

*The reflexive voices of young people in
Tottenham: youth-identity formation, reflexivity
and negative representations*

by

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Abstract

While a wide body of literature has emerged on Tottenham's youths since the England riots of 2011, the perceptions of the young people themselves have not been subjected to the same level of attention and scrutiny. My thesis intends to fill this gap by looking at the subjective experiences of youths in the north London constituency of Tottenham (the area where a peaceful demonstration escalated into the England riots). In particular, it investigates young people's reflexive attitudes towards their identities and how they deal with stereotypical and homogeneous youth representations. By putting forward an alternative conceptualisation of reflexivity that spells out how reflexive orientations relate to lived experiences and past engagement in the social world, my study aims to open up novel pathways for understanding youth-identity formation and stereotyping processes.

The study applies qualitative methods, including a version of interpretative phenomenological analysis, to analyse identity-forming processes and how young people reflexively deal with the harmful consequences of stigmatised identities. Research participants ($N = 16$; 16–25 years of age) are drawn from various youth organisations operating in the Tottenham wards.

In shedding light on the discrepancy between how young people see themselves and how others—e.g., the media and politicians—view them, the study repudiates the common misconception that Tottenham's youths are a homogeneous entity; rather, it concludes that these young people embody a complex ensemble of heterogeneous identities, outlooks and reflexive capacities.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis began outside academia. The research problem emerged out of a concern expressed by a number of young people in Tottenham in the aftermath of the England riots of 2011. Drawing from personal and professional experience of working with youths in Tottenham, I repeatedly encountered young people who found that their identities were being misrepresented in the media. As a result of these misrepresentations, many of Tottenham's young people are regularly perceived in negative ways by people outside their "ingroup" (e.g., people who are not from Tottenham or of a different generation). While the "dominant discourse" painted a picture of youths from Tottenham and other "riot-affected areas" as "unreflective" citizens belonging to a homogeneous group, my own experience, just like the one narrated by the young people themselves, led to the opposite conclusion. Tottenham's young people are extraordinarily diverse both in terms of the heterogeneous reflexive orientations that they employ to negotiate their multiple identities, and in terms of their varied experiences and life trajectories. Youth diversity in Tottenham is, of course, also manifested by a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. More than 63% of Tottenham's population are from different black and minority ethnic communities, and almost 200 first languages are spoken by Tottenham residents (Haringey Council 2019a). Yet, much of the media and some politicians have had a tendency to put forward homogeneous representations of Tottenham youths. The discrepancy between the stereotypical and homogeneous portrayal of youths provided by many dominant groups, on the one hand, and my own experiences of Tottenham, on the other, led to the emergence of my initial research concern: how do youths, themselves, make sense of this discrepancy and how are youth identities formed and negotiated in the context of it.

In the early stages of the study process, the research concern moved toward focusing on the type of orientation that the young people possess when responding to these negative and homogeneous representations. Rather than welcoming representations that perceive Tottenham youths as a single social identity category, the majority of my study's research participants—all

linked to Tottenham—maintained that Tottenham represents a heterogeneous community consisting of youths that rarely reflect the stereotypical images presented by the media. Two subjective variables appeared to play an important part in scrutinising and laying down a rationale for rejecting such negative representations:

- (i) Many young people are active social agents who *reflexively deliberate* about how they identify themselves in relation to their social environment and, e.g., media representations.
- (ii) When constructing or rejecting identities, young people draw upon a series of *lived experiences* that accumulate over time into a “stock of knowledge.”

Although my thesis is empirical in nature with an empirical problem as its point of departure, the research questions that guide the present study are informed by (i) and (ii), above, which I shall refer to as my “ontological premises.”

The next step was to seek theoretical tools that could both act as a means to investigate the empirical problem and allow me to conceptualise the aforementioned ontological premises in a coherent way, without imposing a theoretical grid onto the subjective narratives and experiences of the research participants. This pushed my research towards a twofold goal:

- to engage with *empirical* questions that emanate from a substantive problem (e.g., “How do young people in Tottenham deal with stereotypical misrepresentations?” “Do stigmatised representations impact on youth-identity formation?”); and,
- to develop a fresh *theoretical* approach that can support the empirically-oriented research (e.g., a framework that can assist in explaining the link between “external” perspectives of youth identities and “internal” ones, and between young people’s reflexive activity and social experiences).

The assessment of both an empirical and a theoretical gap, accompanied by rich qualitative data and the development of a new theoretical approach, makes this study relatively unique in scope and ambition.

With the empirical concerns and the theoretical ambitions in mind, the purpose of the present study is to explore *how* young people in Tottenham:

- (a) experience, negotiate and make sense of their identities;
- (b) deal with the “dominant discourse” that appears to misrepresent Tottenham’s youths;
- (c) employ different reflexive orientations in the construction of youth identities; and,

- (d) draw on their past, lived experiences and social realities—reflexively or otherwise—when navigating multiple identities.

It goes without saying that at the heart of such an exploration lies the urgent need to take young people seriously by accommodating their subjective experiences, narrative accounts and own concerns. The study, therefore, prioritises what will later be referred to as the “*internal* aspect of identity,” which denotes the perspective of those whose identity is being described; namely, how young people in Tottenham see themselves. The study also looks at the “*external* aspect of identity;” namely, the identity of an individual or a group as perceived through the lenses of others than the one(s) whose identity is under scrutiny. Throughout Chapters 6 and 7, however, this “external aspect” is narrated by the young people themselves rather than the (external) sources responsible for constructing this aspect of identity and the negative representations that often comes with it. Only by listening to the (reflexive) voices of youths can we begin to uncover the “oppressive” effects of negative representations and “externally derived” identities, as well as the way that Tottenham’s youths mediate between how they see themselves (the internal aspect) and how others see them (the external aspect).

Identifying young people’s reflexive capacities appeared to be absent from the “dominant discourse” on youths in Tottenham. This shortcoming has given rise to representations of youths as homogeneous and unreflective. Contrary to the approach adopted by most of the literature on Tottenham since the 2011 riots, the next seven chapters demonstrate that by recognising how young people employ different reflexive orientations, we are in a better position to understand heterogeneous constructions of youth identities and life trajectories. For example, some of the research participants were surrounded by a relatively similar social environment, yet, their identities and transitions into adulthood differed to various degrees. It was therefore natural to ask, “What makes a particular person willing to *take on* a certain identity, while her similar-aged neighbour, who occupies the same social attributes, *rejects* it?” The concept of reflexivity helped to explain this phenomenon: divergent reflexive orientations can lead to divergent identity-forming processes and life courses. Despite the usefulness of this concept, my research realised quickly that identification of the reflexive capacities in young people was not enough; a novel construal of

reflexivity that also encompasses the reflexive subject's *biographical life history* and *social environment* was required.

The latter point is a crucial addition to the analysis of reflexive activity. Like many sociologists (e.g., Archer 2012; Brock *et al.* 2017; Caetano 2019; Farrugia and Woodman 2015; Sayer 2010; Telling 2016; Wimalasena and Marks 2019), I see lay reflexivity as having two qualities: first, it is the ability to *reflect upon ourselves while taking into account our social circumstances*; second, it *mediates between the social world and what we do or become*. However, many of these sociologists treat reflexive activity and the social realm as two entirely separate domains. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate in various ways how our reflexive orientations cannot help being shaped by previous social experiences. In other words, reflexive orientations must—at least to some extent—draw on past experiences or activity rooted in the social world. This claim makes it impossible, I shall argue, to draw a clear-cut line between reflexivity and the social realm. The result of this claim is the development of a novel theoretical framework that is able to account for the fact that reflexive orientations are both socially situated and historically constituted. Chapter 2 is entirely dedicated to outlining this alternative theory of reflexivity and the ontological consequences of accepting it, while Chapter 6 demonstrates how young people's reflexive attitude towards identity—and life more generally—is embroiled in previous social experiences.

An interdisciplinary approach to understanding youth subjectivities

The present thesis is situated at the crossroads of several fields of study and areas of knowledge production. Although it is hoped that the thesis makes a valuable theoretical contribution to youth studies and that its empirical findings is applicable to others interested in “youth reflexivity” and youth-identity formation, the research draws upon a wide range of sources beyond the confines of youth studies and sociology of youth. The following objectives propelled my research into new fields of study:

- to develop a new approach to reflexivity;
- to examine the socio-temporal dimension of agency;

- to analyse the complex composition of youth identities in the “super-diverse” area of Tottenham; and,
- to look at stereotypical youth representations in the aftermath of the England riots from young people’s perspective.

These objectives locate my study as an *interdisciplinary* construction with ties to social psychology, phenomenological sociology and critical realism (to mention but a few). This explains why there are few discussions in this thesis confined to the realm of youth studies alone.

The topic of youth is not incidental or coincidental to my thesis. Besides my previous experience in developing and delivering youth outreach programmes, there are at least two main reasons why the “life stage of youth” is the focus of this thesis. First, involving 16- to 25-year-olds from Tottenham as research participants has been important in order to shed light on those who bore the brunt of the media onslaught that followed the 2011 riots. Tottenham’s youths were described as “mindless criminals” with “low educational attainment,” “poor health” and a life of “workshyness.” According to a report put together by Boris Johnson (London’s mayor at the time of the riots), these everyday “realities” are “just a small number of the mutually reinforcing dynamics at play” (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012: 72; cf. Dillon and Fanning in press). In the eyes of most of the media and many politicians, young people in Tottenham (and other “riot-hit areas”) were solely responsible for the disturbances; anyone seeking to formulate an explanation “other than a behavioural one was stridently denounced as effectively condoning or supporting rioting” (Slater 2016: 122; see also Drury *et al.* 2019: 6). Ex-British Prime Minister David Cameron epitomised this line of thought. At a visit to a youth centre in his Witney constituency, he made it abundantly clear that “these riots were not about poverty” but rather “about behaviour. People showing indifference to right and wrong. People with a twisted moral code. People with a complete absence of self-restraint” (Cameron 2011b; quoted in Slater 2016: 132). A discourse emerged rapidly in the immediate aftermath of the riots, painting a homogeneous and stereotypical picture of youths in Tottenham, a picture that many of my research participants said they struggle to shake off. Since the voices of youths had been given remarkably little attention from commentators contributing to the mainstream discourse, the present thesis saw it as a priority to listen to the subjective narratives and experiences of Tottenham’s young people. The diverse young people from the “riot-affected area” of Tottenham, therefore, remain a particularly interesting locus for

the study of youth-identity formation in the context of negative representations. The present study, though, is about youths in Tottenham rather than the riots.

Second, another reason for focusing on the age range of 16 to 25 or “youth as a life course stage” is that processes of identity selection, formation and negotiation are believed to be heightened during young people’s transition to adulthood (Hitlin and Elder 2007: 184; Johnson and Monserud 2009: 384–5). Different “time points”—experiences and events—or “critical moments” (Thomson and Holland 2015) are said to affect life trajectories more greatly during the “youth stage.” It is also likely that the abovementioned negative and stereotypical representations have a greater effect on *youth*-identity formation than identity-forming processes at other periods of the life course. Despite defining “youth” as a crucial stage of development with far-reaching implications, the idea of a “youth stage” is a flexible one that cannot be tied to a specific age range. Even though it stands roughly between childhood and adulthood, the “youth stage” is merely an intermediary phase that transpires in vastly different ways and at slightly different time points of people’s lives (see, e.g., Furlong 2013). What follows, therefore, is not an analysis of youths as if they belong to one unified whole or an attempt to seek commonalities among youths; rather, the following seven chapters intend to recognise diversity and account for heterogeneity across Tottenham’s young people.

Although I use the term “youth” in its broadest sense,¹ I also see it as a relational concept (Wyn and White 1997: 147) that is measured up against how childhood and adulthood—as well as the transitions from dependence to independence, education to employment, and so forth—are *perceived locally* to my research participants. Youth, therefore, is understood as referring to young people in relation to specific contexts of meaning, which, in the case of my thesis, are the multiple identities and social processes associated with *becoming* an adult in the north London area of Tottenham.

For youth research, the concept of “transition” is of special importance because it refers to “the timing and duration of the passage to adulthood and stimulate investigations on how life chances, institutional regulations and individual decisions are related” (Heinz 2009: 3). Youth

¹ The concept of “youth” is broader than, for instance, the term “adolescence.” As Furlong (2013: 1) states, adolescence relates to “specific developmental phases, beginning with puberty and ending once physiological and emotional maturity is achieved.”

transition, just like the term “youth,” should be understood in relation to particular contexts of meaning. In a typical British neighbourhood, for instance, youth transitions are perhaps best understood as the “pathways that young people make as they leave school and encounter different labour market, housing and family-related experiences as they progress towards adulthood” (MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 31). Although I extend my discussion of youths to topics such as reflexivity and identity formation—both crucial components of young people’s transition into adulthood—there will be no attempts to analyse or tackle issues concerning youth transition head-on (for more detailed discussions of what youth transitions constitute, see Cieslik and Simpson 2013: 8–14; Druta and Ronald 2017; Farrugia *et al.* 2018; Gordon 2018; Irwin 1995: 2–3, 17–21, *passim*; Lee *et al.* 2018; MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 31–6, 46; Wyn and White 1997: 94–119; Zapata-Gietl *et al.* 2016). However, in §2.1.2, I shall outline how reflexivity in relation to young people’s more socially embedded dispositions are treated in youth studies.

Perhaps more crucial to the topic of this thesis than measuring youths up against earlier or later life stages is contrasting young people’s own perceptions of themselves with those who perceive or attempt to describe these young people from an “external perspective.” In the eyes of my research participants, this external perspective, or externally imposed identities, has proven to have long-term negative consequences for Tottenham’s youth community. The findings clearly demonstrate that the equation “youth plus Tottenham” carries negative and stigmatised connotations as a result of the perpetuation of the “dominant discourse” on youths in Tottenham, a discourse almost entirely controlled by “external perspectives,” such as the ones offered by the media, politicians and other powerful groups. The more we prevent youths from influencing the discourse about them, the more we allow for misrepresentations and negative stereotypes of youth to be constructed, reinforced and disseminated. In contrast, by listening to the actual voices of those whose identity is being described—those who inhabit the “internal perspective” and are, thus, in an “epistemically privileged” position—the “youth-plus-Tottenham” equation takes on entirely different connotations and associations: a range of goals and aspirations shine through; heterogeneous life trajectories and diverse identities become apparent; and, reflexive and creative capacities are in operation.

Overview of the chapters

What follows, then, is an empirical study that looks at the reflexive attitudes that Tottenham's young people adopt towards their identities and social environment. I have broken this study into roughly three parts: Chapters 2 and 3 uncover the *theoretical* underpinnings of my treatment of the concept of reflexivity and youth-identity formation; Chapters 4 and 5 outline the *methods, interview process, empirical operationalisation* of the research framework and *thematic analysis*; and, Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the *research findings*.

Chapter 1, on the other hand, provides an overview of how I arrived at the empirical problem. It shows the initial stages of the research journey, from identification of the empirical concern through formulation of the research problem to early reflection at the analytic and theoretical level. The chapter starts by offering a picture of the situational context and social environment to which Tottenham's youths are exposed. While §1.1.1 provides a brief overview of the emergence of "super-diversity" in Tottenham, §1.1.2 outlines the socio-economic context surrounding Tottenham's young people. Voluminous bodies of literature already exist on the subject of young people involved in the England riots, and especially in relation to the initial outbreak in Tottenham, some of which are critically reviewed in §§1.1.3 and throughout Chapter 1 (see also, e.g., Akram 2014; Bridges 2012; Briggs 2012; Carpio *et al.* 2012; Creaney 2014; Davies 2014; Dillon and Fanning 2015; in press; Drury *et al.* 2019; Elliott 2011; Fasel *et al.* 2016; Gordon 2018; Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012; Jefferson 2015; Lammy 2011; 2012; Lewis *et al.* 2011; McGeeney 2013; Murji 2018; Newburn *et al.* 2015; 2018; Power 2011; RCVP 2012; Rogers 2013; Smith 2015; Stott *et al.* 2017; Thomas 2012; Tiratelli 2018; Tyler 2013; Wessendorf 2014; Winlow and Hall 2012; Visser in press). Both the riots and the discourse that emerged in their aftermath have had an immense impact upon many youths in Tottenham and how they are perceived by people from outside the area. Even if the riots are not directly related to the topic of the forthcoming chapters, the effects of the "riot discourse" on youth-identity formation in Tottenham certainly are. The first part of Chapter 1 makes a clear indication that the "dominant discourse" misrepresents Tottenham's young people since its homogenous picture appears to be inconsistent with the actual heterogeneity and diversity of Tottenham residents.

§1.2 suggests that the public attention and literature surrounding Tottenham and the riots divide loosely into two camps. While one set of perspectives holds that young individuals are roughly to blame for their actions, the other set considers socio-economic factors to be behind the struggle that many young people go through. The former set is usually found in the media and political discourse while the latter is more common in sociology, particularly in fields such as criminology (Stott *et al.* 2017: 964). Unlike the condemnatory rhetoric put forward by mass media and politicians, a sociological reading of “riotous youths,” and young people more generally, tends to offer a more “empathetic insight” into the youths under scrutiny; rather than merely seeing them as *perpetrators*, the young people associated with the “riot-affected areas” are understood in relation to, for instance, social injustice, structural inequality, government cuts and, in the case of youths from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, institutional racism. By comparing *my own experience* (rooted in multiple conversations with Tottenham’s young people prior to embarking on the present research) with the *dominant discourse* usually dictated by the media and politicians, I hypothesised that it:

- differs from the way young people in Tottenham see themselves; and,
- has a tendency to portray youth identities and behaviours in negative and homogeneous ways.

I dedicate the last part of the chapter to briefly consider two theoretical approaches that *do* take into consideration reflexive activity and heterogeneous identities. I’ll start by taking a look at Ulrich Beck’s *individualisation thesis* and the related notion of “reflexive modernity,” and then move on to explore the ontological position of *critical realism*. Both the individualisation thesis and critical realism acknowledge heterogeneity and theorise how individuals increasingly have to reflexively shape their own paths through life. These positions are welcome additions as far as my research is concerned. However, both of these two approaches tend to lose sight of the more *embedded* social conditions. Since the *social* experiences of Tottenham’s youths play a significant role in the ways in which they navigate through life and negotiate the multiple identities, my study required an approach that could account for how reflexive activity can be continuous with “social embeddedness.” In other words, my research was in need of a fresh alternative or a framework that could complement the two aforementioned approaches.

Chapter 2 continues from where *Chapter 1* left off. It begins by facilitating a general outline of the concept of reflexivity and Margaret Archer's critical realism. The latter has been instrumental in triggering a wider debate about the structure–agency distinction and reflexivity's role of mediating between social structural factors and more agentic capacities. One problem with Archer's social theory, though, is that it insists on a separation between the agentic domain, such as reflexive activity, and the social domain. I go on to argue, in §2.1.1, that an alternative or complementary account to Archer's is required in order to address the fact that reflexivity does not operate in a social vacuum, but instead must draw on previous lived experiences that have accumulated over time through simply engaging in the social world.

Before I put forward an alternative account of reflexivity that demonstrates how a variety of reflexive orientations can be *both* an agentic capacity *and* socio-historically embedded, I outline how youth studies has grappled with the structure–agency distinction and, in particular, how youth sociologists have tried to couple the notion of reflexivity with Bourdieu's "habitus." Crucial to the development of my alternative approach to reflexivity are conceptual tools found in the field of phenomenological sociology. Especially, I borrow the Schützian notion of "stock of knowledge" (see, e.g., Atkinson 2010: 2, 14; Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991: 56; Elster 2017: 282–5; Schütz [1942–55] 1982: 9, 117; [1945] 1962: 208), which in a nutshell is a "stock" of series of lived experiences, as well as habitual and creative "source material," that bring meanings between ourselves and the social world. I claim further that *reflexive* activity makes use of the subjective stock of knowledge that has been accumulated across a person's life course. This, in turn, demonstrates how reflexivity comprises both agentic powers and socially embedded processes. The last "ontological premise" that I put forward in this chapter and base my thesis on is that a young person's stock of knowledge and reflexive orientations make a crucial contribution to youth-identity formation. As far as my research is concerned, thus, youth-identity formation involves temporal, social and mental phenomena: young people *draw from their lived experiences to date* while *navigate through social spaces* where the young people *employ different types of orientations* toward their identity. That is, the subjective aspect of identity involves, among other things, a reflexive agent that is also historically constituted and socially situated.

In *Chapter 3*, I move from focusing on reflexivity to a focus on identity. Before I outline what I mean by youth-identity formation, I provide an overview of two sets of terms; namely social

and personal identity, and the distinction between the “internal” and the “external” aspects of identity. Especially the last set is a vital addition to how I shall go about describing identity-forming processes among youths in Tottenham. While the *internal* aspect reflects the subjective experience that a person has of her or his identity, the *external* aspect operates independently of that person. These two aspects, I explain, should not be viewed as sharply delineated. I go on to suggest that youth-identity studies can benefit from prioritising the internal perspective of young people themselves rather than concentrating on the external aspect of identity, which is more common in sociological studies. By ignoring the internal aspect of identity—that is, by failing to incorporate young people’s subjective interpretations of their own identities—research on youth identity could end up reinforcing homogeneous representations and stereotyped identities.

I finish this chapter by discussing stereotyping processes and the social psychological concept of “self-stereotyping.” With the latter, “externally imposed” stereotypes become the salient feature of a person; in fact, the person, here, regards *stereotypes as self-defining*. Since questions about whether (young) people accept or reject stereotypes are vital in relation to youth transitions and socialisation processes, the concept of self-stereotyping is not only a useful conceptual tool for understanding the research issues relevant to the present thesis, but also a welcome contribution to youth studies and sociology more broadly.

Chapter 4 contains two parts that build on each other. The first part serves as a bridge between the forthcoming chapters and the earlier ones that cover the research concerns and theoretical framework. It also looks at the “fit” between the qualitative methods presented later in this chapter and the empirical operationalisation of the theoretical constructs that, of course, includes a new treatment of the concept of reflexivity. §4.1.1, furthermore, suggests that *interpretative phenomenological analysis* is perhaps the best way of analysing the young people’s subjective capacities and lived experiences. A key challenge here, though, is how to square interpretative phenomenological analysis’ focus on subjectivity and particularity—or “idiographic” research—with my study’s theoretical framework.

The second part of this chapter, outlines the fieldwork and the semi-structured interview process; the study’s research design, recruitment process and data collection; as well as, ethical concerns that inevitably spring from working with youths. §4.2.5 returns to the problem of examining the *particularity* of the research participants’ subjective answers while simultaneously

taking into consideration the *generality* of the “ontological premises”—e.g., the role of the “stock of knowledge” and reflexive orientations in youth-identity formation. To deal with this dilemma, I spell out how youths *generally* apply reflexivity and draw on the stock of knowledge when negotiating youth identities (an ontological assumption), but the way they do this and how it pans out *differ vastly from person to person* (a statement about particularity and subjectivity). While the ontology-based commitments shed light on what youth-identity formation consists of, the interview participants’ answers and the respective analysis of the interviews inform and produce “idiographic-based” research.

How I categorise and thematically analyse the interview transcript is the topic of *Chapter 5*. While certain themes, such as different “reflexive orientations” and “identity-forming processes,” emerged based on my study’s theoretical framework and ontological premises outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, other themes, such as “lived experiences” and “stereotypical representations,” emerged inductively from analysing the raw data. In the closing sections of this chapter (§§5.2–5.2.2), I show how the thematic analysis assisted me in systematising the complex relations between the biographical time points, which include multiple experiences across the lives of the research participants, and the reflexive attitudes that these participants have toward youth identities. This systematisation, in turn, provided interesting insight into how youths in Tottenham deal with, among other things, the many stereotypical media representations.

The remaining chapters discuss the research findings. *Chapter 6* offers an entirely different account of Tottenham’s youths than the one put forward by many dominant groups. The research participants state emphatically that they are regularly being misrepresented and misunderstood; that the media appears to have no real sense of what youths are going through; and, that the tendency to portray young people in Tottenham as a homogeneous entity couldn’t be further from the truth. The chapter, moreover, reveals the ways in which the interviewees from Tottenham represent a culturally *diverse* community and a *pluralism* of identities where *heterogeneous* modes of reflexive orientations are adopted in order to deal with a *variety* of social matters and life trajectories. The findings outlined in this chapter, accordingly, call into question the “dominant discourse,” which is sketched out in Chapter 1. That is, according to the research participants’ first-hand accounts, talk of youths in Tottenham as a homogeneous group and a “feral underclass” is a gross misrepresentation.

The first task of this chapter is to outline the different modes of reflexivity and how the young people in Tottenham employ them in a range of ways. Next, in §6.1.1, the aim is to tie the stocks of knowledge of lived experiences to how the youths reflexively negotiate the various available youth identities. This section provides multiple examples that illustrate different modes of reflexivity as well as experiences rooted in a mixture of different social relations, cultural backgrounds and ethnic communities, and, again, we see the heterogeneity across different social groups of youths. The purpose of the initial sections of this chapter is also to add empirical flesh to Chapter 2's theoretical framework for studying reflexive orientations. The research findings, in turn, have informed and tweaked the theoretical and conceptual constructs used in this thesis. The chapter draws to a close by considering different characterisations of gang members and whether gang culture is a prominent feature of Tottenham. This was a topic that came up during many interviews and exemplified the repeated frustration that young people in Tottenham have with the “external perspective” and its strong tendency to draw on stereotypical representations to depict youths.

Chapter 7 looks at the research participants' in-depth answers to “who am I?”- and “who are we?”-questions. Even though reflexivity is taking a back seat and the focus is shifting to youth-identity formation in this chapter, it does not mean that reflexive orientations are absent in the young people's narratives. Quite the opposite: reflexivity penetrates many aspects of the ways in which *they describe themselves* and their beliefs about how *others perceive them*. It is the *focus* of my empirical analysis that has shifted in this chapter, not the nature of how Tottenham's youths reflect on identity.

The conceptual tools used in this chapter to describe and explain what emerges from the findings correspond in many ways to the theoretical framework sketched out in Chapter 3. For example, §7.2 looks for themes in the findings associated with the two concepts “social identity” and “personal identity,” while §7.2.1 draws on Chapter 3's framework in order to identify and analyse “internal” and “external” aspects of identity within the empirical data. Interestingly, whereas the distinction between social and personal identity does not appear to be particularly salient in relation to processes involved in youth-identity formation, the internal–external distinction surfaces as key to understanding the oppressive effects of negative representations. Not only does the latter distinction shed light on the *discrepancy* between young people's perceptions

of themselves and the representations that others hold of them, it also elucidates the different forms of resistance and reflexive activity that youths engage to counter negative identities of themselves. In giving attention to the internal–external relation, we are in a better position to get to the bottom of how *externally* imposed identities—e.g., stereotypical youth representations—impact on, or are dealt with by, Tottenham’s youths. By occupying the *internal* perspective, the research participants claim that they are the most “epistemically privileged” when it comes to understanding their own identities and how they differ from the stereotypical representations. Throughout the thesis and especially in §7.2.1, I make it clear that this study pursues the same line of thought with respect to who possesses “epistemic privilege.”

The final part of this chapter consists of two sections. The first, §7.3, focuses on the research participants’ experiences of stereotypical representations. In this section, the participants offer insight into how and why they think stereotypes emanate from dominant groups, such as the news media. §7.3.1 provides a discussion of how young people understand the concept of “self-stereotyping” and whether self-stereotyping tendencies are common among youths in Tottenham. This concept, unfortunately, has not made its way into sociological analysis, which is strange since it is, in my view, as much a sociological matter as it is a psychological one. The findings, nevertheless, demonstrate little evidence of self-stereotyping behaviours among the research participants. That said, the participants were eager to talk about self-stereotyping processes—e.g., peers who “believe that there’s actually nothing out there for [them] except for these stereotypes,” as one of the participants puts it—and how to *challenge* or *avoid* engaging in self-stereotyping.

Despite the abundance of literature on the topic of youth-identity formation, little is known about the relationship between young people’s reflexive activity and identity processes in the context of being faced with negative stereotypes. To achieve this, I draw on a novel conceptual framework that facilitates the reflexive voices of youths and their multiple experiences. In centring the subjective accounts and experiences of youths, I hope to avoid imposing a theoretical grid on the narratives of the research participants. The idea of listening to the youths under scrutiny is also important because it is the “external perspective” that has dictated the discourse on Tottenham’s youths thus far. In paying attention to those who represent the “internal perspective,” as illustrated in the last two chapters of my thesis, we end up with an entirely different picture—a more authentic

and heterogeneous picture—of youth identities in Tottenham than if we rely on the “external perspective.”

Chapter 1

YOUTHS IN TOTTENHAM: BACKGROUND, APPROACHES AND A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE “RIOT DISCOURSE”

I am not alone in seeing Tottenham as a particularly interesting neighbourhood to study. Tottenham, in the London borough of Haringey, and its diverse communities have been under scrutiny by the press, politicians and sociologists since, at least, the 1985 Broadwater Farm riots when the police killed Cynthia Jarrett, a local Black woman, after an unwarranted intrusion into her home on Tottenham’s Broadwater Farm estate (see, e.g., Dillon and Fanning 2015: 196; Lammy 2011: 11–2; Waters 2019: 177). My reason and motive for putting Tottenham under the microscope, however, may differ from that of politicians, journalists and even colleagues in sociology. Drawing upon my own experience as a Tottenham resident, who has worked with local young people, I took issue with the dominant discourse on Tottenham’s youths that emerged from news stories and the House of Commons. This discourse appeared to me to fly in the face of young people’s own understanding of themselves and their local environment. This discrepancy between the way youths in Tottenham see themselves and the negative representations of the same youths guided me towards my research concern, which, in turn, set in motion the present qualitative research project, with the aim of gaining insight into:

1. how young people in Tottenham experience and negotiate identities (e.g., how do they perceive themselves and deal with stereotypical representations?);
2. whether the “dominant discourse” misrepresents Tottenham’s youths (e.g., are their identities as homogeneous as they are generally portrayed?); and,

3. the role of reflexivity in the construction of youth identities in Tottenham (e.g., to what degree are reflexive capacities involved in their identity formation?).²

The area of Tottenham is of extraordinary *complexity* and has been labelled “the most diverse constituency in the world” (Visser in press). Yet, the prevailing discourse paints a *homogeneous* picture of Tottenham’s young people, often accompanied by stereotypical representations. The purpose of the below, thus, is not to shore up the already existing discourse, but instead to challenge it and facilitate an “internal perspective” that comprises the reflexive activity and lived experiences of Tottenham’s youths themselves.

The majority of this chapter focuses on setting the scene and reviewing the relevant literature³ in relation to: first, where my study *takes place*; second, the *England riots of 2011* that followed the shooting of a Black man from Tottenham; and, third, how the *prevailing discourse treats youths in Tottenham and the 2011 riots*. The purpose of such scene-setting is to build up a picture of how I arrived at the empirical problem and the accompanying research questions. What immediately follows, then, provides background context and paves the way for the critical discussion and development of several conceptual and theoretical tools, tools that are merely means to investigate the empirical problem outlined in the present chapter.

The first couple of sections shows how the discourse on Tottenham and “riotous youths” is packed with “them-and-us attitudes.” Here, I claim that it appears to be in the interest of certain politicians and some of the media to emphasise a hard-and-fast division that misrepresents youths in Tottenham as a homogeneous “underclass.” The aim of this “division” is perhaps to separate “them” from the “rest of us”—the issue lies with “them,” not with “us”—and, thus, delegitimise claims that socio-economic factors, racism and governmental budget cuts played a role in the 2011 riots. Although my thesis is *not* about the England riots, I feel it necessary to summarise the different interpretations of the disturbances since they have had an immense impact on the way Tottenham youths are perceived, which, in turn, influences how these youths see themselves.

² Later chapters provide more detailed accounts of how I treat these concepts. For instance, while §§2.1–2.2 provide an overview of how I define “reflexivity,” Chapter 3 discusses different aspects of identity and §3.3 outlines, more specifically, what I mean by “identity formation.”

³ The present chapter is as much an outline of the *background* to the research problem as it is a *review* of the literature on Tottenham’s youths. My critical review of the more theoretically laden literature will extend beyond the present chapter into Chapters 2 and 3.

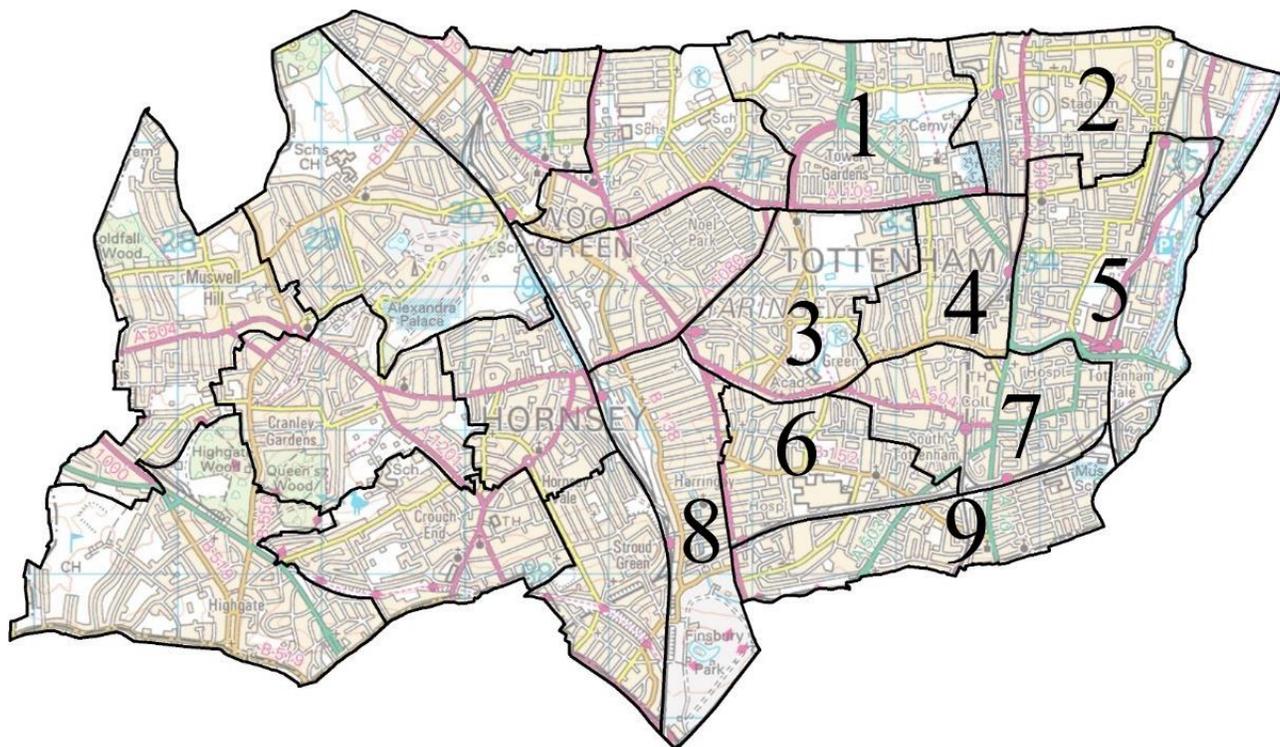
In §1.2 and its subsections, I shall sketch out what I believe to be two diverging sets of perspectives on youths associated with the riots. One set holds young individuals accountable for their actions and, in consequence, offers a *condemnatory* portrayal of many youths, delinquent or otherwise. The other set is for the most part more *empathetic* towards youths and considers structural inequality, institutional racism and socio-economic underdevelopment to be the main cause of the riots and the struggle that many young people go through. I link the former to the way youths are being represented in the *media* and *political discourse*. The latter set of perspectives, on the other hand, is more common in the *sociological literature* on the riots. In the aftermath of the riots, sociological studies seemed to operate as a counterbalance to the condemnatory and inflammatory tone of the more individualistic explanations put forward by the media and politicians.

Lastly, the final two sections of this chapter look at two theoretical positions that explicitly steer clear of any tendency to treat youths as passive and a homogeneous unit: the individualisation thesis, associated with Beck's reflexive modernity, and critical realism. Both positions take seriously the notion of *reflexivity*. The aim, here, is to ascertain whether either theory can assist my study in gaining significant insight into *how* youth identities (in Tottenham) are formed and negotiated in the social world. Although critical realists and proponents of the individualisation thesis do considerable justice to the diverse identities and heterogeneous life trajectories of young people by centring the concept of reflexivity in their respective theories, there are still grounds for concern. The individualisation thesis exaggerates the degree to which individuals are free from structural constraints, while *both* positions fail to provide an account of how our reflexive activity can be continuous with social embeddedness. This conclusion prepares the way for the next chapter, which outlines an alternative account of reflexivity that aims to recognise young people's capacity to reflexively orient their identities, but without denying the socially embedded aspect of identity formation. This account, I shall argue throughout the present thesis, provides us with the opportunity to more accurately explain and describe the complex combination of heterogeneous identities among youths in Tottenham.

1.1 Tottenham’s youths in context: diversity and the riots

One of the most culturally and ethnically diverse areas within the multicultural metropolis of London is the neighbourhood of Tottenham (Elster in press; Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012: 34, 45; Kesten and Moreira de Souza 2019: 53–6; Leurs 2018: 31; Mintchev and Moore 2018: 124, 30; Visser in press; Wessendorf 2014: 65) where my research was conducted. The last two centuries have seen various demographic transformations in Tottenham. In the next couple of sections, I shall outline the emergence of Tottenham’s super-diverse communities and the context in which youths in Tottenham find themselves.

The nine wards that make up the constituency of Tottenham are located in the east of the London Borough of Haringey (see map below). Although the east side of Haringey hosts the most sociocultural and ethnically diverse communities in the borough, a topic that I shall now turn to, Tottenham is also where Haringey’s most deprived wards are concentrated.



- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. White Hart Lane | 2. Northumberland Park | 3. West Green |
| 4. Bruce Grove | 5. Tottenham Hale | 6. St Ann's |
| 7. Tottenham Green | 8. Harringay | 9. Seven Sisters |

Figure 1 The London Borough of Haringey and its nine Tottenham constituency wards (mapped by the author)

Tottenham is culturally, ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. While Figure 2 shows the different ethnic composition of the wards associated with Tottenham (the area), Figure 3 provides an overview of the ethno-demographic developments of Tottenham (the constituency) over the past few decades. The latter figure shows a sharp decline in the proportion of white people. According to the 2011 Census, 47.6% of Tottenham residents referred to themselves as “white” or “white other” compared to an average of 79.8% for England (Nomis 2019). Without including those identified as “white other,” the decrease in “white and white other” population would be considerably higher since the last couple of decades have seen a substantial rise in the number of

Turkish and East European migrant who are likely to refer to themselves as “white other.” In fact, “white other” (25.2%) is now a larger category than “white British” (22.4%) in Tottenham (Nomis 2019). The large decrease in white British people is even more striking among young people; for instance, white British pupils are almost non-existent in some of Tottenham’s primary schools.

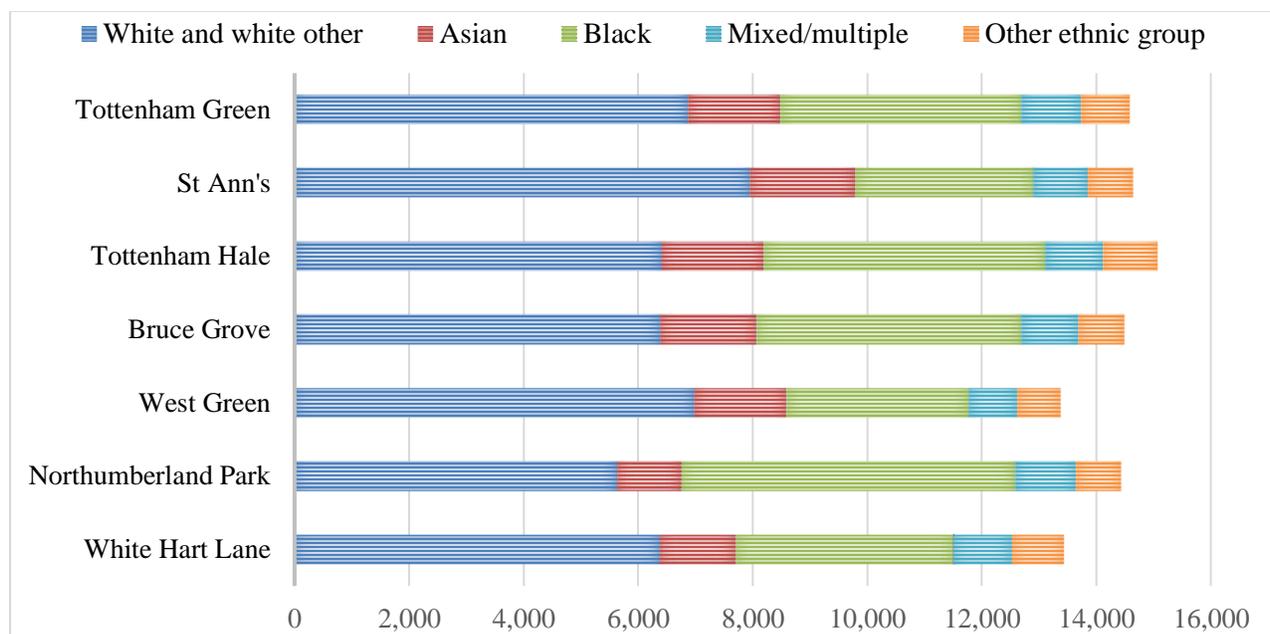


Figure 2 Ethnic groups in the relevant Tottenham wards

Data source: 2011 Census, Nomis (2019)

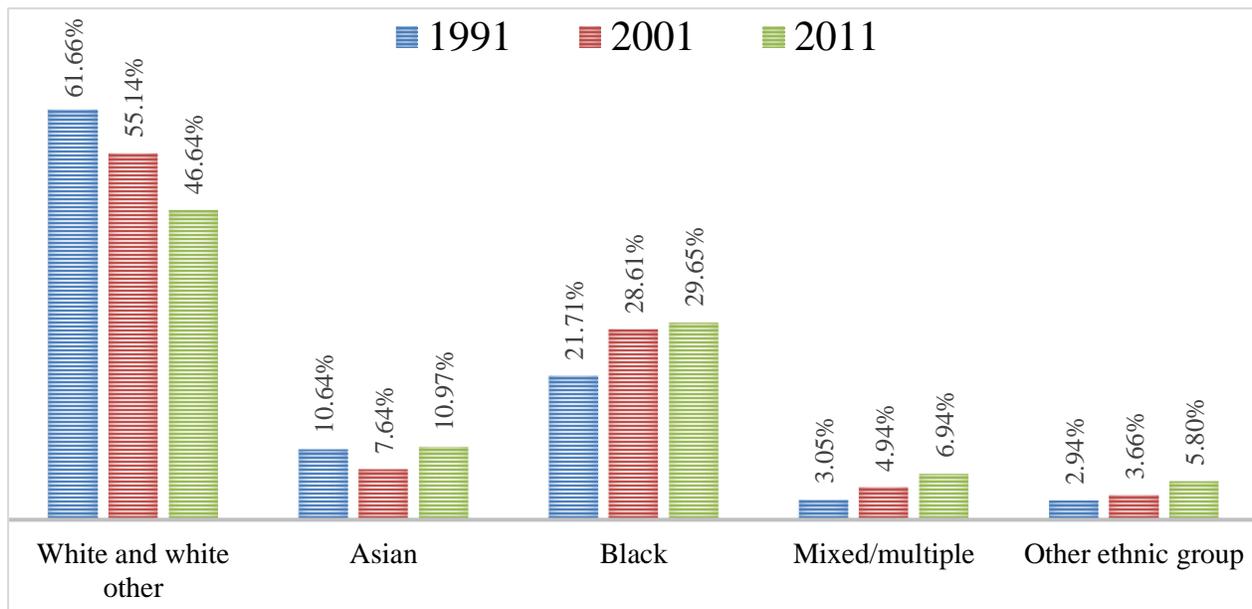


Figure 3 Change in ethnic groups in Tottenham between 1991 and 2011

Data source: Nomis (2019); small area statistics drawn up by the author

These demographic changes mean that today’s youths in Tottenham are surrounded by people of diverse ethnic and cultural origins where no single group dominates. But how did this “super-diverse” community come into being?

1.1.1 The emergence of “super-diversity” in Tottenham

The coming of the railways in the latter part of the nineteenth century allowed better transport links that introduced special workmen’s trains and stimulated significant population growth in areas such as Tottenham (Abernethy 2015: 76). As it became easier and cheaper to commute to inner London, Tottenham’s fields were transformed into affordable housing for working class people intent on relocating from the cramped and dire living conditions of the city (Haringey Council 2019b). While the population of Tottenham was only 9,000 in 1840, it rose to 100,000 by 1891 (McAndrew 2013).

From a high of 158,000 in 1931, the population dropped to 127,000 after WWII. Based on the 2011 Census (Nomis 2019), Tottenham now has a population of 129,000.

After WWII, council flats dominated construction programmes in Tottenham—notably at West Green’s Broadwater Farm and Northumberland Park (see map, Figure 1, above). This was a period of substantial change in Tottenham’s residential profile. In the late 1960s, alongside white “cockneys,” four large communities made up of Caribbean people, West Africans, Irish and Turkish-Cypriots were increasingly present in Tottenham (Visser in press). The next couple of decades experienced several waves of immigration that transformed Tottenham’s ethnic and socio-economic composition. With the arrival of additional immigrants—first from different Asian communities in the 80s, Somali and Kurdish refugees in the 90s, and later Eastern Europeans from 2000 onwards—Tottenham’s demographic pattern was about to become increasingly complex. The late Labour politician Bernie Grant, who was among the first black politicians to be elected as Member of Parliament in 1987 (for Tottenham) and was, in 1985, the first black leader of a local authority (Haringey council) in Europe, pointed out:

...in my area, Tottenham, housing is mixed among the various races—blacks are mixed with whites and Asians and people from Cyprus, and it’s all one big cosmopolitan bundle.

(Quoted in Gates 1999: 190–1)

Since Bernie Grant’s death in 2000, Tottenham’s diversity has continued to grow with residents representing a widening range of countries of origin, ethnicities, religions, age profiles and labour market experiences. And with more than 200 first languages spoken (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012: 34), few other places in the world can boast of a more diverse cultural and ethnic environment than this corner of north London. Tottenham is, therefore, emblematic of London’s diverse communities and in some respects a paradigm example of so-called “super-diversity”—a term that asks us to consider continuing demographic transformations and a wider range of differences (as well as similarities) within and between groups. The latter consideration plays an important part of this thesis.

The notion of “super-diversity” was first coined by Vertovec (2007: 1024) and is intended to “underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything [...] previously experienced.” Although it denotes increased diversity that often results in a “dynamic interplay of variables,”

including country of origin, ethnicity, cultural values and religious tradition (*ibid.*), it is crucial to point out that there has not been “a point in the history of London when cultural differences have not played a significant role in shaping the life of the city” (Keith 2005: 262). Still, what we are currently witnessing in Tottenham, and London more generally, as Vertovec (2007: 1025; see also Mintchev and Moore 2018: 121) highlights, is not only “difference” or “diversity,” but a matter of “diversification of diversity.” Identities and ethnic categories are more fluid; life trajectories are less predictable and sometimes non-linear; all of which may result in new social formations (see, e.g., Kraftl *et al.* 2019).

The term “super-diversity” emerged out of a growing need among social scientists to seek ways of “describing and talking about increasing and intensifying complexities in social dynamics and configurations at neighbourhood, city, national and global levels” (Vertovec 2019: 135). Although it is essential to take into consideration the fact that many areas across the world entail a variety of ethnic and cultural groups that live side by side with one another, it is equally important to keep in mind that each individual within such a diverse community is not in a position to pick and choose identities at will. Besides, having a distinct cultural identity while living in the midst of culturally diverse identities are not a contradiction. For instance, Kesten and Moreira de Souza (2019: 64–5), whose research involves residents in the London Borough of Haringey, including Tottenham, conclude that most of Haringey’s residents see neighbourhood diversity as a normal part of everyday life, but this typically does not extend beyond the public sphere. Within the private sphere, the majority of the residents are more “insular” and activities are more embedded in respective cultural heritages. Therefore, despite the importance of taking account of the heterogeneity when focusing on super-diverse communities such as Tottenham, mental and social lives of residents living in areas steeped in diversity should never be treated as socially disembedded. As I shall claim throughout this thesis, individuals surrounded by diversity still draw on social experiences that are rooted in more embedded processes.

An upshot of living in a super-diverse location such as Tottenham, in the view of Wessendorf (2014: 119), is the *multiple experiences of contact across differences*. Both the latter and the idea of getting on with each other regardless of your neighbour’s background are for many Tottenhamites a given. As Camille, one of my study’s participants, states: “it’s just the norm to have lots of people from different cultures around you.” Diverse communities like Tottenham,

according to a report issued by the neighbouring Hackney council (quoted in *ibid.*: 52; see also Hackney Policy Team 2018: 14), tend to make it “hard for people to make assumptions about other people’s background, limiting the extent to which stereotypes about different groups can build up.” In Wessendorf’s study, many Hackney residents agree with the author that

initial mistrust disappears once people get to know each other a bit better, and that much of this mistrust was based on stereotypes. Rather than using the example of cultural differences, they mention stereotypes against teenagers, which they found unfair and unjustified.

(Wessendorf 2014: 118)

This is corroborated by Mintchev and Moore (2018: 120): “People in diverse areas who actually interact with others across ethnic divides are more likely to have higher levels of trust than those who do not, as are younger cohorts who are used to living in a mixed environment.”

Mutual respect across a range of ethnic groups, as well as a sense of place and community, is strong among Haringey’s population: more than four in five Haringey residents say “there are good relations between different ethnic and religious communities” (Haringey Council 2019a). This is substantiated in Visser’s study (in press). According to her research findings, Tottenham’s diversity gives the young people a sense of belonging and facilitates relatively “harmonious relations amongst ethnic groups.” It provides youths, furthermore, with a social space in which they can “be themselves and where they [can] claim their multiple identifications with confidence” (*ibid.*). Perhaps the most important reason for valuing Tottenham was the “feeling that they were not judged by their peers on the basis of their race, ethnicity or class, where this was often the case outside their neighbourhood” (*ibid.*). For some of these young people, thus, Tottenham’s diverse neighbourhoods appear to stand as a “safe space” that afford relative freedom from being regularly subjected to misrepresentations or “othering” processes.⁴ A recent study by Kesten and Moreira de Souza (2019: 55–6) also confirms that Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in Tottenham’s borough, Haringey, lauded the “diversity of their neighbourhood as providing them with a sense of comfort and security.” Insofar as neighbourhood relations are concerned, thus, a

⁴ As we shall see in §7.1, some of the research participants in the present study also stress that the probability of experiencing “othering” or being subjected to discrimination and misrepresentation increases whenever they are outside of Tottenham.

“super-diverse context offers, for the most part, a safe environment where people can thrive without fear of everyday racism,” as Mintchev and Moore (2018: 130) indicate. Contrary to the negative press coverage that Tottenham received in the aftermath of the England riots, it appears that Tottenham, alongside many other diverse areas, is able to facilitate a positive environment where individuals and groups do not feel like “outsiders,” or the embodiment of “difference.” This is perhaps the result of the fact that in Tottenham *no single ethnic group dominates*.

1.1.2 Tottenham’s socio-economic environment

The experiences, constraints, opportunities and trajectories facing Tottenham’s young people are not only determined by their diverse local environment. Needless to say, a wider set of socio-economic factors and relations also plays a role in their lives. While diversity is generally perceived as being a positive attribute of Tottenham by local residents, many Tottenhamites recognise a range of more negative, local issues: deprivation, unemployment, knife crime, disproportionate impact of stop-and-search on Black people and other discriminatory treatment of BAME communities, as well as a more recent issue: gentrification.

Research by End Child Poverty (2018) indicates that 42.6% of children in Tottenham are living in poverty, making it one of the constituencies with the highest level of child poverty across the UK. Tottenham is one of the “‘most economically deprived areas in the country’ with some ‘desperately rundown’ housing [and] ‘few amenities for young people’” (The Guardian newspaper, quoted in Jefferson 2015: 12). As the map in Figure 1 (see §1.1, above) shows, Tottenham is located in the east of the London Borough of Haringey; and, as is shown on the map below (Figure 4), the most deprived neighbourhood areas are more heavily concentrated in the east side of Haringey. Figure 4 displays the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) percentile by “small neighbourhood areas” (SNA) in Haringey (DCLG 2015). The Index takes into consideration an array of deprivation types, including employment, education, income, crime, health, living environment and barriers to housing and services. The lower the percentile, the higher level of deprivation. According to IMD, areas in the 10th percentile (those shaded darkest on the map) are amongst the 10% most deprived SNA in England. More than half of Tottenham’s SNA fall into the 20% most deprived in England.

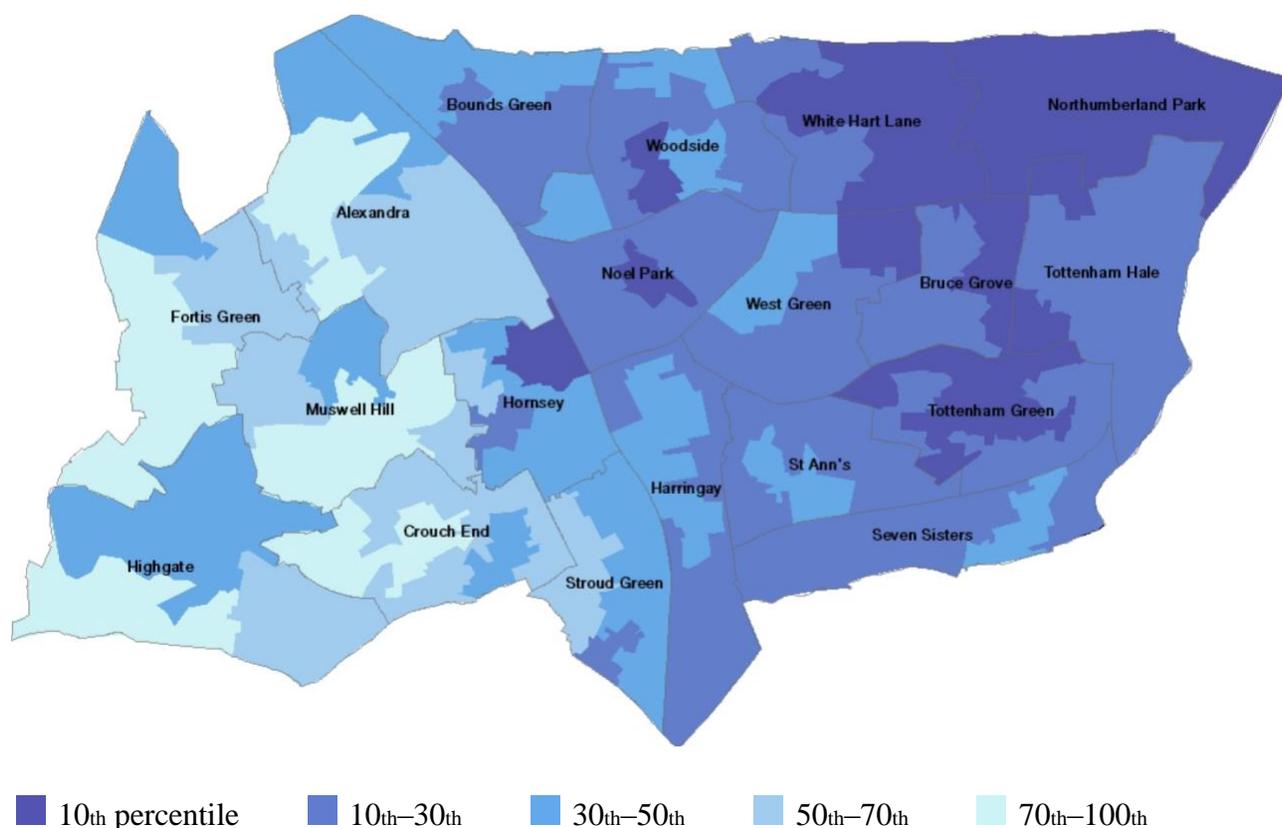


Figure 4 Index of Multiple Deprivation: deprivation decile by small neighbourhood areas

Data source: DCLG (2015)

Residents in the constituency of Tottenham, furthermore, are three times (11.1% compared to 3%) more likely to be without qualifications than in the remaining parts of Haringey. There is also substantial discrepancy in income between those living in the Tottenham constituency and those in west Haringey. “Median hourly pay of residents in the west is in line with the London top quartile, while those in the east earn 33% lower” (Haringey Council 2019a). Again, the contrast between east Haringey, which is essentially Tottenham, and west is stark.

Unemployment rates are higher in Tottenham than the London average. 4.7% of Tottenham’s working population claimed unemployment benefits in 2014, almost twice the London average (Visser in press). Tottenham’s high unemployment figures also reveal that “54 people chasing each

registered employment vacancy” (Jefferson 2015: 12). In the wake of the riots, one Tottenham ward, Northumberland Park (where some of my study’s interview sessions took place), had the highest out-of-work benefit claim rate, at 31.5%, in the whole of London (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012: 45).

The report *It Took Another Riot* (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012), produced on behalf of London’s Mayor at the time of the riots, Boris Johnson, characterises housing in the area of Tottenham as “poor quality,” “poor households” and “a poorly managed built environment” (see also Dillon and Fanning in press). However, with excellent transport to central London and relatively low property prices, Tottenham has become a target for gentrification. Since the England riots of 2011, the state of affairs in Tottenham has provided opportunities for developers to accelerate and intensify efforts to redevelop Tottenham for affluent commuters, which, in turn, has triggered a wave of developments that are changing both Tottenham’s “architectural topography and socio-demographic profiles” (Dillon and Fanning 2015: 193). With regards to the ethnic composition of Tottenham’s wards, the next census (due in 2021) will most likely reflect these burgeoning developments and, thus, buck the demographic trend outlined in Figure 3, above, since the most recently arrived Tottenham residents appear to be the white British, middle class “gentrifiers” (cf. Kesten and Moreira de Souza 2019: 48). At any rate, Tottenham has a long history of solid local activism, which has turned the recent gentrifying developments into a key battleground. For instance, two-thirds of Tottenham’s St Ann’s Hospital site was due to be sold for development of private housing, but a community-led bid for affordable, low-impact housing managed by a group of local Tottenham residents (St Ann’s Redevelopment Trust) halted this process through participatory planning practices (StART 2019).

Underlying the variety of social issues facing Tottenham, it has been suggested (e.g., Drury *et al.* 2019), is the Conservative policies and public sector cuts, designed to respond to the “economic crash” that plunged Britain into recession in 2008. As a result, drastic cuts to Haringey Council’s youth services, which the past decade have become virtually non-existent, affected many youths in Tottenham badly. Whilst working with young people in Tottenham, both prior to and after ex-Prime Minister David Cameron’s 2010 launch of the so-called “Big Society” agenda, I had first-hand experience of how the harsh austerity cuts destabilised Tottenham’s local communities and public services, especially youth provisions. Stott *et al.* (2017: 969) report:

As part of its attempt to shave £41 million from its budget, Haringey Council announced in January 2011 that it would cut its youth service spending by roughly £2 million. By February 2011, eight youth centres had been closed and other services such as after-school clubs and employment support removed.

Deprivation, unemployment, housing deregulation, “precaritisation” in the labour market and cuts to crucial youth services, combined with high levels of stop-and-search—police powers rooted in institutional racism—left many of Tottenham’s youths feeling aggrieved. And when an unarmed Black man from Tottenham was shot dead by the police, the situation for some local youths had reached breaking point. Many political and social commentators link this series of events, along with the aforementioned social issues and policy problems, to the disturbances that escalated into the riots that took place throughout England in August 2011.

1.1.3 The 2011 England riots: background, readings and responses

The England riots of 2011 and their many interpretations gave rise to a wide range of debates, penetrating not only academic and political discourse, but also milieux frequented by the present study’s research participants. Although my study is *not* about the riots, their causes or outcomes, many interviewees utilised the riots as a central reference point and spoke of it as a crucial “time point”—a pivotal moment—in their transition into adulthood. The aim of this section is merely to provide context in which the research problem is rooted by summarising the England riots—an event significant to the young people interviewed—and the relevant literature and interpretations that have impacted on how Tottenham is perceived since the disturbances.

The England riots was one of the events that defined recession-era Britain (Tiratelli 2018: 64). The spark that ignited the initial unrest in Tottenham was a response to the fatal shooting of Mark Duggan, a young Black male from Tottenham’s Broadwater Farm estate, and the fact that his family received no formal notice of the killing. With a long-standing hostile relationship between local police and youths, the failure to address the concerns of Mr Duggan’s family was all too familiar to the crowd that gathered outside Tottenham police station on 6 August 2011. This peaceful protest turned sour when no high-ranking officer was prepared to talk to the protesters, which included friends and family of Mr Duggan as well as many community representatives. The

next four days and nights, about 15,000 individuals took to the streets as the unrest spread to several cities across England, resulting in five people losing their lives, while hundreds of people and police officers were injured. In line with the most recent outbreaks of riots, “‘riot hotspots’ were areas of high and rising unemployment” as well as deprivation (Jefferson 2015: 12; see also Drury *et al.* 2019: 10).

As the fourth night of rioting was looming, David Cameron, fresh from his holiday in Tuscany, addressed the nation. Cameron’s “insight” couldn’t be further away from the essence of the social issues that underlay the riots. Yet, he spoke with authority as if he had the decisive diagnosis of the root causes. Cameron and his Conservative Party colleagues painted a stereotypical picture of those involved in the riots and repeatedly referred to them as members of a “feral criminal underclass” (Clarke 2011; Home Affairs Committee 2011: 5; cf. Lammy 2011: 55–7). Rather than trying to understand the hardship and discriminatory treatment that some of the young people had experienced over many years, their picture was entirely painted based on a tiny minority of “riotous youths.” To solely focus on those five days in August 2011, thus, is “both misleading and disingenuous to those communities that [experienced] harsh austerity cuts, the de-stabilisation of their local communities, and a shift in policy focus from welfare to the criminalisation of the poorest members of our society” (McKenzie 2013: §1.1). Take, for instance, the disproportionate impact of stop-and-search on Black people conducted in Tottenham’s borough, Haringey. In the month of June alone, two months before the 2011 riots, the Metropolitan Police Service conducted

1,614 stop-and-searches in Haringey, of these 91.4% did not lead to any arrest. Such activities were likely to have been highly racialized. In London in 2009, 210 out of 1,000 black people were stopped compared to 76 out of 1,000 for whites.

(Human Rights and Equalities Commission, quoted in Stott *et al.* 2017: 969)

Instead of listening to the experiences and concerns of local people in the “riot-hit areas,” and instead of changing the (harmful) policies and practices that were at the heart of the grievances leading to the disturbances in Tottenham, the British government reinforced policies connected to social and economic injustices (Lewis *et al.* 2011; Newburn *et al.* 2018). Within weeks of the unrest, stop-and-search practices targeting young ethnic minority members increased, while stigmatising representations of youths in Tottenham and other areas associated with the riots intensified. Ironically, as Fasel *et al.* (2016: 673) point out, “it was precisely these discriminatory

practices that were among the core reproaches against authorities made by the rioters in the first place.”

The disturbances in Tottenham also resulted in the government “starting to pump money,” in the words of Haringey’s mayor Sheila Peacock, into Tottenham. Under these circumstances, Peacock stated controversially that the 2011 riots were “the best thing that’s happened in Tottenham for a while” (The Times 2013). Although government investment into Tottenham was seen as long overdue by many locals, the investment, predictably, took shape in the form of a neoliberal, property-led regeneration scheme (Tiratelli 2018: 79). Some interviewees, as outlined in the chapters discussing the findings, brought up these local regeneration initiatives in the interviews. Their reactions to the recent changes in Tottenham varied as they felt that some things were now better, some things were worse and some things were the same. However, they were generally disappointed that the changes appeared to materialise merely in terms of regeneration and gentrifying tendencies rather than developing community programmes and already existing initiatives. The observation of my interviewees is reiterated in Dillon and Fanning’s (2015: 188) article that examines urban policy responses to the riots: instead of emphasising community development, the *Plan for Tottenham* (Haringey Council 2012), which involves explicit goals of gentrification, “echo Thatcher-era approaches to ‘place shaping’ and exemplify a wider re-emphasis on property-led regeneration.”

The government’s *reading* of, and *policy response* to, the riots, thus, appeared to be aligned. By delegitimising claims that socio-economic factors, discrimination and governmental budget cuts played some role in the 2011 disturbances, the government was in a position to dismiss calls for changes to police practices and investment in community development and youth services. Instead, the government discourse laid the groundwork for a neoliberal-led “place shaping” of “riot-affected areas.” Many critical voices, however, challenged the “dominant discourse” that emerged in the wake of the riots. For instance, as we shall now turn to, the mainstream media’s and the Government’s reading and response to the England riots and youths in Tottenham are in stark contrast to that of numerous sociological commentators.

1.2 Diverging perspectives on youth subjectivities in “riot-hit areas”

One central point of departure for this study concerns the polarised debate that erupted in the aftermath of the riots. Although Tottenham’s youths were key “protagonists,” caught in the middle of this debate, some of the youths interviewed, as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, felt that those dominating the debate lacked interest in factoring in the experiences and concerns of young people in Tottenham. The “two sides” of the debate correspond to two diverging perspectives on youths that deal with separate sets of descriptive and explanatory issues. One set emphasises agency and individualism as it holds young people accountable for their own life trajectory and identity formation. This set of perspectives often involves a condemnatory portrayal of youths as irresponsible and vile with indifferent parents. In regards to the riots, this set sees the explanatory issues as involving *immediate* causes, as opposed to *underlying* ones (Davies 2014: 81), and associates the motives of the rioters with destruction for the sake of it (cf. Husband *et al.* 2016: 25), inexcusable criminality (cf. Kelsey 2015: 245–6) and criminal opportunism (cf. Tiratelli 2018: *passim*).

The other set of explanations and descriptions adopts a more empathetic attitude towards youths. Instead of blaming individuals for being irresponsible, this perspective looks at structural inequality and institutional racism, as well as social and economic underdevelopment, as the potential roots of the distress that youths in Tottenham and those involved in the 2011 riots may face across their life course. As far as explanatory statements are concerned, this perspective emphasises the underlying causes of the riots, arising from “regressive socio-economic changes that have taken place in Britain” (Davies 2014: 81; also, cf. Newburn *et al.* 2018: 340).

The dichotomy illustrated in these two opposing portrayals and explanatory claims about “riotous youth identities” is reminiscent of the structure–agency problem that permeates most fields of the social sciences, including youth studies. Coffey and Farrugia (2014: 461) provide an overview of how they see divisions among youth sociologists in debates about agency, with some accused of ignoring agency and others of celebrating it and thereby ignoring “the continued importance of structural issues such as class inequality or entrenched gender divisions.” For instance, many youth sociologists that draw on Beck ([1986] 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; 2009) are regularly depicted as overemphasising agency and, as a consequence, downplaying

economic and social structures. Followers of Beck claim that we are witnessing a disintegration of certain structures and traditional social ties that leads to an increase in agentic capacities. They may base such a claim on processes of *individualisation* that is characteristic of “reflexive modernity,” a social-theoretical approach that I shall discuss in more detail and put to the test later in this chapter.⁵

In contrast, other youth sociologists draw on, for instance, Bourdieu ([1980] 1990), claiming that youth identities and biographies still vary according to social ties and depend on the deep-rootedness of the social *habitus*. Even in today’s individualistic society, young people live with structural constraints and have little choice but to follow the accepted rules and conventions of social institutions in which they live. Youth subjectivities and identities are, thus, far from being cut off from structural influences. Identity work among young people, as France (2007: 158) points out, is not merely “a form of ‘pick and mix’ process.”⁶ However, as will be outlined in §2.1.2, youth studies scholars, the last couple of decades, have found valuable ways to avoid treating youth subjectivities and reflexive (and other agentic) activity as separate from the social realm and, thus, allow for both structural components *and* agency in their analyses.

Lurking in the shadows of the different attitudes and approaches to analysing the England riots and Tottenham’s youths is precisely the structure–agency dichotomy. On the one hand, there are those who argue that the youths in question act to produce particular results. Young adults are thus responsible for any shortcomings or lack of progress that might arise in their lives. This line of argument often sets aside all empathetic considerations and instead condemns young people for any setbacks they may face or delinquencies they may commit regardless of their socio-economic environment. The latter two chapters of this thesis, where I discuss the research findings, reveal how young people in Tottenham feel they are being lumped together under the same stereotypical

⁵ Even though my own experience with Tottenham’s “super-diversity” and young people’s heterogeneous reflexive capacities calls for a theory *à la* Beck’s individualisation thesis, further scrutiny, as I shall point out shortly, reveals some potential limitations to theories such as Beck’s.

⁶ Of course, not all youth sociologists think we are caught in an either/or situation here. Threadgold (2011: 388–9), for example, chooses a “middle ground position” as his research on youth draws on both Beck *and* Bourdieu, the concepts of reflexivity *and* habitus. A different sort of “middle ground position” emerges out of Irwin’s (2005: 108–9, *passim*) examination of key changes and heterogeneity in family forms, life courses, youth transitions and social life more generally. Irwin identifies a conceptual gap between “subjectivities and social structural processes” and provides the theoretical means to deal with both the “contexts of subjective experience and how they mesh within a broader structure,” in which, among other things, identity-forming processes occur.

headings (e.g., involvement in delinquency) and held responsible for any immorality associated with the assumed stereotypes (e.g., any delinquent activity is caused by factors “within” the young person) even though they couldn’t be further removed from the stereotypical traits in the first place (e.g., no involvement in, or even exposure to, delinquent peer networks). I shall now take a look at how large portions of the media and the political establishment constructed and drew on these assumed stereotypes.

1.2.1 Negative representations of youths, Tottenham and the riots in the media

The media is perhaps the most significant factor in reinforcing stereotypical representations of youths. This is strikingly corroborated by my research findings. Many of the research participants were eager to talk about how media representations misrepresent and affect their lives. One interviewee, Amaia, stressed that “the media influences the way people think and perceive us,” while Lesedi shed light on the negative effects that transpire when the “media talks about gangs and Tottenham as if this is a big part of our everyday lives.” This “is not who we are and [it] doesn’t define us; you can’t define us from the way that the media portrays us,” another research participant, Chantal, added.

Tottenham’s residents are used to being portrayed in negative terms. Whether we talk of public discourse, news media or the House of Commons, Tottenham and especially its youths are nearly always spoken of in the same breath as harmful and stereotypical images. Take for instance a recent TV episode of *Countryfile*, a weekly BBC show that reports on rural and environmental issues. Harrowing scenes of violence, police clashing with local youths and firefighters extinguishing flames from burning vehicles are contrasted with the idyllic scenery of a newly-regenerated park. *Countryfile*’s Paul Martin, in a voice-over, portrays Tottenham as “one of the most deprived areas of Britain; [...] haunted by the Broadwater Farm riots, [where nearly] 100 people ended up in hospital, and policeman PC Keith Blakelock lost his life.” He continues, “[b]ack in the late-80s, the Broadwater Farm estate was a no-go gangland ghetto” (BBC 2018). Although the programme was a relatively “innocent” portrayal of a rejuvenated recreation ground, BBC

deemed it necessary to employ stereotypical and negative images simply because the park is located in Tottenham.

Negative representations in the media have a profound psychological influence on both the attitudes of the perceivers—those who perceive a particular group or individual through the lens of media representations—and the perceived. Certain branches of sociology have a long-standing interest in the influence of media representations on people’s perceptions of disadvantaged and minority groups (Jengolley and Clawson 2019). Some sociologists (e.g., Creaney 2014: 171; Kelsey 2015: 244; Newburn *et al.* 2018: 346; O’Brien Castro 2017: 179–81) claim that negative images are a part of the mainstream media’s aim of mobilising ideological constructions. The constructions relevant to the topic under scrutiny involved stereotypical identities of youths, often from underprivileged backgrounds, where (neoliberal) individualistic explanations of the riot events were regularly drawn up. This furthered a “scapegoating venture” of blaming youths for being the harbinger of civil commotion. This “venture,” in turn, reduces the demand for any *socio-economic* explanation, and, thus, facilitates the right set of circumstances for dominating groups to distance themselves from any serious debate about links between, for instance, deprivation and dissent.

In contrast to those from BAME communities or more unprivileged backgrounds, some young “rioters” were exempt from negative and stereotypical media coverage. The “curious case” of Laura Johnson is such an example. The Sun newspaper, which for the most part approved of ex-Prime Minister David Cameron’s “criminality, pure and simple” rhetoric while repeatedly whipping up jingoistic sentiments towards Britain’s marginalised groups, gave the “Johnson case” the following slant:

A teenage girl hauled into court for *allegedly* being part of a mob of 200 looters is the privileged daughter of millionaire parents. Laura Johnson, 19—one of dozens to appear in court yesterday—is *said to have* been arrested behind the wheel of a car filled with stolen electrical goods, cigarettes and alcohol worth over £6,000. [...] Privately-educated Johnson has two brothers. Neighbour David Turner said: “They are *a nice, respectable* family. They *never caused any problems.*”

(The Sun 2011, my italics)

Kelsey (2015: 255) observes as follows: “It is significant that [The Sun’s story about Laura Johnson] featured a background source expressing such surprise, describing the Johnson’s as a ‘nice, respectable family’. The concept of feral teenagers or family background is implicitly excluded from the Johnson family profile, unlike those of other rioters that fit the more predictable stereotype of a ‘sick society.’” Media representations of Tottenham’s youths, by contrast, are likely to be in tune with the “predictable stereotype of a ‘sick society.’”

Crucial to my thesis, however, is the observation that the media is in the habit of not only leaving out socio-economic factors, but also the *voices of youths*. An in-depth exploration of the impact of negative media reporting on the experiences of young people—how they see themselves *vis-à-vis* the impact of negative representations—which is what my thesis aims to do (among other things), can only, in the words of Gordon (2018: 178), “be attempted through an inclusion of the voices of [...] young people.” Some attempts at offering first-hand accounts of young people’s experiences of both the 2011 riots and (the impact of) negative media representations have been made. For instance, the report *Reading the Riots* (Newburn *et al.* 2018)—jointly conducted by *The Guardian* newspaper and the *London School of Economics*—based its empirical discussion on 270 interviews with those involved in the riots, while Baker (2012; for relatively similar efforts, see McGeeney 2013: §3.3; McKenzie 2013) included the voices of young people in Tottenham in her analysis of the role of social media in the riots. Through the voice of Daphne (a young woman from Tottenham), Baker (2012: 179) draws attention to media misrepresentations of youth by highlighting the disjuncture between how the unrest was perceived by local “Tottenhamites” compared to the representations put forward by the mainstream media:

Basically the way it was portrayed [in the mainstream media] was that it was [Tottenham residents’] stupidity. So I wasn’t really happy with the way it was portrayed. So, it was a bit patronising...

In taking *subjective first-hand experiences* into account, the analysis has the potential to avoid simplistic, top-down perspectives and one-dimensional, homogeneous portrayals, as is all too often the case in media coverage of youths.

1.2.2 Tottenham and the riots in political discourse: revisiting the “underclass” debate

In the UK, many politicians and political parties utilise the news media for their own purposes by aligning the output of the news coverage with that of their political goals.⁷ Their line of action often resorts to “individualistic explanations” that construct stereotypical representations of unprivileged and minority communities. These explanations and constructions are in stark contrast to those of a sociological hue. With respect to the 2011 riots, Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, couldn’t make the hostility between media and politicians, on the one side, and sociologists, on the other, any more explicit:

It’s time we stopped hearing all this (you know) nonsense about how there are deep sociological justifications for wanton criminality and destruction of peoples’ property.

(Quoted in Murji 2018: 1828)

Johnson, here, speaks on behalf of a socio-economic system steeped in neoliberal ideology that encourages us to believe that decisions concerning our lives are not only actively made, but also free from constraints. By keeping sociological aspects of the riots to a minimum, Johnson’s narrative misrepresents and criminalises a huge group of young people moving in underprivileged circles. Johnson’s (and others’) focus on criminality also served “as the basis for refusing demands for a major public inquiry” (Newburn *et al.* 2018: 340). David Cameron backed up this approach by confining the riots to “some ‘simple’ form of criminality—an absence of ‘morality’ and ‘community’ among the urban underclass” (Briggs 2012: 389; see also Cameron 2011b; 2011c). The phrase “criminality, pure and simple” and the term “underclass” became mantras hammered into the electorate’s consciousness. While cabinet minister Iain Duncan Smith (2011), talked about “the steady rise of an underclass,” Boris Johnson and Secretary of State for Justice, Ken Clarke, took the rhetoric one step further by characterising the families and communities associated with the rioters as “feral underclass” (e.g., Clarke 2011; Home Affairs Committee 2011: 5).

The term “underclass” describes a “class” of society, often marginalised people in urban areas, where persistent poverty passes from one generation to the next. Among conservatives, such

⁷ See Strömbäck and Esser (2017: 78, *passim*) for an outline of how politicians attempt to control the mainstream media to further their ideological and strategic objectives.

as the political scientist Charles Murray (e.g., 1984) and the ones outlined in the preceding paragraph, the term typically has come to mean the segment of society whose “intrinsically” dysfunctional behaviour leads to unwillingness to work, welfare dependency and delinquency. Although *individualistic* (usually “right-wing”) approaches have dominated the debate about causal factors involved in explaining the existence of the “underclass,” Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged* ([1987] 2012) suggests that the underlying causes are *structurally* rooted (not too different from the approach discussed in the next section). Social isolation and deindustrialisation—e.g., the shift from a goods-producing to a service-focused economy—are some of the many structural factors that Wilson offers to explain “the growth of the underclass.”

As the government ignored structural factors and distanced themselves and their policies from the disturbances of 2011, the “riot discourse” quickly became dense with “them-and-us attitudes.” Their response to the riots emphasised hard-and-fast divisions: an underclass seen to operate within an entirely different moral and cultural frame, separate from the “rest of us.” The “riots were *their* problem, not ours” (Lammy 2011: 57). The construction of such a dichotomy has consequences: the “grave danger is that the language of the ‘underclass’ perpetuates the problem that it refers to, ghettoising a group of people by ignoring the relationship between them and the rest” (*ibid.*).

In Chapters 6 and 7, where I discuss the study findings, we shall see that the research participants from Tottenham have a completely different take on the “them-and-us dichotomy.” In the eyes of the participants, the distance that most commentators have from the young people’s social environment is too vast for these commentators to legitimately make any valid statements about what the young people and their local area are really like. Yet, politicians and journalists are only too willing to make sweeping statements about young people in the area associated with the rioting. Only nineteen teenagers were arrested in Tottenham, an area of about 40,000 people under the age of 25; yet, virtually all of Tottenham’s young individuals have been labelled as members of the “underclass” and share the stigma that has followed them since the riots.

Although the Labour politician and MP for Tottenham David Lammy expressed disapproval of the terms “feral underclass” and “dismal environment”⁸ as a legitimate way of describing his constituency and its youths, he did not hold back in paving the way for individualistic explanations of the riots. He described rioters in his Tottenham constituency as nihilistic and hedonistic (Bridges 2012: 3; Kelsey 2015: 244). The rioters “made choices and must be held accountable for them” (Lammy 2011: 135), choices that were made, according to Lammy, in the context of poor parenting skills (Briggs 2012: 389). The “problem” of (a lack of) “proper parenting” was echoed by Cameron (2011a). A report published by a committee set up by the parliament (RCVP 2012: 21) cited both Lammy and Cameron in attributing the long-term causes of the England riots to (among other things) ineffective parental guidance. Not long after the riots, talk of poor parenting and dysfunctional families was linked to the role of the British welfare state. For instance, another report (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012: 15) brought together the topic of welfare dependency and the assumed conduct of families in Tottenham:

Beveridge wrote that policies of social security “should be achieved by co-operation between the state and the individual” and that the state “should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and his family.” These principles do not prevail in Tottenham...

In the aftermath of the England riots, the government and large portions of the media were behind a carefully orchestrated discourse constructing youth identities that were never too far removed from negative and condemnatory representations. Devalued categories and stereotypical images were repeatedly used to represent “riotous youths,” especially those from Tottenham and BAME backgrounds. These youths were portrayed as a homogeneous group in pursuit of hedonistic experiences and criminal rewards, trapped in an “urban underclass” where poor parenting and over-

⁸ While the term “feral” was applied by London’s mayor during the England riots, Boris Johnson, to describe those associated with the riots, a “dismal environment” is how the report *It Took Another Riot* (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012), produced on behalf of Johnson, sums up the area of Tottenham.

reliance on the state are the norms. They were portrayed as undermining common decency and central values of the “virtuous majority.”⁹

1.2.3 Sociological perspectives on the riots and responses to the “riot discourse”

While much of the media and the government of the day offered *individualistic explanations* for the 2011 social unrest, sociological texts were often intended as a counterbalance to, and critique of, the dominant discourse. Instead of providing condemnatory representations of “riotous youths” and their families, sociological commentators often opted for a more empathetic attitude towards those involved in the riots, emphasising *underlying socio-economic factors* as playing some part. These diverging takes on youth subjectivities represented two poles of a spectrum that in the aftermath of the riots became, in the view of Winlow and Hall (2012: 154), “entirely non-dialectical.”

In an open letter to London’s mayor, the president and the vice-chair of the British Sociological Association (BSA), at the time of the riots, declared that “[one] of the first things that disappears when considering disturbances such as these is perspective.” The letter proposed that sociology has the potential to “unravel the riots” and recommended closer collaborative work with politicians and mainstream commentators. Sociological analyses could add “real understanding” to the “all-too-easy condemnations of these disturbing events” (Brewer and Wollman 2011). Shortly after BSA’s open letter, *Reading the Riots* (Lewis *et al.* 2011)¹⁰ was published. And eight years later, the research project *Beyond Contagion (Re-reading the Riots)* (Drury *et al.* 2019) is still in progress. Taking into account multiple sources and the perspectives of “the rioters,” these

⁹ For a commentary on how politicians and the mass media disseminated a discourse constructing an “antagonistic normative worldview” during and after the England riots, isolating a “virtuous ingroup” (the majority) from “threatening outgroups” (e.g., ethnic minorities), see Fasel *et al.* (2016: 665, *passim*).

¹⁰ *Reading the Riots*—a ground-breaking, data-driven study into the causes and consequences of the England riots—was conducted by *The Guardian* newspaper and sociologists at the *London School of Economics*. It was unique in terms of its “nature as a collaboration between a leading university and national newspaper, and the rapidity with which the study was designed and conducted with a key aim of influencing the policy debates in the immediate aftermath of the disorder” (Newburn *et al.* 2018: 346). Its findings offer not only a variety of framings in regards to “policy problems” behind the England riots, but also an empirical discussion based on 270 interviews with those involved in the riots.

studies do not only pay attention to structural factors, such as unemployment and deprivation, but also social psychological aspects, such as shared social identity and negative experiences of “stop and search.”

Even though claims about psychological factors and everyday experiences of youths made their way into several sociological analyses, most sociological studies on the 2011 unrest focus on structural variables. For example, they argue, from various angles, that the underlying causes of the disturbances cannot be detached from the fact that:

- Tottenham has a history of racist over-policing of its BAME members (e.g., Creaney 2014; Murji 2018);
- the Tottenham wards are within the most deprived 5% in England: 28% of young people live in families that require tax credits and 42% of children are considered to live in poverty (e.g., Jefferson 2015; Power 2011);
- employment opportunities for young people are scarce in Tottenham with (at the time of the riots) 10,000 unemployed and just 367 job vacancies (e.g., Coghlan 2013; Creaney 2014);
- high levels of “advanced marginality” have resulted in the impossible task of finding a reasonably stable and satisfying job for many of Tottenham’s young adults (e.g., Slater 2016; Winlow and Hall 2012);
- policies emanating from neoliberal political ideologies have impacted disproportionately on young people in the “riot-affected areas” (e.g., Fasel *et al.* 2016; Slater 2016).

For many of the sociologists who took an interest in the 2011 disturbances and the aftermath, thus, the behaviour and trajectories of youths associated with the riots typically exist in relation to structural inequalities and other underlying factors. To cite Jefferson (2012: 9), the riots must be understood in the context of “racism, the criminalisation of black youth, growing poverty and deprivation, chronic youth unemployment.”

1.3 My personal experience of youth identities in Tottenham versus the “dominant discourse:” in search of a new approach

In this chapter, I have facilitated a discussion and reviewed literature on Tottenham’s youths, in particular in relation to the avalanche of responses to the England riots from politicians and mainstream commentators. Although the remaining chapters are not about the 2011 riots, the

discourses surrounding youths from the “riot-hit areas” have served as stimuli for my prime research concern. Among these discourses, the dominant one—the one referring to a particular set of youths as belonging to a feral underclass while stirring up “them-and-us attitudes”—does not appear to take into account how it influences the young people it aims to describe. Experiences of negative and stereotypical images can have harmful effects on how youths see themselves.¹¹ Nor does the dominant discourse appear to appreciate the variability in young people’s heterogeneous life course patterns or the reflexive capacities that they employ in a variety of social spaces. Instead, the dominant discourse and its negative representations have a tendency to paint a picture of Tottenham’s youths as rather unreflective and a homogeneous unit, as was pointed out earlier in this chapter where it was shown how the media and some politicians spoke of youths from areas such as Tottenham. Over the many years I have been working and living in Tottenham, a somewhat different picture emerged. My own experience of Tottenham’s young people differs profoundly from the homogeneous and stereotypical portrayals. This asymmetry between my experience and the dominant discourse is echoed in the frustration among the research participants, who felt misrepresented in mainstream debates, as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7.

Prior to embarking on the present thesis and its accompanying fieldwork, I was developing and delivering outreach programmes for young people in Tottenham and the surrounding area. As a youth project manager, employed jointly by Haringey Council and Tottenham Hotspur FC,¹² I was in constant contact with numerous local Tottenham residents, and in particular young people, from all walks of life, including “looked after children” and “care leavers.” During this time, I also witnessed the impact that the England riots had on youths in Tottenham post-2011 and how Haringey’s youth provisions bore the brunt of the spending cuts as a result of the government’s 2008 austerity programme.

As I outlined in the initial sections of this chapter, my own experience of Tottenham’s young people is positive, but it is too multifaceted and complex to pin down to any specific statement

¹¹ O’Toole and Gale (2013: 4) remind us that negative representations in narratives on marginalised young people, especially members of the BAME community, are not “confined to government or media discourses but are also a recurring motif of academic discourses that have characterised ‘racialised youth identities’ as ‘failing identities.’”

¹² Tottenham Hotspur FC and its Foundation work with over 1,500 young people every week. Further information concerning Tottenham Hotspur’s Foundation is available here: <https://www.tottenhamhotspur.com/the-club/foundation/about-us/>.

about who they are since lives in Tottenham consist of heterogeneous social relations, contrasting life trajectories and multiple identities. Ethnic, religious and socio-economic *diversity*, as sketched out in §§1.1 and 1.1.1, appear to be the norm for most of the local youths, an everyday reality they usually value. Of course, structural barriers and social exclusion are also realities for numerous Tottenhamites, as sketched out in §1.1.2, but this doesn't warrant any talk of homogeneity across the 40,000 under-25s living in Tottenham. Some youths may experience joblessness and rising inequality, but they still possess different agentic and reflexive capacities. In my experience, youths in Tottenham (and elsewhere) deal with a myriad of personal, educational and professional goals and challenges in a variety of ways, sometimes reflexively, deliberating on their own practice in relation to their social environment, and sometimes more passively, habitually going about their business.

Rather than allowing for youth subjectivities with different experiences, trajectories and capacities, many politicians and media commentators provide a homogeneous picture of youths. Tottenham's youths are not all the same or wholly determined by “external forces.” In fact, it's hard to find a more heterogeneous mix of young people with differing aspirations than the one located in Tottenham. Yet, reports, such as the one put forward by the London Mayor's Office *It Took Another Riot* (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012: 72) speaks of Tottenham's residents as:

...passive participants trapped in a vicious cycle of deprivation and degradation where unemployment, addictions, low educational attainment, poor health, youth alienation and crime inter-connect in a causal relationship as “mutually reinforcing dynamics.”

(Summarised by Dillon and Fanning in press)

This and many other accounts of Tottenham's young people are deprived of active subjects. Just because the majority of people under scrutiny do not belong to a so-called “upper social strata,” it doesn't mean that they give in to passivity.¹³ Besides, the list of “mutually reinforcing dynamics” is only applicable to, at most, a tiny minority and does not dictate every aspect of their lives.

¹³ I shall later, particularly in Chapter 6, demonstrate how Tottenham's youths employ a *range of reflexive capabilities* that are directed toward a *range of issues*.

Stott *et al.* (2017: 965) raise an additional concern about the discourse surrounding the riots: to “contend that riots exist in relation to structural inequalities or background ideologies is not to provide a detailed explanation of *how* they relate.” To truly understand the relationship between structural variables (e.g., unemployment and inequality) and the behaviours or trajectories of youths is to grasp *how* they are connected. This requires (social) psychological variables and an exploration into “processes” and “mechanisms.” To be more precise, identifying structural variables is not enough, we need insight into the different ways that young people negotiate and experience the social world in order to better understand *how* youth identities are formed, *how* youths end up pursuing particular life paths and *how* young people are socialised to behave in particular ways. This theme that shall be referred to as the “mediatory mechanism”—namely, what connects two variables, perhaps between structural factors and life choices—will be picked up in more detail in the next chapter, especially §2.2.

The epitome of a *mediatory mechanism* with respect to the issue before us, I believe, is the capacity to observe or recognise one’s own identity, situation or performance with respect to one’s social environment, also known as “reflexivity.” The different reflexive capacities and orientations of young people are rarely featured in the discourse on youths in Tottenham. Just because Tottenham is frequently described as an economically deprived area, among other things, doesn’t make its people a homogeneous entity, pushed by socio-economic “forces,” where reflexive orientations are in short supply. Life in Tottenham consists of heterogeneous social relations and communities where young people, in particular, regularly observe their own situations and make decisions based on a variety of reflexive orientations towards their multiple identities and life trajectories. Generalisations, thus, should only be made with extreme caution. But, what might help us in gaining a better understanding and conceptualisation of the reflexive subject and the heterogeneous constructions of youth identities?

Before I move on to a more systematic consideration of my study’s theoretical assumptions—considerations that have been made both *prior to* the fieldwork and *as a result of* analysing the transcript—I shall close this chapter by looking at two theoretical directions in sociology that both take the (increasingly) *reflexive* actor seriously: first, the, so-called, individualisation thesis including the notion of reflexive modernity associated with Ulrich Beck’s work; and, then, critical realism including Margaret Archer’s take on reflexivity.

1.3.1 The individualisation thesis, reflexive modernity and critical realism

The three social-theoretical positions in this section’s title offer a critical counter-weight to homogeneous representations of identities and social reality. Let’s begin by taking a look at the former two. At the heart of “reflexive modernity” is the notion of “detraditionalisation” that refers to processes whereby social conditions allow for increased reflexive capacities among relatively autonomous beings to determine their own identities (Beck [1986] 1992: 128). In the context of reflexive modernisation, the outcome of identity formation processes is more heterogeneous than in traditional societies where reflexivity had a “limited or non-existent role” (Nico and Caetano 2017: 676). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009), furthermore, speak of identity formation and the individualisation process in reflexive modernity—a “detraditionalised world”—as the abandonment of taken-for-granted attitudes:

individualization means the disintegration of previously existing social forms—for example, the increasing fragility of such categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood etc. [In] modern societies new demands, controls and constraints are being imposed on individuals.

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 2)

Modern institutions, Giddens (1991: 1) agrees, “undercut traditional habits and customs.” As a result of the weakening of traditional ties, identity depends on constant reflexive monitoring to deal with a broader set of choices.

Youth studies has, broadly speaking, aligned itself with this way of understanding the emergence of modern institutions and everyday lives of youths. Youth researchers tend to keep tabs on contemporary youth trajectories in accordance with changing circumstances and new issues. Along with Beck, they acknowledge that lives of youths have changed quite considerably in the past couple of decades “with key contexts such as education, labour market experiences and patterns of dependency having been transformed” (Furlong 2009: 1; cf. Irwin 1995: 2–3, *passim*). And with the advent of the Internet and social media, alongside the influx of smartphones and tablets, the “youth stage” is a life course period where young people are producers of unique identities and life trajectories (Shifflet-Chila *et al.* 2016: 367). While transitions to adulthood are more likely to involve reflexive deliberation on life, identity and career choices, they are also less

likely to involve traditional trajectories and a linear movement from, for instance, dependence to independence, and education to employment than what may have been the case previously. As a result, “reflexivity,” “agency” and the construction of “subjective identities” have been given a new ascendancy in the field of youth studies (see, e.g., France 2007: 156). There is a downside, however, to these recent developments. According to Beck ([1986] 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; 2009) and many youth researchers, increased individualisation, as well as social and economic restructuring, has led youths to experience greater uncertainty in their lives.

As I have outlined above, one problem with the dominating discourse on Tottenham’s youths is its tendency to present fixed identities and define youths in homogeneous ways. Beck and many youth researchers move away from such an approach to understanding young people. Rather than providing a “standard biography” of young people’s life courses, Beck is interested in theorising the processes which create the conditions for increased heterogeneity and reflexive subjectivities. This way of understanding a diverse community of individuals appears to more closely match the heterogeneous identities of Tottenham’s youths than the homogeneous representations provided by some of the media coverage. But, how far can Beck’s approach—in terms of its explanatory and descriptive power—assist us in furthering our knowledge about the formation of multiple identities of youths? There is no doubt that Beck’s individualisation thesis and the notion of reflexive modernity are welcome contributions to sociology since they theorise how individuals increasingly have to (reflexively) shape their own paths through life. However, there is a problem: although Beck’s framework sheds important light on people’s reflexive capacities to mediate multiple identities and their personal biographies, his framework loses sight of the key influence of more embedded social conditions.

As far as my research is concerned, it would be a mistake to pursue the question of youth identities by committing ourselves, from the outset, to the claim that the construction of identity is always open to revision. When young people navigate their life courses, they do not merely *tailor* their trajectories or *choose* their identities. Despite the usefulness of incorporating the concept of reflexivity into sociological perspectives on identity, talk of “self-designed biographies” (Elliott 2014: 165) and socially disembedded “DIY identities” are rarely helpful.

Woodman (2009), however, contends that youth studies researchers often misread Beck and points out that the “very concept of ‘choice biography’ does not come from Beck’s work” (Snee

and Devine 2015: 549). While Beck’s individualisation thesis is commonly criticised for exaggerating the degree of choice available to individuals and for treating identity construction as a “pick-and-mix process,” Woodman (2009: 244) argues that Beck’s thesis has been “constructed as a foil to criticize for overemphasizing agency and change.” Reflexive modernity and its uncertainties, according to Woodman’s reading of Beck, are a reminder that we cannot think about inequalities in the same way as when traditional norms were limiting and constraining people’s choice and capacity for reflexivity. Woodman, thus, sees Beck’s work as an invaluable scheme for research into youth identities and inequalities. Although this may be (partially) fair, it is hard to see how Roberts’ response to Woodman could be wrong. Roberts (2010: 138–9, *passim*) presents a selection of multiple extracts that demonstrate the prominence of “choice” in Beck’s reflexive modernity. For instance, Beck ([1986] 1992: 135, Roberts’ italics) states, in his seminal *Risk Society* that:

[each] person’s biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her *own* hands, [...] the proportion of the biography which is open and must be constructed personally is increasing.

As Beck sees it, then, freedom from structure appears to be the norm for today’s youths.

Tottenham’s young people live in a “super-diverse” community;¹⁴ yet, their identities and life trajectories are (at least partially) constructed through social relations and, contrary to Beck’s individualisation thesis, are not independent from structural factors. There are limits, thus, to how far the individualisation thesis can assist us in understanding youth identities since it seems to preclude the possibility of “structural conditioning.” Critical realists, on the other hand, do not only take on board different ways in which youth subjectivities reflexively engage with the social world, they also recognise the “power” of social structures, which we will turn to now.

It is hard to pin down exactly what “critical realism” (CR) is since it is more a string of philosophical positions on various social scientific concerns, including social ontology, causal “powers,” the structure–agency problem and various explanatory issues. It supplies its proponents

¹⁴ In the words of Kraftl *et al.* (2019), super-diverse “identities and spaces extend beyond traditional social (and especially ethnic) identity categories.” For an outline of how “super-diversity” is defined, see, e.g., Vertovec (2019) and the earlier section in this chapter (§1.1.1), which also summarises the emergence of super-diversity in Tottenham.

with a conceptual toolbox that is supposed to help making sense of the social world. Since the next chapter is dedicated to a critical review of a particular critical realist direction—namely, the structure–agency dualism of Margaret Archer’s theory (e.g., 2012: 51–4)—I shall keep the present evaluation brief. The “critical” aspect of CR is not merely related to Marx’s ([1845] 1998: 574) famous phrase, “The Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.” CR is also critical because it “holds that the concepts which inform the meta-theory that defines structure and agency can only be developed via a critical dialogue with alternative social ontologies” (Cruickshank 2003: 3). To that end, it sheds continuous critical light on the methodological issues that philosophers of the social sciences have been concerned with for at least a couple of centuries.

The “realist” aspect commits CR to the claim that social reality has a relatively autonomous existence and that social structures are “ontologically real emergent properties of action” (Gronow 2008: 244). Critical realists, thus, find themselves at odds with the postmodernist and social constructionist “turns” since “realism” and “emergent properties” are at the heart of their social ontology. While *ontological realism* denotes realism about ontology and the social world¹⁵—e.g., social structures are real—emergentism is a bit more complicated. The social, for critical realists, is an emergent reality with its own properties and powers (Gorski 2013: 659). This *social reality* represents the “higher-order” strata that emerges out of the “lower-order” strata, or specific relations and interaction between *human agents* (Mason *et al.* 2013: 349). The “lower order” consists of the parts that constitute the “higher order,” while the latter order has powers to influence the former. Social reality, thus, is *stratified*, which allows social theorists to distinguish between a “higher order” of social structures and a “lower order” of human agency. CR sees social systems or structures as *causally efficacious*—they constrain or enable agents in different ways—but without denying the agentic or reflexive capacities of actors. However, even though the emergent reality of social structures emerges out of the (inter)action of agents, the former is said to be *irreducible* to the latter. Since CR’s stratified ontology avoids reducing social structures to human

¹⁵ According to critical realists, being a “realist about ontology” doesn’t mean that we cannot grasp, explain and represent social reality in different ways. Our accounts of the social world, they claim, are fallible and relative to our particular perspectives. They refer to this as “epistemic relativism” (see, e.g., Cruickshank 2003: 2; Vandenberghe 2014: 5).

agency and vice versa, “conflation” between structures and agents is shunned (see, e.g., Decoteau 2016: 304; Vandenberghe 2014: 6).

Like Beck’s individualisation thesis, critical realist approaches can handle the reflexive capacities and heterogeneity of Tottenham’s diverse youth and their personal biographical management. But, unlike the individualisation thesis, CR introduces a seemingly attractive *dualism* (stratified ontology), where agency *and* structure are taken seriously.

At first glance, it seems as if my search for a suitable framework for understanding youth-identity formation and how Tottenham’s young people reflexively deal with being subjected to misrepresentations has been fruitful. However, it is exactly CR’s emphasis on a stratified ontology—and, in particular, Archer’s strict structure–agency dualism—that makes me have to seek a fresh conceptual framework to accompany my research. Archer’s CR views the agentic capacity for reflexivity as completely separate to social structures, making young people’s reflexive identity work socially disembodied. As Farrugia and Woodman (2015: 636) states:

In a more doctrinaire style than other critical realists, Archer will admit nothing into the interiority of the subject beyond conscious internal conversations [reflexivity], insisting on their strong separation from the social.

Although critical realists propose a thought-provoking ontology of social reality that encompasses both the “external” social world and our “internal” reflexive capacities, they fail to provide an account of how our reflexive and agentic activity can be continuous with social experiences and embeddedness. Yet, both the individualisation thesis and CR do a great deal of justice to the complexity and heterogeneity of youth experiences in Tottenham as they challenge more deterministic approaches to youth identity that emphasise structure without considering reflexive attitudes, which is why I decided to discuss these two positions here. The next chapter offers a more in-depth evaluation of Archer’s CR and her insistence on a structure–agency dualism, as well as my attempt at putting forward an alternative framework. This framework aims to incorporate certain devices from the phenomenological toolbox in order to demonstrate how our lived experiences of the social world permeates human agency and reflexivity, an endeavour that also provides a means of centring the voices of youth.

Chapter 2

REFLEXIVITY, SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS AND THE STOCK OF KNOWLEDGE

The present chapter intends to put forward a research initiative that involves analysing how people's previous experiences in the social world and a variety of reflexive orientations mutually affect each other. In particular, I shall emphasise the significance of theorising and taking into account how *subjective* experiences and *agentic* capacities, such as reflexivity, shape young people's identities and social realities. I hope, however, that this chapter makes it plain that my account does not point towards an individualistic position or imply an "undersocialised" interpretation of human agency. Quite the opposite: young people's experiences are often *shared* and meanings are *intersubjective*, barriers to upward socio-economic mobility and transitions into adulthood are typically *structural*, while the source material that they draw on when exercising their reflexive capacities is more often than not *social* in nature.

The chapter begins by outlining the divergent meanings of the concept of reflexivity. It then makes a case for the importance of seeing human reflexivity as the key "mediatory mechanism" between the agent and her or his social environment. Why is reflexivity, here, a *mediatory mechanism*? Well, reflexivity "mediates" because it links social conditions to the agent's identity and life course; it's a mechanism because it explains *how* (the agent's experiences of) social conditions often affect her or his identity formation and life choices. The concept of reflexivity, thus, helps in explaining the *mechanism* of *how* social conditions and agents combine in affecting life trajectories and identities. This point of departure draws on Margaret Archer's celebrated approach to reflexivity. I then move on to discuss how the concept of reflexivity has been treated within key youth studies approaches and why many youth studies researchers draw on Bourdieu—

in particular his notion of “habitus”—in order to analysis youth reflexivity’s more embedded qualities.

By putting *reflexive orientations* of actors under the microscope, “how?”-type questions are more likely to be answered while fundamental processes in the socialised world can be revealed. But the agentic capacity of reflexivity tells us only half of the story involved in the subjective aspect of the mediatory mechanism. The chapter goes on to claim that *reflexive orientations are not isolated from previous, subjective experiences accumulated over time*, experiences that are accrued from interactive discourse or from simply navigating the social world. In §2.3.1, I try to explain why it is useful to see the accumulated effects of these experiences as being “stored” in what Alfred Schütz labels the “stock of knowledge.” I then go on to argue that the stock of knowledge operates as *source material for reflexive orientations*, which makes reflexivity to some extent continuous with social embeddedness. In other words, rather than seeing reflexive orientations as operating separately from social conditions and lived experiences, the present chapter argues that the *stock of knowledge links reflexivity to the social world*. The latter point has theoretical and methodological implications within youth studies:

In construing young people’s reflexivity not only as a mediatory mechanism, but also as a capacity that must draw on a stock of knowledge where meaningful past lived experiences are retained allows us to map out and systematise temporal processes grounded in young people’s life biographies.

The empirical challenge, reserved for Chapters 6 and 7, is to demonstrate how these life biographies inform (through the stock of knowledge) young people’s reflexive attitudes toward their identities in a social world saturated with negative and stereotypical representations of youth.

The present chapter, on the other hand, is limited to sketching out the *theoretical* underpinnings of the study’s alternative approach to the concept of reflexivity. This alternative approach emerged from considerations that I made both *prior to* the fieldwork and *as a result of* in-depth conversations with Tottenham’s youths and analysing the transcript. This approach, furthermore, has assisted me in not only assessing the involvement of reflexive orientations in young people’s lives, but also the significance of recognising the fact that reflexive identity work, itself, has its own *subjective history*, a history consisting of a subject’s lived experiences and engagement in the social world.

2.1 Reflections on reflexivity: definitional issues

The concept of reflexivity is subject to a variety of interpretations and covers a diverse range of sociological theories. Although most sociologists (e.g., Archer 2012; Brock *et al.* 2017; Caetano 2019; Elster 2017; in press; Farrugia and Woodman 2015; Sayer 2010; Telling 2016; Wimalasena and Marks 2019) agree that reflexivity, in its most straightforward form, implies the ability to *reflect upon oneself while taking into account one's social circumstances*,¹⁶ the contentious issue of reflexivity has an ambiguous legacy where scholars frequently argue at cross-purposes.

Debates about reflexivity can be divided into at least three sociological areas, of which only the latter two are directly relevant to my study. The first group regards reflexivity as a type of practice among sociologists where the aim is to promote, among other things, transparency and candour in the research process through “reflexive self-understanding” (cf. Kuorikoski and Pöyhönen 2012: 192). Rather than merely being a human capacity for identity or biographical construction, reflexivity, here, is a methodological issue in social-scientific practice (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009; Luttrell 2010). Reflexive self-understanding in youth studies is widely regarded as a “methodological necessity” (Bond 2014: 92; Christensen and James 2017: 6). Whereas this way of viewing reflexivity emphasises the introspection and voice of the *researcher*, the next two considerations involve *laypersons*.

The second group considers habitual behaviour and embodied dispositions generated by structural features of the social world, rather than reflexivity, to be our prime action-guiding “force.” According to this approach, youth-identity formation is socially embedded within everyday life (Simonds *et al.* 2014: 291) rather than a product of reflexive practices. Reflexive activity is merely the result of *disruptive* events, “periods of breach that disturb the durable routines of everyday life” (Akram and Hogan 2015: 608, 14–5). This definition is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 130) formulation of reflexivity *vis-à-vis* his notions of “*habitus*” and “*field*.” individuals become reflexive “when there is a lack of ‘fit’ between the habitus and the

¹⁶ This definitional point of departure is associated with Archer (2007: 4; 2010b: preamble; 2010c: 31; 2012: 1).

structuring conditions of the field” (Stahl 2015: 73).¹⁷ While this construal of reflexivity emphasises the *passive* and *socially-embedded agent*, the next highlights the *active agent*.

Reflexivity, as interpreted by the final group, is associated with the *mediatory process*, linking, so-called, structural or cultural powers to social action (through the “reflexive subject”). Proponents of this view, such as Archer (e.g. 2003: 8; 2007: 5; 2010a: 12; 2010d: 276–8), see reflexive activity as regular “intra-active conversations” occurring *within* the individual. Since reflexivity is understood here to be an everyday agentic capacity, this take on reflexivity is viewed as indispensable in almost every branch of sociological theory, but is hostile to the second group’s talk of embodied dispositions and social embeddedness.

It is the latter two groups’ focus on *reflexive orientations among laypersons* that my research is building upon. However, the theoretical underpinnings of my study do not view theories emerging from these two diverging areas as antagonistic. Rather, reconciliation between them is in part the basis for how I understand different reflexive capacities; my account of reflexivity, unlike Archer’s, is *not* incompatible with social embeddedness. By drawing on phenomenologically inspired sociology—in particular by borrowing notions put forward by Schütz—my theoretical framework demonstrates that *reflexivity as a regular agentic capacity* (third group) and the emphasis on *social embeddedness* (second group) can be reconciled. This “reconciliation” is achieved, I shall argue, by spelling out how reflexive orientations relate to the “stock” of accumulated knowledge and everyday experiences gathered from simply living in a particular social environment, also known as the “stock of knowledge.” This theoretical framework has enabled me to understand and systematise processes concerning youth identities and how Tottenham’s young people deal with negative and stereotypical representations.

¹⁷ No attempt to formulate or discuss Bourdieu’s *habitus* in relation to reflexivity will be made in my thesis since various sustained efforts have been made (e.g., Adkins 2003: 25, *passim*; Archer 2007: 40; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 122; Decoteau 2016; Farrugia 2013a: 289–90; McNay 1999: 102, *passim*; Nico and Caetano 2017; Sweetman 2003: 532; Telling 2016; Wimalasena and Marks 2019).

2.1.1 Archer's conceptualisation of reflexivity and the problem with ontological dualism

One attempt to construe reflexivity as a mediatory mechanism without sacrificing the social domain is that of Margaret Archer's critical realism. The last section of the previous chapter provided a brief assessment of critical realist social ontology. The intention behind this assessment was to see if critical realists could assist in providing a suitable theoretical and conceptual framework for my research with their theory of social reality. Although their attempt at involving both structural and agentic aspects in understanding the increasingly complex social world is valuable, my research also requires a framework that can account for how reflexive and agentic activity can be *continuous with social embeddedness*. In this section, I offer a more in-depth assessment of this issue by taking a look at the critical realism of Archer and the problem with understanding human agency and the social realm as two entirely separate domains.

Before I look at the more problematic aspects of Archer's social theory, let's briefly sum up a crucial claim that she makes concerning our reflexive orientations, namely, that it is possible to adopt *different* types of reflexive attitudes. The "modes through which reflexivity is practised are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous" (Archer 2010a: 10–12). Archer predicted that the notion of heterogeneous modes of reflexivity could open up a "whole new research agenda"—a prediction that has been fully vindicated. Her taxonomy of four modes of reflexivity—"meta-reflexivity," "autonomous reflexivity," "communicative reflexivity" and "fractured reflexivity"—has influenced numerous recent academic texts (e.g., Caetano 2019; Elster 2017; Hung and Appleton 2016; Maccarini 2014; Nico and Caetano 2017; Vandenberghe 2016; Wimalasena and Marks 2019), including the present thesis. How young people in Tottenham adopt a "meta-reflexive attitude" to scrutinise stereotypical youth representations has been particularly useful, as Chapter 6 demonstrates. *Meta-reflexivity*, in short, has two main features: to problematise taken-for-granted assumptions and to constantly revise one's activity according to an "ideal goal." *Autonomous reflexivity* is associated with the "lone thinker" whose thoughts are mostly instrumentally driven. *Communicative reflexivity*, in contrast, indicates a more family- and friends-oriented outlook and reliance on others for advice before setting goals. Finally, rather than leading to a purposeful course

of action, *fractured reflexivity* intensifies “personal distress and disorientation resulting in expressive action” (Archer 2012: 13).

In §6.1, I explore how some young people in Tottenham apply these different modes of reflexivity in the context of negotiating their identities and negative representations of local youths. My initial observation was that these modes are hard to separate into discrete formulations. Archer (e.g., 2003: 151–341), on the other hand, has a tendency to see the abovementioned forms of reflexivity as categorical phenomena that are either present or absent. Reflexive processes are “muddy” and sometimes in flux, while the modes of reflexivity in individuals are not categorical (for a similar argument see Hung and Appleton 2016: 38). To illustrate, according to my research sample, the young people were not *discretely* a “meta reflexive” *or* a “fractured reflexive;” nor were they *either* an “autonomous reflexive” *or* a “communicative reflexive.” Although acknowledging the heterogeneous character of reflexivity is valuable in order to identify nuances in how youths think of themselves in relation to their social environment, the different modes of reflexivity are not categorical in each young person.

In Archer’s “ontological realism,” the different modes of reflexivity represent the “missing link” between structure and agency. Moreover, ontological realism, according to Archer, endeavours to demonstrate “*how* structures and agents combine” (Archer 2003: 8), and can be summed up, crudely, as follows: (1) social structural “forces” impinge upon agents; yet, (2) the reception of these forces depends on “reflexive agents whose subjective powers ultimately determine what they do in fact do” (*ibid.*). Archer has done a good job of challenging theories that “consider the human subject to be the product of social and structural forces” (Rafieian and Davis 2016: 559), theories that give prominence to (1), but tend to neglect (2). As I see it, youth-identity formation would, under Archer’s formula, be explained by specifying: first, the objective social identities available to the young person in their everyday social environment, these social identities are said to impinge on her or him, as in (1); second, the young person’s *reflexive orientation* towards these identities, as in (2); and, finally, whether this process leads to *reproduction* of the respective identities (morphostasis) or elaboration of them (morphogenesis).¹⁸ Many sociologists

¹⁸ To suggest that Archer sees identity formation in this way is based on her explanatory framework of “morphogenesis” (see, e.g., Archer 2013b: 7; 2017b: 1–2; Donati 2014: 147). Archer’s framework is meant to capture

(e.g., Akram and Hogan 2015; Decoteau 2016: 304, *passim*; Elder-Vass 2007; Sayer 2009), however, take issue with (2)—Archer’s emphasis on the indispensability of the active autonomous agent and the subjective powers of reflexivity—as they state that her emphasis on reflexivity is too excessive and “does not correspond to the conduct of real agents in society” (Rafieian and Davis 2016: 559). I shall explore this critique further in the remainder of this chapter.

I agree with Archer (2010d: 277–8) that social constraints (and enablements) depend (to various degrees) on the “subjective reception” by young people. Social constraints, in other words, do not operate entirely deterministically or independently from young people. Whether a given social context or form of structural organisation is a constraint or enablement, Archer claims, “depends on the life project of the person experiencing or attempting to engage with it” (Farrugia 2013a: 287). For social structures to affect—constrain or enable—a young person’s own trajectory or identity, it must be experienced by, and stand in a relationship to, the young person such that it ties in, somehow, with her or his subjective reception, project or engagement in the social world. This claim doesn’t mean that social or structural constraints don’t exist for youths in Tottenham. It merely means that we shouldn’t disregard the subjective experiences and the different reflexive capacities across Tottenham’s youths. Since much of the discourse that emerged in the aftermath of the 2011 riots that started in Tottenham promotes a rather negative picture of youths that sometimes perceives Tottenham’s young people as both unreflective and a homogeneous group, the need to investigate subjective capacities and listen to the voices of youths, themselves, has grown in significance. This explains one important reason why my study prioritises the concept of reflexivity and subjective youth experiences (on which I intend to elaborate upon in a moment).

Although I am not at odds with Archer’s dual recognition of *objective* social contexts and *subjective* powers, the latter appears to operate as a blank canvas in her theory given her insistence on a *separation* between an *agent’s reflexivity* and the *social realm* (Decoteau 2016: 314; Farrugia and Woodman 2015: 636). As alluded to in last chapter’s section on critical realism, Archer’s (e.g.,

an analytical temporal sequence where so-called “structural properties,” at time t_1 , causally influence individuals, at t_2 . Involved at t_2 – t_3 are the interactions between reflexive individuals who do the utmost to bring about certain “projects” (Archer 2017a: 120). As a result, structural properties emerge at t_4 that may elaborate upon t_1 . t_4 , thus, becomes t_1' which has the potential to be “square one” in a new temporal sequence. Note that if the outcome (t_4) has changed during the “morphogenetic cycle” then t_1' may differ from t_1 . If the outcome, at t_4 , remains the same as t_1 , then Archer refers to the cycle as “morphostatic;” that is, morphostasis is the outcome of this social process when the structural properties in question are *reproduced*.

2012: 73; 2013a: 6; 2013b: 7; Donati 2014: 147) “stratified social ontology,” or “ontological dualism,” does not make allowances for the socially embedded constitution of reflexivity and the social construction of identity. Her ontological dualism, in other words, puts her under an obligation to keep human agents and social conditions distinct. If we were to take this dualism seriously, then reflexivity—or “reflexive identity work,” for that matter—operates in a “vacuum” due to its supposed “separateness” from social embeddedness or structures. Archerian structure–agency dualism, then, presents a core problem in her theory of reflexivity.

Since it is my business to shed light on *how* Tottenham’s youth negotiate their identities and deal with stereotypical representations, it’s crucial to not only acknowledge, as Archer has effectively done, young people’s reflexive capacities, but also to appreciate that young people’s involvement in identity work is not separate from their lived experiences in and of the *social* world, which makes reflexivity, at least to some extent, *socially situated* and *historically constituted*. Reflexive orientations involved in identity construction, I shall argue later, are not isolated from previous, subjective experiences and the “stock of knowledge” accumulated over time from interactive discourse or from simply navigating the social world.¹⁹ Archer’s dualism, in contrast, cannot accommodate these types of internalisation processes that lead to the subject being socially situated and historically constituted since its clear “structure–agency distinction” presents hostility to any talk of subjective powers of reflexivity as being socially embedded. An alternative or complementary account to Archer’s, therefore, is a welcome contribution to sociology and youth-identity studies, an account that must address the fact that:

- i. reflexive engagements do not start from scratch, in a vacuum, each time they operate; and,
- ii. previous lived experiences and the “stock of knowledge” are at the heart of the mediatory process of reflexivity.

2.1.2 Reflexivity and the structure–agency distinction in youth studies literature

Sociology of youth is no stranger to grappling with the notion of reflexivity. Like Archer, recent discussion in youth studies tends to explore this notion in the context of different schools of thought

¹⁹ I pick up this claim that our reflexive orientations necessarily must, to some degree, draw upon our “stock of knowledge” in §2.3.1.

on the structure–agency relation (e.g., Bessant *et al.* 2017; Brannen and Nilsen 2005; Coffey and Farrugia 2014; Elster in press; Farrugia 2013b; Habib and Ward 2019; Roberts 2010; Threadgold 2011; Woodman 2009). Unlike Archer, though, many youth researchers see reflexivity to some degree as continuous with socially embedded factors and, thus, address the issue outlined in the previous section; namely, the problem of how to avoid treating reflexive activity as separate from the social realm.

Recognising the fragmentation of traditional structures and the changing dynamics of modern societies, many youth studies scholars see reflexivity as an indispensable addition to their conceptual toolbox. One vital source of inspiration for this line of theorising was Beck’s individualisation thesis ([1986] 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) that I sketched out in §1.3.1. Numerous youth researchers (e.g., France 2007; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; O’Connor 2015: 868; Woodman 2009; Wyn and Woodman 2007) accept the general thrust of Beck’s claims that it is getting harder to predict what lives of young individuals might look like drawing on information about family backgrounds, parental occupations and other traditional structures. But, while the individualisation thesis is seen as useful in explaining why youths increasingly have to reflexively negotiate life trajectories, youth identities and transitions into adulthood, youth researchers rarely consider reflexive activity as being the prime or the only driving force behind identity-forming processes and life choices. Youth reflexivity is not detached from structural conditions or social embeddedness.

Furlong and Cartmel (2007), for instance, argue that social structures and class still matter in modern societies, but the impact of these structural features has become obscured in favour of agentic features. They describe this characteristic of late modernity as the “epistemological fallacy” (*ibid.*: e.g., 5).²⁰ According to the “epistemological fallacy,” youths have a tendency to overemphasise individual choice and their own agency due to a disjuncture between subjective and objective dimensions that obscures underlying structural factors and class relationships. For Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 114), young people increasingly find themselves trapped in a “false reality:”

²⁰ For alternative summaries of the epistemological fallacy, see Bessant *et al.* (2017: 127); Cahill and Cook (in press); France *et al.* (2012: 31); France and Haddon (2014: 305–7, 18); Irwin (2005: 125–6); O’Connor (2015: 868–78); Roberts (2017: 44); Threadgold (2018: 57).

Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure.

In some ways, this is reminiscent of the findings in Brannen and Nilsen's (2005) study on young British and Norwegian people, which indicates a tendency among youths to embrace individualised explanations for issues that may be structural in origin. Although the eagerness to speak of life courses in *individualistic* terms seems more or less universal, the “positive rhetoric of choice” appears to be particularly appealing (and relevant) to young people “whose social background and education provide the resources necessary to think they are the creators of their own destinies without help or hindrance from others” (*ibid.*: 423). In contrast, *structural* resources—externally imposed enablements and constraints—form part of a “silent discourse,” and when structural resources are accompanied by personal resources, the former takes on an “‘invisible’ quality” (*ibid.*: 423, 5).

Sure enough, individualism and the “discourse of choice” appear to progressively permeate all aspects of our lives where identities and life trajectories are said to be of our own making. Young people, in particular, are regularly told to navigate their life course as if they can pick and choose among an abundant of real opportunities. The strong influence of individualism, however, does not necessarily mean that structural factors have become an illusory component. Addressing the idea of the epistemological fallacy, France and Haddon (2014) found that social structures and class are not as opaque as Furlong and Cartmel suggest. Research participants in France and Haddon's UK study seem to be aware of structural influences on their life course. While

many young people have individualistic understanding as to why they are not succeeding academically or occupationally, they also realize that there are broader macro forces constraining their pathways.

(*Ibid.*: 306)

In many ways similar to France and Haddon (2014), Cahill and Cook (in press) find their study participants “keenly aware of the structural conditions in which they are situated.” But, despite offering structural explanations when discussing the influences that different structural factors have *more generally*—e.g., on their peer networks—the young participants were

significantly less keen on applying this understanding to their *own lives*. Cahill and Cook (*ibid.*) claim that:

structural explanations were not readily available within the dominant and socially legible storylines used to understand markers of progression and success within an individual's biography.

Reflexivity, for Cahill and Cook, thus, cannot be entirely disembedded from the “dominant discourse” and institutionalised practices. While reflexive activity among my research participants was always to some degree socially embedded, many participants did not only offer structural explanations for their own biography, some also identified the “dominant discourse” in which these explanations took place; a discourse, as we shall see, that they often dismissed.

As will be shown in my thesis' last two chapters, France and Haddon's findings correspond to some extent to my own. Although reflexivity plays a vital and widespread role in many of Tottenham's young people's lives, external structures both influence their reflexive activity and constrain their pathways. On numerous occasions, many of my research participants indicate awareness of the social context that they have to navigate, manage and are influenced by. Besides, awareness of oneself in relation to one's social circumstances belongs to the very essence of reflexivity. At any rate, unlike my study, France and Haddon (2014: *passim*), alongside several other youth studies researchers, draw on Bourdieu to explain how class and social structures impact young people's choices and reflexivity at the subjective level (see also Roberts 2017: 44). I shall explain in §2.3.1 why my study calls for an alternative framework for analysing reflexivity's more socially embedded features to the one put forward by Bourdieu.

The twenty-first century has seen a number of youth researchers utilise the Bourdieusian notion of “habitus” (e.g., [1980] 1990; [1979] 2010) to argue for the *mutual dependence of reflexivity and socially embedded dispositions* (e.g., Akram and Hogan 2015; Farrugia 2013b; 2018; Farrugia and Woodman 2015; France and Haddon 2014; France and Threadgold 2016; Nico and Caetano 2017; Sweetman 2003; Threadgold 2018; Threadgold and Nilan 2009). They argue that instead of standing outside the *habitus*, young people's reflexivity operates in relation to it. As I have argued elsewhere (see §6.1.1), this line of argument can lead to the tendency to see youth reflexivity in terms of “degrees,” particularly in regards to where young individuals are on the

“socio-economic ladder.” Threadgold (2018: 55; see also Threadgold and Nilan 2009: 53–4) argues that although young people generally possess the capacity for reflexivity, “some can do it ‘better’” as a result of “access or ownership of more resources.”²¹ In my own findings, laid out in Chapter 6, there is little or no sign that those research participants that referred to themselves as “working class” or “socio-economic disadvantaged” lacked reflexive capabilities.

Farrugia’s research into youth homelessness (e.g., 2013b; 2016: 17–35; 2018) demonstrates that socio-economic disadvantage or marginalisation is not an indicator of lower levels of reflexivity. Like the argument that I put forward in Chapter 6, Farrugia (2013b: 690) sees reflexivity as a “widespread feature of modern youth subjectivity,” a capacity that should not be associated with “privilege or material advantage.”²² In the previous section, we saw Archer making a similar contention to Farrugia’s talk of reflexive activity as being widespread; but, in opposition Archer (2007: 39–42), he does not see the concepts of habitus and reflexivity as mutually exclusive. Reflexivity and habitus—where the latter supplies the former with meaning-making resources—are “mutually implicated in creating the practices which young people mobilise to realise different aspirations” (Farrugia 2013b: 690). The habitus, in Farrugia’s view, provides young people’s reflexive activity with its content.

Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson ([1996] 2012; Hodkinson 2008: 4) also turn to Bourdieu to show how we can go beyond understanding structure and agency as opposites, and how reflexivity can be continuous with more socially embedded dispositions. They have put forward an influential theory of “careership” that argues, among other things, that decision-making and progression with respect to career trajectories consist of three overlapping dimensions (e.g., Hodkinson 2008: 5; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997: 29):

- (1) positions and dispositions of the young individual, located in her or his habitus;
- (2) relations and interactions between different actors within a particular field; and,
- (3) turning-points and on-going (longitudinal) pathways that make up the life course.

²¹ See §6.1.1, for a similar argument by Nico and Caetano (2017: 678).

²² Farrugia’s line of reasoning is reminiscent of Shildrick, Blackman and MacDonald’s (2009: 458) contention that a lack of resources does not prevent reflexive activity, but serves to limit the options for such activity.

These three structural and subjective dimensions are much the same as the ones relevant to the theoretical framework developed in the present thesis, wherein the aim is to shed light on: (1) how even our reflexive deliberations draw upon embedded dispositions; (2) how our dispositions are accumulated from a range of interactions and lived experiences within a particular social environment; and, (3) how temporality and crucial “time points” that take place throughout our life course influence our decision-making processes. In what follows, however, the emphasis is more on the subjective than on structures, although the latter is discussed from the perspective of the young research participants. Nonetheless, vital to both my own research and the one undertaken by Hodkinson *et al.* is to avoid treating young people’s decision-making as an abstract, logical process, and instead examine the complex—often messy—ways in which decision-making processes actually transpire. Further, Hodkinson *et al.* ([1996] 2012: 122) referred to decision-making among their research participants as “pragmatic rationality.” By *pragmatic rationality*, they meant decisions that are more than merely cognitive. Rather, how decisions are made is strongly influenced by the respective young decision-maker’s *embodied dispositions, position* and the *resources* at her or his disposal. Again, Hodkinson *et al.* draw upon the Bourdieusian notions of habitus and (economic, cultural and social) capital as conceptual tools to understand young people’s tacit dispositions and personal resources.

The idea that reflexivity and decision-making draw on lived experiences and socially embedded dispositions is similar to the argument that I shall put forward in the remaining sections of this chapter. However, rather than combining *reflexivity* with *habitus*, the present research has benefitted from tying reflexive capacities more closely to the concept of “stock of knowledge.” In §2.3.1, I will explain the rationale behind favouring Schütz’s stock of knowledge over Bourdieu’s habitus. At any rate, what many youth studies approaches, including my own, have in common is an eagerness to explore the issue at hand from the perspective of the relevant young people and to take youth reflexivity seriously. Much of the discourse that emerged in the aftermath of the 2011 riots could benefit from these approaches and perspectives.

2.2 The voices of youths and the “missing” mediatory mechanism

Suppose we’ve been informed by reliable sociological data that one variable caused another variable. One variable represents a particular social context C where, say, youth unemployment and poverty is high, and another variable ϕ represents stigmatised identities of unemployed youths living in poverty. We’ve been told further that a young person, S , lives in C and that ϕ applies to S . But, although we may be convinced that there is a correlation between C and ϕ —e.g., that the former led to the latter—this cannot *by itself* be the whole story; nor can this correlation account for the *mechanism* of *how* ϕ comes about. There is something else in the thick of the process that needs to be accounted for, something that’s left behind by merely correlating ϕ with C , something perhaps sandwiched between C and ϕ . The young person, S , appears to be conspicuously left out of the equation, and no doubt other more inconspicuous factors should also enter the equation. The social phenomenon under scrutiny, thus, is more complex than “ C explains why ϕ applies to S .” Unemployment or poverty *per se* doesn’t create stigmatised identities of youths who are unemployed and poor. We need to investigate S and other factors involved in the construction of ϕ . For instance, how does the young person subjectively make sense of the identities available to her? Are journalists behind the construction of stigmatising identities? What about the political discourse that repeatedly suspect unemployed individuals in poor areas of “being lazy” and “taking advantage of ‘honest,’ hard-working citizens’ money?” How does the young person deal with the stigma and discrimination? Have these identities been internalised or led to “self-stereotyping” tendencies? Is there a discrepancy between how the young person sees herself and how others see her?

It is next to impossible to answer any of these questions without seeking the voice of the young person herself. In addition, we need to seek the *mediatory* process to understand or explain the *mechanism* involved in the formation of ϕ . This is achieved by asking *how* ϕ came about. We may believe that C plays some part in the emergence of ϕ , but in order to gain access to the mediatory mechanism, knowledge of S , as well as her (previous) engagement in the social world is required. A mechanism, then, is concerned with the process, or state of affairs tied up with, or “responsible for, an action, reaction, or outcome of a natural or social phenomenon” (Wight 2015: 52). Citing the social context of the young person or any other social variable is therefore not

enough. For instance, the explanatory claims about the youths involved in the England riots, as made clear in the preceding chapter, were generally governed by assumptions about which social variable caused the young people to partake in the riots. The reflexive voices of youths, however, were for the most part ignored. Therefore, instead of taking yet another look at the structural environment of Tottenham's young people, the present study will "open up the black box," as Lohse (2017) labels it, and look at *how* young people's experiences of, and engagement in, the social world affect their multiple identities and life trajectories.

The notion of a "black box" is often used in the "social mechanisms literature." §4.1, below, provides an overview of how my thesis builds on this literature. The epitome of a "black box" in sociological analysis is the interstices between two social variables, typically *processes* or *mechanisms* between a *cause* and its *effect* (Lohse 2017: 17; Mäki 2009: 85–6; Nielsen and Pedersen 2018: 166). The "hidden" factors involved in explaining how certain stigmatised identities, ϕ , have come to describe a young person, *S*, are also referred to as a "black box." Chapter 1 provided an overview of how the dominant discourse tended to leave out crucial subjective aspects of the youths associated with the "riot-hit areas," including Tottenham, and thus, "black-box" both the young people and the various mechanisms involved in the identity formation of these so-called "riotous youths." Rather than looking "inside the black box," the dominant discourse did not pay much attention to *how* the presumed variables were connected; e.g., "fatherlessness," "gang culture," "lack of aspirations," and "unemployment benefits" were said to lead to the behaviour seen during the riots. Inattention to social processes or mechanisms—"black-boxing"—is a way of simplifying explanations about the social world. To avoid simplification, identification of processes or mechanisms must be integral to sociological explanations. I argue that the processes and mechanisms vital to the present thesis are the different reflexive orientations that youths adopt to monitor themselves in relation to their social environment and the multiple experiences accumulated over time and drawn upon by young people when they negotiate their youth identities. A crucial part of filling in the "black box" of youth-identity formation, then, consists in construing reflexivity not only as an agentic capacity, but also as a subjective process that is both socially situated and historically constituted.

2.3 The reflexive process as historically constituted and socially situated

In promoting reflexivity to a more prominent position in social theory, Archer's social realist theory, I believe, brings itself closer to actual human beings; yet, it finds itself at odds with actual humans in that her theory understands reflexive activity as being detached from social histories and embeddedness. That is to say, on the one hand, Archer's emphasis on "*the subjective powers of reflexivity*" constitutes an advance over socio-ontological accounts that neglect various reflexive capacities, as it identifies the "missing link" that *mediates* the "*role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action*" (Archer 2007: 5, italics in original). But, on the other, her account of humans engaging in the social world is incomplete because they appear to be disconnected from their previous experiences of social conditions and their intersubjective repertoires of shared resources. Since Archer's commitment to ontological *dualism* admits no social factors into the reflexive process, her take on reflexivity, Farrugia (2013a: 288) summarises (perhaps a bit harshly), is "reduced to a form of disembodied cognitive rationality." My aim, therefore, is to construe reflexivity as a mediatory mechanism, like Archer, but without brushing aside the fact that *reflexive orientations are socially situated and historically constituted*.

So, how can reflexivity be *both* an agentic capacity *and* socio-historically embedded? My answer consists of what I shall call my study's "ontological premises" (see also, e.g., §§3.3.1 and 4.2.5): by outlining how (1) reflexive orientations relate to (2) the *stock of knowledge* of a person's lived experiences and engagement in the social world, I hope to provide an adequate answer to the issue of reconciling social embeddedness with agentic powers. My line of reasoning here draws to some extent on phenomenologically inspired sociology. This "solution" will later assist me in attending to the broad empirical concern with how Tottenham's youths experience and negotiate identities in the context of negative representations.

In order to avoid talking at cross-purposes with existing sociological literature—something that happens far too often in debates about the concept of reflexivity (see §2.1)—the next couple of sections will outline how I define reflexive orientations. The threefold commitment of these sections, moreover, is to demonstrate how and why I construe reflexivity as:

1. a mediatory mechanism;

2. a subjective and agentic process; and,
3. socially situated and historically constituted.

The first commitment builds upon the previous sections and Archer's work on the "mediatory mechanism" of reflexivity. This involves conceptualising reflexivity as the capacity to observe one's own identity or performance in relation to one's social environment. The latter two commitments, on the other hand, have not been adequately dealt with in the social sciences (cf. Bouzanis 2016: *passim*; Rafieian and Davis 2016: 562) and are often seen to be hostile to one another. Even so, in what is about to follow, I intend to offer a reconciliation between 2 and 3—the *subjective* and the *socio-historical* processes—a bringing together that lies to some extent at the heart of how I consider the concept of reflexivity.

2.3.1 The stock of knowledge

The ordinary man in every moment of his lived experience lights upon past experiences in the storehouse of his consciousness. He knows about the world and he knows what to expect. With every moment of conscious life a new item is filed away in this vast storehouse. At a minimum this is due to the fact that, with the arrival of a new moment, things are seen in a slightly different light. All of this is involved in the conception of a duration that is manifold, continuous, and irreversible in direction.

Schütz ([1932] 1972: 81)

Although reflexive orientations appear to be rooted in the "here and now," reflexive processes do not operate in a "vacuum," separate from past experiences, as alluded to in §2.1.1. The aim of this section is to sketch out what I see as an important ingredient of reflexive processes, namely, the ever-expanding repertoire of dispositions, meanings, capabilities and the like, also known as the "stock of knowledge" (see, e.g., Atkinson 2010: 2, 14; Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991: 56; Schütz [1942–55] 1982: 9, 117; [1945] 1962: 208; Turner 1988: 80).

The term "stock of knowledge" was coined by Alfred Schütz, who could also be said to be the leading exponent of phenomenological sociology. Crucial to phenomenological sociologists is the idea that social reality is intersubjective as they try to build a bridge between Weberian sociology and Husserlian phenomenology. However, while phenomenologists often focus on establishing the structures of, what Husserl ([1931] 2013) calls, "intentional consciousness,"

proponents of phenomenological sociology are interested in, what Schütz and Luckmann (1989) label, the structures of the “lifeworld.” The latter refers to the world as directly experienced through the subjectivity of everyday life. The lifeworld, thus, is closely connected to the interpretations that we make as we go about our day-to-day lives, which, in turn, are rooted in the “stock of knowledge.” My “stock of knowledge” is typically an unnoticed background configuration of multiple past experiences that comprises: linguistic rules associated with my native language; “conventional modes of interpreting expressions and events; numerous theories and methods; aural and visual forms; shared cultural and normative understandings” and so forth (Elster 2017: 283). These past, subjective experiences and shared meanings, “stored” in the stock of knowledge, are, to borrow a phrase from Delia and Grossberg (cited in Grossberg 1983: 106), “socially and historically constituted vehicles” and provide the requisite guidance for making interpretations.

But, how do our reflexive orientations relate to our “stocks of knowledge?” As a person lives through a range of experiences by simply engaging in the social world, she *adds to* her stock of knowledge. And I suggest further that she *draws upon* her stock of knowledge as *deep-background configurations* (Turner 1988: 83) whenever she exercises her reflexive capacities. “All interpretation of this world,” Schütz ([1945] 1962: 208) thought, “is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it” and, as I shall suggest in the below, why would reflexive orientations not make use of the same stock? The stock of knowledge is made use of as the individual concerns herself with the past, present or future and it enables her to navigate the social world, increase her capacity for interactive discourse and frame how she sees herself and others, all of which also could involve reflexivity.²³ Reflexive orientations are therefore not exempt from, or independent of, the stock of knowledge; they are, in other words, not socially or historically *disembedded*. Consequently, it cannot be, as Archer maintains (see §2.1.1), that agency, as well as an agent’s reflexivity, is distinct from the social realm. I shall refer to the “stock of knowledge” and “reflexivity,” as well as the way in which they interrelate with each other and contribute to youth-identity formation, as my study’s “ontological premises.”

²³ Previous subjective experiences and reflexive processes do not only entail enablements, they also contain negative constraints. For instance, reflexivity can lead to frustration and stagnation, as §7.1 points out, while experiences involving stigmatising representations could lead to self-stereotyping behaviours among young people, which is the topic of §§3.4.1 and 7.3.1.

To speak of young people's reflective activity as being socially and historically embedded is not alien to youth research. §2.1.2 contains various attempts within youth studies to reconcile reflexive and agentic capacities with structural and embedded factors that have emerged over time. However, while sociologists of youth tend to utilise *Bourdieu's concept of habitus* to demonstrate that reflexive activity can be continuous with structural or social embeddedness, the present section shows how my study has benefitted from tying reflexivity more closely to the *notion of stock of knowledge*. While a young person's "scheme of interpretation" is, for Bourdieu, the "habitus," for Schütz, it is the "stock of knowledge." So, why am I less compelled to follow other youth studies scholars in matching reflexivity to habitus? What makes the Schützian notion of "stock of knowledge" more suitable to studying youth reflexivity in the context of being regularly subjected to stereotypes and misrepresentations?

I have already pointed out how youth studies has benefitted from Bourdieu's emphasis on "system of dispositions" via his theory of habitus (see §2.1.2). Bourdieu's efforts provide an understanding of how past experiences play a part in sculpting life trajectories of individuals and social classes. However, his notion of habitus is not known for its flexibility with respect to the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which heterogeneous groups of young individuals—youths in Tottenham are a case in point—make sense of their surroundings and experiences. Habitus' "constitutive dispositions" operate mostly at a "*preconscious level*" (Bourdieu [1980] 1990: 54) and seem to be incapable of "adequately handle the heterogeneity and subtlety of human lives" (Atkinson 2010: 5; see also Telling 2016: 151). In structurally determined ways, the habitus has a tendency to lump together youths assumed to share similar social conditions, which, of course, is reminiscent of the homogeneous representations that I criticise throughout the thesis. A concept that is better suited to catering to the *heterogeneity in active youths*, but without disregarding *social situatedness and embeddedness* was necessary.

Contrary to the concept of habitus, the stock of knowledge does not speak of a particular "level of consciousness;" nor does it assume that those with relatively similar context or experiences belong to a relatively homogeneous group. Although Schütz ([1942–55] 1982: 210–1) states that, typically, the stock of knowledge is inaccessible to conscious awareness, he acknowledges that some portions of the "stock" can become accessible at will (Schütz [1942–55] 1982: 210–2; Schütz and Luckmann 1989: 130). The stock of knowledge, that is, is "*multilayered*,

[...] inclusive of many different interpenetrating levels” (Atkinson 2010: 13). A young person, thus, may draw upon the stock of knowledge preconsciously or consciously, naïvely or creatively.

Regardless of whether it is Bourdieu or Schütz who provides the “ultimate way” of understanding the background configurations of our experiences, thoughts and decisions, both the present research and most youth research view young people’s life trajectories as complex and historically constituted. Youth transition studies, in particular, draw upon life histories to analyse “multiple processes of transition over time,” which, in turn, explains current life-situations and youth transitions among young adults (e.g., MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 44). Heinz (2009: 4), for example, talks about transition not in terms of “timing and sequencing” of becoming an adult, but in terms of life-span development: “Each life phase affects the entire life course” (*ibid.*). All experiences and life phases, then, could potentially be a factor in how a young person sees herself or goes about her life. The next chapter relies on this claim to make a case for the need to include a “life course perspective” in studies on youth-identity formation. In §3.3.1, I discuss how certain aspects of the life course perspective have helped my study in understanding the formation and negotiation of youth identities *across young people’s lifespan*. Many interrelated factors, regardless of how far back they may go, could play a role in identity-forming processes. In taking a life course perspective, then, my study is better positioned to identify “what goes into” a young person’s stock of knowledge, the various social and personal factors that shape the evolving stock of experiences across young people’s life course. On this account, youth-identity formation and young people’s evolving stocks of knowledge are intrinsically linked, as the following three considerations illustrate:²⁴

- (a) a series of lived experiences and reflexive activity take place across a young person’s life course and in the context of social influences and interaction with others;
- (b) the effects of (a) accumulate over a long period of time into a stock of knowledge;
- (c) the young person draws upon her or his stock of knowledge—passively or creatively—when constructing their identity.

²⁴ This brief list focuses only on *subjective* aspects of identity formation processes. Of course, there are many factors involved in youth-identity formation beyond the control of the young person. For instance, identities (especially, *social* identities) and stereotypical representations often pre-exist or develop externally to the young person.

In sum, youths can *actively* construct their identity, but identity construction always entails factors that are *historically constituted and socially situated*. To say that identity formation or negotiation is (partially) “historically constituted,” then, is to say that *previous* reflexive orientations and experiences of the young person, organised as her stock of knowledge at hand, as Schütz ([1942–55] 1982: 9) puts it, are the source material for the various types of reflexive activity involved in the formation or negotiation of her identity. *How* she draws on her stock of knowledge depends on many factors, but especially, as we shall see when discussing the findings (Chapter 6), the different *modes* of reflexive orientations. These “modes,” as argued elsewhere (§§2.1.1 and 6.1), are never entirely discrete or categoric as is sometimes the tendency in how Archer presents the different forms of reflexivity. What is clear, however, is that, regardless of what mode of reflexivity is being employed, every past experience “prescribes [to some extent] various future experiences. In that sense, every experience is future-oriented” (Rogers 1983: 38). In other words, reflexivity is “not merely concerned with the activities that the person is engaged with at a specific point in time” (Rafieian and Davis 2016: 562), it is also concerned with past and future experiences.

2.3.2 The temporal dimension of reflexivity

Reflexive orientations, then, are past-, present- and future-oriented; they are simultaneously an *agentic* capacity and *socio-historically* situated. By construing reflexivity in these terms, we are not only providing a conceptual resource for seeking the “mediatory mechanism,” we have also, I believe, a concept that is not too far removed from an important feature of *how* “real human beings” in the social world actually negotiate their identities. Reflexive orientations, thus, are not a mental activity that starts from scratch each time they are in operation. Nor do they crop up, once in a blue moon, only due to structural disruption. They are *regular* mental processes mixed up in the *past, present and the future*; they are historically constituted and sometimes projected towards the time ahead. That is, there is a temporal dimension to reflexivity.²⁵

Crucial to connecting reflexivity to temporality is the notion of “time points.” The multiple time points that a person experiences over the life span can play a role in tying the past to the

²⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of the temporal dimension of reflexive orientations, see Elster (2017).

present and the future. Time points, here, consist of different experiences and events that have the potential to make an impact on the person. These subjective experiences cumulate over several time points and contribute to the person's stock of knowledge, which, in turn, is drawn upon whenever the person goes about her business—habitually or reflexively—in the social world. Figure 5, below, provides an illustration of how “time points” connect to reflexive subjectivities through temporality. The purpose of Figure 5, moreover, is to summarise and schematise how I understand reflexive orientations and how it will be employed in my study. The first column refers to “time points” set in the *past*; the middle column represents the different reflexive orientations that take place in the *present*; and, the last column indicates that present reflexive activity may act as source material for potential *future* reflexive processes (where “*t*” denotes, analytically, a “time point” in the young person's life and the numerical subscript next to the *t* denotes the stage—past, present or future—in which the “time point” took/takes place):²⁶

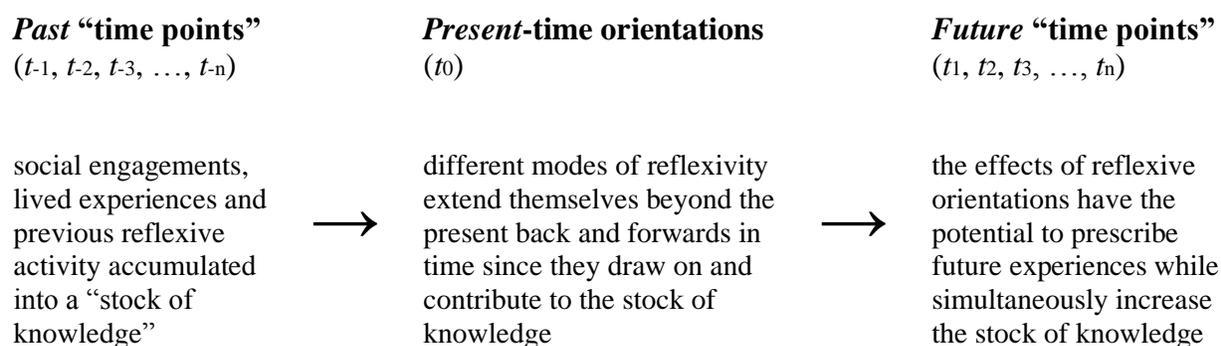


Figure 5 Schematisation of the temporal dimension of reflexive orientations

²⁶ When I talk of “time points” I mean something entirely different from Archer's framework of “morphogenesis” (see, e.g., Archer 2013b: 7; 2017b: 1–2; Donati 2014: 147; see also a brief outline of Archer's theory of “morphogenesis” in §2.1.1). While her explanatory framework captures a temporal sequence that always starts with what she refers to as structural properties, at time *t*₁, that impinge on individuals, at *t*₂, my idea of “time points” simply refers to “analytical points” (e.g., events and experiences) in a person's life that have some influence on the person at a later point in their life.

According to the schematisation in Figure 5, reflexive orientations are temporally embedded: they draw on the past and stretch themselves forward into the future. Previous reflexive activity and lived experiences enable the individual to avoid having to start from square one when reflexively mediating different aspects of the social world in relation to her- or himself. Nevertheless, the move from past to present and into the future, as illustrated in Figure 5, does not only suggest continuity and reproduction of social knowledge and identities, it also signifies how identities and the (social) content of our consciousness can be rejected through reflexive deliberations. However, even in cases where reflexivity is applied to reject common social conventions, reflexive deliberations cannot entirely escape social or temporal embeddedness. Reflexivity, that is, must bring into play at least some social or temporal aspects of the stock of knowledge.

What is the practical relevance of the above? As regards the empirical operationalisation of this schema, one should seek to tie reflexive activity to previous experiences and analyse how the *different* modes of reflexivity impact on the young person's identity formation and life course. When scrutinising reflexivity in relation to the formation of youth identities and life trajectories, then, we should be aware that some youths may, for instance, *problematise* their identities—that is, adopt a “meta-reflexive orientation” to identity work—while others may have a more taken-for-granted attitude towards their own identities.²⁷

By seeing reflexivity as not only present-oriented (t_0), but also as a capacity that must to various degrees draw upon the stock of knowledge of previous subjective experiences in the social world (t_{-1} , t_{-2} , t_{-3} , ..., t_{-n}) and act as source material for future reflexive activity (t_1 , t_2 , t_3 , ..., t_n), we are now in a position to systematise young people's reflexive orientations and internalisation processes. Systematising youth reflexivity in this way is intended to help us better understand and theorise lived, everyday experiences of youth negotiating identities and stereotypical representations. That is to say, by exploring various relevant time points of the past, we can penetrate even deeper into how youth-identity formation actually transpires; an exploration that is the objective of the remaining chapters.

²⁷ A taxonomy of the different modes of reflexive orientations is found in §2.1.1, while §6.1 examines how some young people in Tottenham employ these heterogeneous forms of reflexivity.

Chapter 3

YOUTH-IDENTITY FORMATION AND PROCESSES OF STEREOTYPING

Just like the term “reflexivity,” “identity” can “refer to a range of phenomena” (Lawler 2014: 7–8); just like the different theoretical perspectives on reflexive activity, there are “many different theories of identities” (Phoenix 2016: 5); and, just like reflexivity benefits from interdisciplinary conceptualisations, the concept of “identity” is not situated within any one discipline. The term “identity,” in other words, is “used in a range of ways to describe or explain a variety of experiences and behaviors” (Côté 2009: 376). But unlike the previous chapter’s treatment of the concept “reflexivity”—where the aim was to set out a more *specific* understanding of the concept even though many different reflexive orientations exist—identity is henceforth used in an *extensive* and *inclusive* way. It can signify *uniqueness* or *sameness*, a *social category* or *individual characteristics, roles and expectations*, it can be manifested *externally* or be a *personal* affair, manifested internally through *reflexive* accomplishments or through *preconscious* processes. Identity, moreover, can denote different interpersonal relations:

self	→	self	(how you perceive yourself)
others/external aspect	→	self	(how others perceive you)
self/internal aspect	→	others	(how you perceive others)
ingroup	↔	outgroup	(within-group and intergroup relations)

The present chapter, in essence, deals with multiple answers, angles, contexts and processes connected to the “who are you?”-question. The main purpose of this chapter, furthermore, is to pave the way for the empirical research on youth-identity formation, which findings are outlined

in Chapter 7 below. To fulfil this preparatory role, the chapter outlines how I theorise and define the different aspects of identity and its formation, including how young people deal with stereotypical identities, while simultaneously aims to facilitate a discussion of the broader sociological and social psychological literature on the same topics.

The first two sections focus on social identity and personal identity. Crucial to gaining a deeper understanding of both social and personal identity, I argue, is to incorporate the distinction between the “internal” and the “external” aspects of identity into theories on identity-forming processes. While the *internal* aspect reflects the subjective experience of a person’s identity, the *external* aspect operates independently of that person. I go on to discuss how these two aspects tend to permeate each other and why a sharply delineated “internal–external distinction” (or a “subjective–objective distinction” for that matter), therefore, leads to an unsatisfactory outcome with respect to investigating identities. Sociological analysis on identity, moreover, has a tendency to embrace only the external aspect of identity. By ignoring the internal aspect and, as a result, failing to incorporate young people’s subjective interpretations of their own identities, research on youth identity could end up reinforcing homogeneous representations and stereotyped identities. As we saw in Chapter 1, these homogeneous and stereotypical representations—unfair and inaccurate as they may be—are already dominating the discourse on youths in Tottenham.

Before I move on to talk about processes of stereotype development and self-stereotyping, I sketch out how I understand identity *formation* more generally. In this section, I stress, again, the importance of paying attention to youth subjectivities, including taking previous lived experiences and reflexive orientations into account. Emphasising the *processes* involved in identity formation is crucial to resist “essentialising” certain identity categories. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the “realness” and “persistence” of many identities as well as the harmful consequences that may result from stereotyped and stigmatised identities. The section continues by making a case for the need to include a “life course perspective” in studies on youth-identity formation. The objective of a life course perspective is to consider and examine how a person’s situation and identity unfold across that person’s lifespan, a central theme of my study.

In the last two sections, the aim is to look at a variety of processes that contribute to *stereotype maintenance*. Stereotypical representations are rooted in inflexible and evaluative judgements of a specific group and they often have harmful effects on members of the negatively

stereotyped group. If members of this group describe themselves in terms of stereotypical group characteristics, then they may engage in *self-stereotyping* behaviour. Although the concept of “self-stereotyping” enjoys a special status in self-categorisation theory and social psychology more generally, it is absent in much sociological analyses and youth-identity studies. A key ambition of this section, therefore, is to introduce the concept of self-stereotyping into sociological literature and youth studies, as well as situate it within the present study’s subject matter and accompanying concepts (e.g., “reflexivity,” “identity formation,” “lived experiences” and the “stock of knowledge”). I then go on to discuss self-categorisation theory’s treatment of intergroup relations, where similarities among “ingroup” members are emphasised and contrasted with the identity of some “outgroup.” The baseline from which my argument here proceeds is that the ingroup–outgroup distinction should not cancel out the fact that *heterogeneous* social contexts, influences and subjectivities are not uncommon *within an ingroup*, as well as both *within and between outgroups*. This ties in with the overall conclusion of my thesis drawn primarily from the research findings; namely, the importance of avoiding homogenous and prototypical representations of some age group in a single geographical area, such as Tottenham youths. We should, therefore, never lose sight of subjective and heterogeneous understandings of identities. Yes, identities are social categories, but the processes that form, sustain or change them would not subsist without our subjective capacities, especially our individual lived experiences—sometimes presented to us consciously and, at other times, preconsciously—and our capacity for reflexivity.

3.1 Social identity and the internal–external distinction

Throughout my thesis, “identity” is understood in a wide and flexible sense. It is useful, however, to consider some nuances with respect to the term identity. To be more precise, I shall, in the next couple of sections, bring to light the distinction between “social identity” and “personal identity,” as well as the fragile dividing line between identity’s “internal” and “external” dimensions (for a schematisation outlining the internal and external aspects of personal identity and social identity, see Figure 6 in the section on personal identity). The latter two dimensions make a crucial contribution to the present thesis as they assist in shedding light on the emergence of youth-

identities, stereotypical representations and self-stereotyping. Let me start the discussion, however, by outlining how I understand “social identity.”

Social identity is about one’s social location: one’s “place” within society and what one presumably has in common with others (see, e.g., Akram and Hogan 2015: 11–2; Côté and Levine 2016: *passim*). When I refer to a young person’s social identity, I don’t mean that person’s peculiarities, personality or behavioural traits. Instead, I shall mean “social identity” to refer to the young person’s “key characteristics,” her or his “*master statuses*” (Côté and Levine 2016: 15, 46) and the respective social roles that accompany these characteristics and statuses. Race, ethnicity, gender, vocation, religious affiliation and social class, for instance, are often seen as key characteristics that are all features of one’s social identity.

It goes without saying, then, that a single person’s social identities typically intersect and are multiple. A young person, for example, may see herself as a Black British-Nigerian student, as well as a young woman with a middle-class upbringing. Her social identity, here, derives from her knowledge or experience of her membership of a group or various groups (Tajfel 1981: 255; see also, e.g., Chalari and Panagiota 2018: 11; Stets and Serpe 2013). However, others may define her slightly differently, in which case her social identity derives independently of any self-knowledge or self-concepts she may hold. I shall refer to the former—*her knowledge* of belonging to a socially identified group—as the “*internal aspect of social identity*” and the latter—*others’ assumed knowledge* of her social identities—as the “*external aspect of social identity*.” The *internal aspect of social identity* is then about how *one sees oneself*, or *one’s sense of belonging* in relation to a certain class, gender, profession or social or ethnic community. This “internal aspect” reflects an individual’s subjective experience of her or his social identity. The *external aspect of social identity*, on the other hand, refers to how *others* define and see individuals in terms of key social characteristics. This aspect of social identity, unlike the internal aspect, indicates that the individual under scrutiny has minimal, or no, control over her or his social identity since the respective characteristics or social categories are externally imposed or implied.

Attempts at highlighting the internal and external aspects of identity are nothing new. Côté and Levine (2016) prefer using terms such as “subjective” and “objective” to talk about what’s internal and external to the person in regards to her or his identity development. Others, such as Phoenix (2017: 1312), employ the terms “insider understandings” to describe a person’s self-

perception and “outsider constructions” to describe how others perceive that person’s identity. What most social psychologists (and some sociologists) agree on, though, is that internal/subjective/insider aspects of identity do not necessarily accord with external/objective/outsider aspects (cf., e.g., *ibid.*).

Whether social identities as “master statuses” could be referred to as *objective*—instead of *external*—entities is open to doubt. In fact, I shall later touch upon how social identities are contingent and socially constructed, a claim that naturally renders any assertion about objectivity in regards to identities doubtful. Côté and Levine, nonetheless, insist on referring to this aspect of identity as “objective.” Their insistence is somewhat perplexing, however, since this aspect, in Côté and Levine’s (2016: 36) own words, remains distinctly “objective” while simultaneously being part of an on-going *process* as opposed to being a “thing.” While we can agree on the fact that identities, including external identities—or, as Côté and Levine call them, “objective identities”—are always of a “processual” nature and potentially a “work in progress,” I find it hard to echo their recommendation of associating what I term the “external” aspect of identity with something belonging to the *objective* realm. Hence, rather than speaking of a subjective–objective distinction, I shall prefer using the terms “internal” and “external,” as outlined in the preceding paragraphs, to talk about these two aspects of identity.

Of course, the line between the internal and the external aspects of social identity is blurry. For instance, an individual could have subjective experiences of an “externally imposed” social identity attributed to that individual. Young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities may have experiences of others seeing them in terms of key characteristics rooted in systemic or institutionalised racism and xenophobia; and, a woman may be situated in, and affected by, a workplace that promotes certain roles and expectations associated with social identities that pre-exist her lifespan. In both cases, *the experiences are subjective, but the social identities experienced emerge externally to the individuals*. If the individuals in question see themselves differently from the way others do (by, for instance, attaching social identities to themselves that differ from those that others may attribute to them), then there is a discrepancy between the internal and the external social identity components. Chapter 1 shows how the discrepancy between the *internal* perspective of the way Tottenham youths perceive themselves and the *external* perspective of stereotypical representations of the same youths guided me towards my initial research problem.

The research findings in Chapters 6 and 7 put to use the reflexive voices of youths to further discuss this discrepancy and how the external perspective has led to incorrect and harmful portrayals of young people in Tottenham.

Other times, we *internalise* the (external) social identities associated with our presumed group membership, even though the social identities in question have emerged independently of us. When there is no discrepancy between the internal and the external aspects of social identity, the result could be, but not necessarily, negative “self-stereotyping” tendencies.²⁸ However, a lack of discrepancy between our subjectively derived understanding of our social identities and how people out there see us can also lead to a more positive outcome of mutual affirmation (Côté and Levine 2016: 38–9).

Finally, how we identify ourselves—e.g., subjective knowledge of our social identities—could also influence how other people see us or treat us. In other words, the external and the internal aspects of identities often permeate each other and a *sharply delineated* “internal–external distinction” is therefore, more often than not, a dubious way of investigating social identities. Analytically, however, the distinction between the internal and external aspects of identity has proven to be useful. As this chapter proceeds, I shall sketch out how I theorise the different variants, discrepancies and interdependences between internal and external aspects of our identities.

3.2 Personal identity

While social identity refers to key characteristics concerning a person’s group membership(s), *personal identity* involves attitudinal and behavioural characteristics, as well as more “informal statuses” as opposed to “master statuses.” Personal identity, as well as its characteristics and statuses, furthermore, is often the expression of a person’s—a single human being’s—individuality and relatively unique attributes (e.g., Harré 1993: 52). To illustrate, an individual’s personal identity could take shape through her:

²⁸ For an outline of the concept of “self-stereotyping,” see §3.4.1, while §7.3.1 discusses (the lack of) self-stereotyping processes among young people in Tottenham.

- *interest* in certain forms of lifestyle, political activity, musical genres, social media and physical activities;
- *personality traits*, such as tendencies to be honest, loyal, compassionate, courageous and either introvert or extrovert;
- *behavioural characteristics*, e.g., certain ways of communicating, initiating relationships, approaching new ventures and conducting themselves at, for instance, parties.

An individual's personal identity can also form through a "brand" constructed by the individual herself. The purpose of this brand is to make available a specific representation so that the individual herself can be in control of any external aspect of her personal identity. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are perhaps the best examples of online "brand-making" tools for constructing individualised personal identities among young people (cf., e.g., Côté and Levine 2016: 46–7).

Although youth subjectivity and the adoption of a variety of attitudes, values, behavioural styles and reflexive orientations are crucial in the development of young people's *personal* identities, the identity components are still *historically* constituted and *socially* situated. That is, a young person's personal identity is not merely an agentic or reflexive achievement; instead, it is *also*—or, perhaps, *primarily*—a construction that originates in that person's biography of everyday experiences conditioned by the respective social context in which the young person lives. Personal identity is thus connected to countless of "time points," including many that pre-exist the young person (hence, the importance of identity *formation*, which is the topic of the next section in this chapter).

As with all forms of identity—including social identity, as discussed above—there are an *internal* aspect and an *external* aspect of personal identity (see Figure 6, below, for a schematisation of this distinction). The latter refers to how individuals and groups assign personality characteristics onto a specific person, *independently* of how that person sees her- or himself. The external and the internal aspects of personal identity thus could differ greatly from one another. The external aspect, however, can also be in unison with a person's self-representations as the external impression is often influenced by the manner in which people present themselves to others during interactions. In the case of Tottenham's young people, as we shall see in the chapters where I discuss the research

findings, the opposite seems to be the case. Many external perspectives appear to deny the heterogeneity across Tottenham’s young people and ignore their diverse personal identities.

	Personal identity	Social identity
Internal aspect	self-concepts and -representations in terms of one’s behavioural, attitudinal and personality characteristics involving “informal statuses”	self-concepts and -representations in terms of one’s social location or key characteristics involving “master statuses”
External aspect	other people’s definition or perception of someone’s behavioural, attitudinal and personality characteristics	other people’s definition or perception of someone’s social location or key characteristics

Figure 6 The internal and external aspects of personal identity and social identity

In Figure 6 above, the *internal aspect of personal identity* refers to how a person sees her or his own personality traits, behavioural characteristics and other informal statuses. Personal identity, here, is the result of *subjective* mental processes and entails a person’s:

- a) *sense* of her- or himself “at the level of daily interactions with others” (Côté and Levine 2016: 172);
- b) *experience* of her or his behavioural traits;
- c) *internalisation* of her or his personality characteristics (Chalari and Panagiota 2018: 7); and,
- d) *reflexive orientations* towards her or his identity components.

However, as repeatedly stressed throughout the present thesis, internalisation processes, as well as a person’s experiences, reflexive orientations and sense of her- or himself rarely, or never, operate in a social vacuum. Erikson ([1950] 1993), of course, has already alluded to this as he understood identity development *vis-à-vis* young people’s transition into adulthood as a process that is internal to the young person while simultaneously involving social relationships with others across her or his life course. Therefore, even though a), b), c) and d) emphasise the internal (subjective) aspects

of personal identity, the identity components reflect the person's social relationships and engagement in the social world. That is, while being a subjective achievement, the internal aspect of personal identities emerges out of subjectivities situated both socially and temporally—subjectivities with biographical life courses, wrapped up in social relations. The internal aspect, thus, also involves relationships between different “temporal modes:”

- *past* experiences, since we retrospectively draw from our lives to date (experiences and self-schemas stored in our “stocks of knowledge”);
- *present* activity, since we operate within social spaces that have a bearing on what's available to us and how we act in the present; and,
- *future* possibilities, since we pursue life projects and who we want to be in the future.

Not only do external perspectives influence internal perspectives, a young person's *personal identity* is rarely entirely detached from her or his *social identity*. Using social identities to formulate someone's (or one's own) personal identity can have particularly oppressive or negative consequences, especially if the social identities are entrenched in stigmatised or marginalised representations. Hurtado (2018: 163) offers an example: “a poor African American lesbian with a physical disability will be treated in many social contexts according to her *visible stigmatized social identities* rather than her *personal identity*....” Many draw upon the external aspects of an individual's stigmatised social identity to determine her or his personality, while the internal, subjective aspects of that individual's personal identity are ignored. This is exactly what youths in Tottenham are faced with on a regular basis. Chapter 1 indicated that (external) people rarely take individual personal traits into account when they define young people in Tottenham. Instead, many base their relatively homogeneous and one-dimensional definitions on stereotypical media representations of youth. The last two chapters of this thesis add further empirical flesh to this observation.

Stigmatised social identities or master statuses, exemplified in the preceding paragraph, have a tendency to appeal to our visual stimulus and provide us with little or no information regarding personal identities. I shall later speak of how a more heterogeneous perspective allows for an analysis that is truer to the subject's own identities and life trajectory. The crucial point to call attention to here, however, is the need to distinguish between an external aspect of identity and the

subjective internal aspect, where only the latter deals with the *person's* perspective. Yet, the *external* aspect of identity, which is often viewed as the more salient one even when this aspect appears problematic, is usually the perspective embraced by sociological analysis on identity. If we merely focus our attention on the external aspect, we may not only miss valuable information and make erroneous interpretations about people's identities, we may also play a part in reinforcing and encouraging stigmatised social identities and homogeneous representations of, say, youths in Tottenham; all which contribute to imposing certain forms of oppression. Social identities, however, do not inevitably lead to oppressive or negative outcomes for all. Social identities, or master statuses, can also "confer privilege." Some personal identities can benefit from the "freedom of stigma if an individual's master statuses protect them from subordination" (*ibid.*). For example, a white, able-bodied, socially advantaged, male citizen tend to benefit from his social identity. He is also often perceived and treated as an *individual with unique characteristics* rather than in terms of *belonging to a homogeneous group*. Many of this study's research participants expressed that they were rarely in a position to enjoy the privilege of being perceived based on their personality traits due to the stigmatised social identities associated with being young in Tottenham and the tendency to think of them in a homogeneous way.

3.3 Youth-identity formation

Before I move on, I should deal briefly with an overdue matter in hand; namely, an outline of what I mean by "identity formation." To understand identity formation is to grasp not only *how* social and personal identities form, but also *why* they form and whether the formation varies by *different* social groups or even by individuals within those groups. So, how do these "how?"- and "why?"-questions translate into research on reflexivity and youth-identity formation in the context of Tottenham? This is best answered by summing up some of the critical empirical questions used as the point of departure for the qualitative research process: "How do young people deal with negative and stereotypical representations?" "Are youth identities in Tottenham as homogeneous as the media, politicians and sociologists generally portray them?" "To what degree are reflexive capacities involved in the identity-forming process?" "To what degree is this formation influenced

by young people’s social environment and media representations of youth?” And, finally: “to what degree does identity development among Tottenham’s young people inform their social world?” These questions are discussed and measured up against the research findings in Chapter 7.

Identity is said to form in late adolescence. Much of the current research that has taken place within youth studies concerning identity formation suggests that the “*self*” and *self-concepts* form during childhood and are transformed into coherent *identities* during teen years (Chalari and Panagiota 2018: 6–7; Côté 2014: 175; Côté and Levine 2016: 121, 52; Mizokami *et al.* 2018: 111). However, if we accept Jenkins’ (2008: 5) take on identity—namely that identity is “the human capacity [...] to know ‘who is who’ (and hence ‘what is what’)”²⁹—then not only does the development of self-concepts happen in early childhood, but also identity-forming activity has well and truly began, and perhaps even become consolidated, prior to adolescence. Very young children are able to distinguish between individuals and certain groups in relation to themselves. In addition, throughout this thesis, I claim that all sorts of early (childhood) experiences could impact identity formation and it is, thus, crucial that we do not limit research into youth-identity formation to simply the “youth stage.” Adolescence or the youth stage is certainly a critical time when, as Côté and Levine (2016: 152) states, “many people become active in varying degrees in their identity formation,” but I do not see the need to draw a hard and fast line between the “self-concept development” of childhood and “identity-forming processes” of adolescence.

Some (e.g., Côté 2014: 174; Côté and Levine 2016: 171) see the process behind identity formation in relation to inactivity and proactivity:

Inactive identity formation is characterized by a reticence to think ahead, experiment and explore, or to commit to future personal and social identities (synonymous with identity diffusion), whereas proactive identity formation involves a willingness to think ahead in one’s life in a planning and purposeful manner, and to explore and experiment with future possible selves and identities.³⁰

(*Ibid.*)

²⁹ Jenkins’ (2008: 5) interpretation of identity essentially involves “knowledge of who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on.”

³⁰ Côté (2014: 174; Côté and Levine 2016: 126, 152–3) appears to see the inactive–proactive continuum in conjunction with a set of moral qualities, where individuals who take a proactive approach to identity formation, as opposed to those who take an inactive stance, have apparently been found to have: “higher levels of personal agency, higher

This inactive–proactive distinction can, perhaps, also be viewed as different orientations towards identity ranged along a continuum, stretching from *taken-for-granted attitudes*, on the one end, to *reflexive orientations*,³¹ such as meta-reflexive activity, on the other end. However, even though the two attitudes toward identity formation—taken-for-grantedness and reflexivity—are at opposite sides of the spectrum, they both draw upon lived experiences accumulated into a stock of knowledge. This was evident in the research findings. It is not the case that taken-for-granted attitudes towards identity are wholly situated and socially embedded while (meta-)reflexive orientations are completely disembodied from social influences. Regardless of how much you try to distance yourself from embedded structures by, for instance, reflexively weighing up different identities, you still can't work off a blank canvas, isolating previous experiences, linguistic rules, social norms and shared meanings. In other words, you cannot operate entirely independent of your “stock of knowledge.” You must draw upon *something* when (reflexively) contemplating who you are and who you (do not) want to be. I have elsewhere referred to these claims as the “ontological premises” of my study (see, e.g., §§3.3.1 and 4.2.5).

The identity formation process, then, consists of a variety of previous experiences of the social world and different reflexive orientations; the latter, however, can never be entirely detached from the former since the content and resources involved in any reflexive construction of identity are (at least, to some degree) rooted in past experiences. The methodological and empirical implications, as you shall see in the subsequent chapters, are the necessity to examine young people's *own* experiences and reflexive concerns, which means putting youth subjectivities in the driver's seat.

The present study's emphasis on subjective features of identity formation, however, does not mean that the “external aspects of identity” are irrelevant. As alluded to in the preceding sections, external aspects of social and personal identity are often playing a vital role in what's out there in

achievement motivation, lower neuroticism and use of defense mechanisms, more robust cognitive processes (functioning better under stress, exercising more balanced thinking, being more playful, and demonstrating higher levels of moral reasoning and ego development), and better interpersonal skills and mature interpersonal relationships (higher intimacy, self-disclosure, and most secure attachments). They also tend to have strong relationships with family and friends (but are better able to resist peer pressure), greater self-efficacy, and are more reflexive and self-confident...” My study's findings do not corroborate these staggering assertions.

³¹ For a brief overview of reflexivity's role within “proactive approaches” to identity formation, see, for instance Mizokami *et al.* (2018: 110).

the social world. That is to say, our recurring social experiences are often dominated by external aspects of identity, which, of course, over time will influence how we (subjectively) see ourselves and others. Therefore, again, it is next to impossible to draw a clear-cut line of demarcation between the external—what’s out there—and the internal—our subjective experiences.

Even though the external penetrates the internal and the former, in turn, relies on the latter, talk of external aspects (e.g., factors independent of the individual) and internal aspects (e.g., subjective or psychological factors) is still justified provided we don’t assume a *distinct separation* of the two domains. This is especially the case with identities. For instance, socially defined group identities (e.g., class and gender) have a real impact on how we see others and ourselves. But, identities exist out there in the social world only in so far as they are determined by thought through individual experience, often as part of an iterative process. If, as I believe, this line of thought is credible, then it holds multiple implications for identity formation:

- (i) recurring experiences of (socially defined) identities and the continued belief in them form, enforce and reproduce identities; however,
- (ii) identities are never fixed or independent of human consciousness; and,
- (iii) since socially established identities still depend on our thought, they have the potential to be deconstructed and reconstructed; therefore,
- (iv) rather than having an “essentialist” stable “core,” identities are decentred; and what’s more,
- (v) identity formation is rarely an automatic process, nor is it ever entirely “complete;” this is, in part, because
- (vi) subjective engagement (e.g., reflexive activity) in identity formation is possible; and, in part, because
- (vii) the formation and salience of (intersecting) identities differ depending on the social context; however,
- (viii) despite the conditional and decentred character of identity, identities are capable of engendering powerful, often harmful, consequences.³²

The palpable sense of identity and its consequences, as in (viii), are probably best summed up by Hall’s work (e.g., 1992: 226) on race, as paraphrased by Wright (2011: 134): “‘race’ is a fiction that has very ‘real’ material and symbolic consequences.” The “realness” of many identities and

³² Some themes within this list are inspired by Rattansi and Phoenix (2005: 103; cf. also Hall [1987] 1996: 116; Phoenix and Phoenix 2012: 64).

the harmful effects that may result from it, furthermore, are often the result of the enforcement and reproduction of certain identities mixed with the oppression of one group by another. The very real consequences, in other words, are closely connected to (i) above. What binds (i) and (viii) is connected to what I shall refer to in the next section as the “tenacity” or “persistence” of identities.

The formation of “stable identities,” as in (i), is sometimes accompanied by the emergence of stereotypes. The presence of stereotypes is not only located externally to the individual, it can also alter an individual’s identity formation by impacting on the individual’s self-image. If an individual’s identity is formed based on the endorsement of stereotypical traits as self-defining, then we are perhaps witnessing an identity process labelled “self-stereotyping” in social psychology. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to this concept.

Despite all the talk of continuity and stability in relation to identities, there is nothing permanent about them *per se*. Given (iii) and (vi), reflexivity, for example, is a tool that can disrupt the stability or formation of identities and self-stereotyping tendencies. The potential of reflexivity, however, can have its limitations. Like all agentic capacities, reflexive orientations toward identity are never entirely cut off from (i), (vii), and sometimes even (viii). The qualitative part of this thesis draw on the above list as reference point.

3.3.1 Identity processes and the life course perspective

From a subjective point of view, identity formation is a multidimensional process involving lived experiences and reflexive attitudes toward identities, as well as a person’s social relations across her life course. As stressed in the previous chapter on reflexivity, there is no clear distinction between these different ontological “ingredients:” reflexive orientations draw, at least to some degree, on subjective stocks of knowledge accumulated from past experiences; these lived experiences are embedded in structures of social relations; social contexts and relations, lived experiences and reflexive orientations, are all influenced by temporal processes connecting the past, present and future. Due to the variety of complex, historical factors that affect processes of identity formation, any study considering youth identities and their formation calls for a *life course perspective* that, as far as I’m concerned, should incorporate the last chapter’s account of how reflexive orientations and the stock of knowledge interrelate (my study’s “ontological premises”).

This section build on the previous chapter and, in particular, its last three sections. I start by discussing why it is vital to understand identity formation as a *process* and proceed to sketch out why any research into this process—be it social psychological or sociological—benefits from adopting a life course perspective.

The formation of identities is often a preconscious process resulting in both identities and their formation being seen as natural, or even biological or genetic. This is due to the tenacity and “governance of specific identities” (Hopkins 2010: 7). But, in assigning properties such as “tenacity” or “persistence” to identities, one doesn’t say much about the mechanisms or processes involved in the formation of these “tenacious identities.” Rather than merely claiming that identities appear as natural due to their “persistence,” the present study wants to dig deeper by looking at:

- *processes*; e.g., different “time points” (certain experiences or events) across a lifespan that contribute to the formation, transformation or permanence of youth identities; and,
- *mediatory mechanisms*; e.g., the role of reflexivity in “mediating” these identities as young people journeying through their life course.³³

The persistence of identities doesn’t just appear out of thin air, nor is persistence a quality attached to identities *per se*. Identities and their persistence are instead, in part, the result of social and political processes operating independently of the individual under scrutiny, and, in part, the result of subjective capacities. It is the latter that my study focuses on and I have suggested throughout the thesis that two “ontological premises” are involved in the subjective aspect of youth-identity formation: (1) cumulative effects of lived, subjective experiences across a lifespan and (2) different reflexive attitudes toward youth identities. Both (1) and (2) are significant factors in

³³ The exploration of processes and mechanisms in identity formation, as well as social ontology and sociological work more broadly, is an attempt at steering away from establishing a “black box,” where identity *formation* and the accompanying *processes* of socialisation and internalisation are the black box. A black box, here, is whatever actually happens. For example, something “goes in” to socialisation and internalisation processes (e.g., family, friends and social environment), and something “comes out” (e.g., aspirations, professional roles and identities); but, whatever is “in between” the “input” and the “output” is rarely analysed in sociology. This “in between” part, furthermore, is the black box; the mediating mechanism or process that shows us *how* identities are formed or *how* individuals are socialised to behave in a given way. The preceding chapter, especially §2.2, discusses some crucial mediatory mechanisms—first and foremost the concept of reflexivity—involved in identity formation (for relevant commentaries on the “black box,” see, e.g., Boudon 1998: 173; Côté and Levine 2002: 143; Edling and Rydgren 2016: 1137; Hitlin and Elder 2007: 172–86; Lohse 2017: 17; Wight 2015: 50, 52).

youth-identity formation and can change or reproduce, challenge or accept the “persistence of identities,” as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7.

One aim of the present research is, therefore, to introduce these ontological premises into the *life course perspective*. The life course perspective, as Brady and Gilligan (2018: 70) point out, “provides us with a unique way of integrating conceptually a range of disparate factors” that play a role in the development of individuals over time. The result is a framework that has the capacity to incorporate and combine “numerous types of individual, social, and cultural variation” (*ibid.*: 76), which is key in avoiding homogeneous representations of the young people in my study. This perspective, furthermore, directs our attention to the temporal dimension as it emphasises the “notion of historical and unfolding time” (Hitlin and Elder 2007: 174), as well as the timing, sequencing and dependency of “multiple transition events” (Lee *et al.* 2018: 212; see also Elster 2017). I see the life course perspective, thus, as an ideal approach to studying identity formation.

Yet, the life course perspective has had a tendency to leave subjective experiences out of the investigation (Gilleard and Higgs 2016: 303), while it “is rare to find first-person temporal orientations being the subject of inquiry” (Hitlin and Elder 2007: 174). The present study sees this “oversight” as a limitation to understanding youth-identity formation *vis-à-vis* the life course. In contrast, researching a person’s life course should (also) involve an investigation into the influences of past *subjective* experiences, including the formative years of that person’s lifespan (see, e.g., Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 982). These influences—regardless of how minute or trivial they may be and how far back they may go—are fundamental in figuring out how youth identities are formed, since they give insight into the stock of knowledge that operates as source material for various reflexive orientations, which, in turn, inform identity-forming processes.

So, what are the themes that the life course perspective incorporates in order to paint a richer picture of how persons come to be who they are at present? Brady and Gilligan (2018: 70), inspired by Elder (1994) and Shanahan (2000), list six interconnected themes within the life course perspective (see also Hutchison 2019):

- a) the interplay of human lives and temporality;
- b) the timing of lives;
- c) independent or (inter)dependent lives;
- d) human agency;

- e) heterogeneity in life course trajectories; and,
- f) developmental risk and protection.

a), c), d) and e), in particular, are crucial to my research, and, as touched upon in the previous paragraph, two additional themes (or, “ontological premises” as they were referred to earlier in this section) have emerged during the development of this study as vital to the life course perspective and an understanding of identity formation:

- g) different reflexive orientations; and,
- h) past experiences accumulated into a subjective “stock of knowledge.”

By including g) and h), we are able to consider the cumulative consequences of a variety of subjective experiences and how young people deal with these experiences. This is crucial in order to account for not only the *external* aspects of identity, but also the *internal* subjective aspects. (For an exposition of the internal–external distinction, see the preceding sections on personal and social identity.) Recognising these subjective aspects assists us in exploring possible intervening variables—or “mediatory mechanisms” as I called them in §2.2—and processes that sustain or challenge identity categories. It may, however, be hard to disentangle the aforelisted themes since, for example, reflexivity feeds off past experiences through the interplay of human lives. The result of this interplay—at least according to the findings outlined in Chapters 6 and 7—is the unfolding of heterogeneous and complex identities, subjectivities and life trajectories that are simultaneously situated both socially and temporally. In other words, agentic or reflexive activity and situated action are not mutually exclusive orientations, nor are heterogeneity and interdependency in identity formation. Since the themes in the list above interrelate and permeate each other, I shall not treat them as discrete categories or ontologically separate domains. They will, nonetheless, be used as conceptual tools of the life course in order to assist in understanding and explaining how identities are formed and perceived over time by young people in the north London area of Tottenham.

3.4 Stereotypes and self-stereotyping processes

Although the study of identity is an emerging field both within the social sciences and its subfield of youth studies, the concept of “self-stereotyping” is missing from much of the social sciences and is entirely absent in sociological literature and youth-identity studies. Given that stereotypical youth representations often influence identity formation during the transition to adolescence, and from adolescence to young adulthood, the related phenomenon of self-stereotyping becomes all the more important for youth sociology. I thus believe that the introduction of the social psychological term “self-stereotyping” is not only a useful contribution to the present thesis, but also a welcome contribution to youth studies and sociology more broadly. In addition, the four concepts of “reflexivity,” “lived experiences,” “stock of knowledge” and “self-stereotyping”—all present in my thesis—have yet to be treated in combination. This mix of concepts is a welcome one since self-stereotyping is not immune from social processes and everyday experiences in the social world accumulated into a stock of knowledge; and, these processes and experiences, in turn, are not immune from potential “reflexive interventions.” The phenomenon of self-stereotyping, therefore, should not be isolated from sociological treatments, while scrutiny into processes of self-stereotyping should not lose sight of people’s capacity for reflexivity and other ways of confronting or preventing self-stereotyping tendencies.

Before we take a closer look at the concept of self-stereotyping *vis-à-vis* youth-identity formation and young people’s reflexive orientations, let’s first get to grips with what is meant by “stereotypes.” There are numerous theories and definitions of what *stereotypes* are and different types of behaviour associated with *stereotyping*. There is a consensus in the literature, however, that stereotypes are grounded in homogenous, inflexible, evaluative judgements—often negative and oppressive—of a specific group (e.g., a group’s presumed ethnicity, income, class or gender). These stereotypes, furthermore, “enable judgements of group members to be made quickly and with cognitive ease” (Campbell 2015: 519). While being rooted in belief systems, stereotypical expressions are sweeping statements about a given group that function as “shortcuts.” Hamilton *et al.* (2009: 179) state further: once a stereotypical set of beliefs is formed, that set is

applied to all members of the group, generalizing across individuals, despite the fact that those persons may show considerable variation in numerous respects. This generalization process leads to the perception of homogeneity among group members.

Stereotypes, in which perceptions of homogeneity are formed through overgeneralisation of perceived attributes of group members, distort reality and cloud people's ability to see members of the stereotyped group as individuated subjects. The youth interviewed in my study are all too familiar with the tendency of "outsiders" to have biased preconceptions and, as a result, perceive young people in Tottenham through a homogenous and stereotypical lens. These preconceptions, the research participants claim, are regularly being reinforced by media representations and are deeply woven into the fabrics of British society. Later, in the two chapters covering discussions of the study's findings, I shall outline how Tottenham's young people understand, experience and deal with these stereotypes and biased preconceptions (see also Chapter 1).

The process of stereotyping "is a fundamental human mechanism for perceiving and making sense of the world" (Operario and Fiske 2004: 129). People's identities are made up of categories while processes of stereotyping involve overgeneralisation related to identity categories. These processes are associated with more general processes of categorisation. The process of categorisation, as Settles and Buchanan (2014: 161) put it, is a "means of reducing a large amount of information into a more manageable size." Whenever an individual encounters people who appear to fit into a particular group, the individual typically applies her or his "knowledge" about the befitting social category (e.g., "youth" or "Black youth" or "Black youths from Tottenham"). Luke, one of the research participants (that you will hear a great deal more from in the last couple of chapters), illustrates a lay version of the aforementioned categorisation process and his issue with it: "I'm usually not happy with the way [people describe me] because [...] it puts me in a group or, like..., a category..."

According to Operario and Fiske (2004: 130), "the processes guiding categorization are the same for all objects." Whenever we encounter objects, or anything, within our environment—vehicles, utensils, activities, electronical gadgets, fashion statements, human beings and so on—individuals

first *select* certain characteristics that define the object, then *accentuate* those characteristics in their formed impressions (overlooking other characteristics), and finally *interpret* the object by generalizing from those particular characteristics.

(*Ibid.*; see also Allport 1954)

The categorisation process is not assumed to transpire consciously and since it operates mainly on a preconscious level, the efficiency of the process gives rise to *automaticity*. This is also the case with stereotypes. Yet, although stereotypes are often automatically activated, it is fully possible to (reflexively) intervene in this stereotyping process at any time by, for example, challenging one's biased perceptions or considering others as individuated beings rather than as members of a (stereotyped) category. Stereotype activation can also be challenged by taking into consideration what I referred to in the earlier sections of this chapter, namely, the distinction between the internal and the external aspects of identity. The external aspect of identifying another human being is usually very different from the internal aspect. Hence, by acknowledging the internal aspect—say, the young person's own view of herself—stereotypical thoughts about others may perhaps be more likely to be avoided.

To sum up Operario and Fiske's (2004: 130) model of category-based stereotyping and the key themes involved in their model, consider the following four (paraphrased) points:

- (a) The process of categorising other people is steeped in automaticity.
- (b) Whenever perceivers categorise others, they interpret information and traits about them in accordance with their initial categorisation. This can give rise to stereotypical representations. However,
- (c) perceivers have the capacity to employ category-inconsistent information to revise their biased preconceptions and categorical beliefs. This could result in
- (d) viewing others as individuated subjects rather than as "stereotyped category members."

While (a) and (b) are a basic mechanism for identifying, making sense of people and, perhaps, stereotyping members of some group, both (c) and (d) may involve an intervening mechanism, such as "reflexive interventions," that could play a part in questioning categorising or stereotyping processes. An important outcome of the present research, however, is to always understand (a), (b), (c) and (d) in relation to the perceiver's respective stock of knowledge, past experiences and shared meanings that the perceiver has accumulated across her or his life course. This means that even an intervention into, or revision of, categorical beliefs and bias draws on lived experiences and previous category formation processes. Even if both the perceiver who *does* the stereotyping and the stereotyped subject draw from social, often shared, experiences, it doesn't mean that they share the same perspective. In fact, the external perspective of the perceiver rarely coheres with the

internal perspective of the subject being perceived. That said, stereotypical representations are powerful devices for sustaining social hierarchies, and even though they derive externally to the subject, stereotypes have the capacity to permeate the internal perspective and perhaps even rationalise societal inequalities for both the “stereotyper” and the “stereotypee.” This is one reason why certain stereotypes may not only be held by the social group (e.g., a racist organisation) of the perceiver—the “stereotyper”—but may also be held at the institutional level. This makes it even harder for stereotyped individuals to avoid perceiving themselves through the lens of stereotypical images perpetuated by societal institutions. If the internal aspect of identity—the perspective of the “stereotypee”—involves describing oneself in terms of stereotypical traits then “self-stereotyping” may be the case.

3.4.1 Self-stereotyping behaviours among youths

With *self-stereotyping*, “externally derived” stereotypical traits become the salient features of a person during which the person’s individuality fades away; or, in the words of van Veelen *et al.* (2013), individuals come to “describe themselves in terms of prototypical group characteristics.” Self-stereotyping is, thus, the tendency to endorse stereotypical “group representations” (e.g., Leavitt *et al.* 2015: 47), or “stigmatised identities” (e.g., Hurtado 2018: 163; Pemberton *et al.* 2016: 30; Rivera and Paredez 2014: 229; Stets and Serpe 2013: 53), or “collectivist traits” (e.g., Schmader and Block 2015: 477) as self-defining. Acting or identifying oneself in ways consistent with stereotypes, or doing what everyone expects, could be a sign of self-stereotyping tendencies. Self-stereotyping, then, is an extreme case reminiscent of Jenkins’ (2008: 76) phrase, “our own sense of humanity is a hostage to categorising judgements of others.”

The term “self-stereotyping” was first coined with reference to self-categorisation theory (Hogg and Turner 1987). Self-categorisation theory sees the categorisation process as strongly connected to group behaviour, where similarities between “ingroup” members are emphasised and contrasted with the behaviour of some “outgroup.” This means that self-categorisation theory recognises stereotypes, first, in relation to exaggerated *resemblances* among *ingroup members*, and, second, in relation to the ingroup’s exaggerated *differences* from so-called *outgroup members*. The categorisation process, according to self-categorisation theory, can lead to both

“depersonalisation” and “self-stereotyping” with respect to ingroup members’ identity and behaviour. In other words, whatever enhances the salience of ingroup–outgroup categorisation is likely to enhance *similarity across ingroup members* as well as enhance *ingroup–outgroup differences* and thus “depersonalise” the self-perception of the individual. *Depersonalisation* is somewhat similar to self-stereotyping, thus, in that it refers to the “cognitive redefinition of the self;” not in terms of giving precedence to unique attributes or individual differences, but instead, like self-stereotyping, depersonalisation indicates the transition into defining oneself through “shared social category memberships and associated stereotypes” (Turner 1984: 528; see also Onorato and Turner 2002: 152). “Depersonalised perceptions” of members of a given *outgroup*, furthermore, is somewhat similar to stereotyped perceptions, as “people view ‘them’ as being similar to one another and all having outgroup attributes” (Hogg 2012: 509).³⁴

Since the term “depersonalisation” is almost interchangeable with self-stereotyping, I shall in later chapters restrict the scope of my discussion to the concept of “self-stereotyping” (at the expense of using the term “depersonalisation”). Self-stereotyping refers to processes by which a person comes to see her- or himself in ways that are more consistent with stereotypical representations related to her or his “ingroup.” These processes reflect one aspect of how youths see themselves in relation to their social environment, which is a key focus of my thesis. However, as Chapters 6 and 7 make clear, self-stereotyping tendencies (let alone the process of depersonalisation) do not appear to be a common feature among the youths interviewed. Self-stereotyping is nonetheless a phenomenon that many of the interviewees seem to be latently aware of. For instance, one of the research participants, Lesedi, gave a succinct account of how she thinks self-stereotyping processes operate:

I think if you see stereotypical images enough times you can be disillusioned and believe that there’s actually nothing out there for me except for these stereotypes.

³⁴ The term “depersonalisation” is sometimes erroneously used interchangeably with the term “deindividuation.” While the latter refers to a “reduction in self-awareness” (Mullen *et al.* 2003: 1073) and a “loss of identity” (Hogg 2006: 119; 2012: 509), depersonalisation refers to the process of changing one’s identity from unique attributes that one may have to the presumed ingroup identity. The result of depersonalisation is that one views oneself as a social category representative.

At any rate, the experiences of some of Tottenham's young people did highlight the tension between external and internal aspects of identity, where external perspectives regularly involved stereotypical representations of youth identities in Tottenham. The interview participants were adamant that the stereotypes that they faced emanate from biased preconceptions grounded in *external* perspectives rather than facts. Moreover, the participants appeared to be acutely aware of how they are viewed by others, and, as Pemberton *et al.* (2016: 22) point out, "in varying circumstances they are required to engage with, respond to, as well as circumnavigate the stigmatising implications" of negative discourses, many of which have emerged in the aftermath of the 2011 riots. However, as I point out in §1.1, and later in §7.1, the reality of being faced with discrimination, which often goes hand in hand with stereotypical perceptions, is less likely to occur *within* Tottenham since super-diverse locations, such as Tottenham, offer what Wessendorf (2014: 119) refers to as multiple experiences of "contact across differences." Regular experiences of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, the research participants maintain, result in more tolerant attitudes. According to Visser's study (in press), the type of diversity found in Tottenham can facilitate relatively "harmonious relations amongst ethnic groups" and, thus, opens the door for a space where youths can claim "their multiple identifications with confidence."

As my research progressed and the complex heterogeneity of Tottenham's youths became more and more evident, I started to question some of the social-psychological terms associated with the above. For example, the conventional way that the ingroup–outgroup distinction is made use of became increasingly problematic. To correlate one specific perspective with "outgroup" members, as self-categorisation theory suggests, appears in my view to be questionable. A noticeable outcome of my thesis' findings is that an ingroup should not be contrasted with an outgroup in the *singular*. Instead, the research findings point to the fact that biased preconceptions are prominent among *certain* members within *certain* outgroups. For just as my study emphasises the importance of seeing members of an ingroup as heterogeneous, so it is with outgroups: heterogeneity should be accounted for both *within* and *between* outgroups. For instance, certain politicians and media commentators, as well as certain individuals outside of Tottenham, tend to see young people in Tottenham in stereotypical ways while simultaneously tar all Tottenham youths with the same brush. Rather than speaking of *one* homogeneous outgroup—namely, *all* those who do not have membership in the ingroup—holding a uniform external perspective on

youths in Tottenham, the research participants spoke in more nuanced terms concerning those stereotyping them. A categorical approach to ingroup–outgroup perceptions, therefore, fails to distinguish group membership from subjectivities within that group and ignores variation across outgroups.

Finally, some young people who live in marginalised communities might avoid pursuing certain life trajectories and identities deemed “out of place” or intimidating. This could result in the tendency to refrain from any engagement in identity exploration or, perhaps worse, it could result in the tendency to adopt stereotypical images associated with one’s ingroup. Identity exploration, as maintained by Phillips and Pittman (2003: 127), can also be hampered by the “chronic stress” that many poor or marginalised youths experience. The stressful situation of these adolescents may place a “strain on their cognitive processing resources and limiting their access to representations of self, ultimately suppressing identity exploration and precluding future challenges to presently held identity standards” (*ibid.*). A sense of belonging can here represent a possible pathway for the young people even if this means belonging to a stigmatised or negatively stereotyped group. For instance, in their study on negative impacts of stigma, Bradshaw *et al.* (2016: 153) look at how “negative consequences of discrimination can be alleviated by the meaning, belonging, and support provided by identification with the stigmatized group.” This form of “self-stereotyping” is associated with a *sense of belonging*: marginalised adolescents’ longing for a sense of belonging may entail integrating society’s expectations for them and identifying with their stereotyped group. In this case, reflexivity and self-stereotyping are not mutually exclusive. In fact, reflexive orientations towards one’s identity may be involved in the self-stereotyping process.

If we are interested in understanding the *processes* that contribute to generating these stereotyped identities then we cannot turn a blind eye to the *internal* aspects of identity *formation*—how you view yourself and how you experience or reflexively deal with the perceptions that others have of you—and the different *time points* involved in this formation—how a variety of experiences in the social world influence your identity and life course. A snapshot of a society awash with stereotypical representations and different forms of discrimination is not enough to understand how external aspects of identity inform self-stereotyping and identity-forming processes.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND OPERATIONALISING THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

While numerous insightful studies researching Tottenham's young people exist (e.g., Creaney 2014; Fasel *et al.* 2016; Murji 2018; Power 2011; Slater 2016; Tyler 2013), these often deal with *structural* factors rather than *subjective* experiences of the young people under scrutiny. At odds with this focus on broader social structures relevant to Tottenham's youths, my study revolves around young people's reflexive orientations and what "goes into" these subjective orientations. Instead of applying methods that facilitate structural analysis, the methodological approach unveiled in this chapter brings to light the tools for studying how youth identities come about through subjective experiences, as well as past and present reflexive activity. That is, the methods outlined below explore the techniques necessary to penetrate deeper into youth-identity formation in the context of how Tottenham's young people reflexively deal with negative representations of themselves and their local environment.

The emphasis, here, on subjective and reflexive activity might indicate that my account of youths simply implies a strict individualistic position, often associated with theories of reflexivity. This, however, is not the case. Rather, my study takes account of the fact that people's *experiences are often shared, meanings are intersubjective* while their *structural conditions are typically interconnected*, all of which contribute to the source material that people draw on when exercising their reflexivity. In order to encompass the social world of shared intersubjectivity, methods tackling young people's reflexive orientations must go beyond merely focusing on mental activities

that take place at a *particular point in time, isolated from previous experiences of social conditions*. Understanding youth reflexivity, in other words, requires tools that take on board the young person's *past, present and future*, as well as the fact that reflexive orientations may not only *challenge*, but also *reproduce*, social structures. The methodological part of this chapter, thus, builds on the two immediately preceding chapters.

Margaret Archer (e.g. 2003: 8; 2007: 5; 2010a: 12; 2010d: 276–8) has already drawn theoretical and empirical attention to reflexive orientations among laypeople—features conspicuously absent in the more “oversocialised” approaches within sociology. The present study, however, calls for a different empirical and methodological starting point than that of Archer since my ontological assumptions differ from Archer's framework of “ontological dualism.” While Archer's social ontology emphasises the agentic capacity of reflexivity and social structures as two ontologically *separate* domains, my study rejects such a clear-cut division. While Archer's critical realism emphasises “structural properties” that impinge on the reflexive subjects, I don't see social structures as having powers *per se*. As outlined in §§1.3.1 and 2.1.1, therefore, my study does not operate within an “ontological dualist” framework where “structural properties” and reflexive agents are understood as distinct, or a critical realist perspective where the causal powers of social structures are understood as real. Rather, the aim of my research project is to *reconcile reflexive orientations of young people with social embeddedness and socialisation processes* by taking into account a variety of different “time points”—relevant events, experiences and reflexive activity—during the course of young people's lives. An obvious inspiration for this approach is, of course, the “life course perspective,” as outlined in §3.1.1. To demonstrate how lived experiences, social conditions and reflexive orientations intermingle is, however, a complex task. It's thus been a challenge to seek appropriate qualitative research methods. The methods considered in this chapter, nevertheless, shed light on:

- how different subjective and social factors combine;
- the discrepancy between the “external perspective” on Tottenham youths and how young “Tottenhamites” see themselves; as well as,
- the heterogeneous effects of young people's lived experiences and reflexive orientations.

I have divided this chapter into two parts that build on each other. The first part serves as a bridge between the previous chapters and the present one. It does this by looking at the fit between methods, the study's theoretical underpinnings and the empirical operationalisation of the concept of reflexivity. The first section proceeds by looking at whether a close fit between theory and empirical research has been achieved in youth studies. The section, then, revisits Archer's model of reflexivity and outlines how any empirical investigation into young people's reflexive activity can benefit from applying empirical tools inspired by the *phenomenological* tradition. The initial section concludes that the type of research promoted in my thesis profits from not only drawing from the excellent empirical research found in the field of youth studies, but also the "meta-theoretical" discussions found in social mechanisms literature. I finish the first part by taking a closer look at the role of *phenomenological sociology* and *interpretative phenomenological analysis* in analysing the subjective, lived experience of individual research participants.

The second part of this chapter, outlines the qualitative interview process, while looking at practical issues with respect to the research design and data collection. It begins by providing a rationale for the study sample and the chosen age group. The next two sections proceed by shedding light on the recruitment process and the ethical considerations that arise from working with young people. The study ensured diversity across the research participants from Tottenham and high-quality data collection by working closely with a range of outreach organisations and using appropriate venues for interviewing. However, as I lay out in §4.2.3 and in my discussion of the study's limitations in the Conclusion, the joining stage of the interview process was tricky as I sought to strike a balance between rigour (e.g., strict child protection and consensual procedures) and freedom to exercise autonomy with regard to research participation.

The last two sections of this chapter return to a more philosophical issue. Idiographic assessment is an important part of interpretative phenomenological analysis. Social psychologists interested in idiographic analysis want to look into what makes each of us unique. They, therefore, concern themselves with "particularity." But how can my study use idiographic methods that promote *particularity* while at the same time draw on certain "ontological premises" that state that lived experiences and reflexive orientations *generally* play some role in youth-identity formation? In response to this question, I spell out how *all youths* in Tottenham appear to have relevant

experiences and different reflexive attitudes that impact in various ways on how they see themselves; how this process pans out, however, *differ vastly from person to person*.

I end this chapter by discussing how to practically implement the aforementioned methods, as well as both my ambition to facilitate a detailed *idiographic* investigation *and* gather information that builds on the *ontological premises*. To allow for idiographic interview procedures, I suggest that the interviewer must remain flexible and a good listener in order to let the interviewee talk without restriction. On the other hand, the interviews should not shift our attention too far away from the original research concern, which includes, among other things, both empirical problems and ontological assumptions. To deal with this potential “dilemma,” I have developed a variety of questions (see §4.2.6) and interview guidelines (Figure 8 in §4.2.4) tailored to my research project. Although these guidelines and questions serve merely as guidance, they were invaluable in structuring the interview process while prompting discussion intended to enable the research participants to share relevant experiences and reflexive thoughts about youth identities in Tottenham.

4.1 Preliminaries: youth studies, social mechanisms and phenomenological sociology

As this section title hints at, the present chapter builds on and adds value to three vastly divergent fields of study. That is, it makes use of methods found within the field of *youth studies*; it expands upon Archer’s model of reflexivity by applying empirical tools inspired by the *phenomenological* tradition; and, its theoretical underpinnings can be traced to the study of *social mechanisms*, mechanisms involved in the formation of identities and social reality, more generally. These diverse theoretical and empirical traditions, allowed me to develop both deductive and inductive approaches to analyse youth-identity formation in relation to the empirical sources and my “ontological premises.” Even though my thesis draws on some of the major advances within these fields of study, some drawbacks exist. This section, thus, aims to address some issues within each of these traditions.

First, although always empirically rich, *youth studies* used to be described as theoretically barren. Theory development associated with the field of youth studies has, however, “advanced substantially as a subdiscipline [...] over the years” (Hollands 2015: 70). Youth research increasingly seeks out the “multidimensional young person,” allowing for creative, agentic aspects of youths *without* ditching the impact of social constraints and structural distributions of resources. This was not always the case though (Cieslik and Simpson 2013: 42–3; Farrugia *et al.* 2018; MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 11; Nico and Caetano 2017; Threadgold and Nilan 2015). Some youth researchers tended to fall too heavily on either the side of agency, often inspired by Beck’s ([1986] 1992; Beck *et al.* 1997) reflexive modernisation theories,³⁵ or the side of structure. To avoid this “onesidedness,” more recent youth researchers have allowed for effects of both structural *and* agentic factors, as has already been pointed out in §2.1.2 and elsewhere. This shift in emphasis is also reflected in their use of *methods* to analyse youths and the “youth stage.” The methodology employed in youth studies research is increasingly meant to capture considerations that go beyond simply upholding one side of the “methodological divide” (e.g., *either* methodological individualism *or* methodological holism; qualitative *or* quantitative methods). Contemporary youth studies, Cieslik and Simpson (2013: 43) maintain, tend to employ “a more holistic, mixed methods approach that synthesises the strengths of different methodological perspectives.”

However, according to Feldman-Barrett (2018: 738), most of the research that focuses on theories steeped in the structure–agency problem—whether the aim is to incorporate *both* structure *and* agency, or exclusively revolve around *only* structure *or* agency—tends to ignore a “narrative understanding of events.” The result is a lack of care for complex socio-biographical processes or a tendency to disregard the temporal dimension of youth identities. The present thesis would be of little value if it didn’t acknowledge the complexity of young people’s trajectories and identity-forming processes. The aim of the below, then, is to offer a multidimensional approach that allows me to study reflexive orientations and subjective experiences in connection with the chronological social realities in which young people have lived. This aim builds on §3.3.1, where I outline how the “life course perspective” can help in understanding youth-identity formation and the complex unfolding of heterogeneous identities, subjectivities and life trajectories over time.

³⁵ For a brief discussion of some issues with Beck’s individualisation thesis, see §1.3.1.

Although the methods located in this chapter have been advanced in order to study the young individual's take on identity in relation to how others see her or him, the approach of reaching across disciplines is my research's point of departure, as stated in the Introduction, especially in the section titled *An interdisciplinary approach to understanding youth subjectivities*. The result is a wide-ranging approach that goes beyond perspectives found in youth studies. That is, in addition to putting to use some recent developments within youth studies research, I draw on traditions emanating from phenomenology and the philosophy of the social sciences in order to obtain a "logical fit" between methods, theoretical framework, forms of analysis, as well as my initial research concern.

Second, while youth studies tended to recognise the primacy of empirical research over theoretical work, the opposite is the case with the *social mechanisms* literature; the latter "is still too preoccupied with intratheoretical and meta-theoretical discussions, and we find very few empirical applications" (Edling and Rydgren 2016: abstract). An early aim of social mechanism theorists was to build a bridge between theory and empirical analyses. It is therefore surprising that their ambition of looking inside the "black box" of social phenomena merely involves theoretical, rather than both deductive *and* inductive, work. As I stated in §2.2, the epitome of a "black box" in the social sciences is the hidden stuff between two social variables, typically *processes* or *mechanisms* between a *cause* and its *effect* (Lohse 2017: 17; Mäki 2009: 85–6; Nielsen and Pedersen 2018: 166). One aim of social mechanism analysis, then, is to shed light on the processes and mechanisms assumed to be inside the "black box."

So, how does my study draw on the social mechanisms literature? The present research shares with this literature an interest in understanding and explaining what takes place between two or more social variables. And, what is sandwiched in between these variables or social phenomena? For me, the answer is a range of mechanisms and internal processes associated with "human activity." "Human activity," unfortunately, is sometimes "little more than a subjective 'black box' in the minds of many sociologists" (Côté and Levine 2002: 143). Revealing the inside of a black box—the activity or mechanisms between an input and an output—is, as far as the present thesis is concerned, to take human activity seriously and a way of working through many "how?"-questions. A prime task of my study is, therefore, to open up the black box that young individuals occupy by understanding how, for example, young people in Tottenham are dealing with

stereotypical misrepresentations and how stigmatised representations might impact on youth-identity formation? In order to grapple with this question, we need to understand how the individuals in question process stuff, or, to be more exact, how lived experiences in the social world and reflexive orientations mutually contribute to forming or rejecting different identities. If this formation was solely to be grasped through *structural* analysis or through studying the respective *social environment* of individuals, the black box would be left unopened. The question of *how* social structures and conditions are *experienced* and, potentially, *reflexively* dealt with must penetrate the analysis. Unpacking black boxes, thus, requires *social psychological* applications³⁶ as well as specific *empirical* tools to unveil what occurs “inside” the person and what goes on between a person’s social environment and, for example, the formation of her or his identity. I have previously referred to these (mental) goings-on as “mediatory mechanisms” (see, e.g., §2.2). The aim of focusing on mediatory mechanisms is to move beyond the structure–agency dualism by incorporating mediatory factors such as young people’s *reflexive orientations* and *lived experiences* accumulated into “*stocks of knowledge*.” These notions have proven to be invaluable in facilitating the research in the present study, research that takes on board the fact that:

1. young people’s identities are *heterogeneous*, even when identity formation takes place within relatively similar social environments; however,
2. young people’s identities are *never entirely open to choice and revision* since even reflexive identity work draws on the stock of knowledge accumulated from lived experiences; therefore,
3. young people’s identities can be *both transformed and reproduced* through, among other things, reflexive orientations and stocks of knowledge.

Third and lastly, the methodology and analysis outlined in this chapter also heavily draw on *phenomenological sociology* and *interpretative phenomenological analysis*. That is, the empirical methods fleshed out below do not only concern themselves with the examination of different

³⁶ Increasingly, social scientists (e.g., Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1010; France 2007: 156; Hitlin and Elder 2007: 170, 85) call for engagement with social psychological literature to play an essential part of mainstream theoretical and empirical traditions in sociology. Social psychology sheds light on aspects and questions often overlooked by sociological studies; questions, for instance, of how people interrelate with their social environment. Without bringing social psychological approaches into sociology, social theorists and researchers expose themselves to the risk of “black-boxing;” that is, unless they rely on psychologists to fill the gap in analysis for them. The latter, however, is not an ideal proposition, Hitlin and Elder (2007: 172) exclaims, since psychologists tend “not to find the existence of social constraints on individual volition as problematic.”

reflexive orientations, but also the detailed analysis of subjective lived experience—the very trademark of interpretative phenomenological analysis. Phenomenologically inspired sociology, moreover, informs my qualitative research and pursuit to understanding how young people see themselves in relation to their social environment in at least two ways:

- My research *starts* with individual young people’s *internal perspective*—how they see themselves—and their subjective stock of knowledge, a product of lived experiences and socialisation. Researching the world as perceived by Tottenham’s young people enables me to learn how *subjective* experiences of, and *reflexive* orientations toward, identities and negative representations affect youth-identity formation in Tottenham *in different ways*.
- My research deals with the *temporal* dimension of youth. Studying different “time points” related to identity formation of young people enables me to systematise internalisation and socialisation processes, as well as demonstrate the roles that reflexivity or the stock of knowledge plays in identity negotiation and formation *over time*.

Let me elaborate on one approach that has its theoretical roots in phenomenology, an approach that plays a crucial role in the qualitative research carried out in my study.

4.1.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis and qualitative research

The methodological approach that comes closest to capturing the tools used in my study is perhaps interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). At present, IPA is regarded as “an extremely well developed methodology” for analysing individual data (Hung and Appleton 2016: 39). IPA is concerned with the detailed study of lived experiences from the perspective of the person under scrutiny. Although I follow IPA in that I start my empirical investigation with individuals and their subjective experiences rather than their structural conditions, I have earlier spelt out that individual identity formation and lived experiences are to a large degree a sociological matter. This is the case because identity-forming processes are partly the result of social situatedness and because lived experiences are often rooted in the social world. The latter point, however, is not hostile to the idea, at the heart of IPA, that understanding identity is a matter of examining “the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience” (Smith 2011: 9). What’s crucial here is that the researcher should attempt to get as close as possible, as Cameron (2016: 225) makes clear, to “understanding what it is like for a person in a particular *social context*, and how it is that this person makes meaning of that experience.”

In directing attention to how an individual makes sense of her or his experiences within a social environment, IPA brings together both phenomenological and hermeneutical perspectives with a focus on an “idiographic level of analysis” (e.g., Cameron 2016: 225–6; Glackin and Beale 2018; Larkin and Thompson 2012: 102; Vas *et al.* 2016: 3). “Idiography” prioritises the *particular* as the primary location for analysis rather than the *general*. Detailed attention to the particular goes hand in hand with IPA’s commitment to phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis and my own commitment to understand how young subjectivities grapple with a variety of identities. Despite seeking the particular, nevertheless, procedures associated with IPA allow for some “generalisations to be drawn, albeit cautiously” (Glackin and Beale 2018; see also Smith *et al.* 2009: 32). IPA researchers should never forget that lived experiences are embedded in *social* life. In §2.3.1, I referred to the accumulation of such experiences as the “stock of knowledge,” which essentially operates as “background configurations” for future mental activity. Since our stocks of knowledge often involve intersubjective meanings and experiences of shared structural conditions that are socially and temporally embedded, *generalisations* can be (tentatively) extracted out of the interview data. Research involving IPA, therefore, does not understand individuals in a vacuum, “the person is not separated from the relevant context” (Cameron 2016: 225).

The interpretative process involved in IPA research is detailed and intricate, where quality is favoured over the quantity of data, attending to nuances and incongruities within the transcript. Furthermore, considering that IPA seeks to obtain personal accounts of some depth and call for comprehensive verbatim transcripts, IPA studies have rarely sample sizes higher than nine. (My study comprises in-depth interviews with sixteen young people and, thus, exceeds IPA’s recommended sample size; despite this, the quality of data and analysis, it is hoped, has not been compromised as a result of the relatively large sample size.)

The in-depth examination and interpretive process involved in IPA cannot escape generating a “double hermeneutic”—or a “dual interpretation process”—whereby the *research participant’s sense-making is made sense of by the researcher*. “Double hermeneutic” is *not* understood, here, in a hierarchical way where the researcher’s sense-making is invincible or more compelling than that of the participant. Rather, it refers to the “problem” of attending to two hermeneutical processes: on the one hand, we are dealing with (1) the experience of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of the *research participant*, and on the other, (2) the *researcher’s* attempt to

comprehend what this experience is like for the participant. These two perspectives are reminiscent of what I referred to as the internal–external distinction in Chapter 3, where the “internal perspective” reflects the subjective experience of the young person under scrutiny and the “external perspective” refers to how others interpret this young person.³⁷ I also criticised, in Chapter 1, the dominance and inaccuracy of the external perspective in the discourse on young people in Tottenham in the aftermath of the England riots. My critique, here, was based on the fact that those representing the external perspective—e.g., the media and politicians—failed to listen to the internal perspective—the voices of youths in Tottenham and elsewhere. IPA, on the contrary, takes people’s lived experiences and internal perspective as the point of departure and focal point for research and analysis. The IPA researcher’s “external perspective,” then, is different from the way I have described the external perspective of those behind the dominant discourse on Tottenham’s youths in that the former tries to incorporate *internal perspective* of those under scrutiny.

IPA, thus, recognises both subjectivity in the researcher’s *analysis* and in the participant’s *account*. At any rate, it is of vital importance that the researcher’s subjective attitude and background assumptions with respect to the research findings should not be swept under the carpet. Instead, the researcher should take on board, as well as log, the “speculative character of the analysis process” (Glackin and Beale 2018; Smith *et al.* 2009) and the dynamic role that she or he plays in making sense of the lived experiences of the research participants. I shall elaborate on this point in §4.2.6, when I discuss the usefulness of using field notes to make observations about my own practice during the qualitative interview process.

In mixing my own methodological approach, which includes, among other things, the empirical operationalisation of the concept of reflexivity, with that of IPA, my study is in a position to *systematise* lived experiences and reflexive activity connected to particular life histories. The aim of this systematisation is to capture the relevant “time points” in young people’s lives and the “temporal richness” of identity formation.³⁸ It also helps my research to demonstrate *how* the young person internalises and reflexively mediates what she or he experiences (as constraints or

³⁷ A more detailed definition of the internal aspects of identity and the external aspects of identity is available in §§3.1 and 3.2.

³⁸ For a definitional clarification of “time points” and the temporal dimension of reflexive orientations, see §2.3.2 and Elster (2017: 286–8).

enablements) in the social world. In more practical terms, biographical interviews and “quasi-longitudinal” analysis are applied to systematise different experiences and events, “time points” that play a part in how a young person sees her- or himself over time. This is not unlike the analysis carried out by MacDonald and Marsh (2005: 44; see also Elster in press) where the aim was to “cast *backwards*” in order to shed light on *current* life-situations.³⁹

Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, in line with IPA procedures, it is hoped that significant insight into multiple mechanisms and socio-temporal processes with respect to identity formation is achieved. These processes involve, for instance, the “expansion” of the young person’s stock of knowledge over time and her reflexive attitudes towards youth identities in the context of the social environment in which she finds herself. The interviews, accordingly, revolve around how the young person experiences and reflects on her multiple identities, as well as related processes and episodes of growing up in a particular neighbourhood. In other words, throughout the fieldwork, answers were sought to the following research questions:

“What type of identity claims do young people in Tottenham articulate when narrating their various senses of ‘self?’”

“What type of reflexive orientation is applied, and is reflexive activity common among Tottenham’s youths?”

“What is the role of lived experiences and reflexivity in forming youth identities?”

“What identity claims do other people make when they talk about youths in Tottenham and how do the young people deal with these representations and ‘external perspectives?’”

While these questions are central to the fieldwork, the following questions are formulated with the research participants and the actual interviews in mind:

“If you had to describe yourself, what would you say?”

“What past experiences or situations have affected the way you identify yourself?”

“How do others describe you?”

“How does the media represent or talk about young people from Tottenham?”

“Do you think people outside Tottenham generally perceive you differently from the way you, or local people from Tottenham, perceive you?”

³⁹ I shall elaborate upon what I mean by “quasi-longitudinal” in §5.2 and in the Conclusion, where I talk about my study’s limitations.

In using IPA and the qualitative approach outlined here, my study developed *inductively* and avoided, at least to some degree, being divorced from the reality of young people in Tottenham. The same could not be said about the prevailing discourse on Tottenham youths, as outlined in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, my study is not built on theoretical sand since the inductive process is accompanied by a theoretical framework.⁴⁰ Concepts and categories can be construed from the data, but the data, in turn, is also informed by the theoretical framework, including various ontological assumptions, and the conceptual parameters that guide the research (e.g., the role of *reflexive orientations* and the *stock of knowledge* in *identity formation*). As a consequence, my study hopes to have accomplished the difficult task of deriving a “logical fit,” as discussed in the preceding section, between research concern, theory, methodology and the body of empirical material.

4.2 Research design and field study

4.2.1 Recruitment process and research setting

Prior to embarking on the present research, I was managing several outreach programmes for young people in Tottenham. During this time, I was in regular contact with numerous local Tottenham residents and community-based organisations, which made the recruiting process and the communicative aspect of my fieldwork easier (for a more detailed account of my association with Tottenham and youth work, see §1.3). In January 2016, I approached different outreach organisations in Tottenham and the local council’s Children and Young People’s Service about my study proposal and research intentions. A few months later a brief steering group meeting was held at Tottenham Hotspur Football Club where I had the chance to present the research project to stakeholders and lead representatives from the following organisations:

⁴⁰ The claim that facts can emerge entirely *independently* of theories is a claim associated with grounded theory (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009: 61). The research approach in my study, therefore, deviates from that of grounded theory even though I do not necessarily claim that all facts are theory-dependent.

- Haringey Youth, Community and Participation Team
- Haringey Virtual School of Children in Care Team (Children and Young People's Service)
- Tottenham Hotspur Foundation
- Pushcamp Outreach Team

These four organisations work primarily with young people and are all based in Haringey, the north London Borough where Tottenham is situated. By involving a variety of outreach organisations, some level of diversity was ensured and maximised. This assisted my research in taking account of heterogeneity in how identity formation transpires across Tottenham's diverse youth community. Whereas Pushcamp is a local initiative of young mentors working directly with youths, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation (THF) is an established charity with significant investment from Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. THF's aim is to provide sports, health, employability and education programmes for communities in North East London as well as encourage enterprise and promote social cohesion locally in Tottenham. Haringey Virtual School has a well-established partnership with THF, which made dissemination of information and regular updates easier (most communication was channelled through one prime contact at THF). While several steps were taken to ensure participation was a positive and safe experience without compromising "authenticity," rigorousness and caution increased during recruitment of the young "care-leavers" from Haringey Virtual School.

During the research period, I was also able to collaborate with 639 Enterprise Centre, a new "hub" based in the heart of Tottenham where local people can gain entrepreneurial and employment skills. This centre turned out to be perfect for hosting individual interviews since the centre's main space facilitated privacy and discretion, but without compromising the safeguarding of research participants. Although there were always other people in the large room, it was still possible to build and establish rapport with the interviewees due to the secluded and calm nature of the dedicated interview area. Besides carrying out interviews at the 639 Enterprise Centre on Tottenham High Road, interviews were conducted at Tottenham Hotspur FC (White Hart Lane Stadium) and Northumberland Park Community School. All venues are located in north Tottenham and share the same postcode district of N17.

When seeking suitable community outreach organisations to assist with the recruitment of my research participants, it was not a requirement for them to have prior experience working with young people on “identity-related issues.” The topic of “identity work,” however, was eagerly discussed at the introductory steering group meeting while I presented the research topic and possible interview questions. Some project leaders attending the meeting spoke powerfully about witnessing identity-forming processes among their cohorts and the negative effects of stereotyping. At any rate, this discussion led to a slight misunderstanding of my study’s sampling procedures. Some of the lead representatives present at the meeting stated that they knew of *particular participants* who were remarkably “reflective” or “aware,” and thus would be the “right fit” for my research project. By involving only those who are particularly “reflective,” I pointed out in response, the sampling process will fail to comply with the intention of this research project; namely, to investigate how (different) youths in Tottenham identify themselves in relation to media representations and, more generally, their social environment. Selecting a group of only studious youths with introspective personalities would result in a sample drawn from a too narrow pool of young individuals and, thus, would not be of much service to the present research aims. As a result, rather than merely rely on the lead representatives of the respective outreach organisations to recruit on behalf of my research project and in order to avoid the risk of recruiting only the more reflective amongst their cohorts, I asked if I could shadow youth workers or observe sessions to make the recruitment more “indiscriminate” and a gradual process.⁴¹ This way, I was in a position to meet some of the prospective research participants and start the process of building rapport prior to embarking on the interviews. Through this approach to recruitment, I avoided the issue of only recruiting youths interested in the topic of my research, or youths with heightened reflexive capacities, or youths who wanted to vent their frustration with false media representations. I also believe that this approach increased the chance of reaching (“hard-to-reach”) young people who

⁴¹ As part of this approach to recruitment, I attended THF’s *Kicks* project and observed a workshop aimed at *Leadership Through Sport & Business* participants; I was shadowing youth workers at a Saturday project run by Pushcamp and invited to talk to young people who frequented Tottenham High Road’s enterprise hub, 639 Centre. Except for those participants recruited from THF’s *Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)* programme and the *E18HTEEN* project for care-leavers, my study’s research participants were all recruited as a result of having the opportunity to meet me at different community programmes prior to being invited to take part in the interviews.

may find the interview situation daunting or find it hard to express how they feel about youth identities and negative representations of Tottenham.

Although I was able to include young people who were perhaps less likely to communicate their reflexive attitudes towards different identities, it does not mean that the interview process was entirely free from being biased towards narratives that foreground reflexivity and positive images of Tottenham. Some participants, for example, may still have felt the need to draw attention to positive narratives to act as a counterweight to the many negative representations of Tottenham. The aim of (re)producing subjective narratives of how youths identify themselves will always raise epistemological challenges concerning the extent to which the qualitative data are subject to revisionism (see, e.g., Feldman-Barrett 2018: 739). Young people—like most who find themselves in an interview situation—often want to portray themselves in a favourable light. And since many of the research participants have been subjected to negative representations put forward by what I referred to as the “dominant discourse” in Chapter 1, it is probable that some answers were intended as a *counterbalance* to this discourse. I elaborate on these limitations to the fieldwork in the Conclusion. A number of steps, however, were taken in order to facilitate an environment where the research participants could remain “authentic” and “at ease,” for instance: allow the interviews to take place in familiar settings; meet with the participants prior to the interviews; let the interviewees know that their identities are kept anonymous, and so on. In any case, regardless of whether the research participants showcased their most “reflective” voice during the interviews or overemphasised the positive aspects of Tottenham, many of their answers clearly demonstrated that they must be *thinking regularly about themselves in relation to their social environment*. Despite asking questions that perhaps encouraged the young respondents to be reflective, it was apparent that reflecting on local youth identities *vis-à-vis* media portrayals of young people in Tottenham was far from an unfamiliar activity to the research participants.

4.2.2 Research participants and sampling logic

The fieldwork that forms the basis for my thesis consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews with sixteen participants aged between 16 and 25 years old. The initial target sample was fifteen young people—marginally larger than the recommended sample sizes ($n < 9$) for interpretative

phenomenological analysis studies.⁴² In addition to the sixteen participants that were recruited specifically for my research project, I also draw on interviews with two young Tottenham residents, Ahuzar and Jaden (see §7.1 and 7.2.1 below), that were a part of a workshop that I attended at Tottenham’s Bernie Grant Art Centre in September 2018.

Table 1 provides an overview of who was recruited. As is indicated in the column to the right, an aim of the present study was to recruit participants through a range of sources in order to ensure diversity. In the middle column, I specify the “style” of the initial interview with the respective research participant. Although all the interactions were face-to-face, not all were one-to-one interviews. Later in §§4.2.4 and 6.1.1, I shall elaborate upon some issues concerning group—especially one-to-four—interviews.

<i>Name, age and ethnic background of participant</i>	<i>Date, place and style of first interview</i>	<i>Recruitment of participant(s) and number of interviews undertaken</i>
Lesedi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 (18 as of the final interview) • Kenyan and South African 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 2016 • 639 Centre (639) • one-to-one 	I was introduced to Lesedi and staff at Tottenham High Road’s 639 Centre via the founder of the youth outreach organisation Pushcamp. Three interviews with Lesedi were conducted.
Brianna <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 20 • Mixed Caribbean/White 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 2016 • 639 • one-to-one 	After shadowing the manager of Pushcamp at a Saturday project for youths at Chestnuts Community Centre in the Tottenham ward of St Ann’s (for map of the Tottenham wards, see Figure 1, §1.1), I met Brianna who agreed to do an interview at 639 centre. I was only able to carry out one interview with Brianna as Pushcamp staff and I were not able to reach her again during the fieldwork period.
Luke <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 • Ghanaian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 2016 • Northumberland Park Community School (NPCS) • one-to-one 	Luke was recruited through <i>Kicks</i> , a programme organised by Tottenham Hotspur Foundation (THF). Although Luke is now a <i>Kicks</i> coach, he had previously attended the project as a participant. In addition to talking to Luke while making observations during <i>Kicks</i> sessions, two long interviews were undertaken; one at the venue where <i>Kicks</i> takes place and the other at THFC.
Khadiija <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 • Somali 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct. 2016 • NPCS • one-to-one 	Khadiija also attended THF’s <i>Kicks</i> . Only one interview was conducted with her.

⁴² Due to the close examination of each in-depth interview, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) studies rarely have sample sizes larger than nine. For more information regarding sampling sizes in studies using IPA, see, e.g., Larkin and Thompson (2012: 104) and Vas *et al.* (2016: 4), as well as §4.1.1 above.

Amaia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 • Black Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct. 2016 • NPCCS • one-to-two 	Amaia and Sapphire were initially interviewed as a couple after a <i>Kicks</i> session. One subsequent interview took place with Amaia as we arranged to meet at THFC a week later.
Sapphire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 • Black Caribbean 		
Mohammed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 • Nigerian (Hausa) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct. 2016 • Tottenham Hotspur Football Club (THFC) • one-to-one 	Mohammed is a care-leaver who attended THF's <i>E18HTEEN</i> project. Although <i>E18HTEEN</i> is mainly a project facilitating one-to-one mentoring for young people leaving care, the project hosts a few evenings—some of which I was present at in the beginning stages of my fieldwork—where all of Tottenham's care leavers are welcome to attend. Although Mohammed's answers helped in forming a better understanding of youth identities in Tottenham, the <i>E18HTEEN</i> project manager and I were hesitant in using the interview material explicitly since it reveals sensitive data with regards to his care-leaver status.
Dilara <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 18 • Turkish (Kurdish) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nov. 2016 • 639 • one-to-one 	Dilara was recruited by 639 centre staff. Some language issues impeded effective communication between Dilara and me; nonetheless, she spoke passionately about Tottenham—in particular, with respect to ethnic and cultural diversity, which she perceives as a positive aspect. Only one interview with Dilara took place.
Jermaine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 • Black Caribbean 		<p>These four participants were recruited from two contrasting THF programmes: <i>MOPAC</i> (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime) and <i>Leadership Through Sport & Business</i>. The latter is a scheme that helps "bright youngsters" from disadvantaged backgrounds establish high-level careers in business and finance. THF's community development manager introduced the quartet to me before I outlined the nature of the study to them.</p> <p>The initial one-to-four interview lasted for a very long time (about two hours). I met with them a week after the first interview, but the interview was interrupted prematurely due to an award ceremony that they had to attend.</p>
Simon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 • Black Caribbean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nov. 2016 • THFC • one-to-four 	
Camille <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 • Bajan 		
Chantal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 • Jamaican 		
Temí <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 • Nigerian (Yorùbá) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nov. 2016 • 639 • one-to-one 	<p>Temí was recruited as a result of 639 Centre allowing me to attend an employability workshop that she took part in at the Centre.</p> <p>Two interviews that lasted about an hour each were conducted.</p>
Stephen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 • Cypriot and Caribbean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan. 2017 • THFC • one-to-one 	<p>Attended the same workshop as Temí (see immediately above).</p> <p>I carried out only one interview with Stephen as we were unable to get hold of him to arrange a follow-up interview.</p>

<p>Tiago</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 • Black Portuguese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan. 2017 • THFC • one-to-one 	<p>A care-leaver. Recruited by Haringey “children in care” team. Decided not to draw directly on this interview due to the sensitive nature of the content.</p> <p>Tiago was the only participant that I had met prior to embarking on my research. Hence, lengthy conversations with him took place both before the start of my study’s fieldwork and after. However, I only conducted one formal interview with him.</p>
<p>Nala</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 18 • Eritrean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 2017 • 639 • one-to-one 	<p>Nala was utilising the enterprise hub at 639 Centre when I asked her if she would like to partake in the study (after permission from Centre staff).</p> <p>Two long interviews with Nala were carried out.</p>

Table 1 Details about the achieved sample

There were no restrictions on who could be recruited to the study except for age range and the fact that they needed to live in the Tottenham wards or be strongly linked to Tottenham through education or upbringing. While the young people interviewed grew up in a variety of socio-economic situations surrounded by diverse sets of identities and life trajectories, they are all from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This was not an intended plan of action. Nevertheless, the young people’s ethnic backgrounds in my study reflect more or less the backgrounds of the participants attending the outreach programmes of the community organisations in Tottenham from which the sample is recruited; besides, the demographic profile of the study sample is not far off the demographic data on Tottenham’s young people.⁴³ No attempt, however, is made to formally measure variables connected to ethnicities.

The rationale behind deciding on an age range of 16 to 25 is largely due to the fact that reflections and decisions made during this period are deemed to greatly affect trajectories of youths with respect to developing personal and social identities (Johnson and Monserud 2009: 385). Young people occupy multiple, often contradictory, positions and thus “have a range of social identities, with different identities having salience in different contexts” (Côté 2009: 380–1). Even if a young person goes through a relatively “stable transition” to adulthood, this transition is likely

⁴³ As I point out in §1.1, the population of “white British” people is only 22.4% in Tottenham (Nomis 2019).

to involve more changes in terms of forming and negotiating identities than any other period in that person's life courses. I shed further light on why youth transition is a crucial stage with regards to identity-forming processes in the Introduction (under the section *An interdisciplinary approach to understanding youth subjectivities*). It is also worth noting that the significance of transition is even greater when considering "children in care" ("looked-after children") or the switch that "care-leavers" experience from care to an independent adult life. Although the study sample includes a couple of young care-leavers, only one care-leaver is explicitly featured in the interview material drawn upon in Chapters 6 and 7's discussion of the findings.⁴⁴ Another obvious reason for involving 16- to 25-year-olds from Tottenham in my research is that young individuals from this age group were caught in the middle of a polarised debate that emerged in the aftermath of the England riots. Since the riots, the narrative concerning Tottenham's youths has often entailed inaccurate stereotypes and homogeneous representations that sometimes treat them as passive agents. Chapter 1, where I make a case for why the study is conducted in Tottenham, and the chapters where I discuss the findings elaborate on how negative youth representations have affected Tottenham's young people.

4.2.3 Consent and ethical considerations

Ethical review and approval for my research project was sought from the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham on 3rd November 2015. The present study was granted full ethical approval on 19th January 2016.

During the joining stage of the interview process, consent forms (see Figure 7) were provided to all research participants or, if underage, their parent or carer. Besides providing written evidence that the young person (or the young person in conjunction with her or his guardian) has given informed consent, the purpose of the consent form is to permit the participant to exercise autonomy and inform her or him about the research process. Although participation was usually decided between the potential participant and me, the participant's suitability was also sanctioned by the organisation known to her or him. Liaising regularly with respective community organisations was

⁴⁴ See Hung and Appleton (2016: 39, *passim*) for youth research related to reflexive orientations of young people in care.

therefore a priority. Before each interview could proceed, informed consent had to be gained while the interviewee will have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (Figure 7 below). The Information Sheet outlines aims and purposes of the research project and what will happen if the participants agree to partake in the study. The young people were also informed that they are free to withdraw at any time during the project or the interview. However, although participants are permitted to change their mind about contributing to the research project, it was made clear that the deadline for withdrawal is six months after the interview process is finished.



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
Department of Political Science and International Studies
School of Government and Society

Consent Form for Research Participants

Provisional title of research project:
The role of reflexive experiences and meta-reflexive orientations in the formation of young people's identity in Tottenham

To be completed by the participant. Completed by parent/guardian, if the participant is under 18.

If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about how you see yourself and how others see you, as well as some biographical questions. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to record the interview.

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Participant Information Sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing or I will be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I give permission for the researcher to record the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant (or parent/guardian if participant is under 18)

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher

Name of Researcher: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent Form for Research Participants September 2016 – March 2017
Name of Principal Investigator/Researcher: Julius Ester, PhD in Sociology, University of Birmingham



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
Department of Political Science and International Studies
School of Government and Society

Participant Information Sheet

Provisional title of research project:
The role of reflexive experiences and meta-reflexive orientations in the formation of young people's identity in Tottenham

I would like to invite you to participate in a project, which aims to understand the way people think about their identities.

I am a doctoral candidate at University of Birmingham, but I have lived and worked in the London Borough of Haringey where this research project is taking place. It is hoped that the project could provide useful information about a concept called reflexivity, which is a form of thinking that we do in relation to how we see ourselves and how we about living in society.

What will happen if you agree to take part?

- You will have read and understood the information about the project.
- You will have signed the consent form (if under 18, signature from your parent/carer is required).
- You are not required to make any preparations in advance to the interview(s).
- Arrange a suitable time to meet, which is convenient for you. The meeting will take place either at Tottenham Hotspur FC or at Bruce's Grove Community Centre in a public space convenient for you.
- The interview will be with myself and is expected to last no longer than half an hour.
- Arrange to follow-up meeting if necessary and convenient.
- When I have completed the study I will produce a summary of the findings which will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.

Will your participation in the project remain confidential?

If you agree to take part, your name will not be recorded and the information will not be disclosed to other parties. Your responses to the questions will be used for the purpose of this project only. If you take part in the project you will remain anonymous.

Are there any disadvantages of taking part?

It could be that you are not comfortable talking about yourself and how people see you.

Do you have to take part in the study?

No, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part, you have been approached because you are somehow linked with the London Borough of Haringey and have been nominated by one of the organisations in Haringey that we work with on this project. If you do not wish to take part you do not have to give a reason and you will not be contacted again.

Can you withdraw from the interview?

If you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time during the project or interview. If you change your mind after the interview(s) is/are completed, you can do so, but the deadline for your withdrawal is 6 months after the interview(s) has/have taken place.

Researcher: Julius Ester, PhD candidate, University of Birmingham jx506@bham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr Justin Cruickshank, University of Birmingham cruickshank@bham.ac.uk

Figure 7 Consent form and participant information sheet for the interviewees

All interviews were undertaken by myself and were audio-recorded, using the app Voice Memos (for a screenshot of the audio/transcription software, see Figure 9, in the next chapter). The

interview data is backed up by a password-protected disk drive. None of the participants had any issues with granting permission to record the interview, but they did make queries regarding the *anonymisation* procedures; for example, some of the research participants *wanted to be identified*. In spite of this request, it was explained to all informants that anonymity should remain for the sake of consistency and due to the fact that it is not the *content* of participants' narrative that matters the most in this research (e.g., *what* they have been involved in). It is rather the understanding of *how they consider* and *draw upon* the "content" that adds value to this research project (e.g., *how* their identities come about through their stocks of knowledge and reflexive activity and *how* they deal with negative representations of youth identities in Tottenham). In addition, if my study was to reveal the identity of interviewees, there is a greater chance that they may present themselves during the interviews with "less authenticity" than if they remain anonymous. Hence, all names of the young participants used in the study are pseudonyms.

The safeguarding procedures for the participants, approved and put in place right at the beginning of the initial interviews, were very rigorous. Perhaps overly rigorous. In accordance with the ethical considerations specified from the inception of the research project, no contact details, such as phone number and email address, were exchanged between the participant and the interviewer. This constraint made it hard to communicate with the research participants (outside of the interview encounters) in order to, for instance, arrange future meetings. It was especially limiting with respect to the research process since follow-up interviews were of utmost importance. The aim of the *initial* interview was to gauge the reflexive orientations toward her or his identity and social environment. The focus, here, was to bring to light the *present-oriented aspect of the reflexive process*. The principal purpose of the *follow-up* interviews, on the other hand, was to shed light on how the young person's *previous* lived experiences impact upon her or his identity formation and the reflexive activity involved in this process. Follow-up interviews either had to be arranged at the end of each interview; alternatively, the respective outreach organisation had to act as a mediator between the participant and myself in order to organise subsequent interviews. This issue is discussed more critically in the Conclusion under the section *Limitations and directions for future research*. The communicative process improved, however, as the research progressed and the interview style, to which I now turn, became more focused and systematised.

4.2.4 Data collection and interview style

The qualitative research took place between September 2016 and May 2017. Semi-structured interviews constitute the principal instrument of my research. The completed interviews were digitally recorded, as mentioned in the previous section. Each interview varies in length, but about an hour was required to have any chance of entering into a meaningful dialogue. The interview guidelines (see Figure 8 below) are developed in order to inform both the ontological assumptions (sketched out in Chapters 2 and 3) and address the empirical research concern involving youths in Tottenham (summarised in Chapter 1). The guidelines contain key themes⁴⁵ (the columns to the left in Figure 8) that structure the interview process. They do this by prompting discussion intended to shed light on how the participant thinks about identity in relation to her or his environment and whether stereotypical youth representations or “self-stereotyping” tendencies play a part in the identity development process (for a summary account of the phenomenon of self-stereotyping, see §3.4.1). The middle columns of the guidelines below are a reminder of what the researcher should observe or look for during the course of the interview.

⁴⁵ Since the themes presented in the interview guidelines (see Figure 8) were developed mainly deductively and from previous research, what was eventually considered “key themes” changed both during the course of the fieldwork, and during the course of the thematic analysis, as the next chapter points out. For an extract of the final coding frame designed for thematic analysis of my study’s qualitative data, see Figure 10.

	<i>Interview themes</i>					<i>Interview observations</i>			<i>Post-interview analysis</i>		
	(1) Brief biography of participant P_i .	External perspective	Internal perspective	Lived experience	(5) Any episodes or previous experiences related to how P_i sees her-/himself?	Discrepancy between (2), (3) and (4)?	Connections between (3) and (5)?	How does P_i talk about (1) – (4)?	Type of reflexivity	Effect of different modes of reflexive orientations	
		(2) How do others (e.g., media) describe P_i ?	(3) How does P_i see her-/himself in relation to others?	(4) How does P_i describe her-/himself?					Meta-reflexive orientations	Other modes of reflexivity	Role of reflexive orientations in shaping P_i 's life trajectory
What to look for during the interview and in participant's answers:	Close family and/or community ties?	Social identities or stereotypical representations?				Self-stereotyping?	Does the stock of knowledge influence identity formation?	See youth identities as inevitable / natural phenomena?	Historically-constituted or socially situated?	Stagnating? Frustrated?	Encouraging stigma or self-stereotyping?
	Independent and/or self-reliant?	Personal identities or unique characteristics?				Rejecting social identities?	Drawing upon the stock of knowledge creatively?	See youth identities as socially constructed phenomena?	Rejecting social conventions and "standard" representations of youths?	Opening opportunities and perspectives for life projects?	Challenging negative and stereotypical identities?
P_1											
P_2											
P_3											
etc.											

Figure 8 Interview and discussion guidelines for the researcher

So, why rely solely on in-depth interviews to accompany the present research's theoretical ambitions? Why not utilise research techniques in order to combine "hard" empirical data—films, social media, etc.—with first-hand participation observation, popular with, for instance, ethnomethodology? I believe only data retrieved from interviews—directly from the young people themselves—can shed light on my research focus. There are at least three reasons behind this rationale; more specifically, my study seeks to understand: first, how lived experiences of young

people in Tottenham contribute to youth-identity formation; second, how young people (reflexively) negotiate the myriad of identities available to them and negative youth representations promoted by the media and many politicians; and, third, the multiple and complex *voices of youths*. Since the dominant discourse on young people in Tottenham post-2011 riots tended to ignore the opinion of youths, it's about time narratives and experiences of Tottenham's young people themselves are listened to. These are difficult areas that do not become known through "hard empirical data" or merely through observation of the young people under scrutiny. As Perez-Felkner (2013: 127) states, while "pure observation has its strengths, direct engagement with children and adolescents can help researchers access how children and youth construct meanings from their social worlds and yield deeper understandings of socialization processes."

Even though interviews are by no means "naturally occurring," they do comprise a "collaborative process" consisting of the *researcher's* (re)construction of *young people's* lived experiences, interpretations and different reflexive orientations.⁴⁶ The widely-discussed issue concerning this topic, moreover, is the extent to which "interview data can be said to correspond with objective reality, or whether they are merely the product of an artificial social encounter" (Heath *et al.* 2009: 81). When the young people recount their youth and childhood experiences, their accounts are always subject to the "vagaries of memory, nostalgia, and, sometimes, revisionism/self-censorship" (Feldman-Barrett 2018: 739). The present research is no exception: since its focus is to (re)produce and understand subjective narratives about how youths see themselves (as a result of, for instance, lived experiences and reflexive orientations), the problem of an "artificial social encounter" cannot be entirely avoided. In other words, I accept, along with MacDonald and Marsh (2005: 45), that "more goes on in interviews than the telling of the truth of lived experience." At any rate, as discussed above, it is not so much the truth-value of the *content* of participants' narrative that matters in my research (yet, of course, the more truthful the account, the better). What really matters is obtaining data shedding light on *how they reflexively think about* the "content" and *how they draw upon* their "stocks of knowledge."

⁴⁶ This "collaborative process" is, of course, connected to the tendency of interpretative phenomenological analysis to engage in a "double hermeneutic," which was discussed in §4.1.1.

The interviews were extensive, complex and in-depth due to the nature of the research. As a result, interviews were by and large conducted on a one-to-one basis. Some interview sessions, nonetheless, involved more than one interviewee. For instance, a preliminary interview at Tottenham Hotspur FC was with a quartet of young people (50/50 male/female ratio), while two female informants, during an interview session at Northumberland Park School, found it more convenient to be interviewed as a couple. Druta and Ronald (2017: 788) draw attention to limitations of interviewing pairs “in terms of positionality and couple dynamics.” Besides, since my research is more interested in reflexive and experiential capacities that operate more on a subjective than a collective level, interviewing young people in pairs or groups was avoided when possible. Table 1, in §4.2.2, provides an overview of the achieved sample and the interview style applied to the initial interviews with the research participants.

The aim was to carry out two or more face-to-face interviews with each participant during the research period. Most of the participants included in this study completed two interviews, but few did more than three. The initial interview focused on assisting the participant in communicating her or his attitude towards identities. It was important, here, to allow the young person to recognise the “conversation” as “belonging to” her or him. During this interview process, the task for the researcher was primarily to identify the reflexive processes involved in negotiating youth identities. The follow-up interviews, on the other hand, comprised for the most part an investigation into experiences and real-life situations, what I refer to as “time points,” connected to the research participant and how these time points relate to the formation of the participant’s identity. In other words, the follow-up interviews consisted of gathering “information” that has accumulated over time and contributed to the young person’s “stock of knowledge.” This information is crucial since it sheds light on the “source material” that the young person draws on whenever she exercises her reflexive capacity. The aggregate of the interview sessions is supposed to show how multiple youth identities are formed or negotiated in the context of the numerous negative representations of Tottenham’s young people.

As a final point, although Hung and Appleton (2016: 40–1) seek to locate different modes of reflexivity among their research participants (like the present study), they follow Archer (2003) in introducing the concept of reflexivity, characterised as “internal conversation,” *to the research participants* as part of the initial interview (unlike the present study). For instance, in Hung and

Appleton's (2016: 41) study, the young interviewees were asked to "describe a range of uses for their internal conversation." Instead of introducing concepts such as "reflexivity" or "internal conversation" to the research participants, the present study sees it as the *task of the researcher to identify* different types of reflexive tendencies based on how the participant reflects upon her or his identity and life trajectory during the interview. By the same token, it was essential for my study and the qualitative interview process to involve as few technical terms and leading questions as possible. The interview guidelines (Figure 8, above) were therefore memorised in order to allow the interview to flow "naturally" (in a conversational style), encourage participant responsiveness and reduce my reliance on concepts from a prompt sheet. The in-depth qualitative interview should allow the young person to structure the narrative of her experiences of identity formation processes in whatever way she chooses. After all, it is the young person, not the researcher, who has subjectively experienced the phenomena under discussion and it is the young person's reflexivity, not the researcher's, that my study investigates.

This point is connected to the question of who possesses "epistemic privilege." Several research participants spoke of how the media and government ministers regularly misrepresent youths in Tottenham. Negative representations like the ones that Tottenham's young people sometimes face often serve to further the ideological and strategic objectives of the "ruling class." And what's more, they are based on an "external perspective" associated with the media and politicians and are, according to some of the research participants, *epistemically inferior* to the "internal perspective" of the young people who actually live in Tottenham. §§5.1, 6.1.2 and 7.2.1–7.3 discuss how some knowledge claims can be more illuminating than others. These sections argue that when the topic "youths in Tottenham" is discussed, then Tottenham's youths are more "epistemically privileged" than other groups.

4.2.5 "Ontological premises" and idiographic research (revisited)

As the interview guidelines schematised in Figure 8, above, imply, the semi-structured interviews prioritise narrative accounts of how the research participants experience youth identities, including "externally imposed" representations of Tottenham's youths. These interviews deal with phenomenological and idiographic concerns where answers to questions such as "how do you see

yourself?” or “what is it like to have a particular experience?” are what matters (§4.1.1 provides an outline of how interpretative phenomenological analysis draws on idiographic research). Even though idiographic research and interpretative phenomenological analysis concern themselves with “particularity” and a rich array of intersubjective meaning-making, the qualitative part of my study is far from devoid of *ontological* assumptions. The formulation of the interview questions, for example, draws on certain “ontological premises.”

What are the “ontological premises” that I refer to here? As sketched out in Chapters 2 and 3 (but also *passim*), three ontological premises are central in the present thesis:

- (a) *reflexivity* is a vital mediatory mechanism that mediates between what’s “out there” and how we see ourselves;
- (b) *lived experiences* in the social world are the vital “source material” that instruct, via the “stock of knowledge,” our reflexive orientations (as well as mental content and processes more generally);
- (c) both (a) and (b) are vital “ontological ingredients” in youth-identity formation.

While my research assumes that these “ontological ingredients” are present (to various degrees) in identity formation *in general*, the idiographic aspect of my research—besides being more methodological than a statement about ontology—points to *specific* events or phenomena related to a *particular* young person’s identity formation or negotiation. The fact that this thesis operates primarily at an idiographic level is not, I believe, inconsistent with, or in opposition to, any of its ontological assumptions. On the contrary, an idiographic approach was selected on the basis of the assumption that identity formation consists of, *inter alia*, people’s heterogeneous reflexive capacities and lived experiences, which are both socially and temporally embedded. By appealing to these “ontological premises,” exploration of the *subjective* meanings of lived experiences and reflexive activity in everyday lives is in the driver’s seat, while “law-like generalisations” of the data and the findings are of little import. That is to say, an “idiographic approach” is preferred to more “nomothetic explanations,” partly *because of* my study’s ontological premises.

4.2.6 A final note on interview questions and field notes

Following on from the discussion in the preceding section, in order to enable detailed *idiographic* investigations, the interviews require probing into areas that crop up during the interview encounters. The interviewer must, therefore, be prepared to jot down unforeseen points and questions that may emerge from the discussion (this was carried out when the interview session was over). The interviewer must also remain flexible and disposed to listen in order to let the interviewee take the lead and talk without too much restriction. It is a challenge, however, to keep a balance between being flexible, on the one hand, and gather relevant information that builds on the ontological premises, on the other, as laid out in the previous section. After all, the point of the interview data is to address the research concern even though the information is *idiographic* rather than *nomothetic* in nature.

The semi-structured interviews were, therefore, flexible and unpredictable, but still contained a formula, inspired by the interview guidelines in Figure 8 above, that typically consisted of the following interview questions:

- 1) Do you regularly think about how you see yourself and how others see you?
↓
- 2) If so, how do you think about it; for instance, do *you choose* your identity or do *others* (e.g., family, friends, “society,” existing dominant groups) *determine* how you see yourself?
↓
- 3) Do other people or, say, the media see you differently from the way you see yourself and, if yes, is this problematic to you?
↓
- 4) How does your everyday life influence your identity and do you reflect on identity during the course of everyday living?
↓
- 5) Have certain events, experiences or people triggered this way of thinking or would you reflect in this way regardless of what has happened in your life?
↓
- 6) Describe the different situations in the past and present where your identity has played a significant role or been a topic of discussion?

During the interview, these questions are usually formulated in a way that is supposed to make the interviewee feel at ease, with questions moulded to fit the specific research participant. The participant, moreover, should be allowed to deal with the questions at their own pace so as to encourage a comfortable research environment while at the same time facilitate personal narratives and honest responses.

As I wanted the meetings with the research participants to be as unobtrusive as possible, *field notes* were written up as soon as possible *following* the interviews. These reflective notes deal with not only relevant observations and informal conversations that are not picked up by the digital audio recorder, but also attend to the qualitative research technique used during interviews. The notes, then, include comments on the interview approach and technique so that improvements can be made in future interviews. In this way, the field notes also operate as a “reflexive” research journal as they support in questioning and adjusting my own practice during the qualitative interview process.⁴⁷

By studying the field notes in advance to the follow-up interviews, the researcher is given an opportunity to identify specific points and questions that should be investigated further in subsequent interviews. This was particularly helpful for the present study since the initial interview focused primarily on the participant’s *present reflexive orientations toward youth identities*, while the subsequent ones looked at the social influences and the participant’s lived experiences across her or his life course. That is, the notes (of course, in conjunction with the transcript) support the researcher in connecting the reflexive orientations of young people (identified primarily in the initial interview) to their stocks of knowledge (identified in the follow-up interviews). The interview process, then, lays the groundwork for systematising the multiple “time points” and different factors involved in the negotiation and formation of individual young people’s identity. In view of that, it also prepares the way for the thematic analysis, which is the topic of the next chapter.

⁴⁷ Although this type of “reflexive” research practice is not entirely unrelated to *lay people’s* reflexive orientations, reflexivity in this context is a *methodological issue* in the social sciences (cf. Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009; Kuorikoski and Pöyhönen 2012: 192; Luttrell 2010) and should not be confused with how I use reflexivity throughout the present thesis.

Chapter 5

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

While the immediately preceding chapter deals with *qualitative methods* for conducting youth-identity research and the next chapter is concerned with the actual *research findings*, the present chapter provides a bridge between research methods and the discussion of the findings. That is, this chapter offers an overview of how I *thematically analysed* the qualitative data accumulated from the in-depth interviews. Even though these qualitative interviews were conducted with a small number of young people ($N = 16$), they produced a large amount of research data. The interviews, furthermore, were guided by a list of broad-ranging topics, topics that changed throughout the research process and eventually transformed into *themes*.⁴⁸

The chapter begins by sketching out how the semi-structured interviews progressed from audio-recordings to a transcript of considerable size, then, to an in-depth examination of the text, and, finally, to the development of themes. It proceeds by demonstrating how the procedure of developing themes or “patterns of meanings” is well suited to use alongside the “social phenomenology” located throughout this thesis. Practitioners of interpretative phenomenological analysis should already be acquainted with this procedure. In interpretative phenomenological analysis, patterns of meanings are usually referred to as “‘*themes*’ and the themes are usually drawn from detailed, line-by-line commentary on the data, called ‘*codes*’” (Larkin and Thompson 2012: 104). Integral to this coding procedure is the building of a thematic map that allows for contextually rich insights as well as analysis of both explicit (manifest) and implicit (latent) content. The chapter then moves on to explain the process leading to the development of the final coding frame that consists of core categories and sub-themes. When developing such a coding frame and the type of research presented in this thesis, more generally, priority is given to making the young informants

⁴⁸ For a schematisation of the interview guidelines, see Figure 8 in §4.2.4, and see §§4.1.1 and 4.2.6 for lists of typical questions aimed at the research participants.

“emplot” accounts and themes that emanate from their “narratives imbued by personal experiences” (Christodoulou 2016: 323).

The last segment of this chapter takes us through how the current research project involves the examination of multiple “time points” across the young person’s life course and how this can be captured within a “quasi-longitudinal” study (§5.2). It then goes on to investigate temporally embedded processes. The aim of this investigation is to show how a thematic analysis can help in *linking* past experiences in, and of, the social world (or “time points”) to present reflexive orientations. This aim is outlined in §5.2.2 and based on the more theoretical discussion of §2.3.1. The objective of the ensuing sections, then, is to prepare for an examination of the research findings, which is the task of the two chapters following the present one, by outlining how the verbatim interview transcriptions were thematically analysed.

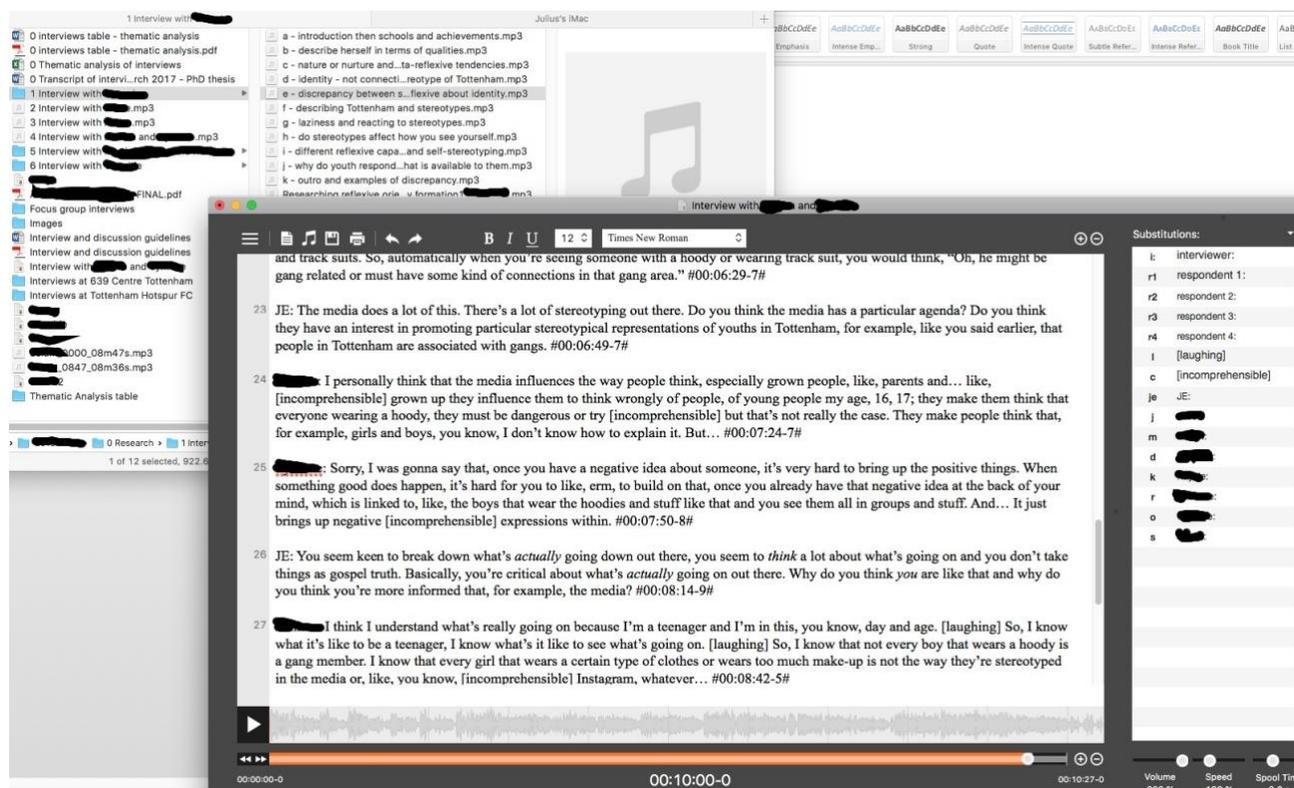


Figure 9 Screenshot of the verbatim transcript with audio waveform included in the transcription software

5.1 From transcript notation to theme creation

After the qualitative interviews were transcribed in full—verbatim—a series of close readings of the data followed. Figure 9, above, shows an example of the initial stages of the transcription process before the interviews were ready to be thematically analysed. Although a range of themes were explored *prior to* as well as *during* the interview process,⁴⁹ the task of categorising the data into themes was not carried out until the fieldwork was complete. The first step after concluding the transcription was to place codes in the transcript text next to the relevant passages in order to consider possible new themes. This preliminary coding process assisted in building further data categories for detailed thematic analysis later on. In other words, line-by-line analysis and initial codes on each individual transcript—particular narratives of each research participant—was prioritised before developing more “solid” and across-case themes. Along with interpretative phenomenological analysis (see §4.1.1), the in-depth exploration of the 98-page transcript involved primarily a *descriptive* analysis to begin with, focusing on the young person’s description of her life course and how she describes herself. The more active *interpretative* approach to the transcript was put in place later when the key objective was to develop a transparent account of *meaning-patterns* of the data (Smith *et al.* 2009; see also Tiratelli 2018; Vas *et al.* 2016: 5). Although it is crucial to provide descriptions of relevant phenomenal experiences—especially the description of particular lived experiences and the “essence” of the young people’s perceived identities—it is the detailed *interpretation* of these experiences that takes centre stage in this study. In addition, rather than seeking *nomothetic* formulations or *statistical* relationships of variables and *frequency* of thematic codes, the aspiration of the below is to develop a “faithful” *reading* of the accounts the participants give of themselves in relation to their social environments. This aspiration is in line with the *idiographic* and *interpretative* approach to coding, which play a vital role in the latter stages of the qualitative research process of this study (§§4.1.1 and 4.2.5 sketch out how my study’s qualitative aims and idiographic research are connected).

⁴⁹ The interview guidelines, Figure 8 in §4.2.4, are an example of themes that were developed prior to the interview process.

How is the notion of “theme” employed in thematic analysis and what does it mean? First, it refers to particular patterns of meaning located in the data. For instance, when Amaia,⁵⁰ a teenager from Tottenham, explains why she’s sceptical of stereotypical images of youths and doesn’t accept the common media representations of Tottenham, many emerging patterns and themes can be noted. The extract below is Amaia’s response as to why she thinks she is in a better position than, for example, social and political commentators to understand the identities of local young people and what Tottenham is like.

I think I understand what’s really going on because I’m a teenager and I’m in this, you know, day and age. [laughing] So, I know what it’s like to be a teenager, I know what [it’s] like to see what’s going on. [laughing] So, I know that not every boy that wears a hoody is a gang member. I know that every girl that wears a certain type of clothes or wears too much make-up is not the way they’re stereotyped in the media...

In Amaia’s account we have a multitude of possible themes covering everything from youth culture and media representations to reflexive orientations and epistemological matters such as the idea that it may be impossible for an adult “outsider” to comprehend the lives of teenagers in Tottenham. This short extract comprises *manifest* content, whereby texts and themes are directly observable, e.g., themes such as “youth” and “media representations.” However, it also constitutes *latent* content that, for example, refers to (negative) stereotypical images more *implicitly* and points to the possibility that Amaia is in a unique position—that is, she has “epistemically privileged access”—to comprehend “what’s really going on.” §§6.1.2 and 7.2.1–7.3 provide a more detailed discussion on why youths in Tottenham are more “epistemically privileged” than other groups when the topic under scrutiny is “Tottenham youths.” The idea of privileged epistemic access is also reflected in Sapphire’s answer about whether media representations of young people in Tottenham are valid.

I feel like I’m quite educated on what this is because I know a lot of people who may dress in a certain way and may be seen as a criminal or, erm, someone who’s involved in something negative, but I just feel like it’s something that I’ve always seen, so I have an idea about it.

⁵⁰ The names of the research participants are anonymised through pseudonyms (throughout the thesis).

The emergence and identification of latent content—in this case, Amaia and Sapphire’s epistemically privileged access to youthful identities within their own environment—is, of course, more subjective (the researcher’s perspective). The below thematic analysis draws upon both explicit (manifest) and implicit (latent) content during the coding procedures, procedures already familiar to practitioners of interpretative phenomenological analysis.⁵¹

The emergence and selection of themes and categories in this study comprise another demarcation: the distinction between themes drawn from *theoretically*-driven ideas and themes emerged *inductively* from analysing the raw data. In the case of my study, the former operates deductively and, for the most part, came into being prior to the fieldwork (some theoretical and conceptual tweaking, though, took place during the course of the interview process). Some concepts, such as Archer’s different modes of reflexivity (see §2.1.1), were broadly speaking in line with my (preconceived) theoretical framework, which was developed both deductively and through previous empirical research. Other concepts and themes emerged inductively. Certain themes were derived spontaneously from the research participants voicing their concerns. For example, although the topic of the 2011 riots was not featured in the interview questions, the young people used the riots and the discourse that emerged in the aftermath as a reference point to provide context to some of the negative stereotypes that they faced. Also, concepts such as “lived experiences” and the “stock of knowledge” turned out to be more important than initially thought. These two notions were introduced as it became clear during the fieldwork that I needed to conceptualise better the identity-forming processes and the “source material” that the young people utilise whenever reflexive orientations are in operation. These “emerging concepts,” thus, came to prominence via the empirical data at a later phase of the research interviews. Many of the emerging concepts and categories developed into “overarching themes” (see Figure 10 in the next section) once the thematic analysis got underway. On the other hand, certain themes—especially the thematic categories of gender, ethnicity and class—were expected to be conspicuously featured in the narratives of the young people interviewed, but did not emerge inductively from the data in particular pertinent or salient ways.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Hung and Appleton (2016: 37); Larkin and Thompson (2012: 105); Smith *et al.* (2009: 79–80) for further discussions regarding identification of thematic patterns and content in relation to interpretative phenomenological analysis.

All in all, while “theoretically derived themes allow researchers to replicate, extend and refute existing studies [...], there is little point in conducting qualitative work if one does not want to draw on the naturalistically occurring themes evident in the data,” as Joffe (2012: 210) points out. The all-important qualitative process and thematic analysis in this study, accordingly, involve thematic content that is not only determined deductively from prior research and theoretical work, but also content derived inductively from empirical concerns found in the data material.⁵² The thematic content, furthermore, consists of both latent as well as more manifest thematic development.

5.1.1 From refining themes to final coding frame

One aspiration of my study’s approach to thematic analysis is the *systematisation* of young people’s reflexive orientations toward their identities in relation to relevant “time points” during their life course. As will be demonstrated below, this approach will assist in figuring out, among other things: whether the “dominant discourse” misrepresents Tottenham’s youths; the type of orientations that tend to reject stereotypical representations or lead to self-stereotyping measures among young people in Tottenham; and, whether those young people see their identity claims as malleable or fixed.⁵³ The main driver behind this approach is the development of “core categories,” “overarching themes” and “sub-themes,” which encapsulated the codes of the condensed and conclusive coding frame. An extract from the final thematic schematisation of this coding frame is presented in Figure 10.

⁵² The fact that themes derive both deductively and inductively corresponds to the aim outlined in the previous chapter of approaching empirical sources in deductive and inductive ways in order to illuminate the complexity of youth-identity formation.

⁵³ Earlier in this thesis (§3.4.1), I defined self-stereotyping as the process in which an individual integrates stereotypical characterisations associated with her ingroup into her self-concept.

Topic/thematic category	Past (relevant "time points")		Present activity		Youth-identity formation	
	Lived experiences	Reflexive activity	Type of reflexive orientation	Social identity and stereotypes	Personal identity	Self-stereotyping
<p>Overarching theme</p> <p>Example of code or sub-theme</p>	<p>education, positive experience, negative experience, identity-forming experience, influence (structure–agency), family</p>	<p>autonomous, communicative, fractured, meta-reflexivity, identity-forming orientation</p>	<p>ethnicity, cultural identity, stereotype and media representation, (perceived) social identity, (perceived) personal identity, identity-forming aspect, self-stereotyping and passivity, rejecting self-stereotyping and proactivity, external aspects and internal aspects of identity</p>			
<p>Date of interview: Sept. 2016</p> <p>Place of interview: 639 Centre</p> <p>Pseudonymous name: Lesedi</p> <p>Sex: Female</p> <p>Age bracket: 16–19</p> <p>Ethnicity: Black African</p> <p>Background / biography: "I live in Tottenham," "my primary school is on the border of Barnet and Haringey," "I went to</p>	<p>I did enjoy my time at secondary school. I had a lot of opportunities there. In year 7, I enjoyed the... we didn't have an orchestra at that time, so we had just a string ensemble, but since that time it has grown into a symphony orchestra. [JE: What instrument did you play? L: Violin.]</p> <p>We didn't have soloists, because it is just about giving everybody the opportunity to play. Being lead just meant that my role was to encourage others, and encourage my section.</p> <p>JE: Is it totally down to you that you've achieved that much, or would you say that there may be certain other things in your life that may have influenced you?</p> <p>L: I don't think that you could accredit everything to me. I think my mum definitely has influenced the things that I do. She's always encouraging me to do more, to try more, even during her time at school she was that kind of person who would do public speaking and drama fest and she was the prefect and she was going to be the head girl but thought it was too much responsibility. She wasn't head girl in the end. So, it's her encouraging me to do these things to a higher level, to a higher standard. I think she has definitely... embossed this theory of excellence in whatever you trying to do</p> <p>It's my mum encouraging me to, "you</p>	<p>JE: Were they just passive experiences of her [L's mother] talking about "excellence" or did you reflect upon what she talked about and thought, "this makes sense." Did she tell you, "this is how you should live your life" and then you just did it, or did you think, "given my circumstances, this is how I want to live my life"?</p> <p>L: I think it has to be a bit of both, I think, like, whenever I went to school and they told me about this opportunity, I tell my mum, and, she says, this would be very good for me to learn this or that, and I think about it, and I'll be like, "ok", that might be a really</p>	<p>I guess one way to describe myself is quite determined, quite driven and... I wrote a paragraph about myself the other day... one of the things that I wrote was a quite cheesy; one of the things that I wrote was a "trailblazer". Maybe that's a bit much, but again I was very proactive about the things that I did in school, while my counterparts were not that interested about extracurriculars.</p> <p>So, perhaps I don't quite connect with the idea of trailblazer, but then I haven't found "my Tottenham" either, where I can see people doing things that my peers [incomprehensible] and loving things the way I love things, but maybe it's because I haven't gone out to find it, because I socialise with people at school who live around Bounds Green area, whereas I don't really socialise with people around Tottenham. But yeah, I talk to my neighbours and they are great people, and I talk to the people in</p>	<p>My identity... I guess... I think there are different, like, subcategories; there could be your cultural identity, I am Black, I am an African, I am half South-African and half Kenyan, but I was raised in England and I've been to Kenya maybe twice and would not necessarily call that home, so I guess to some degree you could call me flat-out British. Erm, I am a young woman, who live in Tottenham. I don't think I really connect with this idea of living in Tottenham or perhaps the idea that the [unclear] [unclear] [unclear] because my schooling was mainly done at around the Muswell Hill–Bounds Green-ish area [most affluent areas in Haringey]. And I think this idea of excellence was always giving me the</p>	<p>perhaps protects herself against stereotypical representations: "one of the things that I wrote was a "trailblazer". Maybe that's a bit much, but again I was very proactive about the things that I did in school, while my counterparts were not that interested about extracurriculars."</p> <p>[How would I deal with stereotypical information about Tottenham residents?] I think, ultimately, I'd be, again, I'd be shocked by... because when the riots happened I was on holiday—I was in Kenya with my mum—and like we were looking at, and I just didn't understand, because it's quiet here, nothing really happens here, like, yeah. So, I was surprised when the riots happened, and I think when you see stuff like that in the newspaper, you're quite surprised too, it's never really on my street. Erm, but I don't live on Broadwater [Farm] [...] If I saw an [unclear] [unclear] [unclear] [unclear] about Tottenham I'd be a bit confused wondering who would write it, do they live in Tottenham or is it someone who lives in Hackney and just has, I don't know, a couple of brain cells ... together, I don't know? Erm, I'd be shocked. And, I don't think I'd do that much about it. I'd probably think about it for a bit, show my mum, like, what is this, I don't understand, but apart from that... Comment: discrepancy between media representations, on the one hand, and reality, on the other; questioning media's standpoint. People who reinforce stereotypes of Tottenham residents may have an agenda or</p>	

Figure 10 Extract from the coding frame; procedures designed for thematic analysis of the qualitative data

Figure 10 is extracted from a 78-page document, which I refer to as my study’s “coding frame.” It outlines the final template for coding while exemplifies some of the codes and thematic categories that have been condensed from numerous themes and codes. Furthermore, this coding frame is the guiding thematic scheme for the present research and its content is based on the verbatim-transcribed interviews as well as several initial commentaries on the codes. Prior to systematising the thematic categories into a conclusive set of “overarching themes” and “sub-themes,” as in Figure 10, a preliminary process of “iterative” thematic coding took place. Like Hung and Appleton (2016: 42), the iteration process of revising and refining themes between “within-case and across-case analysis” was applied in order to identify the most applicable codes and create a more “accessible” final thematic template. After completing the thematic template, which had been a work in progress since the birth of my research, individual transcripts were, yet again, measured up against the coding frame.

The coding frame (Figure 10 above) consists of themes pertaining to three “umbrella categories.” The first umbrella category is called “Past” and contains overarching themes such as previous “reflexive activity” and “lived experiences;” the second is called “Present activity” and includes themes about the different types of reflexive orientations that young people use in the present; the last umbrella category is labelled “Youth-identity formation” and comprises the following overarching themes: “social identity and stereotypes,” “personal identity” and “self-stereotyping.” The codes and *sub-themes* linked to these overarching themes are too many to list here, but the most crucial ones are listed in the coding frame extract above.

Needless to say, the thematic template—that is, the coding frame—used in this study takes into account that the same interview passage or quote can have *multiple* codes, as well as numerous overarching themes and sub-themes, assigned to it. A quote from an interview with Luke illustrates how a single statement applies to multiple columns in my coding framework:

I experienced a few things back in the day that, like, influenced me. But also, things in the past don’t always control you. I should’ve been a “road man”⁵⁴ [laughter]. I mean, with the people around me—the kind of people I grew up with, people from the road—I should be

⁵⁴ The term “road man” is used by mainly London youths to describe a person that tends to hang out on street corners and communicate via slang. The term is usually loaded with negative connotations. A road man might “possibly engage in illegal activities” and may have “a general street ‘swagger’—an air of confidence, can be aggressive [sic], they know, and play the system on the street” (Canaan Project 2013). This definition was more or less confirmed as adequate by the research participant himself.

doing other things, not the things I'm doing now [working as a head coach for an established sports club]. [...] Being a "road man" is kinda expected of me. It's easy to just go with the stereotype, the category, [but] categories are not for me, erm, so I chose a different destiny. I didn't wanna be that category even though most thought I'd be just another "road man."

In this interview excerpt with Luke, multiple themes relevant to my coding frame are brought up and alluded to: "external aspect" of identity (how others perceive Luke), lived identity-forming experiences, stereotypical images, social influences, his local environment, temporal aspects of practice, peer pressure, social expectations and so forth. While these themes cover mainly factors that an agent finds hard to control, the excerpt also contains themes that point to Luke's more agentic capacities: "internal aspect" of identity (how Luke perceives himself), a degree of autonomy, past and present reflexive orientations, a tendency to reject stereotypes (or, to be more precise, an intervention into processes of self-stereotyping) and so on. On the one hand, what Luke grapples with here is the irresistible and undeniable influence of his social environment as well as the perpetuation of stereotypical images and representations by the media. But on the other, he refers (tacitly) to his reflexive capacity to reflect upon and reject the idea of a "predetermined destiny" and the constraints of the social categories put upon him. In other words, multiple thematic codes, even "contradictory" ones (constraints and enablements, "internal" and "external" aspects of identity, as well as structural influences and agentic powers), can derive from a single interview segment. Thematic analysis, thus, has the potential to shed light on complex mental and social processes. As I pointed out throughout Chapter 1, an approach that takes into account the heterogeneity and complexity of youth-identity formation is badly needed, especially with respect to how youth identities in Tottenham have been treated up till now. The "dominant discourse" on Tottenham's youths, in contrast, appeared to favour simplicity over complexity while it tended to employ stereotypical representations rather than give a nuanced portrayal of Tottenham's diverse young people.

The next challenge in the thematic analysis process involved highlighting potential *relations* between the themes. Some researchers focus on the examination of the relationship of a particular code to other codes "in terms of co-occurrence and sequencing" (Joffe 2012: 217). But, this is not how relations are understood in the present study. Rather than merely seeking nomothetic

knowledge or looking at statistical data—especially, frequencies and co-occurrences of codes—the researcher plays an active interpretative role in making sense of the possible links between multiple thematic codes (see §4.1.1, above, for an outline of how the researcher’s interpretative contribution generates a “double hermeneutic”). For instance, *interpretative* analysis is required to figure out how the identity claims of the young person are linked to her or his stock of knowledge. That is, does the young person draw upon lived experiences and shared meanings when making identity claims? While this question deals with the *content* of the young person’s identity work, the current study also concerns itself with possible *causal* relations. For instance, is she influenced by her social environment, including, perhaps, negative media representations of youths, when articulating how she sees herself, or does her reflexive orientations have some bearing on the formation of her identity? (Most likely, it’s both.) These sorts of questions assisted the inductively-derived categories in moving from being preliminary codes on the transcript into the final structure of the coding frame.

While the semi-structured interviews were guided by the interview and discussion guidelines (as detailed in the preceding chapter’s Figure 8), the final round of thematic analysis relied on the coding frame (see an extract of this frame in Figure 10). The discussion in the remainder of this chapter takes the latter—the themes in the six columns of the coding frame—as its point of departure while analysing:

- (i) young people’s subjective *stocks of knowledge*, accumulated from their lived experiences and *previous reflexive orientations*—to analyse this theme, I rely on coded extracts from the interview transcript as presented in the first and second columns, from the left, in the coding frame (see Figure 10, above, which is a screenshot of the final coding frame);
- (ii) the heterogeneous ways that Tottenham’s youths draw on (i) to make different *reflexive orientations in the present*—first, second and third columns;
- (iii) how (i) and (ii) contribute to young people’s sense of who they are in terms of their “key characteristics” or social identity—first, second, third and fourth columns;
- (iv) how (i) and (ii) contribute to the emergence of their *personal identity*—first, second, third and fifth columns;
- (v) the discrepancy between the “internal aspect of identity” (how young people in Tottenham see themselves) and the “external aspect of identity” (how others see them)—first, fourth and fifth columns;
- (vi) whether Tottenham’s young people scrutinise stereotypical representations of youths in their local area—second, third and fourth columns;

- (vii) the type of reflexive orientation involved in (vi)—second and third columns;
- (viii) whether any of the research participants internalise stereotypical youth representations and as a result see stereotypes as self-defining (self-stereotyping)—fourth and sixth columns;
- (ix) whether they understand youth identities as “natural phenomena” or as socio-cultural constructions—all the columns.

5.2 “Time points:” systematising lived experiences and past reflexive activity

While some studies (e.g., Zapata-Gietl *et al.* 2016: 205) refer to “time points” as variables or data collected during different phases of the research process (this is particularly the case with studies analysing the transition into adulthood), the present study sees “time points” merely as key lived experiences and events across a subject’s life span that relate to that subject’s present orientations.⁵⁵ The former employs *longitudinal* data and research design to record the *changing experiences of informants at multiple stages in the life course* (the same sample of research participants is interviewed at distinct, often carefully selected, temporal intervals; e.g., one interview on a biennial basis for two decades). The latter, on the other hand, employs a “quasi-longitudinal” interview style and analysis (cf. MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 44), which involve data collection and in-depth interviews at *one point in time* (perhaps a few in-depth interviews with each research participant during a year-long research project). The reason why it is here referred to as “quasi-longitudinal” is because the interviews take account of lived experiences in the social world, socialisation processes and a variety of reflexive orientations that not only occur in the present, but have occurred in the *past at various different stages of the young person’s life*. However, these past experiences are merely recounted from memory, from the present perspective (hence, “quasi-longitudinal”). Although longitudinal research offers the ideal opportunity to study and chart individuals or groups over time, the purpose of the below is to link a variety of present orientations to multiple “time points” (relevant lived experiences) and to offer the “prospect of penetrating deep into *how* socialization processes [and] identity formation [...] actually transpire through temporality and

⁵⁵ For a more detailed outline of “time points” construed as key moments and experiences across a person’s life course, see Elster (2017: 286–8).

reflexivity” (Elster 2017: 274). The project of involving multiple time points across the young person’s life course, I believe, can be captured within a quasi-longitudinal study. I shall pick up this discussion in the Conclusion (under the section labelled *Limitations and directions for future research*).

As my conceptual framework outlines, I use the Schützian term “stock of knowledge” (Schütz [1945] 1962: 208; [1932] 1972: 78; [1942–55] 1982: 9, 117; [1970] 2011: 131, 136–51) to refer to the subjective “source material” that has accumulated over time through a variety of lived experiences (see, e.g., §2.3.1). The stock of knowledge (as source material), in turn, enables an individual to, among other things, communicate as she navigates the social world, as well as assign identities to herself and others. An obvious concern here is that one’s stock of knowledge is typically inaccessible to conscious awareness; not only for the researcher, but also for the research subject under scrutiny. In addition, to study the infinite number of possible time points involved in the development of the stock of knowledge *independently of one another* and to know *which ones are related* to present reflexive activity are yet other well-grounded causes for concern. However, although the “temporal flux” of experience makes it tricky to identify relations between the relevant time points, I believe it’s not entirely unfeasible to ascertain episodes and experiences that have contributed to the expansion of the stock of knowledge. An aim of the final two sections of this chapter is exactly to demonstrate this; namely, the possibility of analytically singling out time points relevant to the formation of young people’s identities, wherein both reflexivity and the stock of knowledge play a role.

5.2.1 An example of how to identify and analyse biographical “time points”

The various “time points,” then, are narrated by the research participant and collected by the researcher. Essentially, it is the researcher’s job to make further queries about a specific topic (e.g., a particular important aspect of the participant’s answer[s]) in order to locate the relevant “biographical time points.”

The biographical time points, here, are not merely a subjective narrative that concerns itself with the participant’s life course, they are also temporal relations between: past, present and future;

lived experiences, social conditions and reflexive activity; and, internal and external aspects of identity as they interact over time (cf. Christodoulou 2016: 336; Heinz 2009: 8; MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 44, *passim*). At any rate, it is the job of the researcher to *systematise* the complex relations between the biographical time points. My thesis argues that this job is more effectively accomplished by applying the thematic analytical framework outlined in this chapter, accompanied by the life course perspective (see, e.g., §3.3.1) and the idiographic methods outlined in the previous chapter that incorporate the aforementioned ontological premises (see, e.g., §§2.3, 3.3.1 and 4.2.5).

Based on the coding frame discussed in §5.1.1, let me sketch out some time points that play a temporal and influential part in forming the identity of the young people interviewed. I shall do this by using an example extracted from the research findings. The temporal factors or time points appearing in this illustration are obtained from the two columns (“lived experiences” and “past reflexive activity”) to the left in the thematic schematisation of the coding frame (see Figure 10 in §5.1.1, above, for an extract of this document).

Lesedi is a young Black woman who had just finished secondary school at the point of the interviews. She has always lived in Tottenham, which is in the London Borough of Haringey, but the secondary schools that she attended is located in the more affluent area to the west in Haringey borough. She had many enjoyable experiences and “a lot of opportunities” in secondary school, and achieved various awards and extremely good grades. She spoke of many positive experiences (time points) with respect to: playing in the school orchestra and string ensemble; being “very proactive about different educational activities” and “interested in ‘extracurriculars;’” the excitement of getting her “A* [highest grade possible] a year early” and so forth. Lesedi’s “schooling was mainly done at around the Muswell Hill–Bounds Green-ish area,” which is located on the other side of Haringey from where she lives in Tottenham. She explained that although she grew up with her “working class mum,” in Tottenham, “this idea of excellence was always giving [her] the borderline middle-class upbringing.” “Excellence” was a reoccurring term that Lesedi used in conjunction with how she sees herself and her aspirations. For example, she spoke about specific experiences where her mum “embossed this theory of excellence in whatever you trying to do.” Lesedi emphasised, “‘Excellence’ wasn’t something I was scared of, it was something I saw as natural in relation to who I am or at least [in relation to] what I should strive for.” “This is

probably down to [my mum] encouraging me to do these things to a higher level, to a higher standard.”

She also spoke of less positive experiences. For instance, Lesedi expressed how she remembers being “othered” by her fellow students—there was an atmosphere of “me” and “them”—and that she felt “kinda small cos you can tell that you’re different” every time she entered the maths classroom.

I was the only Black person in top set maths and then it got to that point where I was like, I am supposed to be something special here or am I just another statistic, I don’t quite understand because I was not very confident about it...

Lesedi explained that the “othering” experience that regularly took place in and around the school on the other side of the borough from Tottenham was often underpinned by judgemental projections. Although she appreciated many of the things that the secondary school and the surrounding area had to offer, she felt that most perceptions outside of Tottenham represented a prejudicial “external perspective.” Lesedi’s feelings of being othered, then, was specifically connected to experiences that took place outside Tottenham where she lives.

I think Tottenham is known for being very multicultural, whereas Muswell Hill, Bounds Green and Crouch End [areas surrounding her secondary school] to some degree are quite homogeneous and ultimately may perceive me as different, or “other,” or may not think that there is more to me, perhaps...

The idea that young people from Tottenham feel othered by people from outside their neighbourhoods—people who represent the “external perspective”—is, of course, reminiscent of the account put forward in §1.1, where I described how Tottenham’s diversity operates as a “safe space” for many with BAME backgrounds. I shall revisit this claim and the topic of “othering processes” in §§7.1 and 7.22.

Although Lesedi’s experiences of “othering” and being discriminated against were discouraging, she seemed to have a strong sense of identity and referred to certain “time points”—positive experiences of empowerment, especially meaningful moments spent with her mum—that enabled her to block out some of the negative prejudice. She gave much thought to how her identity

clashes with external perspectives and stereotypical images imposed by the media as she was regularly measuring her social experiences up against her sense of self in reflexive ways.

Here we see a young Black woman, whose *multiple experiences* combined with her *reflexive orientations* seem to carve out her unique trajectory and shape how she sees herself. In other words, significant time points that included lived experiences, social conditions and reflexivity contributed to Lesedi's personal identity. She touched on several episodes, experiences and instances of reflexive activity that were factors in her developing:

- a picture of her mum as a strong Black woman and a role model (Lesedi's mum "embossed this theory of excellence in whatever you trying to do;" "she was that kind of person who would do public speaking and drama fest and she was [a school] prefect;" "I don't think that you could accredit everything to me, I think my mum definitely has influenced the things that I do");
- a lack of fit with stereotypical images of young women in Tottenham ("if I had gone along with the [stereotypical images of youth in Tottenham], I don't think I would've achieved as much as I had");
- a resistance to negative self-stereotyping ("[although] media talks about gangs and Tottenham as if they're a big part of our everyday lives, I've never seen the Tottenham or Wood Green gang in my life, I don't know anyone [laughter as she speaks] who's a part of the Wood Green gang [...], so I think it would be like this shadow, or [...] bogeyman that people would be talking about that I'd never truly identify with");
- a determination to be who she wants to be, often in the face of difficult and discriminatory circumstances ("I'm very big on science and I want to study chemical engineering and to some degree, some people would say, being a girl in this field would maybe be a bad thing, but I also know that there are tons of programmes that try to get girls into STEM, soooooo, even if I see one group that says no, I know that I'll look for something else that tells me, 'Yes, come do this,' 'because you're different,' 'maybe because I'm a woman,' 'maybe because I'm Black,' 'because I'm a young person' If there's one group putting me down, I know there's another one on the flipside;" "I was very proactive about the things that I did in school, while my counterparts were not that interested about extracurriculars. I was willing to try more").

All these factors—a variety of relevant time points involving subjective experiences and reflexive orientations within her social environment—play a part in the complex process of how Lesedi negotiates her identity. These time points reflect Lesedi's numerous and varied lived experiences that, in turn, contribute to the expansion of her stock of knowledge, a stockpile that she draws on whenever she—reflexively or habitually—navigates the social world.

5.2.2 Tying young people's reflexive orientations to their stocks of knowledge

Integral to the theoretical framework, set out in Chapters 2 and 3, is the importance of dealing with “how?”-type questions. This means, among other things, that the researcher should not shy away from embarking on an investigation into *how* identities and life trajectories are formed. I have suggested that this investigation does not only entail looking at social structures—traditionally favoured by sociologists—or mental activities—favoured by psychologists. Nor do the “how?”-type of queries merely require an investigation into the mediatory mechanism between what's out there and the action of the individual epitomised by the concept of reflexivity. Besides taking all of these factors into account, the researcher must, I believe, also call for an investigation into “*temporally* embedded” processes. Whenever a young man, for example, thinks (perhaps, reflexively) about his identity, the thinking doesn't occur in a temporal vacuum, independently of his previous experiences in, and of, the social world. Both the young man and the social world that surrounds him have a history. They are embedded in temporality. An important task of this section and the next couple of chapters, thus, is to make use of the study's findings with the intention of connecting identity formation to relevant *life course experiences* of the young people and demonstrate how the heterogeneous modes of reflexivity⁵⁶ involved in the formation of their identities are socially and temporally embedded.

One of the interviewees, Nala, a young woman aged 18, revealed how she sees herself *vis-à-vis* how she envisages her future trajectory through drawing on different reflexive modalities. Nala's ambitions appeared to be mainly *autonomously* driven, but she gave examples of *conferring* with her mum while *meta-reflexively* reflecting on her identity. She applies, here, at least three different modes of reflexivity: “autonomous reflexivity,” “communicative reflexivity” and “meta-reflexivity.” To illustrate how she thinks about her identity in relation to her social environment, here is an example of her application of reflexivity:

I don't see myself as a university student, but I wanna make something with myself so I've made up my mind, I'm starting uni[versity].

⁵⁶ See §2.1.1 for a discussion of Archer's different modes of reflexivity and §§6.1–6.1.1 for empirical examples of these modes drawn from the research findings.

I've applied to study tourism because I'm, like, good with people, customer service and stuff, and wanna know more about the world.

Her answers are a textbook example of reflexive activity: on the whole, how she reflects upon her identity and social circumstances “bend back” on how she sees herself and pursues different career options. This reflexive attention to herself, moreover, is not only a *present* concern. Rather, it connects to both the past as well as the future. That is, her reflexive deliberation on identity and vocational trajectory, here, draws on her lived experiences accumulated in the subjective stock of knowledge and exerts influence on how she pursues her career. Since she doesn't see herself as *a university student*, she must have some (previous) experience of *what it is like* to be, or the sort of identity attached to being, a university student, or what is required of university students. Furthermore, since she doesn't *see herself* as a university student, she must have some (preconceived) idea of *who she is* and measure this perceived identity up against the idea of being a university student. While reflexively comparing the identity and roles of university students with how she sees herself, Nala cannot escape drawing on her previous experiences and understanding of *what it is like* to be a university student and her perception of *who she is*. The reflexive attitude, demonstrated in her answers, therefore, does not merely depend on how she thinks about herself and her life trajectory *in the present*. She draws heavily on *past* experiences—a variety of “time points”—when she negotiates her identity, which makes her identity historically constituted, formed and negotiated *over time*. Reflexivity is here a temporal process.

Nala proceeds:

I've been moving around a lot because of personal circumstances [...]. That takes its toll on your, like, emotional health [...] so you have to be calm and smart and focused on what you want and that'll get you everywhere.

What she regards as experiences of adversity, as well as successful outcomes of her previous reflexive attitude towards these life experiences, are brought (back) into play when she weighs up, in the present, different life choices. Her subjective “stock of knowledge,” in other words, informs her of:

- good and bad practices;
- who she is and her sense of self;

- natural and strange settings;
- viable future objectives to be pursued, given her understanding and experience of relevant external constraints and enablements.

She continues by referring to certain past “time points,” including reoccurring experiences relevant to her commitment to pursue studies in tourism.

I’ve moved around in north London a lot, but I have yet to see the world. [...] I watch a lot of TV and read a lot of newspapers; [...] I see all these places that I’ve not been to. Back in the day, in Year 7 I think, I said that I wanna travel, visit countries; I wanna learn about them and show other people these places.

Although her stock of knowledge is pretty much “devoid” of *lived* experiences with respect to *actually* travelling the world, Nala appears to have accrued enough “imagined experiences” of what travelling and being involved in the tourist industry could be like. In the future, she may perhaps find out whether her imagination (the idea of travelling) and experiences of external sources (presentations of travelling) cohere or clash with reality (actual travelling). Another possible source contributing to her interest in travelling is perhaps her feeling of being “stuck in north London.” It looks as if the *lack* of experience—“...but I have yet to see the world”—is also a factor in her decision to stretch her wings beyond the confines of her local environment. However, regardless of whether her fondness for tourism and travelling is driven by external factors, (lack of) certain experiences, reflexivity or indulgence in imaginary ruminations, *past* mental activity remains the source material drawn upon when she reviews her career options. The processes involved here are complex, heterogeneous and based on both reflexive orientations as well as everyday experiences less accessible to consciousness. But, most of all, they are in essence situated temporally in the past.

Nala also displays “meta-reflexive tendencies” since she *problematizes* her own life trajectory and identity as she tries to circumnavigate stereotypical representations of youths. Like other reflexive orientations, meta-reflexivity is *not exempt from drawing upon past experiences*. For instance, Nala’s previous experiences of the many misrepresentations of the social environment in which she lives—namely, the “riot-affected area” of Tottenham—seemed to have influenced the way she sees herself as well as the path her life and career may well take. Stereotypical

representations, however, do not influence Nala in terms of leading to self-stereotyping tendencies, but instead in terms of her pursuing pathways and identities that proves that she *differs* from the stereotypes that others—the media, in particular—may have of youths in Tottenham.

The media portrays certain people in Tottenham, where I live, as bad, [...] and, like, especially the youth. Maybe they despise Tottenham because of the [England] riots [of 2011]? I don't think it's right that Tottenham is being portrayed as bad because of the youth. I want to show I'm not this stereotype that they wrongly put on us. So, I wanna make things happen, that's why I wanna study and, like, travel. [...] Things are looking up for me now.

In this short passage, she reveals a critical stance towards media's homogeneous representations of young people in Tottenham and regards the stereotyping, put forward by certain politicians and the media, as unfair.⁵⁷ One consequence of Nala's meta-reflexive attitude, here, is the prospect of resisting self-stereotyping tendencies; that is, she takes a stand against the stereotypical representations of young people like her by thwarting any conflation between the *external perspective* put forward by the media and her own *internal perspective*.

What is implied within these interview extracts is the value of taking into consideration experiences of the past (e.g., Nala's past experience of local events, such as the riots, and her take on the media's one-dimensional response to these riots) and the impact that they have on the young people's reflexive orientations toward their identities and life trajectories. Examining how particular biographical "time points"—related experiences across a person's life course—inform a young person's reflexive attitude is thus of utmost importance.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how my study employs thematic analysis to extract themes and meaning from the interview transcript. This analysis has, in turn, assisted me in

⁵⁷ In regards to homogeneous and negative representations of areas such as Tottenham, ex-British Prime Minister David Cameron, for instance, stated in the aftermath of the England riots of 2011 that inner-city areas had brought about a state of "moral collapse" (McKenzie 2015: 10). Allegedly, the local people, themselves, were entirely responsible for this moral collapse. In similar fashion, other government ministers (e.g., Clarke 2011; cf. Briggs 2012: 384; Creaney 2014: 172) tended to lump Tottenham youth together in blanket stereotypes, with "feral" and "thugs" often used to define them. Heterogeneous and positive representations of Tottenham's young people and their families were almost non-existent in the discourse as politicians, accompanied by the media, were in the habit of depriving them of their personal identity. §§1.1–1.2.3 provide a critical overview of different representations of Tottenham's youths and the 2011 riots.

systematising the complex relations between the biographical time points, as well as between different aspects of identity, social experiences and reflexive activity.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS: REFLEXIVITY, SOCIAL CONTEXT AND HETEROGENEOUS YOUTHS

One conclusion that emerged from the empirical data (as has already been alluded to) is that, unlike what most representations of youths in Tottenham suggest,⁵⁸ young people's *reflexive attitudes* towards their identities and life trajectories are *heterogeneous*:

Tottenham youths appear to be aware of themselves in relation to their social environment through complex modes of reflexivity, while their situations and social relations are not only varied, but also experienced heterogeneously.

According to what has already been stated and what is about to ensue in the pages that lie ahead, the heterogeneity that I am referring to here is present in the way that the research participants from Tottenham identify with different:

- ethnic backgrounds;
- cultures;
- experiences;
- social relations;
- attitudes;
- lifestyles;
- opportunities and constraints;
- educational and professional aspirations;
- life trajectories; and
- “modes of reflexivity.”

⁵⁸ See §1.2.1 for an overview of media representations of young people in Tottenham and the England riots, while §§1.2.2 and 1.2.3 tackle the same subject, but from the perspective of politicians and sociologists, respectively.

While this list's first two themes are evident in Chapter 1's overview of Tottenham's increasingly complex demographic profile (see §§1.1–1.1.1 and Figures 2 and 3), the other themes emerged from the empirical material and shall be elaborated upon soon. This conclusion, furthermore, paints an entirely different picture of Tottenham's youths from the homogeneous one presented by much of the media and certain politicians in the aftermath of the 2011 England riots, as outlined in §§1.2–1.3. It is the idiographic uncovering of heterogeneous youths that will be the focus of this chapter. This is achieved by giving empirical flesh to the notion of “reflexivity” and the phenomenologically laden terms of “lived experience” and the “stock of knowledge.”

The first task is to outline the different modes of reflexivity and how the young people in Tottenham employ them in a range of ways. Here we see a move from *theoretical* treatment of the concept of reflexivity, brought to light in Chapter 2, to *interpretation* of the data via the thematic analysis and coding process introduced in the preceding chapter. Relentless attempts at avoiding the common problem of imposing a theoretical grid onto the narratives and experiences of the research participants have been made during the process of turning the findings into a valuable academic discussion. That said, any claim of “theory-free knowledge” is untenable, as previously tapped into. Therefore, no presentation of empirical material can be entirely theory-free; besides, the study's ontological premises (see §§3.3.1 and 4.2.5) that suggest that reflexive concerns and lived experiences play a vital role in identity-forming processes will also penetrate my discussion of the research findings. Hence, although a narrative and idiographic approach to understanding the research findings is prioritised, the present chapter will not be bereft of theory and ontological assumptions.

The research findings point to various differences across Tottenham's young people even though they are situated geographically in the same area. Although the topic of identity and stereotypes will not be discussed until the subsequent chapter, it is worth pointing out that the media especially after the 2011 riots, tends to see young people in Tottenham as a single “social identity category.” The media and the “external perspective,” more generally, in other words, repeatedly talk about youths as having the same characteristics or belonging to the same social group. This chapter argues that this is a mistake. According to the findings, *different* types of reflexivity are widespread among Tottenham's young people. These reflexive orientations are

directed towards a *variety* of life issues as they navigate *multiple* social spaces. Tottenham is diverse and its youth are likewise. We thus cannot ignore the

separate ways of thinking which mean that each individual is characterized *by a range of not necessarily homogeneous behavior* in terms of the degree of legitimacy of cultural practices and preferences. This type of approach leads the researcher not to depart from a sociological argument, but towards a sociological argument attentive to social realities in their individualized form.

(Lahire 2015: 111)

The purpose of the first two sections is to shed empirical light on “social realities in their individualised form,” as suggested in the above quotation (Lahire 2015: 111), which, in practice, means to enquire into Tottenham’s diversity—*within-group differences*—and how the young people reflexively deal with it. In the final section, the focus shifts somewhat from merely looking at experiences and reflexive activity to the young people’s social relations and contexts as well as how they understand their social environment in relation to negative representations of Tottenham. To illustrate the discrepancy between Tottenham as experienced by local youth and the stereotypical representations of it, I shall consider different perceptions and characterisations of “gang membership.”

Although this chapter draws on the qualitative research methods and the thematic analysis outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, while simultaneously attending to the ontological premises and theoretical framework outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, its main purpose is to build on the research concern sketched out in Chapter 1. The aim of the below, therefore, is to gain insight into the role of reflexivity in forming youth identities, which resulted in an argument that challenges the “dominant discourse,” a discourse that the research participants claim misrepresents Tottenham’s youths. Rather than providing yet another homogeneous portrayal of Tottenham, the chapter argues that:

- not only do young people in Tottenham apply different modes of reflexivity in a variety of situations;
- not only does the social environment that surrounds the young people affect them in a variety of ways;
- not only do the young people have multiple identities and life trajectories;

- Tottenham’s young people also represent a complex community of heterogeneous social relations, a mirror of heterogeneous social groups, an heterogeneous social and ethnic mix with heterogeneous cultural backgrounds.

Tottenham is an extremely diverse area where young people inhabit heterogeneous worldviews that cannot be lumped together into a single social category.

6.1 The heterogeneity of young people’s reflexive engagement

In the next couple of sections, I shall first reintroduce the different modes of reflexivity. Then the objective is to employ some examples drawn from my findings to illustrate how different reflexive orientations are used by young people in Tottenham and the significance of taking these orientations seriously. Since the research findings are packed with examples of reflexive activity, it goes without saying that different types of reflexive orientations *are* regular mental processes among the study sample. This point—namely that reflexivity is common among the research participants from Tottenham, and, perhaps, economically disadvantaged youths more generally—is often devalued or even rejected by the media. The aim of this section and the remainder of the thesis, therefore, is to focus attention on the importance of better recognising the *nuance* of youth-identity formation, wherein reflexive orientations play a crucial role.⁵⁹

I have previously (see Chapter 2 and Elster 2017: 276–83) outlined in detail how I understand reflexivity. In short, a *reflexive orientation* of sorts refers to an agent’s capacity to observe or recognise her own identity, situation or performance in relation to the relevant social environment. This may lead to transformation of her practice, life trajectory or identity. However, as I have made clear earlier, it can also reproduce, or even reinforce, her habits or how she sees herself. I have also

⁵⁹ Nuance, diversity in trajectory (Brady and Gilligan 2018: 75), the idea of historical and unfolding time (Hitlin and Elder 2007: 174), key turning point moments in people’s lives (Hubbard 2000: §11.4) and the formative influence of previous experiences on agentic processes (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 982) are already central within the life course perspective (see, e.g., §3.3.1). The notion of heterogeneous modes of reflexivity, however, has not yet been incorporated into the life course perspective, while key concepts associated with the life course perspective have not been incorporated into theories on reflexivity, as alluded to in Chapters 3 and 7. With this in mind, it is hoped that the introduction of concepts such as “reflexive orientations,” “stock of knowledge” and “time points,” all employed throughout the present thesis, into the life course perspective can help it to fulfil its purpose of painting a “rich, in-depth picture of how a person comes to be where they are today” (Brady and Gilligan 2018: 72).

suggested that reflexive activity makes use of the subjective stock of knowledge, where shared meanings, previous lived experiences, and the like, are “kept.” This makes all types of reflexivity to various degrees temporally and socially embedded. Before I start considering the heterogeneous modes of reflexivity as employed by one young person from Tottenham, let’s take a look at how Margaret Archer understands these modes.

Archer claimed that a “whole new research agenda” would open up if her premise that “the modes through which reflexivity is practised are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous” is accurate (Archer 2010a: 11). The claim, moreover, is that social structures affect individuals in a variety of ways as individual actors have different reflexive attitudes toward their social environment as well as themselves. As discussed in §2.1.1, Archer puts forward four modes of reflexivity: “meta-reflexivity,” “autonomous reflexivity,” “communicative reflexivity” and “fractured reflexivity.” The increasing tendency to “morphogenesis” in society—society’s capacity to modify its structures—favours the former two over the latter two, according to Archer (2012). In short, if an agent problematises her or his activity while being driven by an “ideal goal, which is never realized in a satisfactory way,” then the agent’s approach is said to be *meta-reflexive* (Donati 2013: 90). *Autonomous reflexivity* is epitomised by the “lone thinker” whose internal reflections are for the most part instrumentally driven. In contrast, “*communicative reflexives*,” who care for the most part about their families and friends, rely on *interpersonal*, rather than *internal*, communication. Finally, *fractured reflexivity* is defined as mental activity that “cannot lead to purposeful courses of action;” rather, it intensifies “personal distress and disorientation resulting in expressive action” (Archer 2012: 13; Akram and Hogan 2015: 608).

Although all forms of reflexivity, even the ones operating on a “meta-level,” *appear* to be disembodied, the present thesis has throughout its chapters tried to show that the opposite is closer to the truth. Reflexive orientations are never entirely free from being shaped by different social experiences, shared meanings and intersubjectivity; nor can they be entirely detached from different “time points” relevant to the person adopting the reflexive stance. We shall see many examples of reflexivity’s embeddedness as the chapter proceeds.

Temi, a 24-year-old woman from Tottenham with a Yorùbá-Nigerian heritage, is an example of a person whose different reflexive orientations are shaped by a multitude of past experiences and embedded processes.

My influences are proper varied. [...] Can't really say everything's down to me in life. So, erm, it probably was a little bit of, like, a spark of interest from somewhere or something, so, yeah, I guess, I've always had, like, a deeper look at myself or who I could be. Also, maybe, in terms of my personal convictions as well, like, towards "what do I want?" "Do I want to gain friends? Do I wanna see positive things around me? Do I wanna be treated well? Do I want my family to love me?" That kinda things, probably those kinda influences that strike up... erm... certain parts of my life, I guess.

She proceeds by providing an example of how past experiences have influenced her present outlook and her decision to pursue a career in the arts, specialising in painting.

I remember meeting many creative people back in the day. Yeah, I did this afterschool club thing, where we were encouraged to be creative. That has definitely shaped me. [...] When I do certain things, like being creative, today, it's probably because I had that certain upbringing.

Temi's decision to talk about the past emerged as a result of being asked about her influences and why the arts matter to her.

She talked at length about what she referred to as "subscribing to something;" something that you generally believe in, something that you may have been introduced to through your social environment or worked out for yourself. Her capacity to reflect and make choices with respect to how she sets about her career and life trajectory, as well as how she sees herself, then, has a complex origin rooted in, among other things, lived experience, heterogeneous modes of reflexivity and "some kind of thing that she subscribes to:"

It's hard to say if how I go about my life now, how I make choices, is down to this school, or this experience, or this neighbourhood. But, at the same time, there must be something, I guess, I agreed to, in my mind, when I was, like, a young person; there must have been some kind of thing that I subscribed to, or subscribe to, should I say, where I feel comfortable, you know. So, it could be [...] I had a great capacity to do whatever, but this capacity is maybe down to family influence or things that happened back in the day.

Temi displays *different* modes of reflexivity—especially, her capacity for meta-reflexivity is evident—all of which are socially and temporally embedded.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The interviews with Temi, and with most other research participants, did not contain questions directly addressing the concept of reflexivity or other agentic capacities. However, they did allow her to "find" areas of her life and topics in which she could locate or display her reflexive capacities. Her reflexive orientations, thus, were something that had to be identified through thematic analysis.

So, basically, I had, or have, a capacity to do creative stuff, think creatively, but at the same time, you know, my family and some, like, important experiences gave me that capacity. Certain people around me made me feel as you could talk to whoever you want; you can do whatever you want; that kind of thing, so there must have been some kind of... I must've subscribed to something, I guess, that's how I feel. Yeah...

Here we see the temporal and social dimensions of reflexivity at play while, as I pointed out in §2.1.1, the different forms of reflexivity cannot be unambiguously separated into clear-cut discrete formulations. Thus, in opposition to Archer's presentation of her modes of reflexivity (e.g., Archer 2003: 151–341), the different reflexive modes in individuals are not discrete (see Elster in press; Hung and Appleton 2016: 38 for a similar argument). Reflexive processes are “muddy” and in flux, while having their own temporal background. We are not *either* a “meta reflexive” *or* a “fractured reflexive;” nor are we *either* an “autonomous reflexive” *or* a “communicative reflexive.” Temi, for example, applies a “meta-perspective” when she dwells upon her influences or reviews her life trajectory, but she *also* confers with trusted people around her regarding what path she should pursue (communicative reflexivity) while displaying independent, self-sufficient tendencies (autonomous reflexivity) as the following extract shows:

...yeah, for instance, like, erm, coming out of university there's a whole: “should [I] go back to uni?” “Should I do this and that?” “Should I pursue craft or career and stuff?” And the reflective nature just drove me to, like, obviously, make certain agreements with people, and say, “I'm gonna do this review for a month and I'm gonna record some stuff.” I was kinda asking people around me what they thought I should do too. Yeah, it made me, perhaps, a little bit more determined to use time wisely. It did drive me to, erm, think about opportunities a little bit as well—if there wasn't this, what can I do now, like...? I did think about the here and now, but, at the same time, reflecting, perhaps, [...] brings a little bit of, erm, woes and some, almost like, fears, like, would I “lose myself” in the time that I'm away from people? Would [...] I still be relevant in terms of even, like, my CV?

Temi's account involves the use of heterogeneous modes of reflexivity and among these modes is her ability to meta-reflexively reflect on or problematise her own reflections. However, her meta-reflexive tendencies, interestingly, appear to sometimes result in frustration and stagnation (“reflecting [...] brings a little bit of woes and some, almost like, fears...”). In other

words, meta-reflexivity and fractured reflexivity are not mutually exclusive here.⁶¹ In a later interview, Temi spoke of how reflecting on yourself and your life course choices can lead to *different* outcomes; for example, a meta-reflexive attitude can sometimes be instrumentally productive (normally the outcome of “autonomous reflexivity”), while, other times, it can bring about discouragement (normally the outcome of “fractured reflexivity”).

I’ve encountered points in my life when I’ve probably thought “OK, I think *too* deeply” about this thing or where I wanna go, then, you know, I never gonna really pick myself up and explore the rest of whatever else there is for me to learn.

You have to always think about if you’re *too* reflective; when are you gonna actually move forward? There are some problems in thinking too much about yourself. But, there has been, hopefully, like, a good balance. I’m always kind of seeking to help, erm, when I can anyway, so that helps me take my eyes off from myself. Reflection can also make things happen for me. And, also, just reflecting as well could be on how good the world is; and how good people can be; and how good it is to see stuff that’s being done for children and stuff like that...

Reflexivity, on the whole, enables Temi to navigate the social world, and Archer (2003: 10) is right that what Temi and other young adults in Tottenham do when navigating through their lives cannot be explained without reference to the young individuals themselves and their reflexive orientations. That said, the type of reflexivity is not categorical in each individual—Temi is not *discretely* or *exclusively*, say, a “meta-reflexive” or an “autonomous reflexive;” she zigzags between a wide range of reflexive orientations. In addition, the outcome of her reflexive activity is sometimes unpredictable, or in flux, and not always satisfactory to Temi herself. Sometimes Temi’s reflexive orientation leads to *change*—e.g., break free from community-oriented ways of life (Farrugia 2013a: 288)—and sometimes to *reproduction* of past patterns. Sometimes it is oriented towards the *past* and sometimes towards the *present* or *future*. Sometimes the activation of reflexivity sets in motion a *beneficial* turn of events and sometimes it causes *disorientation* and

⁶¹ Burkitt (2016: 329) points out that Archer’s take on agency is “imbued with moral and political conceptions of the person and self which say that ‘when I am an agent, I am, I count. But when I am passive, incapable, constrained, dependent, I am less a person, I count less.’” For instance, Archer evaluates “meta-reflexives” in a positive way: “attaining the level of personal and social selves and being seen as effective agents, purposeful and dedicated in roles and projects” (*ibid.*: 330). So-called “fractured reflexives,” on the other hand, are evaluated as “emotives,” “neither in control of their emotions nor their circumstances, resulting in impeded reflexivity, their subjectivity ‘makes no difference to the play of objective circumstances upon them [...]. In short, they make no difference’” (Archer 2003: 299–300; cf. Burkitt 2016: 329).

“the (usually temporary) suspension of action in a particular segment of life” (Nico and Caetano 2017: 679). At any rate, the heterogeneous modes of reflexivity are never of a disembedded kind; they are socially situated and historically constituted; that is, they operate within a particular social environment and involve the past since they draw on the stock of knowledge. The frequent application of these modes by the research participants, furthermore, indicates that although they live in close geographical proximity—that is, in Tottenham—they may deal with their opportunities and constraints found in their social environment in entirely different ways, partially as a result of applying different modes of reflexivity.

6.1.1 The widespread use of different reflexive orientations among Tottenham youths

The main point in this section is twofold; namely, that (1) Tottenham’s youths appear to have a huge repertoire of heterogeneous orientations, and that (2) they *do* exercise their reflexive capacities on a regular basis as they negotiate their multiple identities and navigate their social environments. This twofold point is somewhat at odds with much of the literature on youths in Tottenham and what some sociologists have alluded to. According to Nico and Caetano (2017: 678), “economically disadvantaged individuals” with “lower educational levels”—terms often employed to describe Tottenham youths—“have not found, in their social contexts, favourable conditions for the development of a more scholastic and ontological reflexivity.” Any examples pointing to a shortage of “ontological reflexivity” among “disadvantaged youths” did not emerge from my study’s findings. Most of the interview participants regarded themselves as working class or economically disadvantaged (relative to a British context), while some are also of lower educational levels, but this did not appear to correspond with a lack of reflexive orientations, as we shall see.

Nico and Caetano’s study (2017) resembles Porpora and Shumar’s interpretation of Archer’s findings. Porpora and Shumar see Archer’s empirical work on reflexivity (e.g., 2003: 152–361) as an attempt to explain “an aspect of intergenerational class mobility. Individuals who, for whatever reason, gain the skills to engage in a more internalized style of self-reflection [e.g., meta-reflexivity or autonomous reflexivity] may be in a better place to do well in the educational system and become

upwardly mobile” (Porpora and Shumar 2010: 209–10; see also Golob and Makarovič 2018). (After all, the title of Archer’s 2007 seminal work is *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*.) Linking reflexivity to the social and economic cleavages between social strata is also present in Donati’s work although he sees this link as being more rigid with less room for upward mobility. “Reflexivity is distributed in such a way as to be freer and wider in the upper social strata, and more repetitive, constrained and narrower in the lower social strata” (Donati 2010: 152).⁶²

The argument that those who have the most potential to succeed socio-economically in society are likely to be more reflexive—especially, more “autonomous reflexive” and “meta-reflexive”—than those less socio-economically successful is not corroborated or verified by the present study. Although the interview sample did not include any young adult from the so-called “upper social strata,” the interview participants demonstrated abilities to direct a range of reflexive orientations toward a range of issues. Based on the findings (emerging from an admittedly small sample size), then, there is no or little correlation between the extent of reflexive activity and socio-economic status. By way of illustration, Nala, a care-leaver, who left school at sixteen, displays both aspiration to succeed and a reflexive attitude towards her identity and life trajectory (despite her “socio-economic” situation).

Many things go against me, but it doesn’t make me stop trying. I really wanna work in the tourist sector or do something with people or travelling, but there’s too many things happening right now. So, for now, I have to work for a bit. I’m trynta sort it so I spend a lot of time reflecting on my life and obstacles and stuff.

Nala specified that she regularly come up against many obstacles. “Gender barriers,” for instance, was something that she said she had recently faced and had been reflecting on “quite a bit:”

Some treat me like a girl. I don’t think people see me as a woman. I think that’s going against me too. Labelling and judging people based on, like, gender, is a bad thing. [...] I mean, from a young age men are taught to be... have you heard of that phrase, “big dogs don’t cry” or, I don’t know, “big guys don’t cry?” So, from little you’re taught to become

⁶² This argument is reminiscent of Sweetman’s (2003: 537) contention that a “capacity for—and predisposition towards—reflexive engagement is characteristic of certain forms of contemporary habitus.” This leads Sweetman to formulate the notion of a “reflexive habitus,” a notion Archer (2007) finds highly oxymoronic (cf. Snee 2014: 59): it “is hard to think of any concept less helpful for dealing with conscious deliberations and the determination of choices” (Archer 2007: 56).

a certain way because of your gender. It's not, kinda, "natural." I think it is more "taught," from generation to generation. Because it's all we know or how we were brought up to be [in order to] just pass it on to the other generation. I think this is, like, erm, a barrier.

Nala exercises her reflexive capacities, here, by measuring her identity up against societal norms and perceptions in relation to what it means to be a woman. Through reflection, she appears to reach the conclusion that gender roles and expectations are social constructions. She also seems to think that socialisation and internalisation processes from early childhood through adolescence into adulthood make gender roles look as if they are "natural phenomena." Although reflexivity may not stamp out societal bias and sexism, Nala appears to at least avoid allowing some of the sexist attitudes that she faces to determine the conditions of her life or "get inside her head." That is, her reflexive orientation plays a role in avoiding negative "self-stereotyping."

Lesedi is another young woman who reflexively deals with her own identity in relation to her social environments as she reflects on some of society's constraints *vis-à-vis* being a young woman. She is a high educational achiever and described herself as economically disadvantaged. Although Lesedi resides in the same postcode as Nala, their social relations are poles apart. Having very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (for details about the achieved sample, see Table 1, §4.2.2), their point of reference sometimes appeared to be unconnected. While Nala's parents were not involved in her educational trajectory, Lesedi's main source of inspiration for taking school seriously was her mother. While Nala spoke of keeping secondary education at arm's length, Lesedi couldn't get enough of extracurricular activities. Lesedi was relatively well-travelled, but Nala had "yet to see the world," in her own words. These differences, perhaps, influenced Lesedi to seek activities and relations outside of Tottenham, while Nala felt restricted to carry out most of her endeavours within Tottenham even though she desired to branch out beyond her own neighbourhood. Their reflexive activity, though, did not appear to differ too much—they both practised a variety of reflexive modalities—despite the fact that the *content* of their reflexive deliberations varied. Here Lesedi puts different reflexive orientations into operation while reflecting on how her academic trajectory relates to both her personal and social identity.

Reflection is something that I kinda return to a lot. For example, I've been thinking a lot about why I'm doing, you know, STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics]—yeah, like science and engineering—being a girl. I guess, on the one side, the government and politicians want young people to do well so that they can go into uni

and be part of the workforce, so they would encourage that sort of thing, the thing that I do, but on the flipside of that, I'm very big on science and I want to study chemical engineering and to some degree, some people would say, being a girl in this field would maybe be a bad thing, but I also know that there are tons of programmes that try to get girls into STEM. So, even if I see one group that says no, I know that I'll look for something else that tells me, "Yes, come do this;" "because you're different." Maybe because I'm a woman? Maybe because I'm Black? Because I'm a young person? If there's one group putting me down, I know there's another one on the flipside.

In this brief interview extract, a variety of reflexive orientations are applied. The way she relies on different groups to approve of her educational journey is steeped in communicative reflexivity, while there are meta-reflexive tendencies in Lesedi's interest in the political motives behind STEM and her concern for getting young Black women into STEM subjects. Yet, it is her autonomous reflexive orientation that seems to be the driving force behind how she pursues sixth-form education.

In another interview, Lesedi demonstrates how her meta-reflexive orientation led her to question, and eventually ditch her communicative reflexive activity for a more autonomous reflexive approach to her educational trajectory.

...me and this girl Janelle⁶³ were kind of talk[ing] to each other, "I can't do physics, this is so hard, why am I here" almost the whole year, and I think that negative attitude obviously had an effect to some degree and perhaps put down our grade a bit more than it should have...

Later in this interview, Lesedi explained that rather than sharing her experiences with Janelle or others, she decided to block out her classmates' opinions and just "stay focused on the prize." Reflecting on the negative experience of conferring with others resulted in her having a more instrumental and autonomous reflexive attitude towards learning. The complexity and heterogeneity of Lesedi's reflexive orientations are an example of how (reflection on) past mental activity can change present circumstances in a variety of ways.

The male interviewees were less vocal about expressing their reflexive capacities. This was particularly prevalent among the young men who were a part of (focus) group interviews (mixed

⁶³ The name of Lesedi's fellow student is pseudonymised like all the names of the research participants.

groups of male and female) as opposed to individual one-to-one interviews.⁶⁴ While some studies talk about “reflexivity’s winners and losers” (Adams 2007: 142–3; Lash and Urry 1994: 3–6) where males are often positioned, structurally, in a context that encourages or empowers them to become “reflexivity’s winners” (Adkins 2000; 2003; see also Belliappa 2013: 35–6), there is little sign of this tendency in the present research findings. The male participants, especially when talking in a group, were hesitant in embarking upon narratives of self-identity. They talked frequently about their social environment, but rarely in relation to themselves. However, this does not mean that their life trajectories, personal qualities or identities are exempt from reflexive interrogation. It first and foremost suggests that the young men’s *public* expression of such reflexivity is more muted than, or manifested differently from, the more extrovert tone of the female participants in this study. Perhaps the male participants have not found their social contexts (or the interview setting) favourable with respect to publically airing narratives of intimacy, reflexivity or self-identity?

Although the male interviewees appeared to share more similar traits with one another than the female participants in terms of being reluctant to express themselves (reflexively) through first-person perspectives, some differences did emerge among the young men. As we shall see, some seemed quite insular in their outlook (e.g., Jermaine), whereas others appeared to be more open-minded and all-embracing (e.g., Luke). Jermaine, who is attending a 16–19 “free school” in north Tottenham at the time of the interview, encapsulates the “young man” hesitant in expressing narratives of self-identity and cautious of exercising his reflexive capacities.

Don’t really think about myself much, really. Yeah... I’m kinda happy with who I am. [...]
But I do sometimes think that other people see me, like, differently; differently from the way I, maybe, see me.

But when it was asked how he thinks the internal aspect of his identity (how Jermaine sees himself) differs from the external aspect of his identity (how others see Jermaine in relation to his “membership” of a social group), then he opened up and provided an interesting observation:

...other people see you differently when you’re in a different area. There’s not, like, one social identity.

⁶⁴ I shall elaborate further on this limitation in the Conclusion. See also §4.2.4.

Jermaine was, here, referring to the potential heterogeneity of multiple social contexts. As we were leaving the interview venue (Tottenham Hotspur FC, White Hart Lane Stadium), I asked him again what he meant by “there’s not one social identity.” (Perhaps he was hesitant in expressing himself in front of his peers, especially the two girls.) He explained (and I am here roughly paraphrasing Jermaine) that people from the east side of Haringey [Tottenham] see him in a different way from those who live in the west [Muswell Hill and Crouch End]; but, there are also within-group differences among individuals in Haringey west. In other words, how others see him *depends*; it depends on the particular perspective of the *individual* and their upbringing, culture, ethnicity etc. So, *there’s not one external perspective*.

Jermaine’s account differs somewhat from the common social psychological distinction between ingroup and outgroup perspectives (see a definitional summary of the ingroup–outgroup distinction in §3.4.1). Things are blurrier than the crude picture built up based on the supposed division between ingroup and outgroup, personal and social identities, internal and external aspects of identity formation. Both the external and the internal aspects of a person’s identity are plural, complex and typically in continual flux; ingroup members differ from each other and there are many different “outgroups” out there, some of which overlap with ingroup members; and, social identities often influences and impose limits on a person’s personal identities. These different identity categories and aspects all hinge on a multitude of factors, social contexts and differing perspectives. I shall elaborate further on this theme in §7.2.2.

Jermaine’s reflexivity is not non-existent then. It is just that his reflexive activity does not appear to involve putting himself in the centre. Jermaine’s reflexivity looks as if it is oriented towards *what’s out there* in relation to himself rather than *himself* in relation to what’s out there. It also looks as if the particular social location he may find himself in is crucial with respect to how, and whether, he articulates this reflexive activity.

Another young Black man, Luke, slightly older than Jermaine, also downplayed narratives of self-identity despite demonstrating a range of reflexive tendencies. When asked about why he reflects on his own actions and what’s going on in the social environment that surrounds him, Luke responded,

Cos I wanna see change. Some people are not bothered and I feel that the ones that *are* bothered, [...] they’ll do something, or anything, to contribute towards it. They may not be

the next Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela, but they'll do their little part, you know, to contribute to that...

Although I tried to tease out narratives that shed light on Luke's more self-reflective or autonomous reflexive tendencies, his answer remained focused on how *one* should, or can, go about *one's* life. For instance, I asked him, "Do you think it is important to think about *yourself* when you navigate through life?" and "Do you feel that you may hold *yourself* back by reflecting on things that don't necessarily affect you directly, for example, by dedicating most of your time to thinking about others?" Luke answered the questions by placing himself in the generic "you"-position as opposed to from a first-person perspective:

Yes, [thinking about other people than yourself] could hold you back at times, but, I feel like, it's sort of like... if your heart's in it then you just go for it. If you feel like helping this person, help that person, cos you never know what could come out from it.

Rather than speaking of *himself* in relation to his social environment, Luke frequently drifted into generalisations about "value-driven axioms." It is possible that this tendency to talk about "people in general"—through the generic "you"—or his passion for altruism was Luke's *modus operandi* for de-centring himself from the discussion.⁶⁵ At any rate, in order to make any statement at all about how young men and young women differ with respect to reflexive activity and narratives of self, a focussed (comparative) study of gender *vis-à-vis* reflexive orientations and a much larger sample size than the present study are required (and very welcome).

Finally, except for the fact that he tends to avoid relating his horizon of values and altruistic worldview to *himself*, Luke's orientation, in the two extracts above, could be described as meta-reflexive. That is, Luke's orientation is reminiscent of how Archer (2007: 309) defines meta-reflexivity: activity that sees the *pursuit of values* as "an end in itself, regardless of the considerations of costs." It is also possible, however, that his "generalised life lessons," exemplified in the above statements, have *little* to do with meta-reflexivity; they might, instead, be the result of lived experiences or intuition or something else. It is therefore not only hard to draw

⁶⁵ Although Luke, like Jermaine, tends to shy away from reflecting on himself in relation to the relevant social context, Luke appeared to possess a bigger repertoire than Jermaine with respect to exercising a variety of reflexive orientations (including some reflexive considerations on self-identity), as was demonstrated in §5.1.1.

discrete boundaries between the different modes of reflexivity, as outline in §§2.1.1 and 6.1, it is also hard to draw a clear-cut boundary between what is and what isn't (meta-)reflexivity. At any rate, what seems to be beyond doubt is that Luke, Jermaine, Lesedi, Nala, Temi, Sapphire, Amaia and the other young interview participants from Tottenham all engage regularly in acts of reflexivity regardless of where exactly the boundaries lie.

If this section has been right to argue that reflexive capacities are widespread among young people—regardless of whether they are economically disadvantaged or more privileged—why do some sociological accounts (as outlined in the immediately preceding section) think that there is a connection between reflexive activity and social-class background or social mobility? Why do many commentators believe, for instance, that reflexivity is more frequent among upwardly socially mobile groups and the, so-called, “upper strata?” Although impossible to answer without access to the interests and backgrounds of these commentators, one answer could be that some social researchers fail to see that reflexive orientations can be directed towards different topics of discussion that often operate with different logics, rooted in different social spaces and cultures. The researcher, as a result, might regard certain topics and everyday concerns as less likely to have been under reflexive scrutiny. Others (e.g., Nico and Caetano 2017: 678) believe that reflexivity is less prominent among economically disadvantaged social groups with lower education levels because they are not surrounded by conditions relevant for the development of certain reflexive orientations. These exclusionary ways of framing reflexivity seem problematic. Although young people's respective socio-economic background may constrain, rather than open up opportunities for, them, they are still capable of performing reflexive thought and action. Young people's socio-economic status may be a determinant of numerous aspects of their life trajectories, but it is hard to find any indicators that socio-economic status impacts on their abilities to reflect upon themselves in relation to their social contexts. A person's reflexive capabilities are not reducible to the social environment in which the person is situated; nor does reflexivity necessarily depend on a specific social space to operate. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that: first, *reflexivity is reflexivity* regardless of the topic under discussion or the socio-economic background of the reflexive being; and, second, the reflexive concerns of a person in a particular social context differ from that of someone in a contrasting social context, but this doesn't make the concerns less reflexive.

6.1.2 Reflexivity, multiple social experiences and contradictory characterisations of gang culture

We have so far in this chapter seen several empirical examples of Tottenham youths' diverse orientations—both in terms of how reflexive attitudes are applied and how the social world is experienced. Building on the argument outlined in §2.3, we have also seen that these orientations should not be studied in isolation. Young people's present orientations, including reflexive as well as less reflexive ones, should be studied in relation to those young people's respective stocks of knowledge, past lived experiences that have accumulated into subjective source material that these young people draw on. In this section, I want to briefly lay bare how these lived experiences reflect a mixture of different social relations, as well as cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The aim is to avoid the common mischaracterisation of young people in Tottenham as a static category and, by the same token, stress the significance of exploring the heterogeneity across different social groups of youths. This is achieved, here as elsewhere in the thesis, by focusing on the individual *subjective* experiences and processes themselves. As Telling (2016: 149) states, to “work out whether and where reflexivity is in fact going on, we must listen to the actual reflections of individuals”—their reflexive capacity to observe themselves in relation to their social context—and explore how meaning-making and reflexivity *occur through situated action and social experience*.

To illustrate the variation in social experience across groups of young people in Tottenham (groups that are often constructed as similar), let us consider one topic that came up in some of the interviews: the characterisation of gang members and whether gang culture is a prominent feature of Tottenham. I decided from the outset that I would not bring up the topic of gangs or gang culture in the interviews. As pointed out in §1.2.1, the media has made a habit of tying terms such as “gang culture” to Tottenham (e.g., the term “no-go gangland ghetto” was employed by the BBC [2018] to describe an area of Tottenham, and associating gangs with Tottenham was commonplace in the aftermath of the 2011 riots) so I felt it inappropriate to incorporate such stigmatised themes into the interview questions. This topic, thus, emerged from the research participants, often in relation to questions about how people outside Tottenham, including the media, portray their neighbourhood.

Amaia, a young woman with West African and Hispanic heritage who lives and goes to school in Tottenham, thinks stereotyping of her local area operates on a large scale and is erroneously attributed to local youths.

the biggest stereotype here, I'd say, is that Black boys, they're all in gangs. That's what is stereotyped. You see a Black boy with a hoody: he's allegedly in a gang. That's not necessarily true. He might have a hoody, [simply] because he likes hoodies

Sapphire, a student from a Black Caribbean background in her last year of secondary school, spoke in similar terms about stereotypical images of youths in Tottenham (where her school is) and in the neighbouring area of Edmonton (where she lives).

Some see teenagers in Tottenham as gang members. I feel, like, because I've lived in this area for quite a long time you get to know some of the people and what you realise is the people that are put into this stereotype aren't always what people think they are. They are quite a good people [...]. I feel like I'm quite educated on what this is because I know a lot of people who may dress in a certain way and may be seen as a criminal or, erm, someone who's involved in something negative, but I just feel like it's something that I've always seen, so I have an idea about it.

Amaia, like Sapphire, talks about inhabiting an “epistemic privileged position” when it comes to understanding the complexity of youth identities in Tottenham and shedding light on the fact that “people that are put into this stereotype aren't always what people think they are.”

I think I understand what's really going on because I'm a teenager and I'm in this, you know, day and age. [laughing] So, I know what it's like to be a teenager, I know what [it's] like to see what's going on. [laughing] So, I know that not every boy that wears a hoody is a gang member. [...]

I have friends who wear hoodies, and they're not gang members, so I know that people's perception of them is wrong, so I'm able to correct them if someone was to come up to me with that opinion.

The “external” perception of Tottenham's young men, Amaia confirms, is wrong; they're not gang members. But, who are behind the “external perspective?” Who are to blame for the emergence of these negative stereotypes that appear to be falsely attributed to young people in Tottenham? Amaia provides an assertive answer:

I personally think that the media influences the way people think and perceive us, especially grown people. [The media] influences [parents and grownups] to think wrongly of [...]

young people my age, sixteen, seventeen; they make them think that everyone wearing a hoody [...] must be dangerous, but that's not really the case.

In analysing these extracts, we must anchor Sapphire's and Amaia's reflections in lived, social experience. When you combine the reflexive orientations of Sapphire and Amaia with the social relations and context they experience and "live through," then the result appears to be the following view on stereotypical images of their peers in Tottenham with regard to gang culture: the conventional portrayal of Tottenham's young people is based on wrongly attributed stereotypes; Sapphire and Amaia blame media, adults and, more generally, those who are "uneducated" about local Tottenham youths—that is, those who have no personal experience of adolescence in Tottenham—as liable for constructing and upholding these stereotypes. In their experience, gang membership is not prevalent in the area in which they live. However, the way some people dress may conform to stereotypes associated with gang culture, but this point does not warrant the attribution of these stereotypes to those people.

Sapphire elaborates on her experience of gang culture and its status:

Some youth around me, yeah, claim to be in gangs. They want me, or, like, people around them, to think they're gang members. Those who know them, though, know they're faking it. They're fake.

The fact that a small percentage of youth in Tottenham are full of false bravado, "deceitfully" claiming gang status, is an experience that Khadiija, a young Somali woman who left education after secondary school, shares with Sapphire:

There's a lot of stuff going around, like, gangs and stuff around Tottenham. Some of it is true and some of it is [incomprehensible] wrong and stuff. Most of them are kids and they relate to gangs or pretend to be, like, gang members.

Sapphire, however, points out that regardless of whether youths pretend to be affiliated gang members or not, associating young people in Tottenham with negativity when you have next to no insight into their lives is never called for. In Chapter 3, I referred to the latter perspective as the "external aspect of identity." It is one thing that youths *pretend* to be in a gang, but it is quite another when "external observers" make stereotypical, and often racist, claims that youths must be gang members just because they, say, wear a hoodie, or are connected to Tottenham. Sapphire

gives the following “epistemological explanation” of why negative stereotypes about Tottenham youths and gang membership perpetuate.

...once you have a negative idea about someone, it's very hard to bring up the positive things. When something good *does* happen, it's hard for you to like, erm, to build on that, once you already have that negative idea at the back of your mind, which is linked to, like, the boys that wear the hoodies and stuff like that and you see them all in groups and stuff. And... It just brings up negative [incomprehensible] expressions within.

Amaia states, similarly, that “hooded youth” are associated with negativity and gang culture, mainly due to the numerous stereotypical representations presented in the media. Youths in other areas, however, may not be affected by these stereotypes, even though “the hoodie” is part of their uniform. On the other hand, just by being from Tottenham plus being a member of the BAME community make it hard to shake off these stereotypical images regularly produced by the media.

...we're so used to seeing, like, images of gang members or Black [youths] in the media and stuff. They normally wear hoodies and track suits. So, automatically when you're seeing someone with a hoody or wearing track suit, you would think, “Oh, he might be gang related or must have some kind of connections in that gang area.”

The reflexive orientations of Sapphire and Amaia, together with their lived experiences, inform them to look beneath the surface. Sapphire, for instance, actively seeks “in-depth understandings” since scanty and sketchy perceptions, which external perspectives typically draw on, are not sufficient to define her peers. As Brewer and Hewstone (2004: 3–4) put it, Sapphire “may become aware of how [her] prior knowledge may bias [her] perception of incoming information and actively correct for such biases in [her] judgments and decisions.” Sapphire asks for others to do the same.

Although Chantal,⁶⁶ a young woman from Tottenham with a Jamaican background, agrees that one should “look beneath the surface” in order to avoid unfair negative representations, she perceives gang membership as not entirely uncommon in Tottenham and sees the transition into gang life as a “natural” one for some.

⁶⁶ The initial interview with Chantal, Camille, Simon and Jermaine was conducted under “focus group”-style circumstances (they were interviewed in a group of four). All four interview participants share a Caribbean heritage and they are a mixture of Key Stage 4 and sixth-form students (aged 16 or 17).

I feel like it's human nature to be territorial over things you love or [...] where you're from. Like, when people talk about where they come from, in terms of their heritage—like, I'm from Jamaica—they claim it proudly and that's [...] kinda human nature to do that, to be territorial, like, over family members. [...] I would kill for my family because those are the people that I love and care about. And I feel like people that participate in gangs and postcode wars are kinda like that. They [...] kinda indulge in their area and their postcodes.⁶⁷

There are some tendencies of essentialising young people's drift into gang life and quest for belonging in Chantal's account. Being territorial over things you love and gang participation are almost a part of human nature, in her opinion. However, being involved in a gang does not define you, according to Chantal. Her experiences of gangs (and social groups more generally), thus, allow for heterogeneity across their members, as the following excerpt shows.

I don't believe what you do [e.g., being a "gang member" or a "white-collar worker"] defines a person; you could do a boring office job and be the most exciting person in the world, it doesn't define who you are. And, I believe that these boys [who are involved in gangs] are being subjected to, like, a stereotype that may not even suit them. Just because they find a different way of sorting themselves, of joining a gang, don't mean they aren't good people.

But what makes some young people join a gang? While, for Jermaine, the onus is on the agentic capacity of the young person her- or himself—"I think it's the individual cos they're choosing to go down the wrong path instead of bettering themselves"—Camille thinks society's unequal distribution of opportunities should bear the ultimate responsibility:

I think society [is to "blame," rather than the individual]. I think it's the opportunities that people are given; [...] we're not all given equal opportunities. Especially, the education system is flawed [...]. [E]verything else [...] has changed, but the education system seems to stay the same and you've got those who don't excel academically; and they don't know what else to do, so they do turn to crime or do turn to other things that are not viewed as socially acceptable. So, if we were to find a way to cater to those people, then maybe we

⁶⁷ Concerning the idea of "repping your ends" or being patriotic over your postcode, Camille takes a different stance than Chantal: "...nowadays, where someone's from is a really important factor and I don't think it should be. I mean, you got people dying over a postcode. So, for me that's why I'm not overly passionate about where I'm from because you have those people whose postcode or area mean so much to them that they're, literally, willing to die for it. So, when I say I'm not passionate about an area, it's not because I'm not proud of where I come from. [...] I just [...] prefer to show it in a different way; I'm not gonna go out and defend my area and criticise other people from where they're from."

wouldn't have these people feeling like they have to belong to a gang in order to feel accepted in society.

Chantal, essentially, agrees with Camille. Some youths are drawn to gang life as a result of being located in a certain social context that affords limited opportunities for many young people. But the many constraints and the lack of opportunities that gang-involved youths face, in Chantal's view, should, if anything, discourage the use of negative, one-dimensional characterisations of these gang members.

They've just been given different circumstances and different opportunities and I feel like it's wrong to just give them the most negative stereotype, because [...] if you meet them, they're not negative people, they're nice people.

At this point, Camille, interrupts:

Some of them are ["negative people"].

But Chantal reiterates:

Yeah, but *some* of them are actually nice people; being in a gang does not, like, equate being... not nice and some don't even do any crime. [...] They're not all similar, they're, like, mixed. They'll be just like us and I think it's wrong to subject them to a stereotype that doesn't suit them.

Chantal's emphasis on seeing gang members in heterogeneous ways is not shared by Simon. For him, homogeneity is one of the prime characteristics of gang membership:

[Gang members] lack individuality. They kinda, like, when you look at gangs, they move in a group. [...] If they were to attack someone they mostly be in a group, they mostly be together. It's kinda like, they want the kind of idea of family.

Across the answers of this quartet of participants, heterogeneity was relatively consistent. While Chantal, who sees gangs as not entirely uncommon in Tottenham, tends to essentialise young people's journey into gangs, Jermaine and Camille think there's nothing "natural" about joining a gang. While Jermaine blames young individuals, themselves, for "*choosing* to go down the wrong path," Camille believes social injustice and inequality play a role in the emergence of gangs. While

Chantal doesn't think gang members deserve the negative connotations they have been given, Camille is less convinced of Chantal's claim that "they're nice people." And, finally, while Chantal's experience tells her that gangs are usually heterogeneous groups (at least the ones she has come across in Tottenham), Simon thinks homogeneity across members is inherent in gangs.

Lesedi appears to inhabit a different social space, and hence a different vantage point, from the others even though she is born and bred in Tottenham, like the others. Gang culture is not a noticeable feature of Tottenham for Lesedi.

Media talks about gangs and Tottenham as if this is a big part of our everyday lives. [...] I've heard about things such as the Tottenham or Wood Green gang, I've never seen them in my life, I don't know anyone [laughter as she speaks] who's a part of the Wood Green gang...

I've never seen them [the gangs], so I think, it would be like this shadow, or [...] bogeyman that people would be talking about that I'd never truly identify with.

While Lesedi doesn't really acknowledge the existence of gangs in Tottenham, other research participants do. It is unclear, however, what lies beneath these differences and similarities among the research participants since we are dealing with a range of heterogeneous factors and relations in a "super-diverse community" (which is how Tottenham was spoken of in §1.1.1). Here, I believe the interviews with Lesedi involved a misjudgement on my part, namely, the failure to probe into whether, for example, Lesedi's ethnic or cultural background, or the fact that she's a high educational achiever and her secondary education took place outside Tottenham affected her view or experience of gang culture in relation to Tottenham. That is, in this particular case, I failed to look at how Lesedi's reflexive orientation has been influenced by her stock of knowledge, which includes her past experiences, social relations and cultural background. All the participants, nonetheless, seem to be united in thinking that gang culture is not a particularly prominent characteristic of their neighbourhood. They're also united in thinking that external perspectives that overemphasise gangs in relation to Tottenham are not only incorrect, they're also harmful. So, it's not really a question about whether, for instance, Lesedi is right or wrong to say that gangs are not a part of the everyday lives of youths in Tottenham. We can only assume that variations in the answers given (e.g., the degree to which gangs exist in Tottenham) reflect variations in experiences or reflexive attitudes across the study sample. Correspondingly, similarities in the answers (e.g.,

media's tendency to paint a negative and stereotypical picture of Tottenham) reflect similarities in experiences or reflexive deliberations. Just because members of a particular group (e.g., young people in Tottenham) have the same epistemically privileged status (e.g., they generally know more about the state of affairs associated with Tottenham's youths than those lacking this status), it cannot be assumed that they have the same experiences of a particular phenomenon (e.g., prevalence of gangs in Tottenham).

I have earlier argued that analysing reflexive orientations can assist in explaining the *differences* that steer one young person to pursue a particular trajectory or to develop particular identities and another young person to develop an entirely different pathway through life even though they *both share and are brought up in relatively similar social environment*. We have seen Luke's reflexive activity lead him away from a path that he claimed was "kinda expected" of him and we have seen how Chantal's reflexive attitude has helped her to "look beneath the surface," and, as a result, avoid letting negative stereotypes contribute to how she defines herself. Yet, we have seen that a focus on social relations, context, lived experiences and the temporal dimension—e.g., how the past influences the present—is still vitally important.⁶⁸ These factors, by the same token, can *also* demonstrate why young people develop different life trajectories, multiple identities and various contrasting perspectives on the same issues. Although a young person can "remain in the same point of social space and thus face similar, reinforcing experiences over time" (Atkinson 2010: 10), this social space operates in the intersection of multiple social relations across the young person's life course. The *multiple social spaces* associated with Lesedi and the other research participants are here, again, a case in point. At any rate, it is hard to disentangle what the "real impetus" behind *differences* in the emergence of youth identities is since the agentic capacities of the youths under scrutiny always involve past social experiences that are situated in a range of social relations and contexts. The subject of the present chapter, then, has been to bring empirical examples to bear on the complexity of social experiences and reflexive orientations in order to better recognise the *nuance* involved in the lives of youths. Although Tottenham is only a small

⁶⁸ For an attempt at balancing present *agentic* capacities and *past structuring of the lifeworld*, see Atkinson (2010: 10); alternatively, see Elster (2017) for an attempt at tying reflexivity to past, lived experiences. Similar efforts are also made earlier in the present thesis (see, especially, §§2.3–2.3.2 and 5.2.1–5.2.2).

area in north London,⁶⁹ its young people epitomise the complex blend of heterogeneous social factors and reflexive capacities that are not uncommon in super-diverse communities.

⁶⁹ There are at least 63,400 children and young people under the age of 20 living in the London Borough of Haringey (approximately one third of Haringey's total population). The six Tottenham wards have the largest number of people aged under 20 (29,700 children and young people in total) among the Haringey wards (Haringey Council 2019a).

Chapter 7

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS: YOUTH IDENTITIES, STEREOTYPES AND MISREPRESENTATIONS OF TOTTENHAM

While the preceding chapter focuses on the reflexive concerns and lived experiences of Tottenham's young people, it tells us little about constructions of youthful identities. The present chapter, on the other hand, pays attention to young people's answers to "who am I?" - and "who are we?"-questions. With reflexivity taking a back seat and the focus shifting to youth identity, it does not, however, mean that reflexive orientations are absent in what follows. Quite the opposite, the young people's reflexivity is penetrating nearly every narrative, statement and portrait of how they see themselves and how they think others see them. That is, implicit in the young people's accounts is the tendency to think about themselves in relation to their social environment, which, illustrates precisely how I have defined reflexive activity. It is the *focus* of my empirical analysis that has shifted in this chapter, not the nature of how Tottenham's youths reflect on themselves.

The prime purpose of Chapter 3, with its conceptual framework of identity formation and stereotyping processes, was to pave the way for the present empirically-laden chapter. This does not, however, mean that the framework's conceptual tools dictate how I go about the empirical research or analyse the findings. The intention of the conceptual tools—some of which were developed *prior to* the fieldwork and some as a *result of* the fieldwork—is not to impose a rigid theoretical grid onto the transcript or the thematic analysis, but, rather,

- (1) to facilitate an understanding of the connections between the psychological and the socio-temporal dimension;

- (2) to explore how youths, themselves, make sense—reflexively or otherwise—of their personal and social identities; and,
- (3) to take young people seriously by accommodating their subjective experiences, accounts and concerns.

What emerges from (1), (2) and (3) is the importance of understanding identity from the perspective of those whose identity is being described, which is also a vital feature of the framework outlined in Chapter 3. I refer to this as the *internal aspect of identity*. In the case of my research, the “internal aspect” is represented by young people’s own experiences and perceptions of themselves. This aspect shall continue to play a significant role as it will be measured up against the *external aspect of identity*, namely, the perspective of individuals or groups other than the ones whose identity is being described. While in Chapter 1 I sketched out how youths are perceived primarily in the media and political discourse, the current chapter mainly draws on narrative accounts of how the *research participants* experience “externally imposed” representations of themselves.

Before I investigate how young people understand the “internal–external distinction,” I shall continue to scrutinise one of the most noticeable conclusions to emerge from the research findings: *heterogeneity*. In particular, the first section of the present chapter involves an examination of heterogeneous youth representations across Tottenham’s young people. I shall proceed by discussing how youths in Tottenham perceive their *social* and *personal* identities. The findings indicate that the research cohort primarily responded to questions concerning how they define themselves by accentuating their *personal identity*, rather than framing themselves in terms of *social identity categories*. The young people’s eagerness to talk about personal identity and individual uniqueness, I contend, may spring from the fact that they don’t want to associate themselves with social identities that may carry stigmatised or negative connotations. At any rate, the distinction between social and personal identity does not appear to be particularly crucial in relation to processes involved in youth-identity formation. The internal and the external aspects of identity, on the contrary, seem to be as crucial to the research participants as they are in illuminating the oppressive effects of negative representations. In §7.2.1, I discuss the hostility between these two aspects further by drawing attention to:

- 1) the *discrepancy* between young people’s *perceptions of themselves* and *awareness of the stereotypical representations that others hold of them*; and,

- 2) the different ways that youths *resist* “*externally derived identities*” and the accompanying *misrepresentations of them*.

In shedding light on the internal–external relation, we are in a better position to understand how *externally* imposed identities—e.g., stereotypical and stigmatised identities—impact on, or are dealt with by, young people in Tottenham.

But, what if a young person’s perception of her- or himself *endorses, rather than conflicts with, stereotypical traits*? In other words, what if the external aspect of identity becomes the internal perspective? We are here, of course, speaking of the possibility of *self-stereotyping* tendencies, the possibility of regarding stereotypes or prototypes as self-defining. Before I discuss the phenomenon of self-stereotyping, I begin the last segment of this chapter by focusing on the research participants’ experiences of stereotypical representations. The participants offer insight into how they think these representations emanate from dominating groups, such as the media and politicians. The term “self-stereotyping,” curiously, has not really garnered much attention within sociological circles. The study, therefore, hopes to make a useful contribution to sociology by briefly looking at self-stereotyping practice from a youth perspective. The findings demonstrated little evidence of support for self-stereotyping behaviours among the research participants. The participants, however, were eager to talk about processes reminiscent of self-stereotyping and how to *challenge* or *avoid* engaging in these processes.

On the whole, the way that the research participants characterise Tottenham’s youth identities differs significantly from the stereotypes circulated and sustained by the media and politicians. Although these stereotypical representations have been around, in different shapes and forms, at least since the 1985 Broadwater Farm riot in Tottenham, many of the research participants link the “emergence” of stereotypes to the news coverage (see §1.2.1) that transpired in the aftermath of the England riots of 2011 that started in Tottenham (see §1.1.3). Negative representations of Tottenham’s young people, however, do not only boil down to stereotypical images, they also involve the mistaken and misleading portrayal of them as members of a homogeneous unit. To avoid one-dimensional and homogenous depictions of young people, I have stressed the need to apply theoretical and empirical devices, such as the ones discussed in the earlier chapters, that take into consideration the complexity and heterogeneous nature of youth subjectivities. §7.2.2 provides

an example of two social psychological concepts, “ingroup” and “outgroup,” that struggle to accommodate the diversity of today’s youths. I here build on the discussion in §3.4.1. These concepts assume that “ingroup members” are similar to one another and fundamentally different from, as well as hostile to, “outgroup members.” This way of understanding identities and intergroup relations, I maintain, limits the scope for empirical research into youth identities and struggles to take into account diversity across young people. Rather than placing youths in a unified homogeneous group with similar outlooks, we need to appreciate, as well as examine, the complex combinations of social-group memberships, the multiple intersecting identities, the heterogeneous trajectories and the array of identity-forming processes. The case of Tottenham’s young people and their “super-diverse” environment exemplifies the importance of seeing youth subjectivities and their “group memberships” as heterogeneous.

7.1 Heterogeneous processes of youth-identity formation in Tottenham

As we saw in the previous chapter, the interview participants from Tottenham give a clear indication that their reflexive engagement is heterogeneous, just like their social and cultural space. In this section, we shall see that the upshot of employing a range of reflexive orientations in the midst of a diverse social space is that identity-forming processes and outcomes can be equally heterogeneous. Young people can, for instance, “experience ethnic-, gender-, class-, and minority-identity formation as psychosocial tasks, with a variety of outcomes depending on the degree and types of agency exercised by the person,” Côté (2014: 192) states, as he encourages youth-identity researchers to draw attention to the complexity and heterogeneity of identity formation. This observation, moreover, points toward a “more complex structure–agency position that helps us to understand the range of identity formation processes and outcomes in the variety of late-modern social contexts among the entire socio-economic spectrum” (Côté and Levine 2016: 80). These diverse identity-forming processes that spring from young people’s everyday lives and their interrelation with the surrounding social contexts cannot be grasped without seeking to understand youth subjectivities. One key purpose of this section, then, is to consolidate the importance of

taking subjective experiences of young people themselves into account, allowing for the possibility of heterogeneous youth identities, while involving the temporal dimension of youth-identity formation.

Young people in Tottenham often have multiple identities that intersect and differ from their local peers. As has been pointed out before (cf. Côté 2014: 192–3; Côté and Levine 2016: 79; Drury *et al.* 2019; Lahire 2015: 113; MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 3; O'Toole and Gale 2013: 137; Stevenson 2014: 201; Visser *in press*; for an overview of homogeneous and negative portrayals of youth put forward by the media and politicians, see §§1.2–1.2.2), some commentators, especially in the media, are reluctant to accommodate this diversity within their rather homogeneous accounts of young people in Tottenham. These commentators may be forgiven, however, for not offering an in-depth analysis of young people's various reflexive capacities that often result in a heterogeneity of youth identities, but there are other factors that hint at a heterogeneous outcome that are too obvious to ignore; namely, the fact that Tottenham has about 200 different languages spoken while more than half of its population “come from a culturally diverse background” (Haringey Council 2019b).⁷⁰ When discussing the homogeneous perception that the media and many “outsiders” have of Tottenham, Temi adds aptly, “I don't get why some think we're all the same in Tottenham coz most likely Tottenham residents are known to be, like, diverse.” Luke also finds homogeneous representations of youths irritating and irrational:

...yeah, I'm a bit different, different from people around me. Some call me crazy just because when others say they like “A,” I usually kinda like “B”...yeah. I guess we're all different though; that's why it's annoying when [“outsiders”] think we're all the same.

The young people themselves see heterogeneity as an obvious part of—and perhaps even a direct result of—Tottenham's multicultural and “super-diverse” environment. Lesedi, for example, who lives in Tottenham, but has many experiences of other neighbourhoods in Haringey borough, where the constituency of Tottenham is located, talks of Tottenham as “being very multicultural.” She contrasts Tottenham with Muswell Hill, where she had her secondary-school education, and sees the latter, which is located on the other side of Haringey borough, as “quite homogeneous”

⁷⁰ Tottenham has been referred to as possibly “the most diverse constituency in the world” (Visser *in press*).

compared to Tottenham since Tottenham is far more diverse—culturally and ethnically—than Muswell Hill and other areas located west in Haringey.⁷¹ It was unclear whether Lesedi believed that multicultural identities and a heterogeneous societal environment should be thought of as mutually reinforcing social phenomena, or as causally linked (e.g., multicultural social environments give rise to heterogeneity). In a recent workshop delivered by Exposure at Tottenham’s Bernie Grant Art Centre, young people discussed what Tottenham means to them and media’s role in shaping people’s perceptions of Tottenham. When asked about the positives of living in Tottenham, diversity was one of the most popular reasons for liking Tottenham. Ahuzar,⁷² a seventeen-year-old student who refers to herself as “a member of the Tottenham community,” said that “Tottenham hosts a diverse range of cultures and communities from all around the world. Such diversity offers great opportunities for different jobs, knowledge of other communities, new tastes, new fashion, new literature...” (Exposure 2018).

Camille, one of my research participants, also speaks of Tottenham, and London in general, as “very multicultural.” In Camille’s mind, the fact that Tottenham is ethnically, socially and culturally diverse makes their neighbourhood “more tolerant” and “more accepting” than if it was a homogeneous environment. “[I]t’s just the norm to have lots of people from different cultures around you,” Camille says. Other areas, on the contrary, “may perceive me as different, or ‘other,’ or may not think that there is more to me,” in the words of Lesedi. Camille agrees, “I would guess that people [situated in less multicultural areas] are maybe less tolerant; and maybe I might feel not as comfortable whenever I face people from these places since they may not see me as an individual; they may see me just as ‘another Black girl.’” Lesedi and Camille’s belief that intolerance increases as you leave Tottenham is corroborated by Visser’s research into different dimensions of belonging among young people from immigrant backgrounds in Tottenham. “London is a city famous for its images of cosmopolitanism, openness, and tolerance, but outside of Tottenham, this openness to difference is not always experienced as such by its young residents”

⁷¹ For a map of Haringey, see Figure 1, §1.1; see §1.1.2 and Figure 4 for an overview of how east Haringey, where the Tottenham wards are located, and west Haringey differ.

⁷² Although the names of the research participants interviewed in the present study have been anonymised, the names of the young people taking part in the workshop delivered by the youth organisation Exposure, some of which have been quoted here, remain the same as in the source (Exposure 2018), as requested by the Exposure team.

(Visser in press). I made a similar point in §1.1.1, where I described how Tottenham’s “super-diversity”⁷³ appears to stand as a “safe space” that affords relative freedom from being regularly subjected to misrepresentations or “othering” processes; as mentioned, the opposite (less safe and increased discrimination) is the case when young people from BAME communities find themselves in less diverse environments.

The issue that Camille and Lesedi tap into here is a common thread among the young people interviewed; namely, only certain privileged groups are *seen as heterogeneous* and *exempt from being subjected to “othering;”* only certain privileged individuals are *seen as individuals* and *do not know what it is like to be a victim of intolerance*. The interviewees generally felt that Tottenham’s youths are neither viewed as a heterogeneous group nor as persons with individuality. In their mind, this is the result of allowing *external* perspectives to dictate the way youth identities in Tottenham are (re)presented. The distinction between the “external aspect of identity”—assumed knowledge others have of some individual’s or group’s identity—and the “internal aspect”—an individual’s *self*-concepts—is an implicit theme that arose during the interviews.⁷⁴ External accounts that perceive certain young people as a homogeneous group may hold harmful consequences for those at the receiving end of the biased perceptions. Chantal elaborates,

when you go to a place where a lot of people aren’t familiar with [Tottenham] or they’ve heard things in the media, you automatically get tagged as “that person or that child from Tottenham must be very...” [You are] perceived in a certain way—a negative way, perhaps—and I feel that’s really unfair [...] to be honest, because that’s not who we are and that doesn’t define us; you can’t define us from the way that the media portrays us...

Although my own experiences of Tottenham provided the backdrop or context for understanding Tottenham’s youths in heterogeneous ways, the topic of diversity and heterogeneity emerged spontaneously from the research participants themselves. Whenever questions about Tottenham and the participants’ peer networks arose, they were often eager to talk about diversity. Similarly, whenever questions about other people’s perceptions of youths in Tottenham came up, they regularly talked about being perceived as a homogeneous group. As I allude to in §3.1 and

⁷³ A brief overview of the term “super-diversity” is given in §1.1.1.

⁷⁴ See §§3.1 and 3.2 for a summary of how I understand the external and internal aspects of identity in relation to the broader aim of this thesis. A later section, §7.2.1, draws on narratives extracted from the research findings to discuss these aspects of identity.

elsewhere, then, the internal–external division and its significance to this study, as well as the themes of heterogeneity and homogeneity *vis-à-vis* young people in Tottenham emerged, at least in part, inductively from the young people (see also the earlier section on data collection, §4.2.4, and §5.1, which discusses how themes emerged from analysing the raw data). The conceptual tools developed and outlined in Chapter 3 and throughout the thesis are, therefore, to some degree a collaborative process, co-created between the research participants and me.

In the last chapter, we saw how a variety of reflexive orientations contributes to the emergence of heterogeneous youths, and we have also seen how a multicultural social space that operates within the intersection of multiple social relations leads to diverse youth identities. The latter, however, does not only involve socio-cultural spaces, structures and relations, it also involves the “diachronic dimensions” of youth identity, such as young people’s *life courses*, identity-forming *processes* and *temporality*. Identity is not only socially situated or a reflexive achievement, it is also historically constituted. Throughout the present and the previous chapters, there are numerous examples of the “processual” nature of identity and how identity can be a construction originating in a young person’s biography of everyday experiences. Take, for instance, the following three factors that all play a role in the socio-biographical processes involved in the formation of Temi’s identity (a 24-year-old Black British artist from Tottenham with Nigerian heritage):

1. “external” influences and socialisation processes:

- “my influences are proper varied;”
- “I’ve grown up in quite a vibrant, diverse background;”
- “...meeting many creative people back in the day;”
- “every day [...] I did this afterschool club thing where we were encouraged to be creative;”
- “certain people around me made me feel as you could talk to whoever you want;”
- regular encounters with other British Yorùbá-Nigerians, as well as everyday exposure to Tottenham’s multicultural milieu and Londoners more generally;

2. “internal” influences and reflexive tendencies:

- “...although people out there and my family, and stuff, shape my identity, I always think about my influences;”
- “...always had, like, a deeper look at myself or who I could be;”

- “reflection can also make things happen for me;”
3. the impact of “external” influences on agentic capacities (via the “stock of knowledge”):
- “I have a capacity to do creative stuff, think creatively, but at the same time, you know, my family and some, like, important experiences gave me that capacity;”
 - “...when I do certain things, like being creative, today, it’s probably because I had that certain upbringing;”
 - “although people out there and my family, and stuff, shape my identity, I always think about my influences;”
 - my creative “capacity is maybe down to family influence or things that happened back in the day.”

The identity-forming process, thus, entails, among other things, social experiences, intersubjective relations and complex mental activity that operate across a person’s lifespan.⁷⁵ Formation processes, however, do not always lead to transformation of particular identities, as outlined in §3.3.1. From time to time, identity-forming processes may contribute to the permanence or stability of some identities, perhaps, especially if they are imposed *externally*. As Sapphire points out, “once you have a negative idea about someone, it’s very hard to bring up the positive things. When something good does happen, it’s hard for you to build on that, once you already have that negative idea at the back of your mind...” It is possible that Sapphire, here, also spells out the epistemic process involved in the narrow-minded, inconsiderate and uncritical perspective that some political and media commentators have with respect to, so-called, inner-city youths.⁷⁶ At any rate, it is hard to see how these commentators can come to the conclusion that homogeneous representations are the most accurate way of portraying young people in Tottenham or areas of similar demographic characteristics when the evidence points to the opposite conclusion.

⁷⁵ I cannot think of a better way of studying how different past factors (e.g., cumulative consequences of lived experiences) influence someone or some group over time than through a “life course perspective.” For a summary of how I employ this perspective with respect to the present study and a list based on Brady and Gilligan’s (2018: 70) interconnected themes of the life course perspective, see §3.3.1.

⁷⁶ “Homogenising representations” of youths and many BAME communities are *also* common in academic discussions on the theme of identity, as O’Toole and Gale (2013: 137) point out. Such discourses, furthermore, tend to pay little attention to young people’s own perspectives and reflexive orientations. For instance, in the case of young BAME individuals, “the preoccupation with political disengagement and disaffection overlooks the ways in which ethnic minority [...] young people *do* politically engage” (*ibid.*: 4).

7.2 Young people's social and personal identities

Whenever the question “Who are you?” came up during the research interviews, the young people's answers rarely entailed a clear distinction between social identity and personal identity. The focus of the answers was more concerned with how *they see themselves* in relation to the *identities assigned to them by others*. That is, the interview participants emphasised how their “internal” identity differed from the so-called “external” aspect of their identity. Before I outline the internal versus external distinction in relation to youths in Tottenham, I shall consider how the participants define or see themselves in terms of “social identity” and “personal identity.” Again, like the topic of the preceding section, heterogeneity was identified in the findings, where multiple identities are being constructed, performed and reproduced.

An aim of the study is to be faithful to the transcript by respecting the subjective and phenomenological sense as found in the lived experiences of the interview participants. Care, thus, should be taken to avoid using too many social psychological concepts to describe how the young people see themselves. The research participants talked about identity in its broadest sense—e.g., identity as roles, statuses, sense of “self”—rather than merely in terms of personal and social identities. Nevertheless, it is worth recapping how I understand the terms “social identity” and “personal identity” since they are sparingly employed throughout the remainder of this chapter and also implicitly by the research participants (a more comprehensive treatment of these two terms is found in §§3.1 and 3.2).

Social identity is about “key characteristics” and “master statuses” constructed within society at large. For the young person, a sense of belonging to some (in)group is an important factor in the formation of her or his social identity. Both social relationships and external factors beyond the control of the person—e.g., social identity categories that pre-exist the person—influence social identity development across their everyday life.

There appeared to be little enthusiasm for talking about *social* identity characteristics when the questions concerning identity arose. Perhaps the young people found it more exciting to talk about their *personal* identity; or, perhaps they feel the need to avoid outlining social identities that are sometimes rooted in stigma or marginalisation? Yet, some social identities did crop up during

the conversations, but typically only in response to questions specifically asking about the interviewee's (social) identity. For instance,

Khadiija refers to herself as “a Muslim girl;”

Camille sees herself as “British with Bajan heritage;”

Chantal finds the label of “being from Tottenham” too narrow, but doesn't mind referring to herself as “someone from [London Borough of] Haringey;”

Lesedi provides a more elaborate breakdown of her social identity: “I am Black, I am an African, I am half South-African and half Kenyan, but I was raised in England and I've been to Kenya maybe twice and would not necessarily call that home, so I guess to some degree you could call me flat-out British. And, erm, I am, of course, a young woman;”

Luke, on the other hand, is less specific, “I'm just a human being like everyone else,” but adds that *others* probably see him as “a Black male, working class.”

At any rate, their deep-seated enthusiasm for discussing social identities from a macro-contextual perspective—e.g., issues concerning gender, race, class and religion—was not matched by a similarly strong interest in discussing social identities in relation to themselves. Instead of measuring how *they* see themselves in terms of social identity up against how *others* see their social identity (or the identity of Tottenham youths more generally), the interview participants were more devoted to commenting on the oppressive effects of how *social* identities, often laden with stigma, prejudice and stereotypic images, override some young people's *personal* identities (more on this point in the next couple of sections). This phenomenon may also explain why they were more enthusiastic about emphasising their *personal* identities whenever questions arose about how they see themselves.

By “personal identity,” I mean a person's “informal statuses,” as well as their attitudinal and behavioural characteristics (see, e.g., Côté and Levine 2016: 27, 172; Chalari and Panagiota 2018: 7). It appeared to me that the interview cohort answered most questions concerning how they define themselves by giving emphasis to their *personal identity*, as opposed to framing themselves in terms of *social identity categories*. For instance, instead of citing social identities or her different group memberships when responding to the question about who she sees herself as, Amaia emphasised personal identity, unique attributes and idiosyncrasy:

I would describe myself as being, erm, very vibrant, helpful, thoughtful person, I'd like to say. [...] I'm quite a *different* individual, if I may say so myself.

Temi also prefers to describe herself in terms of her personal identity: “I can be quite an introverted person” with “a reflective nature.” Lesedi takes no issue with listing a range of social identity categories that may apply to her, but, like Amaia and Temi, she truly comes to life when she goes into detail about certain features of her personal identity:

I guess one way to describe myself is “quite determined,” “quite driven” and... I wrote a paragraph about myself the other day... one of the things that I wrote—we had to be quite cheesy—was a “trailblazer.” Maybe that’s a bit much [laughter], but again I was very proactive about the things that I did in school, while my counterparts were not that interested about extracurriculars. I was willing to try more. I was reading a university brochure and something it said was, they believe in this ethos of “why not;” I can’t remember if it was in Greek or Latin, but this ethos of “why not” kinda sums up who I am.

In describing herself mainly in terms of personal rather than social identity categories, Lesedi is distancing herself from “externally derived” media representations of Tottenham’s youths, representations that frequently go together with stigmatised social identities. Lesedi continues, “...so, perhaps I don’t quite connect with the media’s portrayal of what Tottenham is [...], that everyone’s an ‘XYZ youth’ in Tottenham [...]. I never really identified with living in Tottenham.” Lesedi’s line of thought is not an anomaly. The idea of using Tottenham as a reference point for defining their identities is dismissed by nearly all the research participants. (Simon is perhaps the exception: “I just see myself as a normal...a normal boy from Tottenham.”) Chantal, as stated earlier, is fine with incorporating Haringey (the London borough that includes Tottenham) into her frame of reference for making identity claims about herself, but sees “being from Tottenham” as too narrow to be included in someone’s identity; besides, Tottenham is laden with “negative impressions,” in the words of Chantal. Camille also repudiates the very idea of using Tottenham—or small areas or postcodes more generally—as a means to define oneself, but rejects it on slightly different grounds than the other interviewees. She shares her reasons for dismissing it by critiquing people’s “zealousness,” as she calls it, or exaggerated pride in defining themselves in terms of the area they “represent:”

As [for] me, like, I try not [to] associate myself too much with the area, not because I’m not proud of where I’m from, but because I feel like if you take too much pride and you’re willing to, like, segregate yourself from other cultures and other areas, and say, “oh, I’m just from Tottenham,” then that’s what sparks, maybe, a lot of controversy, because I feel

like [...] we can kinda become zealous—too zealous—about it. Like, for me, I’m from Tottenham, I was born in Tottenham and it’s *just* a place where I live. [...] I feel like people overplay it; you have to be so passionate about where you’re from. It’s just where you were born. You could even argue that’s what started a lot of violence with, like, gangs and stuff because that unnecessary pride about where you’re from, it [...] basically creates disillusion and it’s not necessary.

Their reasons for preferring to talk about themselves in terms of personal identities could be rooted in the issue of the possible link between social identities and negative stereotypes. It could also be connected to what Camille talks about in the preceding quote, namely, the issue of how a focus on social identities can transpire into an exaggerated and unnecessary pride. It could be that their implicit rejection of social identity suggests that in a super-diverse community such as Tottenham, it is hard to pin down one’s identity by means of key characteristics and social identities. In any case, the young people’s reasoning implies reflexive tendencies and some heterogeneity across the study sample.

The research participants appear to understand personal identity as something transpiring through everyday interactions. In their opinion, it emerges biographically and reflects their behavioural styles (cf. Côté and Levine 2016: 27). Take Sapphire, for example. She describes herself as “quite motivated; I try to keep a positive vibe, all the time; and, I try to bring that positive vibe to other people.” And, like most of the other interviewees, Sapphire sees the need to point out that the *external aspect of identity* does not reflect, or rarely reflects, who she is. “[F]rom first impression, people may look at me and think, ‘she’s quite quiet’ and ‘she may have an attitude,’ ‘she probably holds back,’ but once you get to know me, I’m a really good person.”

Particularly among the young women, the findings demonstrated that their strong sense of who they are and who they want to be is in constant relation with their social and “external” environment. Although subjective in nature, this form of reflexivity displays a continuous interaction between the internal and the external aspects of identity. In fact, the internal–external relation looks to be among the most prominent components of youth-identity formation, at least according to the present research findings. It is worth, therefore, to take a closer look at how the findings shed light on the “tension” between *externally* determined, imposed, regulated or legitimised identities and how young people *themselves* define the identities that are relevant to them in their context.

7.2.1 The internal and external aspects of identity: contrasting representations of youths in Tottenham

We have seen how the research participants foreground their *personal* identity in their accounts of how they see themselves. The critical issue here is that Tottenham's youths are rarely treated or perceived in ways harmonious with their own accounts. Instead, they are more often than not identified through externally derived social identities that often include both stereotypic and stigmatised identities. The internal aspect of identity, in other words, is overlooked or dismissed by many mainstream commentators and those less familiar with young people in Tottenham. An important aim of the present study, thus, is to highlight the discrepancy between the "internal perspective" and the "external perspective." The former perspective indicates that a subject possesses "epistemic privilege" by having the capacity to perceive itself through, among other things, a variety of reflexive orientations and subjective experiences. The latter perspective, on the other hand, usually lacks "epistemic access" and has sometimes negative and oppressive effects on the stigmatised subject under scrutiny (§§5.1 and 6.1.2 also discuss the question of who possesses "epistemic privilege").

My reason for applying the previously discussed form of phenomenological sociology (see, e.g., §2.3.1) is precisely to take the internal perspective seriously. I have earlier shown how phenomenological sociology has the individual mind—the consciousness of the knower—as its point of departure, and, thus, how it has the potential to recognise both the internal aspect of identity and the heterogeneity among young people. The point of the present section, thus, is to take into account the lived experiences and private self-perceptions of young people, which may or may not involve reflexivity. I shall measure these "internal self-perceptions" up against the young people's understanding of how they are being perceived from an external perspective. The latter, I shall assume, represents identity assignments by others, such as the media, political commentators and those who are not "members" of the young people's "ingroup."

By "the internal aspect of identity," I mean a person's self-concepts in terms of how she sees herself, which includes both *social* identity and *personal* identity categories. The *internal* aspect of *personal* identity denotes a person's own perspective on interactional, physical, behavioural and attitudinal characteristics that she associates with, or attributes to, herself. This perspective may

have been obtained through experience or be the result of reflexively dealing with a variety of “available” personal identities. Alternatively, a person may attribute certain key characteristics, such as class, gender, race or vocation, to herself. I refer to this perspective as the *internal* aspect of *social* identity.

I have earlier referred to *other* people’s definitions or perceptions of a person as “the *external* aspect of identity.” If the external aspect involves the person’s *personal* identity, then others perceive that person in terms of presumed personality traits. If the external aspect involves the *social* identity of the person, then others define or perceive that person in terms of inferred key social characteristics.⁷⁷ The external aspect can also involve judging a *group*, as in when the media talks about youths in Tottenham. As I have stated before (see Chapter 3), the line is blurry between the different constellations of internal and external aspects of social and personal identities. Just as the preceding chapter makes it clear that our reflexive orientations are never entirely distinct from our lived experiences and social context, it will become clear in the remainder of this chapter that *the way young people see themselves is rarely entirely detached from externally imposed social identities*. Yet, the young research participants are aware of the fact that externally derived identities attributed to them may *differ* vastly from how they perceive themselves. They are also aware of how these “external identities” often confer power over marginalised groups and promote negative images of youths in inner-city areas such as Tottenham.

When Lesedi states that “I don’t think I really connect with [...] the idea that the media has on Tottenham—that everyone’s an ‘XYZ youth,’” she is alluding to the possibility of a *mismatch* between how she sees herself and other youths in Tottenham, on the one hand, and how “external groups,” such as the media, see the same Tottenham youths, on the other. Here, I shall make two assumptions based on the eight points listed in §3.3 about how socially defined group identities have “real” consequences despite their socially constructed nature. First, although all knowledge is perspectival, some knowledge claims are more illuminating than others. Hence, second, some groups are more “epistemically privileged” than others (cf., e.g., Bar On 1993: 88–97). On these grounds, I shall respect Sapphire’s statements that “I’m quite educated on what this is...” and “it’s

⁷⁷ For a more comprehensive overview and a schematisation of how I understand the internal and external aspects of identity, see §§3.1 and 3.2.

something that I've always seen, so I have an idea about it." I shall also accept Amaia's "inference" that "people's perception of [youths in Tottenham] is wrong, so I'm able to correct them if someone was to come up to me with that opinion." As outlined in §6.1.2, Amaia's inference is based on, in her own words, the fact that she understands "what's really going on." This is because, she continues,

I'm a teenager and I'm in this, you know, day and age. [laughing] So, I know what it's like to be a teenager, I know what [it's] like to see what's going on.

In other words, Amaia's "line of reasoning" presupposes that the young people from Tottenham interviewed in this study are likely to be the most epistemically privileged regarding (as expected!): young people from Tottenham. It is exactly this presupposition that I propose to pursue; namely, that the research participants have an "epistemic advantage" over, for instance, the media with respect to ascribing identities to them. The internal aspect of identity, thus, needs to be listened to, while external perspectives should probably do more listening.

The internal–external distinction was implicitly a recurring theme among the research participants. Lesedi, for instance, spoke of how media's portrayal of Tottenham youths during the England riots of 2011 was unrecognisable to the youths actually living in Tottenham:

I was shocked by [how the media portrayed youths in Tottenham] because when the riots happened I was on holiday—I was in Kenya with my mum—and we were looking at [the news], and I just didn't understand, because it's quiet [in Tottenham], nothing really happens here, like, yeah. So, I was surprised when the riots happened, and I think when you see stuff like that in the newspaper, you're quite surprised too, it's never really on my street. Young people round here, we are basically not the way TV and newspapers describe us.

Lesedi continued, annoyed at the "external perspective" that she thinks reinforces stereotypes about Tottenham:

...who would write it? Do they live in Tottenham or is it someone who lives in Hackney and just has, I don't know, a couple of brain cells... together, I don't know?

The riots were also brought up by Lesedi in an earlier interview. She thinks that the external aspect of Tottenham's young people's identity is shaped by the media coverage of the riots. Lesedi

explains that the consequence of the media representations of young people, especially in the aftermath of the riots, is that people generally think that the identity of Tottenham and its youths could be described as

multicultural, working class, perhaps lazy; [...] perhaps people see Tottenham as violent; and there's a lot of [...] violent youth culture, although I've never seen it that way. When the riots happened, I was like, "what's going on?" But I think some people's perception would be "Oh, that's kinda obvious it would happen there."

Jaden thinks that media representations of youths in Tottenham do not only influence people who are not associated with the area, they also have some negative bearing on young people, like himself, who are born and bred in Tottenham. To the question, "What do you think the media's representation of Tottenham is?" Jaden answered:⁷⁸

Negative. We are all represented as gangster and crazy, dangerous bandits. This makes me feel pretty angry and it also makes me think negative things about the area I live in. I wish they showed the positive side more. Then maybe, just maybe I could feel better about where I am from.

(Exposure 2018)

These external representations of Tottenham have a harmful influence on how Jaden experiences his local area and to some degree how he sees himself. On top of that, media's external perspective on Tottenham is inaccurate:

It's false; none of my friends are like this. They are kind, smart, creative. No one is stupid to smash shops and steal stuff. It's just a couple of people who spoil it for other people. People who are not from Tottenham should come and see the reality.

(*Ibid.*)

Jaden's reflexive ability to see himself in relation to the external aspect of identity doesn't stop media representations from having a damaging effect on him.

Both Jaden's capacity to spot influences that affect how he feels about the identity of the area in which he lives and Lesedi's capacity to place her own self-perception in juxtaposition to how others identify her and her peers represent the epitome of reflexivity. Other research participants

⁷⁸ This question was raised at a workshop delivered by Tottenham Community Press and the youth communication charity Exposure. The workshop was held at Tottenham's Bernie Grant Art Centre in September 2018.

combine Lesedi's reflexive capacity to juxtapose the internal and the external aspects of identity *with* Jaden's ability to recognise how the external world affects the internal aspect. Temi, for instance, has a tendency to not only contrast her own perception of herself with that of others, but also to weigh up how the latter influences the former, which she sums up as follows: "although people out there and my family, and stuff, shape my identity, I always think about my influences, if that makes sense." Chantal also thinks about her influences, but is adamant that the external aspect of identity—how others define her—is epistemically inferior to the internal aspect and should, thus, be rejected. In regards to external perspectives on young people in Tottenham, Chantal says, "that's not who we are and that doesn't define us; you can't define us from the way that the media portrays us."

The above accounts of Jaden, Lesedi, Temi, Chantal and others include different mental orientations—reflexive or otherwise—towards internal and external aspects of identity *and* biographical life courses that are situated socially and temporally. Luke's comment, below, on how media stirs up fears and misrepresents youths demonstrates how lived experiences and reflexivity come together through temporality. It also indicates why the external aspect of identity should be treated with scepticism.

Media and politicians think there's a lot of Black youth around on the roads and that everybody feel intimidated about that—yes, Tottenham is multicultural, but there's no need to feel intimidated, I've definitely learned that. So, like, I'm originally not from Tottenham, I've lived here for about 5 years. But, I've heard so many bad things about Tottenham, but when I came, I found that it was not what it sounds like at all.

Luke

Luke's personal narrative also shows how he moved from having an *external* perspective to having an *internal* perspective on Tottenham's youth-identities, from being "epistemically disadvantaged" to becoming "epistemically privileged." In 2009, what he knew of youths in Tottenham came from external sources, such as media and stories based on hearsay, sources typically entrenched in stereotypical representations. But since Luke moved to Tottenham, as a young man, he has gained a deeper understanding of what local youth are really like; besides, he is one of "them" now. A change in perspective may be more common when the subject is able to move into a position closer to the "internal aspect." If Luke had not relocated to Tottenham, then his perspective would

probably not have changed. This substantiates Sapphire's view, as pointed out earlier, that external perspectives are usually "stagnant:" "once you have a negative idea about someone, it's very hard to bring up the positive things. When something good does happen, it's hard for you to [...] build on that once you already have that negative idea at the back of your mind..."⁷⁹ There is also a methodological lesson to be drawn from this: although the aim of phenomenological sociology (see §2.3.1), as well as interpretative phenomenological analysis (see §4.1.1), is to understand a person's relatedness to the social world and the manifestation of lived experience as it happens within this world (see, e.g., Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991: 34–5; Larkin and Thompson 2012: 102; Vas *et al.* 2016: 3), a phenomenological approach will never be able to fully adopt the internal perspective. However, by prioritising the internal aspect of identity—in the case of my research, listening to the voices of Tottenham's youths—we are closer to revealing the (heterogeneous) identities of Tottenham's young people than if we gave credence to the external aspect of identity.

7.2.2 Ingroup and outgroup members: a youth perspective

Before we attempt to understand the social psychological concept of "self-stereotyping" in relation to youth-identity formation in Tottenham, let's take a look at the related terms "ingroup" and "outgroup." The present section will act as a bridge between the above segments—it builds on the debate about the internal and external aspects of identity, heterogeneous youth-identities and the previous chapter's analysis of how youths in Tottenham employ different reflexive orientations—and the forthcoming section on the process by which youths describe themselves with stereotypical traits.

The last couple of sections are an attempt at displaying the discrepancy between internal and external aspects of identity as experienced by this thesis' protagonists—the young people themselves. However, in labelling these two aspects "internal" and "external," I do not consider the former aspect as being inherently antagonistic to the latter. Nor do I maintain that all those who

⁷⁹ Camille also emphasised the stagnant nature of external perspectives in relation to Tottenham: "So, obviously, Tottenham riots was something that got a lot of media attention, and, it's just, maybe, a label that Tottenham hasn't been able to, like, shake. Any story that's associated with crime [...] will always continue to have that label. So, [people] are just judging by the information that they got from the media: they would negatively perceive Tottenham."

represent the internal aspect, as opposed to the external aspect (and vice versa), embody the same attitudes, belong to the same social group or share the same identities. The two aspects merely indicate whether the subject considers itself or whether it is being considered by an external source. I have, however, claimed that the former occupies a position of “epistemic privilege,” while the latter operates from an “epistemic inferior” position.

The concepts of “ingroup” and “outgroup,” traditionally, differ from the way I understand “internal” and “external.” In social psychology, the former two concepts play a vital role in analysing “group behaviour.” I spoke of how self-categorisation theory understands “ingroup” and “outgroup” in §3.4.1, but it is worth shedding some *empirical* light on this topic. The categorisation process, according to Hamilton *et al.* (2009: 190, my italics), “accentuates the *similarities* among members of an ingroup and the *differences* between the ingroup and some other outgroup as a contrast category.” A group, they postulate, is “likely to be perceived as a single unit (in our terms, to have high perceived entitativity) to the extent that within-group similarities are high and between-group differences are also high.” In the case of the present research, the ingroup represents those who psychologically identify as being members of the group “Tottenham youths,” while the outgroup represents those with which Tottenham youths do not identify. Outgroup members, thus, are the collection of individuals about which the descriptions are made, while the ingroup members are the ones making them. In taking on board the subjective accounts presented in this chapter, it is hard to maintain the distinction between ingroup and outgroup in a way that is useful for understanding, or faithful to, the young people’s perspectives. I have earlier quoted Jermaine on how *he sees* “outgroup members” and how he thinks *they see* him. Jermaine explained that how he perceives other people and how they perceive him *depends*; in both cases, it depends on multiple social and subjective factors. Sometimes the young person has affinity for, and prefers, their ingroup over the outgroup; other times, it is the other way round. Sometimes the young person shifts between multiple groups and self-identifications, which may include adopting identities more common among their outgroup members. Yet again, within-group heterogeneity, complexity and fluctuation should not be ignored.

Lesedi, for instance, spoke in nuanced terms about the discrepancy between how she relates to other groups and how others perceive her. She answered the question “Do you think there is a big difference between how other people identify you and how you identify yourself?” as follows:

It would depend on who you would be talking to and what description, like, what brief you will tell them about me. Coz if you talk to people within my school, I think, perhaps, the teachers would have an accurate portrayal of me, but would not be as accurate as some of my friends would; or, perhaps, would be similar to what my peers would have, but not my friends. [On] top of that, if you asked a stranger and they would just look at me, they could judge me depending on what I'm wearing, my height, the fact that I'm Black, the fact that I'm a woman. If you took me to Tottenham, if you took me to Muswell Hill, if you took me to Crouch End, different perceptions about who I am, what I do.

Lesedi's experiences inform her that the way people perceive her fluctuates based on a variety of factors. Despite the variation, she is regularly perceived as "other" whenever she ventures outside of her own community:

My identity differs depending on where I am, so if I'm in one community, rather than another, they may perceive me differently. [...] I think different areas have a different vibe to them and they have different experiences and culture attached to them. I think Tottenham is known for being very multicultural, whereas Muswell Hill, Bounds Green and Crouch End to some degree is quite homogeneous and ultimately may perceive me as different, or "other," or may not think that there is more to me, perhaps. Maybe I'm generalising it; I probably am generalising it.

Many of the young people interviewed, interestingly, considered "outsiders" as more or less heterogeneous. They do not throw multiple "outgroups" together with no apparent prior investigation into how closely these groups in fact fit together. Yet, they felt that many "outsiders" did not perceive young people in Tottenham as heterogeneous. Like Lesedi, some of the research participants pointed out that the probability of experiencing "othering" increases whenever they leave Tottenham and that they regularly encounter people who see Tottenham youths as a homogeneous unit, or, as Temi puts it, "...some think we're all the same."

In conclusion, young people in Tottenham, as a so-called "ingroup," appear to have the capacity to perceive so-called "outgroups" in heterogeneous ways. But, when the "outgroup" is the "ingroup"—that is, when the media or people less familiar with Tottenham are the ingroup—then they have a tendency to make generalisations about youths in Tottenham as if they are all alike. Yes, there is, perhaps, a general tendency for most "members" to perceive their own ingroup as more heterogeneous than outgroups. Yet, the asymmetry between when young people in Tottenham are the ingroup (the perceivers) and when, say, the media is the ingroup demonstrates

that *dominant or high status groups tend to see heterogeneity within their own groups, but seem incapable of viewing others, especially marginalised groups, in the same way.*

This line of reasoning is somewhat reminiscent of a 2001 study into the so-called “outgroup homogeneity effect,” which refers to “the tendency to view members of out-groups as more homogeneous than members of the in-group” (Brauer 2001: 15). However, the asymmetry between Tottenham’s young people and more dominant groups in terms of how they perceive each other invites comparison with the “superiority hypothesis” rather than the more “classic hypothesis” that simply proposes that ingroups have biased perceptions of outgroups. According to Brauer (*ibid.*: 16), the *superiority hypothesis* states that “Members of high-status groups have biased perceptions of out-groups, whereas members of low-status groups do not.” Furthermore, members of “high-status groups,” such as journalists, academics and politicians, tend to focus on the diversity of their ingroup and, as a consequence, see their own group as more heterogeneous than any outgroups. This hypothesis also alludes to the fact that members of what Brauer refers to as “low-status groups” have a tendency to view the outgroup as more variable than their own ingroup. If Tottenham youths can be categorised as a “low-status group” then the outcome of the present research differs in this respect from the superiority hypothesis. The research participants from Tottenham do not appear to see “their ingroup” as more heterogeneous than outgroups, which would have been the same as the “classic hypothesis” where all ingroups occupy biased perceptions of outgroups. Nor do the participants perceive outgroups as more heterogeneous than “their own ingroup,” which would have been similar to the “superiority hypothesis.” Rather, the interviewees insinuate that heterogeneity should never really be ruled out regardless of ingroup or outgroup membership. Perhaps this is a reflexive capacity that many young people in Tottenham (and elsewhere?) possess; namely, the ability to see themselves in relation to a complex world, which includes perceiving others as members of heterogeneous social groups rather than simply adopting an “us-versus-them” attitude. Tottenham’s young people, thus, appear to put Giles and Giles’ (2013: 154) recommendation into practice: “meeting up with people from another culture does not mean you will engage a monolith.” It’s a different story with those describing Tottenham’s young people from the outside in. Based on the experiences of the youths interviewed, as well as those of my own (outlined in §1.3), it looks as if the perspectives of many “external” commentators lack

any interest in applying the same open-minded approach to appreciating certain outgroups since they tend to perceive and portray youths as a monolith.

The preceding paragraphs demonstrate that the application of the dichotomous distinction between ingroup and outgroup struggles to facilitate complex perceptions that people have about groups different from the one they belong to. My study, thus, requires alternative concepts that are able to shed further light on to the complexity and heterogeneity of intergroup and within-group relations.

We have heard how Lesedi has described herself and she has also provided an overview of how she thinks others describe her. Besides being a young woman from Tottenham, she has referred to her social identity as follows: “I am Black, I am an African, I am half South-African and half Kenyan, but I was raised in England, [so] you could also [...] call me flat-out British.” She continues, “on top of that, if you asked a stranger and they would just look at me, they could judge me depending on what I’m wearing, my height, the fact that I’m Black, the fact that I’m a woman.” For the present purposes, it is tempting to ask: “Does she belong to one ingroup? Two? Ten?” An exact number is impossible, but she holds a variety of social-group memberships, of which some could be described as intersectional identities. The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (e.g., 1991; 2019; see also, e.g., Phoenix 2016: 3–4). In the words of Settles and Buchanan (2014: 160), *intersectionality theory* accentuates “how combinations of social-group memberships and social-group identifications create unique social positions for individuals, which influence their perceptions of the world, experiences, and outcomes.” It is vital to consider the multiple “ingroups” that Lesedi occupies since the combination of these groups generates specific consequences and meanings. For instance, Lesedi’s statement “the fact that I’m Black, the fact that I’m a woman,” could mean that she belongs to the group “women” and another group “Black people.” However, the racism, sexism and oppression that Lesedi may face as she navigates the social world are not identical to, or interchangeable with, the oppression experienced by, say, Black men or white women. Rather, it is the combination of the intersecting identities—in the present case, it involves the predicate “being a Black woman” as opposed to “being Black” or “being a woman”—that leads to a unique cumulative disadvantage, which is “greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (Crenshaw 1989: 140).

As we have seen in the above, the young people interviewed clearly recognise the diversity of the members of their own ingroup, as well as outgroup heterogeneity. We have also seen how some young people belong to multiple (oppressed) groups where the “intersectional experience” is greater than the sum of each (oppressed) group. And, finally, we have seen that some young people acknowledge that a member of a social group can hold multiple “loyalties;” that is, they can simultaneously be members of an ingroup and an outgroup. Let’s elaborate on the latter point as we persist with Lesedi’s account of her different identities. She states that “I am a young woman, who live in Tottenham. I don’t think I really connect with this idea of living in Tottenham [...] because my schooling was mainly done at around the Muswell Hill–Bounds Green-ish area.”⁸⁰ Lesedi sometimes describes herself as someone from Tottenham; at other times, she describes herself as someone who can’t quite connect to Tottenham. In a way, she is here both an ingroup and an outgroup member at once. According to my study’s findings, these cases are complex because so-called “ingroup members” do *not* uniformly share the same affinity for their fellow members or define themselves in relation to outgroup members or hold identical views with regard to outgroups (cf. Phinney 2005: 189; Phoenix 2016: 5).⁸¹ As a result, the notions of ingroup and outgroup do not sit well with my research findings.

Although theories concerned with ingroup–outgroup dynamics and the categorisation process can benefit from acknowledging *heterogeneity*, *intersecting identities* and *the fact that ingroup and outgroup members can have overlapping loyalties*, I don’t think youth-identity studies would gain much from acknowledging the concepts of ingroup and outgroup. For instance, when analysing the complexity and heterogeneous nature of Tottenham’s young people, the two concepts are too limited in their scope and in their capacity to facilitate diversity. The distinction between

⁸⁰ Both Tottenham and Muswell Hill are located in the London Borough of Haringey. Yet, while the former is among the most deprived areas in north London, Muswell Hill is among the more affluent areas. This reflects the fact that Haringey has the highest wage inequality nationally (Scott 2016). §1.1.2, Figure 4, provides a map of Haringey borough that indicates that the most deprived neighbourhood areas are heavily concentrated in the east side of the borough where Tottenham is situated.

⁸¹ Another example of the complex relation within and between ingroups and outgroups is found in W.E.B. Du Bois ([1903] 2018), who put forward the notion of a “double consciousness.” This notion spells out the internal conflict experienced by oppressed groups, and in particular with respect to the unique experience of African Americans, in which they “view themselves simultaneously through their own eyes and those of white society” (Perez-Felkner 2013: 133). This means that you are not only looking at yourself as a member of an ingroup, but also as if you are a member of an outgroup.

the internal aspect and the external aspect of identity, on the other hand, remains a useful conceptual device that assists in throwing light on, first, how youth subjectivities and identities are constructed through lived experiences and reflexive orientations, and, second, how external perspectives and social contexts affect identity-forming processes of young people.

7.3 Stereotypical representations and the reflexive voices of youth

Talk of self-stereotyping tendencies has not really garnered much attention from sociological researchers. This is curious given that self-stereotyping involves both processes of *socialisation* and stereotypes that are held at the *institutional level* over which an individual has minimal control. It is hoped that this thesis can open the way for a sociological treatment of self-stereotyping. But before we hear from the research participants about their experiences of self-stereotyping and how they resist self-stereotyping tendencies, let's find out how young people in Tottenham are being stereotyped and misrepresented as experienced and articulated by Tottenham youths themselves.⁸²

The topics of stereotypes and negative representations were rarely raised explicitly by me during the interviews. They usually emerged after I had asked questions concerning youth identities or how media perceives young people in Tottenham. It is, however, possible that rather than introducing their "lists" of stereotypical representations spontaneously, the young people who participated in the study spoke about stereotypes associated with Tottenham's youths more as a result of "leading questions." For instance, a question, such as "How does the media represent or talk about young people from Tottenham?", could trigger memories of the "riot discourse," which often involved stereotypical representations of Tottenham, and the role of the media in constructing and reinforcing negative stereotypes in the aftermath of the 2011 England riots.

The young participants, nevertheless, regularly expressed how they are frequently being stereotyped and misrepresented as alleged members of some (often stigmatised) group that they can't relate to (e.g., "gang-bangers," "teenage mothers," "inner-city youth," "rioters") by "outsiders." The emergence of derogatory stereotypes about Tottenham's youths has shaped people's perception of them despite the fact that the stereotypical representations have emerged

⁸² For a more detailed look at stereotyping processes, see §3.4.

almost entirely externally to the subjects being stereotyped. When the topic of stereotypes came up in our discussion, Simon, like many other interviewees, called attention to the 2011 riots: “Yeah, after the riots, people think [...] Tottenham is a really bad place and stuff...” Simon continued by listing some of the common stereotypical representations that he has witnessed since the riots:

...mainly drug dealers and stuff; robbing stuff; have no self-esteem and what not; slow lives; that’s what people think about Tottenham.

Camille is also of the opinion that the riots played a part in how people perceive and stereotype Tottenham and its youth.

So, obviously, Tottenham riots was something that got a lot of media attention, and, it’s just, maybe, a label that Tottenham hasn’t been able to, like, shake.

...I would say that [people] are just judging by the information that they got from the media: they would negatively perceive Tottenham.

By regularly repeating the same set of stereotypical representations about Tottenham’s youth, the media has enabled homogeneous judgements to be made with cognitive ease for those who rely on information relayed to them by accessible news sources. Once formed, the set of stereotypes is applied to all members of Tottenham’s youth community. As a result, people distort “reality” with their biased preconceptions. Even though the process of stereotyping is “not assumed to take place on a conscious” level (Campbell 2015: 519), its outcome, according to Camille, has real and harmful consequences.

The stereotypes that stand out for Camille are: “uneducated youth” and “teenage pregnancy.” She adds, however, that Tottenham’s young people are not unique in being at the receiving end of negative media representations:

the media always gonna have a negative perception of, like, any area, coz that’s how [...] they get money on stories—negative stories—you wouldn’t really hear them talk about an area for positive reasons. [...] Any story that’s associated with crime or any area will always continue to have that label.

In Camille’s mind, the lack of positive representation of areas such as Tottenham is down to “*who’s* writing the papers.”

Lesedi, too, links the emergence of many stereotypical representations to the news coverage during, as well as in the aftermath of, the 2011 riots. The consequence of these stereotypical representations, in Lesedi's and many of the other participants' view, is that people identify Tottenham and its youths with "laziness," "youth crime," and "gang culture." Amaia particularly emphasise the latter:

the biggest stereotype here, I'd say, is that Black boys, they're all in gangs. That's what is stereotyped.

Jaden (Exposure 2018) is equally emphatic in asserting the unfair overemphasis on negativity in media representations of Tottenham's youths: "We are all represented as gangster and crazy, dangerous bandits." For Jaden, negative and stereotypical representations have had a harmful effect on him personally: the media's portrayal of Tottenham "makes me think negative things about the area I live in. I wish they showed the positive side more. Then maybe, just maybe I could feel better about where I am from" (*ibid.*).

According to the research participants, "outsiders" regularly draw on the above-listed stereotypes when they form their impressions of Tottenham youths. The young people themselves, however, do not take the stereotyping process for granted. They appear to apply different reflexive orientations toward the external aspect of identity as they scrutinise the stereotypical representations, and whether stereotypes bear any resemblance at all to themselves or their peers. While many of Tottenham's young people are facing the reality of lived oppression by, for instance, being subjected to stereotypical assumptions about their identities, they also face a reality where *agency*, in the form of reflexivity and ability to withstand externally imposed stereotypes, is part of their everyday lives. Even if some stereotypes "accurately apply" to a couple of local youths, stereotypical representations remain problematic, as far as the participants are concerned, since they are exaggerated beliefs (Camille: the media "sensationalise a story and overplay it") that unfairly generalise across all individuals associated with being young in Tottenham (Chantal: "[the media] don't convey all these smart and intelligent children from Tottenham; they convey us as bad and unintelligent and ignorant, and to me that's not fair"). As a result, the external perspective, which the media seems to epitomise (Amaia: "the media influences the way people think"), misrepresents the youths (Amaia: "[the media] influences them to think wrongly [...] of young

people”) and facilitates the perception of homogeneity among Tottenham’s young people (Chantal: “we’re not all similar!”). This leaves us with another asymmetry in “epistemic power relations:” while externally derived stereotypes, with their harmful effects, penetrate deeply into the general discourse of youths, young people’s own perception of themselves—the one that holds “epistemic privilege”—does not seem to (be allowed to) make its way into the same discourse. Tottenham’s young individuals lack social and political power on which to base their epistemic privilege and consequently cannot, in the words of Hurtado (2018: 163), “completely override the negative and oppressive effects of their stigmatized social identities.”

7.3.1 Processes of self-stereotyping and young people in Tottenham

The main concern, so far in this chapter, has been the lack of fit between the internal and the external aspects of identity; namely, the fact that biased *external* perspectives (that typically encompass stereotypical and homogenous representations of those whose identity is being described) do not tend to correspond to *internal* perspectives (that typically encompass more heterogeneous identities at odds with the stereotypes). But, what if they did? What if a young person internalised externally defined stereotypes? What if the negative stereotypes were to be accepted as self-defining?

We shall now turn our attention to exactly this phenomenon where the gap between the internal perspective and the biased external perspective is narrowed to the point of closure. The phenomenon in question involves the social psychological concept of “self-stereotyping.” With *self-stereotyping*, the *external* aspect of identity becomes the salient feature of a person. Externally imposed stereotypes of some group, say, “inner-city youth,” become internalised by a member of the stereotyped group. This may result in the (“ingroup”) member describing herself “in accordance with prototypical group characteristics” (van Veelen *et al.* 2016: 4), stereotypes associated with so-called inner-city youths. Instead of drawing on unique *personal* identity categories, the “ingroup” member now sees her identity as *interchangeable* with whatever stereotypes are linked to the “ingroup characteristics” of inner-city youth.⁸³

⁸³ §3.4.1, above, offers a more comprehensive outline of the concept of “self-stereotyping” and its role within social psychology and self-categorisation theory.

The transcript yielded no clear cases in which self-stereotyping was found among the diverse group of young people being interviewed. In fact, nearly all the research participants spoke of (externally derived) stereotypical characteristics as hardly ever being their salient features. Although self-stereotyping tendencies did not appear to be a common feature across the research sample, there were some examples where the *external* perspective was in tune with the *internal* perspective of the participant. For instance, during a discussion about whether the external aspect of identity differs from the internal aspect, Khadiija explained that this is usually the case. However, she later in the interview indicated that she did *not* think that the way other people describe her is at variance with how she describes herself. She listed several social identities (“Somali,” “girl,” “youth” etc.) and personal identities (“sporty,” “a bit crazy” etc.) to illustrate how her self-concept closely resembles the way others usually define her. Khadiija’s brief list of social and personal identity categories, though, could hardly be described as an example of prototypical group characteristics, stigmatised identities or stereotypical representations. In other words, she does not appear to identify herself in ways consistent with stereotypes; she simply endorses the “external aspect” of her identity if she thinks it applies to her. With respect to self-stereotyping tendencies, then, the outcome of the findings is something of a truism: none of the research participants seem to accept externally imposed identities and stereotypes as self-defining unless the (stereotypical) identities define who they are.⁸⁴

The topic of self-stereotyping is nonetheless a subject matter that many of the interviewees are both latently aware of and eager to discuss. In Lesedi’s experience, self-stereotyping is quite a common phenomenon. She describes the self-stereotyping process as follows:

...if you see stereotypical images enough times you can be disillusioned and believe that there’s actually nothing out there for me except for these stereotypes.

Lesedi also says that what may look like self-stereotyping is actually something else. Take the stereotypes “worklessness,” “welfare dependency” or, so-called, “workshyness,” which, according

⁸⁴ This assertion, thus, is worthy of further investigation. Although I have incorporated lived experiences and the temporal dimension of identity formation into the present thesis, in future research it is perhaps necessary to collect longitudinal data in order to see whether externally derived (stereotypical) representations have had an effect on the individual’s identity formation; or, whether the external perspective just so “happened” to coincide with the internal perspective.

to Lesedi, are sometimes associated with young adults in Tottenham. If a person in Tottenham is unemployed or on benefit, Lesedi implies, it is not a case of self-stereotyping.

I don't necessarily believe it always happens like that. [...] It is not like people in Tottenham end up without a job because they've heard that [...] unemployment and Tottenham go hand in hand.

Unemployed people in Tottenham are not, in Lesedi's view, unemployed because they take on stereotypical characteristics or engage in self-stereotyping. She explains: "I think some people have their setbacks and need the support, [which is why] they go to the job centre or are [...] on benefits."

Sapphire, on the other hand, thinks self-stereotyping is a more prominent feature across young people generally. She provided the following breakdown of how she thinks self-stereotyping works:

I do feel that there's a lot of stereotypes that, erm, are associated with my generation. With that, it does make a lot of people quite self-conscious because they may think, "Oh, maybe I should be this sort of person" instead of just being themselves...

If self-stereotyping or the issue of endorsing stereotypical traits occur among youths, it is more of a question of "fitting in," according to Sapphire:

people become, like, a stereotype because it's easier for them to fit in—mainly for them to be able to socialise with certain people or think that they're "prestige." They would fit into that stereotype [...] to be those sorts of people instead of being themselves because it's easier to be that way.

Luke also thinks that some young people engage in self-stereotyping, but he wants to steer clear of one-dimensional determinants of the phenomenon: "I believe it is deeper than that." For Luke, the issue of self-stereotyping is connected to the structure–agency problem. He proceeded with the question "how does a young man become a 'roadman?'" Does he *choose* to adopt stereotypical traits (e.g., be "on the road," as Luke calls it)? Or, is he *pushed* by social and economic circumstances (e.g., a lack of opportunities or negative experiences)?

I believe that, subconsciously, the "branding" [e.g., stereotypical representations] of the area and all of that [...] just builds in to [some youths] automatically; growing up from watching elder people—older brothers and siblings or older friends—it's just like, yeah, the cool thing to do. But really and truly, they're not really been given a sense of direction.

So, I feel like it kinda gets lost and, then, it's easy to just go with the stereotypical category, so just fall in there and keep with it.

In Luke's view, young people's lived experiences within the social environment in which they live contribute to *identity-forming processes*. For instance, socio-economic circumstances may limit young people's access to different representations and, as a result, suppress identity exploration. But this does not entirely explain instances of *self-stereotyping*. Self-stereotyping, for Luke, also springs from lacking a clear sense of direction, it fills a gap. In a similar discussion, Nala echoed, to some extent, Luke. The process of self-stereotyping, she suggests, may not occur simply because "people are told what they are and they become it. What if it is because they don't know who they are yet and therefore just accept the stereotype?" Perhaps Luke and Nala see self-stereotyping as a possible "solution" to "invisibility" or "deindividuation" (the latter term refers to a lack or loss of identity [Hogg 2006: 119; Hogg 2012: 509])?⁸⁵ If so, then Leavitt *et al.* (2015: 47) provide a deeper understanding of this connection:

What self-stereotyping demonstrates is that members of underrepresented groups may be motivated to identify with any available representation simply because one representation is better than no representation (i.e., absolute invisibility). The one representation, no matter how unfavorable or inaccurate, provides answers to the "Who am I?" questions that people are motivated to answer and provides a reference point around which to negotiate one's identity with others.

We have seen how some young people in Tottenham deal with negative and inaccurate representations of them. But, how do they *avoid* engaging in self-stereotyping? The answers are quite similar to arguments made earlier. According to the research participants, self-stereotyping can be side-stepped by recognising that:

- (1) stereotyping processes are not immune from young people's "reflexively intervention;"
- (2) the oppressive nature of negative stereotypes has harmful effects; and,
- (3) stereotypical representations emerge *externally* and, hence, do not necessarily (or even usually) cohere with the *internal* perspective.

⁸⁵ Self-stereotyping here could also be linked to the deep-seated need individuals apparently have for "ontological security," a term coined by Giddens (e.g., 1979: 123; see also, e.g., Akram and Hogan 2015: 12), which describes the "need to maintain a sense that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, and that the view of self and social identities that individuals have are stable and reliable" (Shilling 1992: 83).

Moreover, for Temi, it is helpful to “always think about [your] influences,” while, for Luke, avoiding self-stereotyping can involve making sure that you are surrounded by an eclectic group of people: “I could hang out with someone that’s from the road and I could also hang out with somebody that drinks at a bar or someone that’s quite posh.” Recognising that identities and stereotypes are, as Luke says, “just categories” can help young people to avoid “essentialising identities” and self-stereotyping. Camille thinks along the same lines as Luke: “where you’re from doesn’t mean anything. [...] It’s just where you were born.” There is no need, nor would it be rational, in Camille’s view, to understand your identity as categorically interchangeable with (stereotypical) representations associated with the area in which you live or the social group that surrounds you. It is, thus, vital to recognise that the external aspect of identity, which frequently includes stereotypical assumptions about youths, does not necessarily reflect the internal perspective; nor does it, in Chantal’s words, reflect “who we are:” external perspectives “can’t define us.”

Chantal sums up the concern that has engaged our attention throughout this chapter, namely, the tendency of “outsiders”—in particular, dominant groups within media and politics—to assign stereotypes to *all* members of certain social groups. In the case of the present research, this tendency has led to generalisations that deny the existence of subjective traits across the young people of Tottenham and, thus, misrepresent who they are. To shed light on this issue, I have applied two aspects of identity to consider: the *internal* perspective of how someone or some group perceives their own identity; and, the *external* perspective of how others perceive some group or someone. Both perspectives have been narrated and scrutinised through the reflexive voices of those whose identity is being described. Externally imposed identities and derogatory stereotypes have been described and measured up against the young people’s own view of themselves. Except for some minor instances of self-stereotyping, youth identities in Tottenham are characterised by the research participants as vastly different from the stereotypical representations provided by the media and politicians in the aftermath of the 2011 England riots. Contrary to the externally derived representations, Tottenham’s young individuals represent a complex combination of heterogeneous groups and appear to regularly employ a range of reflexive orientations toward their multiple identities.

CONCLUSION

Since the England riots of 2011, there has been a report produced on behalf of London’s Mayor referring to Tottenham as a “dismal environment” (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012; cf. Dillon and Fanning in press); ex-Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, accompanied by Justice Minister Kenneth Clarke, has talked about those in “riot-hit areas” as belonging to a “feral criminal underclass” (Clarke 2011; Home Affairs Committee 2011: 5); the media has repeatedly employed harmful stereotypes and negative language, such as “no-go gangland ghetto” (BBC 2018), to describe Tottenham; and, more generally, those who are less familiar with Tottenham—whether they be journalists or members of the public—have had a tendency to speak of youths in Tottenham as constituting a homogeneous group. Although these varied sources, outlined in more detail in Chapter 1, have dominated the discourse on Tottenham’s youths, they are rarely in a position of epistemic privilege when it comes to understanding the intersection of youth and Tottenham. In contrast, this study’s research participants—all of whom live in Tottenham and are between 16 and 25 years of age—do have an epistemic advantage regarding immediate knowledge of everyday life in Tottenham for youths. This advantage, nevertheless, does not mean that those who occupy this particular standpoint automatically know more, or better, simply by virtue of their social location (Wylie 2003: 28). It merely means that they are likely to have had experiences of being young in Tottenham and of negative stereotypes associated with being from Tottenham; experiences that those who are “epistemically inferior” lack.⁸⁶

Drawing on their privileged epistemic access to Tottenham’s youth identities and what it is like to be at the receiving end of harmful, stereotypical depictions, the research participants in this

⁸⁶ The idea that Tottenham youths have “privileged epistemic access” to knowledge regarding youths in Tottenham—especially when comparing them to those behind the “dominant discourse”—was also brought up in §§6.1.2 and 7.2.1–7.3.

study have provided rich, thought-provoking empirical data that contradict the “dominant discourse” on youths from areas affected by the riots. By shedding light on participants’ reflexivity—the capacity to consider or monitor yourself in relation to your social environment—and “stock of knowledge”—lived experiences accumulated over time—the findings have produced unique insights into the heterogeneous lives and identities of Tottenham’s young people, as well as how youths deal with negative representations.

This concluding chapter takes stock of the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions that my thesis makes to sociology of youth and social theory more broadly. The first section concerns itself with the development of my study’s theoretical framework and how it emerged out of numerous attempts to address and theorise the initial research concern. I shall proceed by summing up the key themes emerging from the findings and the conclusions that I have drawn from these findings: first, in relation to reflexive activity of youths in Tottenham; and, next, in relation to youth-identity formation and how the research participants tackle stereotypes and stigmatised representations. Before I round off with some concluding remarks and ways in which my thesis contributes to knowledge, I shall address several limitations to the study, some of which constrain the generalisability of my findings, and potential avenues for future research.

A new theoretical framework: reflexivity, identity and the socio-temporal dimension

The framework put forward in Chapters 2 and 3 is hoped to emerge as vital theoretical contributions to youth-identity studies and, more broadly, social theory, especially that which is concerned with social ontology. The development of this theoretical framework was tied to certain empirical concerns, practical problems and research questions, as outlined in Chapter 1. Figure 11, below, shows sequentially the initial stages of the research process and how the theoretical approach developed in order to address issues that emerged in response to my own experiences and interactions with youths from Tottenham prior to embarking on the present research. These issues, to be more precise, became apparent to me as youths expressed resentment about being frequently misrepresented. The youths, furthermore, displayed a variety of reflexive attitudes towards

different identity issues, such as being negatively and inaccurately portrayed by dominant groups and people outside Tottenham. The task of my research was to capture the interrelated dimensions of these issues. The contributions, summarised in this section, accordingly, offer the theoretical resources to understand and explain the reflexive orientations that youths have towards identity, including the distinction between how they see themselves and how others perceive them. These resources, in turn, gave rise to a framework for analysing how the subjective aspect of youth-identity formation is rooted in both reflexive activity *and* socio-temporal factors.

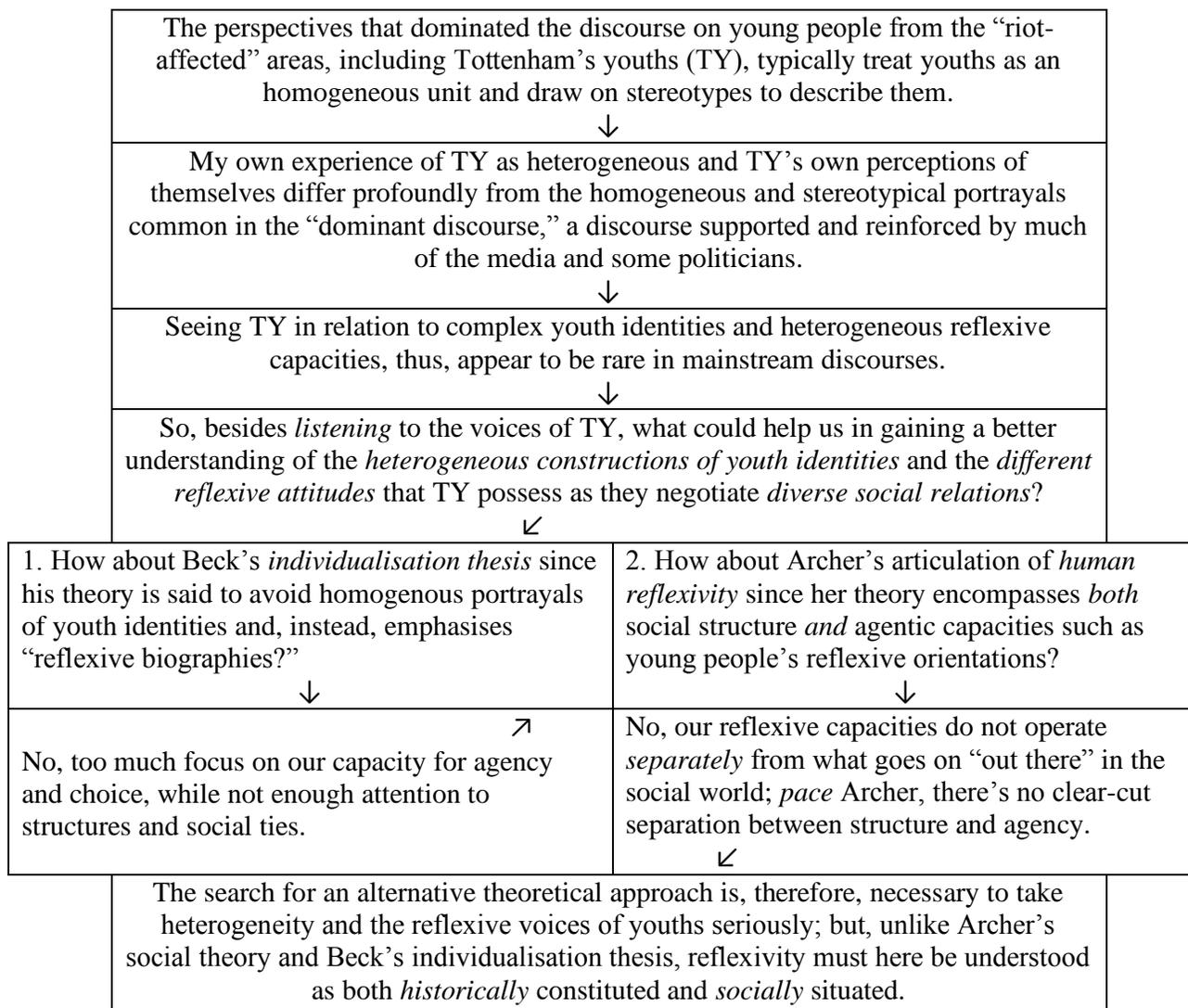


Figure 11 Sequence of how the empirical problem resulted in the development of a novel theoretical framework

Young people in Tottenham demonstrate that both their reflexive orientations and socially embedded experiences are vital in the construction of youth identities. Reflexivity and social life, however, do not operate as two separate phenomena, as Archer’s theory alludes to, but, instead, they are, to various extent, continuous with each other. One outcome of the initial phase of the study process, then, as indicated in Figure 11, was to put forward a research initiative that involves

analysing how people's *previous experiences* in the social world, which also involves being faced with negative youth representations, and a variety of *reflexive orientations* mutually affect each other. This has already been explored within the field of youth studies, but not by applying Schütz's concept of the "stock of knowledge." (See §2.1.2 for an outline of how youth studies scholars have dealt with the concept of reflexivity in relation to more socially situated or embedded processes; §2.3.1 provides an outline of why I think my study has benefitted from employing the term "stock of knowledge" as opposed to Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," which is favoured by many youth researchers.)

The key theoretical contributions made in this thesis are as follows. First, throughout the thesis, I speak a great deal about the fact that young people apply *different modes* of reflexivity in the context of negotiating youth identities and stigmatised representations. This is an idea that has been taken up by many sociologists as a result of Archer's (2010a: 11) theory of reflexivity, which is premised on the assumption that "the modes through which reflexivity is practised are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous." Archer (e.g., 2003: 151–341), however, has a tendency to see the different forms of reflexivity—meta-, autonomous, communicative and fractured reflexivity—as *categorical* dispositions that are either present or absent. In my theoretical framework, I allow for the possibility that reflexive processes can be "muddy" and that different modes can operate simultaneously. While §2.1.1 facilitates a *theoretical* model that speaks of the overlapping and ambiguous nature of the different modes of reflexivity, §6.1 provides *empirical* flesh to this assumption by demonstrating that Archer's "modes" are, in practice, rarely ever categorical in each young person.

Second, theories of reflexivity have had a tendency to treat reflexive activity as a disembedded quality where the individual is in a position to *distance* or *detach* herself from the social context as she reflects on herself. Empirical observations made during the early stages of my fieldwork appeared to oppose these theories and their tendency to link reflexivity with "disembeddedness." The *theoretical* underpinnings of the study's alternative approach to the concept of reflexivity, therefore, emerged *inductively*. Furthermore, these observations triggered the development of a vital theoretical and ontological contention that holds that all modes of reflexivity involve, at least to some extent, socially situated features. Regardless of how much your reflexive deliberations try to distance themselves from embedded structures, you still can't work

off a blank canvas, entirely isolating, among other things, social experiences, linguistic rules, shared meanings and social norms. You can't, that is, operate entirely independent of your "stock of knowledge," a term that became more and more crucial as the research progressed and is equally important to the next theoretical contribution.

Third, reflexivity is not only socially situated, it is also historically constituted and ties the past to the present and the future by both drawing on, and contributing to, the stock of knowledge. Linking reflexive orientations to the stock of knowledge has not, to my knowledge, previously been explored. The Schützian term "stock of knowledge" (see, e.g., Atkinson 2010: 2, 14; Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991: 56; Schütz [1942–55] 1982: 9, 117; [1945] 1962: 208) refers to our "deep-background configurations" (Turner 1988: 83) or "source material" (Elster 2017: e.g., 283; in press) that bring meanings between ourselves and the social world. While the second theoretical contribution is about my framework's emphasis on explaining how reflexivity is not exempt from being *socially* embedded (see also, e.g., §2.3 and *passim*), the third contribution gives insight into reflexivity's *temporal* dimension (see, e.g., §2.3.2). I suggest further that crucial to connecting reflexivity to temporality is the notion of "time points." Time points, here, denotes relevant experiences and events that have the potential to make an impact on the person over the life span. With a framework that accounts for the agentic capacity of reflexivity as both socially situated and historically constituted, we are now in a position to *systematise* the social and temporal "content" of reflexive orientations and the relevant time points that play a vital part in identity-forming processes. The way in which the stock of knowledge and reflexive activity interrelate with each other and contribute to youth-identity formation became the basis for my study's "ontological premises."

Fourth, crucial to gaining a deeper understanding of youth-identity formation, and in particular in the context of negative representations of youths, is the distinction between the "internal" and the "external" aspects of identity. While the *internal* aspect reflects the subjective experience that a person has of her or his identity, the *external* aspect operates independently of the person or group it aims to describe. The distinction between these two perspectives or aspects of identity was developed in order to shed light on the oppressive effects of negative youth representations, as well as the discrepancy between young people's perceptions of themselves and the view that others hold of them. It is thus another theoretical pair of concepts that emerged from

the abovementioned empirical problems. By conceptualising the internal–external relation, my thesis makes a theoretical contribution to explaining and understanding the ways in which *externally* imposed identities—e.g., stereotypical and stigmatised representations—impact on, or are dealt with by, say, young people in Tottenham.

Fifth and lastly, the term “self-stereotyping” has not garnered much attention outside (social) psychological circles. The study, therefore, hopes to make a potential contribution to sociology and youth studies by theorising self-stereotyping tendencies within a sociological perspective (see §3.4.1). When “externally derived” stereotypical traits become the salient features of a person, during which the person begins to describe themselves in terms of stereotypical characteristics, we may be witnessing a case of “self-stereotyping.” It is particularly interesting to explore self-stereotyping processes in relation to the other theoretical contributions outlined in this section. Youths are often caught in between their internal perspective and external perspectives, required to circumnavigate stereotypical representations of themselves. In these situations, some respond by ignoring these stereotypes; some deal with them reflexively; and, some accept them as self-defining. It is here useful to draw from the theoretical framework, put forward in Chapters 2 and 3, in order to understand:

- the role of social experiences and the stock of knowledge in enabling self-stereotyping;
- the potential of (different modes of) reflexivity in scrutinising the “threat” of self-stereotyping; and,
- how the notions of “internal” and “external” aspects of identity can shed light on whether there’s a mismatch between the young person’s self-image and the “externally imposed” stereotypical images.

Youth reflexivity in Tottenham

Perhaps the most significant conclusion to be drawn from the empirical data is that—unlike what most representations of Tottenham’s youths suggest—identities, standpoints and life trajectories that result from young people’s different reflexive orientations and social relations in Tottenham are *heterogeneous*. This conclusion paints a different picture of Tottenham’s youths than the homogeneous one presented by the “dominant discourse” that emerged in the aftermath of the 2011 England riots. According to the findings, reported in Chapters 6 and 7, the research participants

stated repeatedly that they were being misrepresented and misunderstood on a regular basis: the media and most politicians have no real sense of who they are and what they are going through. The participants found the tendency to portray all of Tottenham's young people as similar—as a homogeneous unit—absurd and gave numerous examples of Tottenham as a culturally diverse community where a pluralism of identities is flourishing, which corroborates §1.1.1's portrayal of Tottenham as a “super-diverse community.” Heterogeneity in Tottenham's youths wasn't only self-evident to them, it was also something they were proud of. The diversity that surrounds them, the young people claimed, has a positive effect on Tottenham residents' attitudes. As Camille, one of the research participants, stated, people are “more accepting in this area because we're so diverse, it's like... it's acceptable, it's just the norm to have lots of people from different cultures.” First-hand accounts of young “Tottenhamites,” such as Camille, are never, or rarely, featured in the media coverage, and the result is the dominance of an external perspective that repeatedly produces negative and homogeneous, rather than positive and heterogeneous, representations of those whose voices are the heart of this thesis. The findings, thus, make a crucial contribution, or perhaps “intervention,” by calling into question the dominant discourse on Tottenham's youths and other young people connected to areas affected by the 2011 riots.

The aim of Chapter 6 was to gain insight into the role of reflexivity in forming youth identities and in challenging misrepresentations of youths in the “dominant discourse.” With respect to the reflexive orientations among youths in Tottenham, there appear to be at least two conclusions emerging from the study's findings:⁸⁷

- (1) young people in Tottenham employ a *variety* of reflexive orientations; and,
- (2) these young people exercise their reflexive capacities on a *regular* basis.

As Chapter 6 indicates, there are numerous examples, in the research findings, of reflexive activity that is directed at a range of issues. In addition, based on the way in which youths from Tottenham are portrayed from the “internal perspective” of the research participants, reflexive orientations appear to be a regular mental process across Tottenham's youths. The findings,

⁸⁷ Although based on a relatively small sample size, the findings provide some support for “what things are like” in Tottenham *in general* since the in-depth answers obtained from the research participants also contain general remarks resulting from lived experiences that they have had of *other* young people in Tottenham.

therefore, challenge the assumption that youths in Tottenham—and, perhaps, economically disadvantaged young people, more generally—are in any way “less reflexive” than youths elsewhere. For example, the conclusion from my findings is at odds with Nico and Caetano’s (2017: 678) analysis that suggests that those with higher income and educational levels have developed “broader reflexive competencies” and those with lower income and educational levels “have not found, in their social contexts, favourable conditions for the development of a more scholastic and ontological reflexivity.” The majority of my study’s sample referred to themselves as working class and (relatively) economically disadvantaged, but these factors did not appear to correspond with lacking “ontological reflexivity.” Much of the empirical evidence in Chapter 6, and elsewhere above, points to the fact that young people in Tottenham are active social agents who reflexively deliberate about their identities in relation to their social environment. This point is not only devalued by the media, but is also sometimes rejected by some sociological studies, as alluded to in §1.2.3.

The qualitative data also provides plenty of examples of proactive identity formation processes, where youths resist the pressure of stereotypes, while agentially engage in a range of activities that takes them into adulthood. As I highlighted in §6.1.1, just because the youths under scrutiny do not hail from, so-called, “upper social strata,” it does not mean that they give in to passivity. Yet, as Dillon and Fanning (in press) point out, one of the most influential reports on Tottenham’s youths and the 2011 riots, *It Took Another Riot* (Independent Panel on Tottenham 2012), repeatedly refer to young residents in Tottenham as “passive participants” trapped in a vicious circle.

To conclude, by looking at young people’s different reflexive orientations, the present study has put itself in a strong position to document heterogeneity in youths within a particular geographic area. From this sociological vantage point, I believe we have a more authentic picture of youth agencies, identities and diversity in Tottenham. With this focus in mind, the study has also been in a position to address the harmful effects of the dominant discourse that has given rise to negative stereotypes, as well as representations of youths as homogeneous and passive.

The study, however, has not only focused on the “here-and-now attitudes” among the youths. It has also been an aim to understand and explain reflexive identity work as operating in tandem with previous lived experiences in and of the social world. This thesis’ two empirical chapters have

provided ample evidence that reflexivity is not only present-oriented and an agentic capacity, but also *socially situated* and *historically constituted*. In highlighting and systematising young people's reflexive activity in relation to a variety of everyday experiences from childhood to young adulthood, we are better equipped to understand how youth-identity formation actually transpires and communicate how youths negotiate identities and stereotypical representations.

Youth-identity formation in Tottenham

The complex and heterogeneous nature of youth subjectivities in Tottenham extend themselves to identity-forming processes. Chapter 7 demonstrates how these processes are sometimes more reflexive than habitual, and sometimes vice versa. In any case, youth-identity processes that take place in present-day Tottenham will always produce heterogeneous youth identities since they are situated in a multifaceted and multicultural environment. Although the research participants see heterogeneity as almost synonymous with Tottenham, and as a direct result of their multicultural and “super-diverse communities,” those who are less familiar with Tottenham do not see it this way. As I have stressed throughout the thesis, the prevailing discourse on youths paints an entirely different picture. The dichotomy between these two pictures or perspectives, led to various theoretical developments and empirical conclusions, as outlined above.

A fundamental outcome of this dichotomy was the importance of taking the subjective experiences of youths themselves into account, allowing for the possibility of past experiences, reflexive deliberations and heterogeneous youth identities. This approach, however, presented me with some problems with respect to applying the social-psychological distinction of “ingroup” and “outgroup.” As outlined in §§3.4.1 and 7.2.2, self-categorisation theory tends to treat “*ingroup* members” as *similar* and *contrast* the identity and interest of some ingroup with “*outgroup* members.” The empirical baseline from which my argument was developed led me to question the conventional way in which intragroup and intergroup relations, as well as the ingroup–outgroup distinction itself, are understood. Talk of *similarity* among group members appears to cancel out the possibility of *heterogeneity* within an ingroup, as well as within and between outgroups. The empirical findings of my thesis, thus, found it hard to apply these terms since the identities,

interests, influences and subjectivities emerging from the data are more complex than what the distinction between ingroup and outgroup allows for.

Rather than using “ingroup” and “outgroup,” I opted for an alternative approach to understanding the relation or discrepancy between the perceptions that those under scrutiny have of themselves and the perceptions that others have of those under scrutiny. I have referred to this relation as the “internal” and the “external” aspects of identity, or the “internal perspective” and the “external perspective.” The purpose of developing this approach is to be in a position:

- to distinguish between a particular group of individuals that is epistemically privileged in some respects and individuals or groups that are not;
- to do justice to those who may be marginalised or disempowered by hegemonic discourses;
- to look into whether there’s a discrepancy between how some group perceive themselves and how others perceive them; and,
- to identify the negative and oppressive effects that people external to a disadvantaged group can have on members of this group.

Crucial to how I understand the internal and the external perspectives, moreover, is that neither perspective is predicated on the assumption of homogeneity. This allows me to discuss Tottenham youths’ point of view and juxtapose it with the external point of view, but without having to treat either point of view in homogeneous ways.

The internal and the external aspects of identity seemed to be as valuable to the research participants as they were in analysing the aforementioned discrepancy and the oppressive effects of negative representations. The interview transcript was packed with experiences that highlight the tension between the internal and external aspects of identity. For instance, the research participants claimed that many of Tottenham’s youths face stereotypes on a regular basis that originate from biased preconceptions grounded in *external* perspectives. The latter, here, refer to perspectives held by those who do not live in Tottenham, including representatives of the news media and the House of Commons. Through thematic analysis of the transcript, I also detected a common theme in the empirical data that could best be described as “them-and-us attitudes.” These attitudes, I believe, exist not only among those who inhabit the internal perspective, but also among those who represent the external perspective (as I briefly brought up in §1.2.2). For example, during the England riots, it was in the interest of numerous Government ministers to construct a “division”

so as to separate “them” (e.g., youths associated with areas affected by the riots) from the “rest of us.” This, in turn, allowed the Government to maintain that the problem lies with “them,” rather than “us” and, hence, delegitimise claims that socio-economic factors, institutional racism and governmental budget cuts played any role in the riots.

The dominance of the external perspective in influencing people’s view of Tottenham’s young people—and perhaps “inner-city youth,” more generally—had another effect on the research cohort. The empirical evidence indicates that the negative connotations attached to many *social identities* commonly associated with youths in Tottenham are a result of stereotypical representations introduced by “external perspectives” such as the ones put forward by the media. These connotations led the young people to shy away from referring to themselves in terms of social identities. As pointed out in §7.2, the findings reveal that the research participants responded primarily to questions about *personal* identity, while, on multiple occasions, they sidestepped questions that encouraged them to frame themselves in terms of *social* identity categories. Further analysis of the data suggests that the avoidance of using social identities to describe themselves and the eagerness to emphasise their multiple personal identities could be a result of the fact that social identities in Tottenham have a tendency to carry stigmatised or negative connotations.

Despite the hesitation of participants to list social identities that may apply to themselves, the transcript yielded little interesting information regarding the distinction between social identity and personal identity. The internal–external distinction, on the contrary, appeared to be meaningful to the participants, especially in relation to the different ways that they acknowledge and sometimes reflexively challenge “externally derived identities” that more often than not are accompanied by stereotypical and stigmatised representations.

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite the varied contributions of this study, many of which have been listed and discussed earlier in this concluding chapter, several factors limited the scope and generalisability of the findings, as well as the effectiveness of the research. In this section, I shall summarise some limitations of my study and make a few suggestions for future research.

Utilising qualitative methods inspired by interpretative phenomenological analysis resulted in a small sample size.⁸⁸ Although the semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small number of young people ($N = 16$), they produced a large amount of empirical data. Yet, like most small studies, the present one is not in a position to capture a wide range of youth experiences and perceptions. The in-depth interviews, however, involved conversations that allowed the research participants to talk about their peer networks and how youths in Tottenham, by and large, express themselves. The findings, thus, gave a sufficient amount of support, I believe, to a number of more wide-ranging conclusions; e.g., the claims about the *diversity* of youth identities in Tottenham and the variety of *active* (or *reflexive*) ways in which youths challenge stereotypical representations and, more generally, negotiate their ways to adulthood.

The research findings also contained a gender imbalance (fewer young men took part than young women) and all the participants involved in the study were non-white. Discussions about ethnicity, race and gender, however, were not the focus of my thesis. The role of ethnicity and gender in youth-identity formation has, therefore, not been sufficiently tackled in the above. The procedures of this study will, hopefully, though, be repeated on a larger scale in the future, but with a strong input from, for instance, critical race theorists and feminist scholars. Nevertheless, the fact that the sample was heavily representative of young individuals from different BAME backgrounds makes it at least true to the demographic characteristics of Tottenham. The uniqueness and extreme diversity inherent in Tottenham's demography (see §1.1.1 and *passim*), on the other hand, make the findings difficult to generalise. The findings are also time and place contingent as the research was conducted in the area where one of Britain's most dramatic disturbances in recent decades unfolded. As a result, youth-identity formation in Tottenham since the 2011 riots cannot be discussed without reference to the consequences of regular exposure to negative media representations of youths and the area in which they live. As such, the uniqueness of the topic addressed in this study and the research findings have limited generalisability.

On a more methodological note, my fieldwork included a couple of focus group interviews, none of which were particularly successful. Whilst in a group, the male interviewees were

⁸⁸ Since interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) prioritises depth over breadth, sampling sizes are rarely larger than nine interview participants. For more details regarding IPA and my study sample, see §§4.1.1 and 4.2.2 (see also, e.g., Larkin and Thompson 2012: 104; Vas *et al.* 2016: 4).

significantly less expressive, especially in regards to opening up about possible reflexive identity work, than when they were interviewed in a one-to-one environment. In §6.1.1, I discuss both the shortcomings of group interviews and possible reasons behind the more muted reflexive engagement among some of the male research participants.⁸⁹ To sum up this point, future research in this area is best served, I suggest, by avoiding group interviews and focus groups to gauge young people's reflexive capacities and attitudes towards youth identities.

Another point that concerns qualitative methods involving research with youths is my over-rigorous approach to safeguarding the young research participants. In line with safeguarding procedures outlined from the inception of the fieldwork, no contact details, such as phone number and email address, were exchanged between participants and myself (for an overview of my study's ethical considerations, see §4.2.3). This was obviously not an issue with respect to the initial interview, but these restrictions to the communicative process made it difficult to arrange future meetings with the research participants. It was particularly limiting in regards to the importance of follow-up interviews. While the purpose of the initial interview was primarily to evaluate the reflexive orientations that the young person may have towards her or his identity, the follow-up interviews comprised a more in-depth investigation into past experiences and relevant events—what I earlier referred to as “time points”—that play a part in youth-identity formation. The follow-up sessions were, therefore, vital in order to shed light on the “source material” that the young person draws on as she negotiates identities and navigates through life. To deal with the lack of contact details, we arranged a date for the subsequent interview at the end of each interview session and kept the respective outreach organisation informed about our meetings in case a last-minute cancellation was required. While this arrangement was far from ideal, it made it possible to have two or more in-depth interviews with the same participant.

As with all qualitative research, speaking about past, lived experiences in an interview situation can be problematic. For the young research participants—or anyone in the interviewee's chair—recounting past events will always be subject to potential revisionism or self-censorship (Feldman-Barrett 2018: 739). Let me illustrate. Although I never brought up the topic of the England riots in the interviews, the participants saw the “riot discourse” as a central reference

⁸⁹ Druta and Ronald (2017: 788) also draw attention to certain limitations of interviewing pairs and groups.

point—especially with respect to the many negative images of Tottenham that accompanied the discourse—and spoke of the August 2011 disturbances as a crucial “time point” in their transition into adulthood. Due to the dominance of the negative youth representations appearing in the media, it is possible that some of the interview answers were intended as a *counterbalance* to the “dominant discourse.” This, however, does not mean that the research participants spoke of Tottenham and its youths through rose-tinted glasses. It merely means that they were more eager to emphasise positive aspects of Tottenham and rectify misrepresentations of youths than to further disseminate and reinforce homogeneous representations and stereotyped identities.

On a related note, when discussing identity with young people, it is natural that the answers project an account of themselves that reflects their *sense* of who they are or how they *want* to be perceived. I thus agree with MacDonald and Marsh (2005: 45) that “more goes on in interviews than the telling of the truth.” Important to my research, however, was not necessarily to find out exactly “who they are,” but to understand *how they explore the many aspects* of who they are and *who they are not*. Studying subjectivity will always be problematic. Yet, I believe that my empirical and theoretical focus on the subjective aspects of youth-identity formation and how young people negotiate negative representations has nonetheless allowed us to have a more complete idea of the make-up of youths in Tottenham.

In addition to what I have already alluded to in this section, future research repeating the key procedures of this study would be worthwhile with the following two variations. First, in the present study, the internal perspective is represented by young people in Tottenham, while the external perspective represents mainly the media and politicians.⁹⁰ In the future, it may be interesting to conduct further research by measuring young people’s own perception of themselves up against perceptions of *other* external perspectives, such as parents, teachers or employers.

Second, as briefly outlined in §§4.1.1 and 5.2, this study employs a “quasi-longitudinal” research design that involves data collection over almost a year-long interview process. “Quasi-longitudinal” is a term borrowed from MacDonald and Marsh (2005: 44) and it is used to indicate

⁹⁰ The fact that youth perceptions have been contrasted with media representations and comments made by politicians is primarily the result of themes emerging from this study’s transcript that showed a tendency among research participants to talk about the media and politicians as the most significant factor in reinforcing stereotypical representations of youths.

the emphasis that this study places on taking account of different “time points”—a range of lived experiences and events—at different stages of the young person’s life (as they are remembered by the research participant). The in-depth interviews, in other words, do not only involve questions about the present, but also an investigation into previous lived experiences and how they have impacted upon the person’s identity and life trajectory. The interviewee, here, explores her past experiences from a “*retrospective* point of view.” Although the present research project has been able to capture key time points across the young person’s life course by looking back in time, future research in this area could certainly benefit from a *longitudinal* design since such an approach offers the ideal opportunity to chart and analyse the changing perceptions of young individuals “as they happen” at many different time points. A longitudinal approach can therefore improve our causal understanding of how a variety of youth experiences and perceptions, including exposure to negative representations, affects youth-identity formation.

Concluding remarks

This study into youth-identity formation and how young people exercise reflexivity in the context of being regularly subjected to negative representations contributes to existing fields of knowledge in, at least, three ways. Firstly, it develops a theoretical framework that draws together and unites two approaches to understanding identity formation that usually tend to cancel each other out. That is, it takes *both* reflexive orientations *and* socially embedded aspects of everyday experiences seriously. It does this by showing how Tottenham’s youths negotiate their identities and deal with stereotypical representations through an examination of young people’s reflexivity, not only as an agentic capacity, but also as a capacity that is both *socially* situated and *historically* constituted. These assumptions provided the premises for ontological theory-building that resulted in a novel theoretical framework.

Secondly, it advances a methodological approach that comprises qualitative techniques and a thematic analysis with a coding scheme designed to examine the heterogeneous modes of youth reflexivity and the “internal” and “external” aspects of identity, to mention but a few. This approach draws on the aforementioned ontological premises while at the same time emphasises the

importance of listening to the reflexive voices of youths. It thus responds to calls for a more nuanced and complex understanding of how young people deal with youth identities.

Lastly, several empirical themes emerge from the findings that shed fresh light on youths in Tottenham, who have, since the England riots of 2011, undergone a great amount of scrutiny by the news media and politicians, as well as within sociological and criminological circles. The methods and theoretical tools outlined in Chapters 2–5 have enabled me to study a variety of reflexive orientations and lived experiences among Tottenham’s youths, which, in turn, has led to an entirely different account of youths in Tottenham than the one provided by the “dominant discourse.” A key empirical conclusion emerging from the data is that—in opposition to the many homogeneous portrayals of young people associated with “riot-affected areas”—youths in Tottenham display numerous agentic and reflexive characteristics, while their experiences and life trajectories are heterogeneous.

The latter point is rarely taken account of in policy making and life- or work-based development programmes for young adults in diverse areas, such as Tottenham. Youths, and especially those categorised as disadvantaged, are far too often lumped together as if they are homogeneous in terms of (lack of) aspirations, (lack of) skills and (lack of) willingness to venture beyond boundaries of their familiar sphere of influence (cf. Elster in press; Farrugia 2018: 8–10; Hull *et al.* 2018: 86; van Keulen *et al.* 2009: 290). According to my research findings, this is a mistake. Although it has not been an aim of the present project to seek to establish an indicator upon which practitioners and policy makers in the field of youth development could base their future decisions, my study’s findings undoubtedly involve outcomes that could be valuable within the key youth policy arenas. When developing programmes and policies aimed at enhancing the welfare of, or employability opportunities for, youths, it is vital to recognise context-specific concerns, reflexive capabilities and heterogeneity across young people, as well as the multiple dimensions of youth-identity formation. This requires policy makers and youth work practitioners to go beyond statistical data, tick-boxing exercises and quantitative performance measurements to allow for qualitative schemes and indicators, not unlike those advocated throughout this thesis.

In fact, we could all benefit from further insight into the heterogeneous voices and diverse needs of young people. By tuning in to these voices and recognising how they employ different reflexive orientations and draw on multiple experiences, this study has been able to demonstrate

the existence of a discrepancy between the self-perceptions of youths in Tottenham and the prevailing discourse on these very same young people; between the actual experiences, concerns and agentic capacities of those under study, on the one hand, and the construction of youths as homogeneous and “mindless” by those who have little experience or understanding of youth identities in Tottenham, on the other. The findings show that these inconsistencies are a result of misrepresentation of Tottenham’s youths in the media and among politicians. In scrutinising this discrepancy through the reflexive lens of the young research participants, attention was inevitably drawn to the oppressive effects of stereotypical representations. The participants highlighted how negative stereotypes and false characterisations continue to shape people’s reality of youths. The study, however, does not only reveal the dangers of stereotyping and the consequences of constructing youths as an unreflective, homogeneous group, it has also indicated how these constructions are challenged and (reflexively) dealt with by the young people themselves.

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