

**TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR EFFECTIVE
RESPONSES TO BLACK YOUNG MEN ASSOCIATED WITH CRIME
FOR BLACK MAJORITY CHURCHES**

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses a practical theological approach to explore concerns regarding black young men (BYM) labelled ‘problematic’, involved in crime and gang-associated activities. Their over-representation in the criminal justice system, also their deaths at each other’s hands, has been the subject of studies and debates in the USA and the UK. Responses and interventions to these concerns have been numerous and varied.

This work is rooted in the author’s role as a black Pentecostal pastor in Birmingham and offers a framework from which Black Majority Churches (BMCs) might be able to develop more effective responses to these concerns also exploring the interests and needs of BYM. It addresses the key question: how might the narratives of BYM influence BMCs in shaping more effective theological and pastoral responses to the situation of these men?

The research question is explored using a version of the Pastoral Cycle (PC), allowing for the use of interdisciplinary approaches to understand the situation of BYM in Birmingham. Through literature review and empirical investigation of fourteen BYM regarding how they understand their situation and what would help them, conclusions were drawn. The study then explores possible responses of BMCs, using New Testament Church of God (NTCG) as a case study for discussion. It is from these sources that some theoretical, theological and practical prescriptions and conclusions emerge, suggesting that BYM and BMC leaders are prepared to engage in some initial dialogue about the situations facing BYM in Birmingham.

This thesis provides new empirically based knowledge about BYM’s perceptions about themselves and their involvement in criminality, and also BMC’s response to their situation. It offers insights into practical theology, sociology and criminology regarding BYM within an urban context.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to four particular groups of people who have all inspired or motivated me in some way towards the production of this work. These groups include my parents, Beatrice and Norris Anderson, who coped with my wayward days as a black young man, believing God that I would eventually change towards becoming a man of integrity. The second group are those pioneers involved in the emergence of BMCs in the UK, in particular my father-in-law, Bishop Sydney Uriah Thompson (RIP), who passed away a week before I submitted this thesis. This group coped with oppression and racism and other challenges as they established what we now know as the 'BMC phenomena'. Thirdly I dedicate this thesis to BYM, who I argue have been misunderstood and misrepresented at times; therefore, the privileging of their voices acknowledges the absence of their narratives in the discourse and debates regarding them within different sectors of society. Finally this thesis is dedicated to those men, women and leaders within BMCs and the wider Christian community, willing to develop a socio-political and 'street' awareness towards working with BYM on their rehabilitation, desistance and transformational journeys.

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Family, Friends and Colleagues

I am thankful for the patience and support of my immediate family who have seen me navigate my way through many challenges associated with this research since 2001. Much appreciation goes to my mother, for her continued prayers on the journey, also for the encouragement of my dad and sisters, Rose and Lehona. Huge gratitude goes to my wife, Pauline, and children, Daniel, Benjamin and Ebony, who supported me with many words and acts of kindness and encouragement.

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Finally, my thanks go to the Lord, who I acknowledge as the ultimate motivator towards implementing my Christian faith, in practical action, that is able to engage and support marginalised individuals, families and communities.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACEA	African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance
AME	American Methodist Episcopal Church
BC	Black Church
BMCs	Black Majority Churches
BYM	Black Young Men
GT	Grounded Theory
NTCG	New Testament Church of God
PT	Practical Theology
PTR	Practical Theological Reflection
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

INTRODUCTION

Black young men's over-representation in the criminal justice system, their associations with gangs, guns and knives, 'Black on Black violence', and Black Pentecostalism or black majority churches (BMCs) are generally seen as separate entities. Whereas the issues associated with black young men (BYM) are discussed and researched within criminology and social sciences, disciplines that seek to make sense of BYM's dynamics, social-causal factors, relating to the above issues. However, whilst acknowledging the emergence of some solutions and support recommendations relating to the rehabilitation and desistance of BYM, it remains pertinent that these men are still more likely to be socially alienated and detached from statutory, community, voluntary and faith sector services (Anderson, 1999; Glynn, 2014; Gunter, 2010; Rich, 2009; Pitts, 2008).

On the other hand, discourse regarding black Pentecostals and BMCs focuses on areas associated with church life, spirituality, personal relationship with God, doctrinal identities and the work of the Holy Spirit in the practices and activities of these churches, towards fostering what Alexander argues to be a Pentecostalism that 'draws from the deep wells of African spirituality and slave religion' (2011: 16). The early research works of Gerloff have contributed some of the most comprehensive explorations relating to the evolution of UK BMCs (1992). In recent years, the works of Aldred (2005), Adedibu (2012) and Thompson (2013) further contributed to the continued development of understandings relating to significant issues associated with the cultural, missiological and social significance of the African-Caribbean Diasporian contribution to the British Christian landscape.

Having acknowledged two distinct disciplines above, namely, theology and social science, this work seeks to bring these disciplines into critical dialogue, fostering interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary relationships in exploring the development of a 'BMC Practical Pentecostal Street Theology' that is able to support black young men on their journeys of rehabilitation and desistance. I acknowledge here, that there are different perspectives regarding notions of desistance and rehabilitation. However this work applies the definition of Glynn (2014), Farrall and Calverley (2006) who suggest that desistance is to do with the termination of offending by individuals involved in criminality. Glynn further argues that 'desistance is directly tied to the psychological mechanisms that drive change in criminal behaviour patterns' (Glynn, 2014: 15).

It is from this that I suggest theological mechanism or processes are also valid towards driving change in criminal behaviour patterns as highlighted in chapters six and seven.

This work has accepted the rehabilitation perspective represented by Martin, Sechrest and Redner (1981) highlighting that rehabilitation is associated with the results or outcomes of planned interventions and approaches that supports an offender to reduce their involvement in criminality and to ultimately terminate offending. It is within the definition that I will present a framework in chapter seven that may support BMCs to develop effective interventions to support BYM who may seek to live crime-free lives.

I draw on research regarding BYM, my own historical experience of being a BYM influenced by the street, as well as my current role as a BMC leader in NTCG and the narratives and stories from fieldwork respondents. The focus group response from BMC leaders regarding

their involvement and perceptions about black young men is also relevant in our contextualization here. As already acknowledged, this work considers it necessary to engage with inter-disciplinary perspectives, offering several tools for understanding contemporary social realities and issues, some of which may be categorised problematic (Rubington and Weinberg, 1989).

Whilst rooting this research in the field of practical theology, it uses a version of the Pastoral Cycle (PC) represented below to explore BYM's experiences and narratives that are analysed by using interdisciplinary approaches to bring greater understanding of their situation. I am concerned here to explore the stories and experiences of BYM associated with the issues above. Furthermore, I am interested to understand why BMCs are not more actively and effectively involved in engaging and supporting these men, who may be involved or at risk of involvement in crime, gang-associated activities. I acknowledge from the outset that numerous reports and research, have highlighted BYM as victims and perpetrators of gun and knife crimes, resulting in fatalities over the years, in cities and towns like London Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham and Wolverhampton (Beckford, 2004; Gunter, 2010; McLagan, 2005; Home Office, 2006). This picture inspired me towards researching, what for me, was not a comfortable or acceptable situation regarding BYM's disproportionate involvement in the criminal justice system and fatalities associated with gangs, guns and knives (Glynn, 2014; Gunter, 2010). Furthermore, I was interested to understand the motivating or inhibiting factors for BMC's responding, to what I had perceived to be a crisis with and facing BYM in the communities these churches were a part of.

Background and Motivation

The impetus for undertaking this project was influenced by a number of key events and stages in my life, which will be expressed more fully in chapter six. However, just some initial thoughts here. My roles as the father of two black young men, whose lives I saw negatively influenced by peer pressures and the ‘street’, as a pastor in areas of Birmingham with many incidents of gun and gang violence and as a social worker in a number of deprived areas and actively engaging black young men within the community regarding their development, became motivators for me to ask some key questions. These were germane to the question: How can I and other BMC leaders effectively respond theologically and practically to what I had perceived to be a ‘social problem’ facing BYM, their families and the communities they lived in? My roles in church and community therefore led me to ask the following questions:

- Do I have a Christian duty towards marginalised people and communities?
- What role do BMCs have in engaging and supporting those black youths represented in school exclusions, Black-on-Black violence and their over-representation in the prison and wider criminal justice system?
- How might the stories and narratives of BYM influence or inform BMC leaderships, who may seek to develop a ‘practical theological street theology’ that effectively responds to the needs and interests of these men?
- Are BMCs in the UK involved in socio-political engagement and activities relating to above issues and concerns?
- What is there in the traditions, theologies and beliefs of BMCs that supports or hinders their involvement with black young men?

- Are BMCs aware of the impact of guns, knives and gang-associated issues within the community, more specifically the impact on the families of victims and perpetrators?
- Are BMCs spiritualising issues that may need inter-disciplinary explorations and analysis?

Whilst not an exhaustive set of questions, it makes more prominent some of the concerns I had about the perceived disconnect between BMCs and the needs and realities of BYM, categorised as ‘problematic’ (Glynn, 2014; Gunter, 2010). Furthermore, the questions offer BMCs the opportunity to explore whether they could or should respond to identified concerns of these men or just ignore them. Importantly, I reiterate from the outset that this project is concerned with the gang and criminally associated issues of BYM. This, I suggest, is a problem, as highlighted in the works of Anderson (1999, 2008), Gunter (2010), Glynn (2014), McLagan (2005), Pitts (2008) and Rich (2009). Key issues relating to some of the perceived gaps, disconnect, suspicions between BYM and BMCs also possibilities for mutual discourse are explored, also critically analysed in chapters five, six and seven.

Another motivator for this work was my prior mapping of support services for BYM, which revealed a sparseness of effective responses or engagement of these men. I argue here that, it became increasingly evident from initial explorations that BYM were misunderstood and misrepresented in how they were portrayed in some sectors of our society, resulting in media stories and reports lacking any ‘credible’ narratives from the men themselves (Glynn, 2014; Gunter, 2010; Wilson and Rees, 2006; Rich, 2009).

Accepting that I was dissatisfied with how I, BMCs and church leadership colleagues, theologically and practically responded to issues of concern, more specifically BYM's needs and interests, raised further thoughts about the relevance and impact of my Christian faith and witness. Here, I was concerned to further understand how, according to Pattison (2000: 7), my 'religious belief, traditions and practices engages with the experiences, questions and actions' of, for example, black young men as those involved in this study, who from my perspective, appeared isolated and detached from the support of BMC life and structures. This possibility, Pattison suggests, creates the space for conducting an 'enriching dialogue' between my beliefs and traditions and the contemporary situation with black young men, that can be intellectually critical and practically transforming (2000: 7).

Situating this research in the field of practical theology is not without its challenges, relating to its varied perspectives, limitations and implementations, as will be addressed later in chapter one. However, it is within this arena that my research is grounded, as stated previously, in the works of Anderson (2001), Andrews (2002), Ballard and Pritchard (2006), Cartledge (2003), Forrester (2000), Graham et al. (2005), Stone and Duke (2006), Woodward and Pattison (2000) and Pattison (2007).

In taking a stance, as a black Christian Pentecostal minister, to view this work through practical theological lenses, the next section sets out some initial theological considerations.

Theological Considerations

Having taken time to reflect on my Christian practices, as pastor and on my involvement with black young men in church, community and prisons, it became apparent that my early reflections were without the theological insights and frameworks offered by PT and PTR.

Admittedly, I recall the early stages of reflections, engendering feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, detachment and, at times, a sense of being isolated from the real and lived experience of young men that I sought to work with. Some of their stories of incidents and activities they had experienced regarding issues of violence, gang activities, and death of friends as a result of gun and knife confrontations were alarming. These types of scenarios (as will be represented in the narratives of respondents in chapters four and five), further motivated me to reconsider my Christian Pentecostal response, in engaging with BYM's 'realities'.

Another important factor in entering the explorative phase of this work was my personal dissatisfaction, as mentioned previously, with what I perceived to be the lack of strategic theological response from BMCs and in particular the NTCG, the denomination where I was a leader, relating to the gap or disconnect between BYM and BMCs. My continued involvement in the Birmingham black Pentecostal churches context afforded me the opportunity to observe and discuss with numerous ministerial and church leadership colleagues, their response, for example, to the tragic deaths in 2003, through gun crime, of two young black women. At the time, the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, stated:

At the heart of the matter to deal with gangs, drugs, knives and gangs is a calling to engage with vulnerable people, to offer opportunities and support – in short to bring hope to those in need, to bind up the broken-hearted and to set the oppressed free. It is not an easy task, but it is the task Jesus called us to through his words and his example. When he called us to make disciples of all people, he did not just mean those people who make us feel safe and comfortable. The task we face in rebuilding

our city and our communities is a reminder of the Old Testament story of Nehemiah who was a great visionary who had a passion to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem. He was a persistent man undaunted by rumours and discouragement from his colleagues. (Bringing Hope Toolkit, 2006: 3)

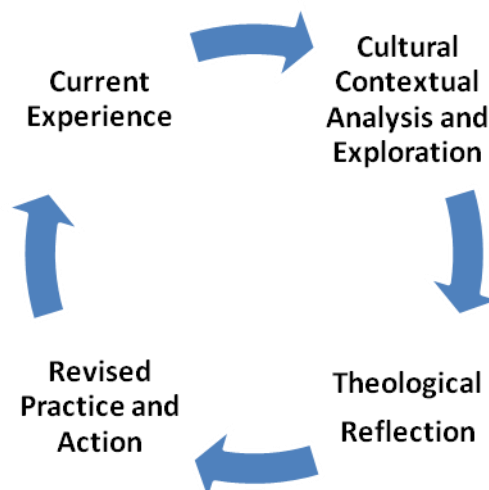
I found little evidence during the above period, suggesting BMCs were critically reflecting or engaging in any theological strategising regarding the issues associated with gangs, guns or the types of young men highlighted in this work. Reddie's thoughts regarding black Pentecostal churches highlights some of the concerns already raised. He states:

The rise of this newer form of Pentecostalism is one that does not have an explicit identification with, and commitment to, the socio-political concerns of Black communities, as was the case with the traditional Black church. (2012: 163)

It is within the above context that this work seeks to explore, through PT lenses, the issues associated with BYM, particularly those involved in behaviours and attitudes that are threatening to themselves, their families and communities. In effect, it will consider more specifically the dynamics and social activities of BYM categorized as marginalized, alienated, socially excluded, 'difficult to access' and gang-affiliated (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1990; Gunter, 2010; Heale, 2008). Furthermore, it seeks to address a key question, 'What underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies inform, shape or inhibit the responses of BMCs to the situation of black young men?' In responding to this question, as acknowledged, a version of the Pastoral Cycle, highlighted by Ballard and Pritchard (2006), is used, which will theologically reflect and offer some thoughts to BMC should they choose to

revise their practices and actions relating to engaging BYM. Within this framework, Ballard and Pritchard argue for a ‘doing theology from below’ approach, suggesting that this slogan has two connotations:

Both of them reflect the perspective of liberation and its insistence on praxis. First, the reference is to theology’s starting point. The cycle starts as we have seen, with present experience, which becomes questioned by some event or crisis. It starts in the concrete reality of where people are. (2006: 89)



The PC offers the opportunity for exploring black young men’s narratives and experiences, as well as considering the ethos of BMCs regarding their experience, traditions and capacity to facilitate a working relationship with black young men, as will be explored in chapters six and seven. Evidently, the above PC also offers the opportunity for social analysis, in order to make sense of the experiences of the contemporary situation being researched, which in the context of this project relates to two key areas, namely BYM and BMCs.

As seen from the PC above, theological reflection forms a crucial aspect of the process, giving way for reflecting on the Word of God in relation to our analysis. Finally, with the possibilities for revised action and practices becoming redefined, it is noteworthy that this is not an end within itself, but an aspect of an ongoing process for continued theological development. I suggest that this development has the potential to inform BMCs seeking to engage BYM and contribute to wider PT debates.

This project, in essence, seeks to establish an in-depth understanding regarding BYM's thoughts, experiences and aspirations and how such an understanding is able to influence BMCs seeking to effectively engage with these men. It is intended that this research would privilege the voices of BYM, deemed 'hard to reach', 'disaffected' and 'hard 'core', labels ascribed to these men (Gunter, 2010; Glynn, 2004). On the other hand, it seeks to be enriching, in developing new and fresh ideas to influence the rehabilitation, desistance and support processes with BYM.

In order to ensure that the different areas of exploration were adequately addressed, it was crucial that all fieldwork and associated research processes were firmly grounded in a methodology and methods that would effectively represent the voices, context and realities of those involved in the project. The next section offers an outline of the field work process.

Fieldwork

Whilst considering our exploration within a practical theological framework, it utilised research techniques and tools of observation, interview (semi-structured) and focus group discussion, which provided the means through which to explore the nature of the respondents' lived experience and the thoughts and feelings of BMC leaders. This primary research data

was obtained through the fieldwork process, conducted in Birmingham in three main locations, namely HMP [REDACTED], a local NTCG church and the offices of the Bringing Hope charity.

The fieldwork considered three key factors in obtaining data from young men interviewed. Firstly, it explored their views and experiences about their involvement and association in criminally associated activities. Secondly, the issues of desistance and rehabilitation were considered, which as stated previously, relate to the process in which the frequency of their criminally orientated behaviour and actions decelerates and exhibits less involvement in factors that would contribute to their criminality. Thirdly, the work sought to consider if a Christian response, through the lens of practical Pentecostal theology was a viable conduit for engagement, reflection and faith driven action, which could be ‘pressure tested’ by BMCs.

The dialogue, findings and observations were developed within the context of grounded theory, exploring and analyzing factors emerging from young men’s narratives that could construct theories relating to areas of social life (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, within a grounded theory process, this work was able to consider any emerging issues and patterns that could subsequently be applied in modifying and reformulating theories and practice as represented in the PC above. A more detailed exploration and description of the research methodology and methods used are presented in chapter three.

Researcher’s Fieldwork Reflections

In seeking to validate my approach, I was conscious of the need to develop and maintain an ‘outsider’s perspective’, at the same time acknowledging my biases. This position required a

conscious awareness and understanding of my potential influences in the interview process, with young men and BMC leaders, some of whom I already knew. I was therefore mindful to be as objective as possible as a researcher, seeking to be rigorous and critical in the analysis and evaluation processes. Fetterman's work (2010), however, highlights a response which supports the advantage of being a 'known individual' in a community that already has suspicions of 'outsiders'. This is also supported by Bell and Newby (1971), Goodson and Phillimore (2012), validating the advantages for having prior understanding and insights into the community or group being studied. Glynn, a Birmingham criminologist, whilst working on the project, *Hard to Access Young People and Drugs Support Services in Birmingham*, argues that:

Young black people have felt comforted by talking to someone who identifies with who they are, as opposed to their supposed social label. Likewise, disaffected white male and females who are embracing urban culture through music such as hip-hop, garage, drum 'n' bass, dancehall music, etc have felt more at ease knowing that the researcher had a familiarity with the world they occupy. At all times positive reinforcement without judgment enabled those young people to feel at ease in expressing their views on their terms. (Glynn, 2004: 19)

Whilst in agreement with Fetterman, Newby and Glynn, the reality proved difficult at times, not to steer conversations or issues in certain directions, given that I had some prior knowledge, understanding and relationship with some of the individuals involved in the study. Consequently, 'ethical quality control', to minimise the potential for invalid outcomes and discrepancies, was considered. Some of these controls, according to Kumar (2005), included

non-judgmental attitudes and approaches, triangulation of results/findings and working within ethical conceptual frameworks, which Kumar suggests, places a check on the negative influences or bias.

In concluding this section, I would argue that in spite of my intention to minimise biased influence on respondents responses, it was to be an inevitable potential, be it subconsciously or otherwise, that some results of interviews and discussions would in some degree be impacted by me.

Outline of Thesis

This work contributes to the development of a black practical Pentecostal street theology, which offers some thoughts and principles that might inform BMCs and their leaderships, who may seek to develop a socio-community and political awareness of engaging and supporting BYM. In seeking to represent the above, this thesis uses eight chapters. In chapter one, I offer some thoughts regarding the interdisciplinary nature of this project. The chapter goes on to set the context for the use of practical theology as the lens through which this work examines the dynamics of black young men and the ethos of BMCs. It gives an outline of the overall methodological moments or stages in the PC, which is used to probe in each area of the cycle (experience, analysis, theological reflection and revised practice). Here, I also explore the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in privileging the voices of BYM. This chapter considers the issues associated with using personal narratives and self-reflective approaches in this study. Finally, the chapter goes on to explore the processes and principles involved in using PT as a tool should BMC's seek to engage BYM.

Chapter two considers the literature and research relating to BYM categorised as gang-associated, problematic, 'hard to reach' and socially excluded are represented and understood. It represents the first phase of the PC to analyse the situation of these men, using interdisciplinary sources and means to understand their situation. Research studies in the UK and the USA are explored, triangulated and critically analysed, highlighting relevant and pertinent issues, at the same time representing the limitations of these studies, in particular, relating to the limited and at times absent voices of BYM, resulting in this project's focus on privileging the voices of these men through empirical research. Importantly, the chapter explores the issues associated with BYM's over-representation and criminalisation within a criminal justice context and whether the perceived challenges or concerns regarding them are socially constructed or otherwise.

In chapter three, I set out the basis or context on which this research is undertaken and, subsequently, offer more detailed thoughts relating to the research methodology for undertaking my fieldwork and empirical aspect of this work. In essence, this chapter describes the processes involved in gaining access BYM, both in prison and community, as well as engaging BMC leaders. Furthermore, it offers thinking relating to ethical considerations applied to the research. Importantly, the chapter considers how interviews will be conducted referring to the methods and analytical tools to be applied when discussing findings and outcomes of study. As an aspect of this work, I was also involved in maintaining a reflective diary consequently; some extracts from this diary will be included in the work, more specifically in chapters four and five.

Chapter four represents the stories and narratives of BYM relating to their situation. It considers a number of key factors associated with these men, such as upbringing, parenting, street influences, prison life, entering the criminal justice system and gang-associated activities. This chapter then presents the interview findings in a thematic way, which includes the theorising from scholars who have studied BYM. Chapter five offers an analysis of the findings from the men, exploring further issues emerging from the stories. This chapter includes an analysis on such themes as, childhood socialisation and negative exposure, the nature of BYM's self-concept, 'street dynamics' and coping with trauma. The chapter uses the information abstracted from the findings along with the literature to present a more succinct analysis of the situation facing BYM, offering some thoughts as to what might support these men on their rehabilitation and desistance journeys. Here, the voices and needs of the men are presented, offering a picture, which BMCs have an opportunity to explore its responses to BYM, actual or potential.

Chapter six sets out to explore the belief and theological context of BMCs, more specifically, considering its Pentecostal contextualisation. This also takes into account BMC's doctrines, ideologies, practices and socio-political activities. In this chapter, I consider my own Pentecostal narrative, through a 'self-reflection' process. The chapter considers what the church understands to be its mission relating and how this may or may not relate to being involved in supporting BYM. Focus group responses from BMC leaders are represented in this chapter, exploring their thoughts and aspirations about community involvement and more specifically work with BYM. The chapter uses NTCG as a case study example, for more targeted exploration on thoughts regarding ecclesiology, evangelism, sin, salvation, God, Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, naming some of the key issues for consideration.

Chapter seven explores some of the identified gaps between BMCs and BYM. It considers the present responses of BMCs to the needs and interest of BYM and explores the theological and other factors that drive their present position. The chapter then argues for BMCs to rethink their responses and consider a different perspective, based on research undertaken for this work. Here, the chapter offers thoughts on what it might mean for BMCs to consider a different approach relating to their theologies, practices and traditions, should they choose to effectively support BYM. This chapter, in essence, presents a conceptual framework towards BMCs engagement with BYB through the use of PT and PTR perspectives.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis with a brief self-reflection as to lessons learnt and what I would have done differently in the research planning and implementation process. The chapter also evaluates the worth of the findings, considering strengths and weaknesses, and offers some thoughts as to how the research agenda of this work is moved forward beyond the project.

CHAPTER ONE: THROUGH PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL LENSES

1.1 Introduction

The introduction sketched how this study considers practical theology and its 'place' within BMCs and its potential application for engaging and working with black young men. I want to explore how concepts and perspectives from practical theology could contribute to the development of a black practical Pentecostal 'contextual urban' or street theology, able to effectively engage and support BYM. This chapter will also consider aspects of liberation theology and its connection to practical theology (Hermans and Moore, 2004; Pattison, 1997; Cone, 1986).

I grounded this study in the experiences of disaffected urban youths, more specifically BYM, associated with gangs, the 'world of criminality' and the 'Street' (Glynn, 2014; Gunter, 2010; Rich, 2009). Working with people regarded as 'hard to reach' and involved in antisocial and criminal activities (Anderson 1999; 1976 Beckford 2004, Coughlan, 2008; Glynn 2004; HMO 2006, McLagan, 2005; Kelin and Maxon 2006) raised issues around my use of interviewees' personal narratives and my own experiences in the research process. Given these variables, my motivation to utilise the PC for probing into the world of BYM seemed appropriate as stated previously and will be highlighted further in chapter three.

I argue in chapters two and five those social scientific and theological perspectives on the 'problems and challenges' of gang-associated lifestyles and their consequences are plagued by conflicting, limited, misrepresented and punitive responses (Regan, 2010; Anderson, 1999 Beckford, 2004). Consequently, I am under no illusions here regarding the potential challenges

involved in any critical search for new insights on pastoral practice (Forrester, 1990). ‘External’ debates and controversies may shape these challenges. For example, advocates of a more Reformed tradition argue that the Word of God revealed in scripture should correspond with Christian practice and activities. Liberal scholars, such as McDonald, offer counter narratives:

The Word does not supply a direct and unequivocal answer to all Christian moral practice. Indeed, the attempt to encapsulate the divine requirements in dogmatic rules or formulae and to apply these to situations tends to foreclose discussions of the issue; the answer is given before the question is heard. Wisely, the tradition of moral theology takes the Bible as a general guide only. (Forrester, 1990: 21)

At one point, as a member of and a leader in NTCG, I would have opposed this ‘Liberal’ perspective wholeheartedly. This fact does not say anything about my journey to agree with many of McDonald’s arguments for an interdisciplinary, critical, interrogatory and practical theology. My encounter with the research made me very aware of my insular and, at times, closed thoughts regarding pastoral theology and critical theological analysis. (I discuss some of the factors that influenced this journey towards pastoral theology in chapter six.)

The research explores the relationships between the NTCG and other BMC’s traditional theological activities, practices and theories and ‘Christian life and practice ... in relation to wider society’ (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006: xii). In particular, I seek to develop a Pentecostal Practical Theology that engages in practical theological reflection and relevant action. That is, a holistic Christian response to the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual challenges

associated with gang-affiliated youths based on the PC represented in the introduction. Its twin aims are to make a unique contribution to academic knowledge within the academy and the BMCs. The study offers principles and perspectives around PT and PTR that both inform and challenge the understanding and practice of ‘good news’ to BYM and their communities. The next section offers some thoughts surrounding interdisciplinary perspectives and how this may fit within PT discourse and analysis.

1.2 Inter-Disciplinary Context

As indicated previously, this work, whilst applying the PC, does not negate the perspectives and tools of other disciplines in the enquiry and analysis phases. Consequently, perspectives from, criminology, sociology, psychology are considered within an interdisciplinary context. Cartledge’s work on *Practical Theology: Charismatic Perspectives*, acknowledges the potential interplay between sociology and theology, as it may for example relate to researching BMCs’ theologies on engaging BYM (2003: 12).

Furthermore, he makes clear that, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that the field of PT, whilst still evolving, is open to inter-disciplinary perspectives, as it empirically explores situations and issues of concern or interest (Cartledge, 2003).

In recent years, there has been an increase in inter-disciplinary dialogue, enquiry and interventions relating to issues categorised as problematic, of social concern and of interest to human welfare and wellbeing. Critical conversations, for example between theology and social science, medical science and social ethics have allowed for collaboration on a number of key issues, such as poverty, HIV and AIDS, inner city deprivation, educational

underachievement of BYM, racism, sexism, gangs and youth associated violence has not been without some territorial and contested methodological debates. The idea that one discipline and its associated perspectives and approaches are adequate enough, to singularly explore, interpret and address, social, community and ‘human related problems’ or challenges, is at best contested and at worst rejected.

This position of inter-disciplinary partnership, in all honesty, was not an approach to be considered by me or NTCG colleagues at the early stages of my BMC leadership in the late 1970s, at a stage when my perspective was that ‘Jesus and the Church was the answer to the “world’s” problems’ – a view that I now argue to be dogmatic, myopic and lacking openness to other thoughts and perspectives. I am not here however, to negate the methods, perspectives and ethical boundaries the above disciplines have applied or utilised in their work over the years. However, I argue here, there is growing evidence that scholars and proponents of social science, education and theology are showing willingness to self-assess, on whether their respective models and approaches are sustainable within contemporary enquiry about ethical, moral, socio-political issues and within the academy (Cartledge, 2003).

The notion of ‘reflexivity’ or the evaluating and assessing one’s perspectives, approaches and activities is becoming more acceptable within these disciplines, as they become more open to collaboration and ‘inter-disciplinary’ conversations and partnerships (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006; Cartledge, 2003).

Haralambos, a leading sociologist of the 1980s represents an example of ‘self-assessment’ associated with perspectives on religion. He states:

There has been a tendency for sociologists to consider the emergence of new religious movements in the context of the secularization debate. This rather narrow concern can prevent a consideration of many interesting questions. (Haralambos and Heald, 1980)

As this work develops, it does not assume that the readers will be from a Black Majority Church (BMC) tradition or is a black Pentecostal like me, nor will fully understand or identify with the 'world' of black young men, relating to their 'social exclusion', crimes and gang-associated violence or in some cases, black-on-black gun and knife attacks resulting in deaths (Gunter, 2010; Heale, 2008; Wilson, 1990). With that acknowledgement, this work uses PT lenses to make sense of the context of BYM, BMCs and the possibilities for critical dialogue in developing a PT paradigm that might inform and support BMCs to work effectively with BYM. The next section offers some thoughts regarding the complex world of PT and PTR.

1.3 Entering the Practical Theological Arena

Many scholars have contributed to the development of Practical Theology. These include: Cartledge (2003), Woodward and Pattison (2000), Pattison (2007), Graham, Walton and Ward (2005, 2007), Forrester (2000), Thompson (2008) and Ballard and Pritchard (2006). I acknowledge the depth and range of this scholarly work, but wonder how accessible it is to the world of BMCs, black communities and BYM that is the focus of this work. I also wonder whether their scholarly approaches would embrace or contest my understanding of PT and argument for a black practical Pentecostal street theology in the UK. These questions open the discourse regarding the relationship between BMCs, BYM and a version of Practical Theology largely developed in white European context (Adedibu, 2012; Beckford, 2000; Sturge, 2005).

To examine this relationship in no way negate the continued significance of the body of work produced by black UK scholars that covers a range of issues around theological praxis and black/Caribbean Christian spiritualities (Aldred, 2005; Reddie, 2007; Sturge, 2005). Whilst there are few explicit references to PT or PTR in this work, there are implicit references to how PT engages with socio-political or socio-community issues. Beckford, for example, in *Dread and Pentecostal* (2000) and *God and the Gangs* (2004) offers challenges to BMCs regarding political theology and argues for ‘Theological Liberation’ from Eurocentric theologies (Adedibu, 2012). On the other hand, Lartey (2008) offers some specific thoughts surrounding PTR, as he (along with mainly white theologians) considers a various approaches to theological reflection, arguably an aspect of PT (Thompson et al., 2008: 59-6).

It is my contention that there are not enough conversations between black and white PT proponents regarding issues of joint or separate concerns, such as race, culture, and gender and community deprivation. For example, any future PT-orientated research into BMCs and black young men must acknowledge the intersections of structures of bias and discrimination that maintain inequalities in the practice of researching these groups in the UK.

Amongst scholars in the USA, however, there is evidence of more specific and overt use of PT concepts. This includes work that follows what Floyd-Thomas et al. (2007) say are two guiding principles associated with a PT framing for BMCs: PT and Practical Wisdom.

Practical Theology: The study of institutional activities of Christianity, including Christian education, preaching, church administration, pastoral care, liturgics, and spirituality; also

refers to the branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in particular social contexts.

Practical Wisdom: African/African American virtue that represents the ability to discern what is necessary in order to survive and thrive. The Black Church conveys practical wisdom to its children and youth through actions more than words. Emphasis is placed on intentionally designed rituals and mentoring programs, such as rites of passage ceremonies and youth religious training programmes in order to ensure the ‘living out’ and practice of this knowledge (Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007: 255).

Cone, in his seminal work around a black theology of liberation, was clear that the Black Church should not only be about singing, preaching, clapping and Sunday worship, but should be active ambassadors of Christ, who have an affinity with poor marginalised peoples and are committed to their liberation from injustice. Cone argues that:

Without practical commitment to validate faith’s claim, what we say about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit becomes nothing but pious talk that makes persons feel good, similar to the excitement derived from musical and sporting events. Theology is the church applying a critical self evaluation of what it says and does on behalf of the one who defines the church’s identity-namely Jesus Christ. (1986: viii)

Pinn (2002) and Andrews (2002) also focus in on Practical Theology. Whilst Andrew’s book, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion*, argues for an engagement between PT and BMCs / Black Churches, I am unable to

represent how prominent his thinking is with black leadership in US black churches. Having said that, Stoddart, referencing Andrews' work, stated:

Practical Theology (in the USA) is part of the church traditions and practices that are conflicted about racism and ambiguous in their responses. (2014: 116)

Whilst noting Stoddart's thoughts here, my study strongly echoes Cone and Andrews' commitments to continued advocacy for black churches to be actively involved in PT and critical analysis as they represent the gospel.

The work of Cornel West is important here, because his analysis and commentary on the role of class, race and gender within an American context has influenced thinking around how BCs engage with issues affecting black folk in their churches and communities. I detail his specific analysis of the BC and black youths later on. For the moment, though, it is important to note the question provoked by West's general position, a question that bubbles beneath the surface of most discussions in the area: do I take a view that white PT scholars and theologians would be incapable of addressing the issues of race, class and gender were they to research the interactions between BMCs, BYM and their communities?

The answer depends on their willingness or resistance to engage in inter-disciplinary, inter-cultural and intersectional conversations and analysis (Cartledge, 2003; Forrester; 2000; Thompson et al., 2008). Intersectional here means that the approaches used or considered are 'contextualised': they take serious account of 'human experience, social and cultural location, and social changes in those cultures (Bevans, 2006). In this, I do not assume that black

researchers (like me) are free of prejudices or biases that could result in weak or invalid research outcomes without ethical and interdisciplinary considerations.

As more scholars from diverse backgrounds are involved in PT, there are more opportunities for increased intersectional and interdisciplinary work. From within a US black theology context, Hopkins, suggests that this work is driven by second generation black scholars, who see the need to place 'black religious scholarship into conversation with bodies of knowledge different from theology' (1999: 110). From within a UK white theology perspective, Pattison's work, *The Challenges of Practical Theology*, offers some suggestions for such partnership working in the UK. He states:

I would characterise my theology as Universalist, liberal, inclusive, humanistic, non-metaphysical, interrogative (seeking to ask some of the right questions rather than to know all the answers), and dialogic with people and insights of many different disciplines and professions. It is based upon the belief that God takes humanity with absolute seriousness, to the extent of imaging Godself as material human being in history. For me, this implies that all humans should take all other humans seriously in their material bring and situation, too. God is to be found in all people and places, and can be learned about best often at the edges of orthodox religious communities and thought systems. (Pattison, 2007: 18)

I have no contention with Pattison's 'positioning'. However, I wonder how his crafted intentions and stated principles would fare if applied to research into unfamiliar areas of concern or interest, such as those commonly associated with women or the black community?

I believe his theological position offers room for dialogue, partnership and reflection and is based on the notion that all human beings should be taken seriously within their respective context. It offers a viable template for interdisciplinary conversations and the co-production of fresh ideas and effective action.

I am mindful that PT focuses on how one's Christian faith is lived out in reality and how, along with social scientific perspectives, the Bible or Word of God is important in our theological reflections and conversations. Whilst important, however, Thompson et al., like McDonald (1990), warn against 'Treating the Bible as some kind of literary pope that utters holy truth without regard for circumstance or context will only serve to close some issues that should be left open to the speaking of God' (Thompson et al., 2008: 78–79). This perspective contests the 'divine command' approach (embraced and advocated by numerous BMCs, such as the NTCG, and explored in detail in chapter six), as does the next section that offers some thoughts on the use of personal narratives in Practical Theology and its relationship to the understanding of scriptures.

1.4 Practical Theology and Scriptural Considerations

I would argue that the challenges around the interpretation of experience in light of scripture represent a dynamic and complex puzzle for Christians. A PT perspective requires us to assess it from multiple perspectives, which may include anthropology, social science and theology as highlighted previously.

For example, the incident where Jesus reads from Isaiah in the synagogue (Luke 4:18) features prominently in the work of both practical and black theologians. 'The Spirit of the

Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.’ Black theologians, like James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore and Dwight Hopkins, argue that Jesus’ reading of this text declared his siding with the poor, oppressed and marginalised. Hopkins (1999: 25) says that, through Jesus, we see clearly a key theme in the Hebrew Scriptures that of compassion for the poor. He adds that God’s siding with the poor is the glue that holds together all the stories of the Bible. Cone and Wilmore offer similar commentaries on the passage.

However, it is worth noting that the Luke text requires a broader understanding of hope and redemption in the ancient Hebrew context. This portion of scripture from Isaiah deals with both the judgement of God and the salvation of humanity. From my reading, Jesus does not proclaim God’s judgement (a feature of the later verses in the passage from Isaiah), but hope in the form of five statements which are explored below aided by Gordon’s (2006) exegesis in Anderson et al., (2006: 33–35).

The first focuses on the preaching of ‘good news to the poor’ ‘Good news’ here is translated from the Greek word *euangelizesthai*, which corresponds with the noun *euangelion*, meaning ‘good news from God’. Evans (1990) says this good news was not just spiritual, but also related to the proclamation of victory (Evans, 1990: 270). This double victory has meaning to some of the people involved in this research. It represents the possibility of freedom from poverty, ignorance, life ‘on road’, spiritual desolation and destructive behaviours. The good news that Jesus brings challenges their captivity to these things with the expression of hope and imminent victory.

The second, the release of the captives, signifies freedom from all that dehumanises people. To me, captivity represents a dehumanisation of an individual and is at odds with Jesus' mission to bring life and hope. The word translated as release (*aphesis*) does not just mean release from physical bondage, but also release from the condemnation and 'oppression' of sin. Release from captivity means freedom from sin.

The third, to give 'sight to the blind' can be either be understood in terms of healing the physically blind or those 'blinded' by external influences. From the perspective taken here, the recovery of 'sight' (to bring hope when hope seems absent) suggests recovery, restitution and transformation.

The fourth is the proclamation of 'the acceptable year of the Lord'. This phrase suggests that Jesus advocates liberty to the oppressed, or as Evans puts it, 'to send away in freedom those who have been broken in pieces' (Evans, 1990: 271). So, Jesus, not only proclaimed hope for the oppressed and marginalised in Palestinian society, but the year of the Lord's favour, liberation, to a people occupied by a foreign power. It was within this context that hope emerged, as Jesus announced, 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...'

The final statement concerns the preaching and teaching to 'the least of these' (as referenced in Matthew 25:40). This suggests that our practical support to those who are 'othered', marginalised, is a ministry to Jesus. This text is explored by Bob Rowland in the poem, 'Listen Christians'.

I was hungry and you formed a humanities club and you discussed my hunger.

Thank you.

I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel in the cellar and prayed for my release.

I was naked and in your mind, you debated the morality of my appearance.

I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health.

I was homeless and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.

I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me.

You seem so holy; so close to God. But I'm still hungry and lonely and cold.

So where have your prayers gone? What have they done? What does it profit a man to page through his book of prayers when the rest of the world is crying for his help?

(Cone, 1986: 113)

The poem raises issues around the 'spiritualisation' of 'practical' scriptures and offers a tool for individual and congregational reflection and practical theological discourse and action. In a similar manner, theologians of a gospel of liberation place the historical Jesus and his message in the political context of the first-century Palestine of his day. In this, they bring the 'here and now' dimension of his message to the forefront of our exegesis and acts of faith. As implied above, Matthew 25:31–46 represents a reference point for critical reflection on our engagement in God's salvific acts in the now and the life to come (Hopkins, 1999; Cone, 1986; Berryman, 1987).

Woodward and Pattison (2000: 9) remind us that Pastoral and Practical Theology offer space for religious belief, tradition and practice to meet contemporary experiences, questions and actions. They argue that this dialogue is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming: it has much to say about faith, work and life. For Heitink, practical

theology is now identified as a theological theory of action, with a methodology closely linked to the social sciences (Heitink, 1999: 1) and global reach.

Practical theology should be understood as an empirically descriptive and critically constructive theory of religious practice. The empirical and descriptive dimension, which is pursued in close cooperation with other disciplines in the field of cultural studies, prevents practical theology from wishful speculative thinking and contributes to empirical theory building. (Heitink, 1999: xvi)

According to Cartledge (2003), contemporary practical theology is the interconnected practice of a range of disciplines. Bonnie Miller-McLemore, who writes of the ‘living human web’ of practical theological interpretation, highlights this (2012: 60–62). Osmer (2008: 15–16) describes how this web links individuals, families, congregations, communities and larger social systems. But, whilst the web analogy is interesting, it is important to recognise that the definition of practical theology is still ‘contested’ and dynamic. As noted above, it requires us to do more than simply contemplate theological doctrines and principles as interconnected abstract ideas. We are to develop approaches that allow for the practical application of those doctrines in everyday life: to contribute to the welfare and wellbeing of the ‘web’. Of course, the notions of wellbeing and welfare are also shaped by religious pluralism, globalisation and different conceptions of justice and social action.

The interconnection of academic reflection and discovery and pastoral adaptation and application provokes the development of new models for equipping people with theological knowledge and the professional skills necessary to minister effectively in dynamic and

demanding situations, as in working with the cohort of men featured in this study. Such situations may include communities characterised by urban youth disaffection, antisocial behaviours, exploitation and oppression. The next section sketches a framework in which PT and PTR tools and approaches that might inform BMC in their construction of a practical Pentecostal street theology.

1.5 Constructing a Framework for Doing Practical Theology

Many theologians argue that the pastoral situations generated in urban or inner-city communities require us to develop insights from a variety of perspectives to translate and apply faith effectively (Cone, 1986; Kinast, 1999; Osmer 1996; Woodward and Pattison, 2000). Whilst acknowledging that the field of theology is represented diversely, even within the same academic discipline, as practical theology, we are still faced with similar challenges in considering different sources of information (experiential, oral, written or empirical), to represent our knowledge and understanding of a given situation, like that already referenced relating to BYM. However, it is also important to consider this within a critical listening, questioning and learning framework (Stone and Duke, 2006). Kinast supports the notion that:

Critical thinking does not mean simply negative criticisms of established teachings and convictions; in fact, it may not include negative criticisms at all. Critical thinking means an honest search for truth by comparing different positions, questioning their basis and assumptions, analyzing their sources, testing their implications, and forming judgements about their validity and relevance. (1999: xi)

Kinast's statement raises another issue here; that of Christian and social ethics, which may be based on moral judgements, notions of 'right' and 'wrong', representation of 'good' and 'bad' or evil, also activities driven by religious and moral convictions. Given that this research considers the behaviours and activities of BYM, that for some BMCs may be incongruous with 'righteousness', it is necessary to include some thoughts on this issue. This will be considered in chapter six.

Within a more contemporary context, Stone and Duke suggest that if one is a Christian, living according to their faith and takes seriously the spiritual dimension of life, one will inevitably think theologically (2006: 1). They further suggest that the process associated with thinking theologically is best known as theological reflection. Whilst Duke and Stone offer an interesting representation of theological thinking, which arguably raises the profile of theological reflection with those less likely to class themselves as theologians or 'theological reflectors', they however, acknowledge the complex nature associated with our respective interpretations of what they categorise as 'faith seeking understanding' (2006: 7). On the other hand, making 'faith-sense' according to Kinast (1999: ix) is a term for an ancient practice. It is what the early Christians called mystical or wisdom theology, an understanding of life in light of God's participation in it. They did not think of this as an intellectual skill or task reserved for specifically trained scholars. Making faith-sense was the way of life for a disciple of Jesus. It coincided with his call recorded in the gospels, to recognise the signs of God's presence in everyday events and to shape one's life accordingly. According to Kinast, as people did this, they guided their lives into the reign of God, or to put it more biblically, God reigned in their lives.

It is arguable, however, that, whilst seeking truth, as suggested by Kinast, there remains the need for caution, bearing in mind that this process is ongoing and that no one has a final or complete grasp on the truth (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006; Kinast, 1999). Furthermore, if we were to consider the use of the PC, it would give us the opportunity for ongoing analysis, reflection and strategic planning for relevant and practical action. Here, we are able to consider factors associated with how we make sense, and how we respond to living out our faith in everyday life. Ballard and Pritchard remind us of the complex and changing world, in which PT has to find its 'place'. They argue that:

Christianity is no longer automatically assumed to be the normative expression of British culture. We now live in what is often referred to as a post-modern or post-Christian and increasingly plurastic society in which different faiths, religious or humanistic, sit side by side in various states of co-operation or completion. (2006: 3)

Thompson et al. (2008) supports the need for process, and approaches that are able to analyse theological activities, as a means within an ongoing theological dynamic, rather than an end in itself. Andrews, however, brings in a 'reality check' reminding us that:

...the chasms that stretch between the discipline of theology and our ordinary lives of faith exist because theology does not frequently appear practical. He continues, by suggesting that practical theology is generally understood within a 'doing' framework. 'Practical theology therefore holds in deliberation theological revelation, theoretical science, and the practice of ministry. Therein exists a critical relationship between theology, theory and practice. (2002: 1)

Here, Andrews challenges any notion of representing a practical theological analysis just within a scientific and linear framework, purporting that practical theology is an engaging process between theology, theory and practice, with each one feeding back upon the others. It is within this process that we are able to actively apply personal narratives and use of one's own experience, whether as ethnographer, action researcher, practical theologian, pastor, participant observer or an involved observer. Whilst the chapter is not intended to explore all these factors, it is worth exploring however, some of the key challenges in using personal narratives.

1.6 Towards the use of Personal Narratives in Practical Theology

There have been numerous challenges faced by scholars and researchers over the years regarding how we define the notion of Practical Theology, and how one's personal experience and narrative is included in research or methodological considerations within this field (Reader, 2008). Reader suggests a review and refining of practical theology in light of the complex contemporary 'spaces' in which Christianity operates. Walton's work is important here and highlights two key issues for me. These include her writings on the use of narratives and how this relates to her feminist theology.

Walton acknowledges the importance and challenges associated with using one's experience, be it historical or relating to contemporary human relationships, 'as a valid source of theological understanding' (2014: xiii). She also highlights both in her book, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* and contribution to *Theological Reflection Methods*, some critical notions relating to the use of narratives (Graham et al., 2003, 2005). Walton challenges theologians and others who seek to consider use of their own narrative or that of others to

ensure that there are mechanisms and process in place that allow self-reflection and motive-assessments to take place. Walton offers the following set of questions that are pertinent for use of my narrative below. It is worth quoting her at length here:

The type of questions that reflective enquiries ask of themselves and thus include:

How does my personal history generate presuppositions that influence my approach to this topic?

How does my gender, class, ethnicity, sexual identity, cultural location influence my understanding?

Where do my allegiances lie and how do my commitments guide my approach to inquiry?

What can my body and my emotional responses contribute to generating the knowledge I seek?

When these questions are posed, the intention is not simply to generate self-knowledge (although this remains important), but rather to understand the self within the context of the political and social world through which it is being continually shaved and formed. (2014: xvi)

In an attempt to address key thinking related to the notions of subjectivity and use of personal experience or auto ethnography in this research, along with Walton's key questions, this work seeks to explore the dynamics and factors in how personal experience can be applied in acquiring greater understanding of the role and place of practical theology, both in the academy and at a 'grass roots' level, as in the cases of the young men in the study.

Like Walton, Webster and Mertova (2007: 4) suggest that narrative has depicted experience and endeavours of humans from ancient times. Narrative research records human experience through the construction and re-construction of personal stories. It is well suited to addressing issues of complexity and cultural and human centeredness, because of its capacity to record and retell those events that have been of most influence on us.

In considering Walton's questions here and arguing for using the narratives of BYM as well as my own, this work seeks to further enhance my faith understanding and reflection (Stone and Duke, 2006: 11). Furthermore, the proposed application of the PC process or spiral of interpretation as represented in the introduction, arguably has the potential to develop knowledge, further understanding, insights and fresh ideas for engaging disaffected urban youths. Within this context, narratives (my own and those of the BYM, representing a 'street reality') can provide a conduit between individual experiences and wider societal realities. Reed-Danahay (1997) argues that auto ethnography challenges a rationalist exclusion of 'self' from the research process. Fetterman's reminder here is about the credibility of the ethnographical approach. He states that:

Ethnography is about telling a credible, rigorous and authentic story, which gives a voice to people in their own local context. Ethnographers are noted for their ability to keep an open mind about the groups they are studying. (2010: 1)

Let us not negate the present temptations, however, for there to be shifts towards arranging evidence according to criteria or biases predetermined by thoughts and cultural ideologies, as well as personal values. Therefore, the need for 'quality control' is vital. Kumar (2005)

purports that in order to minimize the potential for invalid outcomes and discrepancies, consideration must be given to notions of triangulation, conceptualization and non-judgmental orientation, which place a check on the negative influences or bias.

Given the very complex nature of the issues faced by urban youths and communities and the relationship between some key scriptural commissions, mandates and obligations for the church community, which speak of ministering to the poor and oppressed, also showing love (Luke 4:18 and 1 Corinthians 13), there remains the key question: how can we develop a model, where transcendent hope and action is manifested through a practical theology?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer highlights the mandate of the church by saying:

The church of Jesus cannot arbitrarily break off all contact with those who refuse his call. It is called to follow the Lord by promise and commandment. That must suffice. All judgement of others and separation from them must be left to him who chose the church according to his good purpose, and not for any merit or achievement of its own. The separation of church and world is not affected by the church itself, but by the word of its calling. (Bonhoeffer, 2001: 132)

An example of challenge, critical questioning and self-reflection is represented in the responses of Black ministers following the Watts uprising in the USA. Following the uprisings in more than 128 US cities during 1963–1968, it became a time of great soul-searching for black churches and leadership in these cities. It was at this point that many of the black church leaders had to go beyond the ‘Church rhetoric’ and consider seeking ethical

guidance for the emerged unfamiliar context. Many church leaders in the United States gave an interesting response to the Watts and other city uprisings and stated that it was a lesson for developing a deliberate and conscious response to issues of serious concern. These ministers posed a number of critical questions:

- What is the responsibility of the churches to the oppressed when the oppressed revolt?
- How much of the truth should one tell the police when the children of one's own parish are liable to police brutality and summary arrest?
- What should be the Christian position regarding violence against property as a tactic of insurrection in the face of extreme deprivation and exploitation by the white power structure – city hall, the banks, the landlords and police?

The above questions regularly emerged, where black leaders gathered to consider intervention strategies, given that the situation, according to Cone, was the most serious national crisis in US history since the Civil War. It was at this time that many of these ministers and some scholars, found empowerment and insight in reading the work of leading theologians and key thinkers such as, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Frantz Fanon, David Walker, and Jürgen Moltmann, whose positions were rooted within a neo orthodoxy. Much consideration and thought was given to a theology that firmly rooted social ethics, in how scripture or the sacred text was manifested in action, challenged oppression and empowered the oppressed (Cone, 1986).

Cone further challenges churches to engage with the realities of the marginalised. He suggests that churches must be willing to engage and affect the lives of urban or inner city youngsters and be prepared to hear their stories, no matter how pained. Cone's perspective of liberation

points to a God that fully associates with the oppressed and marginalised. It could be argued that the experience both of the black leaders and those involved during the uprisings resulted in an analysis and reflection that lead to the reading of the likes of Bonhoeffer, towards them developing new perspectives and actions (Wilmore and Cone, 1979).

Let us consider here, for example, how the Black churches and leaders following the Watts rebellion responded within the PC Context. Firstly, their experience of church was seriously challenged by a rebellion that caused them to seriously consider causalities and, how their respective churches were affected. Pattison (1997: 51) helps us in our analysis with his response to liberation theology and hermeneutics. He distinguishes four stages that facilitate ‘the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present day reality, both individual and social’. He notes:

First comes our way of experiencing reality, which leads to profound ideological suspicion’. This arises from Christian commitment to the liberation struggle, which arouses suspicion that ideas and institutions, including religious ideas and institutions, may in the past have been ideologically determined and interpreted to obscure issues of liberation-domination. Secondly, there is the ‘application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to the theology in particular’. At the third stage, ‘there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads to exegetical suspicion, that is to suspicion that the prevailing interpretation has not taken important pieces of data into account’. Lastly, ‘we have a new hermeneutic’. (Pattison, 1997: 1)

With this ‘new hermeneutic’, new opportunities present themselves in the pursuit of our understanding and practice of the Christian faith. Pattison further outlines three: the acute awareness of those in our communities and the wider world who have and those who do not have the means to economic, social and political wellbeing; the extent to which the Christian faith claims of salvation actually liberate people from the margins to the flourishing realms of kingdom life in the ‘here and now’ and the life to come; and the degree to which our pastoral care challenges or affirms structures that hinder or promote humane experiences in accordance with Scripture (1997: 64–67).

It could be argued at this stage that this chapter has already taken a presupposed position in suggesting an admissible role for the use of personal experience in the research process. However, Huberman and Mills (2002: 1) suggest that ‘realists contend that the phenomena we study are fundamentally “unknowable” but we can make plausible sense of them through warranted analysis’.

Therefore, in attempting to consider a research study on how practical theology is able to contribute to the desistance or rehabilitative process and ultimate transformation of urban youths, we are faced with the difficult and complex task of diametrically opposing contexts, namely: ‘disaffected urban youths’ and ‘practical Pentecostal theology’.

There are evidently continuing demands for experiential authenticity and honesty, as a growing number of researchers and academics assert the right to apply experiential-related approaches in their enquiry. Pattison and Walton highlight the relative benefits for the use of personal narratives. Their use and advocacy for this type of approach further highlights the

increased profile of this approach in the field of academic enquiry (Pattison, 2000; Walton, 2014). Chapters four and five represents abridged narratives of BYM that corresponds with Boylorn and Orbe. They argue that:

Narrators make sense of everyday and significant life events through powerful descriptions that include similes, metaphors, phrases, terms and other codes. (2014: 27–28)

The above contextualisation arguably suggests that BYM, within this framework, have the opportunity to represent themselves within culturally creative ways that may be ‘street’ or ‘urban’ in expression. This will be represented in the language and expressions of respondents in chapters five and six.

The next section offers some thoughts in how this research, relating to BYM and BMCs will be progressed, by its application of the PC, and how this is used to interpret each phase of the cycle.

1.7 Youth, Black Men and BMCs: A Hermeneutical Response

The search for understanding, interpretation and interventions to support and enable new approaches in dealing with urban youth disaffection and, in particular BYM, has reached a place where it is said to be urgent. Over the past five years, the death of young people associated with gun and knife crime became a key theme for government, faith communities and voluntary sector organisations (Anderson, 2013; Glynn, 2014).

It is within the above context that the question relating to practical theology is posed: is it possible that a practical theological understanding and application can be developed that is able to contribute to new approaches and thinking around urban youth rehabilitative interventions? James Cone (1986) argues that by focusing on the theological text, we are granted the freedom to take seriously its social and political situation without being determined by it. He further suggests that our question now is not about whether we take seriously our social existence, but *how* and in *what* way we take it seriously. Other key questions are whose social situation does our theology represent and for whom do we speak? In answering these questions, Cone re-enforces the importance of scripture in our theology as the aid to defining and understanding how this supports those spoken about in scripture.

Beckford (2004) in *God and the Gangs* supports the need for a church to links faith and practice (praxis). The call for change from the 'streets' as well as the church pews is becoming more pronounced. Beckford challenges church leadership, especially black churches, to develop a revolutionary spirituality arguing that:

Through Jesus' confrontation of legal, religious and social structures that oppressed, marginalised and demeaned, Jesus heralded an alternative value system and social order. It was so radical that it provoked the authorities to conspire to get rid of him. For Jesus, those outside the community, the outcasts of his time, were made central to God's redemptive plan. The prostitute, tax collector, the revellers, the Samaritans and the sick were invited to be part of the Kingdom of God (Luke 6:20-26). For churches to be prophetic, the task is to have a radical commitment to the oppressed of our time.

In the urban context the failing schoolchild, the disaffected youth, the drug user and the abused teenager become central to the prophetic mission. (2004: 7)

Edwards also call for churches to consider how they represent their faith. He suggests that there is a need for:

A radical rethink on how the church represents the gospel (good news) within the communities they are part of.

He suggests that we must aim to move the ideas from the ‘page to the streets’. Evangelicals must all begin by joining the conversation on how to unite to present Christ credibly as good news to society. Only then, will we have earned the right to speak in the public square. Only then will we be able to begin the task of re-imagining how we might transform society. Only then can we move forward, in unity, to implement long-term strategic change (2008: 30).

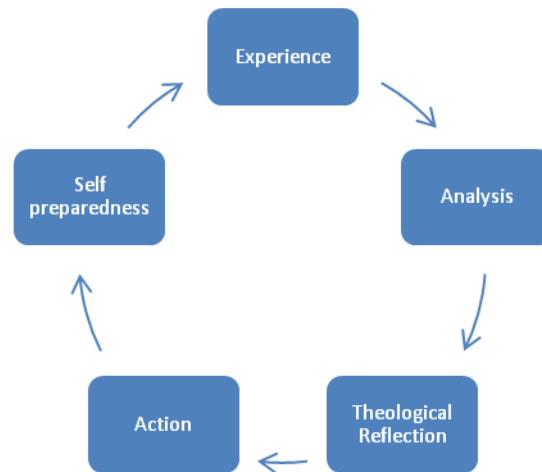
Practical theology within the context of this research offers the opportunity for critically considering how faith, action and reflection becomes interwoven in working with disaffected urban youths. This work seeks to consider the utilisation of, the philosophical, theological and social scientific sensibilities in our listening, questioning and understanding of what could be arguably classed as an ‘urban youth problematic’.

As stated previously, my entire work is grounded in a PT context, utilising the tool of PC or hermeneutical spiral. Having said that, I offer an addition to the four positions, namely experience, analysis, religious or theological reflection and action. I argue here for a position

of self-preparedness, which would be the starting point of the PC process. The 'self preparedness' position would consider the following questions:

- What are the motivators (personal, spiritual, and community, social) for me becoming curious, about seeking to bring new, fresh different insights to research interest?
- Am I open to new, fresh and different, intellectual, spiritual, social challenges, also changes that may offer new ways of 'seeing', feeling and experiencing things within an ethical research framework?
- Are any of my present practices, attitudes, mindsets, enablers or disenablers within the research process?
- Do I need to set in place a support structure for emotional, spiritual support on the journey?
- What training and development needs do I have to maximise my potential for research task?
- What key advice/understanding and knowledge is required for the research journey?

Whilst not an exhaustive list, it offers the opportunity to reflect on one's self and proposed activities before considering the four other sections or positions within the spiral, namely, Experience, Analysis, Theological Reflection and Action, represented in the diagram below.



In using the above framework, it will mean that following my preparedness assessment that the following is considered:

Experience

The experience phase, whilst the traditional starting point within the cycle is represented here as phase two. This aspect represents the situation to be explored. It considers the real-life issues and associated ethos or dynamics. In the context of this work, for example, it seeks to make sense and represent the dynamics of black young men, with the different categorisations and perceptions. Their context will be defined both historically and contemporarily, as understood and expressed by them and through the eyes of associated individuals and readings.

Analysis/Exploration

The aspect of making sense of the experience or identified situation has a number of components, which require further exploration, interrogation and revelation. It is now, as highlighted in the introduction, that interdisciplinary tools and ethical considerations become

more pronounced. It is here that associated influences aligned to the experience of black young men, be they political, influenced by race, gender, sexuality, religious expressions or criminal justice issues are considered more critically. Ballard and Pritchard argue that any considered response regarding ‘experience’ ‘must be based on an analysis of what is going on’ (2006: 85).

Theological Reflection

The theologically reflective position offers the opportunity for me to immerse myself within the completed analysis and to critically evaluate it in light of the Word of God. Here my theological reflection will be also influenced by my beliefs, spiritual traditions, understanding and reading of the. Chapters six and seven offer further thoughts on this area.

Action

Any action to be considered within the above process has to be within an informed framework, whereby all the information, data, analysis, and theological considerations are used in determining any new, improved and suggested actions to be taken. In other words, I am supporting a notion by BMCs to engage black young men should not be based on my curiosity and concern relating to the gap I perceive, but on critical exploration and conversations subsequently considered in light of God’s Word. It is within such a process that the argument for a black practical Pentecostal street theology will be realised.

1.8 Conclusion

As already highlighted, this study is situated within a PT framework and seeks to explore as well as reflect in depth, how a group of black young men associated with behaviours and

lifestyles deemed ‘challenging’ represent their stories. It is hoped that the emerging narratives and experiences of these men will inform BMCs, the academy, community and faith organisations as well as respondents themselves, as to the themes emerging. I also anticipate that the findings will influence my practice towards developing fresh and more informed approaches to my understanding of PT, as I seek to bring current practices experiences, values, beliefs and concerns of church communities and, indeed, wider society more widely into critical dialogue with Christian theological and scriptural traditions and processes (Stone and Duke, 2006; Woodward and Pattison, 2000; Osmer, 2008; Viau, 1999).

In chapter two, this work explores the research and work already undertaken regarding the dynamics of BYM.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SITUATION OF BLACK YOUNG MEN – VIEWS FROM SOCIAL RESEARCH STUDIES AND REPORTS

2.1 Introduction

As already stated in chapter one, this project is grounded in the field of PT and applies the PC (diagrammatically represented in thesis introduction) to explore and analyse the situation of BYM. The PC offers an opportunity, by using interdisciplinary sources, to represent insights from the lives of BYM, their needs, interests and dynamics. Importantly, before I am able to offer any interventions, solutions or ‘theological responses’ to BMCs, towards the support of these men, this chapter probes into the ‘research world’ relating to BYM, seeking clarity, explanations and insights from studies in the UK and USA. It is from such understanding, along with the empirical data, that this work seeks to analyse emerging concerns, themes and issues. Furthermore, it will view them in light of scripture and theological reflection, seeking fresh approaches or strategies towards revised practices and actions, as highlighted in the PC model (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006; Thompson et al., 2008).

Having already identified that I am both curious and concerned regarding issues associated with BYM categorised as problematic, violent, gangs affiliated and ‘hard to reach’. These terms at certain stages in the research or analysis phase have been contested, challenged and further explored (Anderson, 1999; Dimitriadis, 2003; Glynn, 2014; Rich, 2009; Pitts, 2008; Byfield, 2008).

It is within the above context that this work explores some of the research process for understanding BYM men as categorised earlier. I explore approaches and frameworks applied by proponents within fields of sociology, criminology, education and theology offering, varied complementary and at times oppositional explanations and accounts regarding the ‘world of BYM’.

The associated issues relating to BYM’s involvement with criminal justice, gangs, black-on-black violence, ‘street’ or ‘road’ lifestyles have been researched and explored extensively in both the USA and the UK. Some of these explorations by scholars like Anderson (1999, 2008), Dimitriadis (2003), Glynn (2013, 2014), Gunter (2010), Heale (2008), Klein and Maxson (2006), Pitts (2008), Rich (2009) and Wilson (1990, 1991) offer some contextual revelations regarding the dynamics of BYM’s association with the above issues. Furthermore, they offer empirical research data that this work contests at times, but also builds on. From an overall understanding, this research will offer some principles for constructing a ‘practical Pentecostal street theology’, for developing a fresh and, indeed, different perspective in engaging and working with BYM, which I argue is minimal at best and absent at worst. Chapter four represents the empirical phase of this work, bringing further and added insights to the literature and research exploring these men, which includes their perceptions and thoughts about the types of responses that may support their rehabilitation and desistance trajectories, should they choose such a path.

As well as considering the literature of some of the researchers named above, this chapter will also draw on my own experiences in my varied roles (pastor, community advocate, social worker and youth worker), past and present, in Birmingham and other UK towns and cities, (Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, London, Nottingham, Derby and Wolverhampton) working

with ‘hard to reach’ young people and communities experiencing gang- and gun-associated issues. In effect, this research seeks to understand the dynamics and level or extent of the challenges or ‘problem’, as identified through the social pathology, labelling or other perspectives (Rubington and Weinberg, 1989). My exploration brings into light the omission or minimal inclusion of theological or faith based interventions or explanations regarding how BYM could be better supported. I also suggest that the voices of BYM should be featured within any strategy relating to understanding and effectively supporting these men, a view strongly supported by the works of Rich (2009) and Glynn (2014).

The chapter concludes with the recognition that challenges and issues facing Britain’s inner cities regarding black young people are indeed complex, requiring diverse and multidisciplinary approaches and perspectives to aid our exploration, assessment and interventions (as acknowledged by proponents mentioned above and highlighted in the Government’s Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry (2006) on *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System*). I, therefore, argue in this work for a critical conversation between BYM, their narratives, BMCs and previous research relating to the notion of a ‘black youth problematic’, as this work seeks to develop further understanding on the contextualisation of BYM in particular. The next section offers some thoughts relating to ‘blackness’ as it relates to this work.

2.2 Notions of Blackness

Throughout this work, the term ‘black’ is used to refer to people of African Caribbean heritage. Where other Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are intended, specific

references will be made. However, I believe it's important to note that perspectives relating to how the academy represents 'blackness' or black intellectual thought are complex. I argue here that BYM also have valid thoughts regarding the notion of 'blackness' or 'being black' and their identities, equally valid within critical discourse. I would suggest that these thoughts are not without the influences of the different factors impacting on their lives, be they political, criminal, religious or relational. I am aware that there is a range of academic and political discussion concerning how populations are labelled and how these populations seek to redefine themselves (Drake, 2010). One such discussion is the extent to which talks and media representations of black young people in the context of gangs, guns and crime confirm prejudices and assumptions that, according to Beckford (2004), academic and pastoral work should indeed question.

2011 saw a report from the REACH Media Network that highlighted some interesting observations based on their research surrounding, *Media Representations of Black Young Men and Boys*. By using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, they utilised content analysis, an approach used for systematically assessing and analysing written, verbal and visual communication, relating to how BYM are represented. From their very extensive research, they offer the following:

[C]lose to 7 in 10 stories of black young men and boys related in some form to crime – a comparatively higher figure than in coverage of young men and boys more generally.

Violent crime, murders, and gun and knife crime accounted for the majority of crime coverage featuring black young men and boys in the mainstream news, with little

context or explanation for the reasons why crime was committed. (Cushion, Moore and Jewell, 2011: 2)

There is no denying that BYM are categorised negatively by those who seek to sensationalise or stereotype their involvement in crime. Glynn (2014) argues that ‘black consciousnesses’ and ‘black pride’ are distinct and selective attitudes that have histories independent of ideologically oriented political strategies and white racism or oppression. His research of black men in both the UK and USA afforded him the opportunity to explore narratives of BYM regarding their ‘pride’, blackness and criminality. He was able to ground his work within an African-American, African Caribbean and Caribbean British context, which, as far as I am aware, no other researcher has done in relation to researching desistance and black men.

What remains clear and requires reiteration here is what Rich (2009) and Glynn (2014) propose: that BYM are ‘privileged’ to tell their stories, arguably allowing for the production of counter narratives regarding their categorisations and labels, also towards contributing thoughts for their support. The next section considers the communities and context in which the ‘realities’ of BYM are explored.

2.3 Inner City Communities and Black Young Men

Discussions, research, reports, seminars and conferences raising concerns about young people’s behaviour, moral choices, involvement in criminality, encounters with the police and their association with violence are not new, in particular, connection to BYM and black communities (Anderson, 2008; Gunter, 2010; Rich, 2009). One such early report highlighting

concerns about the treatment and plight of black youths was the Scarman Report, produced after the Brixton Disorders of 1981. Concerns were raised regarding the underachievement of black youths, to which the author stated:

Though the extent of the causes of their under-achievement remain a matter of controversy, I have received evidence from many organisations and individuals pointing to the failure of black youths to acquire sufficiently early the skills of language and literacy, and to the sense of disappointment and frustration which at least some black parents and children feel in the education system. (1982: 26)

Scarman raised further issues in his report regarding how black communities were being policed and the social conditions and resources available in these communities for the enhancement and empowerment of its residents. His report was clear about the need for interdisciplinary working towards developing 'healthy' communities. Furthermore, the report acknowledged that Brixton and other inner city areas had complex, political, social and economic challenges. He suggested that the core of the problem was due to:

[A] decaying urban structure, with its attendant evils of bad-quality and inadequate housing, and lack of job opportunities, with its inevitable evil of high unemployment. These depressing conditions coexist with the crucial social fact that these areas have a high proportion of ethnic minority groups – blacks and Asians. And these groups believe and feel, with considerable justification that the colour of their skin, and their first or second generation immigrant origins which count against them in their bid for a fair share in our society. (1982: xiv)

Scarman acknowledged that such factors as socioeconomic inequalities, educational underachievement, racism and inadequate policing might have significantly contributed to the 'Brixton riots'. There has been an increase in research and literature in recent years, still highlighting some of the concerns and issues raised in Scarman's report relating to educational underachievement, poor housing, lack of employment and the ineffective 'policing' of BYM (Beckford, 2004, 2008; Gilroy, 1987; Gunter, 2010).

Gunter (2010) and Glynn (2013, 2014) concur with the notion that the present factors facing BYM, within a UK context, some who were not born at the time of the Brixton Disorders are not dissimilar to what has been highlighted in Scarman's Report. Both these researchers used a qualitative methodology to interview young men regarding some of the issues raised above. Whilst acknowledging Scarman's report as significant in raising the issue of race, Glynn's work brings into greater prominence the context of race in how we understand, research and work with black men.

Glynn's work on *Black Men Invisibility and Crime* explores the issues associated with black men by using critical race theory (CRT) in addressing issues highlighted above. For him, CRT becomes a counter-narrative in challenging stereotypes, messages of subordination and the dominant culture (2014: 27). His work builds on empirical research in the UK and USA, and contributes fresh and new insights into engaging and working with black men. His work supports the argument that many of the issues associated with BYM's desistance and rehabilitation are usually addressed within criminal justice and statutory services orientated frameworks, resulting in sometimes punitive and inappropriate responses. Researchers like

Anderson (1999), Gunter (2012), Regan (2010), Beckford (2004), and Pitts (2008) also support this.

Anderson (1999, 2008) and Rich (2009) offer insights into the lives and dynamic of black youngsters in some US inner city areas. Anderson's ethnographic approach explores issues associated with youth violence, crime and social deprivation and its link to moral and ethical lifestyle choices. Rich's engagement with black young men emerged out of his curiosity as a medical doctor, having to deal with the trauma associated issues of young black men being shot or maimed by violence. His concern was not to become desensitised and detached from their pain and realities, but to enter into a more critical conversation regarding how to effectively engage, support and understand these men. His reflection is worth quoting at length here:

Behind the statistics and data, behind the observations of researchers like me and urban ethnographers like Elijah Anderson, are the young men themselves. Sadly, because of their social position and the legacy of violence, racism and poverty into which they have been born, they have become, for many, strange icons of fear. Each time a shooting or stabbing or an assault is reported in the news, the detail obscure a young man with a story, a young man with real blood running through his veins. Without any access to their voices, we could easily formulate solutions that are out of sync with the realities of their lives and that would be ineffective or outright destructive. Without hearing their stories, we lose sight of the young men who hold real hope for the future, whose visions for community embrace peace and nonviolence. (2009: xv)

Whilst acknowledging the complex web of interactions highlighted by Rich and potential challenges associated with young people's lives (see diagram below), it is important to note that the majority of young people in urban and inner city areas are able to engage with everyday living without involvement with the criminal justice process. In effect, their lifestyle choices and daily activities do not represent any major concerns (Anderson, 1999; Regan 2010). However, as highlighted in the work of Glynn (2014) and Gunter (2010), some of those BYM caught up in the 'criminal justice web' because of their criminality, particularly its association with guns, knives, gangs and violence, have caused damage and devastation to individuals and communities, resulting in new and revised government legislation and policies regarding tackling gun and knife crime as highlighted in numerous UK Home Office reports (Home Office 2004, 2006). Having said that, the empirical work of Glynn has highlighted that BYM caught up in the above context expressed that they felt detached and isolated from those in positions of power and influence who could offer them effective help and support to exit their criminal lifestyles.

A commissioned Children's Society study into black young people's experience of the youth justice system argued that:

The over representation of black young people in the youth justice system is well documented, yet relatively little is known about how young black people experience and perceive the youth justice system. The Children's Society believes that only by listening to young people can we fully understand their experience and seek more effective solutions to the challenges they face. (Wilson and Rees, 2006: 47)

The Children's Society study used two key research methods. The first, the 'Snowball Technique', where a youngster already involved in the research is asked to identify others who may be willing to take part in the research. The second was to use a range of community, church and youth groups to 'broker' contacts with their young people who might be willing to engage. Forty seven young black people took part in this study, with the majority being BYM between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. Wilson and Rees admitted that it was difficult to get some youngsters to participate in one-to-one interviews, with them displaying a range of responses, varying between 'suspicion and even hostility to simple indifference about any research involving questions about the police and other agencies of youth or criminal justice' (2006: 5).



It is evident from research already undertaken that obtaining BYM's narratives and representing their lived experiences is best achieved through systematic, empirical processes that are sensitive to the needs and context of participants, therefore minimising potential suspicions, as in the Children's Society study. Anderson (1999) and Rich (2009) from the USA and Glynn (2014), Gunter (2010) and Pitts (2008) were all mindful to ensure their work

represented culturally competent approaches. That is, approaches able to effectively engage and interact with different cultures, socio-economic and racial backgrounds. The next section offers thoughts as to how research associated with black communities and black youth and BYM in particular can be constructed.

2.4 Framing the Issues and Challenges Facing Black Young Men

In attempting to establish an understanding surrounding BYM's interconnected issues as represented in the diagram above, we are faced with a number of inherent difficulties. There are contradictions and dichotomies involved in framing a research strategy that effectively captures the 'experiential dynamics' of these men. Whether an ethnographic approach is used, as in Anderson (1999, 2008), I am mindful that it represents one of the numerous empirical research perspectives. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that any approach applied does not erode the fluidity and sensibilities to be researched (Gunter, 2010). Other important considerations here relate to the influence of the researcher's gender, race, religion and class, factors that may be contributors or inhibitors to obtaining authentic narratives of the 'realities' of BYM, an area considered in chapter three.

In seeking to understand BYM's lifestyle choices, their involvement in criminality and how these issues are represented, some researchers have suggested that a 'naturalist' perspective can minimise the reliability, generalisability and validity of the data emerging from some ethnographic type research approach, which may have depended on a more participant observation method. Gunter (2010), along with Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), challenges the notion that a participant observation method in isolation is capable of employing explicit and standardised procedures that can be replicated across a number of settings and against the

same set of facts (Gunter, 2010:39). This situation, I would argue highlights the potential challenges and tensions between scientific and naturalist researchers seeking to ‘make meaning out of others’. Consequently, Elliot and Stern highlight the need for caution, suggesting:

[N]ot to assume that everyone approaches the subject from a common social and cultural framework. People from different societies and cultural traditions have a range of attitude beliefs and values that affect how they define ‘*acceptable*’ standards and practices what they define as ‘*ethical*’ issues and how they perceive and respond to these issues. (1997: 1)

This reinforces my argument for considering multidisciplinary perspectives and approaches in this work, therefore, taking much greater notice of other disciplines, as already highlighted in chapter one. In our continued discussion, it is important to highlight the fact that this work is, in effect, dealing with a gendered context, where the need to explore the racial and masculine dimensions of BYM men are necessary, as argued by Glynn (2014). Rich (2009: xv) acknowledges that the BYM we are concerned about are already stigmatised. Their social position, the cycles of violence, racial stereotyping and poverty into which some are born further serve as ‘isolators’ from being ‘socially included’ as men with potential, who for complex reasons have become associated with crime. In line with Rich’s concern, Hutchinson’s book, *The Assassination of the Black Male Image*, highlights the following US perspective:

Nine out of ten adult black males are not in prison, on parole or on probation. Nearly eight out of ten blacks graduate from high school. Nearly six out of ten young blacks reside in two-parent households. (1996: 44)

Whilst not oppositional to Hutchinson's challenge to the negative portrayals of black men, this work is more interested in understanding the situations associated with that 'one in ten' that is in prison, on parole or probation and the 'two out of eight' black youngsters that did not finish school. Having said that, some researchers have argued that BYM are also 'trend setters', having developed a cultural identity expressed through their music, dress code and speech, both in the UK and USA (Byfield, 2008). With this said, Anderson highlights, what for me, remain some of the key issues when analysing the situation pertaining to BYM. He suggests:

Living in areas of concentrated ghetto poverty, still shadowed by the legacy of slavery and second-class citizenship, too many young black men are trapped in a horrific cycle that includes active discrimination, unemployment, poverty, crime, prison and early death. When they act out violently, or are involved in dramatic crimes that make the news, the repercussions for the general image of the young black man can be far reaching. Strongly identified with violent criminality by skin colour alone, the anonymous young black male in public is often viewed first with fear and suspicion, his counter-claims to prosperity, decency and law-abidingness notwithstanding. (2008: 3)

In strengthening Anderson's argument, Alexander (2010) offers a view that black men are situated near enough to the bottom of the masculine 'ladder', which I argue here suggests that BYM's 'realities' are more likely to be seen with suspicion and negativity. White and Cones offer a perspective that adds credence to the work that needs to take place if black men are to experience a sense of inclusion and belonging, given their already marginalised positions:

Black man has been typecast as America's villains. It is our desire to show their true measure. We were taught by the Black men in our lives to carve out a positive template of Black male identity; we hope that this book will serve, in turn, as a measure of hope to other Black man – and as a lesson to society as a whole, so that people may not only better understand the individual Black man but also comprehend the challenges he faces in his life. It was the same spirit of hope, optimism, and rebirth that inspired the Million Man March. (1999: 4)

What is emerging from the picture above, is a context where BYM are represented by researchers and the media in ways that may not necessarily concur with how the young men would represent themselves (Rich, 2009). For Bowling and Phillips (2002), the negation of a positive understanding and insight into black men's masculine identity only serves to continue a process of subordination of black men by systems and institutions generally lead by white men, with policies and procedures that could inadvertently or deliberately be used to perpetuate what the Macpherson Report (1999) categorises 'institutional racism'. The report argues that:

Racism in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which disadvantage or advantage people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. In its subtle form, it is as damaging as in its overt form. (1999: 20)

Whilst understanding Bowling and Phillip's argument and acknowledging Macpherson's argument, my interest in this project is with, what I argue to be the subordination and 'othering' of BYM by BMCs (more fully discussed in chapters four, five and six.

Having considered some factors that may contribute to why and how BYM are categorised or problematised, the next section explores further issues associated with BYM and their criminal justice encounters.

2.5 Criminal Justice Encounters

Both USA and UK research and reports have highlighted and further reinforced some concerning statistics and issues regarding BYM. These are related to some of the following:

- BYM's deaths in police custody (Sanders, Young and Burton, 2010).
- Disproportionate numbers of black men stopped and searched by the police (Home Office, 2006).
- BYM more likely to die from gun and knife related incidents than their white or Asian counterparts. McLagan (2005) claims that between 60-70% of gun-related murders and shootings are incidents of 'black-on-black' violence.
- BYM are over-represented in the prison population and under-represented in many colleges and universities (Beckford, 2004; Glynn, 2014).

- BYM associated with gangs, guns and violence more likely to receive heavier prison sentences than their white or Asian counterparts (Glynn, 2014; Gunter, 2010).

Whilst not an exhaustive list, this picture seriously concerns me because it highlights factors that impact on the overall welfare and wellbeing of BYM as featured in this work. Issues associated with BYM's deaths and serious violence relating to gun and knife crime, have for the UK emerged as a key theme for government, faith and community groups over the past fifteen years or so (Gunter, 2010; Home Office, 2006; Regan, 2010). Research, police and government reports surrounding BYM's involvement in gangs and gun and knife crimes offer further insights into their criminality, as well as highlighting the disproportionate numbers in prison, dying in gang-associated violence and represented in police stop and search statistics (Home Office, 2006; McLagan, 2005).

Glynn suggests that there is a link between how black male criminality is researched by white men, who, he argues, have a 'hegemonic privilege', 'that profoundly impacts on many aspects of black men's masculinities and self concept' (2012: 30). Hooks (2003) offers a hypothesis here, arguing that black men's 'cool masculinities' are one way of pushing past the pressures and marginalisation that subordinates black men. Majors (1992), on the other hand, argues that black male 'cool masculinities' are, in effect, an attempt to mask or conceal their 'realities' and feelings of being subordinated and marginalised from white society. His notion of the 'cool pose' or 'cool mask' in the 'world' of BYM is highlighted in the following:

The cool mask is a defence system that is not instantly turned on and off. It becomes a deep-seated part of the black male's personality an integral part of the face he shows the world. Cool pose shapes black male interactions by helping them express strength and toughness with strict discipline and

conviction. Black males do not respect other black males who fail to display a strong image. Even if they do not feel strong on the inside, their deportment should announce strength, cool and self-assurance on the outside. (1992: 45)

The ‘problem and challenges’ of gang culture relating to BYM and its consequences continue to be an area plagued by conflicting, contested, limited and, at times, punitive responses (Regan, 2010; Anderson, 1999; Beckford, 2004). On the other hand, it is important to note that the issues associated with gangs, guns and knives does not only affect black youths (McLagan, 2005). However, there appears clear evidence suggesting that BYM are more profiled within gang categorisations and disproportionately represented in the criminal justice process, as stated earlier (Gunter, 2010). In areas with a high black presence, such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Nottingham, there appears to be some similarities regarding BYM in terms of community deprivation, peer influences, gang association, educational underachievement and school exclusions (Beckford, 2004). In its 2006–7 report on *Young Black People and the Criminal Justice System*, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee confirmed:

Eighty per cent of Black African and Black Caribbean communities live in Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Areas. Deprivation directly fuels involvement in some types of offence – such as acquisitive crime – and also has an important impact on educational achievement. (2007: 5)

This acknowledgement, alongside the works of Anderson (1999), Gunter (2012), Glynn (2014), Regan (2010), Rich (2009), Dimitriadis (2003) and Pitts (2008), as well as my experience, suggests that there are multiple issues impacting on BYM’s lifestyle choices that have lead some into criminality and subsequent encounters with the criminal justice system. Some of these issues will be explored in chapters four and five.

Our search for understanding and interventions to support and enable new approaches in dealing with the pervasive issues associated with BYM's criminality, moral choices and desistance is complex. In seeking to understand the dynamics of BYM within the fields of social science and theology, I am mindful of differing perspectives that may theorise their criminality and subsequent desistance within a 'racialised' context as in the works of Glynn (2012) and Russell (2002). Glynn's work acknowledges that whilst criminological theorising is concerned with why black men commit crime and their high rates of incarceration both in the UK and USA, little is known about black men's desistance (2012: 41).

For Beckford (2004:5), the underlying causes of gun crime and gang violence are the product of a systemic failure or multiple breakdowns in social, cultural, political, communal and moral forces in the urban context. Whilst acknowledging Beckford's approach and analysis, to have some grounding in a socio-political evaluation, it could be further enhanced with narratives and views of some victims and perpetrators of gun and knife related crimes. In questioning Beckford's lack of empirical data, there is a similar challenge to criminologists from Maguire (1996). Maguire argues that they should take more time engaging with the dynamics and functions of criminals whilst theorising.

Another perspective emerges from Grover (2008), who explores the relationship between crime, inequality and ethnicity and concludes that black men's desistance or disengagement from criminality is more rooted within a class, not a racialised, context. Whilst, understanding the different approaches and varied interpretations in exploring BYM's desistance trajectories, this work seeks to offer a more nuanced spiritual and specifically theological perspective,

which I argue is lacking in most of the studies. Having said that, Reno (2002) supports the notion of ‘finding spiritual purpose’ as a basis for desistance, which I would argue resonates with advocating a ‘practical Pentecostal street theology’ as proposed in chapter seven.

Glynn argues for new and fresh approaches to deal with BYM, suggesting that a more intersectional (considering gender, class, health, race, spirituality, community and education) approach is required, considering the interrelated systems and relationships influencing black men (2014). Russell’s position supports Glynn, but is more specific in that he advocates for a research model, namely ‘black criminology’ (2002: 145). Both Russell and Glynn arguably support the need for those engaging BYM to develop approaches that move beyond the stereotypes and assumptions and advocate models of engagement that are intersectional and interdisciplinary, allowing for critical conversations.

With young people’s involvement in ‘gun’ or ‘knife crime’ remaining at the forefront of community safety agendas, many practitioners are being asked to work on interventions with little or no evidence as to ‘what works’ in ‘anti-knives’ and ‘anti-guns’ strategies. A key question here is where are the voices of both perpetrators and victim in the development of solutions? As stated previously, Rich (2009) is clear that solutions without an input from those directly impacted will lack the real essence of developing ‘solution focused’ interventions. Graef also offers another model, in advocating a restorative justice paradigm. The notion here is for both victims and perpetrators to be given the opportunity, with their families, within a safe space to translate and channel negative experiences into more positive processes and frameworks. This process should only be implemented if both parties agree (2001: 15). Whilst this approach is dependent on the willingness of individuals to participate,

my experience in working with BYM raises further thoughts as to how feasible this approach would be, especially with gang-associated feuds, where a life may have been lost.

The next section examines issues associated with gang-associated categorisations and labels assigned to BYM.

2.6 Understanding Black Young Men and Gang-Associated Lifestyles

The shifting understanding of the nature of Urban Street Gangs (USG) has led to changes in the levels and types of responses in the UK, especially in relation to BYM. In the past fifteen years, research data has highlighted the need for a more evidence-based approach to tackling gangs. Evidence-based, in this context, refers to approaches that use empirical findings to develop approaches and perspectives that are effective in addressing gang-associated issues (Glynn, 2013, 2014). Having said that, we are faced with what Alexander (2008: 13) argues to be a concept ('the gang') 'that is marked more by disagreement and debate than by clarity and consensus'. She further suggests that their boundaries are fluid and slippery, with memberships that are uncertain, marked more by convenient fictions of urban masculinities and race than by empirical insight.

Whilst agreeing in part with Alexander's argument, the Home Office in 2004 facilitated a number of key conferences across the UK, aimed at bringing public service agencies and community groups together to engage in dialogue around tackling issues associated guns, gangs and knife crimes (Home Office, 2004). Having attended one of these conferences in January 2004, it was clear, from my perspective, that groups and agencies were motivated to be part of the solution in tackling gang-associated crimes. The conference sought to highlight what was understood to encapsulate 'gun culture'. The following emerged:

- Guns were a symbol of status, a sign of allegiance and weapon of choice for certain groups and gangs;
- Its association with the ‘bling’ (expensive clothing, jewellery and materialistic attitude) ghetto lifestyle of ‘gangster rap’ and hard, cool heroes of action films and video games;
- Guns are linked to the illegal drug trade;
- The use of guns in dealing with conflicts between groups and regions (Home Office, 2004: 10).

Whilst the above could be related to other racial groups, Rich (2009), Anderson (2008) and McLagan (2005) consider the associated consequences for BYM, given the concerns already raised in this project. Anderson (2008), Heale (2008), Pitts (2008) and Gunter (2010) highlight further factors that they suggest may contribute to BYM’s involvement in, activities, lifestyles and behaviours associated with gangs. These include:

- A need friendship or brotherhood
- A need for protection and security from other gangs
- A need to make lots of money quickly
- Family involved in gang lifestyle
- Media glorification of the gang lifestyle
- Lack of success in school/education
- Feeling bored – nothing to do
- Poor self-esteem and being misunderstood (Anderson, 2013; Anderson, 1999; Coughlan, 2008; Klein and Maxon, 2006).

Dimitriadis' work on, *Friendship, Cliques, And Gangs: Young Black Men Coming of Age in Urban America*, in exploring the notion of gangs amongst BYM, presents them as 'modes of association linked to antisocial behaviour' (2003: 18). Anderson, with a more family orientated comparison, states:

Youths who have strong family grounding – very decent folks, churchgoing families with nuclear or quasi-nuclear structures and with love and concern for the younger people – are often the most to resist. (1999: 115)

On one hand, Anderson represents a counter gang resistant perspective, however, this says little about youngsters who may not be directly involved as gang members but may be associated with friends or acquaintances already involved. Gunter (2010) suggests that, for some BYM, gangs fill a void for belonging, respect and offer a space to enhance their masculinity and 'cool pose', as highlighted above. Wilson's concern regarding BYM's gang affiliation and poor self-concept is represented in the following quote:

[A] young black man with no self concept will be motivated by self alienation, exhibit an ignorance of his ethnic heritage, engage in unbound hedonism, manifesting in deep insecurities, regarding his masculinities and masculine courage. (1991: 35)

Although there appears to be some representation of a culture/value-system emerging from some research referencing some BYM who idealise or legitimise violence as a means to resolve conflicts and gain 'ends' (specific community areas), this does not necessarily amount to being in a gang. However, it can represent the context in which, Anderson argues:

The primary victim of the present situation is the poor black family, which is experiencing a profound crisis. This crisis spreads as the young are drawn to the underground economy. The metaphor of a raging fire or cancer comes to mind. Crack leads to illness, death the proliferation of homeless children, crack babies, teenage pregnancy, violence, high rates of incarceration, and other problems ... In the community, the street has a kind of magical magnetic quality; it attracts those who are not well anchored to more conventional social forms. (1999: 235)

What appears clear here are the challenges to determine what would truly represent BYM as gang associates or gang members. Admittedly, we have some indicators, as highlighted above, however, I argue that the contention relating to gang categorisation remains an ongoing debate; therefore caution has to be taken in for example labelling any on group gang members. According to Regan:

It is almost impossible to put a figure on the number of young people involved in gangs. After all, they are hardly likely to want to identify themselves to those in authority, given what they are getting up to. That said, those do who speak up may well boast about having larger numbers than they actually do in order to magnify their status. (2010: 13)

Delgado and Stefancic also argue for a position and approach that allows black men to tell their stories within empirical frameworks, therefore affording them a degree of influence to shape and ultimately determine how they are contextualised (2000: 229). This could arguably also relate to how they respond to gang-associated labels. Whilst not at odds with Delgado

and Stefancic's proposed approach, it remains a minefield to determine the how, why and what of gang-related categorisations. Klein and Maxon highlights a point already made by Alexander (2008) relating to gang categorisations. They suggest:

The definitional issue has probably been the stickiest one that gang scholars have had to confront in the almost eight decades since Frederic Thrashers', pioneering efforts in Chicago (1927). All the attention paid to it has not until now yielded much consensus, a fact that in itself testifies to the complexity of the issues and the need felt by all gang scholars to find a useful and acceptable approach. (2006: 4)

The confusion around definition relating to gangs is not 'innocent' argue Klein and Maxon. They further suggest that there is a 'politics of labelling' involved when considering gangs. Gang-associated research represents varied notions of gang categorisation, from 'an organised group of young men', 'friends who hang out' to 'an organised group with an identifiable leader (formal or informal) who show unity and loyalty among themselves, especially in times of conflict'. However, what have become pronounced and concerning are the crimes, fear, intimidation and harm these gangs engender in communities (Anderson, 1999; Klein and Maxson, 2006: 68).

Amidst the contested views and discussions regarding gang definitions, Wilson brings us back to a reality of the challenges BYM face to establish an identity that fosters a positive outlook on life. He suggests that these men are plagued by some key challenges that are oppositional to them having wholesome and crime-free lives. He argues that many BYM involved within

the criminal justice system exhibit certain ‘reactionary masculinity’ traits represented in the following. The individual:

- Lacks a sense of social responsibility or social interest.
- Lacks a deep and abiding African identity and consciousness; exhibits an impoverished empathy for others.
- Tends towards rigid and excessive self-interest, self-centeredness, self-service, intolerance, stubbornness.
- Lacks self-control, discipline, persistence, and high frustration tolerance; lacks long-term goals and commitment to pro-social values.

(1991: 34–35)

Wilson’s suggestion is concerning here, because it in many ways reinforces stereotypes about BYM that may not have been intended. It appears that Wilson is making a strong point about BYM with little or no self-concept. He says they may be motivated towards lifestyles that are incongruous with personal, family and community welfare and wellbeing.

Another factor emerging from research is that of BYM and ‘absent fathers’. Gunter (2010) and Glynn (2013) highlighted in their respective research, that most of the young men they had engaged had something to say about absent fathers and the lack of positive black male role models. Interestingly, Glynn’s research in the USA and UK referenced ‘father deficit’ as a key issue in understanding the dynamics of BYM. His work highlights narratives, where some of these men expressed anger and resentment at not having a father or father figure around them as they transitioned to adulthood, resulting in the streets and peers becoming their role models (2013, 2014). This aspect will be further discussed in chapter five.

In line with the increase in academic writings regarding BYM, Hooks (2004) suggests that there is little written as to how black men might create *new* and different self-concepts as a basis for transitioning towards healthier, emotional, social and economic lives. Having acknowledged this observation, I would argue that more recent research from scholars like Rich (2009), Gunter (2010) and Anderson (2008) has gone some way to challenge Hooks' assertion. Rich (2008), for example, supports the approach of having critical conversations with young men involved in gang activities, some of who have been shot, resulting in him treating them in hospital. He argues for an 'empowerment process' that would enable these men to offer thoughts and approaches that would best help them to develop positive and healthy lifestyles. Maruna and Farrall (2004) also support the call for the active participation by BYM in determining effective approaches and routes towards their desistance.

The categorisation and lengthy prison (some receiving between 25 and 35 years) sentences of BYM labelled as gang members, I would suggest has less to do with gangs in general, but more to do with the negativity associated with BYM's gang membership or affiliation. The political, social and media representations in recent years have painted a picture of BYM being instigators of activities and behaviours, rendering some communities 'no go areas'. Hale's research helps here as it relates to BYM, gangs and criminal justice in Birmingham. He states:

West Midlands Police had the highest number of armed call-outs in the UK; one detective referred to Birmingham as being 'like the Wild West', as firearms incidents rose to at least one a week. As a city council officer put it: 'A few years ago the situation was out of hand. The city threw a lot of money into the gang problem. We

realised that the way in which it was being tackled was completely disorganised, and we realised that public authorities didn't understand the problem.' (2008: 119–20)

Whilst not negating the real challenges associated with finding solutions for what some cities class the 'gang problem', Wilson (2009) argues that there are racial and cultural forces at work here, which view BYM's association in gangs differently than other groups, therefore engendering a sense of 'moral panic'. The next section paints a picture regarding the UK gang context, suggesting that this is not a new phenomenon.

2.6.1 Gangs and Disorder in the UK – Nothing New

The challenges faced by city officials, community leaders, faith groups and numerous governments over recent years regarding crime, antisocial behaviour and gang violence is not new, argues Gooderson (2010). He suggests that gangs in various guises have been a consistent feature of the urban landscape of Britain over the years. This is also represented by Barry-Dee (2008), who argues that even seventeenth-century British towns and cities had gangs that routinely vandalised urban areas, were territorial, and were involved in violent conflict with other gangs. Barry-Dee's research offers historical and contemporary insights into the impact of gangs in urban communities across the UK. An example of this is the fear generated by the Mohocks and Hawkubites, who were said to have brought mayhem to the streets and alleyways of London during the early eighteenth century. Interestingly, Barry-Dee cites the prayer of a Reverend Divine in around 1715:

From Mohock and from Hawkubite, Good Lord, deliver me! Who wander through the streets at night, committing cruelty? They slash our sons with bloody knives and on

our daughters fall; and if they murder not our wives, we have good luck withal. Coaches and chairs they overturn, nay, carts most easily; from Gog and Magog, Good Lord deliver me. (2008: 3–4)

It seems that the responses to gangs have been as patterned as the behaviour of the gangs themselves. As the historical understanding of gangs and their place in urban life has deepened over the last thirty years, a body of evidence has emerged that claims that gang-related violence has reached epidemic proportions in certain UK cities (Regan, 2010; McLagan, 2005). Rarely do these two bodies of knowledge interact in any meaningful way. Current concerns around prevention, desistance, community-based intervention and intelligence gathering take little account of the theoretical perspectives, political and cultural nuances and analyses that characterise many of the historical discussions. There is a discussion to be had concerning the relationships between the knowledge needs and claims of those who manufacture information, those who consume it and those who are ‘acted upon’ based on it.

Over the last 30 years there have been two to three generations in black communities that have grown up seeing each other (children, parents and grandparents) experience disaffection and hopelessness, due to the consistent failure of some public authorities regarding education, policing, social care and health, employment, as well as the lack of community resources. Furthermore, issues associated with social exclusion, poor housing, racism and ‘poor self images’ are factors echoed by Anderson (1999) and Gunter (2010), that necessitate exploration when considering the context or dynamics of BYM, such as those involved in this research.

The next section concerns itself with the Birmingham context in which this research is located.

2.7 A Birmingham Contextualisation

Following the gang-related shootings in Birmingham of two innocent young women at a New Year's celebration in 2003, the increase of strategic thinking and interventions to address the issues associated with gangs and guns became main headlines for the media and key agenda items for community and state. During this period, as stated previously, a conference was held in Birmingham on gun crime. The Home Office minister at the time, Caroline Flint, stated:

Gun crime and gun culture has become a serious issue in many of our towns and cities. For some, carrying a gun has become a fashion and part of everyday life. The result has been the almost casual use of guns, and a loss of life that is wholly unacceptable (Home Office, 2004).

Audrey Gillan (2008), an award-winning journalist, in her *Guardian* article on 2^d September 2008 further highlights the difficulties faced by those seeking to address gang-affiliated crimes and issues. She again contextualised the Birmingham context by stating:

This is the reality on the troubled streets of Birmingham's Lozells, Handsworth, Newtown and Aston areas, thickly populated, and socially deprived inner city estates that have been peppered by the bullets of gang warfare for more than a decade. The killing of Dimitri Foskin, 24, last month near his home in Newtown brought Birmingham and its gang's attention not seen since two young women, Letisha

Shakespeare, 17, and Charlene Ellis, 18, were killed in the crossfire at a party outside an Aston hairdresser's early on New Year's Day 2003. The war between the Burgers and the Johnsons has claimed 27 young lives.

Gillan's article represented her understanding of the impact of gang-associated violence conflict. In her framing of the Birmingham gang problematic, she acknowledges that the 1990s saw significant network of gang affiliates that were predominantly black and were linked to two key gangs in the first instance. These were the Burgers (named after the burger joint they hung out in Soho Road) and the Johnsons, known as the Johnnies or JC (named similarly after a cafe in Heathfield Road). Hale (2008) brings a more detailed exposure to issues raised by Gillan, in that he has spoken to individuals he alleges were gang and ex-gang members.

Gillan's exploration of Birmingham's gang- and gun-associated violence and crimes included two key interviews. One was with Kirk Dawes, an ex-police officer, now director of West Midlands Mediation and Transformation Service, an independent organisation involved in gang mediation work and Dr Derek Campbell, chair of the National Independent Advisory Group on Criminal Use of Firearms, which liaises with the Home Office. Both Dawes and Campbell said that following the arrests of a number of key gang members involved in drug dealing, kidnappings, severe use of violence and influential in a number of shootings and fatalities, there emerged room for other members to aspire to become 'bigger' and 'badder' (more ruthless) than some of their heroes, who had received substantial prison sentences. According to Dawes, with these key individuals removed from the gang infrastructure, some of their followers sought to develop alternative groups, crews (another name for gangs) and

gangs. Some of these groupings emerged as affiliated splinter groups to the two main gangs as highlighted above.

In a number of encounters and discussions with key community individuals during this research journey, some interesting issues emerged. Although anecdotal, it is worth mentioning one of these discussions. This was with musical artists and youth mentor, who uses his musical lyrics to tackle issues such as gun and knife crimes in the community. From his perspective of working with BYM in the community, he supports the notion that a large percentage of young men that join gangs receive ‘loving affirmation’ and acceptance within these groups, which is not present in their natural or biological families. He explained how surprised he was to see children as young as ten expressing language and actions that fostered negativity and behaviours that could lead to criminality.

Whilst the above does not represent empirical data, it does raise concerns, from a significant community individual about young people, in particular black boys, who are seeing the ‘gangster lifestyle’ as one to aspire to (Anderson, 2008; Gunter, 2010). Research has highlighted that Birmingham’s youth gangs, whilst fragmented in some areas, still represent serious concerns for the City. The following represent some of the names given to these gangs or groups:

- Mob Squad,
- Blood Brothers,
- Power Hill Crew,
- SLASH,
- Bang–Bang,

- Badder Bar Crew,
- Raiders,
- Cash Money Crew,
- Sodom,
- KYG (Kingstanding Young Governors),
- Aston Panthers,
- C-Crew,
- South Side Mafia (SSM),
- Shere Punjab,
- Kings Norton Crew,
- Villa Youth,
- Zulus,
- Links Gang,
- The Muslim Birmingham Panthers

(Beckford, 2004; Glynn, 2004; Hale, 2008; Coughlan, 2008; McLagan, 2005)

Although not the emphasis of this work, it is important to acknowledge that the '90s also saw the emergence of a number of Asian and white gangs, although this was on a less highlighted and pronounced scale within the media arena' (Coughlan, 2008).

It was from the above context that the growing concern regarding Birmingham's 'gang problem' became a government priority, resulting in numerous government officials visiting and talking to key organisations and agencies involved in tackling the issues raised earlier.

There remains some of contention as to the degree to which we are able to quantify the extent of BYM's involvement in gangs. During this research I have spent many hours exploring social networking sites that BYM use to express some very real, 'hard core' and hard-hitting lyrics regarding street life and the 'code of the streets' (Anderson, 1999; Gunter, 2010). Sites like, Word on Road TV, grimeblog.com and YouTube are frequented by both the criminally involved and those not associated with criminality. 'Word on Road TV' is used by young people on a daily basis as source for UK street videos, covering genres such as Grime, Rap, R&B, Funky and Bass-line from London, Birmingham, Manchester and Nottingham.

Another area of concern for some researchers is what Wilson (1994) categorises as black-on-black violence, which is touched on in the next section.

2.8 Black-on-Black Violence

Acknowledging that BYM are killed by other BYM, because of gang or other issues, some have questioned the extent to which this has become 'accepted'. The category of 'black-on-black' violence is itself problematic, because all it does is separate BYM into a category that further links them to negativity, problems, challenges, someone to be feared and avoided; more so if one is gang-associated or deemed 'hard to reach'. Given that there is no category of 'white-on-white' or Asian-on-Asian violence, the assumption seems to be that BYM's violence against each other is somehow unusual and worthy of special police investigation. For many years, knife-crime has been endemic in some Scottish cities. However, there is no 'Scot-on-Scot' violence categorisation. This labelling, I would argue is a racially constructed phenomenon, which Glynn (2014) challenges, calling for the 'social scientific world' to develop clear and competent ways to explore, analyse and represent black men in ways not

constructed by white male hegemonic privilege. Glynn argues that the mass incarceration of black men further reinforces the notions of black men being inherently ‘criminal’, based on the disproportionate numbers ‘locked away’.

Although without ‘precedent’, the creation of a ‘black-on-black’ context relating to violence is arguably an example of the association of black peoples and their communities also with crime. McLagan’s (2005) research highlights how this categorisation has been used by the police and community safety partnerships in London and Birmingham. Scotland Yard’s ‘Operation Trident’ in London, for example, established a task force response team, for specifically targeting and working within the black communities regarding issues associated with guns, knives and violence. Similarly, in the West Midlands, the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence partnership was established with similar objectives to Trident.

Byfield offers a counter narrative to the black-on-black violence storyline in her book, *Black Boys Can Make It*. She challenges the notion of black young men as victims and argues that:

Black boys are not a homogeneous group. Contrary to popular view, they are not synonymous with underachievement. Many do achieve academically. Yet the press is littered with headlines about underachievement of black boys and a plethora of academic research focuses on the negative outcomes of their schooling. This persistent deficit model reinforces negative stereotypes and adversely affects their expectation, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. (2008: 3)

According to Byfield, the voices of black young men, in particular, are marginalised and restricted. Most media representations profile them in negative ways, as highlighted in the REACH research above.

The next section considers some of theories surrounding how BYM may be labelled.

2.9 Construction of Labels for Black Young Men

Whilst the works of Anderson (1999), Glynn (2014), Rich (2009) and Gunter (2010) have some representation of black youngsters from a ‘street level perspective’, the understanding and representation of urban youth, and in particular BYM, continues to be directed by the criminal justice system, government legislation, political considerations and the established media. For example, Omaji (2003) argues that criminal justice agencies very much influence thinking and imagery around ‘urban youth’, especially in relation to attitudes and activities labelled ‘deviant’ and ‘challenging’. He notes that often these agencies draw on ideas and perspectives derived from classical sociology and deviance studies. For him, mainstream approaches to the ‘youth problematic’ are rooted in simplified versions of theories, ranging from Durkheim’s work on anomie to Merton’s discussions of strain to Cohen’s work on social control and ‘folk devils’. All of these explain how social structures and processes direct orientations towards involvement in behaviours deemed dysfunctional or criminal. In their simplified forms, these studies of *Classical Criminology* offer frameworks that do not disturb the status quo.

On the other hand, Ferrell and Websdale (1999) suggest a growing number of scholars and researchers have problematised the study of crime, deviance and social control itself and

focused on the complex mediated dynamics that construct meaning within these domains. This paradigm of *Cultural Criminology* frames its analysis in a mode that embodies sensitivities to image, meaning and representation. Farrell and Websdale seek to deconstruct and address the manufacture of mythic and misleading public images associated with urban youths and their families. This strand in the literature focuses on the processes and structures of power that construct and impose images on particular social phenomena in particular times, places and milieus.

I would argue here that the constructed 'images' of BYM are associated with negative pictures emerging from the activities of a minority involved in criminal activities and behaviours. With Farrell and Websdale in mind, Madhubuti argues that there is a 'war on Black men' that seeks to disempower, marginalise and render them 'dysfunctional'. He suggests that where black families are effectively dismantled, this may result in some of their male members entering lifestyles and behaviours that only serve to detract from the creation of 'sane, healthy and energetic youth; provide basic life-giving and life-saving support systems' (1991: 77).

Becker, whilst firmly in the *Classical Criminology* paradigm, offers a bridge to more contemporary theorising. His work on 'labelling' argues that deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather a consequence of the application of rules and sanctions to an offender by others. For Becker, the deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied (Becker, 1963). Deviant behaviour is behaviour that people successfully so label. In these terms, BYM are labelled 'hard to access', 'problematic' by policy makers, whose

overall remit, I would argue is to provide policy and services that protect those Merton (1938) describes as ‘conformists’.

Pryce (1979) conducted one of the earliest studies relating to black young people in St Pauls, Bristol. His study, although dated, has some relevance for our exploration, as it focused on the first generation of Caribbean migrants to the UK, who came with high aspirations and ambitions, but found themselves consigned to a force of cheap labour and labels, which isolated and marginalised them from effective social and economic resources (Ely and Denny, 1987). Black parents and children were subjected to racial discrimination that resulted in ‘endless pressure’. Pryce identified two types of adaptations to this pressure, law-abiding conformity and rebellion. Whilst some first generation parents tended to choose ‘conformity’ and aspired towards integration, the second and third generation were more likely to adopt the second response (Coombe and Little, 1986). Whilst Pryce’s study offers some nuanced appreciation and understanding of BYM at the time, insights into the ‘macho culture’ of African-Caribbean men and boys, it, however, had a narrow focus, more to do with the influences of Jamaica and its ‘rude boy’ cultural representation, which I address in Chapter five.

Pryce’s research, whilst dated and at times lacking in a more critical conversation and analysis surrounding BYM, offers thinkers and scholars like myself data that one can critically analyse and add to in the development of new and fresh approaches to researching black families and BYM. For example, Pryce argued effectively over thirty years ago that the ‘black macho’ behaviour seen in BYM was culturally learnt and subsequently ‘perfected’ for surviving on the streets. This concept is also echoed in the works of Anderson (2008). For O’Donnell and

Sharpe (2000) and Cashmore (1988), Pryce crossed the 'ethical mark' in his work when he associated the label of delinquency with Rastafarianism, which Pryce himself admitted was a stereotype in the subsequent edition of his book.

The 1980s saw two major disturbances in UK cities heavily populated by young black people, raising further concerns about policing issues, as highlighted in the Scarman Report of 1982. Coombe and Little contextualise the position facing black youngsters and communities at the time. They state:

Relationship between young blacks and the police are very fraught, and have been so for many years. Black youths were the major targets when the 'sus' laws were in operation. (1986: 73)

Moore (1996) represents a notion of 'Cultural Transmission' and intergenerational transaction between two groups of people living within the same cultural environment. According to cultural transmission theory, in the socially disorganised and poorest zones of the city, certain forms of crime have become the cultural norm, transmitted from one generation to the next as part of the normal socialisation pattern. According to this theory, successful criminals provide role models for the young, demonstrating both the normality of criminal behaviour and the possibility that crime may pay. This theory, according to Byfield, can be inverted to also operate positively, suggesting it enable black parents with a 'balanced' outlook to transmit similar values to their children. Byfield claims that a combination of the following could turn young people's lives around:

[P]ersonal ambition, parental support, empathic teaching, willingness to learn, self-belief, and self-confidence, acknowledgement of the value and benefits of educational achievements, a determination to work their way out of poverty, developing a competitive nature and life-style, not allowing distractions or disparagement even from friends and peer groups to deter them from achieving their personal goals and, above all taking personal responsibility for organising their lives and not looking to blame others for any of their shortcomings, failures, disappointments and setbacks. (2008: x)

The above sections have highlighted a number of key thoughts surrounding how the dynamics of BYM are perceived and constructed. It paints a clearer picture of some the issues facing BYM, allowing for greater understanding and sets the scene towards considering how a theological approach may be constructed in engaging them. The next section commences the thoughts regarding the development of a theological response to issues emerging from our research so far.

2.10 Towards Considering a Theological Response

An issue that has manifested in some of the research referenced above is the lack of effective, culturally competent and interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches for engaging and working with BYM categorised ‘hard to reach’(Glynn, 2013). Glynn argues that there is a persistent weakness of policy making in terms of the black community, BYM and gang-associated issues, because of their failure to examine the aspirations and goal-striving patterns of black youth and to engage them in critical dialogue with other ‘community champions’. Like Glynn, Rich (2009) is also concerned that the lack of critical conversations with black

youngsters relating to what might support them, amounts to formulating policies and solutions without a key part of the jigsaw.

For Pinn (2002) and Beckford (2004), the black church in particular has a role in engaging in conversations that are spiritual and critical, that lead to practical actions. This work seeks to offer a PT analysis and response that engages BYM more effectively, affording them the space to represent their 'realities'. It builds on some of the work already done within criminology, social science and education, to offer a theological perspective, which, I have already argued, is minute at best and absent at worst, in much of the debate regarding BYM, criminality, rehabilitation and desistance.

This work, as stated previously, is seeking to develop a framework, to allow for a more critical conversation about how BMCs may consider ways of engaging BYM (should they choose to develop a socio-political approach rooted in a revised theology). However, I am mindful of the potential challenges relating to working with BMCs that may already have traditions, doctrines and beliefs that are oppositional to the men in question. Beckford's challenge to BMCs argues for a 'prophetic approach' that uses scriptures and a theology for creating a countercultural, politically engaged and self-sacrificing worshipping community able to transform the disaffected and marginalised in urban Britain (2004: 7). Whilst agreeing in some way with Beckford's proposal, I believe it lacks the depth of critical thought and analysis required in his aim to develop a practical theological paradigm for working with gang-affiliated young people. Having said that, Pattison and Woodward (2000) clearly support the capacity of practical theology as a functional tool, arguably able to be applied in working with gangs and other disaffected individuals. They suggest that practical theology

has the scope for engaging with issues of contemporary human and religious concerns and interests.

2.11 Conclusion

The chapter has taken time to explore a number of key themes surrounding how BYM are categorised, labelled and worked with. It has also considered some of the challenges faced in attempting to engage BYM, who may be cautious or mistrusting of authority figures, which may include researchers, as highlighted in the Children's Society Study. This chapter acknowledges the complexities involved in seeking to develop interdisciplinary approaches in researching BYM relating to their involvement in criminality. What has become clear in this chapter is the absence of empirical theological research representing thoughts and feelings of BYM regarding their situation.

This chapter has highlighted other areas of concern and interest, requiring further development in this thesis:

1. To develop a PT framework for obtaining black young men's narratives to gain a greater understanding as to how best to engage and support them.
2. To interrogate the potential partnership possibilities between black young men and BMCs.
3. To explore how PT and PTR can offer greater insights into BYM's dynamics and further use PT approaches to develop ongoing conversations with these men.
4. To explore the possibilities of using an adapted PC for BYM to construct their own understandings of themselves and interventions that will support their rehabilitation and

desistance trajectories. To consider the possibility of developing a partnership protocol between BMCs and BYM, where critical and mutually enriching dialogue is possible.

Importantly the above issues will be addressed in subsequent chapters. However, this chapter has acknowledged the need for approaches and methods that would facilitate obtaining and analysing the authentic voices of BYM, towards creating a practical Pentecostal street theology that effectively responds to their situation. The next chapter explores the methodological frameworks and process for achieving this aim.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH CONTEXTUALISATION AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the practical theological context on which this research is grounded. My interest, in seeking to privilege the voices of BYM categorised ‘hard to reach’, gang-associated and ‘problematic’, is to understand their dynamics, interests and needs to facilitate a process for critical exploration. This analysis might allow for tools to be developed that are capable of being used in supporting these men on their transformational journeys. With this in mind, this chapter sketches out the process by which my role as BMC pastor and leader, the issues associated with BYM, possibilities for a mutually supportive dialogue between these men and BMCs are researched.

This chapter offers the methodological framework in which the following two questions along with their associated issues are explored:

1. What are black young men’s thoughts, perceptions and experiences regarding their behaviour and lifestyle choices, which have resulted in their association with such issues as gangs, guns, knives, violence and involvement in the criminal justice system?
2. What underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies inform, shape or inhibit the responses of BMCs to the situation of black young men?

In seeking to address the above questions, the chapter offers detailed thoughts relating to the research methodology and methods for undertaking the data gathering phase of this work. It

also considers some key ethical factors that govern how the research is undertaken. The chapter explains the processes involved in gaining access to YBM, both in prison and community, as well as engaging BMC leaders. Methodological processes for engaging both groups are represented in sections below. Importantly, the advantages and disadvantages of the approaches chosen for undertaking fieldwork interviews and focus group discussions and analysing research outcomes and findings are considered. Reflective moments in the field work process and overall research are captured in my 'reflective diary', which highlights certain emotions, feelings and thoughts pertinent to the project. This aspect also acts as empirical data source, with some extracts from the diary being included in chapters four and five.

In facilitating an enquiry to gain greater understanding of BYM's dynamics and how BMCs might effectively respond to them, it was important to consider the approaches and processes that would gain legitimate access to BYM to gain appropriate data that represents their narratives and experiences within a defensible ethical research framework. Whilst acknowledging the different ethical frameworks involved in research enquiries, it was necessary to initially engage with the ethical processes of the University of Birmingham, where this project is assigned. The next section sets out ethical research process applied in undertaking the empirical phase of the overall project.

3.2 Research Ethics

Having worked in the field of social work and operating as a pastor in Birmingham, I was familiar with ethical considerations or regulations as they related to situations or individuals I had worked with. However, it became increasingly clear that academic research was governed

by guidelines and processes, offering a number of different safeguards for actively engaging in one's research interest. Having commenced this project in 2001, I became increasingly familiar with different and new perspectives and approaches as represented in the works of Strauss and Corbin (1998), Creswell (2003), Dawson (2009), Gray (2009), Dickson-Swift et al. (2008) and Kathy Charmaz (2006), just to name a few. Whilst acknowledging the influence of these individuals, it was important to acknowledge the ethical governance procedures and requirements of the University of Birmingham for students undertaking research.

The University of Birmingham's guidelines on research ethics, introduced in September 2008, confirmed that students that had commenced their research prior to this period, whilst governed by the aspects relating to 'integrity and accountability' were not generally obliged to go through an application process to undertake work already started. However, for me, although I had started my project before the new guidelines were implemented, I had not in essence engaged in the empirical phase. Consequently, the two questions posed above were to be subjected to the full code of practice guidelines, requiring an application and approval from the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee. Having undertaken this process, ethical approval was granted to undertake empirical work with BYM and BMC leaders. Ethical considerations were, therefore, partly governed by the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Research ('Code') (2010–2011), the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998 and other legal provisions aimed at handling personal information (section 3 of the Code). This code provided the framework for the governance and the guidelines for researchers to undertake work, embedded in good ethical conduct and upholding good practice principles.

Although adhering to the University's ethical codes, principles and practices derived from the field of social work/science, my Christian commitment to treating people, spaces and opportunities with respect, humility, integrity and accountability was also paramount. The aspect of social and Christian ethics is also important in this work, but will be addressed in chapter six, which will consider BMC's perspectives and response to BYMs lifestyle choices, considering such issues as what determines right and wrong, also the moral principles and practices that motivates an individual or group to intervene in situations deemed 'wrong' or 'problematic'.

As highlighted in the introduction, the field of PT and PTR continues to be important in this project, because it offers the opportunity for critical reflection on actions. Whilst governed by ethical procedures, it also engages with scriptures and motivations emerging from the Christian faith, more specifically from a black Pentecostal tradition. Before considering more fully the research design for this project, the next section explores the notion of engaging with 'sensitive research', which I suggest this work represents.

3.2.1 Sensitivity Considerations

Whilst acknowledging that the enquiry with BYM was a research activity, using social scientific and interdisciplinary tools, Dickson-Swift et al. (2008) suggest that 'qualitative research is an emotional activity and researchers need to be aware of the emotional nature of the research and anticipate the effects that it may have on them and their participants.'

This, they suggest, has the potential to impact and influence an individual, group or community directly or indirectly and, whilst agreeing that all research has consequences, they

argue that some may result in harmful outcomes (2008: 1–2). Having said that, the associated issues of ‘socially sensitive’ research are governed by very serious guidelines, principles and legislations aimed at minimising the risk of negative or devastating outcomes.

Given that the empirical phase of this work seeks to understand key issues associated with a group of men that were already ‘problematized’ and linked to some very sensitive social concerns, namely gun and knife crime, violence and gang-related activities, I argue that this is indeed a sensitive research project. This work was therefore not without the insights, principles and perspectives of research proponents mentioned earlier, but also guided by perspectives in PT and PTR advocated by such scholars as Cartledge (2003), Andrews (2002), Pattison (2007), Stone and Duke (2006), Graham et al. (2005) and Thompson et al. (2008). These scholars offered me the tools and confidence to grapple with what was initially a daunting piece of work and enquiry, representing two distinct entities, namely theology and social science, BMC also BYM, or, put within a Pentecostal context, the ‘world’ and ‘church’.

Having acknowledged that this area of work was ‘sensitive’, potentially dangerous as well as emotionally draining, as suggested within the work of Dickson-Swift et al. (2008), it was discussed in numerous supervision sessions with my supervisor, who guided me regarding any challenges within the research journey. Our continued critical conversations during the process served to reinforce the need for safety of all involved in the project. Consequently, the University’s ethical approval process ensured that all factors relating to the research design and fieldwork activities were critically assessed in order to provide clear guidelines for managing risk and any other sensitive issues that may emerge within the project. With this in

mind, all introductory and consent letters for engaging respondents were approved by the ethics committee and for those respondents to be interviewed in HMP [REDACTED], a further approval process was undergone from their own ethical and risk management team.

Given the criteria (involvement or risk of involvement in criminality or criminal lifestyle) for respondent's inclusion in this process, I was also mindful that individuals may reveal information that might be emotionally painful, challenging or difficult for them to express and for me to hear. It was therefore my responsibility to ensure that all respondents had the opportunity to express any concerns or challenges emerging from the interviews and had access to advice or referral to professional support should it be necessary. This may mean referring them for counselling support or to other community and prison affiliated services. Importantly, following sessions, all respondents were given the opportunity to debrief, as agreed the ethical approval process. Copies of the introductory letter and the consent and debriefing forms are included in the appendix 1 and 4 of this thesis.

A further factor worth noting in this section is that of disclosures. Given that this research project sought to engage young men who could have disclosed illegal activities, it was ethically and legally my responsibility to inform respondents of my ethical obligation to report such disclosures to the authorities. Of course, I was mindful at the same time, that this had the potential to jeopardise the research. Consequently, it was made clear from the outset that the research was in no way seeking to incriminate individuals, put them at risk or 'promote offending' for the purpose of the project (Glynn, 2013). Having said that, individuals were made aware that during the research process, if a disclosure emerged that presented a threat to life or could potentially cause serious harm, then it would be relayed to

the organisational lead who referred them as potential candidates for the research. Furthermore, participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the process if they felt their lifestyle or activities were incriminatory.

3.2.2 Further Fieldwork Ethical Considerations

Having considered the above sensitive and ethical research issues, I was further mindful that there were other factors worth noting, as they also had potential to detract from or influence the project and overall research design. These issues included:

1. Participants in the community involved in an unknown (to me the researcher) conflict or contention from a 'code of the street' perspective, which may present a risk if seen travelling to his fieldwork interview.
2. Risk assessment from the researcher perspective does not determine the safety of participant outside the interview situation.
3. Care to be taken to ensure that participants do not glorify the impact of their crimes on their victims.
4. Prisons can play a significant role in enhancing or hindering the research process dependent on a whole range of variables, such as restricting prisoner's access to the research process, security issues and prisoner's visits by family and legal representation, etc. To keep the number of restrictions placed on the research to a minimum, it is important to keep the liaison and communication with the prison as on-going as possible throughout the duration of the research process.

In considering methodological and ethical issues associated with this project, it became clearer in my mind that seeking to understand the context of BYM, privileging their voices and exploring the potential responses of BMCs was a complex endeavour. Here, we are faced with, not only interdisciplinary conversations and methods, but also the need for combining urban or community auto-ethnography considerations, therefore ensuring that approaches were suitable for accessing participants, exploring and analysing their dynamics, some of which were filled with emotional pain and difficulties.

In acknowledging the above, I remained mindful of Dickson-Swift et al., their reminder about self-management in the research process, stating:

When recounting their experiences some of the researchers we interviewed talked about how they undertook a constant management of self in the research, especially in situations where there was a high level of expressed emotion: that is, people crying or feeling angry. As we outlined earlier, sensitive qualitative research is intimate and often goes into private spaces; often researches are with people who may be experiencing difficulties in their lives. (2008: 88)

The next section represents the research context in which BYM and BMC leaders were accessed.

3.3 The Context of Study

In addressing the questions posed in section 3.1 above, this research assumes that BYM in Birmingham, who have been the subject of numerous criminal justice encounters, associated with criminal and gang activities, potentially have insights and solutions regarding support they may require towards living crime free lives. Their narratives and experiences, I suggest have the potential to inform BMCs who seek to engage with this cohort of men, as well as their families. This suggests these men ‘telling and naming’ their own stories and experiences (Glynn, 2014; Rich, 2009). As noted in chapter one and reiterated in chapter two, the narratives of BYM have the potential to inform PT within the PC process as to the associated issues and dynamics that may hinder or support them on their transformational journeys. In exploring the world of these men, this project is seeking to assess their stories, consequently, offering some thought and principles which might inform BMCs in particular, who may seek to develop a practical Pentecostal street theology, towards supporting the desistance and rehabilitation journeys of these men.

In seeking to understand the world of BYM within a Birmingham context, an area I had worked in for over 35 years, it was important to refresh my mind as to the environment these men were accustomed to. It was, therefore, important to be familiar, for example with some of the social music network sites (Word on Road, YouTube and Grime Blog) that BYM in Birmingham frequented, sites that expressed views and thoughts relating to their lifestyle choices and general feelings (West Midlands Police, 2008; Glynn, 2004). The next section represents a more detailed contextualisation of where this research is situated.

3.3.1 The Spotlight on Birmingham

Birmingham is known to be the ‘Second City’, where the issues relating to BYM’s involvement with gangs, guns, knives and youth violence gathered momentum in the 1990s. Hale, in his book, *One Blood: Inside Britain’s New Gang Culture*, highlighted some of the key issues associated with the gang conflict between two rival gangs in Birmingham from the 1990’s onwards. His approach was to use content analysis, considering newspaper and media coverage of the issues, and to talk with some individuals who were ex-gang-affiliated at the time. He helps us here with the following context of an aspect of Birmingham’s gang-associated culture:

As one ex-gang member described them: ‘There was really only one head man at the top of both crews, with a couple of people working for him. That man had immense power: he could stop violence happening, and he could also gather a team together to initiate it. There was also an aspect of self-policing – if you knew a certain sub-group of one of the gangs had robbed stuff from you, you could phone him and he’d find it. There were about a hundred hard core mans – any shootings, stabbings or whatever was down to them. The number of houses shot up in this city must run into its thousands – and it got more territorial. (2008: 109)

The works of Beckford (2004), McLagan (2005) and Hale (2008) concur that the ‘guns and gangs’ agenda for Birmingham and nationally came more into the media spotlight and became a serious concern for the government and the black community more specifically in 2003, when two young women were killed in the crossfire of a gang-associated feud as

mentioned previously. This placed Aston in Birmingham on the ‘world stage’, with much media coverage over the following year.

The following *Guardian* article of 2 January 2003 gives a context:

Two teenagers were shot dead early this morning after a dispute at a party in Birmingham. Police said a member of the public heard a ‘considerable’ number of shots shortly after 4 a.m. from the hairdressing salon where the party was held. On arrival officers found a 17-year-old girl and 18-year-old woman and a third teenager with gunshot wounds outside at the back of the premises in Birchfield Road Aston.

The 17- and 18-year-old died of their wounds despite efforts by the police and paramedics to revive them while the third was taken to hospital, where her injuries are not thought to be life threatening.

It later emerged that a fourth teenager at the party was admitted to hospital with gunshot wounds.

The road around the murder scene was sealed off while officers conducted house-to-house inquiries. A car riddled with bullet holes was later recovered nearby and is being forensically examined but the police do not know how it was linked to the killings. (cited by Beckford, 2004: 1)

The subsequent investigatory process undertaken by the police resulted in the conviction of up to eleven leading Birmingham gang members linked to the shootings. Some of these individuals were given up to thirty years prison sentences (Heale, 2009; McLagan, 2005).

Further gang-, gun- and drug-associated incidents in Birmingham linked to BYM further profiled this agenda, resulting in government reports and interventions regarding issues of gang- and gun-associated crimes (Home Office Conference at The Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 19 and 20 January 2004).

Beyond the coverage of the tragic 2003 incident, however, the sometimes sensational and ‘moral panic’ responses of the media lack any detailed or critical analysis or enquiry into the very complex world of BYM. Importantly, issues associated with BYM’s employment status, educational under-achievement, over representation in the criminal justice and mental health systems, poverty, housing, racial stereotyping, racism, family relationships, peer influences are just some of the factors in an interconnected web that potentially impact our understanding of these men’s gang association in a Birmingham context. For some commentators, institutionalised racism, poverty and lack of opportunities remain at the centre for BYM remaining socially marginalised (Gunter, 2010). A cautionary reminder here, however, is represented in Byfield’s (2008) work, which challenges perspectives that subscribe to populist notions, portraying all BYM as belonging to a larger homogenous group and that these men are ‘deviant’ and a ‘problem’. Byfield’s work clearly argues for seeing the potential in BYM to become positive role models and not be located within a gangs, guns and ‘violent crime’ categorisation.

Gunter (2010: ix–x) brings another perspective by challenging researchers and the academy for being preoccupied with a notion of a ‘black youth problem’ or black youth subcultures, resulting in what he argues to be a theoretically myopic research focus, concerned with the ‘sensational’ and ‘spectacular’. This position, according to Gunter, down-plays the mundane

character of BYM's lives in favour of 'eye-catching activities', such as gang violence and gun and knife crime. Whilst understanding Gunter's concern here, this research seeks to empirically represent the context of what he argues to be the 'spectacular', at the same time, ensuring that mundane issues relating to BYM are not negated.

Having offered some thoughts as to the areas of my empirical enquiry and the context in which this exploration takes place, the next section concerns itself with the approach and methodological considerations.

3.4 Methodological Considerations

This research is interested in gaining better understanding of the dynamics of BYM, who for numerous reasons, have become involved and associated with criminality. In effect, this study is seeking to obtain their authentic 'voices' or narratives about their life style choices, involvement in criminal behaviour and activities, as well as their thoughts as to what may support them to desist and live free from criminal involvement or activities. Furthermore, the practical responses and thoughts of BMCs relating to the needs and interest of BYM are also important to the study.

This work is seeking to explore and analyse a sample group of individuals regarding some very sensitive thoughts, issues and feelings as acknowledged previously. Consequently, I had to consider the different approaches, offering the appropriate tools for exploration and analysis. Given I was seeking to consider a sample group for this study, affording me the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding, it became clearer during the research design phase that a qualitative methodological approach and perspective would be suited for the

study, because it sought to explore such issues as behaviour, experience, motivation, feelings and attitudes. This is supported by numerous research proponents and scholars, suggesting that qualitative research relates more to exploring attitudes, behaviours and experiences, as opposed to a quantitative methodology, which has more leaning towards verification regularity, statistical analysis and satisfaction regarding certain issues (Dawson, 2009; Grey, 2009). Dawson's approach helps us further here. She indicates that:

Certain words help to suggest a leaning towards qualitative research, others towards quantitative. For example, if you have written 'how many', 'test', 'verify', 'how often' or 'how satisfied', this suggests a leaning towards quantitative research. If you have written words such as 'discover', 'motivation', 'experience', 'think', 'thoughts', 'problems', or 'behave /behavior', this suggests a leaning towards qualitative research. (2009: 20)

Dawson, however, also supports the use of both approaches (triangulation), suggesting it has the potential to counteract the weaknesses in both qualitative and quantitative research. Whilst worth mentioning, I was not swayed from using a qualitative approach, given the need to explore in-depth narratives and insights and to build research relationship with respondents. The positives for undertaking this work within a qualitative methodological framework seemed appropriate in this project.

In choosing a methodology that would help me in studying the social realities of BYM, it was also important to consider the methods, offering a set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analysing the data from BYM and BMC leaders. It was clear, at least in my

own mind, that I was embarking on exploring some difficult situations and circumstances aligned to individuals whose stories needed to be told with honesty, commitment, compassion and sense of advocacy. This I would argue represents some core values that make this research credible. The next section, therefore, considers the research methods.

3.4. 1 Research Methods

As stated previously, this research process seeks to explore and analyse BYM's narratives, considering the possibility of facilitating a critical conversation with their stories and BMCs, which is considered in more detail in chapter six. In order to obtain key data for facilitating such a dialogue, I had to consider methods that would provide me and respondents maximum opportunity to gain understanding. According to Bell, 'Methods are selected because they will provide the data you require to produce a complete piece of research' (1987: 50). Given that there was a possibility for some of the respondents not to have completed formal education, which may have impacted on their reading and writing abilities, my thought was to minimise involving them in any form of detailed writing or completion of questionnaires.

Again, I was mindful that this was a sensitive research project that needed methods and analytical tools that would facilitate relationship building, trust development, open dialogue around key issues and the creation of a safe and comfortable environment. Consequently, I used taped interviews, guided by semi-structured questions. This was to record the interactions and to allow me to better observe participants and record any significant physical, emotional responses felt pertinent to study. The use of a personal journal was also adopted during the empirical research journey as stated earlier. In using PTR, I was also able to consider my approach, thoughts and attitude to each interview.

The use of grounded theory as an analytical tool was considered suitable for this project, because it consists of systematic, yet flexible, guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded in the data themselves’ (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). Within a grounded theory process, the project was able to consider any emerging issues and patterns that could subsequently be applied in modifying and reformulating theories and practice. More will be said about grounded in the interview section, given that this theory is intended to influence and shape questions as themes emerge. In the next section consideration is given to how BYM were selected for the study.

3.5 Study Sample

This project involved respondents from a diverse range of offending behaviours and activities, which included, anti-social behaviour, armed robbery, drugs offences, gang-related crimes and violence, also those identified to be at serious risk of entering any of the above. These individuals were identified by leaders, me and coordinators from the following Birmingham UK-based organisations with which I have and continue to have meaningful working relationships in my capacity as pastor, community advocate and volunteer. I was, therefore, known to some of the respondents to be involved in the study. However, it was important that the following organisations were all willing to become a ‘brokerage’ and conduits for accessing BYM to participate in the research:

- Bringing Hope Charity (organisation working with gang-associated families in prison and community)
- Young Disciples Limited (youth development organisation working with high risk young people)

- Shalom Consultancy and Counselling Practice (Partnership Organisation of Bringing Hope, offering counselling and therapeutic work to clients)
- HMP ██████████ (hosting young men involved with above organisations)

The sample included fourteen black young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five from organisational referrals, as well as ‘the informal networking of the snowball technique (where those interested are asked to suggest others who may be interested)’ Reason (1994: 145). The age range chosen was because this is the age that black young men’s experiences and representation within the criminal justice process is highlighted as needing greater understanding (Gunter, 2010; Glynn, 2014). In effect, organisations identified individuals they deemed suitable and would make the initial contact regarding the research project.

In ensuring that this research process was robust, transparent and fulfilled the ethically approved procedures, the following factors were considered and applied:

1. Selection Criteria – Ensuring that there was a selection criterion, approved by ethics committee that was able to identify suitable respondents from prison and community to engage in the research process. Furthermore, that a similar criteria process was approved for selecting BMC leaders focus group.
2. Pre-piloting questions for BYM – To ensure that interview questions would allow young men to openly express their stories, it was appropriate to ask up to three young men to offer thoughts about the types of questions that would facilitate authentic responses regarding the interests and needs of BYM who were associated with crime.

3. Engagement – This aspect is to ensure that respondents, once contacted, were seen in safe environments, with minimum outside distractions, and that ample time was given to putting participants at ease (relationship building phase).
4. Briefing – Ensuring respondents have full awareness of the research and interview process, also their option to withdraw, to see their transcript or to hear the recording of their interviews.
5. Interview – To ensure that digital equipment was suitable for recording data for subsequent transcription and those recordings be stored in a secured cabinet or other locked space. This is to maintain the process of confidentiality offered prior to the interview and approved by the ethics committee.
6. Debriefing – Ensure that respondents have the opportunity to reflect on the process of being interviewed and express any feelings of distress or concern. Furthermore, reiterating their right to have their data removed or withdrawn from the study. However, pointing out that should they choose to withdraw, it would be important to do so within the time frame highlighted in their consent form (copy in Appendix 3).
7. Field work journal – Ensuring that my thoughts and feelings, as well as my observations are recorded within 24 hours of interview, therefore capturing initial reflections regarding the interview process and participant’s responses.
8. Transcription – To ensure that the narratives of respondents are represented as accurately as possible, with the awareness that BYM’s language from a ‘street perspective’ may require further translation within the coding and analysis phase of the study. Another key factor here was for the researcher to be familiar with the data, so that it could be credibly represented.

9. Coding of Data – To ensure that the data from each interview was coded by using a grounded theory approach represented by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006). From this process, the researcher was able to commence analysing and theorising from the qualitative data acquired.

Importantly, this study is not seeking to claim a generalised position from its findings, nor is it a comparative study with other young men in Birmingham. However, it is seeking to identify and make sense of key and pertinent issues associated with a cohort of BYM that are able to inform and support BMCs and those interested in developing effective approaches in responding to these men.

Given that some of the young men were already familiar with me, this raised certain questions as to whether they would be ‘open’ and ‘honest’ or become intimidated by my role as ‘researcher’. The positives here were that some respondents would have already been in a trust or familiar relationship, which could be advantageous, given that this cohort of men was known to be untrusting of authority, cautious of ‘outsiders’, feeling stigmatised and labelled, feeling misunderstood and misrepresented.

On the other hand, my experience reminded me that some of these men could also be unreliable and unpredictable, especially with people with whom they have no prior experience or relationship. Having said that, I was also mindful of the possibility of respondents sanitising issues or becoming hesitant to highlight factors that they believe may be offensive or contradictory to me as a minister or perceivably a ‘moral person’, which I suggest, can point to issues associated with social and Christian ethics which is considered in chapter six.

With the above considerations, I suggest, that the relationship with respondents already known to me and the organisations they were affiliated, was more of an advantage than disadvantage for this project.

In choosing to explore BYM's narratives through PT lenses, using the PC framework, as already acknowledged, a qualitative methodology and methods were decided on to obtain a clearer picture of these men's experiences. The next section considers the associated issues and processes involved in undertaking fieldwork interviews.

3.6 Interviews

I was mindful from the outset that I was a black researcher, with an 'insider knowledge and perspective', connecting with BYM, who may have had negative or challenging experiences with individuals or institutions they associated with white racism and oppression. This was arguably a privileged position; one that I had hoped would contribute to rich data emerging from my interviews. However, I had to be mindful about entering the interview process governed by certitude, that openness and honesty was guaranteed. On that cautionary note, Gunaratnam (2003) suggests that the race of the interviewer and the space where they interview can have impact on the levels of openness and honesty within the research process. Dickson-Swift et al. offer further considerations regarding respondents' capacity to be open, honest and trusting of researchers. She suggests that there is also research evidence, arguing that a respondent's lack of relationship and professional distance is also able to engender disclosure of personal and sensitive information. According to Dickson-Swift et al.:

Some of the researchers that we interviewed acknowledged that their participants often share private information about certain aspects of their lives that they would not normally expect to hear due to their status as a stranger. (2008: 34)

This argument evidently, challenges my notion of it being advantageous to interview respondents that may be known to me, however, it was an approach which I believed was suitable within the context of the study as argued earlier.

The use of semi-structured questions (see copy in Appendix 5) allowed for respondents to freely offer thoughts, opinions and stories as the interview progressed, which from the PC framework offers further data for analysis, building a clearer picture for developing an informed response to the needs and interests of BYM. It is from this data that, an adapted form of the grounded theory process was applied as mentioned earlier, represented in the works of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006).

I remained mindful that I was a black researcher who sought to create a safe space for BYM to talk freely about themselves and their understanding of what responses could potentially support them to desist. The intention was, therefore, to offer a space and approach for open and transparent dialogue. For Spence, this 'safe space' serves as an important function where, for example, BYM, as those represented in the study do not feel obliged to defend their racial identity or humanity (2010: 68).

All those interviewed expressed how comfortable they felt with my approach and interest in them, as well as their stories. Again, many of them expressed how important it was to have a

researcher who understood their background and was not unfamiliar with the issues associated with 'the streets'. Whilst confident about my approach to engaging and interviewing these men, I was always mindful that the trust and confidence developed during the process was to be momentary, which at times resorted to me feeling that these men were 'being used'. Having said, the emphasis on 'research integrity' and functioning within a defensible research process cancelled such a feeling. It is within this defensible research process that the next section considers the briefing and debriefing processes for respondents.

3.6.1 Briefing and Debriefing

In order to undertake this research within a given time frame, following on from the ethical approval stage, organisations in community and HMP [REDACTED] were contacted to confirm names of respondents taking part in the research.

All respondents were given copies of the introductory letter and consent form (see Appendix 1 and 4), explaining the context of the research and their contribution to the overall project. The letter was, therefore, used in each interview to brief and reiterate the value of each participant. Sessions concluded with a debriefing, allowing for participants to offer any thoughts regarding the process or content of the interview. It was clear from both briefing and debriefing sessions that the men felt supported and valued to be able to 'tell their stories' in a safe and environment without being 'judged'.

Several respondents commented that what they had expressed in their interviews, related to issues they had kept and not shared prior to the interviews. Some also commented on how comfortable they felt being able to talk about faith, religion and moral issues. Being

acknowledged as a son, father and brother, some men said reminded them that the labels associated with their criminality should not diminish their desires to live a life outside of a continued criminal justice encounter. For the four respondents in prison, they were more expressive about their frustration of being labelled a 'black offender' or 'black ex-offender', because they felt this to be a perpetual barrier to their progression to living crime-free lives. This is due to (according to them), not being treated equally or fairly in areas of employment, training or education.

3.7 BMC Focus Group

As with obtaining full ethical approval for engaging BYM, a similar process was undertaken for implementing a focus group of nine key BMC leaders (3 female and 6 males) in Birmingham. These individuals understood that I had already gained greater understanding regarding the young men categorised as problematic, gang-related, criminal, violent and dysfunctional (Anderson, 1999; Gunter, 2010; Rich, 2009). It was also agreed that focus group participants would be men and women, leading churches in areas of Birmingham, known for its association with gangs, guns, violence and black young men categorised as problematic. It was within the focus group context that these leaders were asked to address the question posed below:

What underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies inform, shape or inhibit the responses of BMCs to the situation of black young men?

It is from their emerging responses that this project will offer some fresh thoughts towards developing more meaningful dialogue between BYM and BMCs, which is explored in chapter seven.

In undertaking this project and gaining relevant and revelatory narratives and response from young black men and BMCs it gives me an opportunity to offer some basic or foundational principles for developing a practical theology that is able to inform those who may seek to engage with the agenda of supporting BYM, seeking to live crime free lives.

The next sections consider the use of grounded theory as my main analysis for the empirical phase of this project.

3.8 Use of Grounded Theory

This project applies aspects of grounded theory (GT) approaches, consisting of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative information or narratives (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). Gray suggests that the grounded theory researcher is able to work with his or her participants ‘to actively construct the data, to get beyond static analysis to multiple layers of meaning’ (2009: 502).

According to grounded theory proponents, ‘grounded theorising’ will provide a framework from which to create a picture consisting of key issues and themes associated with, for example, BYM who are involved with crime and behaviours linked to ‘gang cultures’. In seeking to represent the authentic voices of BYM, it was important to consider what Dawson suggested. According to her, a GT approach offers the researcher the tools to be able to obtain

data that achieves a ‘saturation’ point, where no new data or information is being provided. She further argues that ‘grounded theory’ is also a flexible model, enabling new issues to emerge that researchers may not have thought about previously (Dawson, 2002: 21–22).

Whilst acknowledging principles in grounded theory, relating to ‘saturation sampling’ and ‘theory generation’, this work did not fully apply these principles, but pragmatically adapted approaches and methods offered by grounded theory for identifying key themes and issues relating to BYM. The associated theme and issues are represented in chapters four and five. Importantly, I have already acknowledged that BYM are cautious and lacking trust with authority figures or individuals seeking to penetrate and investigate their ‘world’. With this in mind every effort was made to obtain relevant data from the sample group of BYM and, at the same time, risk not gaining their trust, confidence and stories in attempting to fully implement the conventions of GT.

This work acknowledges the need for maintaining the balance between objectivity and sensitivity; consequently, my aim was to be open and willing to privilege the voices of BYM, by applying tested research methods and approaches. This, according to Strauss and Corbin, is, ‘hearing what others have to say, seeing what others do, and representing these as accurately as possible’ (1998: 43).

It became apparent that the process interviewing, observation, transcribing, coding and analysis had to commence with the first interview (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). It’s worth noting that the process was not without challenges. These included dealing with the doubts and sometimes cautious nature of some participants, who turned up late for interviews or

cancelled at the 'last minute'. It was also clear that some of them struggled with confidence, which resulted in me taking more time to prepare and encourage them. Interestingly, all those who had extra encouragement or confidence-building support managed to tell their stories with a degree of confidence.

3.8.1 Analysis

Throughout the data gathering and analysis interplay, much time was spent re-listening to interviews, reading journal notes and coding and recoding data. Reading through many pages of transcribed data and listening to hours of voice recordings, arguably shaped my thoughts as to what the BYM in this study highlighted as important, relevant, experiential and 'their story'. I have included a copy of one transcribed interview in the Appendix 6, allowing for the readers of this thesis to get a picture of what one respondent had represented in his interview. It was from such an example that all transcripts were coded and analysed, which is represented in chapters four and five. Importantly, the analysis of respondent's narratives, according to Bold (2012), should not be considered within traditional objectivity, which she admits does not fit a 'narrative approach'. However, she strongly advocates the essentiality of acknowledging one's subjective position, therefore, collecting and analysing data with this position accounted for in the discussion.

As mentioned earlier, self-reflection, both ethically and from a PTR perspective, is necessary in this process to account for the approaches, feelings and models represented in the research process.

3.9 Reflexivity Process

As already mentioned, the need for a reflective process is necessary, because it allows the researcher to review or assess how his or her research practice has been conducted. For me, the reflective aspect of this work focuses on how my faith, spirituality, racial identity, biases and presuppositions impacted on the research journey and outcomes. Chapter six highlights aspects of the self-reflective process as it relates to my position as BMC leader with a concern regarding BYM and the response of BMCs. Finlay and Gough suggests the following notion of reflexivity:

Reflexivity emerges out of the etymological root of the word *reflexive* which means to bend back upon oneself. In research terms this can be translated as thoughtful self-awareness analysis of intersubjective dynamic between researcher and researched.

Reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which the researcher's social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact on the research process.

(2003: ix)

At one stage of the research or field work journey, I found myself struggling to maintain a balance between the notion of objectivity and sensitivity. The problem that arose, related to dealing with my multi-dimensional roles: pastor, social worker, researcher and community advocate. Whilst having the awareness and knowledge that the context of this work was to be led by an ethical research approach, I found myself feeling and experiencing the 'pain' of some of the young men interviewed, which activated further thinking regarding arranging counselling or pastoral care support to help them through some of the challenges they had highlighted during our interview. Admittedly, it was difficult to manage my feeling at times.

It became necessary for me to have discussed with other researchers regarding emotional attachment issues and also to consider the work of Dickson-Swift et al. (2008) relating to 'Undertaking Sensitive Research'. Bolton's argument strengthens the challenge against a self-indulgent approach to research, suggesting the following:

The reflexive thinker has to stand back from beliefs and values systems, habitual ways of thinking and relating to others, structures of understanding themselves and their relationship to the world, and their assumptions about the way the world impinges on them. (2005: 19)

It is in line with the above understanding from Dickson-Swift et al. and Bolton that I acknowledge 'best practice' offered by Bolton, but must not negate the temptation to be influenced by my prejudices, fears and biases in the research and reflective processes and activities. In essence, I suggest the requirement was for me to detach myself emotionally from data content, and work systematically through the men's narratives, moving beyond the insights gained from the interviews and enter a more analytical phase, focusing on the coding, emerging themes and theoretical considerations.

3.9.1 Verification and Corroboration

It is important to remind ourselves here that the empirical data gathering phase of the overall project is rooted within a PT paradigm and that a PC framework; verifies each stage of the cycle. As mentioned above, I ensured that my reflective journal represented my feelings, perceptions and thoughts concerning the research process and narratives received. Creswell helps us here. He suggests:

A plan for qualitative procedure should end with some comments about the narrative that emerges from data analysis. Numerous varieties of narratives exist, and examples from a scholarly journal will illustrate models. In plan for study, consider advancing several points about narrative. (2003: 197)

Another aspect of this process was to engage with some key research colleagues, who offered reflections, advice, critical responses to issues relating to BYM, BMCs, theology and criminology. I was, therefore, able to explore more critically key issues emerging from my research.

As a result of exploring BYM's dynamics through their narratives, the subsequent phase of empirical gathering was to triangulate emerging themes with the focus group of BMC leaders, where findings are represented in chapters six and seven.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted why I have chosen to locate the study within a PT framework as well as the key reasons for considering using a qualitative methodology. It further offers thoughts as to why grounded theory was felt appropriate in the interpretive process and to explore key themes as they emerge. This work acknowledges that it is from a continued conversation between BYM and BMCs that praxis for BMCs to effectively support these men may emerge. Furthermore, I am also able to consider my position as a 'reflective practitioner', which, according to Forrester, involves 'ongoing dialogue between theory and practice in which if it is effective, understanding is deepened and practice improved' (2000: 28).

My aspiration in this research journey was to acquire greater understanding about the interests and needs of BYM that would support the development a practical Pentecostal street theology, in turn offering some basic principles to BMCs, which might inform and influence a more effective approach to engaging and supporting BYM on journeys of transformation, rehabilitation and desistance.

The next chapter, phase two of the PC, continues its probe for further understanding regarding the situation of BYM.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS REGARDING BLACK YOUNG MEN

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter represented the methodological processes for approaching this ‘empirical data gathering phase’ of the overall project. It is again important here, not to minimise the complexities and sensitive issues that may emerge whilst exploring the ‘world’ of BYM as already acknowledged (Rich, 2009). With this in mind, I now focus on the findings emerging from the narratives of our respondents, categorised as problematic, gang-associated, ‘hard to reach’ and dysfunctional (Anderson, 1999; Gunter, 2010; Glynn; 2014; Wilson, 1990; Coughlan, 2008). The emerging themes from their narratives and subsequent analysis represents a phase in the PC, as highlighted in the introduction, that allows for exploration and interrogation of the ‘realities’ of YBM.

This study uses multiple research methods and approaches, as highlighted in the methodology chapter. In essence, this work seeks to explore and understand the potential contribution BYM’s experiences and stories to academic discourse and debate regarding their lifestyle dynamics, as well as to consider how, through the application or tools of PT, BMCs are more able to effectively engage and address issues associated with these men.

Having already acknowledged that BYM are at times misunderstood and misrepresented, this work seeks to privilege their ‘voices’, in the academy, within BMCs and the community sectors, so as to develop a greater understanding of how these men could be supported in their rehabilitation and desistance journeys (Glynn, 2014; Rich, 2009).

This study involved 14 BYM, who were identified using the following framework:

- Black (African Caribbean, African and dual heritage with one parent African or Caribbean) young men, between the ages 18 and 35, who have been involved with activities and behaviours (e.g. drugs, violence, gang- and gun-related) that resulted in their involvement in the criminal justice system
- Respondents to have been involved with one of the following organisations or services: Bringing Hope Charity. Young Disciples Ltd. HMP [REDACTED] and Shalom Consultancy and Counselling Practice
- Individuals seriously at risk of reoffending following prison sentence or community order
- Individuals on probation order or licence regarding activities and behaviour associated with this research
- Research interview is only possible with the full agreement and consent of respondents.

Importantly, each interviewee's identity has been kept hidden within the text, in line with the ethical agreement. However, for ease of referencing each person's narrative, they will be identified by coded lettering. All interviews were voice recorded and the use of a semi-structured interview approach applied (Gray, 2009; Dawson, 2009; Creswell, 2003). Subsequent to each interview, personal journal entries relating to my thoughts, feelings and any observations felt to be significant were made (Anderson – Research Field Work Journal,

2013). Interviews were used to collect stories and narratives on a number of themes, such as: gang association, childhood memories, relationship with parents, and involvement in criminality, understanding relating to faith and spirituality, thoughts and suggestions about living crime free lives. Each interview lasted between forty minutes to an hour, which included some occasional unstructured conversations that were not recorded.

Some of those interviewed had reservations, based on their perceptions relating to research, and what they had heard from other people, about how some researchers and reporters had obtained information from the black community, which according to them, was misrepresented when published. This issue relating to trust and caution is highlighted in my journal entry regarding ‘CH5’, one of the respondents:

‘CH5’ was willing to engage in the process – when we met he was warm in his greeting. Having explained the process again, and the need for his signed approval, also reconfirming my use of a tape recorder – ‘CH5’ explained that he was not comfortable with this type of formality, but wanted to support my work. I reiterated that this was a confidential project, which was not seeking to incriminate or gather data for the authorities ... His caution and level of risk assessment resulted in him not agreeing to sign any paper work, but agreed to be taped. (Anderson, 2013: 28 Field Work Journal)

Fortunately, ‘CH5’ was the only young man not to have signed any paperwork, but contributed significantly to this project. Four interviews were done in HMP [REDACTED] and

the other ten undertaken in three community venues. Overall, participants were pleased with the approach taken.

In seeking to understand BYM's narratives and to bring it into meaningful dialogue with PT, I have framed my exploration and analysis within the PC framework, highlighted by Ballard and Pritchard (1996: 85–86), already highlighted and referenced above. Furthermore, the analytic “tool” applied in this process was an adapted form of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008), from which the following themes emerged during interviews:

- Childhood experiences and early socialisation
- Early/initial involvement in negative, criminal and challenging behaviours
- ‘On Street’ or ‘On Road’, impact on self, family and community
- The role of faith, spirituality and religion on lifestyle choices
- Responsibility or blame for ‘On Street’ lifestyle choices
- A mother’s heart
- Fathering and fatherhood
- Black majority churches: relevant or irrelevant to black young men.

4.2 Childhood Experiences and Early Socialisation

Childhood experiences (negative and positive) and early socialisation, according to Byfield’s book, *Black Boys Can Make It: How to Overcome the Obstacles to University in the UK and USA*, are key factors that can contribute to predicting how children may or may not respond to given social situations. Historical research into child and youth development has aspired to

predict behaviour through data analysis, attempting to tease out patterns of activities that indicate certain outcomes. Erik Erikson (1968), along with other personality theorists, supports the view, that a child's socialisation and upbringing can have significant influences on that child's world view on self, trust, relationships and making choices. Hjelle and Ziegler, in their work on 'Personality Theories' state the following:

Since each psychological stage builds upon the ones preceding it, the attainment of a stable sense of autonomy adds substantially to the child's sense of trust. This interdependence of trust and autonomy may sometimes have the effect of impairing future psychological growth. (1981: 122)

All respondents cited childhood experiences and early family and street socialisation as factors that influenced their development both negatively and positively. For 'P2', his perception about his development appears oppositional to the above concept of development. He stated:

I believe you don't start making the right decisions until you reach about 25, 26 well that's for me. Before that you are just making bear decision and your brain is not fully developed. I don't know if that's because I spent pure years in jail, my brain ain't fully developed, because it could be that if I was on road, it probably would have developed.

'P2' highlights the fact that his time in prison over the years could have affected his capacity to make right and balanced decisions. His acknowledgement that he commenced making right

decisions at age twenty-five is an indicator of a young man, open to influences within his environment and context, that if not positively directed and reinforced, potentially, could result in becoming involved in negative lifestyles and behaviours. 'P2's' notion that the age of 25 represented his awareness towards making right decisions, although personal, is concerning for three key reasons. Firstly, it suggests that he was not prepared to take responsibility for his capacity to make choices that were morally and ethically 'right' prior to being 25. Having said that, one also raises the question as to what parental input was present relating to guidance, and responsibility for him making right, informed and positive choices. Interestingly, he said he grew up with a mother and father present, but went on to state:

P2 – As I grew up I used to go out with the lads from Handsworth, messing about, playing, stealing from shops, listening to Ragga videos, carnival times, the 80s. Kinda just chillin.

This, from my assessment indicates that 'P2s' upbringing was also influenced by his peers and the area where he grew up. Whilst not having the evidence to substantiate it, my second concern relates to peer -influences. Here, one wonders if 'P2's' peers also had similar thoughts regarding making right choices at the age of twenty-five. Alternatively, no other respondent represented 'P2's' view on making right decisions at the age of 25.

My third contention relates to 'P2's' capacity, now as a 30-year-old, to possibly transfer to younger men his thinking that it's permissible to make wrong choices and get caught up in trouble up to the age of 25, without taking serious thought and responsibility for positive decisions and actions. In our continued representation about socialisation and childhood

experiences, 'R4' represents further factors and experiences that may impact on one's development and subsequent perceptions about relationships and lifestyle choices. His thoughts are represented in the following:

R4 – In the area that I lived, I was exposed to a lot of behaviour that I shouldn't have been exposed to. There were big argument between my mom and her man. My mom would dash (throw) things at me when she was angry. I've seen it when she's smashed things over my step dad's head. Believe me, I've seen stuff like a man trying to chop down my uncle's door with an axe. He lived two doors down from us. I've just seen loads of different types of madness like that, you know what I mean and it just became the norm.

'R4' highlights a very real picture of his context as a child and young person. His acknowledgement that it was 'normal' to see, and be in that type of environment, echoes what other respondents stated about seeing and experiencing the impact of such behaviours. The dynamics associated with what 'R4' represented is concerning for me both professionally, as pastor and social worker, or just as a concerned individual, hearing about the degree of negative exposures he encountered whilst growing. For 'P2' and 'R4', I suggest that, with the lack of positive guidance and role modelling their world view and ethical understanding about moral choices, right and wrong had the potential for distortion, with possibilities of leading them into both anti-social behaviour and criminality.

'CH4's' 'insider' perspective of growing up in a 'troubled environment' further exposes us to issues that a number of our respondents experienced.

CH4 – From I was young I was bullied by my brother. I witnessed seeing my mom getting beaten by my dad. I don't think that was good for me to be exposed to stuff like that. It's later on in life it played an effective part. So, I suppose it was a struggle growing up. At one stage, we was running away from our dad to where he couldn't find us.

'CH4' clearly highlights how his childhood experiences and exposure to violence, anger and negativity impacted him as he grew. This picture is also represented by 'CH1', 'CH3', 'P5', 'R4', 'P4' and 'CH2'. Whilst these respondents indicated that their homes, as well as their neighbourhoods negatively influenced their childhood development, others in the sample highlighted how peer influences and their neighbourhoods had some influence on them becoming involved in negative activities and behaviours as they grew up.

It is worth noting that of all 14 respondents; only two indicated having a positive childhood. 'P1' stated; 'I had a good childhood, anything I needed I had. I lived with my mom not dad.' Similarly, 'R3' highlights a contrastingly different early childhood to that of the twelve other respondents.

R3 – My childhood before I started secondary school was fun, it was active, it was positive, I was young, didn't see no danger. I was a child. I was 11; I was allowed to be 11. I didn't realise a lot of the peer pressures or how society was. It was just me being 11 really.

'R3' acknowledges a positive and fun-loving period in his childhood, which potentially represents one of the stabilising factors needed for entry into teenage years. Of course, I would not suggest that this factor is strong enough to safeguard him or, indeed, 'P1' from the challenges associated with living in gang-affiliated areas, neighbourhoods with a propensity for violence and negative peer relationships. This is confirmed by 'R3's' later reflection:

R3 – If I could change the tables now I'd be the one sitting at the front of the table taking in all the knowledge. I was very articulate at school had a lot of potential, but basically I wanted to play the 'bad man'. The bad man doesn't get you very far. So, I got expelled from school in my final year.

The notion of the 'bad man' or 'bad boy' as a person worth aspiring to was mentioned by all 14 respondents. The concept of the 'bad man' is highlighted in the works of Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010), Gunst (2003), Lawson (2012), McLagan (2005) and Wilson (1994). This aspect will be developed further in chapter five. The narratives gave further insights to what these young men perceived and articulated to be the 'bad man' or 'bad boy' from a street perspective. The following represents the 'bad man' categorisation according to respondents:

- Has no fear, respect or time for authority or authority figures (e.g. city council, police);
- Has 'respect' on the streets for his capacity to fight and intimidate others;
- Has money and access for gaining fast cash through illegal means;
- Has a tendency to take risk in dangerous situations;
- Has easy access to guns, drugs and illegal goods;
- Has 'name brand' clothes and jewellery;

- Has women ‘waiting on him’ in more than one area;
- Has a high degree of influence on the street and is able to cause major disruptions on family or community cohesion;
- Has the brains and intelligence for significant or key criminal endeavours;
- Has ‘power and authority’ to instigate a truce with feuding groups or rival gangs;
- Is known for his involvement in the criminal justice system (prison, police and probation);
- Has friends, known to be ‘bad men’ or ‘bad boys’;
- Has ability and contacts to freely access night entertainment and clubs without paying;
- Is known to be a ‘serious’ man;
- Has the authority to commission robberies and violence on individuals;
- Is known for his capacity to show anger, aggression and being ruthless.

Whilst not an exhaustive list or definitive construction of what is understood and perceived as the ‘bad man’ or ‘bad boy’ by respondents, it gives an insight into associated activities and lifestyles these young men were exposed to, as they transitioned through childhood into their teenage and young adult years. The next chapter will explore the above issues further.

For ‘P1’, whilst acknowledging having a positive childhood, I register concerns here as to how this is perceived, given his later statement relating to his neighbourhood, siblings and behaviour. It’s worth quoting him at length to highlight the emerging issues and his perceptions relating to black youths.

P1 – From nursery, my behaviour was bad. There's three of us, my sister, my brother, older than me, so obviously I'm learning off them in the meanwhile. My brother was getting in trouble in school at a young age and me as a young child; I'm looking up to my brother. I got involved in fighting. You see, I was brought up in Highgate where I lived up to the age of 11 and then I moved to [REDACTED], so things went from violence to seeing nice cars, so it's gone from fighting to money. Highgate was a dominant Black area; Highgate was where I learnt some bad stuff. The majority of the pupils at my junior school were black and from Highgate, so it was kinda, if you put so many Black people in one place then it kinda does escalate to being violent.

It would appear from 'P1's' analysis that a black majority neighbourhood with multiple challenges has the potential to become a violent environment. Whilst not subscribing to this analysis, and acknowledging that there are indeed more complex and nuanced considerations relating to such issues as, class, racialisation, poverty, employment status, educational achievement, parenting, neighbourhood social and political activism, it is clear that 'P1' is not alone in this analysis. This view was supported by 'CH2', 'CH1', 'CH4', 'P4', 'R1', 'R2', 'R4' and 'P2', all who grew up or had connections in black majority neighbourhoods in parts of Handsworth, Highgate, Newtown, Lozells, Balsall Heath, Winson Green and Aston. 'R3' gives a context of the area where he grew up.

R3 – I grew up in area 'X'. Well, 15 – 20 years ago was probably one of the worst areas you could have lived in. There was kids doing drive by shootings, pulling handbags, snatching chains. Area 'X' was one of the worst areas to go or live in 20 years ago.

It became apparent during my interviews that, although some respondents found it a challenge to express experience that may have been painful, they were able to recall how they felt at the time of certain key periods during their early developmental years. 'CH3' for example, with tears expressed the following:

CH3 – My childhood was very unpleasant up until the years of secondary school. I remember growing up in a very abusive home, where there was a lot of violence and I just felt like the home that I grew up in there was a lack of love. I never really felt loved.

Having spoken to the sample group and re-listened to their recordings about their childhood experiences and early socialisation, it seems that this period in their lives remain readily accessible in their minds; they were all able to recall key events, experiences and significant emotions attached to those periods or moments.

The reviewing of my fieldwork journal entries substantiated the notion that, respondents found the initial question about their childhood experiences emotive, resulting at times in anxious eye movements, tears or silence. Interestingly, this was the first question that was posed, which may have meant them being anxious at the initial stages of the interview. However, my observation was that this question engendered certain emotional feelings and responses, both in respondents and myself, resulting in me feeling uncomfortable and disturbed at times, hearing some of their stories. For example, hearing their narratives relating to exposure to violence, abuse and criminality in their childhood and formative years triggered questions relating to their parenting and safeguarding issues, which I acknowledge is

not the focus of this research, but an important concern worth highlighting, possibly for future research.

This section highlighted that all respondents had childhood experiences and influences that were impacted by several factors. These included their home life, peer friendships, parenting, school encounters and the neighbourhoods they lived in. Furthermore, all respondents acknowledged that the negative peer influences in their neighbourhoods were significant in them acquiring skills and approaches to becoming 'street savvy'. 'P3' for example helps us here.

P3 – I was easily influenced by older boys. I would just following other people, until things just got out of hand with me becoming more and more involved in crime. I was influenced to do the wrong. The olders were the older people that you look up to. They basically got everything from whatever they got themselves into doing until they got to that stage in life. They were role models. Impress them and try to be on their kind of levels – that was what drove me.

The inference gained from the above narratives supports an argument for incorporating each aspect of a young black man's life, namely, family, peer influences, neighbourhood factors, education, personal aspirations and reflections, in assessing how these may or may not contribute to criminal involvement.

In our continued exploration, the next section considers respondents' initial or earliest involvement in criminality and challenging behaviours.

4.3 Early/Initial Involvement in Negative, Criminal and Challenging Behaviours

Interestingly, each young man was able to recall the period when they engaged in activities or behaviours categorised as challenging or problematic. Wilson (1994) argues very strongly for an African-centred solution to issues of criminality and 'Black-on-Black Violence'. He suggests that:

Criminality in the African-American community is not merely the subject matter for theoretical debates nor merely the stuff of scholarly treatises. It's a matter of life and death. (1994: 15)

Wilson's challenge to those working with black men; to take their work seriously is also echoed by Rich (2009) who express concerns about the continued marginalisation of BYM by those who are supposedly in a position to support them. Gunter supports the notion that this continued marginalisation is reinforced by the continued negative labels relating to BYM.

In seeking to make sense of how the respondents entered the criminal justice continuum, it is important not to consider their criminal actions, activities and behaviours in isolation of other factors, as already acknowledged above. 'P3', for example, confirms that his negative and problematic behaviour emerged within a context of peer and role model influences.

P3 – I would follow older friends, just thieving out of shops, like sweets and that – little things. I was a youth when this started, about primary school. I'd just go into the

shop and pick up chocolates and putting them in my pocket, which lead onto other things.

‘P3’ was one of my youngest respondents at age 23 and one who said that he was easily influenced by older lads. The role modelling or influence of older boys and young men was not just significant for ‘P3’, but for all respondents, who stated that they looked to older boys or young men to aspire to. ‘P2’ represents being influenced by older boys as he recalled:

P2 – From junior school, I used to be stealing and that, stealing out the room, stealing crayons, headphones. Couple of my older friends were coming back to burgle the school and that.

Like ‘P3’, ‘P2’ felt that he was influenced by older boys, who in ‘P2’s’ case had advanced to burglary. The connection regarding older boys or young men influencing younger boys towards negative activities could also be considered within a family and older sibling context, where for example ‘CH4’, ‘CH3’, highlighted how their older siblings influenced their behaviours negatively. This is exemplified further in ‘P1’s’ narrative.

P1 – From nursery, my behaviour was bad. There’s three of us, my sister, my brother, older than me, so obviously I’m learning off them in the meanwhile. My brother was getting in trouble in school at a young age and me as a young child; I’m looking up to my brother. I got involved in fighting.

For 'R2', it was his friends in his neighbourhood, where he received a large aspect of his inspiration and motivation towards negative behaviour and activities. In their case, they were motivated to be chased by the police, at a time when it was seen to be a sign of 'On Road' status to have the police 'coming after you'.

R2 – We just wanted a chase from the police officer. We were bored in the time, so that's what we done. Our holidays was all of us get together from morning till evening in the school playground and that was our 'youth club'.

What may have been 'innocent' fun-orientated actions by this group of young people, had more serious and far-reaching implications regarding young black boys' encounters with the police and subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system. Gunter (2010) explores what he highlights as a black youth sub-culture, which has implications for anyone seeking to work with black young people. Gilroy (1983) and Gunter (2010) support the notion that black youths are unfairly labelled by the media as criminals and subsequently turned into criminals by the police, law courts and immigration authorities, as a result of institutionalised racism (2010: 136). Police operations in cities like London, Nottingham, Manchester and Birmingham in recent years developed teams, specifically targeting BYM or youths regarding gang, drugs and gun related activities. McLagan gives an insight, stating:

[I]t is a sad reality that about seventy percent of the capital's gun murders and shootings involve so-called black-on-black violence, and Scotland Yard set up the successful and highly regarded Operation Trident to deal specifically with gun crime in the black community, whether by Jamaicans, Africans or British-born blacks.

Of course, only a tiny minority of people in these communities are gun criminals. But the effect they have on other people is immense in terms of lives lost, injuries and devastated families. (2005: 9)

The concerns raised by members of the black community regarding police treatment and known discrimination and racial profiling remains an issue for the community, especially relating to the treatment of BYM. A Children's Society study into black young people's experience of the youth justice system argues that:

The overrepresentation of black young people in the youth justice system is well documented, yet relatively little is known about how young black people experience and perceive the youth justice system. The Children Society believes that only by listening to young people can we fully understand their experience and seek more effective solutions to the challenges they face. (Children's Society, 2006: 1)

This study has not only set out to listen to BYM regarding their representation in the criminal justice system, but to explore respondents' journeys leading to criminal justice encounters. 'CH3' helps us further by highlighting his recollection of being involved in negative behaviour. He states:

CH3 – I would say I first got involved in challenging behaviour and difficulties say from the age of 10. I had a habit of smoking weed at the age of 10 and I felt like that constituted to a lot of rebellion with my friends. We would smoke weed a lot and just be negative and that was when the police became more active around our area.

Importantly, the inclination to smoke weed and get involved in negative behaviours is not specific to black men alone. However, some respondents suggested that the stereotyping and labelling of black young people has made it difficult for them to progress in life, especially those who may have had some encounter with the criminal justice system. For 'P2':

[T]he government is just leaving the youth in the communities where they are, giving them no opportunities, but then the next minute they are saying it's this much black kids committing this much crime, this and that. They are not giving them any opportunities to do nothing else.

In the case of 'CH1', he recalls when he was age 10, that he and his younger brother developed strategies to steal sweets from one or two local shops.

CH1 – I used to do little creative things where I used to buy a newspaper, which was like about 20p at the time, and whatever magazine I was trying to steal, just put it in between the newspaper and steal it basically with some sweets. So that's the main things, that was normal. I didn't get caught, I just did it.

Up to this stage, we have considered two key themes relating to early childhood experiences and socialisation and BYM's recollection of when they commenced participating in negative behaviours and activities. According to Regan, many young people are trying to deal with impossible situations, such as:

- Living in poverty;

- Growing up without a dad and no positive male role model;
- Seeing their dad beat their mom and feeling powerless to do anything about it;
- Feeling there is no hope for the future;
- Feeling let down by their school or teachers. (2010: 103–104)

Whilst not an exclusive list, it is evident that the respondents in this study could easily concur with the situations identified. Given that most of our respondents commenced their negative activities and behaviours whilst at infant, junior and secondary schools, I would suggest that not having desisted at that point allowed their behaviours to enter more serious situations, as acknowledged in the works of Anderson (1999), Heale (2008), Gunst (1995), Gunter (2010), McLagan (2005), Rich (2009) and Wilson (1990).

When respondents were questioned about their recollection of the first time they became involved in behaviours, activities and actions categorised as problematic, criminal or challenging, the following emerged:

- CH1 – Age 10 – Stealing from local shops and bullying whilst at junior school.
- CH2 – Age 10 – Being involved in fights, therefore becoming known as the school’s ‘bad boy’.
- CH3 – Age 10 – Smoking weed and anti-social behaviour.
- CH4 – Age 8 – Involved in stealing from local shops.
- CH5 – Age 11 – Selling weed and being involved with older boys who were anti-social.
- P1 – Age 5 – Fighting and disruptive in class at infant school.
- P2 – Age 6 – Stealing whilst at junior school.

- P3 – Age 7 – Stealing from local shops.
- P4 – Age 11 – Excluded from school for smoking weed, being rude and bringing a knife to school.
- P5 – Age 9 – Aggressive behaviour and fighting mother’s partner.
- R1 – Age 11 – Involved in fighting and argument with teachers at secondary school.
- R2 – Age 14 – Involved in serious anti -social behaviour in local neighbourhood.
- R3 – Age 12 – Anti-social behaviour and negatively challenging teachers.
- R4 – Age 6 – Serious fight at school where he tried to strangle other boy for calling him names.

This exploration highlights that all respondents were able to recall or approximate their commencement to behaviours and activities classed as problematic. However, they found it more difficult to identify the specific ‘triggers’ for their actions and behaviour, which included: stealing, selling weed (marijuana), anti-social behaviour, fighting, bullying, displaying attitudes of defiance and disrespect for teachers. I acknowledge that these behaviours and activities in isolation are not necessarily predictors of whether a child will or will not proceed onto a criminally orientated trajectory. I would suggest however, they can help us in gaining greater insight into the dynamics of these men’s lives, when assessed alongside such issues as family influences and upbringing, peer and friendship networks, neighbourhood demography and gang association.

In seeking to explore issues associated with a ‘criminal progression’, the next section represents respondents/ narratives relating to their ‘on street’ or ‘on road’ activities, terms used interchangeably by respondents.

4.4 ‘On Street’ or ‘On Road’ Associated Lifestyle and Activities

From my own ‘on road’ involvement and experience, also the many years spent working with black young men, as well as interacting with my own sons, ages 29 and 24 (ages at the time of writing this section), I have developed a more informed concept of what is meant by ‘on street’ or ‘on road’ transactions, issues, challenges and encounters. Glynn a leading UK criminologist, whose work, *Black Men, Invisibility and Crime: Towards a Critical Race Theory of Desistance*, also helps us here, stating:

Being ‘on road’ is governed by the code of the streets, where respect, toughness, fearlessness, and loyalty are benchmarks for measuring the masculine resources individuals have to possess in order to be part of the gang. Black men who subscribe to this way of being justify their decision by arguing that available routes to becoming men are blocked, and therefore the gang becomes a way of accomplishing their manhood, in spite of the risks involved. (2014: 113)

The works of Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010) and Wilson (1994) also help us to understand the extent to which the code of the ‘road’ or ‘street’ can lead to young people’s involvement in criminal and gang-related activities that can lead to serious violence, involvement with the police, even death, as highlighted by some respondents. Cohen (1955) argues that for many young people who fail to satisfy their aspirations within society experience ‘Status Frustration’, which if not positively addressed can lead to negative activities.

Gunter’s research on *Black Youth, Road Culture and Badness*, highlights the following:

Road culture stresses the need for those involved in it to 'look slick' (well dressed) and not be seen as 'weak' or as 'pussies', whereas working on a building site and undertaking manual labour is seen by many young people as 'dirty', back breaking and 'dead end' work. (2010: 142)

Gunter's road culture perspective is highlighted in the following narrative from 'P1':

P1 – The road is about being the man! You have to have money and a nice car. The road is also about, who's got the most women, who's got the best girl, like that.

Road's not the same as it used to be. We use to be loyal and had a moral code for the road, where we would be loyal with the mans in your crew, but now everything is just chaos.

'P1' has given his perspective on the contrast between the 'then road' and the 'now road'. The use of the word 'moral' is interesting, given that its use can be readily associated with expressions of uprightness, integrity, honesty and being law abiding. On the other hand, the notion of a 'moral street code' is understood to relate to such attributes as loyalty, respect and friendships that should be kept sacred and intact, more so in times of criminal intent and gang-associated activities.

Over the years, in a number of our cities, like Nottingham, London, Manchester and Birmingham, the 'moral code of the street' has resulted in unsolved gang-related murders, because the 'loyalty code' of the street, means not snitching or selling your friend out, even if known to have taken a life. Presently, Birmingham still has a number of unsolved gang-

related murders (Heale, 2008; McLagan, 2005). Furthermore, it could also mean individuals doing prison sentences for a friend in order not to implicate them, even if there is knowledge that they were present and involved in a serious criminal act.

‘R1’s’ narrative gives further insights into how the principle of loyalty is understood and applied.

R1 – Loyalty on the street – it’s important, but nobody follows it anymore and it gets to the point that if no one’s following it, then what is the point? If roles get reversed then it’s a different story, so it’s like you do need loyalty but then what is loyalty? In a sense everyone has a price, so you are loyal but you have price and then you’re not loyal. It’s a tricky thing. I don’t know if I know many loyal people.

For respondents like ‘R1’, ‘P1’, ‘R3’, ‘P2’ and ‘CH5’, their recollections about loyalty emerge from growing in an area where their friendships with peers can be traced back to nursery or junior school. For them, their parents knew each other, consequently, as children they grew having an understanding that there was to be mutual support, respect and protection of each other – no matter what! This, according to ‘R3’ is not a gang thing, but childhood friendships that have emerged into doing positive and negative things together. ‘P2’ gives us further insights here:

P2 – Through school as a black boy, we used to always just get the blame for everything, even when we never used to do stuff. So we just went along with doing badness. As we grew up, then it was the police we had to worry about. It just like the

police were the new teachers that want to blame us for everything now. But you know, growing up round all the lads, all my mates, we were just out, just causing trouble on the roads and that – stealing to buy weed and trying out new things.

For 'R3' and other respondents the notion that the street was family is also represented in Anderson's work. Anderson advocates, however, the need to differentiate between 'decent families from the street' and 'street families'. The contrast, according to Anderson, is understood and constructed by the residents in the community he researched. Anderson argues that the labels 'decent' and 'street' amount to evaluative judgments that confer status on local residents. This arguably would relate to lifestyle choices, involvement or non-involvement in criminality or gang association (1999: 35). Whilst understanding Anderson's analysis, 'R3' represents his analysis, having come from the 'street'.

R3 – The streets influenced my upbringing. It showed me love in a mad way, it showed me community, it showed me respect. People might say you lot were a gang, you guys are a gang. I saw it as a family. I didn't see it as a gang; I saw it as people who I grew up with in my area.

'CH1's' recollection of street life further represents a normalised or desensitised perspective of growing up in a culture of criminality:

CH1 – People around me, everyone was selling drugs, that was a fact. Then you had some people like your knife man and you had some people that were like gunmen that would carry guns and just shoot and you had some people that was just physically

tough and do the physical fighting and stuff like that. It sounds weird but it was actually all normal.

Being desensitised or seeing as 'normal', criminality, violence, anger and gang-associated activities emerged as a key issue for respondents. 'CH4' represents this aspect well:

CH4 – The Streets has always been a part of my life. I mean, I was raised in Newtown when I was young, so everyone I was rolling with, end up growing up and being in certain gangs. Also, my dad used to be a 'big fish' so to say, so I was always in the road life without even knowing it.

CH4's 'big fish' concept about his father, also relates to some of the men, that respondents' aspired to be like. These were men, who were feared, had the street credibility and were well known by the criminal world for their involvement and association in criminality, I suggest, represent the 'bad man' or 'bad boy' previously categorised.

For 'CH5', 'CH3', 'CH2' 'P2' and 'P3' the street represented the following:

- Fast cars and money
- Nice girls
- 'Top' garments
- Status and respect
- Use of aggression, anger, violence and intimidation
- Easy access to drugs
- Area protection or post code rivalry

- Gang affiliation
- Protection of friends and family from rival gangs or enemy
- Wearing bling (expensive jewellery)
- Having access to weapons (guns and knives), if and when required.

All respondents acknowledged that most of the above represented what they sought after when they were younger, and for some the issues are still pertinent, as they work towards their desistance and rehabilitation trajectories. This was because they saw the ‘olders’ (older ‘young men’), the ‘bad man’ or ‘bad boy’, involved in criminality or ‘on road’ activities, which from recollection bought ‘recognition’ and ‘respect’. These men for all respondents were ‘role models’. ‘P2’ states:

P2 – My role models were the bad boys. The older bad boys. Funny, I’m big like them now, but when I was younger, I used to look up to them like that. So the streets have a lot of influence in which way you go in life.

Like ‘P2’, ‘R4’, our youngest respondent at age 21, locates part of his motivation for criminal and ‘on road’ activities in the following:

R4 – If you see a man, he’s got big chains, big rings, ‘nough’ girls around him, probably got a gun or whatever and then you see him doing a bit better than the man that’s working and what not, and you think, ‘You know what – fuck work. I’m gonna hit the road. The road brings me more.’ People are greedy. They don’t want to work no long hours. What it is nowadays, yeah, a lot of black young men that haven’t got

that intuition and that ‘go get it’ attitude to work for it, they want it fast, easy and quick. That’s where they’re going wrong, you get me?

‘R4’ sees a correlation between what he saw as ‘street status’, represented by the ‘bad man’ and his motivation to achieve likewise. However, his continued analysis also represented a critique of where he feels things are going wrong for BYM. For him being influenced by the status symbols of the ‘bad boy’, without considering the deeper implications regarding the criminal justice system is now an area R4 reflects on. Furthermore, he seems to have taken the lifestyle of the street.

‘R4’s position however, does not mitigate for those BYM, who for a combination of reasons, have become desensitised to seeing criminality, aggression and anger as unacceptable behaviours. I would suggest that his reflection, questioning and challenge to himself and other BYM indicates a willingness to further explore alternative routes towards living crime free.

As mentioned previously, there are potential associated dangers in living in areas or environments where the ‘bad man’, gang-related activities and criminality is prevalent. The challenges and dangers for those not involved in criminality or problematic behaviours also require consideration, as highlighted in Anderson’s work. Anderson (1999) and Gunter (2010) who researched ‘Road Culture’, both acknowledge the dangers for innocent folk who live in areas linked to gang and gun violence. Pitt (2007) further highlights the dangers associated with gangs and their impact on community safety. His study, *Reluctant Gangsters: Youth Gangs in Waltham Forest*, highlights the following:

As we have seen, on some Waltham Forest Estates where gangs operate, unaffiliated young people and adults have been subject to intimidation, harassment, theft, violent assault and rape. In controlling the day-to-day behaviour of residents and tenants living within ‘their’ territory’, controlling who may enter ‘their’ territory, and driving out those whom they believe should not dwell there. (2007: 54)

‘CH1’s narrative, although lengthy, represents a context of the danger expressed:

CH1 – I remember, I put on a dance or party as you know it, ’cause I was making money. I was wanting to make more money, so I put on a dance. Invested some money into a dance and at that dance, three people got shot and they were gang members that got shot. Now because I was the promoter, it was almost like I was the person that got them shot, but it wasn’t.

And I remember I was at a local christening, this was probably months after the individuals that got shot. They came to the church and fronted me and they all surrounded me, all intimidated me and the guys that I was hanging around with, all kind of ran off. There was only two people that stood by me, there was about 15 to 20 men around me. And I was getting a phone call at the time and this was from people that was like gang members from the other side and they were saying, you need us to come down, burn out with the stick?

When they say that they mean with the gun and I was like, ‘Nah, nah, nah, it’s cool. I’ve got it under control and they are saying, “Are you sure, you just saying that ...?”’

Fortunately, no one was hurt, but, according to CH1, had he not prevented the young men who wanted to come with their guns, the situation may have turned out different.

It was evident in all the interviews that respondents were able to represent their thoughts, both retrospective and current, regarding the impact their 'on road' lifestyles had on their families and the neighbourhoods they lived. The next section represents this exploration.

4.5 Street Lifestyle: Impact on Self, Family and Community

Whilst, admitting that their behaviour and negative lifestyles had the potential to impact on family relationships and community safety, some respondents were very clear that they did their best to keep their 'badness' or illegal and criminal activities away from their family, especially their mothers, as will be acknowledged later.'CH4' saw his life style as problematic to his family, stating:

CH4 – Instead of being part of the solution I was part of the problem, so there is always gonna be a problem. My street runnings caused problems, I broke hearts, I sold drugs, I sold crack, I sold weed, so I'm selling death not the life. The people knew me around the community. I always put my name out there.

'CH4's conscious effort to 'put his name out there', suggests that, like some of the other respondents, one's name and reputation is crucial in achieving and maintaining 'street credibility'. For some, this included walking with firearms, selling weed, and wearing 'name brand' clothes or jewellery. 'R4' gives us an insight into an aspect of street credibility and status:

R4 – Man, if you ain't got a gun, your mate's got one. If your mate ain't got one, he knows somebody with one. If I told you some of the guns I could get now, you wouldn't even believe it. Put it this way, I know a man now yeah, if I had eight grand I could go to London and I could get an AK47 you get me, that's how deep it is. That's a topper that will chop people in half.

Violence is a big thing out here, because the more violent you are, the more respect you get.

Like 'CH4', 'P1' has positioned himself as a young man that should not be seen as a person to readily challenge. He said:

I'm not an easy target. You bring it to me, I'm gonna bring it back worse, so then it becomes a challenge. If he's done something to me, I'm gonna do something to him and it's not easy to walk away. The levels it gets to are not easily solved just by saying, 'Alright then, let's just forget it', because the hurts go deep on road.

P1 acknowledges that his behaviour had the potential to positively or negatively affect his family. He further went on to say:

My neighbourhood was also affected by my reputation for doing good and bad. I'm not that type of person, who would want to destroy my community or family.

Like 'P1', none of the respondents readily advocated that their intention was to disrupt or negatively impact their families or neighbourhoods. Whilst arguably unintended according to their narratives, the evidence suggests that both families and communities were inadvertently negatively impacted by the activities and lifestyle choices of our respondents. This finding raises associated issues about personal responsibility, ethical choices, maturity and 'duty of care', and masculine identity. Whilst not suggesting that respondents were seeking to deceive me regarding their intended or unintended disruptions to 'home' and community, what was evident, was their respective willingness to reflect and articulate their perspectives on choices they made.

Emerging from interviews, were stories highlighting that, all the young men or their associates, had been involved in fights, conflicts, violence and criminality, resulting in them or someone close to them getting hurt, seriously injured or have died as a result. The impact on self and family according to 'P5', 'CH5', 'CH2', 'R1' is sometimes kept separate, given that at time one's immediate family is not aware of the extent to which a respondent is involved 'on road'. 'P3' highlights some challenges he has had to face.

P3 – One of my cousin's got shot about 6–7 times. Got a bullet inside of him and he's paralysed waist down. I had a friend who passed away on a motorbike whilst speeding away from a situation. I had another friend who passed away in a car crash. There's been loads of deaths, they say the good die young and hopefully I'll see them when I get there. Rest in peace for the fallen ones!

Of all the respondents, 'CH1' gave an interesting and alternative analysis relating to his 'on road' activities, and how this impacted his family. He states:

CH1 – I know that sounds mad but my behaviour probably did more good for my family than bad. Now that might sound so pompous, but when I'm doing what I'm doing, I'm doing mainly money things. So, I was bringing money home. I was bringing in some good money. I bought my little brothers and that mountain bikes brand new.

'CH1's argument that his illegal activities was positive for his family, further reinforces the notion, already highlighted by a number of our respondents, that selling or taking drugs was seen as 'normal'. Consequently, 'CH1' saw his activities positively, as a support to his family, who were already exposed to receiving funds and finance from illegal sources. The fact that 'CH1' was able to support his family in the way he highlighted, raises further questions for this research, as to how the emerging themes can be used to make sense of families like 'CH1's and what models, strategies and approaches could be used, whether theologically, politically, educationally or therapeutically to engage with them towards exploring a desistance or a crime free trajectory. This, of course, is with the understanding that, for some families, the activities described by 'CH1' are 'normal', and not seen to be problematic from the perspective of the 'street'. Consequently, any encounter with such individuals or families may initially emerge in a contested dialogue, which will require recognising the competing factors involved in this dynamic, if, for example, one was to argue that a Black Practical Pentecostal theology or BMCs have the potential to affect change.

In contradiction to 'CH1's argument, 'R3' gives us a stark insight into his context, of how 'street life' outcomes impacted him and ultimately his family.

R3 – Friends I grew up with, some of them are dead because of this street madness. I have been to more funerals than my mom and my grandmother put together, so a lot of my friends are dead. I have got a lot of friends who are in prison. I have got friends that are serving life and they are never gonna come out again. It's not good man, some of them have children.

Hearing respondents talking about friends they had 'lost' to the criminal justice system or violent crime, influenced me to ask the question about how they coped emotionally with such tragedies. Having already highlighted some thoughts about desensitised responses or a normalisation of dealing with such challenges, I am still concerned at worst and intrigued at best, as to how these men function in their daily lives whilst crying at such issues. 'R2' represents his experience and reflection of dealing with loss and conflict.

R2 – The road thing can get serious; many of my friends are not even here because of this. Many of my friends have gone, they're dead. Many of my friends have been shot, parents' house have been shot up and that. So, the ripples go deep and can go on forever.

'R2's story is not at odds with other respondents in this study, further highlighting the dynamics of young men like himself, not a part of this study, but have experienced trauma and emotions that may have been suppressed or masked in order to cope on a daily basis.

Importantly, the next chapter will concern itself with trauma related issues surrounding black young men (Rich, 2009).

Are BYM, who function within a 'street' or 'road' perspective, forced to manage stress and trauma in a different way to 'others'? This question became more pronounced, as I listened to the pained stories of these men.

Whilst not advocating that respondents were seeking to annihilate themselves or are nihilistic, it is worth further exploration as to what sustains a young man mentally or emotionally, who has witnessed the types of tragic experiences already highlighted by some of our respondents. 'P2' gives us an insight into coping with stress and trauma.

P2 – I cope with a lot of the madness by locking off and telling myself forget about it. I learned to be able to lock off and not think about it. Even sometimes, I am in some mad situations that would 'cause some people to freak out, but I cope by locking things off. You may not understand how I can just do it. I just lock off and don't think about nothing. I was in prison when my dad died, but I just had to lock off. I still haven't grieved properly.

Admittedly, hearing respondents expressing thoughts surrounding friends they had lost to gun and gang-associated crimes or the criminal justice system, impacted me, to a point, I was again tempted to revert to social work and pastoral modes to explore their positions, regarding 'healing', debriefing and restoration. It was, however, important for me to remind myself that these stories were real and not to be sensationalised or created as a case needing my

intervention or ‘rescue package’. Consequently, within the context of the research ethical approval, all respondents had the opportunity to debrief and deal with any concerns that may have arisen during the interview.

To date, very little research has been done on exploring the spiritual, ethical, moral, religious and faith-related dimensions of men like those involved in this study. Having heard their sometimes pained, traumatic, complex and emotive narratives, this work, unlike the research by Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010), Heale (2008) and Pitt (2007), has gone some way to gaining insight relating to the role of faith and spirituality of black young men categorised as ‘hard to reach’ and ‘problematic’. The next section considers the role of faith and religion in respondents’ lifestyle choices.

4.6 The Role of Faith, Spirituality and Religion on Lifestyle Choices

This work has considered the narratives of 14 BYM who have all encountered the criminal justice system, because of their negative behaviours and lifestyle choices or criminality. However, they all admitted to wanting to live crime free lives, but acknowledged the challenges associated with this process. Their readiness for living an alternative lifestyle, supported by social or faith based support and considerations are explored in this study.

Importantly, the work of Gunter (2010) and Anderson (1999, 2008), along with other research on black youths, have contributed to this work; however, it is at this stage this project becomes unique, as it enquires into the faith, spirituality and religious guiding principles of respondents. Given the key issues addressed by Gunter and Anderson in their respective studies of black ‘road’ and ‘street’ individuals and families, it was disappointing not to have

seen any meaningful considerations on faith or spirituality, which I argue is also a very valid factor for consideration, as it can be associated with moral and ethical choices.

It's worth noting within this section that all respondents responded to the faith and spirituality question, confirming the following:

CH1 – Christian and Rastafarian background – now a professed Christian

CH2 – Christian background – now a professed Christian

CH3 – Rastafarian/Christian background – now a professed Christian

CH4 – Rastafarian/Christian background – now a professed Christian

CH5 – Christian background – now a professed Christian

P1 – Christian background – now a professed Muslim

P2 – Rastafarian background – no active involvement with any faith

P3 – Christian background – no active involvement at present

P4 – Attended Sunday school as a child – now actively exploring the Christian faith in prison

P5 – Had attended church with his grandmother as a child – a professed Muslim

R1 – Christian home and background – attends church, but not a professed Christian

R2 – Christian background – no active involvement but attends church periodically

R3 – From Christian background – not a professed Christian, but an adherent

R4 – Went to Sunday school for a short period – exploring Christian faith at present

It was evident from my interviews that respondents felt comfortable enough to disclose the above positions. The religious or spiritual positions identified for our respondents, namely Rastafarianism, Christianity and Islam, have the potential for greater exploration, as to how respondents' lifestyle choices are impacted by their understanding of faith, religion and spirituality that I suggest also linked to ethical and moral actions (Faubion, 2001). However,

as previously stated, this work is ultimately concerned with the development of a Practical Theology which might support BMCs who seek to engage with BYM, as those represented in the sample group.

Sociologists and practical theologians have recognized that there are a number of factors for consideration, if we are to assess the capacity and ability of a religious group to engage and influence positive changes in the lives of young men like our respondents. Two key questions worth posing in light of this research are as follows: What practical theological tools would BMCs require to engage effectively with BYM on their transformational journeys and could the narratives of BYM enhance the understanding in BMCs as to the needs and interests of these men? The answers to these questions will be addressed in chapters six and seven.

Whilst all respondents were able to make some reference to faith and religion, representing a way of guiding them in life, eight of them, namely ‘CH1’, ‘CH5’, ‘CH4’, ‘CH2’, ‘CH3’, ‘R3’, ‘R2’ and ‘R1’ highlighted how their understanding and ‘application’ of the Christian faith and its guiding principles have helped them to ‘survive’ on the streets.

Thirteen of the fourteen respondents recall attending church and Sunday school when they were young. For ‘P2’, who did not attend church as a child, he still however, represented a consciousness about the Bible and faith. He states:

P2 – I grew up as a Rasta, so we were always conscious, no evil business like that, more conscious and as I grew up, I read the Bible and that and I feel like faith is an

important thing. Yes, faith is something good to have. I think faith is a good thing, because it gives strength.

'P2' highlights how growing up within a Rastafarian context gave him some faith guiding principles, which he still sees as important, although he would admit to having deviated from them, given he was interviewed in prison. 'P2' was evidently disappointed about being in prison, yet he felt it important to voice this to younger men who he can see heading the same direction. Following my interview, I reflected entered the following journal entry:

P2 – seemed relaxed during interview but voiced his pain about being in prison again. He now wants to tell youngsters about the challenges associated with the criminal world (Anderson, journal entry on 31/01/13, page 11)

For 'P1', who was brought up in a Christian family, his thoughts regarding religion are highlighted here:

P1 – I was brought up in a Christian family, but it didn't connect with me. Christianity don't connect with me. I reckon religion is a thing what you would feel that's right, so Christianity don't reflect with me. I'm a Muslim. My mom's a Christian still, but I'm a Muslim. Allah is greater than my connection with Jesus, so I have taken that road, to say my connection with Allah is greater, so that's the path I want to choose.

Like 'P1', 'P5' also felt that church or Christianity was not for him and offers the following position:

P5 – Basically, I had no religion until probably 2008. I was in prison and one guy just said, ‘Come to the Muslim service’. I’d been to church before with Nan, Sunday and Christmas time, but I didn’t pay it no mind like that. I know that ain’t my religion for some reason. I didn’t feel the energy.

Unlike ‘P5’ and ‘P1’, ‘CH1’, ‘CH5’, ‘CH2’ ‘CH3’ and ‘CH4’ have all confirmed that their conversion to Christianity, in particular, within a Pentecostal and evangelical arena has been transformative for them as well as their families, who have known them when they were involved on the street and living a life associated with, gangs, drugs and criminality. They were all able to give an account of the place they recalled an inner transformation took place, resulting in feelings of release and freedom from their lives of criminality and negativity. ‘CH1’, recalls feeling ‘light’. ‘CH5’ highlights his change by stating:

CH5 – For me, my change came through my faith in Christ, and that’s what I want people to see – that changed me. I want to be able to tell the youths from Road that I was like them, probably even worst, but look what God’s done for me in providing for me.

On the other hand, ‘R1’, not a professing Christian, is able to represent the benefits what he perceives to be a Christian upbringing.

R1 – As I grew up yeah, my mom and dad being Christians gave me some good grounding. Even though I went off the rails, I am who I am today because of how they grew me up and taught me about right and wrong. But in the sense of religion, I don’t

want to go into it too much, but I wouldn't say I have a religion. I have faith. I believe that there is a God, but that's about as far as it goes.

What has emerged from respondents' narratives is that a religious or Christian exposure regarding morals, ethics and faith does not necessarily mean a child or young person will pursue or follow that tradition, if it is not felt to be relevant or supportive. This is seen in 'P1' and 'P5's response and also 'CH5's, who before his Christian conversion recalled his early rejection of Church. For 'CH5':

CH5 – I stopped going to church when I was about 10. I left the church thing for the road, where I made some choices that took me into negative places with negative people.

'R3' similarly echoes what 'CH5' said about his rejection of church. He expressed the following:

R3 – At young age probably 3, 4, 5, I used to go Sunday School with my nan, but I think as I got older I kinda rebelled from the church. I enjoyed the Street, the Road lifestyle. I'm not gonna lie.

For 'R2', it was his belief in God, that he argued grounded him, even when he was involved in criminality. This notion was also embraced by 'R3'. Whilst incongruous with living crime free lives, these men acknowledge God and religion as important in their lives. 'R2' said:

R2 – I think what religion gave me was a consciousness and accountability. So the crime, I tried not to make it physical, I tried to stay at the lower end of it.

Whilst on his conscious journey of change, I found 'R4's narrative brought an interesting dimension into our exploration, because he was able to represent his feelings about faith and God through an experience he had gone through in recent weeks.

R4 – You see, for me, faith is quite a big thing now. It is because recently some mad thing happened to me when I was at home chilling: God come to me in certain ways and he put it as blatant as he can for me, 'Heaven or hell, mate? You get me?'

What has emerged quite notably in this section is that all respondents had a degree of understanding about the impact of religion, faith and spirituality on them making certain decisions. On one hand, it would appear that the men who were advocates of and converts to Christianity were more nuanced in their accounts of how religion, faith, spirituality and actions should relate. Having said that, however, I am mindful of my potential biases, which inadvertently may emerge whilst exploring moral and ethical issues with professing Christians.

The fact that these young men readily expressed a view on their faith or non-faith positions, takes further the work of Anderson (1999) and Gunter (2010), as will be considered in the discussion chapter. The next section touches on how respondents represent themselves, relating to who they hold responsible for their negative activities and behaviours.

4.7 Responsibility or Blame for ‘On Street’ Lifestyle Choices

The responses that emerged with the question about ‘blame’ and ‘responsibility’ had four key themes. Firstly, there were those respondents like ‘P1’, ‘R1’, ‘R3’ and ‘R4’ who concurred, stating that they are to be blamed for getting involved in their negative activities and behaviours. ‘P1’, for example, highlighted the following:

P1 – I blame myself. I don’t blame nobody. I can’t blame society. I can’t blame my environment. It’s easy to blame this person and that person rather than blame yourself. I reckon when you take a look at your own self, that’s when you can change.

Whilst accepting responsibility for his actions, ‘R1’ takes the argument further by also implicating others:

R1 – At the end of the day, you got to blame yourself at first. But then secondary to that, it’s people you are around. But you can’t really blame them, because no one really knows the root of it because they got it from somewhere as well.

If we are to accept their narratives at face value, it could imply a negation of the other factors that influence choices and actions. Some of these have already been highlighted, such as peer influences, gang-associated neighbourhoods, lack of resources and opportunities and educational underachievement.

The next theme that emerged was highlighted by ‘CH1’, ‘CH5’ and ‘P2’, who believe that the government and statutory systems are to be blamed for black young men’s involvement in

such behaviours and activities already highlighted in this study. In line with this argument, 'CH1' said:

CH1 – I would blame the government, if I be honest from my perspective, because I didn't have no opportunities. What am I expected to do? I have left school, can't get no good decent work.

'CH5' also gives his thoughts as to the government's role relating to the 'street'.

CH5 – For all the activities, like guns, gangs, knives, drugs, I'd blame society. We could go on that debate, but, at the end of the day, it's society. If the government don't want drugs to come in, drugs won't be in.

Whilst acknowledging their perceptions about the role of government, these men are not naive to other factors that influenced the dynamics of them being involved in the life of the street.

'R3' helps us here by the following statement:

R3 – I'd have to blame myself. I wouldn't blame my parents and I would have to blame society and the government as well. They put us in these areas, these so-called 'ghettos' with little opportunities as well. So, I think the government as well have to take some of the blame.

The narratives so far have given us some insight into whom and what these men think have a responsibility for the challenges associated with their involvement with gangs and criminality.

‘CH4’s response represents two further themes in this section.

CH4 – Yeah, if I have to blame someone, which I don’t really like to blame someone, I would blame parents first of all and the church as well. Because growing up and that, I don’t think the church did enough to reach youths like us.

The role of parents in positively supporting a child throughout their early years into their teenage years is said to be crucial, if a child is to be given a chance to develop and negotiate complex and competing values whilst growing (Byfield, 2008; Cork, 2005; Hjelle and Ziegler, 1984). Evidently, for ‘CH4’, this was not the case and, consequently, he raises this concern. Now a ‘committed Christian’ he also implicates the church in his narrative. Both these aspects will be explored further in discussion chapter. The next section examines the roles and influences of mothers in the lives of the respondents.

4.8 A Mother’s Heart

An aspect that became very prominent for me during the interviews was the adoration most of the respondents had for their mothers. Having not seen this aspect represented in any meaningful way in the research of Anderson (1999) and Gunter (2010), it inspired my curiosity as to why these young men represented such feelings of admiration, love and appreciation regarding their mothers. Some suggested that their mothers held the role of both ‘mom’ and ‘dad’. Eight respondents lived only with their mothers; the other six lived in households with dad present. However, for ‘CH1’, ‘CH4’, ‘CH2’, ‘CH3’ their experience was seeing their mothers abused and experiencing abuse themselves from their fathers. Consequently, they developed a greater love and a sense of wanting to protect their mothers.

For those just living with their mothers, they observed how these mothers juggled parenting, work and other activities to maintain home and family. 'R2' stated:

R2 – Mom is everything. Mom is everything. Without mom there is no me. Even to this day, my mom is my rock and my life. My mom is more than my father in my life personally.

This acknowledgement implies that 'R2' sees his mother in a prominent role, which he arguably seeks to protect. This notion of importance is also highlighted by CH3:

CH3 – My mom was very important. It was difficult, though, because she went through a lot. But she is very important, because I know deep down that she loved me and I know deep down that she cared. But the way she demonstrated that was difficult for her, because I had other brothers and sisters who she had to look after, but she was always there and I felt like she was the mom and the dad at the same time.

For 'R4', 'CH1', 'P3', 'R3', 'R1' and 'P1', their mothers were described with such words and phrases as, 'the Rock', 'my friend' and 'the person that kept me from losing my mind'. Whilst not always in agreement with their mother's approaches to parenting, both 'P5' and 'CH4' acknowledged that they appreciated the work their mothers undertook to keep them on track, even though, they deviated and entered a life of criminality and gang association.

Respondents spoke about protecting their mothers from gaining knowledge about what they were involved in on the 'street'. This is represented in 'P2's' narrative:

P2 – Yes, I was the bad man on road and with my friends, but I would not take that home for my mom to see. It's like I had to live two lives – one on road and the other at home. Believe me, there is a lot of mans that do the same, because of the respect for their mothers.

For 'P3', because of the respect for his mother, all his criminal activities were in far away neighbourhoods and not in places his mother would frequent. For most of the respondents, their mothers played a leading role in their lives and for some this is still the case. 'P3' highlighted the following:

P3 – My mom is my mother, my best friend, everything that I could dream of. And I am glad that she has been there. I've been through some bad times and she has always been supportive.

Whilst mothers played an important and life-giving role in some cases, all respondents acknowledged the need for a positive father figure and role model in their lives.

For some of the respondents, it was the first time they have had the opportunity to talk candidly about their mothers. This area relating to motherhood raises some key issues associated with roles, responsibilities, parenting self-sacrifice and safeguarding of children (Anderson, 1999; Brown, 1998; Collins, 2000). With much of the literature relating to black motherhood emerging from the USA, my concern here relates to the number of black mothers in the UK known to have lost children to gun, knife and gang-associated issues. There is little published work exploring their thoughts and feelings or recommendations for supporting and

helping other mothers. This is an area for greater exploration and research, but beyond the scope of the current study. More will be said about motherhood in chapter five. The next section considers how black young men see their fathers, whether present or absent and how they themselves see their roles as fathers.

4.9 Fathering and Fatherhood

A key theme that emerged from the young men was the challenges associated with fathers, with those who were absent and, for those who were present, the lack of positive role modelling that was seen. 'CH1' gives us an insight into his feelings relating to his dad's negativity:

CH1 – I think me and my dad's relationship is weird. I didn't like my dad's violence towards my mom and us as children. His frustration would be taken out on us as kids. He was a strong disciplinarian. That's when I decided to hate him, to be quite honest.

For 'CH2', 'R2', 'R3', 'P3', 'P1', 'R4' and 'P4', their fathers played little or no role in their lives. Some of them cited their 'father absence' as being linked to some of the poor choices they have made in life. 'R3' articulates his thoughts in this area.

R3 – My father wasn't around. Growing up as a youth I only saw my father three times until I got to about 14. My father's got about 16 kids. At one point I didn't know all my siblings. My father wasn't around and I think that contributed to a lot of the problems that was going on in my head growing up. I grew up with my mom, so I am

coming from a single parent background. A woman can't teach a man how to be a man.

Respondents' thoughts and feelings about fatherhood represented two aspects. Firstly, their recollection and feelings about their own father and secondly, for those who are fathers, their thoughts on how they represent this role.

Of our fourteen respondents, twelve of them are fathers and have taken time to reflect on how the absence or negative influences of their fathers have impacted on how they father their own children. For 'P3', 'P1', and 'P5', who were in prison at the time of my interviews with them, they all highlighted deep regret about not being able to be with their children. 'P5', in particular, felt that had he been given better support and guidance from his father, he may not have ended up in prison.

'R3' was clear that that he would never want his children to go through what he and his siblings went through, not having a father in their lives. He gives further clarity about his own role as a father.

R3 – I just promised myself that if I have kids I would never let my children go through that, no matter what. I'm married. I've been with my wife, partner for 15 years. I have five kids. My eldest is 14. I have another one, which is 11, 8, 4 and I have a little 7-month-old baby. So I love my kids. I read stories to them. They see me in the morning; they see me at night. I do the school run. There is nothing you can tell

me about my kids. I can tell you their favourite colour, their favourite TV programmes, what they enjoy doing at school and to me that is being a dad.

This question about fathers and fatherhood evidently engendered feelings and expressions that made it clear enough that a number of these men were still carrying anger and resentment towards their fathers for not playing a more active and positive role in their lives. 'P3's' stereotypical view about his father represented the views of three other respondents.

P3 – You know what black men are like. My dad has got kids all over the place. There are six of us, including me. I remember, when I was younger, I'd have my stuff ready to go there and he'd come off with some sob story.

Whether a father was present or absent, it was clear from interviews that there was no clear or distinctive narratives about having a father who was a positive role model for any of these men. I found 'P2's' representation of his father, who was a 'present dad' interesting:

P2 – My dad is quiet. He would trouble no one. All he did was smoke weed.

This implies that a father, even though present, represented an example of smoking weed, which, on one hand, 'P2' saw as okay, yet this illegal behaviour exemplified a context that reinforced acts of criminality that was normalised, as confirmed by other respondents.

It is clear that father absence or the lack of male role modelling is said to be one of the key issues impacting on the lives of black young men who have been involved in the criminal

justice system or gang-associated. This is represented in the research by Anderson (1999), Gaunter (2010), Glynn (2014) and Pitt (2007).

For some of the respondents, their fathers were seen as the ‘bad man’ they aspired to be, but behind the ‘bad man’ was a man who let them down and was not a role model for positivity. This is highlighted in ‘CH4’s’ narrative.

CH4 – Dad played a big role overall. My dad showed me how to treat a woman. That was beating them up, I suppose. I was exposed to that. It was never a secret. My dad would do his thing sometimes with friends there or family there. That’s what was going on in our household and that’s the situation, the foundation, I was brought up in. That impacted on what I am today.

Having heard the narratives of these men, I would suggest that, the lack of positive fathering has had some impact on their perceptions about black men and on how they have decided to father their own children. As Roy (2006) argues, fatherhood within life’s journey can improve human development, giving meaning to black men’s lives. He further argues, however, that the negative social context in which black men and black fathers operate can result in increased criminality and associated gang-related activities.

Having explored what these young men have to say about a number of key issues relating to their lives, this final section explores the relevance of black majority churches in engaging with and supporting BYM in addressing some of the issues raised in this study.

4.10 Black Majority Churches: Relevant or Irrelevant to Black

Young Men?

In my previous work surrounding BMCs and their relevance to social concerns, I have made reference to developing practical theological approach to engaging the streets. These thoughts and reflections are cited in Aldred and Ogbo (2010) and Thompson (2013).

As noted previously, thirteen of the fourteen respondents at some point in their childhood and teenage years attended church. Whilst not specific as to the denomination or style of worship, they all showed understanding that church represents faith, spirituality and moral codes for living.

When asked about black majority churches, ten respondents indicated they had been to one. For 'CH5', 'CH1', 'CH2', 'CH3' and 'CH4', they were fully aware of the spiritual context of these churches and pointed out that they are presently attending one such church. These men all suggest that through their faith in Christ, their lives have been 'turned around' towards making more positive and informed choices that would not bring pain to their families or the community. However, they were not saying that all the challenges in their lives had gone. 'CH3' acknowledges that even in his present 'changed life', he still struggles with some of the feelings of anger of what he experienced growing up.

It has become clear through this work that those men who have embraced the Christian faith were able to offer a greater insight into black majority churches and the potential for applying Christian principles in working with socially excluded men. For them, these principles include

faith, love, care, compassion, bringing hope and practical support. 'P2', whilst not involved in church and having limited knowledge about black majority churches, offered the following:

P2 – First of all, as I said, you need to get role models from road and church that can work together, to give advice and mentoring. Secondly, I think you need to show the youths love and let them know that you are there for them; make sure that they know that. Third, make sure that they know the path of goodness and that they know how to get there.

All respondents, in principle, felt that BMCs and their leadership should seek to be more involved in supporting black young men in their journey towards rehabilitation and desistance. They suggested the following:

- Showing more love to black young men
- Speaking to black young men who were involved in gun crime and knife crime
- Creating jobs for black young men
- Opening the doors of the churches to black young men

'R1' was quite critical of BMCs and stated:

R1 – I would say to black church leaders, 'Get off your asses, man! You need to go into the community, see the problems. Do some research, walk around the area where your churches are and talk to the people, see what you could do for the youths.'

It is important to note that some churches have attempted to engage black young men;

however, these churches have not shown any significant inroads into working with young men like those represented in this study (Beckford, 2004; Anderson, 2013).

Interestingly, those respondents now attending church highlighted the challenges they encounter with leadership that has little understanding of those young men that had come from the 'road' or 'street' like themselves. 'P1' suggests the following as a way forward:

P1 – Church leaders need to develop an understanding about black young men and how we function. I also think that they should talk with us about boundaries and morals for life. One big thing for me is support with employment that supports independence and entrepreneurial aspirations.

For 'P3', in prison during this interview, he advocated for black churches to get involved with individuals like himself, offering support through mentoring, befriending and visits. 'CH1', on the other hand, brings a challenge to black churches.

CH1 – I would want black church leaders to remember where they have come from and not allow this middle class position that's developed in some black churches to stop them relating to the streets.

For 'R4', 'P4' and 'P5', they saw me as a role model of what a black pastor should represent.

'R4' said:

R4 – You need more black people like you in the churches. A person who has come from the road, knows what it's about, you get me? Pentecostal churches should have more involvement in the community than what they actually do.

For 'P5', a professed Muslim, he suggests that, 'Churches need to know how to link with mans from road. It's hard to take a man off the road, even to get a conversation out of him or tell him to come to church.'

What has emerged from these interviews are some clear indicators that can be relayed to black churches who are prepared to consider engaging with black young men like those in this study.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted a number of key factors and dynamics associated with the lives of black young men both in the community and those in prison. What was clear from their narratives is their capacity and willingness to articulate feelings, thoughts, expectations and pained stories at times. On another hand, the level of despair and degree of helplessness was also highlighted in a number of the interviews. The 'language' of despair and helplessness relating to family challenges, joblessness, lifestyle issues was both verbal and non-verbal. This for some meant a sigh or lowering of the head during the interview and on two occasion respondents becoming tearful whilst expressing aspects of their stories. Whilst not wanting to express my own emotions in relation to what was being presented, it became emotionally exhausting at times to balance the notion of object and professional distance against reassuring and supporting a person exhibiting signs of distress. Dickson-Swift et al. (2008:

90) remind researchers that sensitive topics or research areas heighten the risk of becoming emotionally and physically exhausted and overwhelmed whilst undertaking interviews.

All respondents represented stories that, according to them, influenced them in some of the negative choices they made, which for some resulted in their incarceration or involvement with other criminal justice agencies. An interesting factor emerging from interviews was these young men's willingness to express some thought about spirituality and ethical perceptions and associated issues relating to receiving support or dialoguing with BMCs. An important new question has now arisen from the findings in this section: what would it take for black young men and BMCs to develop a joint plan of action towards a framework for supporting BYM? Some responses will be offered to this question in chapters five, six and seven. The next chapter engages in discourse and analysis emerging from the issues and findings in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION RE BLACK YOUNG MEN

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four highlighted the results/findings from the fourteen respondents involved in this project. It commences some initial teasing out of these men's thoughts relating to their narratives. This chapter now seeks to take further, some of the key issues that had emerged, offering some insights into how these men perceive 'their world'. Whilst some of these themes, like peer pressure, community and street influence, represent what Anderson (1999) categorises, *Code of the Street* or Gunter's (2010), *Growing up Bad: Black Youth Road Culture and Badness*, there is a need or necessity for greater interrogation of some of these areas as well as analysis of new emerging ones. Making sense of these themes will arguably help in our understanding and analysis of BYM's interests, needs and challenges. From this the project will progress towards developing a PT framework that might inform BMCs, should they seek to engage and support these men on their desistance and rehabilitation trajectories.

The discussion and analysis in this chapter uses a triangulated approach, where the findings and perspectives within the works of Anderson (1999, 2008), Gunter (2010), Glynn (2014), Pitts (2008) and Rich (2009), are contrasted, compared and reflected upon in light of this work, therefore further enhancing our understanding of BYM's realities. As already reflected in chapter two, all the above have participated in research relating to BYM. I acknowledge that work is considering the narratives of BYM from some of Birmingham's areas and wards known for its gang and gun associated activities, with the West Midlands now being said to have taken over from London as the 'nation's gun crime capital' (McCarthy, 2015). This research considers similarities between USA and the UK. This transatlantic conversation

serves two key purposes. Firstly it serves to highlight the parallel or similar criminal justice responses regarding the treatment to BYM, confirming concerns about their over-representation in prison, stop and search statistics, also how they are represented in the media (Rich, 2009; Anderson, 2008; Glynn, 2014). Secondly, it may reveal some consistent factors that are represented as contributors or influencers in BYM's lifestyle choices whether negative or positive.

In developing greater understanding and insights into BYM's 'realities', this research is intended to inform and support an argument for a black practical Pentecostal street theology that offers some basic principles and approaches, also aimed at contributing to PT thinking regarding BMCs, BYM and the communities affected by crime. Whilst other forms of interventions, such as counselling, social work, probation support, coaching and mentoring have been utilised, in seeking to engage BYM, my concern in this work, is more specifically focused on the development of a 'Christian response' to the issues highlighted in chapters two and four. Some examples of a Christian response are highlighted in chapter six, relating to initiatives like the Bringing Hope Charity, Birmingham UK, 'God Squad' and the Ten Point Coalition in the USA. In essence, this research, in the language of criminology, is seeking to develop a 'faith based approach' in working with BYM on their desistance and rehabilitation journeys (Anderson, 2013; Glynn, 2014; Johnson and Larson, 2002).

As highlighted in chapter four, some of the emerging themes from respondents' narratives were; childhood, socialisation and its impact on developing morals and values, influence of friends and the 'street code' on behaviours both negative and positive, experiencing and coping with trauma, gang-associated involvement, relationships and influence of fathers and

mothers, coping with loss of freedom whilst in prison. Furthermore, this work explored issues relating to moral, religious and spiritual awareness, also gaining insights about their thoughts, and perceptions about BMCs; the role they could occupy in processes of BYM's rehabilitation, desistance and resettlement in community.

Having considered key literature relating to BYM and gained empirical data from the narratives of fourteen young men, this chapter now enters the analysis phase represented in the PC (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006). The chapter will present and discuss the key issues facing BYM, and how this is understood by them and others. It is from this contextualisation that chapter six and seven will move towards exploring a BMC response to the situations facing BYM.

Respondents in this project offered 'rich' data, articulated with confidence and profound clarity, highlighting interesting and nuanced insights regarding their lived experiences. What became clear during the process of interviews was the way each man in his unique way expressed appreciation for being able to represent their stories. Glynn's extensive research relating to Black men's desistance acknowledges the complex dynamics involved in exploring their narratives and lived experiences through empirical process, like undertaken in this research. He argues the following:

The complexity of black men's lives, combined with the lived experiences of black masculinities, therefore demands to be placed in a context not governed by white privileged theorising. (Glynn, 2014: 126)

Whilst acknowledging Glynn's 'Critical Race Theory' approach to black men's desistance and rehabilitation, this chapter seeks to discuss the emerging issues and themes using PT approaches, at the same time engaging with interdisciplinary perspectives as highlighted in chapter three. This chapter seeks to present a clear picture of the situation and challenges BYM may present to themselves, their families, society and BMCs. The chapter therefore positions the voices of BYM in the centre of the analysis, supporting Rich's (2009) argument for BYM's voice to be prominent in discussions regarding solutions associated with their negative lifestyles. In line with chapter four and Rich's suggestion, the chapter considers the following issues and themes towards bring greater clarity of the situation of BYM:

- Black young men's self-concept
- 'On Street' – The Seductive Dynamics
- Coping with trauma and challenges of 'Street Life'
- Family influences and lifestyle choices
- Black majority churches' response to black young men.

Both the literature and responses from BYM had something to say about their perceptions about themselves and how others perceived them. The next section considers the nature BYM's self-concept.

5.2 Black Young Men's Self-Concept

The issues associated with black male self-concept are varied and very much depends on whose perspective we consider. On one level, the concept by western philosophical and ideological thoughts represents black men and their masculinity at times in biased and

negative ways (Beckford, 2004; Glynn, 2014). The other aspect of dealing with black male self-concept is how BYM see themselves.

One key factor that all respondents highlighted regarding their perception about themselves and other black men, related to their learning and self-discovery was the role modelling concept. This for them was represented in aspiring to pattern behaviours, attitudes and activities of the 'bad man' or 'bad boy', as highlighted in chapter four. This aspiration focuses on having the capacity to display behaviours, actions and a language that represents power, authority and having the 'respect' from a 'code of the street' perspective (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1994; Gunst, 2003). These men, according to all our sample, had 'street credibility'. They had the money, 'girls' 'respect' and were known to be someone, not to confront. This image for 'P2', 'R4', 'R3', 'CH2' and 'P5' motivated them into creating their own frameworks to manifest what they saw in their 'role models'. 'P3's 'narrative highlights what other respondents felt and experienced as they observed the 'bad man' in operation.

P3 – I was influenced to do the wrong. The 'olders' were the older people that you looked up to. They basically got everything from whatever they got themselves into doing. This is how they became bad man on road. They were role models. I tried to impress them to become friends and be on their kind of levels – that was what drove me.

Much of the research relating to BYM highlighted family relationships, father deficit, masculinity, searching for purpose and community influences as significant factors when discussing BYM's self-concept (Gunter, 2010; Glynn, 2013). As highlighted in chapter four

most of our respondents stated their fathers played little or no active part in their upbringing, and that their 'street family' was at time significantly more important. This raises concerns from Madhubuti's perspective who argues that:

Properly functioning Black families will produce healthy male/female relationships; create sane, healthy and energetic youth; provide basic life-giving and life-saving support systems (economic, social, educational, health, military, etc.); and clearly define in a programmatically and progressive manner, the roles of men, women and children. Doctrines of right and wrong, concepts of love and caring are family-centred. Human values (spiritual and material) are first practices and taught at a functional level by the family. (1991: 77)

Whilst understanding Madhubuti's suggestion for a family orientated upbringing, it remains a construct that most of the men in this study highlighted in their narratives, had little or no relationship.

Bearing the above in mind, a number of questions are important here, regarding further issues that may or may not impact or influence the personal development and self-concept of BYM. For example, what role does education have to play in the development of these men? Another factor would be: how has media perceptions of BYM affected how they see themselves? Furthermore, how has racism, also disproportionate numbers of black youths represented in police and criminal justice system influenced their thinking? And, is living in poor and deprived neighbourhoods a significant factor?

Raising the above questions serves to highlight the complex nature of seeking to make sense of the possible influences in representing the world of BYM. African-American sociologist and historian W.E.B. Du Bois (1938) helps us here; he argues that there is a problem in how black men are perceived and how they perceive themselves. His work explores the notion of black men developing a positive 'self-concept' as 'Double Consciousness', where he suggest that the problem of self-actualisation is as a consequence of having two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings two warring ideals in one body. Du Bois' double consciousness is arguably represented in 'P2's reflection:

P2 – On leaving school, you're trying to get jobs and that, but you don't get the opportunities as everybody else. As, Asians now, they got business straight away, they are born into that, White people also, some of them are born into it or they know that they got the right, it's their country, so they're alright, but Black people now, they have always had it harder. I think the government is to blame. They're just leaving the youth in the communities where they are, giving them no opportunities, but then the next minute they are saying it's this much Black kids committing this much crime, they are not giving them any opportunities to do nothing else.

'P2' in essence highlights a sense of a 'loss' or diminished identity, which I suggest created a situation where he felt disempowered and excluded. The challenges associated with the respondents' seeking to navigate a lifestyle change, towards a desistance pathway is also highlighted in the works of Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010) and Glynn (2014), representing similar insights to the young men in this research. Franklin (2004) argues that the diminishing of a black man's self-identity represents a deficit, which can represent a form of social

exclusion that he labels 'the invisibility syndrome'. This he argues minimises, if not, severely limits the self-worth or maximised phase of black men. Glynn (2014) also comments on this notion of 'black male invisibility,' emerging from his critical race theory approach.

Self-perception and how others perceive black young men is represented in 'R4's narrative:

From a road level, if you see a man with big chains, big rings, nuff (many) girls around him, probably got a gun or whatever, you think he doing good, even better than the man that's working. Mans like me will think, what fuck I'm gonna hit the road, to be like the 'big man'. I think, nowadays a lot of black young men have not no ambition to achieve things legally. They just want things quick, quick, quick, I think black young men, they are getting involved in the gangs to prove their masculinity. My change started recently, after a fight where I could have been killed, when me and my mates battered the man that disrespected us. That was all wrong I know!

'R4' highlights how the influence of the 'street' and the aspirations of being that 'respected man'. R4's assessment of the seduction of the streets should not be seen in isolation of all the other factors that had influence, his and other respondents, and upbringing. The notion of developing a positive self-concept is not supported by any one model or principle, however there are key considerations relating to how BYM are could be supported to engage in approaches, activities and conversations that would be oppositional to a gang-associated life style. Dimitriadis acknowledges difficulties for BYM in certain communities to navigate through competing values towards a positive lifestyle trajectory. He supports the notion that:

changing economic conditions have fostered ‘ghetto-related behaviour’ – behaviour reproduced across generations in marginalised areas. More and more young people in these neighbourhoods are not socialised to operate outside of ‘ghetto’ but only within it and its own peculiar assumptions and logics. (2003: 58)

It is arguably within the above context that Anderson (2008) suggests a ‘problematization’ of black communities and black youths are then used to portray a picture that may lack any critical analysis. Seeing BYM as liabilities or problems has been explored extensively, but with limited emphasis on implementing support and solution frameworks to address the situation.

Having a self-concept that normalises violence, criminality and negative behaviour was not a distant concept for ‘CH1’, ‘P5’, CH4, ‘P2’ ‘R4’ and ‘CH3’, who all expressed times when they saw little wrong with the above expressions. What is emerging so far is the need to consider the variables within explorations to represent what may constitute BYM’s self-concepts. Importantly, the work undertaken to conceptualise BYM’s identities, should not to be seen as representing a homogeneous group. However, it remains necessary, I would argue, to always include narratives from BYM, which may further enhance our understanding about their realities. The next section offers further insights into issues relating the challenges related to a ‘street code’ that may influence a BYM’s lifestyle choices.

5.3 ‘On Street’ – The Seductive Dynamics

Is there any evidence in the narratives of respondents that gives a clue as to what factors influence, attract, invite or ‘welcomes’ BYM towards the ‘code and lifestyle of the streets’?

Furthermore, what influences does the street have on the desistance and rehabilitation potential of black young men? The work of Pitts (2008), Anderson (1999) and Gunter (2010) have much to say in response to the above questions. Furthermore respondents, all who grew up in areas, also having friends inextricably linked to the 'road' or 'streets', have offered some thoughts on the issue.

According to Anderson, the 'code of the streets is a set of prescriptions, or informal rules of behaviour organised around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence' (1999: 9). He further suggest that this code emerges 'where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one's safety is felt to begin, resulting in a kind of "people's law," based on "street justice"' (1999:10). Whilst acknowledging Anderson's street-code conceptualisation, whilst an American context, it also resonates with the research of Pitts (2008), Haile (2008) and Gunter (2010) in the UK. Hearing from the sample group of BYM is important here; who aptly represent their notion of the 'street code'. R2 and CH2 represent notions and translations of the street code, echoing some of Anderson's research findings:

R2 – The Streets is the places where we all congregate. It all happens on the Streets. Money is made on the streets, transactions, wars. The Street is the place we decide on which activities and behaviours are acceptable. We take control of the streets in our little groups. We feel that we owned certain streets and certain roads. They belong to us because we in them and around them.

CH2 – The Street means status, respect, protection and safety. It also means money, girls and linking up with friends and the mans that mean something to you. For me the street is my life – there was nothing else but what we have to do on road. There was nothing else to do.

‘P1’ also offers a perspective, suggesting:

P1 – In my part where I live, basically I orchestrate what goes on there, whether people are selling or doing to make a living I know. Any one bring trouble to the area has to deal with men. Most of us learn this from the older bad man, who we look up to. Before us, they use to control things.

It is clear from the above and other respondents’ narratives that the street for these men was also about control of spaces or areas and activities associated with their lifestyle choices. For some these choices included violence, gang and area conflicts, robberies, drug dealing and the illegal possession or use of weapons. P3 gives us further insights as to how he perceives the ‘street’:

P3 – Obviously you see people driving nice cars, they got the garments, and the girls. Obviously they are doing their thing; selling weed and other drugs. For me, they were making good money, and I wanted that fast cash really. Not really on a 9–5 job thing – now that I’m in jail it brings it home that doing things the illegal way can lead to this place.

It was clear from interview with 'P3' that he had taken time to reflect on his past criminal activities and had come to a place that he wanted an alternative lifestyle. This process for 'P3' is supported by Farrall and Bowling (1999) suggesting that the desistance process is one emerging from an individual's choice to change in the first instance, that is supported by key relationships and systems around him. However, this may also present a problem for men who may decide to change without support structures. For Glynn (2014) the factor of race is important. He argues that without a culturally competent support structure for black men in prison and community, their desistance possibilities are increasingly diminished.

My journal reflection following my interview with 'P3' represents a brief assessment of his position in prison. The following reflection was noted:

P3 appeared agitated when he came in. He explained that he had not seen his children for 3 months and was worried. He further, expressed how he regretted being in prison, stating that he would never look forward to returning following his release. I put him at ease about the interview process and said that I would pass on my observation to Ms K, the officer that had arranged for me to interview him. He was willing to express freely regarding the questions posed. (Anderson, 2013: 15 – Field work journal)

Being detached from family and friends in the community due to being in prison was also the case for three other men involved in this research. Like P3 the others expressed sadness about being in prison away from their family and friends. However, they all said they were having time to reflect on the issues, resulting them serving prison sentences. As with Glynn (2013), Alexander (2010), suggests that prison experiences for many black men has the capacity to

minimise or impede the journey towards rehabilitation and ultimately the termination of offending.

As seen above, there are a number of variables relating to the influences for BYM, resulting in a 'street code' lifestyle. Similarly, there are variable factors for BYM in prison associated with a decision to desist. For Durnescu and McNeill, the family plays an important role in some men's motivation to desist. They argue:

Understanding families as the context of change, and thus their dynamics, capacities, stressors, challenges and relationships to wider networks, associations and services, is critical to assessing and responding to the individual's needs. (2014: 198)

In returning to the influence of the streets and seduction, of seeing the 'bad man' or 'bad boy' revered on one level and feared on another, was a major appeal for all those interviewed. This position as highlighted in chapter four represents credibility and status on the streets (Gunter, 2010; Gunst, 1995; Hale, 2008). Gunst's research of the Jamaican 'Code of the Street' highlights a very telling context regarding the Jamaican world of gangs, guns, and 'bad man' contextualisation. Like Mclagan (2005), she suggests a connection between Jamaica and the UK in that black men and youths from the UK had responded to some of the negative influences of gangs, guns and violence, represented in her research. Her research led her into some very dangerous situations in order to obtain the narratives of some of Jamaica's known 'bad men'. Whilst not seeking to suggest that the notion of the Jamaican 'bad man' is responsible for a UK construction, we should not negate the influences and possible constituted 'worldview' of the bad man or bad boy, between the USA, Jamaica and the UK.

Interestingly, all respondents have parents, grandparents with links in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. This is an area which arguably requires further development, but is not the main focus of this project.

Gunst's work further captures the essence of what some of our respondents highlighted about control, gang violence and dealing with conflict. She states:

The story began in the ghettos of Kingston, a chessboard of warzones with human pieces; for as long as the majority of Jamaicans can remember, politicians have armed and paid Kingston's most notorious gunmen to enforce their rule in the capital city's thronged slums. (1995: xiii)

The culture of the street, as highlighted in the work of Gunter in his research on *Black Youths, Road Culture and Badness in an East London Neighbourhood*, and its seduction or challenge is expressed in the following narrative:

CH3 – The Streets had a massive influence on my upbringing, I grew up knowing that my family were known for being 'hard core' who lived in an known for its gang issues. If you were nobody or you had nobody that was respected in the area, you'd almost get bullied and people would wanna take liberties with you.

In contrast to the confrontational dynamics of the streets as highlighted above, 'R3' seeks to paint a more 'family' orientated picture.

R3 – The streets influenced my upbringing it showed me love in a mad way, it showed me community, it showed me respect. People might say you lot were a gang, you guys are a gang. I saw it as a family.

It is important to acknowledge that, whilst this study seeks in part to give voice to black young men categorised as ‘problematic’ or ‘hard to reach’, there are those in the communities or areas these young men live, that would be offended by these labels. On the other hand, there are those, who for their own reasons, are readily seduced into the images of being ‘the gangster’ – the one with the gun (heat, heater, chrome, nine, piece or ting).

The final area to consider in this section is the influence or seduction of music and gangster DVD’s, accessed and produced by black young men. The lyrics and activities portrayed in many of these productions depict black young men as ‘bad boys’ ‘rude boys’, ‘bad men’ and gangsters. Some productions show young men showing hand movements of shooting guns and on occasion guns have been featured in their ‘YouTube productions’. These social networking sites, which were viewed over a period of a year, evidently depicted BYM, telling ‘Street Life’ stories through the medium of music. These sites according to respondents are viewed by thousands of young people on a weekly basis. This situation has raised concerns for West Midlands Police and the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership, regarding the potential of these productions influencing or seducing young people into negative orientated lifestyles (Coughlan, 2008).

With an alternative perspective, ‘R2’ and ‘R3’ both advocate that men from the streets are allowed to tell their very pained ‘code of the street stories’, so long as they end it in

renouncing the bad boy lifestyle and suggesting a positive way forward. For ‘P2’ and ‘CH2’, they both gave narratives of how the lyrics of certain Jamaican and American artists involved in crime and the ‘bad man’ portrayal influenced and motivated them whilst they were heavily involved on ‘the road’. Perhaps some of the first musical depictions of being the bad man or rude boy, and not fearing prison or authority are represented in the songs of Derek Morgan and Desmond Dekker both Jamaican Artists of the 60s and 70s represented in the following few lines:

‘Rude boys cannot fail ’Cause them must get bail Oh, dem a loot, dem a shoot’

‘Rudies [bad boys or bad man] don’t fear, no boys, rudies don’t fear ... Rougher than rough, tougher than tough strong like lion, we are iron.’

So far, we have considered some key issues associated with how the self-concept of BYM is influenced by varied situations, including their histories, relationship with family, perceptions about black male identity and search for respect. Furthermore, respondents highlighted a number of factors that influenced them towards seeing a ‘bad boy’ image as being inspirational, and a status symbol. Seeing the seduction and appeal of street life was another area explored, here, Anderson (1999) represented the notion of the ‘coder of the street’ which resonated with issues raised the entire sample group. What is clear for me, is that much of the factors highlighted by Rich (2009), Glynn (2014), Gunter (2010) and Pitts (2008), regarding BYM’s association to gangs, conflicts in the community and environmental factors are not at odds with this research. However, as stated from the outset, this work has progressed issues associated with spirituality, religion and ethical considerations relating to BYM’s realities.

The next section seeks to discover the ‘coping mechanisms’, when black young men encounter trauma within the context of living in a ‘code of the street’ environment.

5.4 Coping with Trauma and Challenges of ‘Street Life’

The narratives of the respondents in this study undoubtedly raises some question as to how they cope with daily life having gone through some of the challenges highlighted in chapter four about childhood, conflicts and violence ? This question became more pronounced having heard and re-read aspects of ‘P2’s’ narrative.

P2 – The neighbourhood I lived in – we had the ‘baddest’ neighbourhood. When me and my boys were on road, people knew not to mess with us. At times there were up to 20 mans, and obviously we were running things in our area. I was obviously in and out of jail. My dad passed away after he came to see me in prison when I was 16. On his way back from the visit he had a car crash. I heard and just had to hold this pain. It causes stuff to happen in your head. My mom and that always in hospital still. These things stress you out. I cope by locking off and telling myself forget about it. I’ve been doing it all my life.

I found my journal reflection and subsequent thoughts following my interview with ‘P2’, seeking answers as to how a young man, having gone through what he expressed, copes with daily life. Rich (2009) again highlights the context of some of our men, stating:

Sadly, because of their social position, and the legacy of violence, racism and poverty into which they have been born, they have become, for many of us, strange icons of fear. (2009: xv)

My time with 'P2' afforded me the opportunity to listen and observe a young man who evidently carried inner pain, yet having the ability to mask, internalise and 'lock off'. This 'cool pose' or 'cool mask' perspective was represented in chapter two, in the research of Majors and Billson (1992). My journal reflection represented the following:

'P2' was evidently willing to express his thoughts about himself and other black young men. Evidently an articulate and knowledgeable man, willing to open about his life, but not to be seen as vulnerable and not being in control. He sat relaxed but would move around in the chair from time to time, when answering some of the questions that were more painful in his history. He stated that he was not happy about being in prison and wanted the opportunity to tell young people when he got out about the challenges of been away from family and friends. (Anderson, 2013: 11–12 – Field Work Journal)

'P2's capacity to cope with stress, live with trauma and still function is not unlike soldiers having to deal with the memories and pain of war, having seen atrocities, but still having to function in daily life. Whilst the respondents in this study are not British Army soldiers, interestingly, some referred to themselves as 'soldiers of the street', involved in a different type of war.

John Pitts work gives further insights into the challenges BYM and wider community face in dealing with gun and knife crime. His research states:

While I was writing this book 39 young people were either shot or stabbed to death on the streets of London in gang-related murders. One of my purposes in writing this book is to contribute in some way to the efforts of the young people, parents, local residents, politicians, police officers, and welfare, health, education professionals who are trying to stop the killing. (2008: xv)

Pitts' work, whilst solution-focused, raises questions as to how as a white researcher like himself engaged with the 'code of the streets', in obtaining nuanced narratives of BYM that is able to represent their voices with authentically. This issue is important because according to Glynn:

Young Black people have felt comforted by talking to someone who identifies with who they are, as opposed to their supposed social label. Likewise, disaffected White male and females who are embracing urban culture thru' music such as hip-hop, garage, drum 'n' bass, dancehall music, etc have felt more at ease knowing that the researcher had a familiarity with the world they occupy. At all times positive reinforcement without judgment enabled those young people to feel at ease in expressing their views on their terms. (2004: 19)

Whilst Glynn's consideration raises some questions, I am also mindful that Pitts' work as a teacher and street- and club-based youth worker and other associated professions are factors

that should not be negated, when considering his capacity to inform the agenda of black youth development.

Both Pitts (2008) and Gunter (2010) coexisted as researchers in the London context, exploring issues of gangs, violence and criminality. Given the disproportionate numbers of black youths that had died as a result of gun, gang and knife incidents in London, I am concerned that their work, whilst valid, says little about the trauma black youths face as a result of seeing, experiencing, being associated to friends and family where a gun and knife fatality may have occurred. My research further highlights that BYM who may have experienced trauma feel that to show any signs of weakness or been seen as soft, contradicts what the code of the streets suggest represent. This counter position represents men that should be tough, hard and fearless and ‘cool’, as represented by Majors and Billson (1992). This was the inference and stated position of all respondents. Evidently, this area is complex and remains under researched, as acknowledged by Rich (2009):

Even though large numbers of young African American men have suffered from violent injury, little research attention has been paid to the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder and other trauma related symptoms on the lives of these men. Because of this vacuum, we are left to rely on the vast store of knowledge gathered from military studies of combat veterans and studies of female victims of sexual violence or intimate partner violence. (2009: xii)

In acknowledging Rich’s assessment regarding the limited research in the area of trauma support for BYM, as those in his research, I continue to explore how the narratives of the

respondents in this project is able to contribute to our thinking relating to developing a faith based approach to ‘trauma support’ or space for spiritual expression. Gilbert argues:

Given the constant toxicity people from the BME background face, compounded by stigma in relation to their mental health problems and perhaps other aspects of their identity, it may be restorative to have time and space for spiritual expression. (2011: 144)

How then do we commence engaging with the respondents in this study in addressing, or further exploring their narratives about challenges and trauma associated with the streets? R2 further highlights a context that contributes to our exploration.

R2 – The road thing can get serious; many of my friends are not even here because of this. Many of my friends have gone, they’re dead. Many of my friends have been shot, parents house have been shot up and that. So, the ripples go deep and can go on forever.

‘R2’s story arguably raises further questions for me, as to what support may potentially emerge from BMCs that is able to engage with the realities of BYM and work towards supporting them on their desistance and rehabilitation journeys? This question will be addressed in the section below about a BMC response to BYM, but more specifically in chapters six and seven.

The next section seeks to establish the importance of families, parenting and how this is impacted by respondents’ lifestyle choices.

5.5 Family Influences and Lifestyle Choices

Chapter four reflected on the impact of some of negative childhood exposures and experiences that impacted respondents. For example, 'CH4', 'CH3' and 'R4' expressed memories of painful and traumatic incidents relating to violence, anger and abusive relationships, which they suggest contributed to some of their subsequent behavioural difficulties on one level, but also equipping them for navigating the 'world of the streets', as highlighted in some of the narratives above. 'R4' expressed, how for him crime, violence, drugs, intimidation and anger, were common lifestyle expressions in his home and family network.

'P5', 'CH4', 'CH3' and 'R4' indicated that their negative childhood exposures and experiences were not one-offs. From this I would argue that this inadvertent acquisition of knowledge and experience can also enable them to develop 'tools' for surviving in the situations they described. On the other hand, the same experiences/exposures could be also used to replicate what they had seen.'CH4's' narrative helps here:

CH4 – I was around drugs from early age and seeing nuff (a lot) madness. It was a family member that put me on the drug ting the first time round. They supplied the first lot and put me on, so it span from there, street life, road life, thug life it became a part of me. It's all I knew to be honest.

The dynamics associated with the above narratives are concerning for me as pastor, social worker and a Trustee of two charities working towards seeing children and families empowered and equipped regarding welfare and wellbeing associated issues.

The lack of positive guidance and role modelling, as highlighted above, arguably represents a context, where respondents' views about moral choices relating to 'right' and 'wrong' had the potential for distortion, with possibilities of leading them into both anti-social behaviour and criminality. Having said that, this notion is evidently contestable, with evidence highlighting positive outcomes of young men growing in negative environments (Byfield 2008). However, let me not fully embrace or support Byfield's contest, because her research of 40 black young men (20 from UK and 20 from the USA) were all students who were interviewed about overcoming obstacles to university studies. Whilst acknowledging that some of these students may have come from negative situations, her research revealed very little about the young men's exposure or involvement in criminality, violence and gang-associated issues. It therefore does not fully appreciate or account for the cohort of men in this sample, as also highlighted in the works of Rich (2009), Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010) and Pitts (2007; 2008).

Byfield's work, whilst stressing the point that 'black boys can make it', she inadvertently places the young men in this study in a category of being the 'other', who she argues are more profiled than black young men who achieve, hence her challenge. Consequently, her research sought to dispel the myth that 'black boys are synonymous with underachievement' (Byfield, 2008).

Interestingly, the work of Byfield (2008) and Cork (2005), two of Birmingham's black female academics and researchers in the educational field, acknowledges the challenges of young black boys. They both explore issues relating to parental support, school and home communication, racism, racial identity and negative attitudes. However, there seem to be an

omission or lack of correlation between BYM who are excluded from school, with multiple exposures to negative influences and how this may or may not influence their involvement in criminality or gang-associated activities as highlighted by respondents involved in this study.

How important then is childhood socialisation and being exposed to negative activities and behaviours in the lives of respondents? Furthermore, what is their perception, as to how their socialisation and negative exposures influenced their world view relating to such issues as dealing with anger, building relationships, violence, coping with authority and boundaries and making right or choices? Evidently questions that respondents have addressed in chapter four.

Unlike Byfield's 'educationally inspired' young men, this research raises the profile of young men who have encountered multiple challenges associated with their educational journeys, with all having encountered the criminal justice system or having gone to prison. Importantly, four of the respondents were in prison during this aspect of field work. All four prison respondents made it clear that the loss of freedom, not seeing or holding their children or loved ones, being told what to do, feeling detached from friends and community, are some of the very real challenges they face whilst 'inside'.

Up to this stage, we have considered the impact of early childhood experiences and exposure to negative influences on the life style choices of black young men. According to Regan many young people are trying to deal with impossible situations, such as:

- Living in poverty
- Growing up without a dad and no positive male role model;
- Seeing their dad beat their mom and feeling powerless to do anything about it;

- Feeling there is no hope for the future
- Feeling let down by their school or teachers. (2010: 103–104)

Whilst not an exhaustive list, it is evident that the respondents in this study could easily concur with the situations identified. Given that most of our respondents commenced their negative activities and behaviours whilst at junior school, it is arguable that their exposure to negative home and community influences further compounded their leaning towards potential involvement in more serious situations, and behaviours as they developed, also acknowledged in the works of Anderson (1999) and Heale (2008). According to Anderson:

reality of inner-city life is absorbed largely on the streets. Their children gain, in words of the street, valued ‘street knowledge’. At an early age, often even before they start school and without much adult supervision, children from street-orientated families gravitate to the streets, where they must be ready to ‘hang,’ to socialise competitively with peers. (1999: 69)

An aspect emerging in this study is the relationship these men had with their mothers, who most said played an important part in their lives. Whilst all respondents acknowledged the need for a positive father figure and role model in their life most indicated the absence of this. For some of the respondents, it was the first time they have had the opportunity to talk candidly about their parents. Interestingly, during the course of exploration, I have found very little written about black men and the relationship with their mothers, which further supports the uniqueness of this research is its exploration a mothers’ influences on BYM. Interestingly, Gunter’s work also highlights the importance young men place on their mothers. The following narrative from his work is not unlike that of those expressed in chapter four:

My mom's like my best friend ... Yeah we argue and she shout at me, but I think that now I've got older I can tell my mom a lot of things ... (2010: 83)

Brown, in his research on black men and their mothers gives us some interesting revelations and insights into the relationship between black men and their mothers he states:

Regardless of class, race, or family relationships, these mothers had to find ways to give their sons confidence and the ability to perform in a society that often questions them, fears them, and views them as the embodiment of America's worst pathologies. (1998: xi)

The fact that the majority of our respondents spoke favourably about their mothers, can also be concerning. Hill offers some thoughts here, suggesting:

Many African-American thinkers tend to glorify black motherhood. They refuse to acknowledge the issues faced by black mothers who 'come back to the frequently thankless chores of their own loneliness, their own families'. This mother glorification is especially prominent in the works of US black men who routinely praise black mothers, especially their own. However, by claiming that black women are richly endowed with devotion, self-sacrifice, and unconditional love – the attribute associated with archetypal motherhood – US black men inadvertently foster a different albeit seemingly positive image for black women. The controlling image of the 'super strong black mother' praises black women's resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers. Yet in order to remain on their pedestal these same super

strong black mothers must continue to place their needs behind those of everyone else especially their sons. (2000: 174)

Although Hill's argument represents more privileged black men in the USA, clear similarities with the narratives of the young men, who according to Hill, seem to profile their mothers, without a deeper understanding of their 'underlining survival dynamics'. Hills' feminist / womanist perspective here is suggestive of a need for women representing their narratives, where men's notion of positive affirmations negates and even reinforces stereotypes and oppression of women and mothers as represented in this work.

Having explored what these young men have to say about a number of key issues relating to their lives and capacity to make right or wrong choices, the issue as to how I and other BMC leaders and churches may responds to these 'realities' is highlighted in the next section.

5.6 Black Majority Churches' Response To Black Young Men

To date, very little research has been done on exploring the spiritual, ethical, moral, religious and faith related dimensions of men, like those involved in this study. Having heard their sometimes pained, complex and emotive narratives, this work unlike the research by Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010), Heale (2008) and Pitts (2008) has gone some way into gaining insight relating to the role of faith and spirituality of black young men categorised as 'hard to reach' and 'problematic'. This section considers some of the responses of regarding the potential in BMCs towards supporting them.

As noted in chapter four, thirteen of the fourteen respondents at some point in their childhood and teenage years attended church. Whilst not specific as to the denomination or style of worship, they all showed understanding that church represent faith, spirituality and moral codes for living. This, I argue, is an important finding for this research because it gives some indication that a proportion of the BYM we may encounter most likely would have had some involvement or connection with faith or spirituality in some way.

When asked about black majority churches, ten respondents indicated they had been to one. For 'CH5', 'CH1', 'CH2' 'CH3' and 'CH4', they were fully aware of the spiritual context of these churches and pointed out that they are presently attending one such church. These men all suggest that through their faith in Christ, their lives had 'turned around' towards making more positive and informed choices that would not bring pain to their families or the community. However, they were not saying that all the challenges in their lives had gone. 'CH3' for example acknowledges that even in his present 'changed life', he still struggles with some of the feeling of anger of what he experienced growing up.

It has become clear through this work that those men who have embraced the Christian faith were able to offer a greater insight into what faith, spirituality and morality had to do with making right or wrong choices. They spoke of such issues as love, care, compassion and forgiveness. 'P2', whilst not involved in church and having limited knowledge about BMCs, offered the following:

P2 – First of all as I said you need to get role models from Road and church that can work together, to give advice and mentoring. Secondly, I think you need to show the youths

love and let them know that you are there for them; make sure that they know that. And third, make sure that they know the path of goodness and that they know how to get there.

All respondents in principle suggested that BMCs and their leadership should seek to be more involved in supporting BYM on their journey towards rehabilitation and desistance. They suggested the following:

- BMCs to make greater effort to engage BYM in the community.
- Ensuring that negative stereotypes regarding BYM are challenged by BMCs.
- BMCs to work with local businesses and other groups to create jobs for BYM.
- Opening the doors of the churches for BYM to discuss their needs.

For R4, P4 and P5, they saw me as a role model of what a black pastor should represent. R4 said:

R4 – You need more Black people like you [researcher] in the churches. A person who has come from the Road, knows what it's about, you get me? Pentecostal churches should have more involvement in the community than what they actually do.

For P5, a professed Muslim, he suggests that:

Churches need to know how to link with mans from Road. It's hard to take a man off the Road, even to get a conversation out of him or tell him to come to church.

What has emerged from these interviews are some clear indicators that can be relayed to black churches, who are prepared to consider engaging with BYM like those in this study. The

narratives of these men highlights key issues to be considered by BMCs who are prepared to engage with the realities of the 'street code', and press towards engaging these men meaningfully. The question therefore is whether the church is relevant to the needs and interests of BYM is worth asking in light of what this research reveals. Davis suggests that BMCs have the potential to do much more than they presently do in the communities they are located. He suggests:

The light that the black church holds must now come out from under the bushes and be lifted high to give hope once more to a people in deep darkness of an unending midnight. (2010: 25)

The late Tupac Shakur, known for his hard hitting lyrics was very challenging to the 'church' and its lack of impact. In an exclusive interview with Vibe-online, Tupac when questioned about God and the church expressed the following:

If the churches took half the money that they was making and gave it back to the community, we'd be all right. If they took half the buildings that they use to 'praise God' and gave it to motherfuckers who need God, we'd be all right. Have you seen some of these god-damn churches lately? There's ones that take up the whole block in New York. There are homeless people out here. Why ain't God lettin them stay there? Why these niggas got gold ceiling and shit? Why God need gold ceiling to talk to me? Why does God need coloured windows to talk to me? Why God can't come where I'm at where he sent me? If God wanted to talk to me in a pretty spot like that, why

the hell he sends me here then? That makes ghetto kids not believe in God.

(Tupac Shakur, 1998: 98)

Whilst aspects of this interview may seem crude and hard hitting, the essence should not be negated, especially in its resonance with black young men. The issues and questions expressed by Tupac will be further explored in chapter seven, in considering the framing of a practical Pentecostal street theology.

5.7 Conclusion

This discussion has been concerned with analysing the findings and narratives of a sample of black young men and to bring their narratives into dialogue with the works of Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010), Pitts (2008). This work, in effect, seeks to consider how the understanding and contributions of BYM are able to support the development and construction of a practical Pentecostal street theology that is able to engage them on their desistance journeys. In listening to the stories of these men, this work has been greatly informed as to what some of the key challenges are and could be used in the development of the framework to support these men towards living a crime-free lifestyle.

In seeking to construct the notion of a 'faith based' intervention the narratives of respondents will be incorporated in the thinking towards developing a support paradigm that would readily engage with BYM, their mindsets, their community, also moral and spiritual dynamics, family relationships, educational capacity as well as the aspect relating to race and gender, which for Glynn (2014), represents an intersectional approach.

As this work continues to develop, it embraces the call for a theological rethink as stated by Edwards, arguing:

Christians can talk all they want about doctrine and truth, but actually, as far as our society is concerned, our credibility and acceptability now depends on our willingness to present ourselves as having a different faith rather than a superior idea. (2008: 25)

Chapters six and seven will now engage with the capacity of BMCs to respond to the realities of BYM; emerging from the literature review and the narratives of respondents in this research. Importantly, I argue here for remaining open to new thoughts and ideas, therefore enhancing the capacity of this work to offer some principles for BMCs, should they choose to engage with BYM.

CHAPTER SIX: BLACK MAJORITY CHURCHES' DISTINCTIVENESS: IN SEARCH OF A FAITH-ACTION PARADIGM

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have already considered the literature relating to BYM, their dynamics, the communities in which they live and their association to gangs, violence and criminality, as well as their representation in the criminal justice system. They have also analysed the narratives obtained from a sample of BYM regarding some of the above issues. Having gained some key insights from probing into the 'world of BYM', by using the PC, this chapter now considers the potential in BMCs to engage with the situation facing BYM. Importantly, I am seeking pointers towards a relevant and effective theology rooted in the faith, beliefs, activities and traditions of BMCs that may be able to respond and negotiate with the realities of BYM as represented in chapters, two, four and five.

Questions relating to the 'relevance' or impact of BMCs on the lives of socially excluded people or communities are not new (Arnold, 1992; Aldred and Ogbo, 2010; Cone, 1986; Davis, 2010; Hopkins, 1999). They emerge from scholars, researchers, leaders and pew members alike, as well as from individuals unconnected to BMCs, like some of the respondents in this work. On the other hand, questions are also raised about 'white churches', leading to the question: who determines relevance, its construction, implementation, impact, assessment or evaluation? I suggest that seeking to bring ultimate clarity to such a question is at best courageous and at worst aspirational. The world of Christian and social ethics supports the argument that:

Our views of ‘reality as a whole’ are based on our experience of those aspects of reality we take to be decisive. In that sense, we must relate to the whole of reality through metaphor. Our choice of metaphors is obviously very important. It is decisive in determining the character of our views of reality and, in the long run of our ethics.

(Wogaman, 1989: 17)

Wogaman’s argument suggests that in seeking to determine relevance or irrelevance, there are factors relating to an individual’s reality, as in the case of the young men in this project, that have led them to make decisive statements about seeing the church as ‘detached from their realities’. Still using Wogaman’s perspective, I suggest that Ronald Brown, one of the former Administrative Bishops (CEO of the denomination) of NTCG, offers some insight into the notion of relevance, for one of BMC’s flagship denominations (Sturge, 2005). From his article in their ‘Vision’ magazine, Brown suggests:

The relevant church is open and willing to address the issues and challenges of the times. It will take the necessary steps to resolve matters in the light of God’s Word, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and human conscience. This will assist the church to keep the main prospective in focus and to go with the vision to impact the world around us. (2002: 4)

Brown raises other questions for me, however, because his statement, whilst decisive for him, does not necessarily become real or applicable to others, like the young men referenced in chapters four and five. In essence, this chapter is searching for a ‘contemporary relevance’ of BMCs that has the potential and capacity to engage and permeate the ‘world’ of black young men, as articulated by the respondents in this research.

This chapter acknowledges the need to further explore the extent to which BMCs, through their history, theologies, preaching, worship, cultures, beliefs and activities, have engaged with its membership, community and more specifically BYM, relating to key issues for support or of concern, be it theological, socio-political or educational (Andrews, 2002; Beckford, 2004; Davis, 2010; MacRobert, 1989, 2007; Pinn, 2002).

I will firstly focus on the historical context of BMCs, relating to their ‘categorisation’ and emergence as a phenomenon within ‘British Christianity’, considering who leads and attends these churches and factors that influenced their cultural and religious values (Adedibu, 2012; Aldred, 2005; Edwards; 1992; Sturge, 2005). The chapter then considers what BMCs do and think regarding the issues associated with BYM and the factors that sustain their response or thinking. Furthermore, the chapter considers my own ‘reflection’ and ‘curiosity’, as a member and leader in New Testament Church of God (NTCG). Here, I reflect on the factors that influenced my interest in the responses of NTCG and other BMCs to issues associated with BYM. This section uses theological reflection techniques to explore factors that influenced my presuppositions that NTCG and other BMCs appear to be disconnected or are oblivious to the challenges and needs of marginalised BYM.

The chapter goes on to explore key identifying theologies, practices, beliefs, traditions and ideologies associated with BMCs, in particular those associated with black Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. Here, I am seeking to consider key themes in these churches relating to their inclusions, concerns, exclusions or indifferences, regarding such things as worship, engaging with BYM, socio-political and community issues (Adedibu, 2012; Floyd-Thomas et al., 2007; Pinn, 2002).

Importantly, this chapter uses the NTCG as a case study example for more targeted exploration of thoughts regarding ecclesiology, evangelism, sin, salvation, God, Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, to name some of the key issues for consideration.

There are three key reasons for using NTCG to represent or highlight what Adedibu (2012) categorises as the distinctiveness of BMCs. Firstly, it offers the opportunity to interrogate (critical questioning) and explore the denomination I grew up in, later, becoming curious about its engagement with black young men, as well as its relevance in community, with individuals and groups not involved or associated with the church (Anderson, 2013). Furthermore, my 'insider' perspective allows for an informed representation of the nuances of its beliefs and traditions (Adedibu, 2012; Aldred, 2005; Edwards, 1992; Sturge, 2005). Secondly, NTCG, said to be one of the catalysts within British BMC's history, arguably planting the seed for what has now become the current BMC phenomenon in this country (Adedibu, 2012; Aldred, 2005; Arnold, 1992; Becher, 1995; Burrell, 2011; Edwards, 1992; Gerloff, 1992; McRobert, 1989; Toulis, 1997).

Given that 2014 marked the 61st year anniversary of NTCG in the UK, this project comes at a significant time, as NTCG enters a phase of appointing new and younger leadership in key regional positions, who will engage with both the opportunities and challenges of being relevant to its membership and communities where they are located (Aldred and Ogbo, 2010; Thompson, 2013). The third argument for using NTCG as a case study is that it offers a single and tangible denomination to explore the contribution of the African Caribbean Diaspora, whose vision, beliefs, faith in God and activities allow for greater understanding and insights into the 'world' of BMCs. NTCG, therefore, presents an opportunity to be included in critical

discourse or conversation between my ‘insider’ curiosity and presuppositions, BYM’s situation and the ethos of NTCG, representing a BMC context or perspective.

The final area for exploration in this chapter relates to key concerns and reflections offered by our respondents and BMC leaders regarding the perceived gaps and disconnect between BYM and BMCs. Here, I consider some of the critical challenges and limitations emerging from BMC’s theologies, practices and activities that might influence their engagement or non-involvement with BYM. The chapter concludes, acknowledging the complex dynamics in which I argue for BMCs to consider reviewing their practices and move towards framing a ‘black practical Pentecostal street theology’ that is able to support the work of engaging BYM.

6.2 The Emergence and Shape of Black Majority Churches in the UK

In order to address one of the central questions posed in this thesis regarding what underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies inform, shape or inhibit the responses of BMCs to the situation of BYM, this section will consider the history, shape, leadership functions of BMCs, which may offer indicators of their experience, capacity, and aspirations to engage these men. A contextual approach is arguably necessary here. John de Gruchy (1995) suggests that theology is contextual worldwide, because it is developed within a particular political, historical and cultural context that inevitably shapes it.

Individuals like Adedibu (2012), Burrell (2011), Edwards (1992), Sturge (2005) Toulis (1997) and Gerloff (1992) have explored the emerging beliefs, traditions, perceptions and assumptions associated with BMCs. Gerloff’s extensive study of BMCs within a British

context suggests that the genesis of BMC denominationalism emerged from the ‘Windrush period’. Her research, corroborated by other scholars, confirms that the Church of God in Christ, established in 1952, was the first BMC emerging from migrants, some working class and others poor, mainly from the Caribbean. Subsequent to this was the simultaneous development and establishment of Church of God of Prophecy and New Testament Church of God in 1953 (Adedibu, 2012), both with their international leadership headquarters in Cleveland Tennessee. Importantly, but not for exploration in this research, is the fact that both NTCG and Church of God of Prophecy emerged from the historic ‘Church of God’ that was established and lead by A.J. Tomlinson in Cleveland during 1906 (Anderson, 2014).

Whilst this section seeks to explore key faith, theological and ideological factors associated with the emergence of UK BMCs, I am again mindful not to see these churches as though they were homogenous, but to consider their heterogeneous composition.

Anderson’s study of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches worldwide gives us insight into the challenges faced by those who seek to represent a ‘homogeneous Pentecostal’ paradigm or perspective. For him:

Pentecostals have defined themselves by so many paradigms that diversity itself has become a primary defining characteristic of Pentecostal and charismatic identity.
(2004: 10)

Adedibu is well worth quoting at length here, to represent the homogenous and heterogeneous dialogue:

This heterogeneity has contributed to the shaping of the theologies and *leitmotifs* of these churches. The apparent influences of liberation theology – a product of the influence of James Cone’s fusion of Martin Luther King’s and Malcolm X’s ‘theologies’ of social inequality and social justice in relation to the egalitarian status of Blacks in America and the repudiation of colonialism – cannot be over-emphasised. Though there are diverse denominational strands amongst Black-Led Churches, the intriguing and challenging feature of these churches is the absence of generalised theologies common to all Black-Led denominations in Britain. There exist, however, points of convergence on various doctrinal ideals, such as prayer, the strong affirmation of literalism in biblical exegesis, works of the Holy Spirit and power evangelism. (2012: 113)

For me, Adedibu captures the complexities in this exploration to understanding the theology and practices of Black Majority Churches, their doctrines, teachings and their role in communities and the wider society. This complexity is also captured in the works of Aldred (2005), Beckford (2000), Floyd-Thomas (2007) and Sturge (2005), all of whom have suggested that making sense of BMCs or black churches has to be done collaboratively in order to understand the institutional and contemporary context of these churches.

According to Sturge (2005), the term Black Majority Church emerged following a series of deliberations and debates between leadership and members of the African and Caribbean Evangelical (ACEA). His work highlights the dialogue and process relating to a British BMC categorisation. He states:

It was deliberate in the sense that we at ACEA, which instigated the use of the term, did so because we wanted to be rid of the badge that churches were not comfortable with and which, at worst was patronising and disrespectful to Black Christians. It was also a matter of self-identity. We wanted to offer a lens through which to view Black Christians in order to recognise their true and proper value and role. (2005: 29–30)

Sturge further suggests there are at least five identifiable segments that could be included under the term BMCs. These include:

- Churches emerging from the African Caribbean Diaspora;
- Churches emerging from the African Diaspora;
- BMCs within the ‘historic’ denominations;
- BMCs within the White Pentecostal denominations; African and Caribbean and
- Spiritual churches. (Sturge, 2005: 53)

Given Sturge’s categorisations, both he and Adedibu (2012) acknowledge that the story of Black Christian’s in the UK can be traced back over one hundred years. More importantly, Adedibu argues that his study ‘has succeeded in effectively dating the origins of Black Churches in Britain to 1906 in consonance with previous assertions of MacRobert’ (2012: 5). As important as this may be historically, I find little evidence suggesting any significant or meaningful input relating to black Christians or black church in the then Christian ‘landscape’ within an early twentieth-century context that impacts or enhances this. Having said that, Trotman’s contribution to the ‘black church’ debate strongly challenges such categorisations, suggesting a resistance and repulsion for those who see it as separatist and discriminatory against other races (Edwards, 1992: 22).

What then are the key factors emerging within the history of BMCs that shaped their dynamics and ethos? It has been almost seventy years since the arrival of the 'Empire Windrush' in England (1948), when migrants from the Caribbean left their homes to commence a new life in England (Aldred, 2010; Fryer, 1984). The arrival of people from Africa and the Caribbean has to be understood within what could be described as a British post-war labour shortage period. People from Africa and the Caribbean were, therefore, actively encouraged to enter Britain and be attached to large companies that were recruiting from Commonwealth countries at the time (Phillips and Phillips, 1998).

Their arrival and subsequent entry into British society was met with blatant opposition and discrimination, with overt expressions of racism and oppressive practices that impacted families that arrived, seeking potential economic, social and educational success (Cashmore, 1984; Jenkins and Solomos, 1989; Phillips and Phillips, 1998). Signs and notices proclaiming 'No Coloured, no children, no dogs' were a common sight outside many rented accommodations (Haynes, 1983; Cashmore, 1984 and Paul, 1997).

There is evidence also suggesting that politicians were involved in reinforcing discriminatory practices. For example, Alderman Griffiths, a Conservative candidate for Smethwick in the West Midlands, endorsed the slogan: 'If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour' (Ely and Denny, 1987). At this stage, Caribbean migrants were seen as the 'immigrant problem' (Ely and Denny, 1987; James and Harris, 1993; Phillips and Phillips, 1998). In a speech in Walsall on 9 February 1968, Enoch Powell, the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West, offered a strong argument to halt immigration into Britain (Paul, 1997).

It is within the above context that Caribbean Christians, in particular people from Jamaica, made attempts to engage with host churches, hoping that, like in their countries of origin, their spiritual and religious needs would be addressed (Arnold, 1992; Aldred, 2005; Burrell, 2011; Brooks, 1982 and Lyseight, 1995).

The experiences of rejection and isolation for some migrants challenged the core of their spiritual and religious beliefs, as represented in the works of Adedibu (2012), Aldred (2005) and Touils (1997). According to Cappel (2009), migrants of the 1950s responded to the hostility and feeling of rejection in one of three ways. She described the first group as ‘retreaters’, who because of the deep and negative experiences and impact of hostility, found their faith and confidence were significantly shaken to the extent they turned away from religion and the Christian faith altogether. For these, it did not mean total abstinence from church attendance or interaction with black Christian folk. Consequently, they would periodically attend for special occasions, like Christmas, Easter and for christenings and funerals.

The second group, categorised as ‘innovators’, were equally disappointed with issues associated with racism, prejudice and rejection from white churches, also the wider society. However, their determination to subscribe to a greater sense of hope that transcended the reality of their situation became motivational in their quest to survive. Motivated by their faith, trust, passion for fellowship and prayer, time was set aside to pray and fast for answers to situations of challenge, uncertainty and hostility (Aldred, 2005; Arnold, 1992; Brooks, 1982; Burrell, 2011; Lyseight, 1995; Thompson, 2004).

The ‘innovators’, like some of the pioneers associated with the historic BMCs, emphasised the significance of applying spiritual power and ‘anointing’, as acknowledged in Luke 10:19, stating, ‘Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.’ The notion of having God’s power and support, made life easier for them to survive and construct ‘spiritual strategies’ or a ‘survival theology’ that could be applied daily (Aldred, 2005; Beckford, 2000; Burrell, 2011, Sturge, 2005). These folk commenced meeting in ‘spaces’ with likeminded people, where they could develop a safe and mutually trusting environment for sharing and worship (Arnold, 1992; Brooks, 1982; Lyseight, 1995; Thompson; 1994).

During this period, as highlighted earlier, many black families were labelled negatively by statutory institutions (social services, police and health service) and were treated with hostility by host communities (Ely and Denny, 1987; Grant and Patel, 1992; Dominelli, 1988). Experiences of isolation and detachment from ‘Back a Yard Realities’ (the familiarities and customs of country of origin) led folk to explore ways of engaging with others from their migrant communities. This approach was both to combat a sense of alienation and forge new relationships and solidarity. It was during this period that those migrants, who had a spiritual and church affiliation and custom prior to entering Britain, sought to bridge the gap for their missing social, spiritual and economic needs.

An important factor worth noting as BMCs developed was the fact that many of those who were now emerging in roles as spiritual, church, prayer and denomination leaders were not theologically trained (Aldred, 2005; Brooks, 1982; Burrell, 2011). However, they had certain approaches and methods in engaging with life’s challenges and demands. Their attention to

prayer, strong emphasis in the power and works of the Holy Spirit, affirmation of the Bible being God's undisputed voice on human functionality and active evangelism were all key expressions and principles for sustaining them in an already hostile environment (Sturge, 2005). This is equated to what Paris (1995) considers to be upholding spiritual values between the relationship of the divine and 'human community', with all its complexities.

It would appear here that the underlining spiritual values, that for some were already established in the Caribbean, whilst fundamentally challenged became further strengthened as they encountered new and different negative 'principalities and powers,' as defined in Ephesians 6:12–13:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

A pertinent question worth asking here is what kind of God were these folk depending on? In Mays' work, *The Negro's God*, he considers how God is depicted in 'Negro literature', songs and sermons within a US context. His response was the 'Negro Masses', saw God in different ways at different times. For some, God was the spiritual and the emotional boost and for others he represented a protector and defender. However, within these different perceptions, what was constant was a God seen as having ultimate power and authority to transcend human endeavours, guide and strengthen one through the different oppressions and troubles faced.

However, a telling finding for Mays, in exploring black spirituality in the USA, was that most of the spiritual songs examined were: '[O]ther-worldly – that is, they lead one to repudiate this world, consider it a temporary abode, and look to Heaven for a complete realization of the needs and desires that are denied expressions here' (2010: 24). The research undertaken by Toulis within NTCG represents similar notions of God as depicted by Mays. Kane helps us here, suggesting that the way God is perceived and understood or represented is contextually and culturally constructed. Kane argues:

The kinds of models we use are those that resonate with experience and that point towards that which is beyond experience – God. The only models we can use are those that are available in our culture. (1986: 118)

In line with Kane's argument, I suggest that the third group that Cappel (2009) highlights are those who refused to back down from entering the established white churches. They saw God as their 'strength', 'defender' and advocate. In essence, they imposed their presence on congregations, implying that they were there to stay. This group is appropriately named the 'persisters'. This group's determination to worship in these churches produced causalities, with fractured relationships, mistrust and engendered responses, resulting in what Cappel categorised 'white flight', a concept referring to the departure of White Christians from some inner-city churches, to churches and spaces that were 'migrant free' (2009: 28).

As a product of the group Cappel categorised 'innovators', I draw on my 'insider' knowledge and experience, as a young person, with other youngsters (between the ages of eleven and sixteen), I recall the prayer meetings, enthusiastic singing and worship, as well as the

spontaneous testimonies about ‘God’s goodness and support’ in daily life. This was seen, felt and experienced during attendances at home and church prayer and worship gatherings / meetings. An important question for reflection is: were the activities, worship, testimonies and sermons relevant to me as a young black boy, dealing with peer and street pressures and enticements? The truthful and simple answer is no! The recollection here is of being expected to trust God at all times, regardless of the challenges, arguably embracing His transcendent capacity through the work the Holy Spirit to empower me to overcome temptations. Whilst an abridged response, it supports the notion that BMCs during my growing years failed to acknowledge the nuances relating to BYM who were part of churches, struggling with outside influences as acknowledged above and in the self-reflection section below.

In recent years, churches like NTCG, Church of God of Prophecy and New Testament Assembly have grappled with issues regarding their relevance, traditions, doctrines, theologies and ideologies (Adedibu, 2012; Aldred, 2005; Aldred and Obgo, 2010; Thompson, 2013). From an ‘insider perspective’, I have observed a growing influence of second- and third-generation leaders (male majority) in these denominations, some having a degree of ‘in-house’ theological / leadership training, whilst others have embarked on more professional and academic theological studies (Thompson, 2013). It is within this dynamic that a degree of reflection and development surrounding socio-political, theological and community concerns are gaining momentum. These are reflected in books and journals such as: *The Black Church in the 21st Century*, *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches of British Christianity* and *Challenges of Black Pentecostal Leadership in the 21st Century*.

Whilst seeing some evidence of reflection about BMCs by BMC leaderships, I suggest it still has not gone far enough in counteracting what some researchers had identified to be ‘inward-looking’ denominations, more concerned with issues of holiness, righteousness and lifestyles that were aimed at ‘pleasing God (Toulis, 1997). Having said that, Aldred (2005) and Sturge (2005), in highlighting the challenges facing BMCs in their early development, suggested that these experiences served as motivators for churches to create infrastructures and developing an ethos that met their social, spiritual and emotional needs, which can now be reflected on.

Recognising the relative development and progression of BMCs, as represented in some of the above research/works, does not diminish Alexander’s concerns about the male-dominated leaderships in many of these denominations. For her, the lack of senior female leaderships in these denominations has an absence of much needed contributions from women relating to such issues as church policies, practices and strategies associated with being a relevant church (1996). She does, however, acknowledge an increase in female leadership, but is dissatisfied that women are not significantly represented in making key decisions, given that many of the BMCs women constitutes the majority of its memberships.

The contentions and debates regarding BMCs patriarchal roots, however, is ongoing, more so, with the emergence of ‘Womanist theology’ (Alexander, 1996; Coleman, 1998; Grant and Patel, 1992). This theology, approach or concept was influenced by the ‘Womanist’ phrase and ethic coined by Alice Walker in 1983, which influenced African-Americans, in the first instance, who at the time were known as ‘Black feminists’. The emergence of UK black Womanist perspectives represents an advocacy of approaches and actions that challenge

oppression, as well as being involved in human transformational activities, in bringing healing to individuals and communities (Hall, 2013).

I am interested here to question whether or not a greater ‘power base’ with female senior leaders within BMCs would enhance the thinking and support structures for engaging BYM. Whilst a valid question necessitating further research, my work has highlighted that all the respondents articulated a love and respect for their mothers, who they felt understood them, and took time to support them. On the other hand, twelve out fourteen respondents viewed their fathers and the men in their lives negatively. From this, I suggest that BYM’s experience with their mothers has the potential to influence their perceptions about female leadership, which may further affect how they see BMCs. This could also be influenced by the positive support and advice they received from some of their mothers, whilst these young men transitioned through the criminal justice system (involvement with police, courts, prison and probation).

BYM’s perceptions and experiences of men and ‘male leadership’, on the other hand, was influenced by the input or lack of guidance from their fathers, which for most of the young men in our study, was absent in their lives. For Madhubuti, many Black churches’ practices and traditions are outdated, resulting in them becoming irrelevant to BYM seeking answers to their challenges. He argues:

It is important that we understand that many Black ministers in their pseudo-positions of power and influence are not necessarily the best examples of strong Black male leadership. (1991: 67)

There may be an argument here for churches to consider dialogue with mothers whose sons have been gang affiliated or involved in criminality. This conversation may have the potential for some fresh thinking regarding how BMCs engage BYM.

Having explored some of the key factors associated with the establishment of BMC in the UK, the next section is concerned with what these churches think and presently do regarding the interests and needs of BYM.

6.3 Black Majority Churches' Thoughts and Activities Regarding Black Young Men

I have argued from the outset that this work seeks to address the lack of literature, research and thoughts relating to BMC's response to BYM. I also acknowledge that not all BYM involved in criminality, gang association and 'Street' lifestyles are seeking to desist and live crime-free lives (Anderson, 1999; Glynn, 2014). However, from the narratives of our fourteen respondents, along with research already done by Anderson (2008), Glynn (2014), Gunter (2010), Pitts (2008) and Rich (2009), there is evidence suggesting that some black youths, more specifically BYM, are willing to seek and receive support towards exiting the negative lifestyle associated with 'street' or gang-associated activities. The works of Dimitriadis (2003) and Regan (2010) are also suggestive that, should the right approaches be used, BYM would not be oppositional to receiving relevant support to exit lifestyles, that for some, have resulted in the violent deaths of friends (McLagan, 2005; Heale, 2008). The notion of the 'right' approaches is addressed in chapter seven.

With some indication that BYM may be receptive to some type of ‘appropriate engagement’, this research has taken the argument further by ascertaining, through empirical work that they are prepared to engage in conversation with BMCs in particular regarding how they might best be supported. However, it was clear from my research that this engagement would only be acceptable on the grounds that BMC’s treated these men with ‘respect’, ‘dignity’, ‘acceptance’ and ‘love’, which according to the men involved in this study does not mean preaching at them, accusing them of living sinful lives or seeking to convert them. These sentiments have been echoed by numerous men in conversation over the duration of this project.

In continuing the reflections on my own theological and ‘faith based’ journey and responses to social concerns as a second generation black Pentecostal minister in Birmingham, already working with BYM, this section raises the critical question again: what underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies inform, shape or inhibit the responses of BMCs to the situation of black young men?

Other questions, arguably germane to the key question, are:

- How important are socio-political and community concerns to BMCs?
- How do BMCs view the situation facing BYM?
- What does it mean to have an inward-looking BMC?
- What factors contribute to the perceived gap between BMCs and BYM?
- How do BMCs see BYM regarding salvation, sin and criminality?
- What constrains BMCs from being more active in working with BYM?
- What would it mean to have an outward-looking BMC?

- To what extent do the theologies and practices of BMCs resonate with the principles of liberation and black theologies? Are these ideas uncongenial? And, what are some of the assumptions about empowering or supporting marginalised people and communities?

The above set of questions, whilst neither exhaustive nor ranked in order of importance, helps us here, as the chapter progresses, to highlight the thinking and activities of BMCs relating to BYM. Andrews' work relating to *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, offers a US perspective on the relationship between black churches and urban youths, which I suggest has some resonance with my UK research regarding the 'gap' and 'disconnect' between BYM and BMCs. Andrews argues:

The disparagement of black churches often reflects concern over two significant groups within the black community. There seems to be an unquestioned consensus among black ministers, theologians, politicians, and laypersons alike that the church is out of touch with the lives and concerns of black urban youths and black middle-class. (2002: 62).

Andrews presents a context, necessitating similar questions to those posed above. Pinn, on the other hand, presents a counter-narrative regarding black church engagement with community. His work, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, offers examples of how some churches in poor black neighbourhoods sought to redress issues associated with drugs and gang association. Pinn argues:

Some churches have targeted alternative employment options as a way of keeping young people off drugs. The rationale is simple: If young people have rewarding forms of employment, they will be less likely to use or distribute drugs. A continuation and example of this 'safe space' concept is found in the work done by Allen AME Church of Queens, New York. Recognizing that children within some worst sections of the church neighbourhood needed a space in which they were safe from the dangers of the streets. (2004: 102–103)

Whilst Pinn presents a US context of black churches' involvement with marginalised young people, there is limited evidence within a UK context offering a similar praxis (Beckford, 2004). Importantly, Pinn's theological perspective on black churches working with black youths in marginalised neighbourhoods I welcome, given the focus of this research and the very limited theological responses and perspectives relating to BYM, which from sociological and criminological perspectives are well documented in the works of Anderson (1999), Wilson (1990), Dimitriadis (2003), Glynn (2014), Gunter (2010) and Rich (2009). Their work offer thoughts, reflections and solutions regarding BYM and such issues as trauma, family life, criminality, street culture, gang, violence, rehabilitation and desistance.

Sturge (2005) and Adedibu (2012) have made some inroads into assessing the historical and contemporary work of BMCs in the UK, suggesting that these churches have contributed to the welfare and wellbeing of the black community with the development of, for example, Saturday schools to challenge the underachievement of black children, developing senior citizens clubs and groups and, more recently, developing food banks. This, however, says little about their considerations on the situations facing BYM.

Beckford's 2004 book, *God and the Gangs*, represents an attempt to bring some critical thoughts to issues facing the church, community, young people in gangs and BYM. His work is possibly the most telling as to what BMCs think, say and do about the concerns about BYM raised in this work. Beckford's work evidently challenged BMCs about what he argued to be their 'retreatist' stance regarding socio-political engagement, critical or intellectual conversations and their lack of engagement surrounding issues of gangs, guns and knives in black neighbourhoods, where BYM were known to be involved. For Beckford, this amounted to BMCs being stuck with mantras of the first generation, with traditions, beliefs and activities that were anti-intellectual, inward-looking, apolitical and arguably detached from the needs of marginalised folk (2004). His most recent work argues that BMCs, particularly Pentecostals, are bewitched by Colonial Christianity and are still not liberated from its colonial Christian heritage. He suggests:

[B]lack British Pentecostalism, due to its colonial heritage, fell prey to an insular anti-intellectualism and apolitical stance that enervated its ability to productively engage the wider culture and advocate for its poorest and most marginalised members. (2014: 5)

From another perspective, Abedibu (2012) speaks of BMC's contributions to socio-political concerns and Sturge (2005) offers thoughts about the 'rich heritage' of BMC early pioneers. However, I have found little evidence in the literature that suggests that BMCs had been involved in any critical discourse or theorising relating to BYM or their issues as raised in this research.

Whilst finding little evidence of ‘conversations’ by BMCs regarding BYM, Adedibu (2012) and Sturge (2005) offer some insights into a number of ecumenical or Christian initiatives, indirectly linked to BMCs. Some of these initiatives are directly involved with BYM and their families, arguably transcending the ecclesiological orientations or denominational definitions. Of interest to this work is the initiative identified in Adedibu’s work, the Bringing Hope Charity, which I was involved in jointly initiating in 2004 and remain a part to this present day. Evidently, this position opens itself to a biased representation, consequently, the views of Adedibu are offered here without commentary. His exploration confirms that Bringing Hope commenced its life in 2004, as a consortium, a partnership between the Council of Black-Led Churches, the Diocese of Birmingham and the Birmingham City Council’s Community Safety Partnership.

Adedibu’s limited exploration, however, regarding a black Christian response to gun and knife crime, acknowledges that the work of Bringing Hope, along with such groups as ‘Families for Peace’ in Birmingham, ‘Mothers against Violence’ in Manchester, ‘The Peace Alliance’ and ‘Damilola Taylor Foundation in London’ highlight some of the challenges and complexities in seeking to engage with individuals and families affected by gangs, guns, violence and knife associated crimes and lifestyles. This, however, says little as to whether these groups are involved in any critical conversations or if the narratives of BYM have influenced their initiatives. That he has identified the above groups is suggestive that they are involved in applying some type of model or approach for engaging those they work with. This is inferred in the following statement:

The premise of Bringing Hope is based on the vision of ‘Christ Action’ and ‘Social Action’ that brings holistic, redemptive and transformative love from the heart of God onto the streets and into the lives of people crying out in need of salvation. The uniqueness of this social action is that it defies denominational boundaries to tackle the problem of gun and knife crime in Birmingham. (Adedibu, 2012: 168)

Beyond the limited statement above, my involvement with the Bringing Hope charity seeks to construct ‘new horizons’ for BMCs that might inform them should they choose to engage BYM.

Importantly, concerns relating to BYM’s association with gun and knife crimes are not new, however, more strategic responses or conversations from certain BMCs have recently heightened, I would suggest, because a number of the gun and knife crime related deaths between 2011 and 2014, have related to young people associated, through family or friends, of BMC congregations. The following extract from a letter I have received from the Ascension Trust, a leading Christian charity, poignantly represents the concerns raised above:

Over the past 4 years in London alone 12 of our young people have been murdered through gang violence across the capital and a greater number nationwide which has blighted our Community in more than one way.

The other worrying trend is that increasingly young men being murdered are coming from the Church or whose parents are very committed Christians in our churches. We thought with this trend increasingly developing, it is important for us as black church leaders to meet and to discuss the causes of this trend and what we can do to stem it

through coordinated strategy. (Isaac, Powell and Shosanya, 2014).

Whilst a progressive move by the Ascension Trust, important questions are raised. Why does it take the tragic deaths of youngsters associated with BMC for leaders to become strategically and collectively involved in exploring issues associated with gun and knife violence and its impact in already impoverished communities? Furthermore, has there been any dialogue with the black community or BYM? These questions may have also been asked of people in a Boston Community in USA, who saw the emergence of the 'Boston Ten Point Coalition', an organisation set up in 1992 by clergy, lay leaders and community leaders, following a gang-related feud, which erupted in the funeral service of a gang member at the Morningstar Baptist Church, as rival members entered the church, turning the funeral service into a war zone, attacking mourners with guns and knives. This initiative, now well established, is known to have influenced the reduction in gang and gun violence in the Boston area (Gebo and Bond, 2012).

The Boston response has evidently resulted in what appears to be an intervention that engages BYM, although I am unable to determine what part, if any, the narratives of BYM played in the present activities of the coalition. The UK context, on the other hand, relating to the called meeting of The Ascension Trust, is at an embryonic stage of development, which may or may not lead to any strategic and theological activities on the issues raised in the letter. Having not attended the meeting called by the Ascension Trust, nor received any feedback on outcomes, I am unable to offer evidence as to their thoughts or plans for progressing the agenda associated with the plight facing BYM, their families and the communities where they live.

Another initiative worth highlighting in this section is the ‘God Squad’ of Brooklyn, another USA example of how faith and action comes together. Founded in 2010 as a Christian response to the continued violence, deaths and gang-associated issues, mostly in African American and Caribbean neighbourhoods, where black leaders had grown weary of encountering grieving church members who had lost a son or daughter to gun violence (Walshe, 2015). This ecumenical response to BYM’s situation is represented in Walshe’s article:

The brightly coloured ‘clergy response team’ jackets issued by the city to the ‘God Squad’, as they are mostly known, were not designed for New York’s winter, but the team, which is made up of Baptist ministers, Episcopalian ministers, Seventh day Adventists and at least one Rabbi, brave the cold regardless.

‘There are too many young black men dying out here,’ Monroe says in his rich Caribbean lilt, ‘and our work can’t stop because of the weather’.

Whilst offering a context to what appears a strategic and practical response to BYM by this concerned group, I observe that the article writer seemed to have represented a stereotypical account of one of the founders of the project, stating ‘Monroe says in his rich Caribbean lilt’. This is an interesting paradox, which, on one hand, paints a picture of a situation, in the community with serious implications about BYM, at the same time; she brings in a Caribbean contextualisation, linking Monroe’s lilt to an already negative reality facing BYM. I suggest that, whether intentional or otherwise, this story represents two categories of black men, those involved in crime and criminality and in Monroe’s case, there is a representation of ‘the animated’ or ‘lively’ black man. Whilst not wanting to take this aspect further, it is important

to acknowledge from research undertaken on black men by black men that this article reinforces some of the stereotypes relating to black men and BYM (Madhubuti, 1991).

The next section offers some reflections and insights relating to my sociological and theological journey that informed and shaped certain beliefs, ideologies and assumptions. I suggest that these factors eventually influenced my entry into pastoral work, impacting on my perceptions about God, BMCs and their connection with BYM and the wider community.

6.4 Theological Reflection and ‘Critical Conversation’ Processes for Supporting Black Young Men

As a black Pentecostal leader, taking time to consider the emergence of BMCs and their thoughts and involvement surrounding the dynamics of BYM, this section reflects on key aspects of my theological journey, experiences and influences that motivated me to pose some of the questions above. This necessity, according to O’Connell Killen and De Beer (2002), has the potential to inspire new perspectives, allowing for critical self-review of behaviors, ideas, approaches and theological activities that may require adjustment, reshaping or termination, as noted in Ballard and Pritchard (2006). Consequently, for this section, I offer some thoughts and reflective insights, drawing from the works of Anderson (2001), Thompson et al. (2008), Ballard and Pritchard (1996), Forrester (2001) and O’Connell Killen and De Beer (2002).

Importantly, making sense of the concept and activities associated with theological reflection, presented to be a daunting task in the first instance. This was due to the complex relationships and variable perceptions and activities associated with my context, as identified in my

narrative below. Furthermore, I had no known ‘theological reflective tools’ for reflecting on my narrative, because theological reflection and ‘faith based action’ evaluation or analysis, were not a part of my tradition, training or leadership activities as a minister in NTCG or generally as a Christian. However, in engaging with the scholarly work of the above individuals, I have been introduced to new and fresh insights to progress this work.

The field of Practical Theology and theological reflection arguably offers a rich array of methods and perspectives to the ‘Christian theological community’, offering tools for honest and critical reflection (Ballard and Pritchard, 1996; Forrester, 2000; Nash and Nash, 2009; Thompson et al., 2008). O’Connell Killen and De Beer also offer some reassurance, as well as pointers, regarding my continued reflections. They suggest:

If we want to encounter the wisdom of our Christian heritage in a way that empowers and offers transformative insights, we must bring that heritage into our reflection from the standpoint of exploration. In this standpoint, we know that coming to understand both our religious heritage and our own experience is a lifelong process of the journey of faith. In this standpoint, we willingly re-experience all the dimensions of the situations on which we reflect. (2002: 50)

For greater reflection here, a variety of approaches and models were considered, all offering the opportunity to reflect, yet having limitations in their respective applications. The approaches considered included ‘Kolb’s learning cycle’, ‘The reflective spiral’, ‘Narrative reflective practice’, including Pattison’s ‘Critical Conversation’ approach (Thompson et al., 2008:50–74). Pattison’s model of ‘critical conversation’ appealed to me for this section,

because it allows for a three-way conversation, which gives expression to the context of this study, in that it enables me to: (a) represent my own views and ideas, as well as assumptions emerging from my lived experiences and church traditions; and (b) it offers a ‘voice’ to the situation of concern or to be examined, namely the context relating to BYM. Finally, (c) this approach ‘opens the door’ for the Christian tradition, in this case, BMCs, to bring expression to their belief systems, theological perceptions and assumptions. It is within this three-way conversation that thoughts and questions can be posed to ‘each other’. According to Pattison:

The basic idea here is that the student should imagine herself as being involved in a three-way conversation between (a) her own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions, (b) the beliefs assumptions and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition (including the Bible) and (c) the contemporary situation which is being examined. For the sake of concreteness, it may be helpful to personify these elements and imagine them as people who may or may not know each other to a greater or lesser extent who come together in a room to have a verbal conversation. (Woodward and Pattison, 2000: 139)

In adapting Pattison’s approach, the following contextualisation is offered to progress this section:

1. A reflection on my feelings, ideas and beliefs: what factors shaped, informed and influenced my thinking and actions surrounding my ontology or contemporary realities of how I perceive black young men?

2. What are the beliefs, traditions, assumptions of BMCs, including their reading and hermeneutics of the Bible that are pertinent to how they view black young men? Furthermore, how do they engage with socio-political concerns or issues?
3. How do the stories, narratives and experiences of BYM give voice to their concerns about the support they require, for those seeking to desist from gang and criminal associations?

In applying Pattison's critical conversation model, I am mindful that there are limitations that he has recognised. These include its limited capacity for acquiring answers to more complex questions that may require in-depth research. Furthermore, this model of critical conversation, according to Pattison's own reflection, can be perceived as inadequate for conceiving theological reflection. Having acknowledged these limitations, I offer a 'critical conversation matrix' below, which gives further expression to my reflection and emerging themes, as well as perceived theological and sociological insights during the conversation.

6.4.1 Self-Reflection Journey

The work of Heather Walton helps here, with some of her pioneering work in the field of feminist theology, theological reflection and using one's own narrative in theological reflection and writings. Walton offers critical tools for theological reflection and advancement. Walton argues against the use symbolic language constructed in, for example, denominational piety to appear powerful. She suggests that using one's own 'common cultural currency' can serve to convey deep and powerful thoughts and meanings (2014:xxvi). Walton challenges theologians and scholars who seek to use narratives as a way of profiling

their thoughts and perspectives under a ‘constructive narrative theology’ banner. She highlights the following:

It is not surprising that, in an age where propositional truth claims and appeals to foundational thinking are treated with scepticism, concrete, orthodox, liberal and progressive theologians alike should turn to narrative as an alternative basis upon which to found theological thinking. It must be admitted that this has proved a very creative turn, but extravagant claims are frequently made for narrative that are not subject to critical appraisal. (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005: 75)

Having no intention here to advocate extravagant claims, I will use Walton’s ‘common cultural currency’ to consider some of the factors that influenced and shaped my ideas, beliefs, assumptions and values, as well as my faith and spirituality, relating to church and BYM. The following auto-ethnography or self-reflection is offered here:

At the age of nine my sisters, mom and myself arrived in England. By this time my father was already established as a deacon at the Handsworth branch of the New Testament Church of God, consequently, we were already profiled as a family. One important issue I need to mention here is my mother’s concern about me from Jamaica, and it was that ‘Carver always mixed with the bad boys’. What a label to carry! So, here we are in England, having to share a house with another family. Yes! This place was a culture shock, the food, school, people, language, music, clothes, smells and much more. Soon we got into the church routine of Sunday school, Divine worship, fasting and prayer meetings at home and church.

I also started at a new school called Rookery Road Junior School in Handsworth. True to my history, I soon became involved with a group of black boys in the school who would dominate the playground and other children. I got into all types of antics and my most creative was being paid to do class work (usually maths) for boys less able. Secondary school life did not change me because after my first year, I again managed to hook with the 'bad boys'. So, smoking, stealing, fighting, bullying was a part of our trademark. So, the things I got involved in throughout my teenage years formed my identity. Many of the lads I hooked with were well known by authorities.

Therefore, what of church? Yes, I still went for a period. By this time, my parents were seriously concerned. Prayer meetings and fasting services were to do with me and other lads I had supposedly led astray. The influences of friends and the then black youth street culture were strong. My parents continued praying daily for me. By this time, my sisters had shed many tears for me.

One profound aspect of this short testimony is my parents' trust and total confidence in God's ability to change me. My mother would say, 'When God ready fe yu (for you)!' My mother, especially, was hurt emotionally by me, but she held Habakkuk 2:3 as her hope for me. It reads: 'For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry' (Habakkuk 2:3, Authorised / King James).

On the 6 June 1977 at 11am God did indeed reveal himself to me in my bedroom in a very dynamic manner. This deep conviction came with many tears, emotional pain, but yet a great sense of liberation and freedom from past issues. The Holy Spirit brought comfort and hope, to which I recall uncontrollably weeping, whilst kneeling on the floor, saying: 'I love you, Jesus', so many times that my throat and body became

tired. With my mother present on this day, she witnessed how God ‘changed her son’. This testimony highlighted the need for a divine process during a profound and radical change. (Anderson, 2001: 34–35)

The fact that I grew up in a black Christian Pentecostal household and attended a BMC, I argue, influenced and socialised me towards certain ways of thinking regarding such issues as prayer, God, worship, forgiveness, respect and the significance of the Bible (Channer, 2001). There are a number of key scriptures that were pertinent in my household, giving credence to my parents’ challenges to me, relating to certain attitudes and activities within my lifestyle they found difficult to cope with. The Bible was seen as a ‘governance tool’ in my household. As members of NTCG, the Bible was seen as the infallible Word of God, to be used to challenge, correct and even chastise. On another hand, I suggest, these scriptures were also intended to point me towards loving God and honouring my parents. I argue here that my parents’ use of certain biblical texts, rooted in their black Pentecostal tradition (expressed below in the section on beliefs, assumptions and perceptions of NTCG), were intended to force me towards a Christian commitment, challenge my behaviour and instruct me regarding living a ‘holy life’.

I recall that the following scriptures were important for my parents, as they attempted to engage me, whilst I remained in the family home. James 1:8 argues that ‘A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways’. This was used by my mother, in particular, to encourage me to become a Christian and have little or better no involvement with the streets or my peers. Another scripture referenced was Proverbs 13:1, which states, ‘A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke’. This was used when I refused or rebelled

against my parents' rules and instructions. Colossians 3:20 was another text used to remind me of my 'duty' of obedience towards my parents. Ephesians 6:1–3 was a text used both at home and church, appealing to us as children and youngsters to be obedient to our parents: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and though mayest live long on the earth.' Interestingly, Ephesians 6:4 adds: 'And fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' This was not quoted much by my parents, which became an issue of contention. Why? Because, my perspective and rebuttal to their insistence on my obedience and respect for them was supported by Paul's instruction to them also not to provoke me!

What is emerging from the above is what I argue to be my parents' biased use of the Bible to enhance and implement their beliefs and assumptions relating to parenting and the Christian faith. The above reflection on my narrative represents the complexity in making theological sense of diverse issues and perspectives associated with beliefs, faith and practice as it relates to the different 'actors' in this 'theological web' (Miller-McLemore, 2012). It is this very challenge that this work seeks to offer some thoughts regarding BMC's involvement and engagement with BYM.

Important aspects in this work are the interrelated and 'inter-disciplinary' considerations between theology and social science that offer this work multiple tools for analysis and interpretations. This interdisciplinary approach, however, is not without its challengers from both the theological and social scientific camps, who continue to explore and contest disciplinary boundaries (Cartledge, 2003).

6.4.2 Social Scientific Analysis within Theological Reflection

The argument that my environment and socialisation within a family where the parents were Pentecostals, members and leaders in NTCG, had an influence in shaping my outlook on life is supported by O'Donnell's Sociological Perspective on 'functionalism'. He states:

According to functionalists, socialisation is the process by which a person learns to behave in an acceptable manner within a society or group. It refers to the way in which values and norms (standards and rules) of society or group becomes part of the individual's own way of feeling and thinking. This process is referred to as the internalisation of these values and norms and through it the individual becomes part of a given culture. (1980: 47)

What is emerging here is an interdisciplinary discourse between theology, sociology and psychology. The psychological perspectives are also pertinent, because they have the potential to translate certain human actions, behaviours and activities, and, whilst not oppositional to a functionalist sociological perspective, it presents different causal roots for certain human behaviours and actions. Unlike the sociologically determined behaviours suggested by O'Donnell (1980), Hjelle and Ziegler, in their research relating to Personality Theories and human nature, argue that it 'is during exposure, observers, (learners) acquire mainly symbolic representations of the modelled activities which serve as prototypes for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour' (1981: 243).

Cartledge (2003: 13) introduces another pertinent factor here, the notion of ‘transcendent determinants’, which from a Pentecostal and charismatic perspective, I argue may represent elements ascribed to ‘God’s supernatural nature, unknown and divine happenings or factors that potentially influence human situations beyond explanations that are socio-scientific.’

In acknowledging the interdisciplinary perspectives associated with my dynamics, I further argue that the influence of the street and my peers presents another dimension that is pertinent to our discourse. The competing values of church, family and parents, on one hand, the values of peers and the streets, on the other hand, highlight some factors that had the potential to help and hinder me developing a positive self-concept as a BYM (Glynn, 2014; Wilson, 1991). Channer’s chapter in *Black Theology in Britain* gives further expression to the essence of my situation represented above. She highlights the following:

As children, many of the respondents were taken to church with their parents or other members of the family. During their youth and early adult years, these individuals had to decide whether to reject or accept these religious beliefs as relevant to their own lives. A factor that was often considered was the potential contempt and ridicule a religious lifestyle might provoke in their more secular minded peers. (2001: 12)

This dichotomy between the influences of the streets or my peers, some who were involved in crime and anti-social behaviors, and the distinctively Pentecostal and charismatic expressions and manifestations, as highlighted in my narrative, was a real dilemma for me. NTCG, for example, with some of its first generation, well-known pioneers at the time, like Oliver Lyseight (first National Overseer and leader of NTCG in UK), Sydney Thompson, Ena

Evadne Beccan, held on to what were then ‘impenetrable’ and ‘uncompromising’ traditions rooted in their translation and interpretation of the ‘Declaration of Faith’ and ‘Doctrinal Commitments’ of the denomination (Burrell, 2011; Brooks, 1982; Lyseight, 1995; Thompson, 2004).

The attitudes, perceptions, values and approaches of the then pioneers and members were akin to what was understood to be ‘true, holy and sanctified living’. However, from another perspective, these factors were incongruous with empowering young people like myself, grappling with the challenges of engaging with or becoming a part of a church that was perceived to be a ‘do’s and don’ts’ church. These traditions and spiritual protocols were taught to members, as ‘gospel truth’, argues Burrell, one of the few NTCG insiders who have written about the Church. It is worth quoting him at length here to highlight what for youngsters, were inhibiting factors that caused some to disassociate themselves from the functions, activities and beliefs systems of the church. This perceived gap and disconnect, influenced by the implementation of the rules, beliefs, values and doctrines of NTCG, highlighted a context of competing perspectives, values and expressions. Burrell represents the following:

This church was, in particular, very traditional in its dress code and style of worship and, in an attempt to ‘rightly defend the faith’, many church leaders mistakenly introduced wrong convictions that they idealised, which were not scriptural. Members of the church were not allowed to wear jewellery – except watches and wedding rings for women only – or cosmetics like make-up, lipstick and nail polish, or even to attend cinemas or theatres. Dancing was prohibited, except when in the Spirit. Certain types

of music brackets reggae – started in Jamaica in the 1960s – or up-tempo music were regarded as a work today, and were strictly prohibited in the church communities some young people including members of my own family were painfully excluded and virtually driven away from the church by well-meaning pastors and details for playing reggae. (2011: 101–102)

Whilst acknowledging the challenges highlighted by Burrell between the church and some youngsters represented in my narrative, I must not negate my experience of becoming a Christian. This ‘Divine’ or ‘Spirit changing’ encounter, from a Pentecostal perspective, resulting in a confession of Jesus being ‘Lord of my life’ resonates with Alexander’s notion of an African worldview. She suggests:

The African worldview is open to the supernatural in all of life. The African indeed prays for and expects God’s necessary, supernatural intervention in all of life’s affairs. All of life therefore is infused with both wonder and fear. (2011: 33)

An important observation here relates to the fact that my transformational experience happened outside of being in a BMC building, church service or associated meetings. Such a phenomenon concurs with what Cartledge (2003) defines as ‘transcendent determinants’. From the perspective of Killen and De Beer, this was my ‘defining experience’. They suggest that:

Experience has an inner dimension – the feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and hopes that carry into and out of any situation. This inner dimension involves our response to and what we make of and do with what occurs. (2002: 21)

In applying what Nash and Nash (2009) categorise as ‘Images and imagination’, the ‘picture’ that emerges in my mind during this reflection is me sitting in the middle of a room. In this room, there are my peers in one corner, representing the values of the streets and my parents in another corner, echoing the principles and practices of the Church. In reentering the above experiences, Killen and De Beer suggest that consideration should be given to ‘the inner and outer dimensions of our experience’ (2002: 22). Similarly, I equate this ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ experience concept with Paul’s writing in Roman 12:12. He states:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may know that ye prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God (Authorized King James Version).

I argue here that the inner and outer dimensions of my experience were influenced by two sets of ‘voices’, asserting their perspectives on issues such as, values, morals, church, temptations, the Bible and making right or wrong choices. On the one hand, my peers represented values and attitudes that gave way to behaviors, which at times were disruptive, anti-authority, loyal to the ‘code of the street’, as identified in works of Anderson (1999), Gunter (2010), Rich (2009), Wilson (1994) and in the narratives of the young men in this study. These external influences were representing the ‘world’ and its sinful actions, as referenced by Paul in Romans 12:2. Furthermore, my mother’s reminders that she was praying for a change in me

caused some degree of internal challenge or turmoil as to whether I should ‘follow’ my peers or respond to ‘the call of the Lord’, as I recall my mother saying on numerous occasions.

The above scenario offers an opportunity to consider what Thompson et al. (2008) and Ford (2007) categorise as the ‘theological mood’ and ‘emotional intelligence’ that may represent different and varied voices in this reflection and theological discourse. These moods and emotions are suggestive that there are issues or challenges that have influenced or triggered certain feelings, resulting in various actions or responses to that given situation. Importantly, it is within such a context of theological reflection that I am offered the opportunity to discern the dynamics of the situation relating to BYM and BMCs as this work seeks to explore (Thompson et al., 2008).

As this work seeks to privilege the voices of BYM that, I have already argued, are usually absent in theological discourse or conversation relating to any Christian response to their situation, the next section represents the thoughts and voices of BYM in this critical conversation.

6.4.3 Black young men offering a perspective

What then do these BYM have to say about their feelings, concerns, expectations and assumptions regarding BMCs? This question is important in this reflection, allowing me to assess their responses, in light of my role as a minister with NTCG, who I suggest is now more open to questions about the validity and relevance of BMCs like themselves regarding the needs of BYM. BYM’s thoughts and questions, as to whether or not NTCG and other BMCs are ‘unconcerned’, ‘oblivious’ or ‘detached’ from the real life challenges they face are

represented in the narratives of some of the respondents in this research. They articulated the following:

CH4 – The church needs to be a place for real people to be themselves, 'cause the setting of churches is like: everyone's holy, everyone's worshipping and almost saying, 'Look at me! I am holy, you're not.'

CH3 – They have forgotten about the struggles that black young men face. I go to church, the Black churches especially, and I see that their main focus is on their congregation, their main focus is on their buildings.

R3 – Some churches judge and the Bible says don't judge thy neighbour and I think it's just treating everybody the same and remembering that everybody has a heart, we all bleed the same. And, open up your eyes and open up your heart to people instead of thinking, he did a wrong.

R4 – Pentecostal church used to feel like they are altogether and better than the other church.

The above articulation raises questions as well as concerns from these men, who may or may not represent young men like themselves in Birmingham. However, by using a qualitative methodological approach and reviewing the literature on BYM represented in chapter two, their responses are significant and I would suggest may resonate with similar cohort of BYM (Anderson, 2008; Gunter, 2010; Glynn, 2014; Pitts, 2008). Having acknowledged these concerns, as mentioned earlier, there is also evidence, represented in chapters four and five, suggesting that these men would be open to dialogue with BMCs, in supporting them towards relevant engagement. In the case of 'CH3', for example, he sees his involvement transcending just having a dialogue. Now attending a local BMC, he states:

CH3 – To be honest, I think the church is not really focussed on black young men. Just based on my own experience, there is never no church that came to me and said, ‘You know what, there’s a God that loves ya.’ So, I think church is definitely missing something there and that’s what I wanna do. I wanna be a church leader that is looking out for people out there.

‘P2’, another respondent, brought up as a Rastafarian and interviewed in prison, presents another view as to what he would offer within a ‘Church’ and ‘street’ collaboration or partnership. He states:

P2 – If I have the chance when I get out of prison, I would want to share my experience with church leaders. You see, my role models was the gun man thing. There was nobody telling me about, ‘Nah nah nah! Go and do education and that. They were telling me to do bad.

These young men have indicated a degree of dissatisfaction here, from which I deduce a ‘challenge’ on one hand, but a ‘request’ and even a ‘proposition’ on another, ‘asking’ for BMCs to be relevant to the needs of ‘road’ or ‘street’ youths. At the same time, they are offering alternatives, whereby, the church could be more actively involved in dialogue with men like ‘P2’. Aspects of these initial reflections will be explored in chapter seven.

Having adapted Pattison’s ‘critical conversation’ frame work, the third strand is that of the Christian tradition, focusing on its beliefs, perceptions and assumptions, which in this chapter is expressed through NTCG lenses.

6.4.4 BMCs' underpinning beliefs, assumptions and perceptions

Whilst this chapter also considers the wider context regarding BMC's beliefs, theologies, activities and evangelistic work, this section explores the key beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions of NTCG, representing a 'BMC perspective'.

As indicated earlier, the NTCG and BMCs in general have been explored, researched and reflected on by individuals, both black and white, males and females. These include individuals like: Adedibu (2012), Aldred (2005), Arnold (1992), Becher (1995), Brooks (1982), Burrell (2011), Lyseight (1995), Sturge (2005), Toulis (1997), Thompson, (2004), Gerloff (1992), MacRobert (1989) and Thompson (2013). Importantly, these individuals represent both academic and non-academic approaches and methods to exploring NTCG's dynamics and contributions to the textured emergence of BMCs in Britain (Adedibu, 2012). The 'NTCG insiders' of the group above, namely, Selwyn Arnold, Ira Brooks, Barrington Burrell, Oliver Lyseight, Sydney Thompson and Phyllis Thompson, offer some critical reflections, insights and aspirational thoughts about the denomination, as well as some considerations as to what informs, shapes its theology, practices, ideologies and beliefs. On the other hand, Toulis (1997), Gerloff (1992) and MacRobert (1989) actively place NTCG alongside other BMCs in a wider black Pentecostal discourse and offer 'outsider' insights, understandings and analysis of how the practices, doctrines and activities of a 'migrant church' became influenced and connected to the wider 'UK Pentecostal growth phenomenon' (Edwards, 1992).

Toulis's 'outsider' perspective was based on an anthropological fieldwork approach and conducted over an eighteen-month period. This empirical work, conducted in one of NTCG's

churches in Birmingham, examined ‘the construction of the identity amongst first generation Jamaican migrants through their participation in African-Caribbean Pentecostalism in Britain’ (1997:2). Interestingly, her research was conducted in a local congregation situated in an area of Birmingham known over the years for its association with deprivation, guns, gangs and violence (Beckford, 2004; Coughlan, 2008; Gillan, 2008; Heale, 2008; Scarman, 1982). Toulis’ exploration of ‘conversation and belief’ offers some insight into the theological and ideological ethos of NTCG. She states:

The church, however, is described as a ‘Holiness church,’ and members adhere to a ‘Holy life’. The beliefs and principles to which members adhere is encoded in the New Testament and a ‘Declaration of Faith’. (1997: 125)

The ardent embrace of the beliefs and doctrinal commitments of both leaders and members is historically rooted in the Holiness movement, emerging out of American Methodism of the mid-nineteenth century. Doctrinally, there is an emphasis on living lives that are ‘separate’, ‘sanctified’ and Spirit-led. In other words, there is a strong emphasis on a commitment to a lifestyle that was enshrined in ethical codes and activities that advocated avoidance of what was understood to be social evils or vices (Becher, 1995). It is within this framework that NTCG’s faith, beliefs, doctrines, traditions and activities are based. These are included in the following scripturally supported ‘practical commitment’ statements at the time:

- Total abstinence from all liquor or strong drinks. Proverbs 20:1; 23:29–32; Isaiah 28:7; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:21.
- Against the use of tobacco in any form, opium, morphine, etc. Isaiah 55:2; 1 Corinthians 10:31,32; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:3–8; James 1:21.

- That our members dress according to the teachings of the New Testament. 1 John 2:15,16; 1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:1–6.
- Against members attending movies, dances and other ungodly amusements; further, that extreme caution be exercised in viewing and in the selectivity of television programs. 1 John 2:15,16; Romans 13:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Philippians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1 (Minutes of the 59th General Assembly of The Church of God: Supplement to the minutes, 1982: 7).

The notion of a relationship with God being determined or affected by how one responds to the above is problematic for me at best and unacceptable at worst. For Brooks, who was also one of the senior leaders of the denomination during this period (1980s), he expressed:

The task of maintaining a progressive cultural balance in the churches is quite a considerable one. It is even more acute where older immigrant members make up for the majority of the congregation of their churches. In that case, key positions in the assemblies are dominated by people who are often seen by younger members as traditional die-hards, and stick to the ‘back-home’ traditions with dogmatic tenacity. Candidly speaking, these are the folks whose well intentioned attitudes of worship reflect a style of humbleness arising from deprivation – to a ‘God’ who is seen by them to be a stern master, and they are satisfied for accepting themselves as perpetually miserable offenders. (1985: 74)

Joel Edwards, another insider at the time, who later left the denomination, has a more specific challenge and suggests that ‘leaders who insist on holding to forms of traditional liturgies will

do so at the expense of young people who may not share the same liturgical culture' (1992: 75). For him a black Pentecostalism within the UK is faced with two major challenges. Firstly, he argues for a critical review, reflection and reassessment of how it interprets and patterns the cultural influences. Secondly, he suggests a re-evaluation and informed analysis of the degree to which UK BMCs have been influenced by the Azusa Street Outpouring in Los Angeles (1906-1909), led by William Seymour, as well as the Welsh Revival of 1904 and the spiritual awakening in Europe. In furthering Edwards' argument, Hill advocates for a Black Pentecostal criticality by suggesting:

Black Pentecostal theologians recognised that they could speak tongues and be critical thinkers. They are beginning to ask very searching educational and pedagogical questions. Pentecostal theological reflections on Christian religious education are necessary for the future. In my view, that is the single most important topic for the church for the 21st century. (2007: 70)

Having acknowledge earlier some progressive shifts within BMCs towards a degree of reflection on their practices, theologies and beliefs, this work continues to raise concerns as to how these present beliefs and traditions are able to effectively respond to the concerns of the respondents above.

It is within the complex web of theological reflection and sociological analysis that this section has attempted to offer a personal reflection, represent the thoughts and feelings of BYM and the values emerging, beliefs, ideologies and theology of NTCG, a BMC

perspective. It is from the critical conversation above that I have been able to represent some theoretical framing that is represented in the 'conversation matrix' below.

Critical conversation issues/key considerations	Carver's experience, ideas, beliefs, feelings and assumptions	NTCG / BMC's beliefs, traditions and assumptions	The dynamics and narratives of black young men	Theological insights	Sociological insights
1) Faith, belief, spirituality and morals	Exposure to Black Pentecostal church traditions, also influenced by the moral code of friends from the streets. Dual influences shaping identity	The Bible is the road map for living. John 3:16 highlights God's love for all, which includes black young men	The streets have influenced their moral, faith and belief systems, yet they are open to discuss offers of support	There is a fallen humanity needing the love and grace of God. Theological reflections needed to develop new approaches	Black young men are influenced by multiple factors: education, religion, community, law and order. Further research needed to include thoughts of black young men

2) Assumptions	Parents don't understand my challenges and conflict with church and the streets. They are unwilling to seek clarity	Becoming a Christian should deal with the issues of the streets for black young men. There is power and anointing if prayer to change lives	The church is far removed from street realities and its many challenges	Practical theology offers the opportunity for BMC to engage with black young men	The challenges facing black young men can be addressed by collaborative efforts: community, government church (intersectional approach)
3) Perceptions	BMCs are inward-looking and show little or no interest in engaging black young men	Black young men from the streets are unwilling to attend church and are too violent and disrespectful	BMC and the Christian community look down on black young men and are detached from them	The stories and narratives of black young men are untold within the theological community	Black young men are products of an unequal and racist society. They are already stereotyped and pigeon-holed

<p>4) Feelings, ideas, moods and emotions</p>	<p>Pressured to please parents and peers. Guilt for not responding to my parents' religion and faith</p>	<p>BMCS have suffered racism and feelings of isolation. This has changed and there is now a self-realisation of having some respect in wider Christian community</p>	<p>Feelings of anger, isolation and detachment from BMC and wider society. Needing their stories told!</p>	<p>BMCs to consider developing new and fresh empirical perspectives in engaging black young men</p>	<p>It is known that black young men are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Strategies needed to address this fact</p>
<p>5) Traditions</p>	<p>Grown up in black Christian home, seeing expressions of Pentecostal faith and worship</p>	<p>Firm belief in the power and authority of God and His word. Pentecostal and charismatic in worship and lifestyle</p>	<p>There is a street life code that black young men live by – it helps them to survive</p>	<p>There is a growing awareness that practical theology can offer new approaches to empirical research re: BMCs and black young men</p>	<p>There are sociological factors that determine human interactions re race, education religion and policy developments</p>

6) Concerns and suspicions	Now a BMC leader involved with black young men. There are concerns that BMC are closed to new ideas	BMC struggle to engage black young men. There are few examples of effective engagement in the UK	The criminal justice system will continue to oppress black young men – BMCs fear the streets	BMCs not exploring the wider world of practical theology and empirical perspectives towards change	BMCs reluctant to consider sociological interpretations of issues facing black young men
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I suggest here that the conversation above has highlighted some gaps, challenges and possibilities for greater and more in-depth discourse regarding the relationship between BMCs and BYM. Furthermore, I argue that without the incorporation of the views and narratives of BYM about their support as advocated by Rich (2009) and Glynn (2013), perspectives and approaches will be limited, ineffective and lacking new and fresh responses for engaging them. In our continued discussion about effective engagement of BYM by BMCs, the focus group of nine senior BMC leaders in Birmingham offers further insights.

6.5 Understanding the Gaps and Disconnection between BMCs and BYM

In order to develop a clearer picture regarding the gaps and disconnection referred to by some of our respondents, it was important to triangulate their thoughts with BMC leaders in the form of a focus group. The focus group comprised of nine BMC leaders (three females and six males), leaders in churches located in areas of Birmingham known for their association with youth gangs, violence, gun and knife incidents relating to BYM. The two-hour focus group session involved discussing some key questions (see Appendix), emerging from BYM's narratives, my insider concerns and discussions informally held over the years with BMC leadership about 'church relevance'.

In taking a position that BMCs have failed to consider the 'realities' BYM categorised 'hard to reach', 'gang-associated' or 'from road', as stated by some respondents, implies a gap or irrelevance to their situation. With BYM also raising concerns about the negative labels associated with their situation, it was important to hear what the focus group had to say here.

The following emerged from the discussion:

LL – For me, the negative labels or statements relating to black young men worries me. As a young black man growing up, I am sure those labels related to me. Somebody would have labelled me in that way without knowing at the time, it's a label that society seems to have accepted, regardless of our position.

ACP – As a mother to a 25-year-old, he isn't like that, so I can't see that we can class everybody in the same vein. He went to university in London and he was stopped and searched. He has got all his little tags showing that he was stopped and searched 15-20 times. This situation shows that our young black men are a target whether they are involved in crime or not.

All nine ministers indicated a concerned as to how the negative labels associated with BYM are represented in the dynamics of daily life, relating to educational institutions, community, as well as within the criminal justice system. Leaders highlight the need to challenge labels generally associating BYM with violence, aggression, criminality, drugs and gangs. However, seven out of nine also agreed that some of their leaders and members within their respective churches and denominations had already bought into these negative labels, based on what they had read, seen, heard or experienced with BYM. Alternatively, as Beckford argues, there are those leaders who withdraw from the issues in question. He suggests that:

[T]he Church sidesteps gun crime and gang violence and focuses on the world to come, preparing for life with Jesus in heaven through devotion to the spiritual life. (2004: 6)

The above scenario clarifies a paradox within this research, because, whilst my hypothesis seeks to argue in favour of BMCs engaging and supporting BYM, it appears that effective support for their rehabilitation and desistance may be met with some opposition from members and leaders in their churches. This raises further concerns as to how leaders would seek to challenge and empower their associate leaders and members to understand and engage with BYM in the communities they ‘serve’. Davis (2010), however, highlights a key consideration here, in exploring BMCs’ responses to social or community concerns. He argues that:

Regardless of the flaws, defects, and deficiencies of the black church, it is still the most important social institution in the black community. Like all institutions, the black church is not perfect, and we should point out its strengths and weaknesses to maximise its full potential. (2010: 13)

Davis arguably presents a reasonable argument, however, our triangulation with the narratives of the respondents and BMCs points to some definite challenges as raised by BYM.

CH1 – I would want black church leaders to remember where they have come from and not allow this middle class position that’s developed in some black churches to stop them relating to the streets.

Like ‘CH1’, other respondents represented the following thoughts and concerns regarding BMCs:

R1 – Let them get off your asses, that’s what I would say, because sometimes I’m in church and I have to ask myself if they really understand or think about what I went through when I went through my madness on the streets?

P1 – For me black churches should offer understanding, boundaries and employment that supports independence and entrepreneurial aspirations. Not to be again oppressed by the system, but to be given a chance to develop differently.

R4 – Pentecostal church used to feel like they are altogether and better than the other church.

CH4 – The church needs to be a place for real people to be themselves, ’cause the setting of churches, everyone’s holy, everyone’s worship, don’t look at me, I am holy, you’re wrong.

R3 – I would say be more accessible. Some churches judge and the Bible says don’t judge thy neighbour and I think it’s just treating everybody the same and remembering that everybody has a heart, we all bleed the same. And, open up your eyes and open up your heart to people instead of thinking, he did a wrong.

R2 – God says, ‘Come just as you are’, that should reflect that statement. Don’t look down at me because I came in my jeans, come just as you are. So treat everybody the same, they should come down to our level.

CH3 – you almost feel condemned by Christian leaders. It looks so, ’cause I’ve been on the outside; it looks like they automatically look down on you, that you feel like they are all high and mighty that you cannot approach them. I believe that they have too many issues within the church, doctrinal issues and things like that.

In line with the above thoughts and concerns from our respondents regarding factors or issues that can become ‘disconnectors’, Andrews brings in some considerations here. His work brings a challenge to Black churches regarding their emerging middle-class status, which is mentioned by ‘CH1’ above. Andrews suggests:

[T]he conflicts encountered by middle-class Blacks are frequently evidenced by their isolation from the African American community. In some cases, less-privileged Blacks consider the middle-class to discount their cultural identification. (2002: 79)

Whilst representing a US context, Andrews’ argument regarding a ‘class’ and a community ‘disconnection’, is not dissimilar to arguments within a UK context by scholars and researchers, like Alexander (1996), Aldred (2005), Beckford (2014) and Reddie (2009).

As noted above, some of the respondents, ‘CH1’, ‘CH4’, ‘CH3’ and ‘R2’ represent a strong criticism regarding their experience and perception of feeling detached or isolated from churches. For Beckford, on the other hand, a gap between the ‘streets’ and the church regarding issues of gang association and gun crime is what he classes the ‘withdrawal response.’ Beckford argues:

The Church sidesteps gun crime and gang violence and focuses on the world to come, preparing for life with Jesus in heaven through devotion to the spirit life. To this end, believers are encouraged to be hard-working, morally upright and socially passive. (2004: 6)

Interestingly, none of the nine black church leaders participating in my research focus group suggested that their leadership advocated a ‘withdrawal response’. However, some highlighted the struggles and sense of disempowerment in engaging with BYM in general and more specifically those associated with gangs, guns, violence and criminality. The following highlights some of the thoughts and feeling of these leaders:

RNT – I think churches struggle with being raw and honest at points. I don’t doubt that we love them and our heart breaks every time they go, but sometimes their reality and actions talk about disconnection from the reality of church. We need to be real with our youths – Whatever they want to address the church should be ready. So yes, there’s a disconnect.

HA – We live in an urban context, would you also say that there’s a clash between a class context, i.e. there’s middle-class aspirations colliding with black young men’s realities. Some of the songs we sing doesn’t resonate or speak to their situation. It says nothing to that young person, who has to cope with issues on the street day after day! And so, the church is not yet ready to redefine and re-evaluate what it means to be the church.

FCP – Many of us dedicate or christen children and quote from Mark 10, that talks about Jesus stopping what he’s doing to support the children. We’ve got it wrong. The Bible hasn’t done it wrong. Jesus hasn’t got it wrong. We’ve got it wrong. Like Jesus, as ministers I think we need to take time with our children and young people.

ENT – I think the youngsters you are talking about, really won’t want to be a part of a structure that is disconnected, why am I going to be a part of that they will say? You can’t even get your own act together! I may have a totally different mindset here,

because I would encourage young people find God wherever they are, and not to get caught up in this denominational thing.

The fact that black church leaders were prepared to engage in discussions regarding black young men as the main focus indicated progress, towards a process of reflection. Although an important step, it does not yet enter an arena where the meeting of these leaders and BYM are able to hold a conversation and explore the issues highlighted in this section. Importantly, the following issues were also pertinent for BMC leaders:

- BMC Leaders struggle to work together on issues of common concern
- Black young men have had negative experience with church
- Gun- and gang-associated crimes are high risk
- Churches are already praying about black young men
- There is need for teaching/training on engaging black young men
- Churches need to come out of the four walls of the building
- BMCs to have ‘open doors’ that welcome black young men.

It is clear from the responses emerging from the focus group that there is the recognition of there being a disconnect and that this gap is an important indicator that the present structure, practices and approaches have very little or no reference within the denominational statement, faith and doctrinal statement or commitments that explicitly represents them engaging individuals or communities represented by the young men featured in this research. I would further argue that many of their songs, sermons and prayers still represent a theology and a God that seem more concerned about the journey towards Heaven and less about the coping in earth, with the social and political challenges (Mays, 1938).

What has become more pronounced in this chapter are the challenges faced by BMC, who have a deep history that is arguably other-worldly, yet within this complexity, there are those leaders who are wanting to identify and bridge the gaps towards creating a more relevant church.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter commenced with highlighting the historical context of BMCs, suggesting that its foundations represented spiritual and social factors as the migrants from the Caribbean in particular battled racism, oppression and marginalisation from white established churches. This phase of formation and growth, according to numerous proponents, set the scene for these churches to practice theologies, traditions and beliefs that served both spiritual and social needs at the time (Aldred, 2004; Arnold, 1992).

The chapter considered the thoughts activities and aspirations of BMCs regarding BYM. Furthermore, some time was taken to consider my own pastoral reflections on engaging BYM. The chapter applied the ‘critical conversation’ process advocated by Patterson (2000) to create the metaphoric space for BYM, MBCs and myself to represent our respective thoughts, beliefs, values and interests. It was important within the process to acknowledge the interdisciplinary tools used in seeking to make sense of what the pertinent factors were emerging out of the conversation. Whilst a difficult conversation and process to facilitate, it offered this chapter three distinct perspectives, represented in the matrix above.

The last section in this chapter sketched factors that may be classed as ‘disconnectors’ or gaps between BMCs and BYM and require a framework in which to assess and commence the

development of a new paradigm towards constructing a black practical Pentecostal street theology. The next chapter commences constructing a conceptual model and basic principles for developing a practical Pentecostal street theology that might inform BMCs should they seek to support BYM.

CHAPTER SEVEN: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: TOWARDS A BLACK PRACTICAL PENTECOSTAL STREET THEOLOGY

7.1 Introduction

This research journey commenced with some curious concerns, thoughts and questions I held, as to the underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies in BMCs that inform, shape or inhibit their responses to the situation of BYM. Whilst subjective, at the initial stages, these thoughts and questions were placed within a PT framework for exploration. This research therefore represents the time taken, through the use of the PC, to explore some of the key issues relating to BYM's needs and interests, also their association with criminality and gang-associated activities (Glynn, 2013; Pitts, 2008; Rich, 2009). Through the literature review, empirical research represented in chapters two, four and five, I have gained key insights and understanding about BYM's 'realities'.

Importantly, I have critically considered and interrogated the issues aligned to the dynamics of BYM and explored factors associated with BMCs that may be influencers in how they see and engage these men.

In chapter six, I began by sketching out factors that may be classed as 'disconnectors' or gaps between BMCs and BYM, therefore requiring a framework in which to assess the possibilities for developing a new or different paradigm towards constructing a black practical Pentecostal street theology. This theology, having explored the dynamics of BYM, would consciously connect with narratives of the 'street' through developing processes for critical conversations with these men, allowing new ideas, solutions and perspectives to emerge. These ideas could then be reflected on and acted upon in light of scriptures. With this in mind, the chapter

continues the process of constructing a conceptual model for such a theology, towards supporting BYM on their desistance and rehabilitation journeys.

With the above backdrop and in seeking to offer a conceptual model and some principles for effectively engaging BYM, I pose some questions emerging out of this work that might help in constructing a PT street paradigm. These questions include:

- What are the challenges that BYM represent to BMCs and how do these churches address them?
- What are the theological considerations regarding God's love, care, support and protection for those represented in the Luke 4:18 text?
- What constrains BMCs from being more active in working with BYM?
- What would it mean to have an outward-looking BMC?
- Are BYM really to be seen as the 'poor', 'oppressed' and 'marginalised'?
- What do the seniors and more vulnerable individuals in BMCs have to say about BYM categorised as problematic?
- If BYM are feeling ostracised, judged, detached and marginalised, what does this mean, if BMCs are seeking to engage them?
- What about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in working with BYM – is there an implicit or explicit expectation that the Spirit will move on these men?

The above questions, whilst not exhaustive, will support us here in the argument for BMCs to be more reflective and critical about the issues facing BYM. In so doing, I further suggest that opportunities for developing different and new perspectives may emerge, resulting in revised

theologies, theory and practices. The next section explores issues that may emerge should BMCs choose to engage with the situations facing BYM.

7.2 BMCs – Challenges and Opportunities in Supporting BYM

In chapter six, I represented narratives of BYM suggesting that BMCs were generally judgemental about them and detached from their realities. Furthermore, it was clear from all BMC focus group participants that they believed there was a gap between them and BYM categorised as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘problematic’ as highlighted in chapter six.

In suggesting that BMCs are aware of the disconnection with the cohort of men represented in this project, it says little about how they intend to address the matter or indeed if they see it as a matter to explore. Having said that let me not ignore or negate the willingness of the focus group to engage in conversation regarding the situation of BYM and more importantly offering to continue the process towards engaging the men. Another indicator of BMCs willingness to engage in conversation about BYM is the called meeting of BMC leaders by the Ascension Trust, about the churches response to the death of BYM or black youths associated with gangs, guns and violence. By placing issues associated with BYM on agendas says little however, whether these churches beliefs, perspectives are embracing of BYM associated with lifestyles and activities arguably oppositional to some of their doctrines, faith statements and practices.

What then are the key identifying theologies, practices, beliefs, traditions and ideologies associated with BMCs, in particular those associated with black Pentecostal and charismatic churches?

The belief in the ultimate and absolute authority of the Bible is one doctrinal issue that has and still does, bring many Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians into dispute and confrontation with non-believers, more liberal Christians and with the academy or other faith and theological thinkers. The challenges that may emerge from non-believers is to do with a doctrine that demands total trust in an Omniscient God, arguably at the expense or sacrifice of common sense and intellectual insights (Rooney, 1996). The issue of Jesus being the only begotten, uncreated son of the Father, with divine authority – being both God and human is also a doctrine that underpins BMCs. This can be seen and heard in their songs, preaching, literature, conversations and teachings (Adedibu, 2012; Aldred, 2005; Arnold, 1992; Burrell, 2011, Brooks, 1982).

How then do we find a ‘space’ for BYM in this theological discourse, which offers hope amidst the theological posturing, as articulated by some of the respondents. This contextualisation and challenges is represented by Warnock’s work, who argues:

The freedom for which the black church has fought has always been both internal and external, expressing itself politically and spiritually, embracing black bodies and souls. This is so because historically the faith of the black church has been shaped and characterised by two complementary yet competing sensibilities: revivalistic piety and radical protest. In the North American context, both have been present from the beginning, and it is this dialogue and differences between the two that constitute the central tension in African American Christian faith. (2014: 13)

I argue that Warnock's assessment aptly represents the challenges facing BMCs within a UK context. It's worth highlighting a personal communication received during my exploration phase of this work regarding BMCs' relevance in the communities they are located. The following email conversation from a counsellor and practical theologian in the USA, supports the notion that BMCs have the potential for engaging with community concerns. She expressed the following:

I wonder what experiences you have had with the Black Church in the US. Though it is struggling, I still consider it one of the greater nodes of hope both politically and for individuals in the US. There is 'power in the blood,' and the blood flows through the Black Church. If you do not have a lot of exposure to the US Black Church, and if the Black Church in the UK does not have that same liberatory potential (though I suspect it does), I would really encourage you to include a visit to the US in your research. A cross-cultural experience might open up whole new imaginaries for neo-pentecostal practical theology. (Froehle, 2011)

Research both here and USA echoes the words of Froehle as represented above. Having said that, this chapter is concerned to further explore how BMCs are able to reflect on their traditions, beliefs, practices and activities and consider its relevance or connections to the dynamics and narratives of BYM, towards developing a strategy mutually enriching for both, as understood to be overarching basis for PT (Woodward and Pattison, 2000). The next section offers some thoughts surrounding BMCs' theology and practices that may point to an 'obligation' and responsibility for engaging BYM.

7.3 Divine Mandate, Obligation and Social Responsibility

A belief that Christians and the church have a responsibility to embrace God's purpose to be active in issues of concern, injustice and oppression, as well as to establish His kingdom is not a new or fresh concept within Christendom (Boff, 1987; Cone, 1986; Dulles, 2002; Pinn, 2002).

Work and research by individuals like Hollenweger (1997), Gerloff (1992), Aldred (2005), Adedibu (2012), Anderson (2014), Beckford (2000), Edwards (1992), Toulis (1997), Lewis (2008) and MacRobert (1989) have associated BMCs with some broad distinctions and characteristics as highlighted in chapter six. NTCG for example have numerous references in their literature pointing to having an obligation to supporting and caring for socially excluded and marginalised people (Aldred, 2005; Arnold, 1992; Burrell, 2011). Lewis' research on *African-Caribbean Pentecostal Church Leaders*, gives examples in a number of the larger BMC denominations that suggest their acceptance of also having socio-political obligations for challenging injustice and other forms of social oppressions (2008). Lewis argues that:

Socio-political contributions of African-Caribbean Pentecostal church leaders at one level remain unacknowledged and at another unknown. As a consequence there is a strong general belief that African-Caribbean church leaders shun worldly political engagement. (2008: 2)

I suppose my enquiry would fall into those who Lewis suggests have a belief that BMC leaders 'shun worldly political engagement'. In my defence here, I am in no way negating the positive and pioneering work relating to developing churches in communities, creating a safe

and empowering spaces and environments for its membership in the first instance, some of who see the church as their ‘saving grace’, from dealing with their social, community and family challenges (Pinn, 2002). The history of these churches both here and in the USA have also known to have supported programmes and initiatives intended to be of benefit to a wider audience than the local church. However, there is little evidence as already highlighted, to suggest that BMCs are effectively engaging with the interest and needs of BYM. Consequently, I argue here for a more critical approach and theology that considers the needs and interests of BYM in light of scripture and theological reflection that allows BMCs to connect with the life and ministry of gospel truths, having the capacity to bring hope to marginalised individuals (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006; Thompson et al., 2008).

Selwyn Arnold, the third ‘National Overseer’ (the term Administrative Bishop is now used) of NTCG who officialised his concerns that the denomination’s teachings, beliefs, practices and theology may not have been welcoming, embracing and caring enough, for oppressed, and marginalised folk. His perceivably radical challenge to the church and its leadership at the time was both welcomed and rebutted (Aldred, 2005; Adedibu, 2012; Arnold, 1992). The welcome was from younger leaders in the denomination who were already questioning the relevance and appeal of the denomination, regarding how it dealt with socio-political and contemporary issues of concern. On the other hand, there were those leaders and members, who felt Selwyn Arnold was challenging ‘holiness standards’ and was in effect ‘watering down’ blurring the principles and church ethos established by the early pioneers. In spite of the varied responses Arnold argues:

To the older generation, the teachings of the Church are sacrosanct. They unquestioningly follow the doctrines and teachings of the NTCG. The youths on the other hand, are of the opinion that the Church has not kept pace with the modern, scientific, economic and political arguments as they relate to issues of life. While some openly reject the teachings as archaic, traditional and even mere Caribbean cultural taboos, there are others who earnestly seek guidance on matters of faith and practice.

One of such issues that has greatly affected the church and is potentially very divisive is the matter of Christian adornment. Like most Holiness Movements of the late 1800s, Church of God members were expected to live a life free from sinful practices, and to shun pleasures and activities that would seem to be inconsistent with holy living. (1992: 40–41)

It was worth quoting Arnold at length because it contextualises his initial assessment as figure head of NTCG between the years of 1984 to 1994, consequently, opening the door for new and different thinking regarding how the church represented its beliefs, practices ideologies and doctrine to marginalised communities.

I suggest that for the leaders and members of the congregation or church Toulis explored, living a ‘holy life’, may to all intent and purposes, serve their ‘insider’ or ‘inward looking’ perspectives, but seem to be lacking in any notion of outreach, engagement or obligation to individuals like the men featured in this work. Furthermore, these beliefs and practices were what became dividing factors between those involved in lifestyles prohibited by the practices

and theologies located within a ‘holiness movement ethos’, the root of NTCG and other BMC Pentecostal denominations.

It is clear that there are some gaps and disconnectedness between BYM and BMCs, who from their perspectives, have been highlighted. For BMCs, there are examples of theologically advocating their obligation to the ‘least of these’, who I would argue also represents BYM. On the other hand BYM have represented thoughts that in essence oppose the notion of BMCs being relevant to their realities. Having identified some gaps and ‘disconnectors’ between BMCs and BYM, the next section explores the some of the ethical issues that may be pertinent in BMCs responding effectively to the situation of BYM.

7.4 Ethical Considerations towards an Outward-Looking BMC Conceptualisation

Defending a position or arguing, for example, that young people should not carry guns, be involved in acts of violence, use intimidation and aggression to influence others, are not without perspectives or value judgements, rooted in some moral or ethical principles or thought (Brink, 1989; Singer, 1994). Having said that, the temptation to construct or come up with an informative encapsulating definition social or Christian ethics is not encouraged by Messer (2006). However he does suggest:

Words such as ‘ethics’ and morality, fairly obviously, have something to do with right and wrong, good and bad, obligation and value. Moral questions might be about what we ought (or ought not) to do, the way we ought to live our lives, the kind of people – and communities – we ought to be. (2006: 1)

Messer's ethical categorisations offer this work a tangible framework, in which to consider the position of BMCs and their practices, theologies, traditions and beliefs, relating to how for example, they view BYM within Rooney's (1996) *Divine Command Morality* notion, suggesting that that one's ethical values and actions ultimately depends on God's sanction and approval, represented in scriptures. What would such an approach mean for BYM requesting a church that 'meets them' where they are? Furthermore would these men able to determine right or wrong without reference to such statements as 'because God's word forbids it!' Or, God is against such actions and attitudes. The above, prompts a key question here: does God's commands become arbitrary? The simple answer, according to Divine Command Theory, is yes.

Whilst divine command theory, could at times point towards 'puritanical prohibitions', depending on how it is applied, Singer presents a counter-narrative, suggesting that:

Some people think that ethics is inapplicable to the real world because they regard it as a system of short and simple rules like 'Do not lie', 'Do not steal', 'Do not Kill'. It is not surprising that those who hold this view of ethics should also believe that ethics is not suited to life complexities. (1994: 2)

The above suggests that whether a church is Pentecostal or otherwise, the need for caution and critical reflection on how ethical principles and theories are translated should not be taken lightly. I am therefore mindful of Gill's humbling reminder to Christian leaders and churches, who are now seeking to be well informed about substantive issues involved with ethical issues. He warns against claiming to be experts on moral issues (1991: xv-4).

This very complex world of social and Christian ethics, as stated, is not without contested and opposing views and perspectives. I draw on the rich sources relating to applied ethics within the Catholic tradition here to further establish this point. It is worth quoting Fisher at length here. Writing in the *Encyclopaedia of Applied Ethics*, she argues:

There remain unresolved tensions between the goal of having a more thoroughly Scriptural, Christocentric and eschatological ethic, and goal of articulating a common morality shared with and accessible to people of all faith and none; between the conception of moral theology as a call to conversation to the fullness of the Christian life, and a less visionary, but some would say more practicable, conception that presents some legal minima, but that is otherwise open to contemporary life-style and personal preferences; between the freedom of individual conscience and demands of Church membership; between the goal of a more holistic moral, spiritual and dogmatic theology. (Chadwick et al., 1998: 491)

In acknowledging the potential tensions involved in exploring areas of social and moral concerns, and its relationship with ethics, I suggest that this offers the Christian community an opportunity of bringing into dialogue human and divine thoughts and perspectives as advocated by (Messer, 2006). It is with this opportunity for bringing divine thoughts and the ‘human situation’, that the next section considers NTCG as a case study to explore this possibility.

7.5 Embracing the Divine Whilst Seeking to Engage with Contemporary Situations

This section uses NTCG as a case example in exploring how BMCs' theological, spiritual and divine perspectives may be reflected upon and reassessed in light of this research. It is also concerned with how their theology and spirituality is able to engage with contemporary situations as that of the context relating to BYM as highlighted in chapters two, four and five.

Chapter six has already highlighted some of the key practices, doctrines, beliefs and activities, both historically and presently operating in NTCG and wider BMC context. In progressing the discussion I consider NTCG's 'Declaration of Faith', arguably their divine mandate, to further explore the challenges as well as possibilities regarding engaging BYM. Whilst having a denominational practical commitments charter for its membership, relating to such issues as:

- Ensuring one follows the spiritual and moral example of Christ.
- Ensuring personal integrity in activities and behaviours.
- Ensuring that family responsibilities fulfilled.
- Ensuring one's appearance is modest, demonstrating scriptural principles.
- Ensuring one fulfils the role of being a good citizen in society. (New Testament Church of God, 2015)

As acknowledged, NTCG is represented as one of the BMCs' flagship denomination. Consequently, how it expresses its faith and spirituality is seen as significant within the wider UK Christian landscape. The following is highlighted in the denomination's spiritual and doctrinal governance literature, which is underpinned by biblical texts: NTCG believe:

-
1. In the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
 2. In one God eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
 3. That Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. That Jesus was crucified, buried and raised again from the dead. That He ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.
 4. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for forgiveness of sins.
 5. That justification, regeneration and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.
 6. In sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; though the Word and by the Holy Ghost.
 7. Holiness to be God's standard of living for His people.
 8. In the baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart.
 9. In speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost.
 10. In water baptism by immersion, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.
 11. Divine healing is provided for all in the Atonement.
 12. In the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints' feet.
 13. In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth for a thousand years.

14. In the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous and eternal punishment for the wicked. (New Testament Church of God, 2007)

I argue here that the above ‘Statements of Faith’, broadly fits within the more inward looking representations of black Pentecostal spirituality. Furthermore, I would suggest that, for those seeking a model of both Church and God, that represented a theology of God’s love, care and regard for all humanity, they would be more likely to find a degree of inward and self-gratifying perspectives on one hand and heavenly and otherworldly on another. Mays suggest that:

The other-worldly idea of God, therefore finds fertile soil among people who fare worst in this world; and it grows dimmer and dimmer as the social and economic conditions improve. (2010: 28)

Historical research regarding the traditions of BMCs like NTCG further suggest that this inward and upward looking perspectives are also featured in songs, sermons, personal testimonies (accounts of God’s goodness) and prayers. The following two songs and choruses found in one of the NTCG’s Church Hymnal also highlight the other-worldly concept:

1. I’ve a home prepared where the saints abide, just over in the glory land,
and I Long to be by my Saviour’s side, just over in the glory land.

Chorus

Just over in the glory land, I’ll join the happy angel band, just over in the glory land,
Just over in the glory land, I’ll join the happy angel band, just over in the glory land,
There with the mighty host I’ll stand, Just over in the glory land.

(song 227: 64)

-
2. When my soul is singing in that promised land above, I'll be satisfied;
Praising Christ the Saviour For redeeming grace and love, I'll be satisfied.

Chorus

I'll be satisfied, I'll be satisfied, when my soul is resting in the presence of the
Lord, I'll be satisfied. (Song 117: 32)

Along with Mays' argument regarding other-worldly, the above songs, whilst still sung in some BMCs, are not necessarily just sung by those who he suggests 'fare worst', but I would argue, from experience, are sung by individuals who go along with some of the traditions and songs of the pioneers out of a sense of respect and loyalty.

On a more critical point however, that is significant for this work is the absence of any reference within the Statements of Faith, songs and choruses that explicitly seek an engagement with individuals or communities represented by the young men featured in this research. I would further argue that the language represents a theology and a God that seem more concerned about the journey towards Heaven and not about the coping on earth, with the social and political challenges. Furthermore there is little evidence about social outreach, caring for strangers, justice, living productively on earth before one dies, educational and material betterment and supporting non-believers.

I suggest here that the essence represented above may be why some of the respondents in this study argue that BMCs have little or no desire to seriously engage BYM who may be perceived to be 'non-committed', un-holy, sinful and criminal. I would further argue that even

for individuals sympathetic to the church, some would find the words and language of the 'Statements' oppressive and confrontational and mystical at best and totally disconnected from their realities at worst.

What have become more pronounced in this chapter are the challenges faced by BMCs who have a deep history that is arguably other-worldly. Yet within this complexity, there are those leaders who want to identify and bridge the gaps towards creating a more relevant church. This work has now taken the time to consider the narratives of a sample group of BYM and heard from BMC leaders, highlighting some of the 'gaps' and 'disconnectors' mentioned above. It is from this, I believe the findings and analysis is able to contribute and transcend what Aldred, Hebden and Hebden (2008) attempted in *'Who Is My Neighbour?'* *A Church Response to Social Disorder Linked to Gangs, Drugs, Guns and Knives*. I suggest that their work failed to capture the voices of those who were associated with gangs, guns, knives or drugs. It took a methodological approach, based on questionnaires to church leaders about their thoughts on the issues above. The report was commended by numerous senior church leaders and on the Churches Together in England website the following is represented:

Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations: Who is My Neighbour?

'Churches are critical partners in reducing knife crime', says a new report. 'Who is My Neighbour?' report pleads for united action against gang-related crime. As knife crime becomes a heightened national concern, Churches Together in England have published a timely report. It recommends ways in which the government, churches and the police services can work together more effectively to reduce gang-related crime linked to drugs guns and knives. (Churches Together in England, 2008)

What has become increasingly clear from this work is BYM's caution and suspicions relating to engaging with authority figures or the criminal justice process. I am therefore again highlighting that there are potential barriers, as represented earlier, for BYM who may be willing to engage with a process that supports their desistance and rehabilitation journeys. I further suggest here that the religious traditions and practices that deliberately or inadvertently marginalise BYM from possibilities of having an enriching relationship with BMCs requires some form of critical review. In addition, I would argue that BMCs should seek to engage BYM through relationship-building, and not from feeling an obligation to 'save' or 'convert' at the negation of developing a relationship that may be mutually enriching. Powell (2008: 3) argues that BYM are also in need of 'divine and unconditional love' amidst the experiences of pain and challenges of having an absent father or being racially profiled by the criminal justice system. The next section highlights aspects within BMCs' theologies that may be applicable towards effective engagement of BYM.

7.6 Theological Reflection, towards Revised Practice

Importantly, this work does not deny those Christian individuals or groups engaging with social and political issues as identified by Adedibu (2012), Sturge (2005) and Aldred and Ogbo (2010). However, it raises concerns in particular relating to BMCs' responses to the situation of BYM, be it theologically through their evangelism and outreach programmes, socially or educationally. Stott helps us to a degree here, by suggesting:

It is exceedingly strange that any followers of Jesus Christ should ever need to ask whether social involvement was their concern, and that controversy should have blown up over the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. For it is

evident that in his public ministry Jesus both ‘went about ... teaching and preaching (Matt. 4.23; 9.35, RSV) and ‘doing good and healing’ (Acts 10.38, RSV). In consequence, evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the Church. (1984: 2)

Stott’s ‘obligatory theology’ arguably connects to Cone and Wilmore’s argument that the responsibility of black churches is to be both spiritually and socially relevant (1979). They further go on to argue that BC’s are located in areas of social deprivation, requiring support and intervention that could come from these churches to bring hope to some of the impoverished neighbourhoods. It is within such a context that scholars like James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, Valentina Alexander, Dwight Hopkins, Anthony Pinn, Dale Andrews, Robert Beckford and Doreen Morrison have argued in their work for a BCs or BMCs to take very seriously their responsibility as God’s social, spiritual and socio-community ambassadors for communities and individuals like those men in this research. I argue here that this work seeks to offer a framework for a critical review of how BMCs theologise around ‘obligation and action’ to marginalised people. In so doing, especially for those churches or denominations unfamiliar with critical conversations, it will commence a process of bringing into critical dialogue what it means to be a prophetic, relevant and reflective church (Beckford, 2004).

I have already highlighted the need for an interdisciplinary approach to addressing the concerns relating to BYM and BMCs. It is with this in mind, the next section briefly explores principles and approaches from liberation theology that might inform our discourse, seeking

to advocate an effective practical Pentecostal street theology that might inform BMCs should they engage BYM.

7.7 Liberation Theology – Help or Hindrance

Liberationist forms of theology emerged as a form of ‘ideological criticism’ that tackled social exclusion from faith-based perspectives (Griffin and Block, 2013). In considering the positions of liberation and black theologies, there is evidence to suggest that their reading of the biblical text is that God sides with the oppressed against the pharaohs of this world (Boff and Boff, 1987). Liberation theologians cite certain biblical texts such as Exodus 3:7–9; Psalm 146:9; Isaiah 1:10–17; 58:6–9; Jeremiah 7:6; Job 29:13; 31:16; Luke 6:20; 7:21–22; Matthew 25:40 and Galatians 2:10 as being pertinently applicable to marginalised, oppressed and poor and as such are key to any Christian faith and practice.

Given that a Liberationist form of theology is both political and practical driven by one’s faith to support oppressed people, what would this theology mean for NTCG for example as one of the UK’s longest established BMCs. Having highlighted some of the challenges in their theologies and practices that may inhibit or affect their effective engagement of BYM, am mindful at the same time of some of their leaders’ aspirations to be more involved with concerns in the community.

From my experience and research, I argue here that BMCs, in particular, have an ‘inward looking’ ethos that is founded on some of their teachings doctrinal principles. On the other hand, they also advocate an interaction with poor and marginalised folk through sermons and the biblical text. Having said that Hill, arguing for a black Pentecostal criticality argues that:

Black Pentecostal theologians recognized that they can speak tongues and be critical thinkers. They are beginning to ask very searching educational and pedagogical questions Pentecostal theological reflections in Christian religious education is a must for the future. In my view, that is the single most important topic for the church for the 21st century. (2007: 70)

Dwight Hopkins another leading black American theologian argues for a context of ‘divine relevance’, linking spirituality with theological reflection and thought. Here he suggests:

Black theology of liberation enters the conversation with various bodies of knowledge to explore a variety of debates, differences, and common pursuits. (1999: 111)

The next section considers some of the possibilities and limitation implications for BMCs’ engagement with BYM.

7.8 Potential and Limitation for Engaging Black Young Men

In chapter six I reflected on my journey as a black young man, representing my own beliefs, assumptions and perceptions. I also highlighted that BMC leaders through the focus group expressed an interest and willingness to consider new methods, perspectives and approaches for engaging BYM. Furthermore, the responses from the respondents in this research have indicated a willingness to come into conversation with BMCs relating to issues that are of concern to them. It is within this understanding and perceiving there to be potential for BMCs’ engaging BYM that this chapter move towards offering seven basic or foundational principles for engagement.

I would suggest that, while BMCs have proven to be one of the most established and known black institutions in the black community, there remains continued concerns and debates regarding its relevance, as stated previously (Davis, 2010). Again reiterating here, there is a need to have these men's voices integral in any discourse or actions relating to their support, an approach rooted in PT and liberation theology perspectives (Pattison, 1997).

West's work raises another issue that is important here and that is to do with how deeply influenced young people are with negative social issues. Consequently he strongly suggests that churches become more radical in their approach to engaging these youngsters and the competing values of the streets. West is also worth quoting at length here:

The impact of mass culture, especially from radio and television, has diminished the influence of the family and church. Among large numbers of black youth, it is black music that serves as a central influence regarding values and sensibilities. Since this music is spiritually inspiring, black people have fewer and fewer spiritual resources to serve them in periods of crisis. With the invasion of drugs in the black community, a new subculture among black youth has emerged which thrives on criminal behaviour and survives on hopelessness. The black rap music of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Fives 'The Message' and 'New York New York' makes this point quite clear. For the first time in Afro-American history, large numbers of black young people believe that nobody – neither God, mom nor neighbour – cares. This spiritual crisis cannot go unheeded, for there can be no economic empowerment or political struggle without spiritual resources. The prophetic black church can play a crucial role in the prevailing crisis in Afro-America. (1993: 36)

West raises some key issues that remain pertinent for BMCs seeking to support BYM. The next section offers some reflection on approaches already deployed by BMCs in responding to social/community needs.

7.9 Lessons from BMCs' United Efforts

This work has already references examples of BMC leaders coming together to strategise following a tragedy or relating to an issue that could potentially bring devastation to the communities where they are situated. Such a context is represented in the response of black ministers following the Watts uprising in more than 128 cities between 1963 and 1968 in the USA. This was a period of great soul searching for black churches and leadership in these cities. It was at this point that many of the black church leaders had to go beyond the 'Church rhetoric' and consider seeking ethical guidance for the emergent, unfamiliar context. Many church leaders in the United States gave an interesting response to the Watts and other city uprisings and stated that it was a lesson for developing a deliberate and conscious response to issues of serious concern. These ministers posed a number of critical questions to each other represented in the following:

- What is the responsibility of the churches to the oppressed when the oppressed revolt?
- How much of the truth should one tell the police when the children of one's own parish are liable to police brutality and summary arrest?
- What should be the Christian position regarding violence against property as a tactic of insurrection in the face of extreme deprivation and exploitation by the white power structure – city hall, the banks, the landlords and police? (Wilmore and Cone 1979: 15)

The above questions regularly emerged, where black leaders gathered to consider intervention strategies, given that the situation, according to Cone, was the most serious national crisis in US history since the Civil War. It was at this time that many of these ministers, and some scholars, found empowerment and insight in reading the works of leading theologians and key thinkers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Frantz Fanon, David Walker, and Jürgen Moltmann. Much consideration and thought was given to a theology that firmly rooted social ethics in how scripture or the sacred text was manifested in action, challenged oppression and empowered the oppressed (Cone, 1986). It could be argued that the experience both of the black leaders and those involved during the uprisings resulted in an analysis and reflection that led to the reading of the likes of Bonhoeffer, towards them developing fresh and new actions and interventions (Wilmore and Cone, 1979).

Research has already shown that black churches' involvement in social action is not a new phenomenon; however, there is arguably a need for ongoing critical reflection and dialogue that represents a kind of theology that Forrester suggests:

Look facts in the face. It must struggle to understand what is going on analysing the situation and probing the problem in all its complexity. And for this purpose it must judiciously use human science and be attentive to ways the situation is being understood through the best available tools of social analysis. (2000: 62)

Hollenweger (1997) also points us to an historical context, suggestive of lessons for contemporary application. He suggests that Pentecostals, appear to have lost the essence of the roots of Pentecostalism, and in some cases have divorced themselves from the initial

emphasis on social justice as represented in the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 (Bartleman, 1982). Regele approaches the church disconnect issue from another angle. In *The Death of the Church*, Regele raises concerns regarding the inaction of churches, who have not accounted for the cultural, political and theological shifts in a society or communities. These shifts according to Regele can present complex and challenging interactions between church community associated with such issues as justice, leadership, faith morality and social concerns. He goes on to challenge church leadership suggesting that if they fail to understand the forces of change, they will be overwhelmed by them, which may ‘push us to the sidelines, leaving us to sit on the bench while the real action is played without us’ (1995: 23). Adedibu, in agreeing with Regele, suggests that ‘the future and potential of Black Majority Churches in Britain can only be maximised if the churches understand the dynamics of the cultural context of Britain’ (Adedibu, 2012: 207).

Importantly, this work has sought to explore and represent the commonality or distinctiveness within BMCs, as we consider how these then relate to their capacity to engage BYM. Whilst I would argue that this work is aiming to inform BMCs, towards some fresh ideas, it is important to note that much of this work relates to an academic audience in the first instance. This of course may therefore be of limited interest to the general BMC community, who may not be familiar with notions of PT, PTR and the PC as represented in this work.

I further acknowledge that approaches represented in this research are associated with notions of modernity, and are therefore highly rationalistic and intellectual. In essence, this may not be fully understood by the wider BMC populace, generally people who are seeking richer and

more personal kind of religious life that is rooted in a spiritual and personal relationship with God (Alexander, 2011; Young, 2000).

In seeking to present a framework for BMCs to consider, if they are seeking to engage black young men, I propose some key questions for self-assessment, as a reflective tool to commence the process of framing a conceptual approach for the engagement and support of BYM. I have already piloted the use of them with BMC leaders in London and Birmingham.

These questions include:

1. If our church continues as it is (practice, attitude, traditions, mindset and theological thinking) how relevant will we be to the needs to our members and communities?
2. Do we (the leadership) know and understand the needs and interests of marginalised and socially excluded individuals and families?
3. Have we (the leadership) taken time to consider the approaches, theologies and methods used to facilitate an inclusive gospel?
4. What further advice/understanding and knowledge do we require to support our work in the community?
5. What do church members, non-members and those not associated with your church say about the church's support structures?
6. What thoughts and feeling do your leadership have about the situation facing black young men?
7. What issues support/hinder your capacity to be effective in supporting marginalised people?
8. How do you reflect on the challenges, successes and opportunities as a church, in order to revise your practices, actions and activities?

The above questions arguably offer a framework for reflection for BMCs to consider the potential issues that may emerge in any attempt to engage BYM. Alongside these questions I argue for BMCs to enter into dialogue and exploration with those Christian organisations already involved in socio-political activities, as highlighted in chapter six. In so doing, this may further increase their knowledge and awareness of approaches and models used to engage and work with marginalised individuals and communities. The next section offers some examples of such organisations.

As this work now moves towards developing a conceptual framework for applying a black practical Pentecostal street theology, it continues to grapple with the tensions between BMCs' beliefs, traditions, theologies, the gaps and disconnectors mentioned earlier. However, this research supports the requests from some of our respondents asking for a church that is concerned about the communities that they are a part of.

7. 10 Becoming a 'Community Church'

This research has highlighted some of the challenges, should a church or denomination seek to represent their values and morals within a context that it may be contested by alternative perspectives as highlighted by Cornel West earlier. The complex and diverse expressions regarding the approaches and models that are best suited to work with marginalised groups are ongoing. Dulles' work on Models of the Church helps us here. He argues that:

God's gifts are not confined to people who employ biblical or Christian symbolism. The Church understands God as the loving Father of all men; it celebrates and preaches God's redemptive love extended to all (2002: 63)

It would not be incongruous with Dulles' position, to argue that proponents of black and liberation theologies, whilst emphasising God 'siding with poor, marginalised and black people', it does not negate his love for all humanity. Put another way, Pinn states:

Members of the Black Church acknowledge human beings were created by God and reflect in their being the likeness of God. In the words of Genesis 1:26 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' This understanding of human nature means all humans have value and any attempt to degrade a human is contrary to the will of God. (2002: 41)

It is within this context that this work seeks to explore how a practical Pentecostal street theology is able to engage BYM who in the context of the gospel are candidates for love, care, support, redemption and God's grace. Cone argues that churches, who proclaim Christ and support the principles and activities associated with faith as a verbal and active manifestation are obliged to support those identified in the Luke 4:18 text or Isaiah 1:17–18; making reference to seeking justice, supporting oppressed and fatherless individuals, empowering widows, bringing comfort and good news to the poor and ministering to prisoners. Cone advocates:

When Faith is understood as a commitment to an ultimate concern, then it is obvious that there can be no separation between faith and obedience, because obedience determines faith. I know your faith not by what you confess but only by what you do. (1986: 40)

Kane acknowledges the challenge for churches to be a relevant voice to oppressed and marginalised people. She argues that:

The church is not geared to making God known to the world, but to its own survival. Though this fact should concern us, it should not cause us to despair. If God is in history, He is also in the history of the church; if there is hope for history, there is hope for the church. (1986: 102)

Her argument again points to a need for serious reflection, if churches are to be the manifestation of God's 'love' and 'care' for humanity, which includes the men represented in this work. Cone and Wilmore (1979) argue that black churches should be relevant to, and be a part of the people in the heart of the community, poor neighbourhoods or ghettos, in the language of some of the respondents of this project.

The need for continued reflection and questioning about relevance remains vitally important as it offers a process and can present the 'space' and opportunity for meaningful insights and new approaches and actions (Forrester, 2000; Cone and Wilmore, 1993; Nash and Nash, 2009). The Bringing Hope Charity helps our thinking here, as they pose a number of key questions, in line with their reflections. Their toolkit for effective church and community action regarding guns, drugs, knives and gangs in Birmingham, posed the following questions:

- Are our churches relevant to the communities we are in?
- How can churches work together regarding issues of concern?

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- How can we represent the Kingdom of God in the activities and programmes we present?
 - How can we effectively work with the community, state and the church to maximise our joint impact in diverting young people from their involvement in guns, drugs, knives and gangs?
 - Along with prayer, what actions are required to deal with the causes and impact of gun crime, gangs, knives and drug use?
 - What resources do churches need to begin to tackle the problems of violence and disaffection that blight the lives of so many people in our city? (Anderson et al., 2006:9).

In seeking to present a conceptual model for BMCs to consider, we are still faced with the questions posed earlier. Further questions from my personal reflection will help us here, in exploring some of the gaps, hindering meaningful dialogue and work between the church and black young men. These questions include:

- What are their thoughts regarding, whether their worship activities and programmes, actions and expressions attract or repel black young men?
- How important is it for BMCs to take time to physically walk and talk to folk in their local communities neighbourhoods?
- Why are ministerial colleagues seemingly less active and less aware of the issues impacting black young men?
- As well as theological, are there also psychological, sociological, educational, environmental criminal justice factors to consider?

Boff brings a critical challenge here as this work seeks to grapple with the questions above.

He argues that:

The most appropriate and specific way for theologians to commit themselves to the poor and oppressed is to produce good theology. But what we want to stress here is that this is impossible without at least some contact with the world of the oppressed. Personal contact is necessary if one is to acquire new theological sensitivity. (1987: 12)

Along with the work of Boff, the work and research of Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez and Dr. Paul Farmer regarding poor and oppressed people represents a beautifully crafted and complementary approach to engaging with the poor. Griffin and Block's conversation with Farmer and Gutierrez, represented in their book, *In the Company of The Poor: Conversation with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez*, represents this complementary relationship.

They state:

Both Father Gustavo and Dr. Farmer have lived among the poor for all their adult lives. Both have shared life with the poor at its deepest and most intimate levels – as priest, as doctor, as friends, as confidant. Father Gustavo explains it well when he says, 'If there is no friendship with the poor and no sharing of life of the poor, then is no authentic commitment to liberation.' (2013: 5)

From liberation theological perspective, which suggests the oppressed and poor should be the subjects, and certainly not the object of their own liberation – with this in mind, this work

seeks to encourage BMCs to place BYM's needs and concerns on their main agendas, as a subject for meaningful discussions regarding engaging them. This may appear a simple request, but may cause much debate in some churches, as to expectations, outcomes and actions that may possibly emerge from such an item. In order to commence the thinking regarding this 'item', the next section considers seven foundational principles which arguably seek to support BMCs who want to work with young black men.

7.11 Towards a Conceptual Framework

The efforts to construct a black practical Pentecostal street theology, moving beyond the present confines of denominationalism and internalised church politics is not without its challenges. In arguing for BMCs to consider making a decision, for a 'preferential option' for engaging BYM is in no way advocating a disconnect from loving and caring for young people. As in the case Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutierrez who consciously made a 'Preferential Option for the Poor', their strategies, activities and theology supported this decision (Griffin and Block, 2013).

My experience during the process of undertaking this research has highlighted that most of the programmes and activities within statutory, faith and community sectors, regarding BYM seldom take into consideration their social, political, and historical experiences. The continuous over-representation of BYM in certain areas of our society regarding mental health, criminal justice and deaths from gang-associated violence remains a concern for me.

This work argues for BMCs to revise their approaches and theologies relating to engaging socially excluded individuals and communities. Reddie's suggestion helps us here. He

proposes a *participative Black* theology, a form of activity-based approach to theological thinking and action that is based on the notion of Christian believers engaging in performative action. His notion of performative action is rooted in activities or action that requires an engagement with the ‘other’ in a specified space (2009: xiv). It seems a reasonable proposition to suggest that BYM who are the focus of this study should be included in what Reddie argues is the ‘other’.

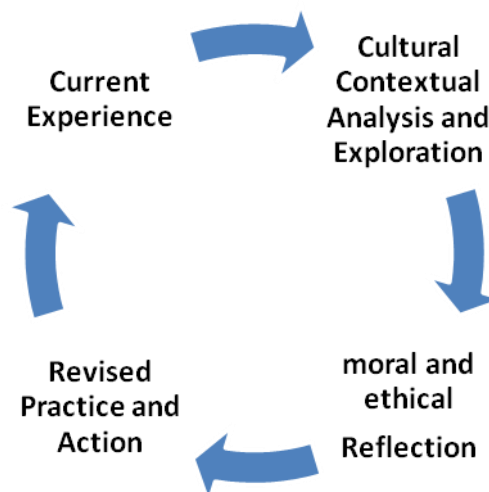
In offering a conceptual framework for engaging BYM, an application of the PC is utilised, namely ‘Experience’, ‘Analysis’, ‘Biblical Reflection’ and ‘Revised Action’. I further argue for an adapted form of this tool to be offered to BYM as represented below. The adapted PC for BYM would not have the aspect in the cycle that represents biblical or theological reflection, but would have moral and ethical reflection instead. The following questions represent this phase in the adapted cycle:

- Does my behaviour cause harm or distress to others?
- How am I influenced to make wrong or right choices?
- How does my actions and attitudes impact others?
- What systems or process, do I apply in seeking to be crime free?
- What principles guide my actions?
- How important is faith /religion as factors to influence my choices?
- How honest am I about my personal feelings?

Whilst not an exhaustive list, a young man, for example, who is from the ‘streets’, ‘un-churched’ (with no concept of church), can be encouraged to interact with this tool, without the fear of having to enter a journey relating to having to understanding the Bible, which for some, can be a daunting task. In considering this approach, a young man could be encouraged

to tell his story of how he has become involved in gangs or other issues associated with crime (experience). The analysis of this situation is then jointly considered with the pastor or church personnel offering support for interpretation and research. Following on from this, the reflection from the young man's perspective becomes an ethical and moral one, but for the church personnel, it's biblical, as to how the engagement between church and BYM progresses.

In using the PC for BMCs and BYM both groups are able to undertake personal reflection regarding their activities and practices.



The following seven foundational principles are offered here, which might help and inform BMCs in any attempt to engage and work with black young men:

- **Acknowledgement position:** Here, it is necessary that BMCs honestly assess what type of contact, relationships, interactions and knowledge and information they have regarding black young men. This acknowledgement is arguably necessary before progressing to any further stages in the process.

-
- Church to have commenced discussion with ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ contribution regarding making black young men a ‘preferred option’. This should include hearing specifically from black young men themselves. For example, respondent ‘P2’ has indicated that young men like himself are prepared to talk to church leaders about their experienced and needs.
 - Churches to consider receiving training and development input as they develop and grapple with applying a practical theological approach to church activities, and more specifically towards working with black young men.
 - The need for churches to commence mapping and exploring their areas as to how black young men function is necessary. Respondent ‘R1’ suggested that church leaders should take the time to regularly walk around the local community their churches are located. It is in becoming more visible in the community argues ‘R1’ that a relationship with local youths becomes possible in.
 - The principle and action of being ‘in the company of the Poor’, as argued by Farmer and Gutierrez (Griffin and Block, 2013), to be affirmed, but be contextualized, to state: ‘In The Company of Black Young Men’. This therefore advocates for churches to be actively engaging and interacting with black young men.
 - Churches to develop ecumenical links surrounding supporting black young men. For example, strategic links with organisations like Bringing Hope is recommended.
 - The understanding that Pentecostalism represents the anointing as represented in Luke 4:18 should not be negated or marginalised but embraced as an active aspect of developing a framework for a practical Pentecostal theology.

Having commenced the above, the process of considering men, fitting the criteria below could arguably become an item for church leadership agendas:

- Black young men to be engaged should be at risk of involvement in gang-associated activities and lifestyle or have been involved.
- Have to have had experience or encounter with the criminal justice process or system.
- They have to have been identified by individuals, organisations, church personnel or service users who have a relationship with them. This is important because issues discussed may raise challenges for the individual that requires support.
- Individuals should be in full agreement for open and honest dialogue.
- Individuals that are prepared to participate with a process that does not oblige them to be members or affiliated to the church.

The engagement of this group of men can create the opportunity for them to inform, and shape thoughts and thinking of churches towards developing a credible approach to engaging black young men.

7. 12 Conclusion

This chapter has identified some of the challenges that BMCs were experiencing regarding their doctrines, beliefs, traditions and values that impacted on their perception and the degree to which they responded to the needs and interests pertaining to BYM. The chapter considered some key questions relating to the following:

- Challenges BYM represent to BMCs
- Theological beliefs, practices, traditions and that may become disconnectors between BMCs and BYB

-
- Inward and outward-looking churches
 - Learning from past experiences regarding sociopolitical engagements
 - Constraints, limitations and possibilities for developing a practical Pentecostal street theology.

The chapter acknowledges that BMCs are argued to be the most established organisations in most black communities, therefore the opportunities offer moral and spiritual guidance should not be taken lightly. This chapter also acknowledged the possible challenges for some BMCs, having deep rooted affinity to their traditions and practices, which I may be perceived threatening should any new or different approach be offered.

In presenting a conceptual model for a black practical Pentecostal street theology, this chapter has considered the narratives BYM the response from black church leaders. It is therefore within a PC framework (Ballard and Pritchard, 1996) that this chapter has systematically offered a process in offering some basic principles which might support BMCs should they choose to engage with BYMs' realities.

As this research continues to represent a dynamic framework for continued reflection, I anticipate new theological ideas and insights emerging that may lead to redefined actions. This work has allowed for me to hear the narratives of BYM, who offered such rich data, allowing for greater understanding of their dynamics.

Importantly, I am in no way advocating that a practical Pentecostal street theology will be the preferred model for BMCs engaging BYM, however, it seeks to support the notion that in the

midst of the different and varied interventions offered that some aspects or perspectives of this research will be utilised.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

8.1 Introduction

This research project commenced in earnest with my reflection as a black Pentecostal minister in Birmingham on my curiosity and dissatisfaction with how I and other BMC colleagues represented our Christian faith in community. More specifically, I was concerned with how the Luke 4:18 text was applied with marginalised individuals in our communities, but more specifically to BYM, who at the time were featured in the media, criminal justice statistics, education, community and faith groups agendas. Their presence on these respective agendas varied between being over-represented in school exclusions, having more searches by police, and being profiled negatively in media reports relating to crime and criminality (Byfield, 2008; Cushion et al., 2011; Gunter, 2010).

BMCs, for example, found that a number of BYM, who were at one point part of their youth groups and Sunday schools, were becoming less interested in what the church had to offer and it was some of these individuals that were featuring in some of the above statistics (Anderson, 2001, 2013).

It is from the above context that this project set out to consider the following two key questions:

- What underlying beliefs, ideologies, practices and theologies inform, shape or inhibit the responses of BMCs to the situation of black young men?
- How might the narratives of BYM influence BMCs in shaping more effective theological and pastoral responses to the needs of these men?

The findings of this study inspires the question: can the insights and understanding gained about the situation facing BYM along with the principles offered towards creating a practical Pentecostal street theology influence or change BMC's perception and activities about working with these men? I suppose such a question just serves as a reminder of how complex this research journey has been and that the impact of this research is not immediately realised and may require further work with BMCs following their engagement with this research as recommended in chapter seven.

8.2 Summary of thesis

I have been clear from the outset that this research is grounded in the field of PT. It uses a version of the PC (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006), to progress the exploration, firstly to consider the experiences and context of BYM. This is done through literature review and empirical data gathering. Secondly, the cycle is used to represent the findings relating to BYM into phase three of the cycle, which then considers the findings in relation to scripture and theological beliefs and principles. It is at this stage the context of BMCs is also explored, to ascertain whether its theologies, requires revision. It is through such a revision some fresh principles and practices may be determined, that in the context of this work may inform BMCs of approaches that effectively supports BYM on their rehabilitation and desistance journeys.

This research used a mixed method interdisciplinary approach to understand the situation facing BYM and BMCs. First, the situation of BYM in Birmingham was described and a literature review undertaken, drawing on a variety of disciplines, setting the scene for

empirical investigation of how BYM understand the situation resulting in their involvement criminality and gang-related violence and activities.

Having undertaken fourteen interviews that were analysed with conclusions drawn, the project was then able to consider the possible responses and inhibitors in BMCs relating to engaging BYM. Exploring the traditions, beliefs, theology, traditions and practices of NTCG and hearing from a BMC leaders' focus group, I was able to undertake a critical dialogue between the various data sources, arriving at some theoretical, theological and practical conclusions.

I had set out on this research journey to understand the dynamics of BYM, in effect seeking to privilege their voices, as well as to understand how BMCs' responded to the interest and needs of these men. As a pastor and researcher seeing PT as a vehicle for exploring my thoughts, concerns and interests, I became increasingly conscious, anticipating that the research journey would not be without certain changes in how I did theology or allowed my 'faith actions' to become transformational. Reisinger's notion of PT helps here:

When the voices of people who have previously not been included in the conversation are heard the conversation changes. Dialogue that does not seek agreement provides opportunities to an esteem God through relationship with a multitude of God's people. To be in a relationship with God is to be in a relationship with others. This creates a space for the creative potential of the margins to affect both the margins and the centre for the good of all. (2012: 175)

In progressing Reisinger's thoughts, with BYM representing the 'margins' and BMCs seen as 'the centre', this work utilised the PC to journey through the project. The next section represents this journey.

8.3 Use of the Pastoral Cycle

In locating this work in the field of PT and using the PC as a 'probing tool', to gain insights into the world of BYM and acquire understanding about BMCs and black young men, it was important in chapter one to introduce the context of PT. Here, the chapter sketched out some of the key factors, challenges and possibilities in using a PT approach for exploring BYM and BMCs. The depth and range of this scholarly work surrounding PT was considered at the same time. The chapter questioned the accessibility of PT framework and perspectives to the world of BMCs, black communities and BYM, the focus of this work. The chapter offered some thoughts regarding developing a black practical Pentecostal street theology in the UK. The chapter highlighted the need for considering PT and PTR within a framework that also uses interdisciplinary methods and perspectives for assessing and analysing situations of interest or concern as represented by Cartledge (2003). It concluded by suggesting that the findings of this work may well be placed to influence my own practice in the first instance and inform BMCs regarding developing fresh and more informed approaches rooted in PT that may help in supporting BYM.

Chapter two represents the first probe of the PC, by exploring the literature relating to BYM categorised as gang-associated, problematic, 'hard to reach' and socially excluded. It explored some of the key research in both the UK and USA, regarding the dynamics of BYM. Importantly, the chapter considers the communities and environments where BYM are located

and how these environments affect their lives. Time is taken to establish the approaches and methods used by researchers to contextualise the realities of BYM. The chapter also explored how the criminal justice system and how an understanding of gang and violence relating to BYM is viewed by these systems. Some time is taken in the chapter to give a context relating to BYM in Birmingham where this research is located. The chapter concluded by acknowledging the lack of theological research or responses relating to BYM categorised as ‘problematic’ and socially excluded.

In chapter three, the project introduced the methodological considerations and framework to address the research questions. It initially considered the ethical issues associated with research and more specifically ‘sensitive research’ as highlighted in the works of Dickson-Swift et al. (2008). The chapter introduced the process of the PC and how each probe from the cycle would ultimately feed into painting the picture of the situation facing BYM, therefore offering some insights and understanding that could be theologically reflected on towards developing informed strategies for engaging these men. The chapter presented the framework in which the empirical or fieldwork phase of the research fitted, considering such issues as identifying sample group, interviewing approaches, briefing and debriefing, transcription and analysis of data. The chapter concluded reiterating the importance of the ‘reflexivity process’, argued to be necessary in PT research methodologies, given that it allows for researchers to review or assess their research practice conducted in line with a constructed PT and PTD framework (Thompson et al., 2008).

Chapter four represented the empirical or data gathering phase of the project. Here is where the narratives and thoughts of fourteen BYM are represented. The chapter represents some of

the challenges encountered whilst seeking to obtain the narratives of the men in the community and prison. It is from the interviews and in using a grounded theory method for analysing the data that the themes identified in the chapter emerged. It is in obtaining the narratives of the men that the chapter was able to privileging their voices and issues pertinent to their situation. This chapter represented, what for some of the men were traumatic situations relating to some of their lifestyle choices, resulting in some tragic outcomes. It showed underlining factors that these men consider being determinants in their offending behaviours or association to gangs and their views on faith, morals and BMCs. This aspect contributes further factors for exploration when researching BYM, which I have not seen in much research literature relating to BYM's dynamics.

Chapter five concerned itself with the analysis of the data from BYM as highlighted in chapter four. This chapter abstracts from findings in the interviews and considers the literature of other researchers to present a sharp analysis of the situation BYM are in and what might help them. It is from this analysis regarding BYMs' values, aspirations, criminality, faith, morals, family and peer relationships influences that BMCs are offered a concept and construct of the interests and needs of these men. In creating clear pictures of these men, it serves to represent them as men having thoughts, aspirations, insights and interest in their welfare, wellbeing and futures. In effect, the chapter seeks to represent BYM's narratives firmly in the arena of BMCs and the world of PT for those interested in furthering this research, more specifically contributing to a black practical Pentecostal street theology.

In chapter six, I entered the theological reflection phase of the PC, relating to a given situation identified to be of interest or concern (Woodward and Pattison, 2000). In the case of the

project, the two are BYM with their interests and needs and BMCs choices regarding how they choose to respond to these men. The chapter concerned itself with questioning the ‘relevance’ or impact of BMCs on the lives of socially excluded people, more specifically BYM. It considered the literature on the emergence of BMCs, searching for any indicators of their thoughts, feelings and activities relating to BYM.

This chapter uses a ‘critical conversation’ advocated by Pattison in Thompson et al.(2008), to bring into conversation the narratives and realities of BYM with BMCs and my own thoughts, values and perspectives. It is through this process, the chapter goes on to create a picture, highlighting any gaps, concerns and possibilities for the shaping of new and fresh ways for BMCs engagement with BYM.

In chapter seven I identified some of the challenges that BMCs were experiencing regarding their doctrines, beliefs, traditions and values that impacted on their perception and the degree to which they responded to the needs and interests pertaining to BYM. This chapter represented the final phase in the PC, because it was concerned with considerations surrounding developing new or revised practices and actions that may have emerged from the theological reflection phase of the cycle. In this chapter, a conceptual framework for a practical Pentecostal street theology is offered. However, it does acknowledge that some BMCs may find such a framework too much of a leap from their practices and theological understandings. The chapter does conclude, however, that BMCs are still seen as having potential for influencing new thinking regarding socio-political engagement relating to some of the issues of concerns associated with BYM raised in this project.

8.4 Moving the Agenda Forward and Further Research

This project has offered thoughts and insights regarding some key factors associated with BYM categorised as ‘hard to reach’ or problematic. It also opens up the possibility for developing a joint forum or initiative for critical dialogue between these men and BMCs. The willingness for this is evidenced in the narratives of the men and in the responses of BMC leaders from the focus group. It is with this potential that I suggest the following framework for moving this project forward beyond the thesis submission stage:

1. Seek to develop a working group with black young men and BMC leaders to determine key issues for consideration.
2. A training and development programme to be written for black young men, offering basic principles of research, group work and introduce PT and PTR as represented above.
3. BMCs not to see this process as a space towards converting black young men, but as a safe space for mutually enriching dialogue. Equally, black young men not to see this as the space for bringing resentments regarding the church, but as a space where mutual respect is encouraged and facilitated.
4. A joint publication with black young men’s narratives and thoughts along with BMCs’ responses and insights relating to partnering around solutions and developing a practical street theology.
5. The group constantly reflects on the progress relating to relationship development, ideas and thoughts emerging from group and setting agendas for future and continued developments.

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5. To explore the possibilities of using this model within the prisons with black young men, working in partnership with such groups as Bringing Hope as referenced in chapter seven.
 6. Offering time to NTCG Leadership Training Centre to progress their research on Pentecostalism through ‘The Heritage Centre and the Roswith Gerloff Collection’, as highlighted previously.

In conclusion, I am under no illusion about the scope of this work and know that without commitment on my part, in moving this agenda forward, it may remain just words. I am, therefore, stating my commitment to those that have contributed to this work that I am prepared to work towards making as many of the recommendations in this work a reality.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Introductory Letter



Dear

I am a part time PhD Theology student undertaking research in the theology department of Birmingham University. My supervisor for this work is Professor Stephen Pattison, whose contact details are as follows: Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT. He can be contacted on 0121 414 57777 or by email: S.Pattison.1@bham.ac.uk.

The Study

I am seeking to gain further understanding regarding how young black men in Birmingham who have been involved or at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g. police, probation) feel. This will be done through a process where you will be interviewed and allowed to tell your stories and relay experiences. Your stories and experiences will then be analyzed and go towards developing a framework and approach that organizations and institutions like community and church groups (Black Pentecostal churches) are able consider in their engagement and support of young black men.

The main question I will ask is:

What are your thoughts, perceptions and experiences regarding your behaviour and lifestyle choices, which have resulted in your association with such issues as gangs, guns, knives, violence and involvement in the criminal justice system?

The Interviews

Your interview will be digitally recorded and written up. Each person will have a pseudonym and a code to ensure that your identity and information shared is not identifiable. All transcription will be stored on an external hard drive that is password protected and kept within a locked cabinet.

Interviews will be conducted with individuals that fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Have been at risk of involvement in gang-associated activities and lifestyle or have been involved

-
- Experience or encounter with the criminal justice process or system relating to behaviours and activities deemed antisocial or violent
 - Have had involvement with one of the following organisation or service: Bringing Hope Charity. Young Disciples Ltd. HMP [REDACTED], Shalom Consultancy and Counselling Practice and First Class Youth Network
 - Individuals to be between the ages of 18 and 35 which will enable a cross section of experiences to be represented

Research Findings

The interviews are one aspect of the work in competing my PhD thesis. Following its completion, it will be kept at Birmingham University and therefore available publicly for students with official access to the university library. It is also possible that the findings and research process be published or short quotes be relayed in lectures or seminars. It is important to note however, that at no time will your name or identity be released or revealed.

As well as offering the opportunity to meet in a focus group all participants will be given the opportunity to receive written or verbal synopsis of the research. I will also send a written report of my finding at the end of the project to the organisation or agency you are affiliated to.

This research project is subjected to Birmingham University's ethical review process, following the guidelines instituted by the British Sociological Association. It is therefore important to reassure you that your contribution is entirely voluntary, which means you are at liberty to withdraw from the process at any time in line with the ethical processes and procedures agreed. Given this, please ensure that you carefully read details relating to your involvement in this project.

What Next?

If you are interested in participating in this project please inform the project lead of the organisation you are affiliated to or contact me on one of the numbers above.

If you wish to discuss further before making your decision, please feel free to contact me.


Kind Regards



Carver Anderson (Researcher)

Appendix 2 Introductory Letter for Black Majority Church Leader's Focus Group



Dear Pastor, Bishop, Church Leader,

I am a part time PhD Theology student undertaking research in the theology department of Birmingham University. My supervisor for this work is Professor Stephen Pattison, whose contact details are as follows: 

The Study

My overall study seeks to understand the stories and narratives of black young men categorised as problematic, gang-related, criminal, violent and dysfunctional. Furthermore, this work seeks to gain insight and understanding regarding how Black Majority Churches in Birmingham relate to the dynamics of these men. In essence I am seeking to develop a framework, where black majority churches and its leadership are able to engage and subsequently work with black young men on their journeys towards rehabilitation and living crime free lives.

Having now gained greater understanding from black young men, through their interviews, it has been agreed that the thoughts and feelings of Black Majority Church leaders should be explored within a focus group context. In doing so, this study will be enriched with the 'voices' of the church and black young men, in conversation regarding the potential for developing a black Pentecostal practical theology that actively relates to the realities of these men.

The focus group will engage a small group of black majority church leaders from areas of Birmingham, known for its association with gangs, guns, violence and black young men categorized as problematic. Your thoughts and feelings along with your interactive discussion will be recorded and subsequently analyzed, which will go towards developing a framework and approach, that organizations and institutions like community and church groups are able consider in their engagement and support of young black men.

The Focus Group

The focus group interview will be digitally recorded and written up. The group will be asked a number of questions relating to how black majority churches' understand, engage with and work with black young men. Furthermore, the group will consider whether or not their present approaches and theologies are relevant or otherwise to the types of black young men highlighted in this study.

Each focus group participant will have a pseudonym and a code to ensure that your identity and information shared is not identifiable. All transcription will be stored on an external hard drive that is password protected and kept within a locked cabinet.

Research Findings

The interviews with black young men and the focus group form an aspect of the work in competing my PhD thesis. Following its completion, it will be kept at Birmingham University and therefore available publicly for students with official access to the university library. It is also possible that the findings and research process be published or short quotes be relayed in lectures or seminars. It is important to note however, that at no time will your name or identity be released or revealed.

As well as offering the opportunity to meet in a subsequent focus group, you will be given the opportunity to receive written or verbal synopsis of the research. I will also send a written report of my finding at the end of the project to each focus group participant.

This research project is subjected to Birmingham University's ethical review process, following the guidelines instituted by the British Sociological Association. It is therefore important to reassure you that your contribution is entirely voluntary, which means you are at liberty to withdraw from the process at any time in line with the ethical processes and procedures agreed. Given this, please ensure that you carefully read details relating to your involvement in this project.

What Next?

If you are interested in participating in this project, please confirm with me on the contact numbers included in this communication.

Kind Regards

Carver Anderson (Researcher)

Appendix 3 Consent Form – Interview

Consent Form – Interview

As researchers we operate under a strict code of ethics and as such we cannot interview people unless we have their signed consent. Please read carefully each of the seven points below. If all these points are acceptable to you, please sign and date the consent form

1. You must confirm that the aims of the study have been **explained** to you and that you are **willing** to participate.
2. Any information given will be completely **confidential** – All taped and written material will be secured – and will only be seen by my supervisor who has responsibility for ensuring that this project is conducted within ethical and professional guidelines.
3. The information you give will be presented in such a way that no one can identify you – your data will remain **anonymous**, and your identity will not be disclosed in the study outcomes.
4. If at any stage of the interview you decide you don't want to participate any more please inform me of your decision to **withdraw**. This will result in your written or recorded information being destroyed and removed from the process
5. All Participant's data will be analysed following interviews and will represent the fieldwork aspect of the project. Participants are able to request withdrawal of their data up to end of May 2013, after which date all data included in analysis for the study, will not be removed.
6. You need to agree that you are happy for the interview to be **tape recorded**.
7. The interview should take about **60 minutes**.
8. You will have the opportunity in a focus group setting to receive a summary of the research **'results'**
9. Are there any questions you want to ask about the study before signing the consent form?

Name: (Participant)

Signed: (Participant)

Date:

Name: Carver Anderson (Researcher)

Signed: (Researcher)

Date:

Appendix 4 Debriefing form

Debriefing Form

Dear Participant,

If you feel a need to speak to a professional concerning any uncomfortable feelings from your participation in this research, you could be referred to a professional counsellor to further debrief regarding the specific issue. You also have the choice of either having your data included in the research study, or to be withdrawn from the research study. If you choose to withdraw from this research study, your data will be shredded and disposed of. If you have any further questions please contact me via the contact details included with this information.

Yours sincerely

Carver Anderson

I have been fully debriefed and the researcher has offered to answer any questions related to this research study.

Print Name _____

Sign Name _____

Date _____

Appendix 5 Interview Questions

<h3>Interview Questions</h3>

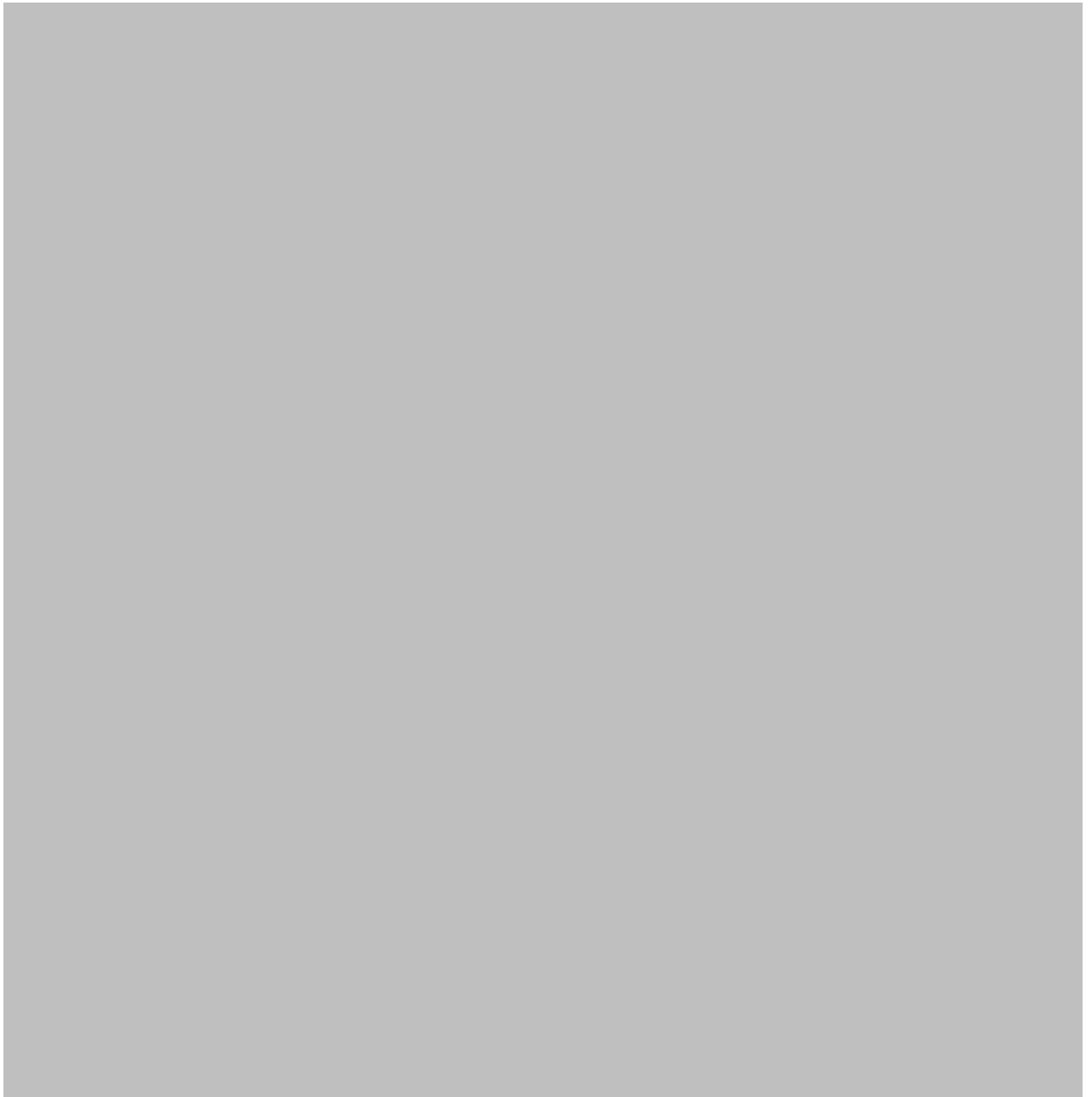
What are your thoughts, understanding and experience regarding your behaviour and lifestyle choices, which has resulted in your association with such issues as gangs, guns, knives, violence and involvement in the criminal justice system?

1. Describe your childhood and upbringing up to you entering secondary school.
2. Can you recall the first time you got involved in issues or behaviours classed as difficult or challenging (home, school or community)?
3. What were the key challenges or difficulties that were present at the time of you getting involved in the behaviours, activities or attitudes? Are any of these issues still relevant 'today'?
4. What influence did the 'streets' or 'road' have on your upbringing?
5. Why did you and other black young men get involved in gang-associated activities and behaviours?
6. In what ways did your negative activities and behaviour affect your family and the neighbourhood you lived?
7. What role, if any, did faith, religion play in your upbringing and do you have a view on these areas of life relating to morals or values?
8. Who would you blame for you becoming involved in activities and behaviours classed as criminal, illegal or 'street'?
9. How important was your mother in your upbringing?
10. What part did your father play in your upbringing and how did this impact you?
11. What support would you and other black young men need to live crime free lives?
12. Presently, what part, if any does faith, spirituality and church play in your life?
13. What awareness have you got about church, in particular black majority churches?
14. What advice would you offer to black Christian leaders/churches regarding how they are able to support you and other young men regarding criminality, negative behaviour and living a criminal or crime free lifestyle?
15. Are there any final thoughts you have regarding black young men living crime free lives?

Appendix 6 Sample of Field work Interview

Field Work interview with CH3 (Community/Church) – 9 March 2013

- 1. Describe your childhood and upbringing up to you entering secondary school?**



-
- 2. Can you recall the first time you got involved in issues or behaviours classed as difficult or challenging (home, school or community)?**



- 3. What were the key challenges or difficulties that were present at the time of you getting involved in the behaviours, activities or attitudes? Are any of these issues still relevant 'today'?**



- 4. What influence did the 'streets' or 'road' have on your upbringing?**





5. Why did you and other black young men get involved in gang-associated activities and behaviours?



6. In what ways did your negative activities and behaviour affect your family and the neighbourhood you lived?





7. What role, if any, did faith, religion play in your upbringing and do you have a view on these areas of life relating to morals or values?



8. Who would you blame for becoming involved in activities and behaviours classed as criminal, illegal or 'street'?



9. How important was your mother in your upbringing?





10. What part did your father play in your upbringing and how did this impact you?



11. What support would you and other black young men need to live crime free lives?





12. Presently, what part if any, does faith, spirituality and church play in your life?





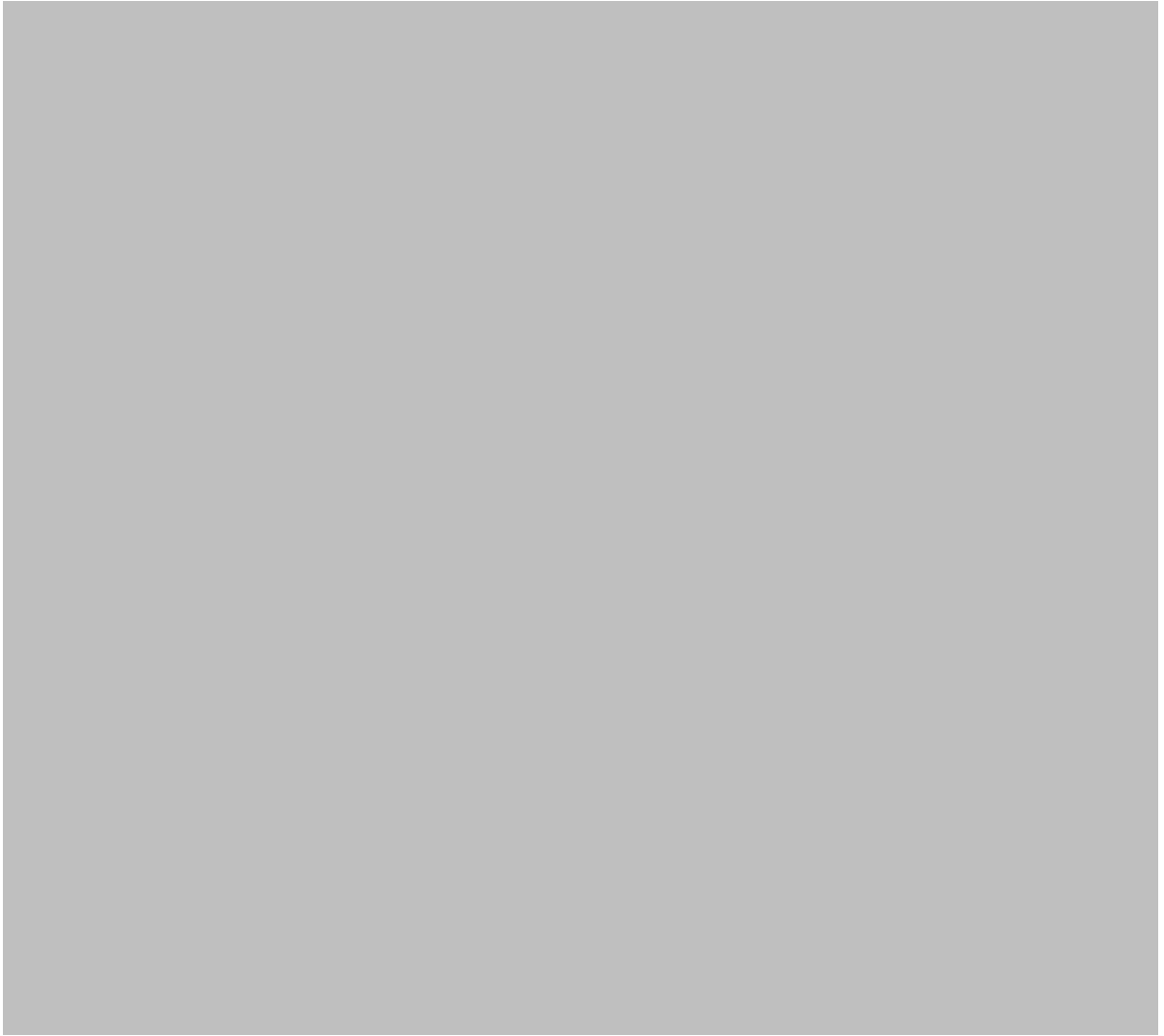
13. What awareness have you got about church, in particular black majority churches?





14. What advice would you offer to Black Christian leaders/churches regarding how they are able to support you and other young men regarding criminality, negative behaviour and living a criminal or crime free lifestyle?





15. Are there any final thoughts you have regarding Black young men living crime free lives?





Appendix 7 Black Majority Church Leader's Questions for Focus Group

1. What are your thoughts regarding young black men categorised as problematic, gang-related, criminal, violent and dysfunctional?
2. 13 out of 14 of the young men I interviewed went to Sunday school/ church as a child but left as they entered their teenage years – why do you think this has happened?
3. What considerations do you think black young men give to such issues as values, morals, education family relationships and spiritual concerns?
4. Have you got a view relating to any theological perspectives that black majority churches apply regarding such issues as social, political and community concerns?
5. What part or role do you believe black majority churches play, in supporting black young men on their rehabilitation journeys and aspiration to live crime free lives?
6. Is there a role for the Holy Spirit in working with marginalised black young men? If so, what is this role?
7. What are some of the key considerations and factors to consider in seeking working with black young men associated with gangs, guns and anti-social behaviours?
8. What part, if any does faith, spirituality and church play in the lives of the young men we have considered?
9. What would your response be to black young men who say that black majority churches are not relevant to where they are at?
10. Do you have any final thoughts regarding the Black Majority churches response or role in engaging young black men?

Appendix 8 Interviews/Focus Group

CH1 – Interviewed in community by author 6 February 2013

CH2 – Interviewed in community by author, 6 March 2013

CH3 – Interviewed in community by author 9 March 2013

CH4 – Interviewed in community by author, 7 March 2013

CH5 – Interviewed in community by author 15 January 2013

P1 – Interviewed in prison by author, 31 January 2013

P2 – Interviewed in prison by author, 31 January 2013

P3 – Interviewed in prison by author, 7 January 2013

P4 – Interviewed in prison by author 15 January 2013

P5 – Interviewed in prison by author, 18 January 2013

R1 – Interviewed in community by author 19 February 2013

R2 – Interviewed in community by author, 4 March 2013

R3 – Interviewed in community by author, 7 March 2013

R4 – Interviewed in community by author, 10 January 2013

BMC Leaders Focus Group – conducted on 21 November 2013

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