

# Young Black Men and The Connexions Service

Cathy Aymer  
Toyin Okitikpi  
Centre for Black Professional Practice  
Brunel University

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Toyin Okitikpi  
Centre for Black Professional Practice  
Brunel University*

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## Introduction

- 1.1 The welfare of young black men is an issue of increasing concern to professionals in the fields of education and of social welfare. Over the past few years there has been concern about their effective transition to a productive and fulfilling adult life. Many researchers have outlined the problem of their attainment, the growing number of school exclusions and their perceived reluctance to access services. A variety of agencies have made efforts to improve the engagement of young black men in accessing services either from the statutory or the voluntary sectors. The Centre for Black Professional Practice at Brunel University has, for some time, been engaged in efforts to study professional responses to these concerns. This project built on these existing contacts and knowledge base. Therefore it did not prove to be difficult to find professionals in social work and education who were interested in assisting with the project.
- 1.2 The impetus for this research project has arisen because there is a need to engage with and actively involve young black males as prospective clients of the Connexions Service. There have been a growing number of publications that have addressed the problems of the exclusion and under-performance and underachievement of young black men. There is, in particular, widespread concern about the over-representation of black pupils amongst children who are disengaged, disaffected and ultimately expelled from Secondary schools, particularly in inner city areas.
- 1.3 The rationale for this research project is to explore the relative importance of a number of factors from the point of view of the young men themselves, to discover what makes a difference and what will enable their aspirations and hopes to be realised. We have much knowledge about the disruptive effects of social and economic disadvantage and racial discrimination on young men's development. We know far less about the protective factors that education and the relationships with significant authority figures and professionals can provide that will affect the resilience of young black men at risk of becoming disengaged.
- 1.4 Aims of the research
  - 1.4.1 To explore with young black men their expectations and aspirations and how they can be assisted in realising them;
  - 1.4.2 To identify the causes of disengagement amongst young black males;
  - 1.4.2 To highlight the factors that contribute towards a successful engagement with the world of school, training, work and society, in order to explore the differences and similarities between disaffected young black men and their successful counterparts;

- 1.4.3 To develop shared knowledge and a shared language for working with disaffected and disengaged young males;
- 1.4.5 To give voice to the young men and thus engage them in finding solutions;
- 1.4.6 To explore the views of significant adult authority figures and providers of services for young people.

## 1.5 Outcomes and Policy relevance

- 1.5.1 The outcomes from this research will be crucial to policy and practice and will identify the means by which the Connexions Service can successfully address the education, welfare, training and employment needs of young black men. Furthermore, it will attempt to identify the organisations and individuals that are best placed to re-engage these young men, and recommend strategies for working with them. The results will aim to unearth innovative ways of providing services that are better able to meet the needs and aspirations of young black men by providing the Connexions Service with a set of guidelines for the provision of a comprehensive service for this client group.
- 1.5.2 The study also seeks to identify the likely barriers to young black men's involvement with the Connexions Service provision; it seeks to highlight the views, experiences and expectations of not just the young black men but also professionals who are wanting to reach out to this group. It attempts to identify how the Connexions Service can ensure that young black men are not excluded from this new and far-reaching service.
- 1.5.3 At the heart of this study is an attempt to discover the factors that make for successful engagement of young black men as they make the transition to adulthood. We aim to explore with young men their aspirations for adulthood and to identify how these aspirations are shaped, the obstacles that can block their fulfilment and the transformational moments that can allow some young men to experience success against all odds. Why are young black men seduced by certain representations of manhood and masculinity and eschew other more positive representations? What is it that social welfare agencies can provide that will make modes of positive transition more available for young black men?

## 1.6 *The contents of the Final Report*

This Report develops the information given in the interim reports with a more expanded description of the research methodology and a further analysis of the responses from the young men and of the authority figures and professionals. The implications of the findings for the development of a model of good practice are further considered.

## The Context and the Problem

- 2.1 This project has investigated certain aspects of a perceived social problem arising from concerns about the outcomes for young black men of African and African Caribbean descent as they move from school to college to training to the world of work.
- 2.2 At the worst, these young men may be at risk:
- of disengagement from the world of education, training and work;
  - of physical injury, or lack of ability to respond to dangers inherent within some sub-cultures;
  - of crime both low level and serious;
  - of death as they become involved in drugs, gangs and other harmful behaviours.
- 2.3 They are also at risk in less obvious ways, because black children and young people who grow up in socio-economic situations where there is a history of disadvantage and discrimination can seriously damage their present opportunities and leave them with a limited view of what the future can bring.
- 2.4 There is a social cost to all these factors as they can often lead to these young men becoming institutionalised either within mental health facilities or the criminal justice system. They also become lost to the employment market.
- 2.5 At best some of these young men will overcome tremendous odds, be able to set goals for themselves and, spurred on by their own determination and support from family, community and significant professionals, make a success of their lives. Others might have been more successful but they were not given access to a possible world where people's aspirations have been realised in order to learn from them. In short, they did not know what it was possible to become.
- 2.6 However, they do so against this backdrop of statistics that are weighted against successful outcomes. The Social Exclusion Unit report states that:
- African-Caribbean young men are over-represented at every stage of the criminal justice process, from stop and search to imprisonment and there is a strong perception among minority ethnic young people that the police assume they are potential criminals;
  - Nearly half of those using Centrepoin't's temporary housing services are black;

- Between 1994/5 and 1997/8, black Caribbean and black African pupils are more likely to be excluded from school – over four to six times more likely than white students. There has been a significant fall in Caribbean exclusions since the SEU report but the rate is still higher than other groups;
- Some qualitative research suggests there is a high level of tension between white teachers (*and black teachers*) and black pupils. Different expectations have been demonstrated;
- Training – one study in South London showed that 75% of those waiting for a training place were black, though they made up only 40% of the local 16-17 year old local population. In 1997, 3.4% of Modern Apprentices were black, compared with a population benchmark of 8%;
- Higher rates of unemployment;
- People from minority ethnic communities are more likely to participate in higher and further education than white people. In 1998, 79% of people from minority ethnic communities were in education or training compared to 67% of their white counterparts. Indian and African young people are more likely to stay in education. African-Caribbean are likely to stay on;
- Overall, African, Indian, African Asian and Chinese people are the best qualified groups, white people and African-Caribbean in the middle, Pakistani and Bangladeshi the least qualified;
- However, the rates of unemployment amongst those with higher-level qualifications are significantly higher for African-Caribbean people than they are for Asian people, which are in turn higher than for white people. An African-Caribbean graduate is more than twice as likely to be unemployed as a white person with A levels. African men with degrees are seven times more likely to be unemployed than white male graduates.

2.7 It is within this context that the project was formulated to investigate how the Connexions Service can best engage young black men and prevent them from drifting into disaffection and social exclusion. On the one hand, there are the structural issues of social and economic disadvantage and of institutional racism. On the other hand, these young men can exercise personal agency and make choices about what type of adults they wish to become. They cannot, however, successfully become agents of their own destiny if we do not ensure that the employment opportunities are there for them to move into. There is the potential for the interests of the professionals and the interests of the young men to conflict. It must be remembered that there are serious implications for the lack of interest and political will to address the needs of this group.

2.8 This leads to a searching question. How can black young men feel that there is any point in engaging with the Connexions service given the overwhelming weight of the above statistics? Clearly, the Connexions Service will need to be able to work effectively with young people from ethnic minorities in general and young black men in particular. There are likely to be different ways in which this can be achieved and this research project addresses this question with a view to making specific recommendations that can be utilised by Connexions partnerships, by local managers and by Personal Advisers. It



seems clear that the Connexions Service has to identify its role in engaging young black men, must address the issues and be given the tools to address problems as they are seen on the ground.

## 3

### A review of the literature

- 3.1 The general public cannot fail to notice that there is growing concern about problems associated with black young men. These problems tend to concentrate on education but they also relate to issues of violence, criminal activity, drugs, unemployment and in general a drift towards social exclusion.
- 3.1.1 It has been difficult to find a vast literature on this subject but a key refrain in some of the literature is “are black boys too ‘sexy’ for school?” This type of question comes out of explorations that have been conducted into the subject of young black men and school exclusions. There is a tendency to believe that the behaviour of these young men is simply a problem that needs to be challenged. Some people have cited the absence of adult role models both in the classroom and at home as the major contributing factor to the behaviour problems and general disaffection of young black men.
- 3.1.2 More generally, the accumulated concern about 'young men at risk' has fundamentally shifted attention away from young women's [achievement] to young men's [achievement] in the decades spanning the 70's, 80's and 90's (Myers, 2000). A DfEE report (2000) which draws on evidence from research and statistics to examine the position of different ethnic groups in education, training and the labour market, demonstrates a pattern of under-performance of black boys, which starts from an early age and continues through further education and higher education and into the labour market (see also SEU statistics).
- 3.2 Backdrop of inequality
- 3.2.1 What is also clear from research is that staying in full time education after compulsory education is more common among minority ethnic groups than among white young people. Ethnic minorities as a whole are over represented in higher education (accounting for 13% of the undergraduate population). Nevertheless, black men (and women), despite being well-qualified, experience very high levels of unemployment. Much is made of the fact that young black women are much more successful than men, and while this is true, it masks the fact that both groups still suffer disadvantage. This high consumption of Higher Education and indeed Further Education must be borne in mind when thinking about some of the research that has been conducted with young black men. Much of this research has been more geared towards the issue of underachievement.
- 3.2.3 Research by Sewell (2000) into the over-representation of black boys amongst children expelled from schools within one local education authority, sought to highlight some of the contradictions for these young men. This was greeted with a great deal of controversy for although the research reaffirmed the impact of racism, it also suggested that 'fashionable black youth culture' has become another pressure for young black men. Are black boys becoming too 'sexy for education? (Sewell, 1997).

- 3.2.4 In trawling through research from both sides of the Atlantic, it is clear that this theme occurs throughout the literature. Many commentators speak of the lure of street life:  
 the image of the hustler as attractive;  
 the culture of macho;  
 education as a threat to identity – it will make you more ‘white’;  
 not enough examples of successful black men (other than sports and entertainment);  
 many young black men come from ‘high risk’ environments where economic vulnerability can lead them to be seduced into harmful or non-productive behaviours;  
 the ‘cool pose’ – aggressive assertion of masculinity.
- 3.2.5 Phoenix (2000), conducted research, which looked at the accounts that both black and white boys gave about their ideas of masculinity and explored the contradictions that arise when the perspectives of the young people are neglected. The research demonstrated the need to think of the young people as ‘reflexive subjects who contribute to the construction of their own positioning’ (p 96).

From the boys own accounts they expressed the view that academic work is antithetical to popular taken-for-granted notions of masculinity. It was a widely held belief that you do not become popular by being good at school. The researcher’s conclusion was that:

“Education policies designed to have an impact on boys’ educational attainment thus have not only to address boys’ construction of themselves in relation to popular/hegemonic masculinity but also how these are racialised so that many boys from all ethnic groups desire the signifiers of “cool pose”,

which include opposition to industriousness in the classroom” (p101).

There was also a perception of teacher unfairness, which echoed research undertaken by Sewell (1997) who found that many of the black boys he studied resented being ‘othered’ by the teachers, being perceived as threatening and being picked on for no other reason they could see than because they were black. For some, the knowledge that teachers were scared of them became a source of power for them and an incentive to behave in ways that signified threat.

- 3.2.6 Masculinity was therefore characterised by toughness and resistance to teachers and to education. This view of masculinity was particularly ascribed to boys of African Caribbean descent who seem to have an investment in the type of masculinity that gave them an excuse for not doing schoolwork. The converse of this was that boys who wanted to identify with their school’s academic values were subject to social disapproval from their male peers. Few managed to be both popular and overtly academically successful.
- 3.2.7 It is against this overarching prevailing view that the project set out to identify the successes that some of these young men were clearly achieving and how these young men managed to achieve.
- 3.2.8 There are currently a number of research projects that address the problems of the exclusion and under-performance and under-achievement of young

black men (Parry, 1996; Haywood & Mac An Ghail, 1996). Others from studies in the USA focus on young African American men as well as a host of other ethnic groups (Laseter, 1997, Kao & Tiende, 1998). There has been a study of emergent masculinities among boys in a London school (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2000), which uses psychoanalytical constructs to explore how gendered and racialized identity positions are adopted. They identified how personal accounts of masculinity are constructed and how often contradictory and conflictual representations can be understood. Gus John (2001), has pointed out that the Social Exclusion Unit has acknowledged research evidence that black students (and Caribbean boys in particular), outperform everyone else up to age 7, with some sustaining that advantage until age 11. By age 14 however, this group is amongst the worst under-performers. There are no specific 'ethnic minority' factors, which could account for this. He argues that working class black girls perform better on the whole than working class white boys *and* girls, whilst middle class black girls perform better in most subjects than middle class white boys. He asks some key questions for policy makers.

-How (if at all) does our education system help children learn from the past in order to manage the increasingly complex multi-ethnic society they inherit?

-How are today's young black Britons helped in their understanding of their past and the struggles of those who went before them?

He also points out that young black men need educational services that

- help them manage themselves and the conflict that often features in their lives,

- help them develop coping strategies, so that they could function more positively in the chaotic circumstances that constitute their daily life away from school,

- help them develop positive identities and to unlearn the behaviours that often characterise 'normal' behaviour in their neighbourhoods, including violence, abuse, bullying, rejection, invalidation, low self esteem, sexism and racism etc.

- help them to negotiate relationships and power structures within schools.

- 3.2.9 Studies from the United States have similarly explored the concerns about what is happening to African Caribbean and African American males. Lovett-Tisdale (1996), and Purnell (1996), both identify the black family as heterogeneous, and made up with single and two parent households and an extended family which spans all socio-economic tiers and geographical regions. Helms (1989), and Stevenson (1993), are cited as believing that a strong racial identity will help young black males to cope during the changes of adolescence. Furthermore, if the education system is not germane to the life of African Americans, and does not try to include the experiences and contributions of African Americans in the school curriculum then this sends a negative image towards young black students about the importance of their educational development. Wyatt (1998) highlights the impact of spirituality, with a conviction that non-material forces influence everyday lives. Black churches are seen to play an important role. They are seen to provide them with active coping patterns through an affirmative relationship with God. This then brings a sense of belonging to a community, confidence in one's ability to solve one's own problems, honesty in relationships, ability to work hard to accomplish a task, leadership qualities, an ability to be co-operative, a willingness to share their material possessions with others, being able to give and receive affection and care, the perception that others are willing to protect them, enjoying the company of others and receiving respect from others.

- 3.2.10 They see the adoption of a particular version of black masculinity as a coping strategy designed to ensure the personal survival of black males in an oppressive white society. This is expressed in a variety of ways, through clothes, disposition, language and the way they walk. Some overt hostility that surfaces can be interpreted as a defence against stress – this anger manifests itself as a consequence of chronic frustration, a chronic sense of threat, vulnerability and anxiety coupled with feelings of relative powerlessness.
- 3.2.11 These US studies conclude that young black men desire the most ordinary of successes – a steady job, the chance to be a productive citizen and an ability to provide for his family, opportunities to shape his community, society and nation and to be able to live in peace.
- 3.2.12 Similar concerns about the achievement of young black men have come out of the Caribbean context. Work carried out by Parry (1996), looked at the relationship between teacher expectations, Caribbean masculinities and male underachievement in the English speaking Caribbean. This research mirrors the findings from Britain and the US.
- 3.2.13 Other British studies (Alexander 1996), have concluded that the predominant view of African/Caribbean's is that of an alien problem. In speaking to these young men, the issues that arose were in relation to identity and nationhood and how their family origin helped define their sense of self (Nigerian or Jamaican by blood, but not by culture). Skin colour was seen as the biggest barrier to integration. These young men believed that their sense of solidarity emerged in middle school years – they felt a personal obligation to other black youth, the absence of which lead to them being ostracised. However, this was based on an oppositional and political stance rather than on cultural identity, with stress on the shared experience of a common enemy. Language (along with dress and music) became a symbolic marker of this oppositional statement of solidarity. This was seen as primarily a male exercise of defining 'roots' and 'territory'.
- 3.2.14 Because of the extent of single parent households, women come to be viewed as the 'can do' gender. Portrayals of women as strong, independent and hardworking, while men were seen to be lacking the work ethic, under qualified and alienated. Success was therefore seen as an inevitability for women, an impossibility for men. Coupled with this was an argument and an assumption that blacks need to work harder to get to the top, and then need to abandon any and all black cultural identity when they do get there. This then led to the need to develop a coping strategy – an alternative value system, a compensatory tool to cope with social rejection.
- 3.2.15 In earlier research focused on African Caribbean boys (Sewell, 1997), suggested that young black males are simultaneously seen as the darlings of popular youth sub-culture in both British and US schools as well as sinners in the classroom. He defines masculinities as responses to a school that sees black boys as 'sexy' and sexually threatening. This then becomes linked to how the young men perceive themselves as males and how others perceive them. In that sense they become too 'sexy' for school. Teachers too cannot escape the wider perceptions that exist about black boys. Much has been written about black underachievement but not much on the total range of black male experience in school and in particular the role of their sub-cultures in school. This research gathered material from adults and young men-one of

the handful of studies that has seriously taken on the African-Caribbean perspective in any great range and detail.

- 3.2.16 Gillborn (1990), and Mac an Ghaill, (1988), conclude that African-Caribbean boys receive disproportionately larger amounts of criticisms than other ethnic groups, who are often ignored when committing the same offence. They both place the blame with teachers and the schooling process.

If there are these factors both in terms of structural disadvantage and in terms of the overwhelming pressures placed on emerging black masculinities, how can education, training and employment seduce young black men so that they become fully contributing members of the society?

During his study Sewell (1997), came to the conclusion that teachers are socialised into thinking that the faults of children can be explained by home and lifestyle. The teachers are therefore socialised to defend the school.

“When it came to ethnicity I found that even the most progressive black teacher could not penetrate ‘the culture of resistance’ set up by the children. They would not accept the absorption of their culture by those who were agents of the state” (p7).

- 3.2.17 Notwithstanding this there must be a way to affect the choices that young people make because the figures show that black young people do remain engaged in school and further education, and in increasing numbers are making the next step to higher education, to training and the world of work.

- 3.2.18 In an attempt to identify ‘protective factors’, those conditions that foster resilience in the face of negative odds, Batey (1999), conducted research to identify the adaptive and coping strategies for the developmental tasks of adolescent African American males. He concluded that good (socially competent), relationships with family, friends and others led the young men to become effective problem solvers and thus able to tackle these tasks with a good degree of success.

### 3.3 What are the costs?

- 3.3.1 Given the above, it is not surprising that as young black men approach adulthood that they wonder whether it is indeed possible to make a successful transition and find a sense of belonging within the society. In any society the move from childhood to adulthood involves the young person in drawing on the cultural, social and intellectual capital in order to enable them to become fully functioning adults. For young black men, faced with a plethora of contradictory representations of black men, they have also to address complex questions regarding their identity and belonging, masculinity and sexuality. Such questioning will inevitably produce cultural contradictions and paradoxes that serve to put added pressure on them. The main cost is they suppress the motivation to learn, they do not defer gratification and they fail to feel that they are agents or stakeholders in society.

### 3.4 How are aspirations shaped?

Typically much of the literature states the problem but there is less emphasis on finding solutions from the young people or from the adults who work with them. How do we counteract the negative factors and bring about success? In this project we are seeking to explore the **relative importance** of a number

of factors from the point of view of the young men themselves, to discover what makes a difference that will enable their aspirations and hopes to be realised. We have much knowledge about the disruptive effects of disadvantage, racism, etc on young men's development. We know far less about the **protective factors of education and the resilience** of young black men at risk.

### 3.5 Mentoring

- 3.5.1 At present there is a popular assumption in the literature that if black young men were provided with appropriate role models and mentors then their lives would be transformed. It is a truism that certain people, events and experiences can transform a young person's life. However, mentoring is only part of the story. How do young people recognise these **transformational moments**, what meanings do they ascribe to them and how are they influenced to make different choices? Gillborn (1999), has pointed out that mentoring may well pander to a deficit notion that views young black men as beyond the reach of mainstream agencies and professionals.
- 3.5.2 The literature has pointed to the many material, educational, family, peer, societal and psycho- social factors that impinge on and influence the outcomes for young black men. It is clear that their ability to stay engaged is dependent on how they negotiate these factors and how they are helped to navigate their way around the different obstacles that they meet.

## Methodology

- 4.1 It is assumed that behaviour is ultimately derived from an individual's interpretation of his/her social world, and qualitative research is an excellent way to open a window to that world. This research aimed to find answers to such questions as: What are the young men's attitudes to school, to training and to work? What are their hopes and aspirations and what do they experience when they come into contact with authority figures? Crucially, this study set out to learn from the perspective of the young men themselves. However we were conscious that at all stages of their journey, young men have to negotiate their relationship with authority figures and thus it was necessary to hear from these figures about how they interacted with the young men and sought to engage them. The research therefore explored the ways in which service providers sought to engage with the young men, looked for obstacles and blocks and attempted to understand the nature of these so that the services could become more accessible. It is evident that not all authority figures are viewed in a negative light, since some young men do remain engaged and make a success of their relationships with these figures.
- 4.2 The study was, therefore, crucially interested in 'what works'. At its core was the need to determine the 'anatomy of success' (mainly from the point of view of the young men) so that it would inform the Connexions Service about the nature of the service that would assist the young men to fulfil their potential as well as assist the Connexions Service to have successful outcomes in its key principles of:
- raising aspirations and setting high expectations for everyone;
  - meeting individual need and overcoming barriers to learning;
  - taking account of the views of young people (individually and collectively) as;
  - the new service is developed and as it is operated locally;
  - inclusion, keeping young people in education and training and preventing them from moving to the margins of their community;
  - community involvement and neighbourhood renewal.
- 4.3 The research began with preparatory work with key 'authority' figures. Schools and Further Education colleges were approached and we were able to have access to a group of young people and significant figures of authority. In addition the views of non-statutory figures within the community were sought, in particular the views of pastors and others within a fast expanding black Christian church. The potential respondents were identified and the research team was able to develop and test the research instruments, namely the semi-structured interview schedules and action research strategies.
- 4.4 A literature review was conducted. The initial search produced a small number of published research findings dealing with this topic. However, a more extensive search has unearthed work conducted in the USA and in the



Caribbean and an exploration of the similarities and differences has indicated some lessons that might be learnt for the British context.

- 4.5 The main research instrument was the in-depth semi-structured interview, and interviews with 60 young men aged 15-19 were conducted. In addition, interviews with 20 authority figures were carried out. These included lecturers and other key personnel from FE colleges; head-teachers and deputy heads of secondary schools; social workers and careers officers; senior LEA officers; church leaders; Connexions managers and personal advisers.

In addition, action research was conducted with 5 of the young male interviewees to explore further their experiences and difficulties with the intent of finding solutions. Action research enabled the young men to discuss their views and attitudes about participation, exclusion, inclusion and their expectations of authority. It also enabled them to reflect on the possibilities of changing their behaviour in the light of these discussions.

- 4.6 The analytical aim of this project was to develop an understanding of what actually happens at 'street level' and to establish an emergent and provisional typology of risk factors and of 'protective' factors for these young men in light of the findings. Furthermore, social welfare provision operates at the intersection of the individual and the state, and is concerned with the interpretation as well as the implementation of policy. When this is further compounded by issues of race and gender, and by people's perceptions and negative experiences of the system of welfare provision, this becomes a very sensitive and difficult area of research.

- 4.7 The organisation and co-ordination of the project

The importance of building networks was crucial in getting access to the young men and to the professionals and other members of the community and served as a barometer of the interest that professionals and individuals felt about this topic. It was important to obtain their assistance in gaining an entry point into the lives of these young men. Focusing on the notion of success, the project set out to seek out the views of those young men who were, in the main, still engaged with the world of education, training and work. We worked from the hypothesis that many of the boys who were still engaged did not have substantially different characteristics from the ones who had become disaffected, but there might be certain influences in their lives that when they reached particular 'turning points' when they could have gone either way, they still maintained a commitment to education and to social inclusion. In fact, as will be shown, many young black men have managed to snatch success out of the jaws of possible disaster, as they daily have to navigate the potentially murky waters near the margins of society. The project was keen to uncover what these influences might be and to enable schools, colleges and the Connexions service to build on and strengthen these to help young black men to remain engaged with the system.

- 4.8 The research process

The methodology bases itself both on the use of the views of the young men as well as the views of professionals working in education and welfare services as the source of research information. This is a form of action research in that it offers practitioners developmental choices, alternative perspectives and ways of responding to their working dilemmas. This data is then cross-referenced with information about the systems and structures that

affect and are affected by the perceptions of the young men and of the authority figures.

#### 4.9 The collection and analysis of the data

The aim of this data collection was to give an account of the experiences of young black men and to determine the meanings that they ascribed to these experiences. The very act of reflection would enable them and us to build a framework of knowledge that linked their past experiences to their present circumstances in education or training and to their future aspirations for becoming fully functioning adults, able to take their place in society. The data collected by the adult group, who could reflect on the structures and services within which their professional groups were working, mirrored this process.

- 4.10 The responses to the interviews varied in detail, depending on the levels of maturity and articulacy of the young men. What was common was their acute ability to reflect on and make sense of their experiences. All of the interviews were audio-taped and summaries made. The first level of analysis was a summary of the responses from the interviews. These were checked by verbatim transcriptions of the tapes. The transcripts were then analysed for the *topics*, which concerned the young men and the professionals, and for the appearance of certain *themes*, which were of interest to us either in terms of our research questions or in terms of interests newly arising from the data. The *topics* and the themes were such things that were common to all young men, but not necessarily in the same order of importance. Some themes were shared, others were individualised, but the dominance of certain themes was marked.

## Findings and Analysis

- 5.1 This section considers the main findings and draws together areas of similarity and difference. This is based on an analysis of the interviews from the stories of the young men and from the accounts given by the professionals and significant authority figures. This analysis leads to a consideration of the factors that facilitate a good outcome and outlines some of the key implications for the Connexions Service.
- 5.2 Notwithstanding the individualised nature of the young men's stories, there were topics and themes that came through strongly from the interviews. The majority of the boys spoke about racism at school and in their daily lives. They understood the different forms that it could take and some of the difficulties they experienced in dealing with this. There was widespread bitterness about the ways in which teachers had labelled them and treated them differently once the boys reached about 14 years old. What came through strongly was the way in which these young men were seeking positive ways of dealing with their sense of rage at the injustices they had experienced. Many spoke of the need to "overcome it", "not let it get in my way". Many of the accounts were very moving and young people said they benefited from being able to voice these experiences in the interview situation.
- 5.3 The principal focus of this research was to explore how these young men viewed their successes both in terms of educational qualifications and social achievements. The rationale was to build on "what works" in order to offer useful solutions rather than merely to rehearse the pains of racism. Nevertheless this aspect will not be ignored and we will return to this later.
- 5.4 Themes arising from young men interviews
- The key issues covered in the interviews have been grouped around major themes as expressed by the young people. Respondents generally found the experience of being interviewed a very positive one, as it gave them a chance to reflect on their experiences, and to signpost their own progress.

### 5.4.1 Attitudes to education

- 5.4.1.1 Whatever these young men may face in their educational experience, there was an underlying theme of 'valuing education'. One of the young men said, ***"I'm very pleased with the way I've kept with my studies, considering my background. I have got a couple of uncles and aunts that have gone the wrong direction. I am actually going to be [the] first of my mother's children that have attended university"***. The idea of the value of education was seen as a legacy handed to them by their parents, and this is particularly true for the African group. When asked about his education, one African young man responded: ***"Without education you can't really do anything. I'm African, and all you get from African parents is study, study, study"***.

5.4.1.2 Many agreed that college provided an almost final opportunity to 'plug' into mainstream society. Being a student gave them a sense of inclusion, as one respondent said, **"I'm very hungry, very hungry for success. I have seen hope. I feel important. I don't feel like an outcast"**. Some respondents felt that studying with a large number of black students was a supporting factor. One respondent said: **"There are a lot of black students. You don't feel strange"**. Respondents expressed value in the study of black African/Caribbean history as part of an overall program of personal development, because this aspect of their studies gave them positive role models and also helped them to emulate the role models. Another respondent said, **"I used to go to black history club, and Martin Luther King, who I see as a role model, showed you don't have to use violence to solve anything. That was good inspiration"**. Another said, **"Mandela is a role model. He show you black men could achieve even though they struggle"**.

5.4.1.3 The issue of trying to stay 'plugged in' was an important recurring theme with most young men. For some, this was a struggle. One respondent said, **"I know I must do my college work but every time my friends call me to play football, I went and then my work fall behind"**. Another said, **"I didn't do any work for about four months and I came back. I still caught up, I should be way bottom of the class, but my mum got down on me"**. Staying focused depended on whether they had others to turn to when things became difficult. These others included parents/carers, girlfriends, aunts and uncles. African Caribbean mothers played a dominant role in influencing the African Caribbean group, whereas African fathers featured quite high for the African group.

5.4.1.4 All of the respondents said that they saw education as a long term investment in the future, to get a good job. While some of them watched their peers on the streets engaging in illegal activities and getting instant gratification, (that is money to buy clothes of the most popular brands, and flashy cars), they chose to remain focused. As one respondent said: **"I know I don't want any part of that, so that what keeps me striving to make something of myself"**. Another said, **"I left college and went back. I don't want to be scrubbing floors. Everyone wants a good job, so that is what motivates me"**. The respondents also equated success with having a good education and they felt that some other black students were more successful than others because they worked harder. They felt they all had the same opportunities. Some used the opportunities while some squandered theirs by not remaining 'plugged in'. One respondent said: **"If someone is more successful than I am, then that's down to them putting the effort and staying plugged in. If I don't make a success of myself then I am to blame. I can't expect someone to send me the success that I want"**. Similar sentiments were echoed by another respondent who said: **"Young black men must realize no one is going to do it for them. They have to do for themselves"**.

#### 5.4.2 Relationship with authority figures

5.4.2.1 Respondents overwhelmingly said that integrity of staff was either as important or more important than their race. However, some did feel that it was easier to relate to some (but not all) black staff especially when they

were able to use a black vernacular. They felt that by having a common language and similar experience black staff were better able to understand and identify with their plight as young black men. One of the many, who endorsed this said: ***“I relate differently to black people. It seems that black people in authority want to help, like I think maybe they know how it is being young and black and trying to make it”***. This was echoed by Black authority figures and will be explored later. Some of the young men stated that problems with white teachers began around year 9, (13-14 years), which coincides with the boys becoming teenagers. Therefore, it could be the period when they are going through some turbulence with physical and emotional development. Consequently, professionals need to be aware and deal with them in a sensitive way.

5.4.2.2 Generally, the respondents saw the police as a negative authority figure. They felt they were targets for the police and that they were stopped and searched more often than their white peers. Some of them had had traumatic experiences of being arrested for someone else, (i.e. cases of mistaken identity). One young man related his experience, he said, ***“I have been in contact with [police]. I have been stopped a few times for no reason. I was about 14 and someone on my estate got mugged and me and my friend had just finished playing football, went home and got a drink, as soon as I come out of house walk around the corner a woman police pushed me against the wall. I tried to retaliate. Another police pushed me”***. Another respondent said, ***“I was locked up for seven hours for something I did not do, they just had to let me go”***. Even those who did not have any negative experience with the police viewed the police negatively because of what they saw happening to their black peers.

5.4.2.3 However, there was acknowledgement that seeing so few black people in positions of authority or high responsibility, sometimes made plugging in difficult. Some of these young men openly expressed their need to have people to motivate them and understand their capabilities. One respondent said: ***“You need that push. You need to [know] somebody care”***. Some students felt a need to approach black teaching staff (who were not perhaps even in their faculty) to seek advice on a range of issues. All the respondents welcomed the help tutors gave them at college. One respondent said, ***“My tutor is one of the greatest people I ever met”***. Another respondent said, ***“My tutor is the most honest and trustworthy teacher I have ever had in my life. I can talk to her and she gives me an honest answer. Sometimes, it makes one sad knowing I have to leave college, [and] I will not see her again. And that not only me, she helps all students”***.

### 5.4.3 Belonging

5.4.3.1 The issue of whether they were African or Caribbean or British was a recurring theme. They were unsure of whether to identify themselves with the place of their birth or whether to identify with their parent’s country of origin. Such questions about belonging seemed to affect their sense of identity and became troubling, as they considered the type of adult they might become. One respondent who was born in England, of Jamaican and Grenadian parents, when asked how he would describe himself became puzzled. He responded, ***“Dunno, West Indian or Black British”***. Interestingly, on the other hand, one respondent who was of mixed parentage; African and English

felt he had the best of both worlds. He said, ***“because I am light skinned, I don’t get trouble for job. I get jobs over black people, but then I have my African roots, I’m mixed, at College I’m black”***. There was much concern about what makes you ‘fit in’ (this was either identified by your speech, your clothes, the car you drive, or the way you walk). The decision to be part of an oppositional sub-culture rather than being identified with the mainstream was one way of playing out the struggle with identity and belonging. This proves to be a more difficult dilemma for young black men than young black women. One young man spoke very vividly about the fact that having been in prison would give him more credibility with his peers than having a degree. He added, ***“if you come out of Uni its no big thing, but if you come out of jail, where you have done two or three years people will be giving you props... respect”***.

5.4.3.2 There are many pressures within black communities that might militate against young men finding a place to belong in this society. The respondents were struggling with this aspect. Some respondents expressed that going to college and being a student helped them to identify with a group, and also they were seen as doing something positive by the society at large. This gave them a sense of belonging. However, when students stepped out of that environment, the dilemma started all over again.

5.4.3.3 The issue of reputation featured quite strongly. Some of the young men expressed the view that they saw benefits in having a positive reputation. They strove to upkeep this good image by controlling their anger, changing their attitudes and attending college, which they saw as the best way for improving their chances of success. On the other hand, there were a few young men who said very forcefully, they felt a negative reputation drew more attention to them, and they were seen as hard, untouchable, and in control. These two outlooks on life, as expressed by these young men, could possibly shed some light on the different outcomes for black young men in society.

#### 5.4.4 *Management of Self*

5.4.4.1 A major theme for all the young men was dealing with their anger and making appropriate responses to actual or perceived injustices. One of the respondents who was described by a white peer as ‘second rate’ said, ***“whatever they throw at me, I just ignore it. I’ve changed, as before, I’d retaliate, but I’ve learnt you have to resolve things through speaking. Fighting, you should never go to”***. Another (African) respondent said, ***“I have gone through a lot. I have been treated unjustly for my job. If it was a black Caribbean, they would have left or would have done something to be in prison by now. I am still with the same company”***. This is a very important statement that explains the different destinies of young black men with roughly equal promise, schooling and opportunity. Emotional life is a domain that can be handled with greater or lesser skill, and brings its unique set of competencies. The notion of emotional literacy is key to understanding why one person thrives and succeeds in life and another of equal promise and background does not.

5.4.4.2 Both from research and from the literature, it is clear that those young men who know how to manage their feelings are better able to steer their way through the spoken and unspoken rules that govern success at school,

college, and the world of work. One respondent who was having problems at school said: ***“ I had to change my attitude cause it ain’t gonna get me anywhere. I was just sitting down in a room thinking and it hit me that I was going to get excluded, and I chose to step up my attitude and change from that day forward”***. This respondent, along with some others who said that after they took time out to see where they were heading, and changed their attitudes, demonstrates that these young men have the capacity for reflection, and it is this emotional literacy that, as mentioned before, has made the significant difference in outcomes. The respondents further admitted that once their attitudes changed, the teachers’ attitudes also changed. As one respondent said, ***“as my attitude got better the teachers treated me better. Before, anything happen in the room, I would get blame for it, but now it’s like, ‘how are you getting on with your work, do you need help?’”*** This has implications for the ways in which the Personal Advisors view their relationship, with the young men.

5.4.4.3 The sense of being endangered was integral to young men having angry outbursts either at school or in daily living. Endangerment can be brought about not just by an outright physical threat, but also, as is often the case by a symbolic threat to self-esteem or dignity. This includes being treated unjustly or rudely, and being frustrated in pursuing your goals. Many young men spoke about being slighted and ‘dissed’, and their resulting sense of rage. One respondent who was continually asked by a teacher if he thought he was on the right course said he felt very insulted and enraged, but he remained and tried even harder and succeeded. For many adults, such outbursts of anger and potential violence can be seen to be out of all proportion to the precipitating incident. Those young men who believe that they have both the will and the means to achieve their goals, who have great expectations of the future, seemed better able to motivate themselves. They were able to feel resourceful enough to find ways to accomplish their objectives, and to be flexible enough to find ways to achieve those goals. Giving vent to anger was sometimes thought to be a good way of handling rage and anger, ***“it makes you feel better”***. However, some young men came to the realization that outbursts of rage often left them feeling more angry, rather than less angry, and in some cases it had disastrous effects.

#### 5.4.5 Cultural Versatility

Many young men spoke about the difficulties in having to choose to live in a ‘black world rather than a ‘mainstream world’. Some wanted to be able to move more fluently in wider social circles. They felt confined to those places where they thought they were welcomed and comfortable. This meant that they were often unable to access anything outside the black community. One respondent who went to have a meal at a restaurant said, ***“I would like to be more open. Going into restaurants, I feel as though [I am being] discriminated against. I feel unwelcomed. I have to make sure people see [me] putting down my money and leaving tip. I need to feel more comfortable with white people”***. They recognised that to be socially successful, you need different kinds of behaviour in different ‘racial’ situations, and that sometimes they lacked the ‘lingua franca’ needed to act appropriately. For example, they understood that one must be able to deal with racist individuals in an assertive manner, in a situation where one is away from ones own territory. For some, the notion of territory was a very

supportive one but it could be limiting on other individuals who wanted to broaden their horizons and engage more with activities in the wider community. One explanation that has been put forward is that the system makes people live in a series of closed environments that place boundaries around their existence. While this may be so, it is felt that these young men need to build up the confidence and self-esteem that could equip them to 'step out' of their confines. It could be argued that this territory might be a state of mind where there is no physical boundary, but an emotional one. One career officer explained how some young black men were reluctant to travel a few miles away to opportunities of work or modern apprenticeships because they did not feel confident navigating their way in the wider community. However, this difficulty in relating well in the wider community might have been due to their perceptions and experiences of racist attitudes. One young man expressed the difficulty when he walked in a shopping area he noticed people hold on to their bags. Another spoke of his experience on the bus. He said: ***"When I get in the bus, and the bus gets packed and the only seat next to me is free, people will prefer to stay standing than come and sit next to me because of stereo and prejudice that are put against young black males"***.

#### 5.4.6 Feelings about being black

In answer to the question of whether or not they felt being black kept them back, all respondents said 'no'. They cited various reasons for not achieving, such as not doing homework, and being unable to concentrate. Most of them who said they were behind target felt it was their fault. In one instance, a young man realised that no one can do it for him and decided to work harder. Another respondent said, ***"I feel whatever your colour, success is possible"***. However, although some of the young men said their colour did not keep them back, they knew that success did not come easily to them. As black men they had to beat the odds. They had to control their anger when they felt they were treated unjustly, and they had to change their attitudes and 'plug in' to their studies. They realised they had to double their efforts. As one respondent said, ***"Black people have to work twice as hard to be successful"***. Even when white teachers were doubtful about their ability they had to prove them wrong. One case was cited where a teacher told a young man he wouldn't pass his English exam. He did not only just pass, he passed with an 'A'. Another respondent said, ***"Being a young man is hard. Being a young black man in a white man's country is even harder. It's like... I say you've got the police [behind you]"***. These young men had a notion of taking responsibility for their actions even with a realistic assessment of what they were up against. They did not always blame racism for their outcomes.

#### 5.4.7 Aspirations & expectations

5.4.7.1 An overwhelming number of respondents spoke of owning their own business, such as a small hotel, an accounting firm and an electrical shop. While these are positive, in that they give hope, one has to ask the question of how realistic they are. Most respondents felt that after completing college and working for a year or two that they would be in a position to start their own businesses. Maybe these young men need to acquire the skills that will enable them to work in teams and to work for someone else.



5.4.7.2 Additionally, most of them expressed the desire to own a home and a flashy car. They saw these as signs of 'making it', and being successful. Others felt they wanted to do their best at their careers. A respondent said, **"I want to be the best chef in the world"**. They expected to access value added jobs after their studies, as another respondent explained, **"I don't want to end up in any dead end job"**. Again, these young men have not come to grips with the reality of the labour market, where, along with qualifications, they need to acquire transferable skills in order to compete with other applicants. Also, statistics have shown that to every vacancy, there are on average seventy-nine applicants. This brings to the forefront, the essential requirement that young men who are seeking jobs should develop the skill of creating good impressions at interviews, and how they should develop a realistic view of how to build a career or vocation. They need also to keep the focus that allowed them to remain 'plugged in' while they were at college to seek out satisfying jobs with similar determination.

#### 5.4.8 Images of masculinity

5.4.8.1 Many of the young men reported how they had overcome the struggle about deciding on the type of masculine life style that they wished to adopt. Some key questions for the research were:

- why are young black men seduced by certain representations of manhood and masculinity, and eschew other more positive representations?
- what can social welfare agencies provide that will make modes of positive transition more available for young black men?

5.4.8.2 It seems that these young men want to be offered more broadening experiences that would enable them to have greater opportunity to see what is possible for a young black man to become. The responses from these young men showed how often they were led into 'categorical thinking'. They are often forced to respond with, and to develop an either/or mentality. 'You have to be either cool or well educated'. As one young man explained, when he said he was going to college, they looked surprised. He added: **"When you black and going to college, it should be more a big thing rather than when you come out a jail all you friends ... Yeah! Yeah! [you hard], but when you finish college no one cares. Going to college doesn't seem cool"**. They were left struggling with the perceived difficulties of being well educated/trained and being ultra cool at the same time. Black females were seen as very much part of the development of black masculinity. However, there was confusion about what young women would value in a man. Some young men believed that girls would value a masculinity that endorsed a wife beating mentality. Others thought that this school of thought is questionable because it seems that the values many young black women want in a partner are at odds with the black young men's perception of masculinity.

## Case Example

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The following example gives an insight into background, experiences, reflections and aspirations of a typically resourceful young man.

Ernie was born in Ghana and arrived in England at age 13. He is very clear about his achievements, he knew that he excelled at personal relationships. His father was the driving force behind his education and his main adviser. His dad always tried to give him the best possible help in achieving his aims for the future. He has a ten-year plan to get all his degrees and become a successful businessman. He is kept “plugged in” by looking at and valuing the achievement of siblings that have achieved in life. He does not want to be different from them. He seeks advice from his tutor. His need for further professional help is for financial assistance so that he can continue his studies and go to university. He believes that you just have to learn to accept authority before you can become the sort of person to be in authority over others. When asked whether he thought that being black had held him back he said “In reality it does but in my mind it wouldn’t, it wouldn’t hold me back from going further to where I want to be”.

This is not a young man for whom everything has gone without a hitch. He told a story about how he has been mistreated at his work, having been suspended for 3 weeks because a large sum of money had gone missing. He is absolutely certain that a different type of young black man would have left or done something to be in prison. He is proud of the fact that he still works for the same company. He is very much aware of what he calls the “racist mind” that put obstacles in his way or frustrates him. This young man believes himself to be on target to meet his goals “I have never been behind target and I have never been ahead of target”.

He stresses honesty and trustworthiness as the attributes that he most values in his teachers and tutors. He was very reflective about whether black or white teachers are more helpful to him as authority figures.

## 5.5 Themes emerging from Adult interviews

### 5.5.1 Staff development

The college staff interviewed felt that there was a need for staff development training on the way white staff should relate to black students. Black staff are able to 'enjoy' black students in ways which white staff often find difficult. Some black staff, particularly male, felt that by having a common language and similar experiences, this afforded them an advantage in engaging positively with students. This echoed the thoughts of some of the young men. One black personal adviser endorsed this when he said, **"I'm actually more or less coming from where they came from, same culture, same make-up, not much difference really"**. There was a strong feeling from black staff that some white staff can feel intimidated by black youth and 'freeze'. However, it was also felt that white staff did and could have positive relationships with black students. Many however felt unable to relate well to young black men. In fact, some white staff are only able to relate to black men who are behaving badly, as this justifies their opinion. This white group also found it harder to relate to young black men who are intelligent and who are attending to their studies.

One respondent said: **"There are people who can – because of their ideology and self-awareness - provide an insightful framework for young black people to advance"**. However, the general consensus was that as long as staff members, black and white were able to develop a trusting relationship with the students, whereby the students could open up, effective working could take place. A black staff member said: **"There are white teachers who have profound and positive effects on black students"**. In saying so, the point was further made that **"Personal advisers must understand though, they are not into some kind of remedial intermediate treatment programme; they must engage in developmental processes which do not mirror negative experiences those young people would have had of schooling and teaching, but to facilitate understanding of the lives of the young people themselves"**.

### 5.5.2 Total development of students

All the adult respondents expressed very forcefully that students need to be taught in a way that prepares them for life. They need to be taught the skills that will help them negotiate their way through life and be able to deal positively with the obstacles that they meet. In order to achieve this as one respondent said, **"a holistic approach to teaching is necessary, not just subject teaching"**. **"Also staff need ability and skills to engage with a wide range of learners, the conformist; the rebellious; bright and rebellious; incompetent and rebellious; in ways that are less remedial and more empowering"**. The system needs to be able to respond to difficult behaviour in a variety of ways and not just in punitive ways to students who are labelled as disrespectful, insolent and disruptive. There was no space to try and understand negative behaviours. Some professionals felt that the negative behaviour displayed by some of the young men could be a cry for help, in which case, a listening ear or a word of encouragement would be a positive response. Adults needed to look beyond the macho and seemingly 'hard' behaviour, which may well mask low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. All the adult respondents expressed that the view that the home

played a major role in helping the young men to stay focused. One adult respondent said **aspirant parents** and supportive home environment are a prerequisite for academic success, another said, “*emotional maturity helps young men to stay on track*”. Therefore education needs to be on self-development and not only academic needs, issues of culture and peer pressure, role of work, experience of work pleasures and the life style that goes with it must be addressed. While some students are able to meander their way through these issues, others are not able to or have no forum in which to address these issues.

### 5.5.3 The qualities/qualifications needed for personal advisers

There were a variety of opinions expressed about what kind of person would suit the role of a personal advisor for students. A general feeling was that the person must be able to engage fully with the students, by establishing trusting, and meaningful relationships. It was also felt that the young men must not be seen as trouble makers, as that attitude, if adopted could hinder effective working. An adult respondent said: “***It is not viewing them [young black men] as a combination of problems. Also, not adopting a treatment model, as this could be limiting and ineffective***”.

Another important criterion was knowing the local area. This was seen to give an advantage in that the PA could steer the young men away from the pitfalls. Adults who have experience of doing youth work, were cited as prime candidates for the Personal advisers job, because they would have acquired the skills to engage with these young men. The point was made that some qualified people from the refugee community with a knowledge of the local area could be recruited as personal advisers, because some are multilingual. The main issue was that people selected to become Personal advisers need to have a variety of social skills and have the local links that would help them to engage successfully with young black men.

### 5.5.4 Other socialising and development factors

Several factors were identified to help keep the young black men plugged in. Key factors were support, economic status, the young men’s determination, and the push from teachers. However, some adult respondents singled out the church as one of the main socialising agents apart from education. It was suggested that the role of the church in helping the young black men to get a sense of belonging and identity has been overlooked. One respondent said, “***The church offers a sense of belonging, purpose and identity***”. This sentiment was endorsed by another respondent who said, “***Churches in particular can help prevent disaffection. It gives them [young black men] a vision and a sense of purpose***”. While all these may be true, the church’s values are conservative, and these values might not be able to attract and keep some of the young men in church. The outlook of young black men might be in contrast with that of the church. For young men who adopt a ‘radical pose’, their mode of dress, (for example cap turned backwards) will not be accepted in church, and this will deter the young men from attending. However one of the respondents was the pastor of an evangelical church with a thriving youth ministry who felt very confident that young men could be reached out to and ‘saved’. It is thus important that other socialising and youth development activities should be tapped into to broaden the horizons of these young men.

## 5.6 Analysis

- 5.6.1 The group of young men in this study has shown some promise for the future. The interviews that were conducted have shed some light on the issues that confront them and have given some direction for solutions to professionals and policy makers (as well as to parents/carers).
- 5.6.1.2 The majority of the young men were willing to make the sacrifice of going on to college and completing their studies, even though the 'fast lane' beckoned them. They have acquired a level of maturity that has allowed them to see the long-term benefits of a quality education rather than adopting a 'here and now' mentality. They have used their peers as both positive and negative examples. They have as an inspiration those that have gone to college and are making a success of their lives. On the other hand, those that have been on the streets, and in the community without any positive agenda, their lifestyles have been seen as a deterrent. The absence of their fathers (mainly Afro-Caribbean) was a factor but for some this also helped them to remain focused, as they wanted to break the cycle and be involved in their children's upbringing. They did not want to be a 'chip off the old block'.
- 5.6.1.3 The young black men interviewed showed that they have been able to take responsibility for their actions and have been charting their course to success with the much-needed support of friends, family and tutors. They have said that being black has not kept them back. They have also realised that in order to succeed, they have to work hard, and most importantly, no one can do it for them. This level of thinking is quite heartening, as these young men have not blamed racism for their outcomes. They have acknowledged that racism exists, but they do not have tunnel vision. Furthermore they have wanted to broaden their horizons, are willing to look outside their very narrow definitions of territory. The majority of these young men have stated that the colour of their tutor or personal advisors did not matter, although some of them felt a black tutor or PA will be better able to empathise with them and understand their perspectives. The integrity of the tutor or PA was of paramount importance.
- 5.6.1.4 Another interesting point that can be drawn from the interviews was that some of the young men cited situations where they were able to beat the odds, in that they did not let negative professional assessment impact on them so that they were deterred from their goals. Instead, sometimes they actually became motivated. For example, the young man who was told he would not pass English worked harder and got an A grade. Another young man who was told that black people couldn't swim fast did not give up, he continued to swim competitively.
- 5.6.1.5 Generally, the young men who had negative attitudes realised that in order for them to stay 'plugged in' and be successful, they had to change their attitudes. Some of them did some 'stock taking'. They compared where they were with what they wanted to achieve, and after observing a mismatch, decided that a change of attitude was the best way forward. Some of them had some traumatic experiences with the police, and the general consensus was to stay away from those who were getting into trouble. They needed to keep out of trouble. However, they all held a negative impression of the police, expressing the view that black young men are targets for the police and they are stereotyped and more likely to be searched than their white peers.

5.6.1.6 Adults who worked with these young men identified gaps in services and areas of policy that can be changed. A key area that was highlighted in both sets of interviews (young men and adults) was that of support. Support was the 'glue' that kept the young men plugged into the educational system and encouraged them to achieve their goals. Therefore the role of the PA is very important in this regard. In the situation where there are no other support mechanisms around for a young man, the Personal advisers role becomes even more crucial. The picture presented by most of the young men gives hope. However, it is not for all of the group, as there were a few who needed 'shepherding'. They were precariously perched on the brink, as was evidenced in their responses, such as, living in an environment where going to jail earns them more respect than going to university. Also, they were influenced to believe that if they had a negative reputation, they would be seen as untouchable. While some were equipped with the emotional capital and the support to deal with whatever was thrown at them, others were still having difficulty, and these are the ones for whom extra support or advisory systems should be devised.

5.6.1.7 From the data it was possible to distinguish between a set of **risk factors** and a set of **protective factors**, which could lead black young men either towards disaffection and disengagement or towards engagement and success in having their aspirations realised. Significantly all young men faced similar risk factors daily but some were more able to develop a resilience to these by virtue of having experienced certain transformational moments in their lives that allowed them to stay 'plugged in' to their studies. Throughout this project a both/and approach was adopted so that the findings reflect both a concern with individual problems and capabilities as well as system-dependent problems. It is thus possible to outline factors that could promote and facilitate a good (or at least better) outcome for young black men.

#### 5.6.1.8 Risk factors

- Lack of opportunity coupled with limited horizons;
- The attitude that a black man can't work for a white man;
- The tendency to lump all black young men into a stereotypically negative whole, regardless of their achievements;
- The feeling that successful young black men go unnoticed whereas those who have entered the criminal justice system gain recognition. In other words, the view that a good reputation goes unnoticed; a bad reputation earns respect;
- Non productive stance to what it means to become a man;
- Uncontrolled anger and rage;
- Being culturally isolated and unable to function outside a very narrow territory;
- Suspicion of and betrayal by authority figures.

#### 5.6.1.9 Protective factors

- Having clear goals and purposes;
- Ability for the young man to do 'stock taking', examining present position and change course, if necessary in order to achieve goals;

- Ability to realise that outcomes are dependent on input. However, obstacles encountered along the way can influence outcomes, so school and colleges and other services must seek to remove obstacles from the path of these aspirant young men;
- Ability to recognise that attitude affects outcomes;
- Having aspirant parents who show their support by venturing into the world of education with their children;
- Emotional resilience that enables the young man to recognise racism and deal with it in a way that protects the self from physical and/or emotional harm;
- Ability to manage feelings and emotions so that they are appropriate to the situation;
- Being self motivated and able to control impulsive behaviour;
- Exposure to positive black and white authority figures who can demonstrate their integrity and trustworthiness;
- Having self awareness and self understanding;
- Being able to identify supports within their social networks, either parents/carers and families, teachers that had been particularly helpful, steady girlfriends or other identified person;
- A desire to learn about handling relationships - this would help them to learn leadership and enhance their effectiveness in social situations.

5.6.1.10 It is important to note that there are far more protective factors than had previously been envisaged and that the adult world can intervene here to enhance these factors and so lead to more positive outcomes for these young men. These lead us to ask what is the role of Connexions in providing for the needs of these young men? What does this mean for the types of people who might become Personal Advisers? It is to these questions that we now turn.

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- 6.1 The honesty and maturity with which the participants were able to describe and reflect upon their experiences, sometimes with obvious pain, struck the researchers forcefully. Their accounts were moving and poignant indicating that once adults focus on their experiences and value them, young black men, in turn, value such interventions and make the most of them. This has implications for how the Connexions service can reach out to this group and engage them in their services. The research points to a number of policy and practice recommendations. These would offer some practical solutions for Connexions partnerships as messages to local managers and for personal advisers and to a lesser extent to inform the delivery of the training and education of personal advisers. These will have implications for local managers and personal advisers.
- 6.1.1 We therefore propose a model of intervention with young black men that would enable the Connexions Service to facilitate good outcomes in their work with young black men. To do this the Service will face many challenges and there will be implications for the recruitment and training of personal advisers and for the management of the Connexions Service.
- 6.2 What are the challenges facing the Connexions Service in providing appropriate and effective service to young black men?
- 6.2.1 The Service must make attempts to ensure the incorporation of the perspective of young black men as a principle for effective work. This is not to say that their perspectives should be uncritically regarded and accepted as fact, but that any credible service provision for young black men must be seen to involve and engage them in some way. This would lead to the Service adopting an investigative approach when dealing with young black men and their concerns.
- 6.2.2 The Connexions Service should seek to enhance the protective factors and minimise the risk factors by intervening in these young men's lives at key points that would allow them to develop resilience so that they can remain 'plugged in' in the face of adversity.
- 6.2.3 The Connexions Service can assist young black men and address their needs by enabling them to develop their personal action plans with short term, medium term and long term goals, and to enable them to seek realistic means of achieving them. The Service can assist these young men by providing the milestones that will guide them on their way.
- 6.2.4 The Connexion Service must think about how exposure to the Service will help to shift some of these boys' narratives of masculinity and provide an environment in which black boys feel that they are being fairly treated and not subject to racial discrimination. They also need to be treated as active agents in the construction of their own experiences.



- 6.2.5 The Service must learn from the success stories of the young men by understanding and acknowledging the external pressures faced by them and being alert to the lure of the streets and constantly reinforce the positive aspects.
- 6.2.6 The Connexions Service should provide and train personal advisers who have the capabilities and skills to connect with young black men in a meaningful way and to work consistently and successfully with them. These personal advisers should, for example, have understanding of the financial circumstances of the young men and be able to help them to manage their finances.
- 6.2.7 Connexions should ensure that organisational contexts are flexible enough effectively to deliver this service. This means that consideration should be given to the types of leadership and management structures can best deliver the service at a local level. A centralised and bureaucratic service, whilst efficient, cannot always be responsive at the local level. Some local authorities may be in a better position to be the lead agencies that can effectively manage the contracts to local organisations and perhaps provide the management of the personal advisers. They can monitor the ways that these small organisations are organised, ensure that they are properly constituted and, for example, ensure that all the necessary checks have been conducted. Connexions partnerships should make every attempt to foster these local arrangements to enable the black communities to take part in providing services to young black men.
- 6.2.8 The Service should be able to define positive outcomes that are also defined from the young men's points of view. This means the setting of performance indicators of successful work with young black men and the continuous assessment and evaluation of the service.
- 6.2.9 The Service should draw upon service models that currently exist that have been able to reach young black men (e.g. youth work; careers, etc.) and develop best practice from these.
- 6.2.10 The Service must ensure that policy opportunities exist to develop a more holistic approach to working with young black men and develop the indicators that might be employed to evaluate such developments. This means that the service to young black men should begin at as early a stage as possible, so that it does not merely become a remedial service when these young people begin to become disaffected. There needs to be effective monitoring in order to track these young men and identify who stays engaged and what are the contextual factors that cause others to drift away from education and training.
- 6.3 What should be the attributes of a Personal Adviser?
- 6.3.1 Personal advisers must have a professional consciousness of the needs of young men. They must have effective communication skills to work with this group. They must be pragmatic and solution focused. Some people would argue that only other black men would be able to have this consciousness but we believe that this can be learned by a sensitive application of the skills of relationship building and knowledge about black communities. This means that it is necessary for personal advisers to recognise difference but not just in negative terms. Personal advisers must have (or have had) the type of

training that has challenged them or caused them to challenge themselves about their attitudes to young black men.

- 6.3.2 Personal advisers must be able to demonstrate their integrity both by acknowledging racism and institutional discrimination and by being resilient themselves to the pain of the young men as they try to test them as credible and trustworthy. They must be able to withstand the testing often employed by these young men and should not be afraid of them or unwilling to set realistic boundaries with them.
- 6.3.3 Personal advisers must be prepared to adapt their practice to meet the needs of black young men. For example, there is a perception within black communities that careers advice has, in the past, pushed these young men into stereotypical directions. Such stereotypical thinking must be seen as unhelpful and frustrating for these young men and personal advisers should be at the forefront of broadening the horizons of these young people and opening up new avenues of opportunity for them. Similarly, the different needs of African young men and African Caribbean young men must be sensitively assessed so that there is a consciousness that the Service cannot be a 'one size fits all' provision. At the heart of the work of personal advisers would be the raising of aspirations and expectations of young black men in terms of education, training and preparation for work.
- 6.3.4 They must be prepared to reach out into the community to parents/carers and other parts of the social networks of this group. It is these networks that can be supportive and transformative or can create unbearable pressures for these young men.
- 6.3.5 It would seem that whatever their qualifications, personal advisers should be people who have thought about the issues that concern young black men and have resolved them for themselves. They would need access to knowledge that would enable them to have that consciousness. Above all, they should offer commitment that allows trust to develop between themselves and the young men. This would mean acknowledging that the relationship building skills with young black men may be different than those employed with other young people and further understanding of the ways in which racism corrodes trust particularly between young black men and white authority figures.
- 6.3.6 Personal advisers must provide opportunities for young black men to broaden their horizons, thus giving them confidence to move outside their territory. This may be by putting them in touch with other organisations and activities that enable them to enhance their life chances, for example, the Prince's Trust. The focus of such work is to get beneath the surface in order to enable young black men to achieve their potential.
- 6.3.7 The young men have consistently spoken about the need to manage their anger in the light of injustices and frustrations that they meet daily. In relation to anger management, personal advisers should be able to call upon significant black males to help these youngsters through this aspect of their development.
- 6.3.8 In order to deliver the above, personal advisers must have continuous personal development opportunities in which they are able to come into contact with black men and their concerns. Black communities can be seen as a resource to help to deliver this training.

- 6.4 What are the implications for the management of Connexions both locally and nationally?
- 6.4.1 The Connexions Service must build partnerships with black community organisations that are not depleting of those organisations but for mutual benefit. This work should encourage capacity building so that Connexions can have access to these organisations but at the same time the organisations do not lose their personnel.
- 6.4.2 The Connexions Service should seek out black community organisations and individuals to assist with the training of personal advisers
- 6.4.3 Concern was expressed about black people who do not have the initial qualifications but who might well be suitable to be trained as personal advisers. The challenge could well be how to train them side by side with others who may already hold recognisable professional qualifications.
- 6.4.4 The Service must take seriously the need for effective professional supervision for personal advisers. This might take the form of consultancy with senior black professionals either within or without the service
- 6.4.5 The Service needs to think about the range of people who can work with the partnerships. For example how can the service utilise mentors, befrienders and volunteers in a way that this is not seen as buying into a deficit model so that only those young people who are becoming disaffected would qualify for such help? For example the use successful black young men to act as 'buddies' for other black men who are not as successful can be explored.
- 6.4.6 There is a need for a new framework for the determination of what works in delivering services to this group of young men which focuses on:
- The quality of relationships between young men, personal advisers and managers;
  - Addressing the needs of groups as well as individuals;
  - Taking account of a wide range of perspectives;
  - Enabling responsiveness to local needs and allowing appropriate risks to be taken in an attempt to reach out to these young men.
- 6.4.7 This is a large and challenging agenda which cannot be taken forward in one single movement, however there is a critical need to decide which parts of the agenda can be addressed at national and which at local level. Developing a service that has credibility with young black men will be dependent in its turn on the quality of its outcomes. These include
- Dissemination of good practice;
  - Identification of a list of key resources;
  - Identification of priorities for research and policy development;
  - Identification of alliances with other organisations to ensure those future developments maintain this focus.
- 6.5 Factors that facilitate good outcomes for young black men

- 6.5.1 Although the structural barriers of racism and disadvantage are important factors in the lives of young black men and affect how they make the transition to adulthood, it is vital to pay attention to their emotional needs as students, trainees and potential workers. The Connexions Service while paying attention to the structural barriers must think about the need for guidance and development for young men that would:
- facilitate emotional literacy;
  - develop self-awareness;
  - develop understanding and appreciating others;
  - help build strong relationships;
  - help to connect them to wider communities;
  - help them to contribute to society.
- 6.5.2 We identify below areas of operation where we consider that a model could be useful for enhancing the engagement of young black men:
- professional 'consciousness' of the needs of young black men;
  - the development of professional education and training that emphasises the relationship building skills of the Personal Advisers;
  - exposure to positive black authority figures is important but not exclusively so;
  - the development of a community based practice that can reach out to significant individuals within the community;
  - the development of formal and informal inter-agency co-operation and communication;
  - the development of links with black community organisations with a view to capacity building;
- 6.5.3 A successful model would be dependent on the training of personal advisers and the development of community networks:
- to enable personnel and structures which promote a building of resilience in young black men;
  - to encourage and if possible institutionalise the use of significant figures within black communities;
  - to allow professional time for building relationships with families, teachers and lecturers who can reach out and connect to 'aspirant' families and local communities;
  - to allow professional time for inter-agency meetings and encourage informal inter-agency contacts.
- 6.5.4 The work of developing this model will vary from one partnership to another, depending on their structures and resources, and also depending on local considerations as well as national prerogatives.
- 6.5.5 To summarise we propose a model of intervention for these young men resting on a recognition of the importance of informal as well as formal patterns and networks, the importance of universalist services coupled with the need for increased targeting of certain groups. Underpinning this is the need for professionals, managers and policy makers to give primacy to the needs of young black men and to be aware of the ever-present likelihood that their needs might be overshadowed.
- 6.5.6 The implications of the research findings are not unique, but the full data shows that by approaching the questions and problems from a solution-focussed perspective, the service can build from the specific strengths of the

young men and black communities. It can also draw on a range of developments in other countries, which could serve as a basis or an inspiration for our own developments.

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