pupils underachieve in school due to institutional racism. It could be argued that failure is expected of black pupils in school, when underachieving academically they might not be pushed as hard or given additional support as their white counterparts. This bold statement by (P4) coincides with Clarke’s (1982) account of this subject area. As stated in the literature review, ‘it is an important step to realise that the supplementary school exists to help children not because they failed to achieve through the system, but because the system is racist, and has failed them’ (Clarke, 1982, p.126). It would be difficult to support such claims as limited facts on this area are available. However (P4) does provide a more in-depth view on the subject area which should require further research.

“I feel the system is set out to target certain individuals in society, for example the form that requires you to state your ethnic origin, why do we have to fill this form out? I think it’s to identify the ones which they feel will not succeed, for example black youths. The better schools will not accept them leaving them to go to a school with a bad reputation. A lot of black youths have been deprived good education so therefore a lot of us do not have well paid jobs” (P4).

(P4) speaks of a form which requires completion before commencement of education. The form requires the pupil to state their ethnic origin as well as other personal information. It was noted that the personal information gained can be used against pupils. Black students find themselves in schools with poor reputations as the so called better schools have rejected them due to the colour of their skin and fear of underachieving. This claim has not been backed up by any relevant literature therefore it will be unjust to believe that this is the case.

With regards to education systems being institutionally racist, this can be somewhat discredited with the educational success of black girls in comparison with white boys and the apparent success Asian pupils achieve during education.

‘An ethnic breakdown of this year’s GCSE results in England shows that "black African" girls are scoring higher grades than "white British" boys’ (BBC, 2004). If this is the case, the notion that schools are institutionally racist could be dismissed. Black girls seem to be performing to the standards set but it is the boys who are falling behind suggesting a problem amongst the boys. In the BBC’s report it was stated that “Black African” girls outperform “white boys”. The fact that the term “Black African” was used is striking. This implies that black Caribbean girls may not be achieving at the same level as black Africans. Research into the educational success and crime rates of these two distinct groups ought to be conducted in order to gain more information regarding black youth crime in the UK.

Again, countering the view that the educational system is institutionally racist, Asian pupils continuously outperform their African-Caribbean counterparts and are level or even better than white pupils.

The issue of parenting in relation to black youths underachieving in school was highlighted in one interview.

“Often there is a ‘go to school and don’t bother me’ mentality from the parents. I run a Saturday school and very often parents will drop their kids off and say ‘here teach my kid’ and I will ask the ‘how often do you read to your child, how often does your child read to you, how often do you take your child to the library, to the museum and the answer is ‘well I don’t really have much time’” (P4).

Parents’ attitude to school will inevitably affect the way in which their children view school. If education is not stressed as being fundamental then the youth would not see it this way. Parents should play an active role in a child’s education, as mentioned above; parents should take time out to educate their children. As many black families are lower down the social class spectrum, income is low so therefore they may work longer hours to generate more income leaving less time to educate their children. “Time is precious and its limited” (P4).

3.4 Single Parent Families

There is a view that growing up in a fatherless home is a key factor in future involvement in criminal activity. The information gained from the interviews was relatively mixed but the majority of interviewees were in support of the view. The participants that supported the claims suggested:

“I do think so; obviously they do need some kind of guidance, there are certain things that only a male can install into boys in particular. I think that young boys especially are very impressionable and if they’re aspiring to be like somebody and the father figure is not there then they’re going to aspire to be like something else” (P1).

“You need that father figure, that presence there when growing up. A lot of the youth that I have worked with--. I worked with this one boy, I wouldn’t mention his name [laughs], he was sent here from Jamaica, no father and had serious problems with his

mother, I soon realised that a lot of his frustration and anger stemmed from the absence of his father. This frustration would often lead to violent crime” (P3).

“In my case load I would say that the majority are from single parent families” (P4).

(P3), a Social Worker in North London, describes a situation whereby a youth he works with has serious emotional problems due to the absence of his father. He stated:

“A lot of his frustration and anger stemmed from the absence of his father” (P3).

The youths’ frustration would get him into fights and other forms of violent crime as a result. The issue of ‘frustration’ was further noted by another interviewee.

“Again the frustration aspect comes into play. They seem to be angry that there fathers were not there to care for them as they were growing up” (P4).

However, despite the overwhelming information given in support of the view that growing up in a fatherless family is a key factor in future involvement in criminal activity, other information presented by the interviewees suggested otherwise.

“I’d say no. I think the male influence can help, Very often with lone parents there is a male figure present. Be it a grandfather, an uncle, friend of the family there is somebody there, it’s not the same as having a father in the house 24/7 but it is there. But I would say not. Where the problem lies is if the lone mother doesn’t do what she should do” (P2)

Only one out of the four interviewees was against the view. It would be fair to say that children raised in fatherless families are at a higher risk of future involvement in criminal activity. There is extensive literature and statistics that strongly support this.

‘According to one study, children raised in single-parent families are one-third more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour; O’Neill found that, holding other variables constant, black children from single-parent households are twice as likely to commit crimes as black children from a family where the father is present. Nearly 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes, as do 43 percent of prison inmates’
(Mortimer, 2005).

3.5 Social Class

During the interviews, when questioned on the issue regarding social class, most were in favour of lower social groups commit the most crime but their reasons varied:

“It seems common that those from lower socio economic groups are the ones that commit certain crime. I think crimes such as gun crime, muggings etc are committed by lower economic groups, depending on the type of crimes they committed, the reason for them doing so maybe to earn money” (P1).

“I suppose if statistics show that then they have evidence to back that up” (P2).

It depends on what type of crime you are talking about? [Laughs] A disproportionate amount of 'petty' crime is committed by those further down the social class spectrum, yes (P3).

(P1) suggests that lower economic groups commit certain types of crime for economic gain, which is why they are overrepresented in criminal statistics. Again, referring back to Robert Merton's Anomie/strain theory, 'Anomie theory seeks to explain why some societies have a higher crime rate than others' (Agnew, 2003, 178). Societies that place great importance on achieving goals such as acquiring material goods and low emphasis on the rules for goal achievement will have a higher crime rate. Lower income groups do not possess great financial wealth; therefore acquiring material goods could be problematic. In black communities, particularly the youth, appearance and reputation is imperative. However, funds are needed to obtain the latest brand clothing, expensive jewellery and flashy cars. As lower income groups do not boast great financial wealth and unemployment rates are high, crime could well be an alternative method to generate income to acquire such goods.

The belief that lower income groups commit crime for economic gain was however disregarded by (P4), who states:

"Well as a probation officer I do know that black youths do commit a disproportionate amount of violent crime" (P4).

The view that black youths commit a disproportionate amount of violent crime was further stressed when it was suggested:

"Crime committed amongst the black youth is mostly violent/frustration crime not acquisitive crime as it is so oftenly stated. A lot of people blame crime on poverty, a quick means of getting money, but a very small percentage amongst black people conduct acquisitive crime in relation to white people" (P4).

(P4) stated the majority of youths she has worked with commit violent crimes as opposed to the acquisitive crime that is often implied. Reasons to this were also put forward in this response:

"They are deprived from leisure activities, deprived of opportunities, the media makes it look as if its poverty, the media is trying to project this but very few commit crime because of this Those further down the social class spectrum are deprived, deprived of opportunity. A lot of black children don't have parental support, vulnerable from parents' ignorance; institutions identify vulnerable people, by applications etc. once the door is shut it turns to frustration" (P4).

Here it is stated that black youths are socially deprived, deprived of leisure activities and opportunities., as Hirschi (1969) stated, individuals with weak social bonds are more likely to commit crime than those who possess strong social bonds. If young black males were involved in more leisure schemes, attended school or even not excluded from school then the chances of involvement in criminal activity could well decrease. Furthermore, there is a view that youth offending is less likely to be a relatively non problematic part of a normal transition to legitimate adulthood for those who experience multiple factors of social exclusion and also, the underclass theory

which states 'The habitual criminal is the recognisable member of an underclass' (Murray, 1996, p.33). The underclass look as if they are excluded from mainstream society, denied job roles and deprived opportunities.

The issue of published statistics being unreliable was considered in the interviews where (P2), with reference to drug addictions, described how data can be easily obtained and concealed.

"Surveys, they may say how many people in a certain group take drugs. If you ask that of two communities, if you ask that of an affluent community you are less likely to get that information because the affluent community have paid to have that drug problem addressed and therefore that drug problem is confidential. Where you go to a poorer community where perhaps social security or National Health Service has addressed a drug problem, that information is therefore theirs, they can do what they want with it" (P2).

Although this statement refers to drugs it can be generalised to crime statistics. Affluent communities may have resources to withhold information from wider communities whereas poorer communities are not in the same position financially and socially therefore the data from this group is more readily available.

"White collar crime is committed by those further up the social class spectrum, you do not hear much about these crimes in the media. They like to portray crime as a problem with working class youths. But it is not just--. Middle class youths commit crime too" (P3).

Although crime statistics show lower social class groups commit a disproportionate amount of crime there seems to be an underrepresentation of middle to upper-class youths.

"I think the label that working class youths have been given, you know, how they are labelled as criminal, and this label does not help. Middle class youths commit crime too but it is just not highlighted as much in the media. Media do not want to portray a problem with middle England" (P3).

Labelling theory proposes that the criminal label placed upon youths from the lower social classes and in particular black youths generates stereotypes. Often perceived to be criminal, they may be subject to intense over policing which in turn could increase the number of black youths going through the Criminal Justice System.

Judging from the information gained in response the question regarding social class, youths will be youths at the end of the day and criminal activity may just be a normal transition from childhood to adulthood. Those lower down the social class spectrum have been noted to commit more crime maybe for financial gain or out of sheer frustration. On the other hand labelling theory also works against the notion claiming that the label placed upon certain groups in society leads to an over representation in crime statistics.

3.6 Black Culture

The issue as to whether there is such a thing as a black culture has provided much debate during this account. As a result of the interviews the information obtained regarding this topic area was diverse with only one participant suggesting there is a black culture and violence seems to be part of it. The findings which support the view that knife and gun crime is part of a distinct black culture are presented below:

“There is such a thing as a black culture; I do think it has changed dramatically. Well for example, the violence, the crime amongst our people today, I do think it is part of our culture. [Long pause]--. Actually I would say its part of black ‘youth’ culture, not black culture in general” (P3)

Given the statistics regarding black youth crime it could be perceived that violence, such as gun and knife crime is a distinctive aspect of black culture. This view is further supported by BBC programme Panorama ‘On a Knife Edge’ (2007). Gun and knife crime within the black community was highlighted as a serious problem. ‘Street crime has rocketed; teenage boys fight post code turf wars, victims are as young as 13. These lads are fighting just for fun, but trouble is all around, especially if you're black’ (Vine, 2007).

As (P3) indicates, violence is part of black youth culture. The turf wars have become somewhat commonplace, particularly in major UK cities. This became evident in the murder of Paul Erhahon, who was attacked by rival youths armed with weapons. ‘During the trial of Paul Erhahon's killers it became clear the attack on him was partly linked to something as seemingly trivial as postcodes - in this case E11 and E15’ (Akwagyiram, 2008). The notion of turf wars was also referred to in Newsnight, Broken Society: Hackney’s Kids. ‘Territory is everything, you cross the line, you pay the price. Post code wars are a source of black youth crime’ (Newsnight, 2007). These postcode wars are a major reason as to why gangs are formed.

‘Gangs are responsible for more than a fifth of youth crime in London, according to the Metropolitan Police, African-Caribbean gangs were described as the largest group, followed by south Asian and white gangs The largest number of gangs found in London are said to be in Hackney, East London (22 gangs)’

(BBC News 2007).

Hackney possesses a significant black youth population and boasts the largest population of gangs in London. These statistics provide some insight into black culture and how violence may play a distinctive part. Individuals may join gangs for protection from others, for respect, to make money or just to look ‘cool’ amongst their peers. Those who grew up in unstable families may seek stability in their lives, as this was not the case in their homes, they sought belonging in the form of gangs.

The 2007 spate of knife and gun crime amongst black youths in the capital prompted former Prime Minister Tony Blair to state: the spate of knife and gun murders in London was not being caused by poverty, but a distinctive black culture’ (Wintour, 2007). This further supports the view that violent crime is a part of black culture.

Although there are strong findings which suggest that black culture is one of violence, the majority of interviewees suggested otherwise:

“I do not think the statement is correct, that knife and gun crime is typical of black culture because that’s never been a part of our culture. Knife and gun crime is something that is happening amongst youths in general” (P1).

“I think there is a black culture but I don’t think that the knife and gun crime is exclusive to black culture, it’s clearly not, there’s white people in prison for these types of crimes” (P2).

“I do not think the knife and gun crime is part of a distinct black culture, no, but I do think there is a generational gap, a difference as to what the first generation were like and what the youth are like today” (P4).

The generation gap referred to by (P4) is supported by Ken Pryce’s ‘Endless Pressure’ study. It was concluded that first generation Afro-Caribbeans came with high aspirations but soon became consigned to a force of cheap labour. Consequently, their children became subject to such discrimination. Pryce identified two types of adaptations to this ‘pressure’: the first was to be law abiding and conformist, the other was to adopt a rebellious attitude. Second and third generation Afro-Caribbean’s were more likely to adopt the second response. The rebellious attitude referred to in this study by Pryce is evident in the number of black youths going through the Criminal Justice System and underachieving in schools today.

Conclusively, the findings generated from the interviews provided interesting views on the phenomena of black youth crime and the way it is portrayed in the media, whether the portrayal can be considered exaggerated or the moral panic is somewhat justified. All claimed the media do portray black youths in a negative light but the social aspects such as fatherless homes, underachievement in school, social class and negative role models all provided substantial literature as to the extent of black youth crime. It could be fair to say the media does portray black youths negatively however, it is fair to say, judging by statistics and extensive literature that the phenomena and the panic surrounding black youth crime is justified.

4.0 Conclusion

All things considered, the emphasis gained from qualitative research as to the extent of black youth crime, whether it is a serious cause for concern or the Media's portrayal of black youths is exaggerated in order to produce a moral panic, illustrates how black youth crime is to a degree a cause for concern.

Key factors which are considered to be integral to involvement in criminal activity amongst black youth provided much insight into the degree of the issue in question. The key factors included; the media portrayal of black youths, negative role models amongst the black community, the underachievement of black youths in school, single parent families, social class and black culture.

The media as an institution was an essential aspect of this account. The question as to whether it portrays black youths negatively was scrutinised and answered in the positive. An example used was the intense and continuous reporting of the recent spate of gun and knife crime in the capital. The media was hard hitting on this area and proposed gun and knife crime was distinctive of black youths. The media however has been criticised throughout this account for not emphasising on the reasons as to why black youths commit a disproportionate amount of crime. The additional key factors were introduced in order to obtain a more balanced argument but findings from qualitative research and existing literature reveal the actual extent of black youth crime and emphasise it is not just a creation of vast media reporting.

Negative role models were a major discussion point providing substantial information regarding the role models that are commonly idolised amongst black youths; namely sportsmen and musicians. There was an outcry for more role models that have achieved through education. This was directly connected to the underachievement of black pupils in school. The statistics and discussion around this topic area indicate a huge gap between the achievements of black pupils in comparison to their white and Asian counterparts. The underachievement of black youths has been blamed on an "institutionally racist" educational system by certain literature. The claim had been supported by research findings. Underachievement in school may lead to criminal activity due to the inability to find good work which in turn may lead to acquisitive crime in order to gain material goods. The exclusion of black pupils in school was also highlighted; social exclusion leads to criminal activity, without participation in society youths will have far too much time to spare, often used to commit petty offences.

Children from fatherless homes are considered more likely to become involved in crime. Research studies surrounding this issue indicated 'children raised in single-parent families are one-third more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour' (Mortimer, 2005). Fatherless homes in black communities are widespread; children growing up without father figures make up a large proportion of youths in the Criminal Justice System. This is an issue that should be explored and cannot be dismissed as false media portrayal.

With reference to social class as a factor in involvement in crime, it came to light that a large proportion of black communities live in so called poverty or are lower down

the social class spectrum. The lack of opportunities, leisure activities, and steady income all contribute to an involvement in criminal activity. The findings from qualitative research suggested those from lower classes commit a disproportionate amount of crime although the type of crime varied. Some suggested acquisitive crime was the main type as a means of acquiring material goods; others stated crime was committed out of frustration. On the whole it was concluded that those further down the social class spectrum commit a disproportionate amount of crime.

The question as to whether crime was a distinctive part of black culture was tackled and based on the findings from qualitative research, the majority suggested otherwise, but judging by existing literature on the previous areas, facts and figures with regards to crime it could be fair to suggest, as Former Prime Minister Tony Blair stated, crime is part of a distinctive black culture. The rise in gun and knife crime in the capital, furthermore the rises in gang culture are all common in black communities.

Although the media have been criticised in its portrayal and reporting of black youths there is overwhelming evidence to suggest the moral panic behind black youth crime is justified. This evidence lies in the topic areas discussed. Black youth crime should not be dismissed as a moral panic but should be considered a cause for concern and an area that needs tackling.

Recommendations

Whilst conducting research into black youth crime and black culture, it quickly became evident that the term black culture was too general. To be more specific, there are different cultures within black culture, for example Caribbean and African culture. Research between these two distinct groups in relation to involvement in crime may produce additional findings that can coincide or even develop further knowledge regarding black youth crime.

As was mentioned in the main body, the educational system was considered to be institutionally racist, this was criticised by the apparent success Asian pupils achieve in education. The relationship between black and Asian youths is another area for further research, the Media's portrayal of the two groups and how society treats them accordingly. As minority ethnics, we all may not be treated the same by society and the media. This will be a good representation of this.

Appendices

Transcription

Key:

Q = Question

P = Participant

I = Interviewer

Interview 1 – (P1), Probation Officer. Leicester

Q – What is your perception of Black youth crime in the UK?

(P1) – It is a very big problem, that's it [laughs]. It is a very big problem.

Q – Do you feel the media portray black youths in a negative light/ is the negative portrayal of black youths justified?

(P1) – It all depends on what type of media you are referring to, obviously the tabloids are going to portray them in a certain way, you have the Rupert Murdoch kind of news that will show a different portrayal.

If you have a story about gun crime and how gun crime has increased--.. You have the London newspapers with a whole load of black faces on there but then again you've got the impartial media for example the BBC, who I don't think make an issue of the race of the person. It depends on the type of media, the type of coverage it is about, obviously the gun related crime in particular for London, to be fair the way the media are portraying it, it seems like its only black guys that are carrying guns, but that is simply not the case.

Q – Celebrities, i.e. Sportsmen and musical artists seem to be common role models in black communities. Do these role models send negative messages to the black youth? Is there a cry out for more black role models that have achieved 'success' academically?

(P1) – It depends on the individuals, I mean you have got footballers, not only are they playing football but they are supporting various charities, I mean we are aware of that, but then say for example, the side that we see, the media portrayal is often almost of the negative side, aside from their sporting achievements they get a lot of bad press. Its often not the good things you hear about like for example the charities they support, schemes for the youngsters, you've got the whole Ashley Cole scenario, him cheating on his wife, this is seen almost typical of black men anyway so obviously in some respects it is almost negative because they are so called role models. However on the music front to be fair a lot of songs made by black people, the actual artists themselves are not giving out a positive message, then again that's common in music in general but I think its difficult for you to say that a music artist can be a negative or positive role model, unless of course the artist in particular was say for example a Christian singing about Christ, that could be construed as positive but obviously its

girls, parties, money and that's what you see and that's what the guys aspire to be like.

I – So there seems to be very few role models that have achieved 'success' academically?

(P1) – Yes

I – do you feel these role models will send a more positive message than the musicians and sportsmen we commonly see?

(P1) – Well of course they would but then it has to become a normal thing for them to see. You have so much of the sportsmen and the musicians but also you have to remember these are so called interesting things. Its very difficult to get kids in general interested in things like politics, you've got your Dianne Abbots, I don't think people would aspire to be like Dianne Abbot unless you have an interest in politics and so its difficult. obviously if we had more role models, if it was normal for you to walk into a company and see a black face as being the top of the top or if it was more commonplace then I suppose it would have more of an impact, however to some extent I do think its very important

I – So more black faces in work places would make a significant difference, so if companies were to take into account affirmative action, do you think that would help?

(P1)– Yes, but its not just affirmative action, I think there needs to be more of an interest, because obviously there is a problem with the black youth here, there needs to be some kind of initiative to get the kids away from the sport and music lifestyle and some kind of initiative to get these kids involved in achieving their full potential. Affirmative action is an option but, if companies were to employ more black people then there would be more black people in that position but it also needs to come from within as well.

Q – Why do you feel so many black youths under achieve in school? Is failure expected of them and are they pushed towards achievement via sport?

(P1) – Well you have the typical sayings, lack of role models, the thing with black kids is that, they seem to lack patience and drive and the support from home, they always seem to be trying to find the quickest way of achieving things, back in the day, the first generations of black people understood the need to work hard in order to achieve things but now, because they haven't had to work for anything, everything has almost been given to them, there's no respect for it. You have the black kids that start off doing well in primary school, but when they get to secondary school that's where it all goes wrong.

Lack of role models, depending on the back ground, if they don't have it around them [pause] -- they seem to get themselves easily distracted, the types of things that entertain black kids are not the academic issues for example its always something like sport, its always something like music and that's where there role models lie, if that's the only thing they see and that's the only thing they're going to know. You've got kids that come home and watch hours of TV, watching sport and music channels and

that's how they want to live their lives, they want to aspire to live like them. They haven't got black people in higher places; it's not the norm so they just aspire to be like the people on TV.

Q – There has been a lot made in the media regarding single parent families. Does the lack of father figures play a part in future involvement in criminal activity?

(P1) – I do think so, obviously they do need some kind of guidance, there are certain things that only a male can install into boys in particular. I think that young boys especially are very impressionable and if they're aspiring to be like somebody and the father figure is not there then they're going to aspire to be like something else that they have seen so I think that, what can you do to address the father figure issue anyway? They feel the necessity to become almost the man of the house and take on a masculine role and demand respect, they will be looking for respect elsewhere

I – When you say elsewhere do you mean out of the streets?

(P1) – Out on the street in their communities and in their environments, amongst their peers and people in a similar mould to them and that's how certain crimes can be committed out of the need for respect and to achieve this alpha male kind of attitude that they aspire to have.

Q – Statistics show that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by those further down the social class spectrum, to what extent do you think this is true?

(P1) – It seems common that those from lower socio economic groups are the ones that commit certain crime. It obviously depends on the areas that people are brought up from. The way it looks it does seem to be committed by the lower class. You have you.-- certain crimes fit certain types of people, I Think crimes such as gun crime, muggings etc are committed by lower economic groups, depending on the type of crimes they committed, the reason for them doing so maybe to earn money,

I – So is it an economic issue?

Yes, to be fair, it depends on the types of crime committed, for example, people from a more well off class wouldn't commit certain crimes, for example, it is unlikely that we would hear of gun crime being rife in these classes.

Certain people can't afford to educate their youngsters, they get trapped into certain gangs, certain cultures and there's no way of them getting out of it, and to be honest its what they see around them and they kind of get stuck, its like a vicious cycle. It does seem to be disproportionate.

I – Why do you feel this is the case?

(P1) – Well, to me its education, it starts with the parents and education. If they can't afford to educate their children then they are going to face difficulties. For instance, you have the certain estates where kids are not necessarily going to school, they're finding other things to do, and if there parents aren't too bothered about what they are getting up to then they are going to get themselves into crime. Like I said, it starts with the parents, it starts with education, if they are not getting the support from either

of the two key “institutions” then obviously they’re going to face difficulties, of course they are going to encounter problems

Q – In 2007 former Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that the spate of knife and gun crime in the capital is part of a distinctive black culture – is there such a thing as a ‘black culture’, if so what does it entail?

(P1) – I don not think the statement is correct, that knife and gun crime is typical of black culture because that’s never been a part of our culture. Knife and gun crime is something that is happening amongst youths in general and in particular in London. Obviously London is so metropolitan and multicultural anyway as it exists but then you do have an obvious issue of black knife and gun crime but I would not say it has anything to do with black culture at all, its just an issue that has happened to occur amongst black people, I do not think it has anything to do with the culture. However you can’t help but notice the fact that amongst black youths in general there is a certain need to see what other people are doing, and almost there is a need to have a certain level of respect. I do not think knife and gun crime is a part of black culture but obviously the respect issue is, in particular amongst black youths actually, I would not say it’s a problem with the culture.

[Tape recorder turned off]

Interview 2 (P2) Social Worker, North London

Q – What is your perception of Black youth crime in the UK?

(P2) – I don’t think it has reached crisis point but I think if the community don’t address the underlining issue then it is in danger of becoming so.

Q – Do you feel the media portray black youths in a negative light/ is the negative portrayal of black youths justified?

(P2) – Yes I do, I do feel that they portray black youths in a negative way. I’m fairly sure that they have been stabbings involving white youths but that information, there pictures don’t seem to get into the newspapers or television so I think there is a portrayal of black youths and there has been for years, a poor portrayal of black youths.

I – So it is not just a recent thing you think it’s been around for quite a while?

(P2) – Yes and I think that the current gang culture hasn’t helped, I don’t think the black gangs, although there are white gangs as well, I don’t think the black gangs have helped in addressing that poor portrayal. The problem as I see it is there appears to be very little self respect amongst the people in gangs and they have to aspire some how to get that self respect and this is one of the ways that they do it.

Q – Celebrities, i.e. Sportsmen and musical artists seem to be common role models in black communities. Do these role models send negative messages to the black youth?

Is there a cry out for more black role models that have achieved 'success' academically?

(P2) – No I don't think that the black role models are particularly good role models for black youths. In the role models that you just suggested, the musicians and sportsmen, I think P Diddy is so distant to a black man in Peckham in an estate. They might aspire to wear P Diddy clothes but that's about it. I think our role models have to be closer to home; I think they have to have targets that are achievable and more realistic to black youths in the UK. In estates they have to have some sort of commonality with those kids. At the moment I have nieces and nephews who want to be like Beyonce. They share nothing with Beyonce other than the aspiration to be a singer, that's it. What I see a lot of our black role models doing is, many of them move away from black culture, so they move into the white scene so they have white partners, their lives become very much non black, so what they're effectively saying to any black youth who's looking at them is, 'actually the black scene isn't for me, as I've progressed I'm going to move into the white scene'. That just sends a negative message across so I don't think that there are many black role models out there that I would be happy for the black youths to aspire to.

I - Would it be necessary to broadcast or promote more positive black role models

(P2)– I think there aren't many positive black role models but there are some like Kwame who goes into schools and youth clubs, who is very accessible to black people and hasn't distanced himself from his community. I think that the mentoring scheme is a good scheme, I know there are different types but generally I think it's a good scheme. I think that where you have placements, like from school at 16 you're allowed to go and work in an area and when I worked in a hospital there was a black undergraduate who came and worked with me and although it was a scientist she was shadowing, she was also shadowing a black scientist and I could perhaps relay some of my experiences as a black scientist in a scientific environment saying 'this is what I found, and this is how I got over it. So I think sort of placements in the work environment could be a good one, I think black people who have "achieved" going into school, going into colleges.

Q – Why do you feel so many black youths underachieve in school? Is failure expected of them and are they pushed towards achievement via sport?

(P2) – I think very often there is a low expectation of them, and I think that low expectation comes, sometimes from the school often from home, often there is a 'go to school and don't bother me' mentality from the parents. I run a Saturday school and very often parents will drop their kids off and say 'here teach my kid' and I will ask them 'how often do you read to your child, how often does your child read to you, how often do you take your child to the library, to the museum and the answer is 'well I don't really have much time'. It's very true in our community where we are lower income, we're out there trying to find money, perhaps working longer hours and time is precious, it's limited but we have to find the time, but with so many people underachieving, we must recognise that and try and find the time. So I think very often it's low expectations from school. Not enough adequate time is being addressed to their education at home; I think that they have to have something more than school and television. I think religion can help, it encourages you to move forward, for

example in churches you have like a family atmosphere and it gives you support and that is sometimes what I think a gang culture can give you, support, and if you don't have it at home, you don't have it at school, you don't have it at church then you're going to find it somewhere else. So I kind of think that its amalgamation. Our history doesn't help because we are always being told we are slaves we are slaves we are slaves, and when we go to our history classes at school and hear about how we won first world war, great you know, but you don't hear about the input of the black armies, the black air force all you hear about is the white influences so the white boy will come out of the history class feeling empowered knowing his history. The black boy doesn't he comes out thinking 'oh the white man did that, the white boy did this' so I think we need to know a little bit more about our history, I think the curriculum can address some of these issues but tend not to. The answer is multifactorial, it's at home, it's at school, it's in the street, and there are loads of reasons why kids are underachieving.

Q – There has been a lot made in the media regarding single parent families. Does the lack of father figures play a part in future involvement in criminal activity?

(P2) – I'd say no. I think the male influence can help, I've seen it often in my school. When a boy gets to 13, 14 and they are becoming a young man and they don't have that role model to direct them as to how a young man should develop, I think it is difficult. Very often with lone parents there is a male figure present. Be it a grandfather, an uncle, friend of the family there is somebody there, it's not the same as having a father in the house 24/7 but it is there. But I would say not. Where the problem lies is if the lone mother doesn't do what she should do.

Q – Statistics show that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by those further down the social class spectrum, to what extent do you think this is true?

(P2) – I suppose if statistics show that then they have evidence to back that up. The only thing I'd say is that in the surveys, they may say how many people in a certain group take drugs. If you ask that of two communities, if you ask that of an affluent community you are less likely to get that information because the affluent community have paid to have that drug problem addressed and therefore that drug problem is confidential. Where u go to a poorer community where perhaps social security or National Health Service has addressed a drug problem, that information is therefore theirs, they can do what they want with it, they can release that information to the press or law enforcement agencies and it's out in the public domain. Where you have these discrepancies so you have confidential information in the affluent more white areas not being released, information in poorer areas being released and when somebody is investigating that issue they're not going to get information there they're going to get information form the poorer areas so I'm not surprised that statistics show that poorer people have the problem because they're not going to have access to the rich persons information so I'm kind of dubious, when I hear those arguments I'm a little bit suspicious of where they came from.

[Tape recorder stopped]

[End of tape, side A]

[Beginning of tape, side B]

Q – In 2007 former Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that the spate of knife and gun crime in the capital is part of a distinctive black culture – is there such a thing as a ‘black culture’, if so what does it entail?

(P2) – I think there is a black culture but I don’t think that the knife and gun crime is exclusive to black culture, it’s clearly not there’s white people in prison for these types of crimes. But I think that there is a black culture. There’s a black way of speaking which is adopted by the whites in the end, of dancing, the handshake which is universal now. So I think there is a kind of black culture but I don’t think it exclusively includes the gun and knife crime.

[Tape recorder turned off]

Interview 3 (P3) Social worker, North London

Q – What is your perception of Black youth crime in the UK?

(P3) – Black youth crime is high when you think of the proportionate representation of black people in the UK. Looking at it from a black perspective it is very, very high. But when you look at the wider picture in terms of crime in general I would say it probably isn’t as high if you’re a black person you tend to notice it a lot more.

Q – Do you feel the media portray black youths in a negative light/ is the negative portrayal of black youths justified?

(P3) – I do believe that the media portray black youths in a negative way to some extent but I think also on the other hand it is justified because a crime is a crime whether it’s black crime or white crime but I think also that looking at it from a black perspective you feel that the media look for the whole sensationalism of what will help sell the papers, as a black person it’s more damning than for a white person. I certainly feel the media has a lot to do with the amplification of crime in black communities.

Q – Celebrities, i.e. Sportsmen and musical artists seem to be common role models in black communities. Do these role models send negative messages to the black youth? Is there a cry out for more black role models that have achieved ‘success’ academically?

(P3) – Yes I do feel they do to a great extent. We cannot dismiss the fact that a lot of, not all, musicians dabble in drugs and you can’t disassociate them with drugs. In terms of role models, yes it’s good to see that there are people out there that are doing good. Some of the musicians and the sport athletes they come back to their communities and make a contribution to some extent. They encourage the youth to look for alternative ways of expending their energy, but whether they make ideal role models I don’t think so because not everyone can be a successful footballer, not everyone can be a successful musician. There are other fields or professions that blacks can aspire to or have the ability to aspire to but a lot of the youths today, the culture we live in see music and sport as the only visible avenues as a way out of poverty, to me this is false in a way, there’s not enough emphasis put on education I

think education is fundamental. It is quite refreshing to look at somebody like Garth Crooks (Former Footballer) and think that he is a role model because he is educated, he was a footballer first of all then he went and got himself a doctor's degree. He took the academia part of it, although it came later in life but obviously some people are not as good as a Garth Crooks to be a successful footballer but there are other channels, whether its education, whether its academia , whether its being in the media, social work, police force, doctor, lawyer, these are things that we should be promoting more amongst the youth because to me there stand a better chance of being successful in these fields, it's much wider than just narrowing it to just sports and music because only the elite of the elite are successful in those fields.

I– Can you give me examples of ideal role models for black youths

(P3)– I would say Martin Luther King was and still is an ideal role model, Maya Angelou, even Barack Obama could be a good role model for black youths because Obama is doing today what we still think of as unthinkable, so I think he is fighting, we all know the way the system is set up, he may not succeed but at least it showed that he takes it one step further to where people like Jesse Jackson took it before and it gives us hope. So to be Barack Obama is a very good role model because considering where he came from and where he is today, if he can do it then anyone can do it. Also people like Oprah Winfrey could be a good role model, where she came from as a very poor person and the way she worked her way up through the system and where she is today, one of the wealthiest women in media, I think these are all good role models. So far as people in the UK are concerned, I do have a few people who I consider to be good role models, for example my good friend Valerie Amos, she is a very good role model considering where we came from and where she got to, leader of the House of Lords and that is an achievement, and even her parents who have recently died, they were her role models, they were both head teachers. So there are people around we can use as role models, most definitely, and it doesn't have to always be sportsmen or musicians because to me there is a negative side to the music because you can't dismiss a lot of them with their drug related past or present and even the language used today, very influential, very powerful messages are being sent out to youths and I feel a lot of it is negative.

Q – Why do you feel so many black youths under achieve in school? Is failure expected of them and are they pushed towards achievement via sport?

(P3) – I know that you can easily say the system is against them and to some extent it is true. But I do not see the system being against them is the cause of their failure. My strong belief is that you can succeed wherever you are who ever you are, wherever you have come from and whatever system you are working within, you can achieve. You just need to be focused and get yourself in the right crowd and good link that can help you to achieve and aspire to certain things. Encouragement from friends, if you have negative friends then you will end up underachieving. But I think education itself, you can achieve whoever you are, your home circumstances may be conducive to you underachieving but I think there is always a way out. If you look for it you will find it.

I– Do you think failure is expected of black youths in school and are they pushed towards achieving their goals via sport for example?

(P3)– Not so much today, probably in the 70’s and 80’s because I do know that a lot of the schools have a perception of black people as being unable to administer education in the same way as the white people can and this is why, from my experience, a lot of my friends and I were told they could not achieve certain goals in schools and they went on to achieve what is beyond belief. I do believe that the system might be against them and push them towards achieving their goals via sport because “that is what we are good at”.

Q– There has been a lot made in the media regarding single parent families. Does the lack of father figures play a part in future involvement in criminal activity?

(P3) – Yes, most definitely. I think--. Well I think the lack of father figure does enhance the likelihood of future involvement in criminal activity, yes. You need that-- . You need that father figure, that presence there when growing up. A lot of the youth that I have worked with--. I worked with this one boy, I wouldn’t mention his name [laughs], he was sent here from Jamaica, no father and had serious problems with his mother, I soon realised that a lot of his frustration and anger stemmed from the absence of his father when growing up. His frustration would often lead to violent crimes. He was so upset so angry, often when he would get so angry all he wanted to do was cry, but he couldn’t so he would become violent, so, so when I was around and I’d see him getting worked up, I would take him into the woods, because we had woods near the complex, away from everybody and he just used to cry, cry for a good five to ten minutes, after he was alright. So yes I do think lack of father figure leads to criminal activity in the youth. It seems to be so common amongst the black community, the men do not want to stay around and take care of their own. It is causing major problems but how do we fix this? [Laughs]

Q – Statistics show that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by those further down the social class spectrum, to what extent do you think this is true?

(P3) – It depends on what type of crime you are talking about? [Laughs] A disproportionate amount of ‘petty’ crime is committed by those further down the social class spectrum, yes, but all white collar crime is committed by those further up the social class spectrum, you do not hear much about these crimes in the media, they like to portray crime as a problem with working class youths. But it is not just--. Middle class youths commit crime too, I think the label that working class youths have been given, you know, how they are labelled as criminal, and this label does not help. Middle class youths commit crime too but it is just not highlighted as much in the media. Media do not want to portray a problem with middle England. Youths will always be youths at the end of the day, youths are always going to commit crime, they have time on their hands and the need to expel their energy some way or another, they might do this through crime.

Q – In 2007 former Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that the spate of knife and gun crime in the capital is part of a distinctive black culture – is there such a thing as a ‘black culture’, if so what does it entail?

(P3)– There is such a thing as a black culture. The cultures have changed significantly. I mean from first generation Afro-Caribbean’s, we aspired to be

something, we worked hard, and we came to UK for a better life, better opportunities you know. We were law abiding--. Law abiding citizens. The culture today--. I do think it has changed dramatically. Well for example, the violence, the crime amongst our people today, I do think it is part of our culture. [Long pause]--. Actually I would say its part of black 'youth' culture, not black culture in general. Black youths today, and this is evident in a lot of them, have a certain style of dress, for example the low jeans, I mean just pull your trousers up, its embarrassing. When your trousers are half way down your legs, how you going to run for the bus, you look stupid, just drawing attention to yourself, we are black, we are already in the spotlight just for being black. The whole thing about respect and trying to be cool, this is all evident amongst our youths today, it is very evident. I do think it is part of black youth culture.

[Tape recorder turned off]

Interview 4 (P4) Probation Officer, Leicester

Q – What is your perception of Black youth crime in the UK?

(P4) – I think it is a very serious problem. The reasons behind it are serious. It's a growing problem which has never been tackled as a route cause.

Black youths born in this country increase the number of ethnic minorities in custody and the number is increasing. Also black people that have just come to this country are adding to the number. 35-38% of my case loads are black, this shows an overrepresentation of blacks in the criminal justice system, black African only represent 1.1% of the population. 25% of the prison population is black. I think the reason is deprivation from opportunities.

Although my perception of Black youth crime is high I feel as if the criminal justice system operates as a government trap. Black youths are four times more likely to be stopped and searched in comparison to their white counterparts, so discrimination hasn't helped. The government do not define crime well. Once they get caught up in the criminal justice system, there future is limited; they trap vulnerable groups of people. Who wants to recruit people with a criminal record?

A significant amount of black males go through the criminal justice system. Black crime is much more likely to be reported and a black child is less likely to give evidence.

The individuals that make up the criminal justice system are made of white upper class males. These individuals don't necessarily know what is going on at street level. Sentencing guidelines are also equipped to send black males to prison. Weighing the causes of sending a guy to prison, a lot of black people have not acquired good education; a lot of them have unskilled jobs so it's easy to wave in court. They are more likely to get custodial sentences; they don't meet the criteria for community sentencing.

Q – Do you feel the media portray black youths in a negative light/ is the negative portrayal of black youths justified?

(P4) – I think the media are not too hard on our black youth. The media has been good on trying to shed some light on the issue but the media is a weapon of social control. They report news in a sensational way. It all derives form the political

agenda, political atmosphere - what the government is saying. They locate crime in a certain area, usually poorer areas so the middle class feel safe. It sounds as if they are exposing the problem but they are actually covering the real problem. The media only covers a small reason to why black youths commit crime. So the media in a way are hitting hard on the issue but also hiding the true story, only saying a small bit about the truth. There is an imbalance in the sensational way they report the problem with crime amongst black people. If they report the crime at the same height as the reason 'why' the crime was committed they'll have more credit. The reason why is never in bold print.

Q – Celebrities, i.e. Sportsmen and musical artists seem to be common role models in black communities. Do these role models send negative messages to the black youth? Is there a cry out for more black role models that have achieved 'success' academically?

(P4) – Our role models I think are not sending out a very positive message. We need more role models that have achieved academically as to the ever familiar sportsmen and musicians that we so commonly aspire to be like but in reality it is never going to happen.

Q – Why do you feel so many black youths under achieve in school? Is failure expected of them and are they pushed towards achievement via sport?

(P4) – Black youths suffer emotionally from school which I think is linked to criminal activity. The teachers target black youths, in a negative way, they leave school frustrated because they can't get good jobs. A lot of offending around anger – violent offences is repressed feelings of pain through school. I feel the system is set out to target certain individuals in society, for example the form that requires you to state your ethnic origin, why do we have to fill this form out? I think it's to identify the ones which they feel will not succeed, for example black youths. The better schools will not accept them leaving them to go to a school with a bad reputation. A lot of black youths have been deprived good education so therefore a lot of us do not have well paid jobs. The information gained through recruiting can be used against us.

Q – There has been a lot made in the media regarding single parent families. Does the lack of father figures play a part in future involvement in criminal activity?

(P4) – In my case load I would say that the majority are from single parent families. Again the frustration aspect comes into play. They seem to be angry that their fathers were not there to care for them as they were growing up. They lack respect for themselves and others. They need that father figure there to install discipline. But the absence of father figure is not only aspect regarding parents that leads to future involvement in criminal activity. A lot of the youth have witnessed their parents suffer at the hands of society and police. There is a generational emotional torture; they won't easily compromise with authority. They have seen parents brutally beaten by police so they carry anger inside them because of parents suffering. The pain made them combat authorities and commit crime. When seeing police they become angry and carry a grudge, this grudge will get them into trouble. I see it as a cry out for help, "you hurt us".

Q – Statistics show that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by those further down the social class spectrum, to what extent do you think this is true?

(P4) – Well as a probation officer I do know that black youths do commit a disproportionate amount of violent crime, it all depends on the type of crime in question. The mentality and parenting style of Africans that bring their children over to the UK is different. The parents do not know the system. In my terms [laughs] Afro-centric and Euro-centric culture in which children are growing up in. Inside the home they are Afro-centric, it's not about poor parenting it's about different parenting. Outside the home they are Euro-centric. There is a contrast of cultures; they may be confused which may cause frustration.

From working with Somalian youths I know in the Somalian culture it is encouraged to settle a dispute in a fight, conflict resolution. Here in the UK it is just seen as conflict. Crimes committed amongst the black youth are mostly violent/frustration crime not acquisitive crime as it is so oftenly stated. A lot of people blame crime on poverty, a quick means of getting money, but a very small percentage amongst black people conduct acquisitive crime in relation to white people. If you look at statistics drug related crime is not common amongst black youths, so the crimes they commit are not linked to poverty. If it was how do you pay for the drugs?

Those further down the social class spectrum are deprived, deprived of opportunity. A lot of black children don't have parental support, vulnerable from parents' ignorance; institutions identify vulnerable people, by applications etc. Once the door is shut it turns to frustration, they turn to crime and drugs. There are no community projects for black young people. They are deprived from leisure activities, deprived of opportunities, the media makes it look as if its poverty, the media is trying to project this but very few commit crime because of this. It is mostly violent crime. Another thing is the language barrier, from a lot of the youths I have worked with the language barrier has lead to frustration, they can't express themselves properly which in turn lead to violence.

Q – In 2007 former Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that the spate of knife and gun crime in the capital is part of a distinctive black culture – is there such a thing as a 'black culture', if so what does it entail?

(P4)– I do not think the knife and gun crime is part of a distinct black culture, no, but I do think there is a generational gap, a difference as to what the first generation were like and what the youth are like today. I feel the youth today have ignored the struggle. They have it easy to what it was like for the first generation. There is the whole notion of being 'cool' and having the respect of your peers. The fashion aspect of the culture, you have to look the best. I think a lot of black parents want to hold onto the old culture but the white community fail to understand, this in its own causes frustration.

[Tape recorder turned off]

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