NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE 'PLAY' OF AGENCY IN THE FORGING AND DOING OF BLACK CARIBBEAN MARGINALISED MEN'S IDENTITIES

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A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Nottingham Trent University

1st September 2005

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores and examines different subjective conceptualisations of black Caribbean men's self-identity. I have focused on intersecting points of oppression in the narrated accounts of eleven participants, who I have defined as multiple marginalised. I explore how black men's identities are forged, normed, and performed as they move between domestic, community, and paid-work environments. The themes that emerged from the study, which I and the participant identified as central to their identities, are 'migration and settlement', the 'body', 'sexuality', and 'lifestyle choices'. I examine each of these themes in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven and how they influence and shape the participants self-identities. The black public sphere provides the backdrop to the study; and how we interact with each other as black people. I blend empirical descriptions and theorising of alternative social histories and realities (where 'race' is not necessarily prioritised as the organising structure to identities) that invite us to rethink how black men's identities are constructed. The identity categories that are constructed through this study are becoming 'black British', 'black and disabled', 'black and gay', and 'black and bourgeois'. I deconstruct how they are positioned to notions of 'normality' within/outside black communities and perceived sometimes as 'inferior' identities to other black men.

I have used developmental approaches in visual research methods along with in-depth interviewing to generate ethnographic accounts that have detailed critical moments in the narrative of self-identity. The accounts focus upon critical moments in the participant's 'life projects' and convey rich descriptions of how men's identities have been a cause, effect, catalyst, and the possibilities opened up by critical moments. These times are the most uncertain and/or ill-defined areas in stories of selfhood were crucial choices are often made that influence and shape who they become. I emphasise a number of different pathways black men at the margins sometime take to negotiate the social constraints and impingements placed against them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Roger Bennett 1966-2006

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Chapter One

Negotiating Identities: An examination of the 'play' of agency in the forging and doing of black Caribbean marginalized men's identities

Introduction

This thesis is centrally concerned with how black Caribbean men negotiate and subjectively construct masculine identities. I look at the *meaning* given to black masculine identities and not at black masculinities per se. This thesis explores and examines potential shifts in the ways in which black Caribbean men 'perform' and 'construct' masculinities as they move between domestic, community, and paid-work environments. Rather then restricting myself to dominant – hegemonic - narratives of performing masculinity, I look instead at the broad differences in multiple marginalized black Caribbean masculinities, based on localities, bodily experiences, sexual identity, and lifestyle choices. The work addresses the fluidity of an individual man's masculine identity as his social context changes. To this end I have been comparing narratives of acting out, or 'doing', black masculine identities. This chapter gives an overview of the thesis and establishes my main argument. It outlines the parameters and discord of 'black marginality', and explains how the idea of 'multiple marginalized black masculinities' is constructed and conveyed throughout this work.

To achieve this aim, I focus primarily on black-on-black relationships, but I also attach importance to the fact that black people live in a multicultural and multiracial society and often negotiate images of ourselves that have been constructed from the outside. Thus, I consider the broader cultural representations and discourses that dominate, at least in part, society's thinking; how we see black men as social actors and how we view their proximity to other (black) people in British society. I distinguish what I mean by 'social representations' and 'discourses', and emphasize how black men are constructed in terms of our 'ethnicity' and/or 'gender' rather than as whole persons with internal and external contradictions, malaises and potential. I draw upon the narratives of research participants and examine the normalizing ideas

and images that have shaped and influenced their subjective conceptualization of 'masculine identities'.

Background and context of study

This thesis was first conceived while driving around a multiracial and multicultural area of my city, when my attention drifted onto a rear car-registration plate. The registration was composed of a Jamaican and European Union flag and the United Kingdom abbreviation (e.g. 'UK'). I pondered for a moment how the motorist might perceive his own identity, since the meaning of the registration plate was versatile and gave different clues to how he might see himself. Was he Jamaican first and British second, or European first, British second and Jamaican third? The question is not so much about what combination or ordering the motorist chose to define his identity, but rather to what extent do others see him as he chooses to see himself? To whom was he speaking and why? And what problems did he encounter by defining his identity so broadly? In writing this thesis I was motivated by the desire to explore stories of intersecting points of identification experienced by black men, and to examine how these stories help such men to subjectively conceptualize their sense of masculine identity. In particular, certain referents and points of identification carry cultural taboos and stigmas, or are ridiculed and can cause some black men to experience layer upon layer of bigotry and prejudice. I argue that these men represent a 'hidden minority' within an already marginalized ethnic/racial group, who experience an underlying thread of 'multiple oppression' partially because of the dual dilemma of 'masculinity' and 'race' (Staples, 1982).

Given that very few studies have critically looked at the complexities of constructing black masculinities (James, 1993), I attempt to capture, through empirical investigation, the unique manner in which cultural images particularly inform and intrude upon the construction of black male identities. I approach black masculine identities partly from a visual angle because of the visual's ability to convey and position personal and social stories within the matrix of being 'multiply othered'. The study appreciates how participants construct their own meaning from social imaginary. Thus, a starting point of the research is the theoretical position that the

audience is one of the most important sites at which the meaning of an image is made. I argue that the links between visualized and black cultures enable the construction of reliable ethnographic knowledge about the 'gendered' and 'racialized' self (as in the way the motorist adorned his car). Visual representations are acknowledged by many sociologists and anthropologists to be influential in shaping people's views of the world. People constantly use visual data to interpret life, and visual data also articulates the everyday realities that research based solely on written data may overlook (Ball et al, 1992, Stuhlmiller, 1996, Jewitt, 1997, & Pink, 2000). Few studies have chosen to focus upon ethnicity/race and masculinity in this way, even fewer on how we construct our reality, or meanings associated with our experiences (Bryan, 2001). However, I can only claim a space for black Caribbean men in this specific work; to tell our particular story, in our own particular way, not seeking to generalize from our experiences of 'race', 'ethnicity', or 'gender' about all black British people, since our experiences are not all alike.

My Biography

Much of what I write in this thesis is not that far removed from my own lived experiences as a black man. At different times in my own life, in differing degrees, I have experienced being constructed as an 'outsider' in one context or another; attributable to my ethnic background, dark complexion, accent, sexuality, locality, slender physicality, family networks, and so forth. I was born in the East Midlands in a predominately white mining town away from many of my urban black peers. Both my parents migrated from Jamaica in the 1960s. My mother arrived in her adolescence with a Kingstonian confidence and was received by my grandfather who was based in London. In contrast, my father came in his late twenties and arrived with a rural reserve. He settled straight into life with my aunties (as a surrogate son) in the small town where my parents later met. My parent's histories could not have started off more differently 'back home', but what they shared in common was their Christian value system and the challenges of adapting to, and creating, a new way of life for themselves here in Britain. Thus, I was exposed to a range of ways that newcomers might construct themselves, in allegiance and commitment to their ethnic project of returning 'home' and linked to their lives in Britain. As a result, I did not recognize

myself in most, if any, of the rigid depictions of black masculinity that existed in the wider society in my youth. As I am now in my thirties, my youthful cultural diet consisted of depictions of 'passive' and 'ignorant' Africans that accompanied Tarzan in his adventures, the Golliwog cartoon sketched on the sides of Robinsons jam jars, blacks as the butt of racist jokes by prime-time TV entertainers such as Jim Davison, Bernard Manning, and Charlie Williams, and BA in the A-Team, who functioned as an extension of the machinery and not as a thinking person in his own right.

In contrast, the Rastafari that most young black people of my generation orientated themselves towards, was too extreme an identity for me to foster, conflicted with my conservative background and certainly didn't represent how I saw my masculine or sexual identities; neither did the 'bald headed' religious Right with whom I attended church. Even my own family's superstitious beliefs and thick Jamaican accent were not wholeheartedly adopted due to my reasoning mind and need to fit in. Yet still, I was too young to appreciate the hybridization occurring within my own identity; instead I looked towards an 'imagined homeland' to rediscover my roots. My first journey 'home' was when I first self-consciously experienced my British identity and realised that I was not quite British or Jamaican. My story is not that unusual: in my direct work with vulnerable and socially excluded black boys and men I have frequently come across stories of how men struggle with the anxious question of self-identity. As such, I was prompted to undertake an empirical study that looked beyond the mere parameters of racialized identities to venture into the uncertainties and changeability in which I and many other black men construct our identities in a period where everyone's identities are supposedly in crisis (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996). However, I do not erase the fictions of 'race' since even though race holds no genetic or scientific validity to differentiate groups of people, it remains a 'zombie category' (see Beck in Rutherford, 2000); a category many people still attach meaning and value judgements against. I will pursue this argument later in the thesis.

Thesis structure

The thesis's central chapters have been organized to show how black people, in their lived experience of the 'black diasporas', are subject to daily acts of verbal and symbolic assault and denigration, fears of imminent aggression and anticipation of more unfair and unjust handling by large and powerful institutions including statutory bodies, but also from their own ethnic/racial communities. As a consequence, identity construction often takes place between the uncertainty of assimilation and exclusion. This is the reality for most, if not all, the participants. Members of visible minority groups accept this form of daily assault as inevitable, perhaps becoming unaware of its insidious impact on their well-being and optimism (Bhui, 2002). Indeed, many black people survive and learn to live with being disliked and hated on multiple fronts. Nonetheless, it is precisely because this oppressive fabric of life is so easily forgotten and ignored that it is worth examining how black men's identities are constructed in resistance, compliance, and/or as an effect of such axes of oppression. Thus, the complexity of the aforementioned issues raises questions of considerable interest about how black men mediate dominant or hegemonic representations and discourses in forming a positive sense of 'self'.

Thus, disparities in performing black masculinities are central to this work. The specific questions the research aims to address in exploring the subjective construction of black masculine identities are:

- in what ways do hegemonic discourses intersect with how black men go about constructing and expressing self-defined positive[1] self-identities?
- what role does 'black culture' play in constituting and regulating black male identities? and
- in what ways do homosocial relations shared between black men enable or disable a construction of alternative self-identities?

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[1] According to Small (1986) if a healthy personality – which equates to positive self-identity – is to be formed, the black individual must first recognise and accept that he or she has a black psychic image (Small, 1986, p. 88).

These questions do not define the difficulties some black men experience per se; rather they uncover how imaginary black communities have operated and managed to maintain collective identities, determining how they themselves define normative masculine identities. In this way, the potential issues that are crucial to the understanding of multiple marginalizations can be uncovered. This project, therefore, provides not only an opportunity for silent voices to be heard, but also a critique of the normalization strategies employed within imaginary black communities that impede, as much as they empower, black men.

The thesis discusses the findings of this research. Chapter Two critically reviews the collective value of using the concepts 'identity', 'blackness', 'masculinity', and 'subjectivity' to study and analyse the different ways black masculinities are discursively constructed and performed. This section considers the theoretical and conceptual unpacking of the messy issues involved in mapping out the boundaries of 'race' and the complexity of constructing black masculinities. I spell out the pros and cons of the poststructuralist paradigm I have used to frame my usage of the aforementioned terms. And I explain why I have been guided, at least in theory, by the poststructuralist assumption that black masculine identity is not a unified or stable sociological category; it cannot be identified and subjected to empirical study. The many-faceted characteristics, repertoires, and different guises associated with black masculine identities are open to change, variation, and fluidity. I discuss how the works of bell hooks, Rex Nettleford, Stuart Hall, and Bob Connell have been adapted and operationalized in the empirical study as potential indicators/makers of 'difference', 'Othering', and 'multiplicity' among black folk.

Chapter Three outlines the context and research methodology adopted to build ethnographic knowledge, and designed to answer the questions posed. In this chapter I present the research strategy, the use of visual methods, and details of the research participants. I first critically discuss the logic and rationale of the empirical study I have undertaken. I then look at the grounds upon which my claim to partial knowledge has been derived and legitimated in this work. In line with the fluidity and openness in self-construction that I theoretically propose in the work, I explain how I engage with visual culture as a central medium to capture analogies and/or

symbolisms of critical moments in identity projects. I discuss how visual mediums invite subjective interpretations, and how visual mediums are shown to straddle the public and private realms of 'black life', breaking down inhibiting social barriers and systems of meaning. I present my argument for the wider usage of visual methodologies in ethnographic studies. I also detail my reflexive experience as a black researcher. I explore my biases, the ethical considerations in handling and presenting imagery produced by the participants, and my thoughts on 'doing' black masculinities in relation to how participants responded to certain clues to my identity and positioned themselves accordingly.

Chapter Four examines the places where we live and the communities we connect with, at least in part, as defining 'who we are'. This first findings chapter deals with the ambiguities of 'space', 'place', and 'belonging' linked to the lived experience of the 'black diasporas'. Centring on critical moments of 'displacement' and 'changes in location' this chapter critically explores stories of migration and settlement, and the synchronic and symbolic parameters used to define localized and globalized referents and points of identification. This chapter explores the cultural rhythms and melodies that have been negotiated by participants to construct their cognitive worlds. I have used stories of aging or returning 'home', and episodes of detachment from imagined black communities to exemplify critical moments in how masculine identities have been self-consciously forged. I suggest a number of cultural turns in the participants' sense of 'blackness' that were ontological indicators to their changing social positions.

Chapter Five examines how in Western culture the overly-signified black male body is a deeply ingrained image that can be blamed, in part, for perpetuating masculine repertoires and exchanges among black men that lead to conflictive relationships, and unusual strategies of the body to cope with these conditions. This second findings chapter deals explicitly with issues relating to body image and bodily capacities as markers of masculinities and blackness. There is no mistaking that the body is 'political' and can be an object of social regulation even when it is discursively constructed (in a black context) as shelter for the 'soul'. This chapter explores suppressed stories of disability and ill-health and how certain participants have

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negotiated their bodies along with subjectively constructing their sense of masculine identity from tenuous positions. I explore lived experiences of marginality and the implications these critical moments have upon changes in the participants' 'behaviour' and 'attitudes' in their search for ethnic and masculine embodiment. Participants varied in their response and mould their bodies and demeanour at critical moments in their lives to suit their structural circumstances and serve their individuated needs. I end this chapter by presenting how bodily experiences have been defined as 'projects' (both imaginatively and in practice) and understood as arbiters of masculine meaning.

Chapter Six, the third findings chapter, deals with issues surrounding black sexuality and sexual practices that are tabooed or ridiculed from within imaginary heterosexist black communities. What comes straight to mind is the issue of homophobia, which I do address in this chapter; but more divisive and problematic are interracial relationships, sadomachismos (sado-masochism, or S&M, is the consensual erotic exchange of power), and other sexual fetishisms that are not talked about and are often linked to an immoral white culture. Stories of constructing black masculine identities are presented here by looking at critical moments of 'mobilization' and 'changes in knowledge' resulting from the experiences of marginality or crystallised in fulfilling sexual fantasies and desires. My interest is in the third alternative space and/or grey areas where liveable lives are made possible and masculine identities are renewed against public and private scrutiny and/or continued participation in imaginary black communities.

Chapter Seven, the last findings chapter, examines the reoccurring question that splits generation after generation: What is this thing me call 'blackness'? And who are the authentic arbiters and articulators of this blackness? This chapter examines issues of immobility and upward mobility, or, in other words, lifestyle choices. I present stories of how participants have negotiated questions of authenticity and upward mobility as they construct their masculine identities. These stories admit a contemporary condition where what we consume and our participation in consumer society is a master signifier of who we are, or at least, who we might like to become. Specifically,

I look at critical moments of 'pride' and 'affirmation' in their sense of masculine identities, as participants negotiated different lifestyles and markers to their blackness.

Chapter Eight brings together the evidence of 'multiple identification', 'non-normative masculinities', the 'third alternative space or allusive social' sites', and 'life-style and consumer choice'. Recognizing that the rhythms and modalities of 'doing' black masculinities are fractured, multilayered, and continuously being negotiated, I suggest, for instance, that normative fictions of *black* masculinities are locally contingent upon the public concealment and manipulation of certain gender practices (e.g. 'bodily incapacities', 'white orientation', 'educational achievement', and 'idiosyncratic tastes') to accomplish ethnic solidarity. The reverse may result in being marginalized, ostracized, not taken seriously, or even hated. Thus, one way ethnic identification is accomplished is by limiting the scope of identity projects open to individuals (in terms of what black masculinity ought to mean), but revealing at the same time the range of survival mechanisms (overtly and covertly) at play in the configuration of new forms of black masculinities. This chapter concludes by looking at the gap in focus in the analysis of 'new ethnicities', 'gender configuration', and ways relationships among black men are, at least in part, structured and influenced by the dominating representations and discourses. The dominating influences I refer to are derived from the black public sphere. I illustrate this, showing how new black masculinities are simultaneously constituted and constructed in social and political practices, embedded in institutional forms, and bound by emotional ties that operate outside and within imagined black communities. Finally, I look at how the study could be extended and explore other areas for future research.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the central themes that emerged from the life-testimonies and literature (e.g. 'migration', 'body-image', 'sexuality', and 'lifestyle choices') through which black men's self-identities are constructed in this work. I have been concerned with the interplay of hegemonic representations associated with black men that are sometimes internalized and might be incorporated into the self-construction of black masculine identities. Dominant representations formed from the outside

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generally position black people in inferior and unequal relationships to white society. Black men take a marginal position and are constructed as 'strangers' to the public realm but through their own unique perspectives, participants provided fresh insights into their subject positions and the everyday social scenarios that affect them. Much work has already been done looking at black people as we relate to education, the judicial system, health, as well as other social welfare-driven research, but 'insufficient attention has been paid to issues associated with psychological and social relations between black people, or to how we construct our reality, or to meanings associated with our experience' (Bryan, 2001, p. 24). Recognizing this gap in research, I focus upon problematic black-on-black relations in a variety of sites (e.g. family, community, and work). I have adopted the position that our experiences are multilayered and complex. I go on in this thesis to emphasize the characteristics of power relations at play and of the implications of being negotiated within and across 'imaginary black communities'.

Chapter Two

Black Male Biographies: A framework for understanding black masculinities

Introduction

This chapter examines the literature that has explored black subjectivity. I explain what is actually meant by 'black masculine identities' and situate my study among existing research and literature. I start by clarifying some of the concepts and terms (some of which were introduced in Chapter One), which are employed throughout the thesis. I outline in detail the theoretical basis which underpins the idea of black masculine identities in this study and the ontological parameters within which the research works. My research primarily draws upon sociological conceptualizations of 'identity', 'ethnicity', and 'gender' and the chapter discusses each in turn to explain how they have been employed in my methodology. In this chapter I also discuss how am influenced by postmodernist interpretation of self-identification. I draw upon the conceptual strengths of 'social constructionism', 'inter-subjectivity', and 'imagined communities' as opposed to the inherent weaknesses found in an essentialist stance. I also look critically at the historic dynamic of 'othering' as it is connected to the ideology of 'whiteness' and the co-construction of 'blackness', and how this cultural mechanism manifests itself in the black diasporas to produce points of differentiation.

MULTIPLE BLACK IDENTITIES AND VOICES

This study engages with 'postmodernist' and 'non-essentialist' reconceptions of notions of identity as opposed to the unified subject traditionally favoured in positivist empirical studies. My engagement with poststructuralism and postmodernism discourses enables the complexity and fluidity in black men's identities to come to the fore, without totally debunking essentialist identity claims. It considers how 'blackness' has been historically constructed and objectified as the silent and imagined 'other' to 'whiteness'; and invites a re-thinking of the ways black male biographies are read and of the social basis of their definition. Given that the idea of

'black masculinity' is, at present, 'desired' (West, 1993, Gary, 1996, & Nayak, 2002) as ardently as it has been 'despised' (Fredrickson, 1982, Young, 1996, & Jahoda, 1999) in the popular imagination, black men have continued to negotiate their identities from marginal positions on a daily basis; in relation to white culture, in relation to themselves, and in relation to their past (Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1963; Blassingame, 1979, Gilroy, 1993, & Patterson, 1973). Although Afrocentric theorists such as Molefi Ashanti (1996) call for a black epistemology to specifically examine this 'crisis of identity', postmodernist approaches (although criticized for taking too lightly the power relations embedded in the constructs of 'race' and 'gender') do offer a useful point of departure from rigid ways of seeing black subjectivity and, more importantly for the purpose of this study, stress the fragility and complexity in the construction of black male biographies.

I feel that black Britons inhabit a kaleidoscope of subject positions. When asked, members of the 'black diasporas' begin to tell a multitude of stories about who they are. Some of us draw an imaginary line around ourselves and say, this is my space, my territory, this is where I belong. The attributes of that space inform the way we see ourselves. But our ancestors' space was also imaginary, and we are the children of the physical and mental journeys they travelled. In our minds each of us draws a line between homeland and the foreign. Our identity depends on how we locate ourselves, in time and space (Venn, 2000). The question arises; to what lengths are cultural narratives of 'blackness' taken up in personal biographies; but also, how are they experienced as a stabilizing force for black men today?

In the broadest sense, the idea of 'blackness' in this study refers to political, cultural, and social ways of being and seeing by members of the black diaspora. The study understands 'blackness' as being non-essentialist, fractured, and disrupts claims to authenticity, arguing instead that black identities and 'blackness' are multifaceted and needs to be examined as such. The category 'blackness' itself is often ill-defined as some essential, innate quality or as a general ancestral connection to the African continent' (Ransby et al, 1993, p. 58). Failure to debunk this reading would render our understanding of 'black identities', 'black experiences', and 'black social knowledge' as fixed, narrowed, and ultimately constraining. Hence, bell hooks (1991) argues that

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anti-essentialist critique 'allows us to affirm multiple black identities', and 'varied black experience' (hooks, 1991).

Thus, 'blackness' not only constitutes a 'moral' (Rogers, 1967, Thomas, 1970, Cross, 1971, Nobles et al, 1984), 'symbolic' (Parham, 1989, Rose, 1994), and 'imaginary' space (Jenkins, 1988, Parham, 1989, Cross et al, 1991, Marables, 1983) but encompasses 'performative' (Alexander, 1996) formations by which contemporary black men construct and understand themselves tentatively as being both 'male' and 'black'. To articulate 'black masculinity' is therefore a process of becoming through performance repetitions and there is no essential core 'natural' to us (see details later in this chapter). Thus, black masculinities are understood in this project as a personal narrative or representation (Rabinow, 1991, Somers et al, 1994, Hall et al, 1996, Ezzy, 1998, & Worton, 2001). In other words, on a day-to-day basis 'blackness' is inhabited linguistically in innovative rhetorical practices. Black talk is one mediator of identity. Modes of communication offer one set of rules that give meaning and form to experience (see Davies, in Bhui, 2002, p. 47): materially, through stylizations of the body (e.g. hairstyles, ways of walking, standing, hand expressions, talking, etc); and institutionally and symbolically, by means of constituting and sustaining camaraderie and community (West, 1990).

When I use the terms 'black' or 'imagined black communities', they are not intended as universalizing social categories that are meant to subsume black femininities under a masculization of the black public sphere. The terms are simply used to hint at the aspects of social life that are centred on masculine performances. At the same time, black femininities and masculinities are not treated as mutually exclusive categories nor seen as historically fixed, but reflect the various ways black men contextualize, reformulate, and reconfigure themselves in private and public. Hence, I use the terms 'black' and 'blackness' interchangeably as underlying principles by which certain males perhaps engage with established constructs and *play* innovatively with new formations to articulate 'black masculine personas'. The terms 'we', 'us' and 'our' recognize my positionalities in this thesis as being 'black' and 'male' identified.

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Disrupting racialized identities

At the outset, I must state that I do not intend to present a tidy story of black masculine identity. First of all, anti-racist writers such as Castell (1983), Gilroy (1987) and Anthias (1992) each identify that there is an arbitrary split in the way even ideas around 'race' function as signifiers or processes of signification for black men. The idea of 'race' is a relational concept. It is justifiable to say that 'race' as an organizing referent for identities is only relevant when it is considered locally, and understood as a specific social and historical construction. This is especially evident in recent discussions of 'black masculinity', where there has been a strategic shift from structural explanations of racialized identities to a holistic concern for the uniqueness and complexity of black lives. Terms we use to define ourselves as racialized beings are in dispute and in constant flux. We are living through a period where there is rupture in how 'blackness' is conceptualized, which has led to destabilizing traditional ideas of racial absolutism (for instance, race having no genetic validity). For instance, Marriott (1996) identifies five central themes that I take up in the thesis, resulting from the disarticulation of 'race' as a foundational concept:

- The interrelationship between race and sexuality
- Cultural difference and national identity
- The formation of black masculinities in settler communities and families
- The relationship of black men to their bodies
- Unconscious desires and fantasies

Scholars have called for a re-examination; not only of 'race', but also of how 'racism' is conceptualized, by using poststructuralist epistemologies (or theories of knowledge) that avoid grand conceptualization of either term. For instance, the idea of 'new cultural racism' (Barker, 1981) points to the urgency of comprehending racism as changing and historically situated. Yet there are also weaknesses in adopting the tenets of this perspective. The idea of 'new racism' is also grounded in egalitarian

values and the belief that black people should, and do, have an equal playing field (in regard to employment or education, for example). Adversely, the tolerant liberal morality of 'new racism' ignores inequalities and evades questions of the internalized legacy of 'old racism', the aesthetic elements of racism (i.e. visual culture), and the cultural dynamics of racism (i.e. internalised racism) (Cohen, 1993, 1991, Cohen et al, 1988). Accordingly, Callinicos infers that 'new racism' is simply a 'shift from biology to culture, and from race to ethnicity' (Callinicos, 1993, pp. 32-3). As a consequence, the idea of carrying out a detailed examination on 'black masculinities' based principally upon black men sharing a fixed racialized identity and experiencing racism in much the same way, presents a host of limitations.

I argue that black British people belong to not one cultural group but to several, and it is this overlapping construction of identity that partially underpins the understanding of identities in this study. Black Britons are not imprisoned in one linear history; neither is our status simply that of 'native' or 'stranger'. If you wish to call such identities Diaspora, bi-cultural, hybrid, Anglo-Jamaican, or multicultural it is permissible to do so. I return to this point later in the chapter. Yet, it does not stop there, the argument presented throughout this thesis aims to distinguish the de-centring, fragmentation, and fracturing of identities occurring in the context of post-industrial societies, where points of identification and alignment are made more problematic as structural roots to identities become progressively more destabilized. To overcome the destabilization in identity formation theoretically, I conceptualize identities (to a certain extent) as abstract, fluid, and changeable; they reflect and reveal the profound emotions of individuals, peoples and communities. Criticisms against the defence of such notions of identity have included the denial of an objective reality, the celebration of relativism, and the emphasis upon a narcissistic or self-obsessed (different from self-love) agent, etc. How I work with these tensions is addressed through-out this chapter. Over the last few decades poststructuralists and cultural theorists have engaged with an anti-essentialist paradigm to examine how social space/place has contributed to destabilizing and producing new possibilities in deconstructing the myths and stereotypes associated with black identity. Much of their work is exploratory and investigative in nature and forms the basis to the analysis (Baldwin, 1981, Cashmore, 1982, hooks, 1987, Rex, 1988; Jones, 1989, Wilson,

1990, Wallace, 1990, Madhabuti, 1990, Hall, 1992, Gilroy, 1993, West, 1993, Julien, 1994, Rose, 1994, Cleaver, 1989, & Marriott, 2000).

The ideologies and discourses through which black men both represent themselves and exclude others are important. In whose name, under whose hegemony (e.g. cultural fiction) do black men undertake to express their respective identities and identifications? From the standpoint of a politics of social representation, another set of questions arises: questions concerning the bewildering diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which constitute 'blackness' as a category; the shifting discursive political and cultural constructions of black identity which cannot be grounded in a fixed set of racial categories, nor biological morphologies, but which are articulated in terms of relations of representation and its politics; the experience of being black in modernity being an adventure in surplus or excess representations;. the extent to which the psyches of black men feel assaulted by the iconic role of black supermen in mass culture. Studies have queried the hyper-visibility and invisibility of black men and questioned whether black men have equal access to racial cultural resources of being black men. The issue of class, age, ethnic and sexual differentiation among black men remains relevant to black masculinities. Which black fathers, brothers, lovers and friends experience in their everyday lives.

During the period of youth, attitudes are formed towards future lifestyles and roles; hence it is necessary to assess how young black males see themselves – if at all - in the roles of lover, husband, and father. Are the roles of husband and father subordinated to the more glamorous and mass-media portrayed ones of freewheeling bachelor and super stud? We need to analyse the role priorities among black men and the forces in their environment that facilitate or impede their fulfilment. Black men face certain problems related to institutional racism and environments that often do not prepare them very well for the fulfilment of masculine roles. They encounter negative stereotyping that exists on all levels. And finally, how do the unconscious fears, fantasies and desires of white men concerning black men relate, through the psychoanalytical process of identification, to black male gender and racial identification, white male narcissism, or to the wider process of cultural 'translation'

and 'hybridity'? These themes are important to the thesis and are taken up in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven in more detail.

This body of work talks of the richness, diversity and elasticity in constructing black identities in an era marked by an instability in cultural and social referents and the so-called 'crisis in identity' (Hall et al, 1992, & Bauman, 1992). Hence, this project follows in the trail of earlier postmodernist texts to point out the 'dilemma of intraracial disparities' (Gates et al, 1996, p. 26), but specifically among black men. I consider a new contextualization and different readings of black male biographies that take account of the emotional geographical spaces black men use to stimulate change and renewal in themselves. Whilst black counter-hegemonic masculine identities are prominent in dominant popular and academic discourses (paradoxically used to signify the 'threat' and 'pleasure' inherent in the signifier 'blackness'), perhaps the most enlightening stories of 'blackness' are told by black individuals who are tabooed, outcast, silenced, and stigmatized by the 'imaginary black community'. Many black men are left to struggle with the tensions constructed around binaries like manhood/womanhood, black/brown, self/other, batty-man/straight, atheist/Christian, haussler/employee, abled-bodied/disabled, and kicky-hair/coolie-hair. It is this complexity and vitality that represents new possibilities for this thesis to view and interpret black masculine identities differently; as such binaries become more problematic and unstable in late modern times.

Theorising black subjecivity

To investigate how black masculine identities are subjectively constructed I turn to theoretical ideas of the black subject. The dominant approaches by which the 'human subject' emerges in Western academic thought rest broadly within two paradigms. They are the 'modern' and 'postmodern' subject(s). This thesis is most explicitly concerned with the latter. The 'postmodern subject' is theoretically interpreted and deployed in the study in a number of different ways. Firstly, to capture the different 'play of identities' (Hall et al, 1992, p. 280) involved in the forging of personal biographies. Secondly, epistemologically, biographies are considered as historically, not biologically defined (see Hall, 1993) – having no fixed, essential, or permanent

unity aspect in the culturally located stories we tell about ourselves. Hence, 'each individual has a unique personal biography made up of concrete experiences, values, motivations, and emotions. No two individuals occupy the same social space; thus no two biographies are identical' (Collins, 1992, p. 227).

I do not apologies for the 'post' prefix which peppers this thesis. It does seen to me, however, that some value can be got from regarding the construction of black men's identities as post. In many respects, the postmodern problem occurred in the modern era for black people locked outside mainstream institutions and structures that coherently defined ones identity in relation to others and self. Thus, the modern notions of racial identities are unhelpful on many levels in the continued analysis of black men's self-identities, especially in the purpose of looking at inter-group dynamics. The black postmodern subject has not been nostalgically constituted in this thesis, but I have engaged with this branch of social theory from the position that the complex negotiation of identity typified by some postmodernist theorist resonates in the 'changing same' (Gilroy, 1996b, p. 268) of black tradition -- the counter narrative. There are researchers who have demonstrated how poststructuralist critiques of essentialism can be used in empirical research to generate more complex insights into the production of social location and experience (Brah, 1996, Hall et al, 1996). My approach in this study works with these tensions in the application of poststructuralist insights to qualitative research. It is concerned with using poststructuralist critiques of essentialism in research, whilst also seeking to legitimate the everyday situated voices and experience of research participants and research as grounds for political action. However, to locate the emergence of the 'postmodern subject' one has to first trace its origin back to the 'modern subject'.

The stable and centred modern subject is understood to emerge from the 'enlightened' and 'sociological' subject(s). The enlightened subject, best theorized by Descartes (1985), is thought to be rational, cogitative, conscious, and self-sustaining — categorically a civilised being. The enlightenment subject was constituted through the specific discursive practices of law, economics, biology, and psychology, whereby the modern black object/subject emerges as the white man's burden, misnamed as the exotic, primitive, or noble savage without agency or history: thus, 'denigrated or

relegated to the periphery of all that is considered central to human development'(Nettleford,1996, p. 27). Discourses are ways of knowing about, or of representing and so giving some control over, reality and social behaviour. In Foucault's words, 'discourses construct definitions of normality' (Foucault, 1979). The discursive field I operate within is sociology. The field of sociology was the foremost discipline theorizing the formation of social identities in the twentieth century and fixing the subject fully into the social world and its processes; and as such construct black subjectivity – and by association identity – from its own notions of 'normality'. From this universalising discourse, the modern sense of 'self' (free from religion and mysticism) is said to unfold throughout the course of the individual's life-span, derived from a fully centred inner core present at birth (Hall et al, 1992). The subject interacts with society, reciprocally, to form his or her 'harmonious and unproblematic identities' (Calhoun, 1994, p. 13). But this belief, this sense of individuality and autonomy, is itself a social construct rather than recognition of a natural fact.

This is an oversimplification of the 'modern subject', but represents the fixed and essential beliefs prevalent in white bourgeois thinking. This construct of identity is used as the basis to examine, compare and contrast individuals and groups in the human sciences. These scientific presumptions are thought to be universal and applicable to all humans. However, this thesis subjects key concepts of identity to the deconstructive gaze, though does not advocate a total abandonment of the 'modern subject'. To paraphrase Hall (1997), the essentializing conceptions of 'identity' are no longer good to think with in their original and unreconstructed forms, but without them certain key questions around agency cannot be thought at all (Hall et al, 1997, pp. 1-2). For instance, most postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers regard identity categories as mere constructions that impede selfhood. They have exhausted their use of socially constructed identities in challenging the status-quo in preference for working through and with the postmodern metaphor of identities. I nurture the belief that black men have not finished articulating the peculiarities of their identity categories as 'black', 'male', and 'heterosexual', etc. Why only select these features to socially construct black men's identities and not others? At the same time, the idea of total objectification (having one's racial and gender identity solely defined by the

subject) is rejected in this thesis, without cancelling out the (un)conscious consequences resulting from attempts of objectification on the self-image of black people; exemplified in how the media, education, and social policy constructs 'black masculinity'.

Simplified and generalized depictions of the 'black man' have featured in the popular imagination as the logical and legitimate object of 'surveillance and policing', or 'containment and punishment' (Gary, 2001), divisively 'criminalizing populations' (Rose, 1994) while simultaneously denying the humanity and individuality of black people. As such, 'black masculinity' has been the site of much fascination, imagination, and regulation by white men (Segal, 1995; Baldwin, 1957); paradoxically homogenizing and misrepresenting the 'facts' about the 'black man' as being a 'child rather than an adult', 'big, black, and dangerous' (Prins, 1993), a 'walking phallus' (Fanon 1963, 1968, & Lester et al, 1999), or 'emasculated' (Marriott, 1996), and so forth. The construction of such caricatures and negative social labeling have served to publicly 'dehumanize' and 'demonize' (Rose, 1994) black men and in turn influence how they are treated. In the book entitled *Invisible Man* (1952), Ralph Ellison tells a story of an African American man, who is losing his sense of identity in a world of prejudice and hostility. Ellison comments;

> "I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me." (from *The Invisible Man*, prologue)

Recognizing academic Western thought has required objectification, a process Dona Richards describes as the separation of the 'knowing self' from the 'known self' (Richards, 1990, p. 72), and bell hooks describes as having 'one's reality defined by others' (hooks, 1987, p.42). This thesis emphasizes the unfeasibility of total objectification due to competing normalization strategies and volatility in the procedural practices of categorization in colonizing the cognitive, linguistic, motivational, and socio-emotional life-world(s) of black men. The idea of total objectification does not acknowledge the safe spaces black men utilize to define

themselves. We must explore different ways of interpreting the meaning of divergent black masculine identities and imaging black masculinities that do not rely upon the assumptions of modern subject signifiers. A constitution structured specifically around the subjectivity characteristic of the white, heterosexual, bourgeois man (Barrett, 1991). Instead, we must turn to self-defined ontologies put forward by black men. Before I begin the critical investigation into how some black men are partially 'othered' within imagined black communities, I give a brief account of how the ideological basis to 'whiteness' has constantly reinvented and redefined itself in opposition to 'blackness' (its fictitious binary opposite) to define its own world view and its own view of its place in the world at the socio-psychological detriment of black people. This thesis is mindful of the ongoing dialectical co-construction, which is at least partially dependent on the same essentialist stereotypical forms and modalities that seek to dominate and control how black people are seen and perhaps see themselves.

The black feminist Patricia Collins notes, 'as the "Others" of society who can never really belong, strangers threaten the moral and social order' (Collins, 1991, p. 68). Edward Said (1978) notes, that the 'other' is sometimes threatening, sometimes ambivalent, and sometimes both. But the 'other' is simultaneously essential for the survival of the social order, because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries (Collins, 1991, p. 68). Hall sees that:

> *Every identity has its "margin" and excess, something more. The unity, the interim, homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it "lacks". (Hall et al, 1997, p. 5)*

By not belonging, the black person occupies a 'special substatus' (Thompson, 1974) which renders their experiences not only marginal, but also invisible. The black man's precarious social position plays a significant role in Western society in emphasizing the significance of belonging. 'White' became more significant when an embodied 'black' appeared in contrast (Davis, 1994, p. 56). Whilst 'some forms of black masculinities provokes an irrational 'threat' or 'fear' in its portrayal as 'outcast', we must also recognize that black men remain fractured within and amongst themselves.

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Each individual embodies unique insights and knowledge of our 'gendered' and 'racialized' identities.

Traditionally, academic discussion on black masculinity tends to ignore this conceptual line of inquiry and is disturbingly proficient in representing black men as simply one-dimensional 'victims'. Stereotypes of black men perpetuated through academic literature stem from a failure to understand both the meanings and forms that 'black masculinity' takes from a black context (Petersen, 1998). As a result of the application of white norms, such studies tend to 'blame the victim' (Ryan, 1971). The portrayal of black masculinity has been ethnocentric in approach (Asante, 1987). White heterosexual middle-class academics easily forgot – indeed are seldom aware - that they too are part of a group and are subject to ethnocentrism and a unique collective group experience (Katz, 1987). Some black academics have passionately counteracted such analyses, and in so doing have fed into self-defeating agendas. This may have been in good faith, but it helps to perpetuate stereotypes proposed by victimhood theorists and to enlarge the discourse of black people as 'perpetual victims', employing 'assimilationist' or 'homogenzing' overtones (West, 1990)[2]. For instance, Madhubuti claims that 'the destruction of black men starts at the birth, intensifies during boyhood, accelerates during the teen years and finalises in early adulthood' (Madhubuti, 1990, p. v.). It logically follows that the black man is considered an 'endangered species' (Akber, 1991). Thus, one central theme of the thesis is the adverse affects of 'otherness' upon the self-image of black men. This means considering how the central concepts which give structure and meaning to the idea of 'otherness' have been (re)invoked within and across imagined black communities and used as a device to exclude individuals and groupings of black men from positions of power.

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[2] For West (1990), the reflectionist argument carries assimilationist overtones that subordinate black particularity to a false universalism. Similarly, social engineering, which homogenizes black folk, overlooks how racist treatment vastly differs owing to class, gender, sexual orientation, nation, region and age. The hidden assumption of both arguments is that we have unmediated access to what is the 'real black community' and what are 'positive images' (West in Lermert, 1993, p. 586).

Prefiguring the essentialist black subject

Probably the most challenging aspect of writing about black masculine identity, especially for a predominately academic audience, is the issue of 'essentialism'. I have stressed so far, the idea that we should move beyond a position of the 'essential being'. An essentialist approach makes claims that there is a true 'essence' that exists to unify all black people. This essence is often described in Eurocentric discourse as a failure of (most, if not all) black people to achieve the progressively individualistic nature of principally white European men. In contrast, the Afrocentric position recalls a mythical ancient black masculinity that stresses the importance of human relationships, harmony with all things, and spirituality. One might argue that these models exist at either end of the same continuum. Both agree that there is the premise of the 'quintessential black man'.

Convincingly, David Marriott (1996) argues that black identity can no longer be fixed in discourses of race and biology, but should be articulated in terms of relations of representations and their politics. The politics of representation, Stuart Hall (1992) argues, means the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject. The essential black subject has come of age and has become a person. A postmodern view that allows for the overt interrogation of black subjectivists and sees black people in far more ironic and varied forms (than in melodramatic terms of innocence and victimization) as agents of their own fate and to control their domestic, community, and paid-work environments. Hall's metaphor of 'identity' strategically recognizes identities as being a 'meeting point' of temporary attachment to the subject positions discursively constructed by the interplay of biography, community, and social institutions (Hall et al, 1995). According to Hall:

> *Identities are never unified and in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. (Hall et al, 1997, p. 4)*

This perspective supports the idea that identities are constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall et al, 1997). From a subject position of representation, the 'self' is taken to be a socially constructed 'fiction' or 'production'. It is never complete, but always in the process of 'becoming' and 'being' (Hall, 2000), rather than being the recognition of a natural fact. When we talk or refer to 'ourselves' we rely upon a temporal understanding of our past, present, and future 'self'. The partnership between the past and the present is an imaginary reconstruction. This 'selfhood' is fluid and mobile and relies upon a historical biography to reveal itself to others. Through narratives of identity we tell stories of ourselves which are often locked into stories of others; namely black social stories. As such there are no fixed boundaries between time and geographic space, a dynamic which allows for the flow of past, present, and future to collide to form the fiction of 'self'. Stories often help to form and sustain the identity of individuals, communities, and traditions, bridging the inside and outside worlds of black agents (Venn, 2000).

By using the 'social story' metaphor also referred to as a 'cultural story', cultural theorists such as Paul Gilroy (1987) have examined the notions and workings of 'black communities'. Gilroy understands 'community' to be a relational term that refers to far more then mere place or population. He emphasizes its 'moral' dimension, which in practice allows for 'personal autonomy' along with 'collective empowerment' (Gilroy, 1987, p. 247). Commenting on the moral dimensions of the black community bell hooks remarks

> *'liberation is found in a working through of past oppression, a working through in which the constituents of oppression become morally diffused by being incorporated into and transformed in the self-creation of an oppressed minority's development of a positive ideology of and for itself'(hooks, 1994, p. 132)*

The need to construct positive knowledge of 'self' emerges from the struggle to reject controlling images and to integrate knowledge deemed communally and personally important: usually knowledge essential to our survival. As a result, the importance bestowed upon 'memory' and 'emotion' is crucial in understanding the black community. These are perceptual spaces that shape, in part, how narratives of the

'self' are told and what is given significance. The question then shifts to one of meaning, participation, and space in the examination of self-defined identities. In this sense, I suggest that social discourses and lived experiences are co-constituted – they intermingle and inhabit one another to frame and articulate identities.

Narrating the politics of 'difference'

Debates on difference have brought to the forefront issues of black sexism, internalized racism, black homophobia, and the exclusion of multi-heritage people from black communities. The tensions between similarity and difference within the symbol 'blackness' is discussed in a critical and sustained way by people such as Hall (1989), West (1990), and Gilroy (1994). To be critical or analytical is often perceived to be an act of betrayal within certain black communities. Where these accusations are made, the 'notion of the essential black subject', which must be safeguarded at all cost turns out to be a surprisingly fragile construct (Gilroy, 1994). Such shifts, in favour of the diversity of black experiences and subjectivities emphasises the complexities of a politics of working with and through difference. Such a critique allows us to affirm 'multiple expressions of blackness' and varied 'black experiences' (hooks, 1992). Black identities are viewed as being dynamic and multifaceted in this thesis. In the same way, Gilroy asserts:

> *The existence of a multiplicity of black tones and styles has created new political tensions and a debate over the possibility and desirability of rules that could govern the production of black art and culture. Intra-racial differences have been compounded and amplified as familiar but deeply repressed divisions based on class, ideology, and money; language and locality have been supplemented by intense and irrepressible antagonisms arising from sexuality, gender and generation. These social divisions inside the racial kin group are no longer seen as secondary or trivial. Both those who oppose it and want to reinstate an innocent idea of simple racial essences have had to recognize their importance. (Gilroy, 1994, pp. 1-2)*

The idea of 'differance' was taken-up by the poststructuralist Jacques Derrida (1976) who opened up a theoretical terrain from which the content and peculiarities of 'difference' can be legitimately thought through. The significance of Derrida's

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conceptualization is that it criticizes and calls for the deconstruction of the 'unified subject' (Hallberg, 1989). In particular, this deconstruction relates to the personal dialogue we participate in with ourselves, and how we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the 'imaginary communities' we haphazardly occupy. In other words, 'difference' takes account of what is occurring within the fictions of 'self' and the manifest difficulties and instabilities over the naming of identities in late modern times (Hall et al, 1996). Hetherington observes:

Difference, therefore, is not always an uncomplicated location. It does not neatly define what is central and what is marginal: rather it operates through a shifting similitude of different locations from which identities-or bits of identities- emerge, often in tension and partial connection with others. (Hetherington, 1998, p. 26)

This thesis emphasizes that there is no organising logic to how identities are inhabited (Derrida, 1976, Hallberg, 1989, Hall et al 1997, & Mirzoeff, 2000) that can ultimately lead us to a final fact or truth about black masculine identities. Instead, this thesis argues for a progressive fiction, of future lifestyles and roles whereby multiple, fluid, or shifting identities are framed by and through the process of 'identification' and not bounded by the constructs of 'race' and 'gender' alone.

The concept of 'identification' at its most basic refers to a discursive recognition of some common constructive origin or shared understanding with another person or group. Identification is a 'process of articulation' of identity but never experienced as a 'totality' and is at all times subject to the 'play of difference' (Hall et al, 1997 p. 3). The theorist Hetherington notes, 'it is through identifications with others, identifications what can be multiple, overlapping or fractured, that identity – that sense of self-recognition and belonging with others – is achieved (Hetherington, 1998, p. 25). Thus, identification is not considered to be automatic from this perspective, but can be won or lost. From this stance identities become increasingly politicized. This is sometimes described as a shift from a politics of (class) identity to a 'politics of differences' (Hall et al, 1992, p. 280). The prospect for a 'politics of difference' offers new ways for black people to voice their experiences (hooks) from our subjectively scripted and fleeting position(s).

The utterance of 'difference' in the black community is seldom heard owing to hegemonic black discourses. A 'one black experience' model (hooks, 1991) ignores differences and the impact it has on identities in terms of identification and connection. As bell hooks asserts, 'we need to challenge the idea that there is only 'one' legitimate black experience. Facing the reality of multiple black experiences offers more opportunities for connection, unification and for taking into account our diversity' (hooks, 1991, Benitez-Rojo, 1995). There are multiple black experiences, and questions of 'authenticity' and an 'hierarchy of blackness' are dismissed in the thesis on the basis of their essentializing qualities (that is, it results in an inability to see each part of a person, seeing black people just as a fixed totality in a static limbo). Instead, a shift from authenticity to peformativity is required. However, the narrative of 'black rage' (Cose, 1993) is very real and is released as our different minds interact to make sense of our collective experiences; the potential is always there to subsume difference within this rage.

Black feminists such as Hazel Carby (1978), Michele Wallace (1990), Dona Richards (1990), and Patricia Collins (1991) know of this homogenizing cultural space all to well. The notion of 'difference' and 'marginalization' are central concepts in black feminist thought. Their debate on the black public sphere being narrowly defined in sexual terms and power being equated with manhood has brought much attention to the tensions between 'unity' and 'difference' within the signifier 'blackness'. This debate continues to be discussed in a critical and sustained way, framed by a discussion of 'subjectification' and the 'black body'. Such discussions have created possibilities for a much more explicit socio-cultural critique of the floating signifier 'blackness', and subsequently the politics of 'black representations'. For instance, Collins remarks:

> *People experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender, and the systematic level of social institutions. Black feminist thought emphasizes all three levels as sites of domination and as potential sites of resistance. (Collins, quoted in Lermert, p. 619)*

The fact that black women are subject to multiple levels of domination explains why black women have been instrumental in exposing the conditions attached to belonging in the signifier 'blackness'. Collins's (1992) concept of 'outside/within', and Du Bois's (1903) 'double consciousness' and Bhabha's 'culture's in-between' dichotomies each in their own way captures the precarious subject positions experienced by black women.

Thus, 'outsiderness' carries not only very real material consequences but also symbolic significance. The view of 'outside/within' has been deployed by individuals and groups who are at odds with the aforementioned hegemonic discourses over the negotiation of their identities. Collins's work explicitly signals a unique point of reference or stance that the status of 'outsider-within' affords black women (1989, 1991). This position provides a 'peculiar marginality that stimulated a special black women's perspective' that allowed 'a distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and ideologies' (Collins, 1991, p. 11). It also provides an awareness of how they come to understand themselves and their partial knowledge of the social world they inhabit. Unlike Du Bois's position they are unable to reconcile the 'split lives of blacks', black feminist recognize themselves, their partial knowledge through this position. Such 'partial cultures ',' cultural hybridization' and 'multiple temporalities' (Bhabha, 1997) characterize the experience of being a member of a minority group and the struggle to retain and protect differences against homogenizing community projects Commenting on the dynamism of hybrid spaces and identities Bhabha asserts;

Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority, positions they occupy, the outside of the within: the part of the whole. (Bhabha, p. 38)

I have adopted a comparable approach to the outsider/within paradigm to this thesis because it highlights the subjective play on 'self' within overlapping spheres of life. Secondly, it captures the mechanisms and processes deployed by the black community to structure, exclude, oppress, and repudiate its members. I argue that

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some black men periodically, or even momentarily, inhabit a marginal position that is parallel to Collin's idea of 'outsiders-within' dichotomy. They inhabit a provisional and fraught position at the margins/centres of the black community, where they go about their way unnoticed by wider society. They inevitably gain knowledge of their own condition of subjugation and the whereabouts to subjugate 'others'. Finally, the critical point I take from these perspectives is that within the intersecting system of colourism, classism, sexism, diasblism, and homophobia, formed by and through the black community, there are few pure oppressors or victims. To paraphrase the identity theorist Hetherington (1998), many of the positions we inhabit as subjects may be privileged, but it also possible to inhabit marginal positions at the same time. Consequently, the thesis recognizes that there are local positions of centrality and marginality but no clear centres and margins (Hetherington, 1998). The marginality that accompanies outsider-within status can easily be the 'source of both frustration and creativity' (Ugwu, 1998 in Jennings, 2001, p.18).

For such reasons, this thesis pays particular attention to the aforementioned discursive practices performed by black men within and across black communities. Each theme of black identity discussed so far, lends a deeper understanding to the vulnerabilities, intimacy, misogyny, hate, and ignorance implicit in cultural prejudices. This prejudice disarticulates the reading of some black men's identities by privileging the reading of others, and renders certain black individuals or groups periodically or momentarily invisible. Each of these themes (e.g. 'belonging', 'difference', 'identification', 'space and place', 'othering', 'safe spaces', and 'outside/within') has been theorized across different ontological, paradigmatic, and epistemological terrains, which has lead to a rethinking of how black identities are constituted. To reiterate, I do not intend to present a comprehensive account of the different meanings associated with black masculine identities; instead I offer an exploratory reading of related dimensions of our complex existence rather then representing black people simply as discrete entities.

Constructing Black Caribbean men's identities

I have adopted the principles of 'social constructionism' to explore the oppressive structures to black men's lives and aimed to reveal the black men's role in continuing dichotomies of oppression. This stance exposes the interplay of 'agency' and 'structure' in how black Caribbean men negotiate identity categories. Foucalt and Derrida suggest the individual motivations and intentions count for nothing or almost nothing in the scheme of social reality. The idea of subjectivity (or core) is constructed and mediated and/or grounded in a social discourse beyond an individual's control. Given that the preceding section has stressed multiple black identities and voices I do not intend to mask black agency. I believe black men do possess agency and make informed choices to effect change in their lives and society. The autobiographies of Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) *Identity, Culture, and kidnapping* (in Asante, 1996. pp. 176-84), Nat Turner (1800-1831) *Narrative* (in Asante, 1996, pp. 620-26), Frederick Douglass (1817-1895) *My Bondage and Freedom and The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (in Blassingame, 1998), Malcolm X (1925-1965), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1993) each provide subjective accounts of the implications of racial oppression upon the construction and social negotiation of their identities as black men. Many studies have neglected to ask the central and most challenging question of how black men see themselves and how they respond to grotesque, but also mundane, normalizing constructions.

Constructionism lends itself to a qualitative approach in that it is anti-essentialist and rejects realism and its emphasis upon objective social facts. The baseline of social constructionism contends that 'reality' and 'social facts' are constructed and there are no 'absolute truths'. Because some social constructionists reject all truth claims (except their own), critics argue that their work is of limited value in accurately interpreting the social world. But this weakness is also constructionism's greatest strength because in the process of questioning 'truth claims' it destabilizes absolute ways of describing the social world. From a social constructionist approach, 'truth' and 'reality' are the products of discourse. Black male identities are the subject and product of discourse – they do not exist in the 'real' world, except as 'fictions'. It is

through language and social practices that the world is constructed. A qualitative approach based on social constructionism and the search for meaning, context, and subjectivity is subject to other forms of criticism. As Gatter argues, 'constructionist and interactionist methodologies go too far in seeing identities meanings and interpretations as malleable'(1998). Constructionism cannot explain a strong sense of self or how identities might stabilize. In addition, Cohen (1994) asserts that these methodologies fail to grasp the relationships between the individual, self, and the group-self. Symbols, for example, can be interpreted differently by an individual, yet still hold a more stable collective meaning for a social group.

In order to overcome this problem I deployed the approach of 'intersubjectivity' advanced by the postmodernist philosopher Richard Rorty (1989). Rorty argues that each person interprets reality in accordance with their subjective condition. But Rorty does not argue for an individualistic free-for-all notion of truth. Rorty emphasises the social influence upon the individuals and his or her beliefs. 'Truth' (or what Rorty substitutes for it) is an intersubjective agreement among members of the community. Thus, any claims to truth are judged based upon locally contingent standards. Such an intersubjective agreement permits the members of the community to speak a common language and establish a commonly accepted reality. From Rorty's perspective, intersubjective beliefs further the integration and solidarity of the community. In other words, as Stanley Grenz suggests, 'whatever we accept as truth and even the way we envision truth are dependent on the community in which we participate…there is no absolute truth: rather truth is relative to the community in which we participate' (Grenz, 1995).

So while many black scholars may criticize the limitations and relevance of adopting a postmodern critique to study 'black identity' (e.g. Chambers, 1998) because of its failure to analyse the gravity of racial marginaliztion, I argue for its usefulness; it captures critical moments in the formation, meaning, and contexts of how black men make choices and produce meaning about themselves in a range of cultural niches and masculine guises. Thus, critical moments revels important events, resources, and limits in narratives of self-identity (as will be detailed later). I suggest that we are partly involved in inventing identities for ourselves and others, and that we locate

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ourselves in these imagined maps, which also have their limits. We create communities of concern and arenas of activity where we can make our protest, tend to our bodies and our feelings, as well as our behaviours and talk (see Allen et al, 2001, Sudbury, 2001, Warikoo, 2005). And everywhere we go, we are charged with telling stories and making meaning, thus giving sense to ourselves and the world around us in the everyday, trivial, and mundane sites and artefacts that come to represent who we are. We are mistaken in thinking that black men simply align or commit themselves to a specific territory or polity without taking into account different lifestyle choices and tastes (Waters, 1995). In exposing the different ways black men are building meaningful, liveable lives, social constructionism helps to make explicit clusters of masculine practices specific to localized and global localities. Henceforth, this study has attached importance to the multiplicity and complex ways black Caribbean men might negotiate identity categories and construct, organize, and legitimate their own sense of self-identity.

In this thesis I stress the constructed nature of identity and argue that there are many ambiguities to contemporary black men's identities. One dimension causing this ambiguity is the powerful role social constraints place upon identities without giving to much weight to claims of essentialism that would suggest that black men's identities are deterministic in anyway. The ambiguities in black men's identities relate not only to ethnicity but also to the ways in which ethnicity intersects with other sources of identity like gender, class, faith, body-image and so forth. Society places external and internal constraints and impingements upon individuals as they become aware and move through the social world. However, as Giddens (1994) asserts we construct our own unique perceptions of the social world.

Giddens has called this the 'knowledgeable agent' who consciously or unconsciously negotiates their self-image and self-identities in their involvement with institutions and in their relationships. In Gidden's words, identity can be seen as part of 'life projects', involving 'the strategic adoption of lifestyle options, organised in terms of the individuals projected lifespan'(1998). The future is 'colonised, knowledge is re-appropriated', and the self is a 'trajectory' and a 'narrative'. Thus, we never act in isolation to common values, norms, and beliefs. Our identities are continually being

dialectically constructed through a negotiation of what society dictates and what we expect of ourselves. I enter this argument at the point in which we are all considered unique and have our own distinctiveness but we also have much in common. Pertinent to this dynamic is the crucial role visual resources might play in the formation of self-identity and the construction of stories of the self. Self-identity is understood in this study as a personal story or a narrative (Rabinow, 1991). One narrative that threads throughout this work is 'blackness' as a political stance and signifier of subjectivity (or agency).

The construction of 'black' political identities

Political and sociological commentators such as Sivanandan (1988), Solomos (1989), Saggar (1992), Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1993), and Mason (1995) explore the continuing lack of political representation for black electorates and question the notion of citizenship at all its levels. By 'black' they are not simply referring to a dichotomy of colour of skin, or a construction of a black identity that is present only as a victim of white society (which reduces racism to what white people do to black people, because they are 'black'). Instead, 'black' is conceptualized as a political category. The claim is not merely that those designated by the label 'black' share certain experiences, but that they might possibly embrace a common identity as a basis for effective mobilization and resistance. As Kastoryane (1997) suggests, groups compete for public resources in order to express their cultural and identity differences publicly. Kastoryane also proposes:

> Whether ethnic, religious, or interest based, a community is a form of organization structured around state-recognised associations. Such a structure allows the community to negotiate each of its elements of identity with the public authorities...identity becomes the strategy of action, the shaping of a community, the tactic necessary to get declared particularities recognised and to negotiate them with the machinery of the state (Kastoryane, 1997, p. 5.)

In this sense, 'black' comes to strategically designate social, cultural, and political identifications and associations. This reflexive consideration of wearing the floating signifier 'black' is different from simply adopting a standpoint of being oppressed. They are conscious of why and how they socially categorise themselves. Black activists often inhabit integrated, or at least cultivated, identities that give due recognition to the emotions involved. Those messy emotions we all carry tell us of the power relations we are embroiled in, which sometimes impede upon our life chances. Sudbury asserts that 'the collective identity approach calls attention to naming as a strategic element of collective action' (2001). This approach is not without its specific problems: whatever way a collective black identity/consciousness is envisaged, it will still present problems when you talk of a multi-layered and heterogeneous agent. The idea of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1990) and 'anti-anti-essentialism'(Gilroy, 1996) addresses this specific problem; when we talk about group identity.

Gayatri Spivak (1990) asserts that 'strategic essentionalism' is about the need to temporally accept an essentionalist position in order to be able to act. In this sense strategic essentialism enables the subject to speak in rather simplified forms of group identity for the purposes of struggle while not denying internal differences. Strategic essentionalism also argues that groups have 'essential attributes', it differs from regular essentialism in two key ways. First, the 'esssential attributes' are defined by the group itself, not by outsiders trying to oppress the group. Second, in strategic essentionalism, the 'essential attributes' are acknowledged to be a construct. That is, the group rather paradoxically acknowledges that such attributes are not natural or intrinsically essential, but are merely invoked when it is politically useful to do so. Thus, temporal essentialism is a useful subversive act in which black people might construct one part of their identity.

Paul Gilroy (1996b), in *Black Atlantic*, insists that the notion of 'blackness' must be constructed in an 'anti-anti-essentialist' manner. It enables one to reject essentialism without thereby committing oneself to poststructuralist and postmodernist treatment of blackness. Anti-anti-essentialism implies that we don't return to essentialism, such as so-called race, that nineteenth century belief in a biological essence, but neither do we agree to a liberal sentiment of anything goes - we're-all-just-individuals with not

much in common. In formulating this idea, Gilroy criticizes two common political tendencies among blacks in the diaspora. An authoritarian one which identifies race with tradition, cultural continuity, and some version of mysticism which always ends up being prescriptive with regard to the content of blackness, as such denying its own hybrid character and European theoretical influences (as with Afrocentrism's pretense that new world blacks are first of all 'African') ; and a libertarian tendency which in reaction denies any relation of determination between race and artistic, musical or intellectual production, and holds that race cannot be made an ethical category at all.

Gilroy points to a kind of non-traditional tradition in the history of the African diaspora a 'changing same' (p. 268). 'Identifications not identities, acts of relationship rather than pregiven forms: this tradition is a network of partially connected histories, a persistently displaced and reinvented time/space of crossing' (p. 268). Gilroy is able to demonstrate 'the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions which suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world' (p 101). Another element of their common identification is through a shared temporality, one that is discrepant from white Atlantic of western modernization. As a consequence, Gilroy argues that the black Atlantic consists of an alternative public sphere.

In short, after essentialism and anti-essentialism, a case for blackness as a category of modernity can be made by careful consideration of cultural artefacts with respect to their particularity, including innovations. A true anti-anti-essentialism can only be expressed in the form of the dialectic of experience (an active term, unlike the passivity of Foucault's soul); both 'dialectic' and 'experience' are used in Gilroy's account. In this sense, the combined understanding of anti-anti-essentialist and strategic essentialism supports the case made in this thesis that current constructions of black men's self-identities, firstly, have not only significance but also agency. Secondly, they provide a theoretical position that facilitates dialogue with, than a total rejection of essentialist reflections on blackness and masculinity.

Thus, strategically constructed and positioned black identities are considered to be played out in black public life-spheres (as described by Habermas in his ideal-speech situation [3]) rather than in established, formal political structures. In Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven, I consider the black pubic sphere as approaching an ideal speech situation. However, instrumental action prevents some black men from making free and informed choices about their lives and routinely negotiate essentialist and anti-essentialist attributes to their identities. Thus, any understanding of black political identities inhabited by men necessitates a closer look at black-on-black relationships and spaces that affirm and shape performances of a political nature. We already know that sources of black political legitimacy are achieved via discourse performed in black churches (e.g. calls and cries [4]), through the music tradition (which articulates the shifting terms of black marginality.[5]) and through its most basic form, the 'black family'. I turn to the role Caribbean culture plays in politicizing and/or grounding black men's self-identities.

Becoming black Jamaican

[3] Habermas proposes a framework for emancipatory politics in terms of a theory of communication. The ideal-speech situation held to be immanent in all language use provides an energising vision of emancipation. The more social circumstances approximate to an ideal-speech situation, the more a social order based on the autonomous action of free and equal individuals will emerge. Individuals will be free to make informed choices about their activities; so will humanity on a collective level. Yet little or no indication is given about what those choices will actually be.

[4] For Madhubuti (1990) the black church operates as the main spiritual, moral and cultural institution for the 'black community'.

[5] Professor Kebede (1995) identifies that black religious and secular music tells the story of the uncrushable spirit and will of black people to survive in the diaspora. From the early introduction of black people into the western hemisphere the cultural forms of 'calls and cries' were primarily used to communicate messages and express a deeply felt emotional experience, of infinite sadness, despair of an oppressed people, and also pleasure. Ballards are narrative songs in which the melody is repeated for each stanza, and faced with hostility, poverty, hatred, prejudice, and often-physical torture, the enslaved African created folk tales, stories, and ballards with well-high indestructible heroes. Later, work songs echoed themes of injustice, trouble with the law, escape from prison and prison life. Songs of black children were at most games and educational songs that playfully prepare children for their adult world. Religious/spiritual texts resound black people's spiritual determination not only to endure and overcome racial hatred but also to aspire to Christian justice, salvation and immortality. The spirituals became for many the symbol of a noble people freed. The Blues genre of songs originated as the result of black people's bitter experiences of racial discrimination, denial of human rights, and intolerable economic conditions. Jazz is considered easier to experience and feel than to define. Rock 'n' roll, soul, and now R & B continue the emotive black narrative speaking of the joys and sorrows of margiinalisation. More recently, Rose (1994) suggests that Rap articulates the pleasures and problems of black urban life. In which male rappers often speak from the perspective of a young man who wants social status in a locally meaningful way.

> *The diasopra experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diasopra identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing anew, through transformation and difference...*
>
> *(Hall,2000, p. 31)*

The meaning and dialectics of black cultural identities are important to a thesis such as this, which examines how narratives of 'Caribbeaness', 'Jamiacness', and 'Britishness' are routinely negotiated into identity projects. How do black men choose between different cultural components (even within 'black culture') to constitute a cultural identity that coincides with how other black people see themselves and that accurately defines who they are? Commenting on black cultural identities, Stuart Hall (2000) raises the crucial question of similarity and difference within the idea of 'Caribbeaness'. Hall suggests that Caribbean identities are framed by two distinct axes: 'similarity and continuity' and 'difference and rupture'. The former is the narrative of 'Caribbeaness', suggesting that there is a common identity that has as its essence blackness (i.e. the silent signifier 'Africa'). In this sense, the task of identity projects is the 'rediscovering of hidden histories'. The production of 'identity is believed to be grounded in the archaeology and the retelling of the past' (Hall, 2000, p. 22). Here, Caribbeaness provides a stable, unchanging, and continuous frame of reference and meaning to cultural identities beneath the shifting divisions of daily life and across communities. However, Hall also proposes that the ruptures and discontinuities in enslavement, transportation, colonialization, and migration produce the uniqueness of what he characterizes as Caribbeaness, which is the meaning I choose to invoke in this thesis. This perspective emphasizes the crucial issues of deep and significant difference, which constitute 'what we really are' and 'what we have become' (Hall, 2000, p 23). This narrative of Caribbeaness alludes to the space where new creolizations, assimilations, and syncretisms have been negotiated and how 'difference, therefore, persists – in and alongside continuity' (Hall, 2000, pp. 25-30).

Exemplifying this relentless evolution and metamorphoses of Caribbean identities, Jamaican social stories have never simply been the black experience. Their intertextual cultural narratives reflect the heterogeneity of the peoples still criss-

crossing in ever-changing levels of aspirations and relationships (Nettleford, 1998). Nettleford argues that there is little more than 'homogeneity of sentiment' to produce unity and self-conscious pride among the diverse peoples of Jamaica.He frames the ambiguities and contradictions of Jamaican cultural identities in the reworking of two traditional proverbs. The Jamaican identity is loosely couched as 'the melody of Europe, the rhythm of Africa, but every John Crow think him pickney white (Nettleford, 1998, p. 171). The proverb points to the presence of hybridity in the construction of Jamaican (and Caribbean) identities, and locates a deep-rooted bias in Jamaican society that all things 'white' —whether in 'colour' or 'status' — are consciously or unconsciously desired and elevated.

The social anthropologist Barry Chevannes goes one step further and suggests that 'the Jamaican thinks what belongs to him as a part of his identity is white, whether it is really white or not' (Chevannes, 2001, p. 11). In order to contextualize this blurring of 'identity' it is necessary to emphasize that the Jamaica born on the 10th of May 1655 began life as a trading and slave colony. The emergence of Jamaicans as a hybrid people marked the opening up of an 'imagined community', divisively constructed upon racial exploitation and British cultural absolutism[6]. Yet, the process of hybridization that occurred in Jamaica was problematic in that it negotiated what was already hybrid. No one group of people that came to Jamaica, whether by force or in freedom, was from bounded or homogenous cultures (Pieterse, 1992); cultural narratives were stable or static and beyond dialectic change. Gilroy's (1993) conceptualization of the 'black Atlantic' points to this and suggests that Britishness and Caribbeaness cannot be grasped in absolute terms. Gilroy argues instead that black self-identities and cultural expressions utilize a plurality of shared histories cross-cutting the black diasopra (Gilroy, 1987, p. 154-6). As a result, the cultural exchange within the black diaspora continues to produce hybrid identities and cultural forms of similarity and difference within and between individuals inhabiting various locales of the diaspora. Thus, Gilroy argues:

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[6] In commenting on national identity, Benedict Anderson (1993) observes that differences between nations lie in the ways in which they are imagined. This perspective appreciates how communities are also constructed through our imaginations, in which the 'black diaspora' is just one distinct formulation of how people might socially group themselves.

Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diasopra. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere. In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which define what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctively British experiences and meanings. (Gilroy, 1987, p.322).

Gilroy notes 'an intricate web of cultural and political connections binds blacks here to black elsewhere, at the same time, they are linked into the social relations of this country' (Gilroy, 1987, p. 323). Bennett (2000) suggests that black culture has thus become a global culture, initiating a plurality of responses as it crosses with local cultures. Thus, black 'diasporic identities are at once local and global, they are also networks of transnational identifications encompassing 'imagined and encountered communities' (Brah, 1996, p. 196).

This thesis notes how the diaspora is a relational concept referring to 'configurations of power which differentiate diaspora internally as well as situate them in relation to one another' (Brah, 1996, p. 183). The locale of the diasopra consists of constructed communities on the levels of local, national, and international communities (Uguris). Locally, diasporic communities are believed to position individuals differentially within their own collectivises with regard to their class, culture, religiosity, sexuality, gender and other social categories that are relational. From localized contexts, individuals create and re-create themselves amidst inter-group power relations that differ from location to location. Nationally, individuals are inserted into social and legal landscapes structured by existing power relations. Internationally, globalization provides the context for individuals to resource, constitute and reference their constructed sense of cultural identity. Globaliztion increases the range of sources and resources available to identity projects.

Thus, black individuals in Britain are shown to straddle multiple cultural niches in the moulding of their cultural identities. The presence of Jamaicans in Britain alter how they see themselves but how Britishness is being constructed. Blackness and Britishness are not mutually exclusive. Yet still, Black British identities are not static and neither are their cultural allegiances. Within imagined black communities black

men are positioned as 'the same' as well as 'different'. The boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of interest. Thus, I construct diasporic identities as being 'outward-looking' and engaged in a 'translocal learning processes', while reflecting diverse translocal cultures (Pieterse, 1992).

DEFINING MULTIPLE MARGINALIZATION

The ability to talk of 'multiple marginalization' existing separately from the generic perception of all black men as potentially subordinated is a relatively new phenomenon, with no agreed vocabulary or conventions. It acknowledges that multiple marginalization may occur when racism is further aggravated by discrimination on the grounds such as gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, property, birth, culture, nationality, social and economic status, sexual orientation, age, disability, work, health conditions. Interventionist in nature, the idea of multiple marginalization gives weight to emerging themes of non-unified and multifarious black identities. These identities shift the emphasis away from 'race' as the determining signifier of black identity, towards a broader interpretation of the factors that distinguish black experiences (for instance, the different positioning of the black bourgeoisie, black feminists, urbanites, integrationists, nationalists, and so on). I am not talking of a grand paradigm shift in how black identities are conceived in the social sciences, but advocating a step back to reflect on how black men see themselves and one another, and how they conceptualize 'otherness' in relation to one another. How do black Caribbean men acquire the capacity to control other men, that is, define other men as non-normative. We must accept that some masculine identities and lifestyle practices deviate from culturally accepted norms and values, causing very real disruptions to the way black communities sees themselves and respond to the concerns of individuals and groupings.

As a consequence, existing at the margin/centre of black communities some black Caribbean men occupy positions that render them partially invisible or silent. They operate as buffers and scapegoats to dominant beliefs and ideals, and carry the secret

shame, fears, and anxieties of their ethnic group. Little is ever said about black men who experience marginalization on multiple fronts. Their stories are often neglected, overshadowed by narratives of dominant black exploits, which, it is claimed, speak on behalf of all black men. There are no simple stories told about black men loving each other, hating each other, or simply enjoying their private possessions. We need to hear the voices of multiply marginalized black men if we are to learn anything progressive about how black men conceptualize themselves as fathers, lovers, friends, employees, consumers, and service-users in Britain.

What is confirmed in the study is that men find it difficult to talk in-depth about themselves. Some participants found it difficult to talk about aspects of their 'gendered' identities. This task would prove difficult for any individual to undertake, since we casually or innately come to inhabit social roles and take for granted their wider significance or meaning. This is specifically the case with 'men', who have never felt the urgency to consciously question their gender identity in a male dominated world. For Seidler (1991), not talking about being men is a general problem of being a man. Unlike women, who have in successive generations challenged imposed constructions of 'womanhood' and 'femininity', men – especially, middle aged heterosexual white men – have collectively refused to interrogate themselves, beyond the surface binaries of masculine/feminine. What is more, in the case of black men there has been further inhibition to speak out, since there exists a deep mistrust and reluctance to talk about themselves in public for fear of undue scrutiny: 'Everyone [black person] is taught to value discretion and secrets' (Bryan, 2001). Yet this research procedure (detailed in Chapter Three) has managed to break down barriers and stimulate in-depth discussions. It has also engaged research participants as valued 'subjects', albeit tentatively, flagging-up points of (dis)connection, identification, and alignments.

As a result, the project goes on to explore moments of tenderness, anxiety, violence, nurturing, pride, journey, and doubts in the forging and performance of black masculine identities. The paradox of the project lies in the fact that it is concerned with issues affecting men who I define as multiple marginalized; how do you begin to categorize or separate out black men based on intersecting points of prejudice or

inequalities without further demonizing or attributing blame on an already exploited group of people? This problem is not satisfactorily resolved. Nonetheless, prejudices do exist in imagined black communities and also warrant investigation. The idea of cultural disapproval (or prejudice) is perhaps the appropriate idea – or tone – to employ in this project. This idea helps us to unravel the regulatory structures and barriers that at present constrain, rather than extend, the possibility of cultural inclusion for all black men in black communities. It also takes account of 'agency' in this line of questioning. Granted, that to be a black man in a white society is problematic; to ignore how black people systematically 'other' black people distorts and simplifies how black masculine identities are continually being positioned and crafted within/outside black communities.

Multiple marginalized black Caribbean men

I defined the group of men I met as multiple marginalized (detailed later in Chapter Three). Part of what is understood as 'hegemonic masculinity' is its ability to define what a 'man' is or is not. Although I do not necessarily perceive myself in terms of possessing a hegemonic masculine identity, my attempt to attach a particular label on black Caribbean men's identities is problematic. In that masculine identities are relational and reducible to the particularities of structural locations. In other words, 'how men define themselves depends on where they find themselves' (Britton et al, 1984, p. 168). I do not want to repeat and add to their oppression. So I limited the sample group to men who described cultural disapproval or prejudice as an important factor that has challenged how they situate themselves within normalising gender strategies and craft their sense of self-identity. Commenting on the socialization strategies of becoming hegemonic men, Etherrington observes;

> *Male children are socialized to be dominant, competitive, aggressive and though. To be a normal male means to aspire to leadership, to be sexually active, knowledgeable, potent and a successful seducer. The burden inherent in these expectations is clear. (Etherrington, 1995, p. 32)*

Learning to be a 'man' is associated with masculine features of body strength and egotistical qualities, and as either 'oppressor' or 'failure' (Fiske, 1989, p. 60). Along these lines, researchers in the Caribbean claim that the socially constructed notion of civility (a value of the old morality) is seen as a sign of weakness and loudness as a sign of strength among Jamaican men. Thus, to be constructed as coarse is to be seen as independent. In this repertoire of social practices and attitudes the idea that masculinities can be civil and strong, is simply not an option. Studies suggest that traditional strategies of achieving hegemonic masculinity have been decentred by the 'street', eroding the authority of parents, the church, and education, and so on. Within this context Barrow (1998) introduces the idea of 'male marginality' in Jamaican families. She identifies kinship relations that fall beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family, combined with male 'irresponsibility', as resulting in male marginality to the home and family. Thus, in the construction of Caribbean masculinities, Barrow (1998) argues:

- It is biological, not social fathering that enhances masculinity.
- Masculinity is validated in the company of other men.
- Behaviour is not merely 'outside', but antithetical to, what the domains of home and family stand for.
- Men give priority to friendships over family relationships.
- Ostentatious spending in peer group activity reduces family income.
- 'Irresponsible' 'uncivilised' sexual indulgence threatens marital stability; mobility and migration take men away from home.
- The reproduction of children detracts from the social role of fathering.

In contrast, Chevannes (1999) rejects the notion that Jamaican men are irresponsible or run from commitment of any sort, in particular paternity. He challenges the notion of male marginality and argues instead that as far as marginalization relates to power and the control of economic resources men are not marginalized in Jamaican families. He also suggests that the role of the absentee father is more dynamic than has been presented. In his research, spanning three decades of Jamaican social life, he has found that men understand fatherhood in terms relative to the construction of their

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identity and use it as a marker of manhood (Chevannes, 1999, p.7). He also identifies the spatial symbolism of the 'yard' and 'home'. Each sphere figures greatly in how boys and girls are socialized into very different gender roles. Chevannes (2001) argues that Jamaicans are socialized to identify domestic work as female and work outside the domestic sphere, *but supportive of it*, as male. The 'yard' is understood as belonging to the women, where girls are taught the importance of domesticity, good hygiene and good manners. He notes that very domesticated men are thought to be intruding upon the woman's area of hegemony. The binary opposite is the 'street' (street corner, bar, road, square) where boys/men gather for celebrations, dancing, drinking, sharing jokes and experiences, and where they are socialized into men (Chevannes, 2001).

Chevannes observes how, 'boys, as soon as they are able to, will resist performing such simple tasks as washing up dishes and tidying the house. Among those they find most repulsive is any chore which brings them into contact with female underwear, washed or unwashed. Also high on the list of male taboos is disposal of night soil, in families without water closets' (Chevannes, 1999, p. 25). The socialization of the boy child is usually marked as making him tough – a common motif in Jamaican cultural tradition – and teaching him 'to avoid a show of tears on every occasion of inward hurt, to learn to suffer deprivation with a self-sacrificing nobility of spirit' (Chevannes, 2001). Accordingly, on a day-by-day basis there is limited petting among men and boys and the boys' punishment is generally more severe than the girl child's. Punishment is meted out by the mother, and then by the father, uncle, or sibling who is able to 'drop man lick' (Chevannes, 1999, p. 26).

Whereas the whereabouts of the girl child is always known and monitored, once the Jamaican boy child reaches pre-pubescence, he is often encouraged to socialize outside the home, that is 'out a' street', or 'out a' road' – out of the direct control and supervision of parents (Chevannes, 1999, p. 29). Unsupervised boys gather experience in risk-taking along with their friends (known as 'spaar', 'staar', 'my yout', 'posse', 'crew'). They invent or learn their own speech pattern, and 'run boat' (organize communal cooking), experience the arts of heterosexual intercourse and homophobic discourse. A boy's attachment to the 'yard' is conceived as problematic,

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and often signals a 'maladjusted' or 'effeminate' child, culturally known as a 'maamaman' (Chevannes, 1999). This is the case unless their confinement inside is focused on activities that are non-female and carry greater value, such as education. A hard-edged masculine identity is marked by participation in gun culture. Chevannes (1999) asserts that 'the gun has become such a symbol of young male identity...... the ultimate representation of what it means to be a man.....in an era in which the greatest social sin among young males today is to dis, that is to show disrespect, the gun is the ultimate guarantor of respect' (Chevannes, 1999, p. 30).

Hence, Butler proposes 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results' (Butler, 1990, p.25). In other words, gender is a performance; it is what you do at particular times rather than a universal fact of who you are. Butler suggests that certain cultural configurations of gender have seized a hegemonic hold (that is, they have come to seem natural in our cultures) but it does not have to be that way. This is not to say that 'hegemonic masculinity' is a neatly defined and closely integrated system (Lee, 1985, Connell, 1995). Hegemonic black masculinity embodies a currently accepted strategy of gender practices that would function automatically if a dominant black masculinity were entirely successful. The idea of 'gender relations' (Connell, 1995) in this study is theoretically posed as interchangeable and intrinsic to the idea of 'power relations' (Hall, 1996). Combined, these concepts illustrate the state-of-play that structures how gender relations can be resisted and negotiated in the black diaspora. Relationally, black masculinities – like all masculinities – are continually being negotiated and constituted within a structure of gender relations that, at least in part, signify the boundaries of group belonging and inclusion within the black diaspora. As such, the study recognizes a range of ways that black masculine identities can be constructed between hegemonic and subordinate. All forms of masculinities are perceived as 'transient' and 'shifting', rather than being discursively positioned at the margins, centre, or hanging in a social limbo (Lee et al, 1985, p. 590).

I have borrowed from Bob Connell's analysis of 'hegemonic' and 'marginalized' masculinities (1995) in this study. Connell's idea of multiple masculine identities has

been broadly used throughout the thesis to help illustrate the implicit difference in men's identities and the play of power that saturates gender relations. However, Connell's conceptualization of the hegemonic, dominant, subordinate, and marginal forms of masculine identities hinges on a mental picture of 'white masculinity'; 'black masculinity' features solely in relation to white men. In Connell's approach 'black masculinity' is constructed as a protest form. This is attributable in principle to the fact that black men may lack sufficient power to negotiate their way through the normalizing features that afford legitimacy and that constitute the privileges experienced by white bourgeois heterosexual males. Connell's ideas of how masculine identities are socially organized stops short of interrogating how supposedly subordinate or marginalized groupings might conceive of themselves and their relations to other men within their respective groups. This is especially the case when you consider that the nature of social power is constantly shifting and changing shape. Therefore, I have adopted Connell's conceptual logic and terminology of multiple masculine identities, but applied them sparingly in order to look at different forms of black masculine identities.

Hegemonic black masculinities are more tangible, since they are constructed around myths of an archetypal black man, which is just that, a myth. In the problematizing of hegemonic black masculine identities it reveals the meaning of culturally bound norms and standards, which supposedly inform and shape masculine identities most men would aspire to accomplish at some point in their lives. Thus, a black masculine performance of a counter-hegemonic instance is likely to threaten to destabilize the legitimacy of patriarchal black communities. Through an array of 'material practices' (such as cultural exclusion, political exclusion, street violence, and so on) this performance is also likely to be subordinated (Connell, 1995, p. 78). As a result, I felt it was necessary to look at the lives that are lived and the socio-cultural elements that help to define what 'racialized' and 'gendered' identities actually mean to black men at different critical moments in their lives (see Chapter Three for details). Yet, what were the critical moments/sites and how were they experienced? How did they transpire in ethnographic testimonies? And how did they compare to masculine constructions conveyed at the time of the interviews?

Conclusion

This chapter has set out a framework for understanding black Caribbean men's self-identities. The first section focused upon destabilizing identity categories in favour of 'performance repetitions' and a 'politics of difference' in becoming black men. There is of course many different ways of interpreting and seeing black men's identities yet to be considered. It stresses the need to see the multiplicity and complexity in how participants narrate how they subjectively construct their identities. The second section emphasized the characteristics of power relations at play and in negotiation within the black community. This issue signify the boundaries, ruptures, and axes that serve, and/or impinge upon, the processes of connection, mobilization and stabilization in the storytelling of men's self-identities. This theoretical framework aimed to provide a useful way in which to see overlapping contours of oppression and rejection that confront black Caribbean men and create new junctures of exclusion. As a consequence, black Caribbean men's identities (and lives) are described best in terms of people's felt collectivists, allegiances, and points of identification which are different from, or may coincide with, external sociological structures such as class, gender, race, religion and so forth. These points have been explored in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven. Chapter Three focuses upon how the former points have been operationalized in the empirical study and how I generated accounts of black Caribbean men's self-identities.

Chapter Three

Building Ethnographic Knowledge through Visual Methods

Introduction

My research has explored identities of multiply situated black men. In this chapter I discuss the logic and rationale underscoring this empirical study. I discuss the methodology and look at the grounds upon which my claim to partial knowledge has been derived and legitimated in this thesis. Previous chapters have been concerned with the backdrops to black men's lives. I have suggested that black Caribbean males living in Britain might choose to construct themselves as men through different social and cultural practices. In accordance with this fluidity and openness in self-construction, I have chosen to engage with visual culture as a central medium to capture analogies and/or symbolisms of critical moments in identity projects that point out positions of marginality. I discuss how visual mediums invite subjective interpretations. Also, visual mediums are shown to straddle the public and private realms of 'black life', breaking down hierarchies of systems of meaning. I discuss in the latter part of this chapter my argument for the wider usage of visual methodologies in ethnographic studies.

RESEARCH ORIENTATION

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach I have adopted in the study of black men who I define as 'multiply marginalized'. The study explored stories of 'black masculine identities', narrated by individuals who were silenced or excluded at the edge of black communities (Robson, 1993; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). These men represent a 'hidden minority' within an already marginalized ethnic/racial group, and they negotiate localized and global constructions of 'black masculinity'. In this study, significant emphasis is placed on cultural and personalized images as sources that black men might use to constitute stories of their masculine identities. Cultural images are important as they provide a direct interface between the social and personal world(s) of black men, and reflect the hyper-visibility and invisibility black

men experience in wider society (Wilson, 1978, Mercer & Julien, 1998). I have used an ethnographic approach within the qualitative interview context to explore the everyday meaning and usage black men give to a range of images to make sense of their identity projects.

Qualitative research is of particular value for an exploratory study such as this. The interactive probing and questioning methods used allow flexibility in the structure and content of interviews This facilitates the exploration of individual circumstances and experiences in a way that is responsive to the accounts of individual participants. In this study I have used three different kinds of visual methods' (as will be detailed later). The three dimensions to the interviews is purposefully used to grasp how images are translated into lived experiences and how they affect how participants subjectively construct stories of their self-identity. Visual images are latent with encoded messages that at times 'speak' louder and less ambiguously than the spoken word; yet visual images are typically marginalized or ignored in scholarly works. Visual methods can be applied to examine aspects of everyday life, and are capable of producing knowledge that is more grounded and symbolic of the life-worlds and opinions of the communities under investigation than the data produced through traditional methods. I suggest combining visual methods with the more frequently used social science methods, to produce ethnographic knowledge, especially since images often work in conjunction with other representations (Stuhlmiller, 1996; Pink, 2001).

The qualitative methods adopted for this study aimed to identify broad patterns of constructing black masculine identities, and isolating specific problems or specific groups where patterns of cultural exclusion are concentrated. Qualitative research does not ignore social contexts or the experiences of people as lived, rather than as constructed by theoretical categories. Central to this critical view has been the claim that the 'melodies' and consolidations used to express black masculine identities – the ways in which people describe their feelings and their understanding of self-identity – vary across different groupings, and that this process needs to be addressed by both research and practice. The concern here, therefore, is that the ideas of black masculine

identities used by researchers are different from those used by the researched. In addition, a qualitative approach is able to explore more subtle variations, where the context of the situation, or the particular language or imaginary used to describe emotions and experiences, can provide further insights into black masculine identities that may be missed by the 'itemized' approach of quantitative material.

The overall aim of the study was to explore the compelling stories used to construct black masculine identities and dialogues within black communities. These stories could then be used as a measure to determine key factors that may be associated with how black masculinities are contested, negotiated, mobilized and differentiated in cultural and gendered terms. There are shifts in Britain to how black men define themselves in terms of class, politics and culture, and how they align themselves to white society, albeit tentatively. A purposively selected sample of black Caribbean men was used, with the intention of investigating the often complex and multifaceted 'reality' or 'realities' of the black community. By encouraging participants to use their own words and imagery, the study could explore the terms and definitions that they used to describe the construction of black men's self- identitiy.

The aim(s) of the investigation:
- to develop an in-depth understanding of the diverse ways in which 'black manhood' is culturally represented in modern Britain, and
- to explore the implications of these representations for black men's identities and sense of social, cultural and community location.

Given that very few studies have critically looked at the complexities of constructing black masculinities in a modern British context, my research therefore looked at the following questions:

- in what ways do hegemonic discourses intersect with how black men go about constructing and expressing self-defined positive [7]self-identities?

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[7] To restate, Small (1986) notes, if a healthy personality – which equates to positive self-identity – is to be formed, the black individual must first recognise and accept that he or she has a black psychic image (Small, 1986, p. 88).

- what role does 'black culture' play in constituting and regulating black male identities? and

- in what ways do homosocial relations shared between black men enable or disable a construction of alternative self-identities?

Thus, the study consisted of eleven black men who took part in sixty-six hours of in-depth qualitative interviews. Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions. Images were used in all three interviews as tools to stimulate memories as well as starting points for conversations about black men's lives. All the interviews relied upon symbolic and iconic black imaginary as stimuli to examine the three questions identified earlier (in the forms of photo albums, visual dairies, and visual prompt cards). In the first interviews we used the participants personalized photo albums, in the second interview we used their photo dairies, and in the final interview we used images I collected (as will be detailed later). I used a broadly three dimensional approach to the interviews which allowed us to produce a pictorial mosaic that takes account of the participant's own perceptions of their domestic, community, and paid-work environments. Participants were encouraged to be reflexive when talking about their life circumstances and experiences of being both 'black' and 'male'.

I present the first-person stories of the men I have interviewed; adjusting their accounts in places to ensure the pronunciation is readily readable. However, every effort was made to ensure the meanings were not altered. The life-testimonies were derived from spoken interviews with the addition of photographic imagery that was presented to, and produced by, the participants. They each put forward their own symbolic and literal readings of their daily lives. Such accounts come across very differently from written life stories. The life testimonies and images are natural narratives using the terms, viewpoints, and voices of the participants. They are presented as such to enhance our understanding of the multiplicity and fluidity of the life-worlds they inhabit. Although all the men wanted to be heard and shared their stories with me - which I am grateful for - I have limited myself to a few stories for each chapter. This will enable me to present a greater variety of stories without becoming repetitive. My concern has been that I do not betray the trust the

participants have shown in me by misrepresenting their stories. As a consequence, names and other identifying details have been changed in order to ensure confidentiality.

Logic and rationale underpinning the research methods, and analytical framework

Visual resources have a crucial role to play in the formation of *postmodern* identities and the construction of narratives of the 'self'. Visual texts do not only provide a context for the production of images; they also serve to communicate ideologies, discourses, and codes which signify or clarify that one particular character's point-of-view or position is privileged within a given text. As Rutherford observes, 'images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power to which both individuals and marginalized groups have access. The deeply ideological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves' (1990, p.116). For these reasons, I have used an ethnographic interviewing approach (reflected in the interviewing schedule) to examine the everyday meanings and usage black men give to cultural images. This approach aimed to ensure flexibility, to be holistic, field-orientated, and contextually well defined, and at the interview level, to enable participants to determine the direction of the central themes/topics under discussion. I viewed this to be especially important, as black people are rarely given the opportunity to be creatively involved in telling our own stories from our own perspectives in academic studies (Smith, 2002). What is more, the study is a case-study of black identities understood exclusively through the perspectives of black men who experience multiple forms of marginalization. The accounts of masculine identity conveyed through this study should be viewed as 'internalist' (May, 1997, p. 14); giving a partial insight into the self-identified juxtapositions that structure what participants see, think and do (Hammersley et al, 1995) in association with their self-conceptualizations.

Accordingly, my central aim in the analysis was to accomplish an accurate interpretation of the participant's perceptions of 'critical moments' (as will be detailed

later) in forging masculine identities. To do this, I was intent on using each set of interview transcripts to construct its own relevant meaning through a process of continual examination of how each component interrelates with the other, as well as the unified meaning of the text. Alongside this process, I would also reflect upon my own subjective presumptions. Meaning emerges from the relationship of each component of the transcripts to the biography of the interviewee. In line with this thinking, the project rejects outright any claims to an objective external 'social reality', in which lived experiences of black masculine identities can be monolithically interpreted. I have been guided by a hermeneutic theoretical approach to interpreting interview transcripts. Hermeneutics argues that it is of paramount importance to place the transcript in social context (without which any interpretation is free-floating or ungrounded) to make it possible to interpret its meanings (Linge, 1976, Thompson, 1981). This approach is problematic: for example, when dealing with historical contexts (contexts for which we may have no information outside the transcript) the hermeneutic response is to use the transcript itself to establish the context. It appears to be paradoxical to establish the context from the transcript, in order to interpret the transcript in its context. Although this seems an impossibly closed circle, hermeneutics takes this premise as a principle.

The meanings derivable from each transcript were limitless; consequently, the analytical aim was to obtain cultural analogies of possible techniques and tools of accomplishing gender orders through visual culture. This involved examining the underlying social patterns or use value of visual images in the black imaginary, and provided an opportunity to utilize our taken-for-granted knowledge of black social stories in socially constructing gendered identities. The argument is that individual transcripts do draw upon the ideas and norms of the wider culture that produced it. The philosopher Heidegger argues that a hermeneutic approach requires an understanding that the meaning derived from a text is historical, situational, and created from particular perspectives. Thus, obtaining the complete meaning and understanding of the text would be untenable. As a consequence, I have not taken for granted my isolated subjectivity in the interpretation of transcripts, but have gone back to participants and collaborated in order to create an intersubjective interpretation of each set of interviews. I understand reflexivity to be a joint project

for participants and myself (as researcher) to arrive at a negotiated level of understanding and meaning about the data. Thus, the hermeneutic principles of 'commitment' and 'engagement' were principles I took on board in the analytical process, with myself (as researcher) standing at the centre of the research process. What is 'reality' was not taken for granted, but developed from a hermeneutic reflection of the comments and explanations that were conveyed and negotiated.

My challenge in this study was to capture expressions of black subjectivities derived from the circumstances and memories of black men without repeating the 'over embodiment, disembodiment and abnegation' (Ross, 1998) that past studies have constructed. This was not an easy or quantifiable objective to achieve, but every effort was made at each stage of the empirical investigation to lend it to the individual voices of participants (Smith, 2001). Inevitable inequalities of the interview situation occurred but were resolved over time, when participants became more familiar and trusting of me. This manifested itself in an increase in empowerment and richer stories being told. This was a benefit of undertaking a longitudinal study of sorts. At first, participants were uncertain of their own positions in relation to the interviewee/interviewer relationship and many resorted to the 'culturally normative patterns' (see Cornwell, 1984) you would expect to see among men in the black community. Participants constructed my identity differently owing to how they constructed themselves and the context of the interview spaces. Most participants constructed my identity as a black male researcher (in that order), who was interested in hearing their stories and delighted in looking through their personal pictures. As a consequence, most participants looked at me favourably, specially travelling large distances and going to great lengths to seek out their stories. What was unique about the interviewer/interviewee relationships was that the issues of racism was excluded from the interview, but was superseded by issues of gender, class, age, sexual orientation, education, occupation, and so on. However, participants were less suspicious of my motives because they assumed we shared a similar social construct of reality, not discounting that black people generally have a mistrust of educated black people.

Culturally, I held the perspective of 'insider', or what Denzin's terms 'native interpretation' and 'observer interpretation' (Denzin, 1989). But there were threads of 'blackness' that were invisible to me. As a result, my interpretations of individuals' experience and knowledge are made in reflection of my own local knowledge and experiences. Although every effort was made to avoid contamination or bias, the reality is that some inevitably crept into the research process as my gaze turned to matters marked by injustice, social exclusion or personal misfortune. Undoubtedly, I have a moral engagement. To claim otherwise would be to deny my own social history. By virtue of being a black male researcher, sharing meanings and caring about culture-bound values and beliefs also makes me a chronicler of the black community as much as the participants. Add to this the conversational interview style of intermittent contact and the whole process produced a closeness and trust between myself and the research participants that should not be underestimated. This closeness reinforced an inter-subjective construct of reality we had built together, which took into account ethnical decisions that safeguarded their welfare and also my own commitment to analytical detachment. I acknowledge that I took a political stance towards the project. In fact, I feel it is vital for black people to critically engage with issues around representation on multiple levels. As part of the enterprise, my own experiences and subjectivities of being a black man and the tensions in my role as researcher (for instance, how I interact with participants, approach the data, and reinterpret its contents) forms part of the narrative. So when I am discussing bonds and relationships between black men (for example, 'interpersonal', 'professional and 'transnational') I recognize my own presence in that discussion.

OVERLAPPING VISUAL SOCIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The study integrates visual sociology and cultural anthropology approaches into a dynamic framework for generating and producing ethnographic knowledge (Collier, 1986, Hammersely et al, 1995, Walsh, 1998, Prosser, 1998, & Pink, 2001). From a cultural anthropological approach, visual representations and symbolic imagery are understood to be cultural products that are encoded at the moment of their

construction and circulation, and decoded by the audience. In other words, they are read and reinterpreted by social agents. Thus, one can take a semiotic reading of images to uncover its literal meaning, the latent meaning behind its production, or as I have done, the meaning derived by the audience. Visual sociologists argue for the wider and more appropriate use of visual methods in social research. Pink (2001) argues that 'visual techniques' should be more widely applied in social science work wherever it is appropriate to examine visual aspects of culture. Many visual sociologists advocate not only a more creative use of visual methods in building methodology, but also an acceptance that visual methods have their place in any good sociologist's 'tool kit'. Visual methods are not only useful in the interviewing context, but also ought to be represented where appropriate in the production, analysis, and presentation of ethnographic knowledge, as in the case of this study (Clifford, 1986). This approach facilitates the production of ethnographic knowledge that does not make any claims to a single reality. Instead it enables stories to be told, detailing how black men might use visual culture to construct healthy identities in their own terms. There is a clear linkage between 'visual culture', 'blackness', and 'visual methods'. At the centre of this argument is the notion that the 'image' determinates our sense of identity more than the written text, impacting upon how we see and fashion ourselves in today's society. Without a doubt we live in an increasingly visual world of billboards, movies, fashion, logos, posters, CD covers, magazines, television, mobile phones, photographs, videos, and DVDs. Even domestic products, such as washing machines, fridges, the family car, the garden and the décor of the house, are visual testaments to 'who I am' or 'who I would like to be'. These images have taken on an increasingly important role in conveying to the rest of society how 'individuals', 'communities', and 'regions' conceive of themselves and how they aspire to be in the scramble for visual space. Pink (2001) suggests that the visual is central to the very lives and experiences that sociologists attempt to examine.

From this perspective, visual culture is the universal language of the world. For example, Coca Cola and McDonald's have maximized on their branded images. A pre-school child need not know the whereabouts of a McDonald's store, but would recognize the 'golden arches' whether that child was from Norway, Indian, Jamaica, or Britain. Ask any teenager to draw the Nike or Windows symbol, or ask any adult to

recall the Visa or Olympic symbols, and most citizens of the world could do so at ease. Signs are everywhere, constantly shaping or influencing our impulses. They direct how we read individuals, social encounters and situations to the extent that we purposefully and meaningfully incorporate signs and symbols that best demonstrate our belief systems, lifestyles, and our position in regard to the rest of society.

For black culture, and black men specifically, one is able to trace the evolving and creative use of signs and symbols that have been crafted to demonstrate our sense of 'personhood', nationhood and, in certain periods, 'blackness'. Steering clear of a debate of black representations (which would take this chapter in the wrong direction) I now turn to the commodification of black male bodies in the present day. Black men (and culture) take on an iconic role in contemporary society as hip, modern, and trendy. Images, whether real or fictional, are the defining characteristic of contemporary society, especially gangsta culture (Boyd, 1997, pp. 70-81). Not so long ago, black people seldom appeared in the printed press or fronted national events. Now black bodies are associated with multi-million-pound advertising campaigns and appear alongside some of the most famous products in the world. But more importantly, those images are transmitted into millions of homes across different continents and appear on shop fronts and on the internet every moment of the day. The term 'hyper-visibility' has been conceptualized to describe this phenomenon, while the opposite term, 'invisibility', denotes the continuing marginalization of a range of alternative black identities whose invisibility is understood as symptomatic of hyper-visibility. Hyper-visibility is problematic because, unlike our white contemporaries, black men are overwhelmingly represented as overly masculine or not masculine enough. The media has tended to ignore the complexity and range of identities that black men inhabit, offering instead extreme self-harming, materialistic, sexist, and individualistic stereotypes. The bifurcation of 'good' blacks and 'bad' blacks still transpires in the media. Good blacks are displayed in advertising, sit-coms, public forums and constructed through notions of normality, whereas the media tend to view stories of 'bad' blacks less favourably. Bad black are featured on Crime Watch, rap videos and news programme. At worst, these are internalized by impressionable young black people and/or mimicked by young white people.

During my own experience of working in Social Services in the early 1990s, me and my co-workers were guided to reflect the ethnic/racial identities of the children and young people looked after by the local authority by placing 'positive' black images on the walls. No debate ever occurred, or consensus was achieved, over what images were considered positive or negative. Images pertaining to notions of an authentic African identity appeared in children's homes across the country that were more remote form the lived experiences of black youngsters than the faces of white children playing that had previously prevailed. The new range of images certainly did not reflect their white mothers, white neighbourhoods, predominately white schools, and white friends in many of the cases. What I am suggesting here is that 'positive images' can potentially cause harm and disassociation rather than achieving the well-intentioned goal. Importantly, there is a gap in the literature examining how images are actually used and consumed by black communities, and since images have figured so much in social policy – as well as being at the centre of popular culture – those questions need to be urgently asked. So this study makes strong links between 'blackness', 'visual culture', and 'visual techniques' in generating biographies.

Using visual images in the interview context to produce ethnographic knowledge bought to the surface how far participants are heavily engaged with editing the 'fictions' and 'myths' attached to the narration and the performance of the 'self'. Participants were encouraged at each stage to reflect and talk openly about who they are, particularly the elements they generally evade talking about. For instance, black male victims of abuse have to cope with the added burden of racism and with the sense of betrayal to their community that disclosure may engender. These men should be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns, needs and fears in relation to their colour, culture and community (Doyle, 1994). Inevitably, the project does not make any claims to represent a single fixed reality, so the visual methods employed do not seek out, or hope to represent, an objective take on the participants' everyday lives. The collaboration at most builds into a negotiated fiction or story of the participants' sense of 'identity' (Fortier, 1998), and represents the 'myths' employed to construct the fiction of personal identity and the strategic pathways participants have taken to achieve a positive sense of identity.

The uses of images in the text

This is an appropriate moment to clarify why and how images were used in the ethnographic interviews and where photographic images appear within the text. In each of the interview conditions (outlined in detail later) I was most concerned with exploring the meanings of images derived from the research participant's perspective. You will see representations of photo albums and photo diaries placed in the text that relate to narrated accounts of critical moments in identity-projects. However, the images I collected and were presented to the participants in interview condition three have not been included in the text. In-line with my original aim of developing better understanding of the meaning participants give to their own self-identities (and not a content analysis to determine the latent meaning in images) interview three was purposefully used to clarify themes and issues already discussed were conspicuous gaps and inconsistencies appeared in testimonies. The intention was to simply use a range of cultural images to further an on-going discussion. The images produced and presented by the participants are much more meaningful and explicit in their rich illustration of how identities have been forged, normed, and preformed overtime. A selection of the images used in interview condition three can be found in the next section.

Thus, the presentation of ethnographic images in the text takes two forms. Firstly, photographic images taken from the participant's photo albums, and secondly, 'visual diaries' produced by participants of their daily lives between interviews. These images are used in the central chapters to situate lived experiences, but are contingent upon the accompanying voices of participants interwoven into the text. I have in part used images from a realist perspective to support written text and to illustrate abstract versions of critical moments in the performance of black masculinities. Readers can possibly enter this objective cultural memory, but this does not take away from the symbolic significance or visual basis through which participants organize and represent themselves. In this sense, images are used in a conventional scientific format, but the realism I draw upon is not intended to be overtly objectifying. Pink suggests 'realist uses of photographs can provide an important layer of knowledge in ethnographic text' (Pink, 2001, p. 131) and implies a collective cultural memory.

However, ethnographic studies have been criticised for objectifying the 'voices' and 'images' of indigenous peoples by privileging their own voices and sight. I have tried to avoid this happening by balancing the mix of participants' photographs, transcripts, and my own voice in the central chapters. Furthermore, the selection of images I have used is not representative of the body of photographs produced by the participants. But through collaboration and careful reflection of what have been identified as critical moments in the narratives, I have selected images that relate directly to the critical moments under question. They serve to focus our attention on the shifting perspectives, experiences, and feelings discussed by the participants. As a result, you will only see a selection of the photographic images produced and organized by the participants. From those images, literal readings were taken that spatially and temporally situate participants in the past/present, at work/home, in front/ behind the camera, and so forth.

In conclusion, the range of images used in the text can be seen at first glance as unproblematic black iconography and personal portraits; but in fact they should be read as representations of representations. The participants engaged with, and translated, the images on multiple levels to explain their self-identities. This process commonly took two forms: 'literal' and/or 'symbolic' use. The scope of images in all three interview conditions allowed participants to reflexively compose and communicate complex and non-linear accounts of their self-identities. Participants moved quite easily between realist and interpretive readings of the images they had produced or had presented to them. Where a realist reading occurred, it did not necessarily consist of claims to a generalized reality, but more often than not involved embellishments and deviations of well established and documented social stories of performing 'blackness' and 'masculinity'. In this sense, most life histories moved seamlessly between broader social observations and personal accounts with the aid of pictorial representations. This was my aim: I purposely used images as part of the research strategy to enable participants to qualify the contours of their lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings, rather then expect participants to rely solely upon memory to conjure up elapsed critical moments in the construction of identity-projects.

Figure 1 Personalised Albums: Army recuirt

Figure 2 Personalised Albums: Family Gathering

Figure 3 Personalised Albums: Romances
With black women

Figure 4 Personalised Albums: Family Portrait

These photographs are a selection of images bought to the first interviews by the participants. They were assembled by the participants and allowed them in conversation to shared events, people, and places as part of the stories they have been telling me about their lives.

Figure 5 Photo diary: Weekly trip to the market
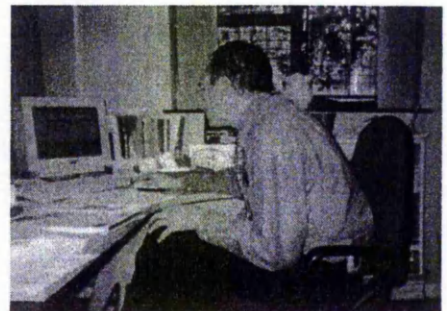
Figure 6 Photo diary: Work rountines

Figure 7 Photo diary: music collection

Figure 8 Photo diary: Building an 'home' in the sun

The photographs above are a selection of images produced by the participants as part their photo dairies. The diaries span the period between the first and second interviews; which did not exceed five weeks. These photographs were used in conversation to shared events, people, and places in the stories they had been telling me about their lives.
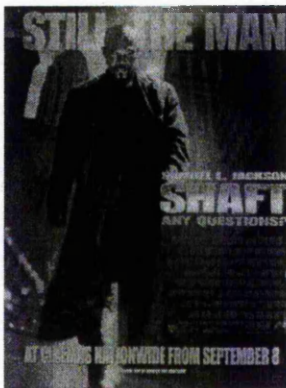
Figure 8 Samuel L. Jackson in Shaft August 2000, in the Pride magazine,
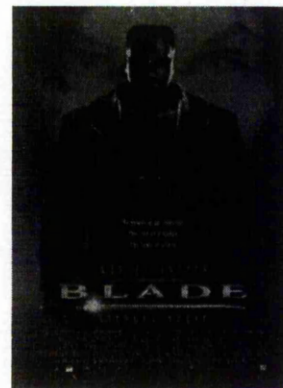
Figure 9 Blacde, New Line Productions, INC

Figure 10 Martin Luther King, Icon

Figure 11 Outcast CD Cover

Figure 12 Collin Powell, Guardian 2001

Figure 13 Emperor Haile Selassie and Royal Family

Figure 14 Tsyon Beckford, Pride, August 2000 2001

Figure 15 British Telecommunication PLC,

The images above are a selection we used in conversation in the third interviews. I bought in images depiciting black men which allowed participants to share my knowledge of black men's identities and comment on them in connection with the stories they have been telling me about their lives.

To employ photographic accounts as part of the study I drew upon principles derived from 'narrative visual theory' (Plummer, 2001). There is not an agreed approach in 'narrative visual theory' to speak of, but the experimental works of Barthes (1977), Jackson (1978), Harper (1978), Wagner (1979) and Spence (1986) provide central features. Firstly, photos are systematically selected through a tacit theory. Secondly, they come close to ethnographies. Thirdly, photos are the basis for organizing an autobiography. And lastly, lives are theorized through photography. Thus, in this context realist visual narratives do not inevitably impede the development of ethnographic knowledge, nor do they necessarily have to consign participants' voices and sight to the margin. This is one of the numerous ways the fusion of images and language can be constructed to form meaningful ethnographic data.

Defining life testimonies

The reason I have used the term 'testimony' throughout this study is twofold. Firstly, the development of testimonies is a widely-used approach in the social sciences to describe personal disclosures and/or accounts elicited in qualitative studies. It is a recognized term in social research discourse used to describe empirically gathered accounts of life histories and social phenomenon. Furthermore, the idea of testimonies bridges the cultural divide between black communities and the academic community in which this study straddles. Participants were familiar with the term testimony. The idea of testimonies forms a cultural 'pillow' in Jamaican religious practice and therefore resonates in the cognitive worlds of most, if not all, participants. From a Jamaican context, to give testimony is to seek redemption and to affirm one's viewpoint, beliefs, values, actions and life. Redemption is not sought from the congregation (or the researcher) but from a higher being witnessed by the listener. The congregation is not there to 'judge', but to bear witness to the testimony. This idea of the Jamaican testimony lends itself nicely to this study because it already emphasizes critical moments and provides an underlining vocabulary and reference system that is organic and natural to the community under investigation. This idea of testimony does not interfere with the way participants are use to telling stories about themselves. It follows established patterns of storytelling that are visible, not only as a point of faith, but as an emotive medium of communication in the wider black

community (i.e. the cultural forms of 'calls and cries'). I feel that the practice of giving a testimony, necessitates a conscious or unconscious negotiation of agency and structure; which is capable of exposing the challenges of naming and positioning self-identity.

Defining critical moment

The concept of 'critical moments' is an idea borrowed from a study on teenage transition conducted by Thomson et al (2002). They applied the concept 'as an event described in an interview that either the researcher or the interviewee sees as having important consequences for their lives and identities' (Thomson et al, 2002, p. 339). The idea of critical moments is similar to Denzin's (1989) 'epiphanies', Mandelbum's (1973) 'turning-points', and Humphrey's (1993) 'social career' and 'career break'. In these latter concepts, emphasis is placed upon structural processes above subjective experiences and they do not pay due recognition to the fragmentation occurring on both a structural and agential level in society. In this study the emphasis is firmly placed upon critical moments to clarify the subjective experience of personal change.

The data is organised in the analysis thematically, emphasizing critical moments that emerged in the life testimonies that were identified by both myself and the participants. The critical moments are indicators to the affect of 'migration', 'body image', 'sexual orientation', and 'lifestyle choices' upon self-identity. The central chapters draw upon those thematic threads, functioning to contrast, highlight, or expand upon how different identity-projects are crafted and performed over the course of a participant's life. The indicators were first used to identify and then trace critical moments in each interview transcript. The task of reconstructing critical moments involved listening to the preferences and self assertion of how participants categorise themselves, and secondly to evidence how critical moments have been a cause, effect, catalyst, and open up possibilities to past projects. To do this, all the life testimonies forming each interview condition were broken down into three overarching themes, relating back to the fluidity in the construction of a men's self-identity as his social contexts change (e.g. domestic, community, and paid work environment). Each life

testimony places greater emphasises on one of the three spheres. This helped me to situate the dominant identifications and referent points for each of the participants. The critical moments are as follows:

Moments of displacement: refers to critical moments that arise from, or were bought about by, uncertain journeys. Journeys in this sense refer to symbolic and physical journeys in which masculine identities have been repositioned and reinvented as a consequence. This idea of journey incorporates the notion of movement between the Black Atlantic and across (black) imagined communities present in Britain. In their life-testimonies, participants convey the new experiences afforded to them in their travels and show how their subjective understanding of their masculine identities has in turn altered through this process. The unpredictability latent in most journeys is commonly linked to strategies for accomplishing personal and/or material success. Most, if not all, the participants had made numerous journeys and changes in location during their lifetimes. These highlight the agency participants have in constructing their cultural identities.

Change in location: brings to the forefront the issue of reception to external/internal migrants by the host country/communities. Experiences of these critical moments help us to locate the differentiation of power bought about by local and global structural constraints that impede the empowerment of some black men. Participants refer to changes in location as being instrumental in how they are perceived and treated as 'men'; they report that they have had to be passive, aggressive, or assertive in how they have negotiated their masculine identities depending on different cultural positions. Changes in location are conceptualized on one level as structurally constraining, but they also open up possibilities of distinguishing the boundaries, limits, and impact of cultural inclusion and exclusion. In other words, we capture the participants' contrived sense of 'belonging' to imagined communities.

Changes in behaviour: refers to critical moments in which conscious or unconscious enactments have been performed to project new meaning into the social world about their gendered identities, through the use and manipulation of the body. Specifically, this kind of critical moment emphasizes social interactions that are intimately and

publicly preformed in accordance to scripted black gender roles. Participants change their behaviour in order to control how their body image is interpreted. Richard adopts a number of public devices, including the scarification of his body, to overcome the stigma attached to his experience of cancer. The socially constructed ideas of the 'body beautiful' and 'black hyper-masculinity' locate the participants' bodies within a cultural context. From here they substitute old practices for new ones that subvert and/or aspire to these standards. The main challenge here is about acting manly in accordance to prescribed gender roles and responsibilities, while integrating new adaptations to the body.

Changes in attitudes: refers to critical moments pertaining to the changes in 'emotions' and 'expectations' in the participant's own sense of body-image. Different critical moments are been bought to the fore in life-testimonies where participants are devalued as a result of how 'bodies' are constructed in the 'ideology of patriarchy' and/or 'hegemonic blackness'. Participants narrate their body images in ways that can be seen as fractured, layered, institutionalized, emotionally driven, and culturally criss-crossing. Dean, a sickle cell sufferer, constructs his body image through racialized and medical discourses, but the most telling dimension to how he found embodiment is indicated in his emotional and attitudinal changes concerning his self-image. Thus, self-image is complex and no clear avenues are therefore presented here aside from how a stable and overly normative discourse of self-images is subjectively arrived at.

Moments of mobilisation: indicate critical moments that have been identified (by research participants and me as researcher), and suggest life-changing events or occurrences initiated by actual or foreseen intersections of oppression. These moments are a reoccurring phenomenon that appears in most of the life stories generated through this study. Crucially, in Akem's and Mark's life-testimonies the managing of their racialized and sexualized identities has required the mobilization of identity projects. Although there is a sixteen-year age gap separating Akem and Mark, similar patterns emerge in how they have mobilized projects. Both Akem and Mark have had to navigate and craft their self-identities, admitting cultural, emotional, and psychological dilemmas bought about by the pressures to succeed in constraining

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black heterosexist and white gay communities.ere has been no clear space to construct and constitute self-identities except within newly defined communities and/or groupings.

Change in knowledge: refers to fleeting events and happenings that are identified (by research participants and me as researcher) as new possibilities for disassembling and reassembling identity projects. Here, I discuss primarily Akem's and Mark's life-testimonies. Akem and Mark's stories of coming out (primarily to themselves as men attracted to other men) point to the array of exceedingly male dominated groups, clubs, and organizations that were navigated and built into their descriptions of masculine identities. These components to their self-identities expose highly reflexive and self-conscious black subjects. Participants illustrate how different constructs of masculinities are worn as masks in private and public dealings with other men. What is more, the process of unmasking exposes forms of 'chosen marginalization' and newly negotiated subject positions within black communities.

Moments of pride: denote critical moments when Daniel's and Mr Williams's self-perception have altered, impacting upon their gendered sense of identity. Daniel's pride in his racial heritage figures heavily in his life-testimony. His racialized and gendered points of identification are entrenched in the 'street' from where his identity became politicized, and where he 'keeps-it-real'. From Daniel's perspective, the notion of pride is not only understood as recognition or deep understanding of internal emotions, but it is also felt to be spatial, and structured around an array of messy emotions shared with his family, friends, and brethrens. Pride is thought of as a survival mechanism which needs to worked at and regularly maintained in order to keep hidden what was really occurring in his life. Far removed from Daniel's interpretation, Mr Williams attributes his greatest sense of pride in leaving Jamaica and returning 'home' a success, after attaining middle-class status in his adopted country. Social mobility is essential to Mr William's articulation of pride, associating his sense of masculinity to personally defined moments of professional accomplishment.

Moments of affirmation: refer to critical moments of grounding or stabilization when Daniel and Mr Williams experienced a positive self-image of their masculinity (for example, reflected in animated objects and reciprocally affirmed in social relations). For Daniel, the absence of his father resulted in his affirmation of manhood being derived largely from choosing to model himself on his older brother; but affirmation also occurred by breaking free of the female hegemony in his household. Related to this, Daniel also found personal affirmation in fatherhood. His affirmation of his racialized identity came about in the race riots of the 1980s, when public and private issues blurred resulting in a miscarriage of justice carried out on his brother. Personal affirmation came to Mr Williams in accomplishing his aim of retiring in Jamaica with financial security. Affirmation of success is manifested for Mr Williams in having built up a successful business, in his vehicles, savings, homes, holidays, and in having privately educated his children. Mr Williams also finds personal affirmation in living out his desired lifestyle and achieving his goal of an early retirement. Personal affirmation for Mr Williams means immediate gratification and strategic consumption; but most importantly it resides in his achievement in providing as a father and husband.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling

The selection strategy was aimed at recruiting black men who have in common a Caribbean heritage and experience of implicit or explicit forms of multiple marginalization. These black men constitute the sample group because of the way they have gone on to craft their identities as an effect, cause, or catalyst to prejudice, stigma, and hatred emanating from black communities. The study included almost all black men (of at least one Jamaican or Caribbean parent) aged between 24-82. In total, eleven participants were recruited from black self-help groups and associations, and through academic contacts. Over the recruitment period the study was publicized (see appendices one & four) in a variety of ways through;

- mailout to group e-mails
- visits BLGB Unison Forum
- visits to Caribbean Day Centres
- letters/visits to Jamaica Returnee Association
- flyers at Caribbean Centres
- word of mouth

Entry activities proceeded at varying pace in the different self-help groups and associations, and this period gave early indication of the ease or difficulty with which potential participants were located in black communities. When suitable participants were identified it would be followed up by an invitation letter that described why the study was being undertaken and what they could expect to experience in a clear and concise way. What is more, I made phone calls and sent e-mail messages to participants to confirm interview dates and times. The participants are not representative or a random sample of the target communities. I used 'dimensional sampling ' and 'snowballing' techniques to chose participants fitting the above description according to who was available at the time the study was carried out. The snowball method (Robson, 1993, p.142) encouraged participants to identify other members of the population, who could also be interviewed and used as informants. Dimensional sampling (Robson, 1993, p. 140) emphasises the need to systematically secure research participants from different combinations of multiply marginalized positions form black communities for recruitment and sampling purposes. I anticipated that participants would move through or between dominant and subordinate identities - neither position is understood as static throughout the project (Connell, 1995, p. 81). As a sampling strategy it was particularly suitable to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and provided sufficient research participants.

There are some omissions in the sample: stigmatized occupations of black men, transgendered black people, and rural black men. There are black men I would have liked to have recruited as part of the study, but due to time constraints and problems with accessibility I was unable to do so. More research needs to be done to identify the needs of these target groups.

The pilot study

The following information details the assessment of the pilot study, the subsequent adjustments that were made, and preliminary findings. The pilot consisted of two participants whose biographies were incorporated into the main study. The two pilot participants were already known to me. I know that they would fulfill my sampling criteria and they would openly discuss issues around their own and other black men's identities. In the first pilot interviews I introduced a collection of pre-selected popular black images and asked participants to talk about how their work, community, and family identities have altered or been influenced by visual culture. In the second, I asked participants to bring along personalized photo albums depicting them growing-up. I anticipated that this would steer the discussion towards particular themes I was interested in exploring. I asked participants to produce self-composed albums, only depicting themselves. I thought this would allow comparisons to be formed of past and present identities, tracing how each participant moves through and between identities. In the third interview, participants were given disposal cameras and asked to produce photo diaries, capturing images of their life-world(s) that represented how they envisaged their identity. I gave participants both verbal and written guidance in how to construct their visual diaries.

The first interview condition comprised of symbolic and iconic black imaginary collected by myself. Each image was reduced in size, making each image no bigger than a postcard, and thus ensuring that no image was unintentionally privileged in the interviews. The images represent in part my own visual world and tell the story of the shops, events, and venues I attended or traveled through during the six months leading up to the pilot. This exercise draws parallels with the exercise I ask participants to complete for the third series of interviews. I attempted to collect a wide range of cultural images portraying respected black musicians, actors, religious leaders, politicians, royalty, militants, service users, and so on; all obtainable from retail outlets or located in public spaces. I felt it necessary to use a wide range of images in

order for participants to choose one or more of the images as references or points of identification which they could speak from or against.

All the images were laid out either on the floor or on a table forming a collage of images randomly placed together. Participants were encouraged through my lead to interact with the images by touching and moving them around. The collection of images formed a backdrop to the conversation. I used the images at certain times to lead new lines of enquiries, and to make tangible connections between what was being said and broader social fictions. The participants were encouraged at first to see the collection as one whole body, but each participant narrowed the collection down creating sub-categories for themselves. They each interwove those sub-categories into narratives about concrete experiences and memories that allowed them to articulate the views and beliefs by which they structure their lives. Thus, the 'organic' emergence of sub-categories operated in a very functional sense to bridge the personal and social world of participants and also allowed participants to independently create reference points for themselves from which they could speak openly and continuously about themselves. The experience of the pilot tells me that the collection of images worked on a number of different levels to unlock memories and clarify viewpoints on self-perception and what constitutes 'blackness'. The collection of images did not replace the use of words in the explanation/description of memories, events, or opinions, but enhanced all of these elements. Although this interview condition was, in effect, successful in producing biographic data, I felt it would be best utilized when positioned last in the interview series. This way, it would provide participants with the opportunity to end our dialogue on a less personal note and provide the opportunity to clarify points made already about how participants (re)conceptualize their sense of 'identity'.

In the second interview condition, pilot participants were asked to bring along a personalized photo album. Raymond bought along a carrier bag full of photos. Between us, we sorted through the photos aiming for around ten pictures to constitute an hour's discussion. I focused upon photos that depicted Raymond at different periods of his life. However, Raymond focused upon photos that depicted significant people and places. Originally, I had asked participants to not include photos that did

not feature themselves, but this approach failed to recognize who was behind the camera and the level of emotional/social significances attached to such images from the participant's perspective. Hence, through introducing photos with significant others in them, the (extended) family was naturally introduced into the conversation. Like Raymond, Daniel is also a father and his child features heavily in his life, but unlike Raymond, Daniel followed the precise directions and bought in photos depicting mostly himself. At first glance, his album suggested some level of remoteness from significant places, people, and events, since most of the photographs depicted Daniel in undistinguished spaces with only himself in the frame. As a result, the conversation did not naturally build into a discussion about his sense of fatherhood, unlike the discussion with Raymond. The only available opportunity to discuss relationships were in his childhood photos that featured him alongside his siblings or school friends. Those relationships framed most of the following discussion. Given the fact that not all the participants would be parents and that they will reinterpret the instructions independently, I felt that I needed to amend the instructions and not make it an implicit requirement that they feature in the entire group of photos. Thus, a 'personalized photo album' simply refers to the emotional attachment to the production and or organization of the photo album. Furthermore, this interview condition proved so successful in accessing how participants conceptualise their 'self-identities' and personal issues that I repositioned it as the first interview condition, hopefully setting the tone for what participants could expect from the process.

The third interview condition consisted of the production and discussion of photo diaries. There was some difficulty with Raymond and Daniel initially starting this phase of the study. Pilot participants found it hard to conceptually think of images playing a pivotal role in the process of identity construction. Thus, a collaboration of sorts needed to occur in the production of visual diaries (Harper, 1997), based upon my request for certain signposts (see appendix two). Both Raymond and Daniel produced a range of pictures using significantly less film than I had first anticipated. Reasons cited were 1.) forgetting to take the camera out with them, and 2.) over problematizing what sort of images needed to be captured. The images were taken at different periods, but roughly over the same time-span, ensuring a moderate level of

comparability among the different visual data sets. Raymond and Daniel treated the photos they had produced slightly differently. All the images were laid out either on the floor or on a table and they were asked to talk about each photo in turn. Some images followed a lineal pattern and a time sequence was visible; in that instance, there was a corresponding story to be told. Other photographs were sporadic and no emerging patterns surfaced. This exercise proved particularly effective in providing an insight into the social worlds of participants and enabled focused discussions around how they conceptualize their occupational and community identities. This interview condition was repositioned and placed second, in order to allow time to interrogate themes and issues raised in the photo diaries.

The profile of the sample

The study was undertaken during the autumn and spring of 2002/03. Constituting the sample group were eleven adult black males of Caribbean descent (by one or both parents) representing a varied range of non-normative black masculine identities (for example, gay, sadist, interracial intimacy, aging, black police officers, entrepreneur, absentee fathers, Barnardos child, returnees, and disabled). Ten men were Jamaican through both parents and one man was mixed heritage of Trinidad, Tobago and Irish descent. Three men were interviewed in Jamaica and nine men were interviewed in the UK. In terms of age, one man was in his twenties, five men in their thirties, one man in his forties, four men in their sixties and one man in his eighties. In terms of sexuality, four men were gay identified and seven straight identified. Three men were married, seven were fathers, and three were grandfathers at the time of the interviews. One participant said he had a disability, with one participant saying that he had had Cancer. The men came from Kingston (Jamaica), Brixton (London), Bristol, and all parts of Nottingham: City Centre, Radford, St Ann's, Colwick.

The sample emphasizes a multidimensional perspective of multiply marginalized black men. The project is not just interested in people per se, but in the diversity of life circumstances and experiences that the sample population embodies. My shared ethnic/racial heritage with the sample population gave me epistemological privilege

into some of the 'subject positions' (Mason, 1996; Hetherington, 1998) research participants inhabited. Consequently, the sample has been 'observer-identified' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997, p. 50) and throws a particularly strong light on stigmatized and tabooed black identities.

Interview format

In-depth face-to-face interviews were the primary method used to generate data. The interview process spanned three phases: the first concentrated on the exploration and discussion of photo albums bought to the interview by the participants; the second focused on the photographic diaries produced by the participants (Dabbs, 1982, Waggening, 1990, & Harper, 2000); the final interview concentrated on broader cultural images I chose. Direct collaboration with participants and researcher occurred in the production or elicitation of visual texts of various kinds.

Initial contact with potential participants was made by me in person (interviewer), by gate-keepers, and/or informants. The first step was to identify the named participant was appropriate for the study, and this was done by checking their name, age, ethnicity, and background. All participants were personally briefed (at least one session), before the series of interviews began. Once participants had been identified and had agreed to take part, the interview commenced. I would explain that the study was about black Caribbean men's lives, and I was specifically interested in exploring what issues (besides from racism) affect their sense of self-identity. Participants were then encouraged to select and bring along a group of photographs from their family albums for our initial meeting.

At the end of the first interview participants received cameras and were asked to take (or have someone else take) photographs that tell who they are, plus significant features of where they live and work. Participants made decisions about which aspect or events were selected to be photographed. The photographs formed the context of the second interviews and are data in their own right. It encouraged participants to discuss their family photographs and learn more about themselves. It also helped

participants to document problematic or contentious areas within their own lives and attempted to empower participants through visual media. Photographs have a high iconic quality, which helps to activate people's memories or to simulate/encourage them to make statements about complex processes and situations. Making known non-verbal components of events and practices allows repeated access and unlimited repetition. Photographs also have limitations in terms of a loss of expressiveness; they do not tell the 'truth', and a personal aesthetic style can determine the framing photography and its content (Collier, 1987, Morris, 1994).

Following on from each interview, a three or five minutes debrief generally took place, depending upon the disclosure and need of the participant. I felt that the debriefing time was a very important part of the interview process. I felt that the debriefings enhanced what the interview data had revealed and offered new information.

Each of the participants was interviewed in a block schedule of two or three in order to make the exercise more manageable. Intermittent contact was made with all participants by telephone or e-mail where a planned or unforeseen gap had emerged between interviews, to prevent losing contact with participants. As foreseen, using a series of interviews enabled participants to develop trust in the project, which has allowed participants to narrate richer stories and unpack and work through different layers of their identity that exposed critical moments in their masculine identities.

All the interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. If participants identified that they would like a copy of the transcript I ensured a copy was sent to them.

The interview schedule

For the most part, the questions that comprised the interview schedule (see appendix three.) were made up of themes in the literature review which have focused upon points of differentiation and cultural issues affecting the daily lives of black men. However, the interview schedule was used only to support discussions; the style of the

encounters was conversational, and formality normally associated with quantitative survey was avoided. The interview schedule covered three broad areas:

- feelings and thoughts about family identities
- feelings and thoughts about community identities
- feelings and thoughts about social identities

Our secure sense of 'social', 'community', and 'family' identification are themes which were given at the outset of the research. Studies suggest that individuals' frustration and disillusionment could have community effects; they could lead to alternative lifestyles, which undermine the family and are associated with low social cohesion. From the broad themes, sub-themes were identified, such as 'colourism', 'sexism', classism', 'disablism' and were incorporated into the interview schedule. Whilst the central themes allowed a clear and accessible way to generate data, the sub-themes helped to clarify the boundaries and ruptures as participants narrated their movement between different spheres in their lives.

Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Nottingham Trent University Ethics Committee. The seeking of approval followed the pilot study, which began in 2002 to refine the themes, interview schedule, and sequencing of the interview sets before I embarked on the main study. On the whole, the receipt of committee approval was straightforward and did not compromise the fieldwork.

Voluntary informed consent was sought as much as possible from participants before interviews were initiated by using a variety of methods (over the phone, by letter, or in person). Therefore, to achieve voluntary informed consent I relied heavily upon gatekeepers to pass on general information about the study to potential participants. Before the series of interviews started, each participant read and signed two consent forms (see appendix five). And for the second time I would explain the purpose of the study and the participant's rights and responsibilities in an explicit and unambiguous

way, to establish a satisfactory level of informed consent, protection of privacy and confidentially.

Each interview started with a statement around rights to privacy and confidentiality. I identified myself as researcher, explained the study, gave a description of how confidentiality would be maintained (e.g. anonymity in write-up, secure storage of data, and who would have access to the data) and mentioned the participant's right to view what was being recorded, as well as their right to withhold and or withdraw data at any time. Most of the participants gave themselves a false name to appear in the write-up and gave their consent for their images and portraits to been used. In some cases, faces have been deliberately blurred to guarantee the anonymity of participants. It was left to the participant's discretion to obtain the permission of any persons that featured in their photo diaries and photo albums.

Participants were informed that all their personal information was held on computer and would only be used for the purpose for which it was gathered. Promises were also madenot to disclose information to unauthorised persons or kept it for longer than was necessary. Most, if not all, the ethical principles I used in this study were 'internalist' (May, 1997, p. 14); which literally means that in constructing the ethnical guidelines I tried to adhere to the moralities, beliefs and values that derive from the individuals and groupings I investigated, combined with the ethnical guidelines stipulated in the BSA Ethical Guidelines.

I presumed that participants would have at least two different modes of communication (i.e. Standard English and Jamaican English) and would feel most at ease switching between both. Although all the participants spoke and wrote in English the study took into account the uses of patois or Creole (that is, 'Jamaican English') and the ethnic matching of participants and researcher. The researcher's knowledge of Jamaican English minimizes any linguistic misunderstanding being repeated in the transcript. However, dialogue can be distorted by the intent to deceive. As a consequence, whatever is said about the participant's way of life was cross-checked and substantiated by photographs of actual events and transactions wherever possible.

Coding and analysis

The data from the study was analyzed using a social constructionist approach. Ethnographic knowledge is produced about research participants via the telling and performing of 'self' in and through the interview space and interviewer/interviewee relationships (Denzin, 1989). I examined the transcripts looking for similarities and differences (Hammersley, 1998, Davies, 1999, Goodall, 2000, & Plummer, 2001). This involved reading and rereading the transcripts. Through familiarization with life-testimonies and correspondence with research participants the central themes of migration, body-image, sexuality, and lifestyle choices emerged from the data sets. I considered the social contexts, interactions, and the lived experience that have had causes, effects, and possibilities to these themes. The phrasing and descriptions used by participants to denote these themes were highlighted on the page of the transcript and also noted onto a separate chart sheet, so that it was possible to return to the full transcript at a later date to explore a point in more depth. This chart than formed the basis for a detailed exploration of all the transcripts, looking for the causes, effects, and possibilities open to 'critical moments', their implications for identity projects, and what they reveal about how black men might negotiate identities.

Each interview condition produced its own episodic narrative; and in the analysis I treated each narrative as an entity or object of study in and of themselves, shifting the emphasis away from lineal accounts or long biographic stories to short biographies. I viewed the data collection and analysis as an intertwined procedure, giving research participants the opportunity to validate emerging themes and topics as the project proceeded in order to ensure the biographies were contextually accurate. Therefore, the study presents exploratory explanations and descriptions of the sets of circumstances and lived experiences that inform how black men might constitute a subjective understanding of 'self' and how it translates into their 'gendered' and 'racialized' identities. Validity is attempted through the continual assessment and reassessment of the data sets with research participants. Emphasis is placed upon what is said about 'self-identity' in association with 'identity-projects', rather than pursuing reliability, accuracy, and consistency, which are elements unobtainable in life-histories (Plummer, 2001). Final readings of each transcript were undertaken by the participants to ensure comments or explanations were not taken out of context and

were authentic from the participants' perspective. Participants are recognized as experts of their own lives and are respectfully treated as such. At most I present a motif or collage of the voices that are rarely listened to, but more importantly I present the collective story that tells of the 'critical moments' (Thomson et al, 2002) experienced by black Caribbean men in performing 'masculine identities'.

REFLECTION ON THE SYMMETRY IN VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY AND BLACK CULTURE'S IN STORYTELLING

The visual research strategy caused participants to connect with their sociological imagination. Participants wove together stories of their self-identity that reflected the experiences of other men in the sample group. The research strategy enabled participants to get involved in the research process as autonomous social agents, constructing and narrating their respective perceptions of 'black masculinity' and the subjective construction of their own masculine identities in oral and visual forms. Crucially, they used their own frame of reference to interpret imagery and locate themselves from an intervening chorus. The strategy proved to be democratic and ethically responsible, since it encouraged participants to be part of the data-collection and interpretation processes. As a consequence, a heterogeneous group of black men testified to different lived experiences, social conditions, and gave divergent meanings to sets of images we collaborated in compiling. In recognition of the fact that most social research investigates either socially excluded or minority groups, every attempt was made by this study to distance itself from disorienting cultural fictions of the desired black body and menacing portrayal of black men. Of course, visual images have a profound effect upon how participants see and locate themselves in society, but this study appreciates how participants reconstruct their own meaning from social imaginary and in the process absorbs, filter out or simply block out imagery that tells them an untruth about who they are and what they ought to be. This study reflects some of the possibilities available to black men who are engaged in social research and hope to explore their real life experiences and perceptions of society.

Social research is a political activity; it operates within the context of power relations divided here into class, race, and gender, not denying sexual orientation and generational differences. Empowerment comes from breaking free from traditional research strategies. These strategies presume and/or reinstall archetypes that are expected to represent absolutes in the participant's psyche, when in fact, they are mythology carried and narrated from a variety of cultural standpoints. What is more, traditional approaches in social research take little or no account of the oppression inherent in certain aspects of research. For example, participants may be expected to make adjustments to the natural order of things rather than contributing to their own empowerment by defining and making sense of their circumstances through a mutually beneficial approach. Social research cannot avoid the question of oppression. The actions of social researchers and the methodologies we employ will have the effect of either illuminating or undermining, on a small scale at least, the oppressions black men are subject to.

The social researcher can be seen as a mediator between the participants and the wider communities that consume the data generated. This position of 'mediator' is a crucial one, as it means that the social researcher is in a pivotal position in terms of the relationship between participants and the wider community. The relationship is a double-edged one, consisting of elements of both empowerment and potential oppression. Which element is enforced depends largely upon the research strategies and the actions of the social researcher. In this thesis, I have consistently argued for a research strategy that recognizes diversities in patterns of power and inequality among black men without becoming derailed with the delicate issue of oppression.

What is clear from this study is that the black community is full of symbolic references. Rather than complicating matters, the use of images in the study simplified the research process of discovering how masculine identities are constructed. Participants testify to the fact that the process of acting out black masculinities is not totally altruistic or spiritual; instead they leave behind trails of symbols and imagery outlining the territories and critical moments in their lives. This symbolic landscape provides tangible reference points from which participants can speak. As I have pointed out elsewhere in this chapter, the data-generation process was a collaborative

exercise and resulted in the production of a black mosaic. I was not surprised with the commonalities and difference in the images that make up the mosaic, as I aimed to capture a number of different ways of seeing and experiencing the black community. For that reason, the images in this thesis should not be viewed individually, but should be seen as extracts from the mosaic. Order and placing are important in contextualizing the themes. Black cultures occupy a very visual and expressive cultural space that produces intertextual representations that make full uses of the visual arena. So why ignore this knowledge, and not exploit this established channel of communication? Black culture provides a fertile symbolic field that organically (re)produces its own vocabulary, which is democratically experienced and universally understood throughout the black community and now in wider contexts. I argue that black communities synchronize with visual culture, and this factor needs further investigation.

In an era where images have become the most dominant medium of communication, the major issue is who colonizes the visual sphere on both a global and local level. The black community is perhaps one of the most effective social groupings to have gained in exposure and interconnection due, at least in part, to the fact that black images are everywhere. The ease at which the black community incorporates and transmits meaning through imagery can be traced to two causes. Firstly, our insider knowledge of how images can serve oppressive ideologies, and secondly our lived experience of how images can work to unite and mobilize people against the aforementioned forces. It is not too inconceivable, then, to comprehend how black men critically read and negotiate, consciously or unconsciously, their social positions on almost a daily basis. The research process bought this activity to the forefront and in the process highlighted an analytical principle that originates from within the black community. The black gaze, for want of a better term, is what this study has capitalized on and utilized to gain further insight into how black men might operate their optical and creative experience of the social world as it confronts their gendered and racialized identities.

Putting the black gaze into better focus meant encouraging the research participants to take individuated snapshots of their social world(s). Participants galvanized

themselves around this task and captured rich illustrations of the little things they see and do each day that are connected with their sense of masculine identities. The items, locations, events, and people photographed served as a means of expressing what interested and excited participants about their own masculine identities. I used a trio of research methods, along with observations, which proved reliable in gathering data on the trivial props and staging that form the background to their lives. The combination of visual diaries mentioned above, combined with photo albums and popular cultural imaginary, provided a three-dimensional viewpoint of the participant's visual life-worlds. Each of these social research methods are well documented and applied in real world research (Lyon et al 1996, Banks, 2001, Plummer, 2001). However, few studies have combined each of these methods in one single strategy. In doing just that I have offered a more holistic approach, which explores the participants' natural worlds and how they intersubjectively negotiate social structures to produce meaning about their own masculine identities. This qualitative strategy has allowed us to partially glimpse the private and public negotiation some black men have undergone in naming and positioning their masculine identities against complex gender relations and intra-racial politics and/or unease. The organising themes of family, community, and paid-work identities constituted the basis of the analytical framework, which in turn lead to the construction of the four central themes: aging and identity, body image and identity, sexuality and identity, and finally lifestyle choices and identity.

These identity categories are not treated as discrete entities but criss-cross in the participant's biographies. Each of the four findings chapters details each of the identity categories in turn. Because of space limitation and the risk of distorting the meaning of biographies I made the decision to limit each chapter to only two or three central biographies (Goodall, 2000, Gray, 2004, & Elliott, 2005), in order to illustrate the dynamics and complexity in constructing black men's identities. All of the different threads constituting the biographies are bought together and discussed at greater length in Chapter Eight. Using the identity categories formed in the study as a discursive framework I will go on in Chapter Eight to critically discuss how the ambiguities in the participant's identities relate not only to ethnicity but also to the ways in which ethnicity intersects with other sources of identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the feasibility, utility, and flexibility of using visual methods to generate 'ethnographic knowledge'. Evident in the preliminary findings were instructive analogies of lived experience and circumstances of performing black masculinities, which were made implicit through the narration of pictorial representations. The fact that participants were not being compensated for their time in a monetary sense further strengthens the quality of the data gathered. There is no reason to suspect that the responses given were not honest accounts or that they were conveyed for reasons other than to help constitute the study. Most, if not all, the participants were enthusiastic about talking about black issues, but the difficulties arise from discussing issues around their own sense of masculinity. This dimension required a lot more soul-searching than first anticipated by participants, and in later encounters they expressed how hard the experience had been. The problem of revisiting past issues did not stop at the point when the dictaphone was switched off but continued for some time afterwards. There are, of course, many ethnical issues at stake in using visual-methods along with an ethnographic approach (Hammersley et al, 1995, and Pink, 2001). Not all of these are directly addressed in this thesis. Nevertheless, ethical considerations were not forgotten when designing and amending the research framework. For instance, I feel that the readjustments to the sequencing of the interviews responded sensitively to the needs of participants and provided some sort of closure to the experience. In Raymond's case, he wanted to use his meetings in a therapeutic sense to talk through issues that have been troubling him from his earlier childhood. While he successfully presented his issues, the original sequencing of the different interview conditions did not allow for the depth but only the breath of his troubles.

In fact, participants from the main study reported that they felt restrained, excluded, ostracized, stigmatized, and tabooed by the 'imaginary black community', but seldom had the opportunity to articulate those thoughts or feelings. We can observe that certain identities are forbidden in the black community, and more studies need to recognize this issue and readdress their research methodologies to reflect this fact.

This was made less problematic because I fused qualitative interviewing techniques with developmental approaches in visual methods to enable multiple and, at times, contradictory voices to be heard. Each research participant took a controlled risk in telling their stories, opening themselves up to 'public' scrutiny. The interplay between pictorial commentary and image production, combined with the interactive probing and questioning, allowed flexibility in the structure and content of interviews, which facilitated the in-depth exploration of individual circumstances and experiences in a way that was responsive to the accounts of individual research participants.

Chapter Four

Diaspora and the Negotiation of Cultural identities

Introduction

This chapter discusses critical moments pertaining to constructions of 'place', 'space', and 'belonging' and their impact upon the participants' sense of self identity. The central aim of this chapter is to throw light on the way that black men form different self-conceptualisations of their own cultural identities as they move between gender regimes; regimes linked to the imagined 'homeland' and also linked to their social relationships here in Britain. I frequently refer to black cultural identities as being fluid, relational, and constructed within a dislocated sense of time and space, creating multiple meanings and power positionings for the research participants. I also consider how power relations embedded in gender regimes may be internally defined, externally imposed, or both, and how they affect participants differently due to conditions of growing-up in the 'homeland' or alternatively living their entire – or most of their- lives in an overseas host community (for example, Britain, Canada, USA, and so on).

Representations of the black diaspora

This chapter is concerned with the important context of the black public sphere. It privileges narratives of the diaspora told by multiply marginalised black Caribbean men. To the naïve eye the 'black public sphere' (that is, the 'black diaspora') might not be recognized as a distinct cultural consciousness. Be that as it may, it represents the histories and tenuous patterns of daily life that constitute the realities for many black people around the world (Cohen, 1997; Hall, 2000; Gilroy, 2002). The black diaspora serves as a robust theatre of innovative cultural and lifestyle practices, which are formulated to meet the broad needs of black people. It encompasses the traditional practices and ideas of the 'black church', 'black scholarship', 'black politics', 'family patterns', 'aesthetics', 'linguistic styles', 'comedy and humour', 'musical styles',

'athleticism/sport' and so forth, which define and bind blacks in Britain, the Caribbean, America, and Canada. As I have pertained to above, I am most concerned with how gender relations criss-cross and thread through the diaspora and serve to regulate and bind black Caribbean men in different black communities. The presumption I make here is that black gender relations are constituted and institutionalized in black Caribbean communities, but I also argue that they are not always harmoniously experienced.

For participants searching for a positive self-identity,[7] the black diaspora has often been characterized as a reciprocal space that frames a reality where normative standards of 'blackness' and 'hegemonic masculinity' are central. My aim in this chapter is to explore other narratives of performing masculinity that can address what the black diasopra actually means to each of the participants. Even though hegemonic black masculine stories appear to dominate black communities (and are sometimes felt to impose a particular definition on all black masculinities) there are a range of competing and contradicting black masculinities in Britain. To paraphrase Uguris (2001), diasporic people are part of highly complex processes in and through which the collective 'we' is constructed. Different constructions of the 'we' lead to 'empowerment/disempowerment' of different individuals and groupings.

From different localities black Caribbean men are seen to inhabit positions of power, wealth, and respect. One way we legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate privileged subject positions is through labelling, ostracizing, and deliberately stigmatizing other black men who exist between the centre and margin of black communities. Such branding occurs because of their occupations, workplace, physical appearance, sexual orientation, geographic location, language, financial status, age, state of health, family role, friendships, community service, and so forth. But most, if not all black Caribbean men, are embroiled in contradictory identity projects. The conditions required for them to realize the truth of their self-identities are constantly changing. As demonstrated in the study, participants have resisted being constructed as inferior or socially stigmatized by their communities at critical moments in their

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[7] According to Small (1986) if a healthy(i.e. positive) perosnality is to be formed, the (black) child must first recongise and accept that he or she has a black psychic image (Small, 1986, p88).

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lives. Some participants inhabit the space of the black community while simultaneously occupying other cultural spaces that can operate in contradiction to black gender regimes. As a consequence, some participants choose not to solely situate themselves in the reality of the black diaspora and instead fuse, or flit seamlessly between, different cultural expressions of masculinities. For such reasons, the research captures how and where participants have had to renegotiate their positions in black communities, periodically or on a momentarily basis, because of the duplicity or multiplicity in their cultural allegiances.

The study features biographies detailing personal experiences of migration from Jamaica to Britain and biographies that touch upon secondary stories of migration constructed and told by the children of migrants. Thus, the starting point of this chapter is the knowledge that critical moments (arrived at by the participants and myself as researcher) partially reveal how different subjective constructs of 'place', 'space' and 'belonging' impact or influence masculine identities; revealing the causes, effects, catalysts, and possibilities open to identity projects. Studies of black men rarely take into account how we negotiate cultures of in-betweenness that extend beyond the physical boundaries of our country of residency. This results in a failure to interrogate the precise nature and impact of displacement and relocation. The impasses of displacement and relocation are not often static during a person's lifetime, and can change, disappear and re-appear as individual and group identities are continually being redefined. Problems can often co-exist or are triggered by aging, isolation from black communities, 'returning home', and so forth. Two kinds of critical moments have been identified in each of the life-testimonies that reveal the contours, ebbs and flows in how black Caribbean men's identities are crafted within the context of black communities.

NEGOTIATING RACE, MIGRATION, AND GENDER

Men who migrated

Commenting on the diaspora, Uguries (2001) observes it in terms of physical social space. She proposes that we inhabit diasporic spaces as a consequence of being

deterritoralized, displaced, dislocated, and distant from our imagined 'homelands'. For this reason, she proposes that there are those who desire to continue their journeys, and who narrate 'stories of return'. It is from this starting point that participants reported their sense of cultural identity. Britain was never the preferred migration destination for many Jamaicans. There are more Jamaicans in the US than in the UK (Norris, 1962), and those who came to the UK usually did so with a plan in mind to return after ten years. In these cases, Britain was always perceived as a temporary solution and never destined to be 'home'. As a result, some first generation Jamaicans narrate their lives in anticipation of their 'homeward journey'. For example, Mr Williams, who I met at his villa overlooking the capital city of Kingston, is a returnee aged sixty-two who had lived in Britain for thirty-eight years. Mr Williams asserts:

I always wanted to come back. My life was always geared towards getting back to Jamaica at some stage. (Mr Williams, 62)

Similarly, Raymond, aged forty-six at the time of his interviews and a child of Jamaican migrants, described in his testimony how his mother came to Britain from Jamaica, and left Britain for Canada, before returning to Jamaica. Raymond asserts:

From Canada where she worked hard, she built a five bedroom villa in May Pen Jamaica. She used to say that one day she would go back, believe you me she did go back. She loves Jamaica, for her it is a beautiful island, and she loves the people. (Raymond, 46)

Thus, to paraphrase Okedija, at the core of every diasopra is a space of nostalgia: acknowledged or suppressed longing for exodus, to return, replicate, and celebrate home (Okedija in Mirzoeff, 2000). Most first-generation Jamaicans can no longer literally go 'home' and instead they replicate and celebrate ideas of 'home' from local theatres. The suspicion and contempt black men endured in Britain on their arrival (because of their accent, skin colour, flamboyant dress, loud mannerisms, and so forth) forced newcomers to construct insular black communities as a survival strategy.

It was difficult to access rooms or accommodation for my generation...this was a fact;
"no blacks, no Irish, no dogs". I don't know why it was this way; I'm not going to be
judgmental. It's up to people who they choose to live in their home. Jamaicans who
came before us acquired property so my generation were lucky that we could rent from
them. My brother and cousin shared a room; wages were low so people shared. We
lived as a group, not just Jamaican, but all West Indian people as brothers and sisters.
We helped and supported one another. (Mr Mansfield, 59)

A next participant, Dean, aged thirty-six, recalls how his earliest opinion of Britain
was informed by the suspicious attitude held by his migrant parents.

There was an attitude of suspicion and that as a black person you wouldn't get a fair
crack of the whip, that white people were prejudiced against black people and would
discriminate against black people, and didn't have any love for black people. That
certainly formed part of my formative development. (Dean, 36)

Studies suggest that the hatred and fear that existed in British society has abated, and
there is less call for individuals to cluster together and find solidarity in their outsider
status. The children of newcomers (who I interviewed) are completely integrated into
their neighbourhoods, at colleges and places of work. They frequently distance
themselves from components of traditional Caribbean ways of life that position them
periodically or on a momentarily basis outside the boundaries of the black
community. The cultural allegiances of the children of migrants have broadened to
reflect their lives here in Britain. This leaves some first-generation participants
clustered together (but with their ties weakened) under modified ideas of ethnic and
national solidarity, a precursor to their fragile and contingent cultural identities. While
some participants are reterritoralized in symbolic journeys to their 'imagined
homeland' to overcome their 'invisibility and namelessness' (West, 1990), most
participants have not permanently returned 'home', but have settled in Britain and
gone on to recreate (or modify elements of) their own distinct cultures here in Britain.

Figure 16 Photo diary: Male members of a community centre

For those participants interviewed who decided to not return 'home', one space that commonly features as important are black community centres/organisations. In particular, older participants cite how they are able to construct and reformulate a worthwhile sense of ethnic identification within the spatial proximity of black communities/groups. Mr Fraser bought along a set of photographs he had taken at his local community centre.

Figure 17 Photo diary: Domino Game

Mr Fraser explains, how as a pensioner, he travels to other black community centres around the country (such as London, Derby, Sheffield, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham, Nottingham, and Manchester) 'to play dominos, drink, and sometimes eat' with other men. Black community centres are seen to provide a supportive environment that allows older participants to feel connected with an evolving story of migration and settlement. Among themselves they appreciate the dilemmas and sacrifices they have made settling in Britain as moral imperatives to their shared sense of cultural identity. In this context the constructed space of the community centre supports a shared cultural memory underpinned by the British response to their presence here. However, Gilroy (1987) observes how black Britain is mobile and constantly changing, which is shown to complicate and also increase the ambiguity in participants' senses of belonging to cultural sub-groups. This notion of the diaspora exemplifies notions of 'hybridization', and the postulating and shifting of 'trans-national' and 'trans-ethnic' cultural boundaries in the negotiation of cultural identities - visible nowhere more than in the public sphere.

Some older participants resist renegotiating their cultural identities by retaining their social proximity to other racial/ethnic groupings almost on a daily basis. Mr Morris testifies that he remains perfectly content working and living alongside other people from different cultures and racial backgrounds, but finds amusement and friendship with a close circle of black Caribbean friends. The existence of black groups and originations helps him to retain his distance without becoming isolated. In contrast, Mr Fraser says:

> *I never had problems with white people; I get along with them and they get along with me. I have never had troubles with them apart from when I first came here; they wouldn't give me a job.* (Mr Fraser, 71)

The ways participants construct their cultural identities are not free from complications, caused by racism. Dean's and Mr Fraser's extracts capture the oppositional points of cross-cultural references and the contingencies placed against their cultural identities. Race and ethnicity continues to play a role in the lives of participants. This affects how participants see and speak about black men's cultural identities. However, cultural diversity is a reality that involves all the participants and is relevant to everybody. Studies show that most people in Britain do not connect with cultures other than their own and simply feel that they co-exist. Many do not see this as a problem. However, participants are conscious of their cultural ties with other people. Most participants imply in their testimonies that they are aware of a mix of intercultural values, beliefs, and gender practices that they perform in different contexts, and they resist others' ascriptive definitions. I now turn to the spaces in which first generation men reformulate new expressions of ethnic identification.

Figure 18 Photo diary: End of the journey

The private space of the 'home' is also important to how some participants construct their sense of cultural identity. Commenting on Jamaican migration patterns, Blakemore et al observe that a minority of aging black men have continued or reverted back to a set of circumstances commonly associated with the 'self-reliant

pioneer' or 'migrant arrival lifestyle' (Blakemore et al, 1994, p. 70): a common pattern of settlement most, if not all, participants alluded to on their arrival in Britain. This pattern consists of 'rented   single accommodation', 'being relatively isolated', and 'unlikely to be in touch with children and grandchildren' (Blakemore et al, 1994, p. 70). For instance, Mr Williams rented a room with a Jamaican family, Mr Morris rented a single room in his father's boarding house, and Mr Mansfield joined his brother and cousin in single rented accommodation on his arrival. However, Mr Fraser is one of two participants who has reverted back to living alone. Mr Fraser contrasts his own experience of living alone with that of other black men he defines as less fortunate and independent than himself. Mr Fraser comments:

Figures 19 Photo diary: My own private space

I have a girlfriend, but she doesn't come often. I enjoy this little place and to know it's my own and I go and come as I please, with nobody to nag me. Sometimes you feel lonely but you say life has to go on. I went to a funeral where one black man died in his flat and was found ten days later (see figure.18). You have some black people – I'm not talking about white – some black men who live on their own you cannot go and have a cup of tea because their place is so dirty. They will not keep their place properly. From when I first live in my own flat I have always kept my place clean. My dad was a very clean man. There was not one person who could stay at his place (i.e. boarding house) and keep it dirty or you would have to leave. (Mr Fraser, 71)

Mr Fraser's comments illustrate how living alone can be confused with either social isolation or loneliness. However, Mr Fraser does not describe feeling isolated. Both Mr Fraser and Mr Morris indicate that they are content and feel independent living alone. Blakemore et al (1994) suggest that, in general, aging black men experience fewer networks or close ties with their families and that this may result in making

them vulnerable. Mr Morris and Mr Fraser, however, have chosen to live individuated and home-centred lives away from their families – a central feature to their identities. Differently, perhaps, from the Blakemore et al study, some participants construct their identities at a neighbourhood level:

...we up here watch out for one another place – neighbours, if anybody comes round even to my neighbours' place I take time and look through to see who it is. I'm the only black who lives here. Nobody troubles me, when my (white) wife lived here she and the people across the road could not agree.

<div align="right">(Mr Fraser, 71)</div>

... I got a place that I like a lot; I am pretty happy there and want to remain happy there. I have an old white couple as neighbours and an old black couple who I like a lot. In fact, I do have quit a lot of black neighbours. Over in the bungalow is a very good friend of mine, Mr Martin. He has known me since I was a baby, so it's nice when I can go and see if they are alright –the elders. They are watching my house as well.

<div align="right">(Raymond, 46)</div>

Being a 'good neighbour' was an important resource in the construction of the participant's cultural identities and a way to achieve a sense of social solidarity. Mr Morris and Mr Fraser testify to having strong ties with their neighbours without close community interaction. So the impression that all, or most, older Jamaicans who live alone experience sharp problems of deprivation, neglect, worry or regret, conveyed by the aforementioned study, is not borne out. Participants negotiated a number of different layers to their cultural identities that were pertinent to how they choose to live and were shown to produce social support networks.

Another space that was important in the construction of cultural identities is the belief in (Pentecostal) religiosity. The participants' religious beliefs (sometimes unobserved) provide distinct codes transmitting cultural values and sentiments that reinforce collective identities. During critical moments of migration and settlement, participants often describe their set of circumstances and hardships in moral terms. Religiosity is one resource participants use to define who they are, and they are conscious of the normalization strategies they employ to spread specific principles

and codes of behaviour. The following six quotations illustrate the moral messages, practices, and religious principles passed from migrants to their children:

Why worry when you can pray, tomorrow is another day, tomorrow will be different. You never know what tomorrow will bring. (Daniel, 36)

I just put God before and God will work it out. If you believe in Him everything will work out the right way…yes sir. (Mr Grey, 82)

My mum liked the hell and brimstone kind of preaching, and midnight would come with people still getting into the spirit. My dad liked organised services with a smartly turned out preacher. (Dean, 36)

My mother is religious…I went to a few black churches and we use to follow around and listen to certain pastors. My mum also held a lot of prayer meetings at the house. It's a nice vibe, very spiritual and emotional…that's what kept me grounded. (Mark, 24)

I don't comprise my value… that's the way my dad bought me up. I'm called after my granddad who was a preacher. I actually went to the church he preached at in Jamaica. It was quite a sensitive and emotional moment. (Richard, 36)

I cannot plan any future now, I'm only living on overtime so I just have to give thanks and enjoy my life until it ends. (Mr Fraser, 71)

The way participants construct their ethnic and cultural identification in Britain often takes a scriptural turn. The participants' narratives of migration and settlement are constructed as part of an elaborate divine plan that accounts for their past and projected futures.

Jamaica farewell

Mr Morris's life-testimony centres on the one image he had brought in to talk about. This is a portrait of himself in his seventies, dressed in his favourite security-guard hat

and overcoat. At the time of his interviews Mr Morris is aged eighty-two, is single, lives independently in the community, and has been retired for nearly two decades. I meet Mr Morris at a lunch club run especially for elderly Caribbean people. At our initial meeting Mr Morris lets it be known to me that he has no plans to ever return permanently to Jamaica to live. However, the predicament he faces, like most aging Jamaicans, is whether he would 'stay' or 'go'. Since making the decision to stay in Britain, Mr Morris's biography breaks from the traditional belief that all, if not most, Jamaicans in Britain hope to return. In the following extract from his interview, Mr Morris describes the vivid set of circumstances that lead him to migrate from Jamaica, helping us to understand why he stays in Britain. Mr Morris explains:

Figure.20 Personalised Album: Mr Morris portrait

I left Jamaica in 1962 at the age of forty-two. I lived in St Catherine in Jamaica...I came here to work money because it was only cultivate I was doing in Jamaica and mi come here to work cash...A men. Mostly cultivate, and raise cow and goat. In Jamaica you only want money to spend, and you will live a good life, it's not cold like this country...warm man...sometimes it's too hot. Remember you born and grow in Jamaica and you get the opportunity to travel, you're glad to go man, yeah. When you are born and grow in Jamaica you would like to go to a strange place to see how life stays that side. When they pick-up immigration to England me try and get out mi passport and come...yeah man it was time for a change.

(Mr Morris, 82)

Mr Morris, the eldest research participant, recaptures why he came to Britain after spending nearly half of his life as a subsistence farmer in Jamaica. His testimony echoes stories in studies that have investigated the experiences of Jamaican migrants to Britain. Most Jamaican migrants to Britain come from poor rural backgrounds, where unemployment is high, work often seasonal and wages low (Blakemore et al, 1994). Mr Morris's geographic and economic circumstances would have positioned him in the lower strata of Jamaica society. He identifies that his only chance to achieve a decent standard of living, and/or fulfil the man's primary role as provider, is by working aboard as a temporary solution (Davison, 1966; Lowenthal, 1972, Foner,

1973; Froner, 1979; & Blakemore et al, 1994) or, alternatively, by finding work in a larger town or city. Mr Morris accepts the Jamaican belief that 'a man who cannot provide for his family is not a man' (Chevannes et al, 1998). Jamaican black men know that 'making life is active, not passive', for instance, 'is man look uman, not uman look man!' (Chevannes, 1999, p. 27). At the core of this construction of hegemonic Jamaican masculinity is the ideal of control over economic resources, through 'juggling' or 'hustling'. Thus, 'juggle, if you can, but hustle if you must. To do nothing is to be judged and branded 'wotlis' ('worthless') and stigmatized by your community (Chevannes, 1999, p. 28). Hustling, for Chevannes, raises issues around morality. Meeting the needs of male identity (that is, economic resources) and reputation figures far greater than respect for life, property and honesty, particularly in poor urban settings.

Partially due to their concern to fulfil social expectations of being a 'man', Mr Morris and other participants made the break from 'home', took the risk and moved outside of their normal frame of reference to seek work. In Mr Morris's youth internal and external migration was not particularly unusual and he implies that it was a decision most rural young men (and women) would in time have to make. I also met Mr Fraser at a lunch club run for elderly Caribbean people. Mr Fraser was aged seventy-one at the time of his interviews and his story of migration replicates the sense of migration as a critical moment conveyed by Mr Morris. Mr Fraser recalls:
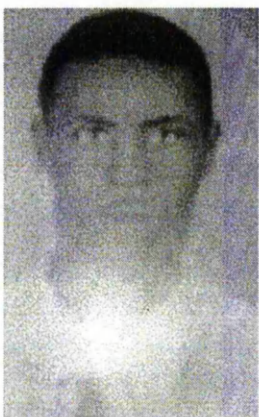
I was born in country not in town, in the parish of St Catherine. I worked for myself; I plant food, bananas and sugar cane and all those things before I leave to come here. When I came here in 1962 it was just clamping down on the amount of people coming into the country and I didn't even know what I was going to meet. (Mr Fraser, 71)

Figure 21 Personalised album: Mr Fraser Portrait

Mr Morris's and Mr Fraser's decision to migrate follows the common pattern forged by their compatriots who left Jamaica in the 'migration boom' (Blakemore et al, 1994) of the 1940s and 50s as a chance to lift themselves out of poverty. However, these participants' stories of migration differ only in the fact that they left Jamaica just as it gained independence from colonial rule in the 1960s. They

left Jamaica just as a renewed sense of pride in 'blackness' began to destabilize the traditional racialized hierarchies (Norris, 1962, pp. 31-42).

Through force, cohesion, and as survival strategies, Jamaica developed into a mixed-blood society (Nettleford, 1966) and since the country's independence in 1962 the national motto (yet to be accomplished) has been 'out of many, one people'. Although racial identification was not scientifically reducible in the Jamaican context as a result of interracial intimacy, a race-based value system existed nonetheless. Cultural dichotomies or hierarchical signifiers existed that attached social value to given characteristics from the African, East Indian, Lebanese, Chinese, Anglo-Saxon and Arawak descendants that made-up Jamaicans. European features (that is, straight hair, thin lips, light complexion, straight nose) were valued more highly than black features, representing the historical inequalities experienced by most, if not all, the participants. But this racial dichotomy or hierarchy was disrupted in the assertion of 'blackness' (for example, Africaness) during the period of decolonisation.

It is worth noting that this specific time/locality is central to the memories of Mr Fraser and Mr Morris and continues to influence how they conceptualize their past and present image of Jamaican society (and most importantly, their ideas about how men from different sections of Jamaican society should act). At times, Mr Morris and Mr Fraser speek from the position of a 'colonial subject', where white hegemonic masculinity still figures as an aspired standard to be accomplished. For that reason (in part) they testify that it would be problematic for them to permanently return 'home' and easily fit back into an isolated village culture without first adjusting parts of their (male) identities, which have served their integration and assimilation into British society. Mr Fraser remarks:

> *I have been living here for forty years now and to go back there and adopt their principles I couldn't. I guess it's the boys out there, their principles are different. Their principles are different to my own. If I go out there now I would like to live independent and respectable and if you go to Jamaica you couldn't because you cannot achieve the standard you are used to living here.* (Mr Fraser, 71)

The extract above implies that the identities Mr Fraser and other participants have been socialized into are nostalgically remembered as 'who they were', but certain threads of their past lives conflate with the new hybridized (that is, European) way of being they have forged for themselves here in Britain. In contrast, Mr Mansfield in his fifties and Mr Williams in his sixties, men who have now returned back 'home', construct happier memories of their early adulthood in Jamaica and recall being encouraged by their parents and siblings to migrate to Britain during the 1960s. Reluctantly, Mr Mansfield migrated at the age of twenty-one and he suggests the only positive effect upon his sense of self was that 'the first few years help me to mature'. Unlike Mr Fraser and Mr Morris, they did not juxtapose their stories of 'self' awkwardly against subsequent generations whose masculine identities are restricted and conditioned by the same land they toiled. But now look towards the 'gun' or 'cool guy' (such as the gunman, drug user, and trouble maker) as ultimately representing what it means to be a black man (Chevannes, 1999); in opposition to white hegemonic masculinity. I return to this theme later in the chapter.

Figure 22 Personalised album: Rural Jamaica

There are negligible differences in attitudes between participants towards men back 'home'. Travelling to the 'mother country' stirred up critical perceptions of men who had not made similar journeys and had remained at home'. Some participants conceptualized their own masculine identities in opposition to less prosperous boys/men from the 'imagined homeland'. However, on their arrival in Britain, most of the participants did not experience an immediate rise in social status. They were socially constructed as racially inferior (by the host community), and continued to accept the stigma constructed around their ruralness and presumed backwardness (Mason, 1995) among more educated and cosmopolitan Jamaicans. For participants who have stayed in Britain, the process of migration has been conceived by many men as a facilitator to changes in identity. Some participants refer to a re-birth in their identities, which affords them the chance to be someone else and change

how they practice their masculine identities (for example, changing occupations, accessing further education, or the processes of fatherhood to bachelorhood, rural reserve to town borne, and so forth). Although the experience of diaspora relies heavily upon cultural links with the imagined 'homeland', it invariably provides a new way of being for some participants otherwise marginalized or stigmatized in their homelands.

Whatever circumstances first-generation participants find themselves in during their old age, their stories are rooted in the idea of 'journeys'. Thus, one of the central characteristics of critical moments contained in their narratives is the 'image of journey', of 'establishing routes', and the historical specificity of journeys by which some participants mark their arrival as newcomers (and maybe their departure as returnees). Whether participants return to Jamaica or stay in Britain, the idea of journey is integral to their testimonies. Biographies interweave stories of travel between the 'homeland' (Jamaica), and the 'mother country' (Britain), and reveal their desire to settle. The participants' ambitions are always simply to settle. However, 'the circumstances of leaving determine not only the experiences in these journeys but also the circumstances of arrival and settling down' (Uguris, 2001, p. 1). Clifford (1992) puts forward the idea that diasopric identities are more insightful when understood from the context of 'travel' rather than simply 'place'. This 'image of journey' is a metaphor used here to differentiate 'routes rather than roots' taken in the forging of diasopric identities. From this context, the 'image of journey' (travel, dispersion, homes, and borders) becomes a pertinent question of 'where, when, how, and under what circumstances' journeys occur (Brah, 1996, p. 182). In the case of Mr Morris and Mr Fraser the decision to leave Jamaica was not made until their mid-adulthood. The two men sought, among other things, paid work and adventure when it became unambiguously clear that the British immigration policy was about to change and alter the flow of immigration from the Caribbean[8]. Mr Morris recounts his journey to Britain:

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[8] The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 established controls on the entry of Commonwealth citizens for the first time. It introduced a system under which any such migrant required a voucher before being given leave to enter. See Mason (1995) for more information.

When they were picking up man to come to Great Britain mi come in the last boat load. Mi come in the last load in 1962. When they say the last trip mi come in that trip before the government pick-up on immigration. It took thirteen days and thirteen nights to reach England, we eat, drink and sleep, and we had a good time on ship...good time.

(Mr Morris, 82)

In contrast, Mr Williams and Mr Mansfield left Jamaica as young men and were sceptical about travelling to Britain. Mr Mansfield recounts:

Travelling to the UK was frightening, we spent twenty-one days on ship – it was freezing. The boat took us to Spain; from Spain we took a train to Paris and a ferry from France to the UK. We were British subjects, so we had no problems, and we were received well.   (Mr Mansfield, 59)

This is in contrast to Mr Fraser and Mr Morris who lived out their entire childhoods and early adulthoods in rural Jamaica and travelled believing the fallacy that they would be welcomed and easily find work within British culture. To complete the journey 'home' is not always the aim of some participants, but it continues to construct their identities as a consequence of their journeys.

Finding work

The men's narratives indicate that finding life-sustaining employment in a new land represents a critical moment in itself. At first, most participants struggled to find adequate work, which affected their sense of being independent; a building block to a stable sense of male identity. When they were successful it was in labouring jobs, which signified a vertical shift for some, from agriculture into industry. Industrial work endorsed what they already felt about their capabilities as men. Each participant experienced different concerns in trying to establish economic stability in a racist and bitterly cold working environment that served to undermine their sense of pride and strength as men.

Occupational narratives are so ingrained in the process of identification that Mr Morris (shown in figure 21 wearing a security officer's headdress) plays with the headdress in retirement as a hard-edged masculine signifier to express a contrived fiction of himself. The headdress effectively serves as a master label, destabilizing how his fragile and somewhat isolated masculine identity might otherwise be read. Mr Morris consciously sets out to manipulate value judgements made about his aging body and demeanour. In Britain, aging symbolizes decay and weakness in masculine identity, unless it is combined with personal wealth, health, and a strong support network, which some black men lack. Occupational identities (real or imagined) serve multiple purposes in shaping narratives of gender identities among aging black men, and validate the gender scripts that have guided culturally-bound practices and performances during their adult lives.

Mr Morris remembers:

> *When I first came to Britain I worked at two different power stations. I shovelled concrete...sweat...hard job you know power station work. I worked at a next place and I did galvanising, I tried all types of work, I worked at the railway, I worked at plenty of different-different places man.*   (Mr Morris, 82)

Similarly, Mr Fraser's narrative of his early working life in Britain is filled with instability and uncertainties. Mr Fraser's testimony illustrates the sporadic employment patterns experienced by unskilled or poorly educated participants who travelled to Britain to find work. Mr Fraser asserts:

> *I haven't got education so I did labouring jobs. The first job I got in this country was at a rose farm, but I couldn't stand it out there. Remember it was 1962 the badest winter they had in so many years. Everywhere was frozen. The toilets were frozen and remember that it was outdoors toilets. I couldn't stand the coldness outside, so I went and got a next job making bedsprings and car seats and all different parts for cars and lorries. The wages wasn't very good, so I got myself a next job at a firm that makes fabrics.* (Mr Fraser, 71)

In contrast, Mr Williams is a returnee who came to Britain with a trade. Mr Williams was encouraged by his parents to travel to Britain to further himself. Mr Williams narrates:

> *When I went for my first job on a building site, the man said to me, what can you do? And I said to him I'm a carpenter, but I did not look like a man. I looked like a young child at twenty-one. I looked like I was thirteen or fourteen...so anyway he offered me a job with low wages. I worked there through my first winter and it was cold, it was bitter, but I was young and fit. I left from that and I went to various firms and then came the winter of all winters in 62. The snow started in December and two days before we break up for Christmas I was told that there would be no more work for me, except if I wanted to go to Blakemoor prison. I spent eight weeks in Blakemoor and I can tell you it was like serving a sentence, it is not much different than being in prison except the fact that you go home at night. If one wants to get an experience in life, it's to work in a prison; it is an eye opener because you're in prison except that you are free to go home.* (Mr Williams, 62)

The way the participants perceive and construct the critical moments of journeying to Britain hinges partially upon an understanding of their masculine identities in relation to their capacities and aspirations to work. The participants' working lives were central to their life-testimonies and were constructed somewhat differently in Britain owing to the change in climate, employment opportunities, and the socio-political landscape. Even in retirement participants continue to define their male identities primarily in terms of what work they did.

'Staying or going?'

Many Jamaicans who have travelled here have testified to working under adverse conditions and have made tremendous sacrifices, but few have saved for their return. Participants did not come to settle, but some participants have not achieved what they wanted to achieve and have stayed. Participants are reasonably unwilling to return 'home' and be constructed as failures, especially when they are content with their lives in Britain. Jamaican society places a badge of shame on people if they do not come back with capital. The participants who are returning 'home' are those who

have been successful in Britain. They have also saved sufficiently to finance their return journey and the cost of settling back into new homes on the island. They openly question whether they would have accomplished as much if they had stayed in Jamaica. Some participants have planned to return but are afraid of making the move, while others cannot, and others still have chosen not to. Mr Fraser remarks:

> *There are a lot of us who will not return back because some can't manage because of*
> *illness, and for those who come from country or town it isn't as respectable as when we*
> *were living there, and they are fearful of gun.* (Mr Fraser, 71)

Participants cite other reasons that have kept them in Britain, including having children who do not know Jamaica, family commitments with grandchildren, and crucially, the fact that racial prejudice in Britain has decreased. Even the depressing effect of British weather (which has played its part in influencing some participants to return 'home') has abated among some participants. Whilst most of the participants worked hard, some lived frugally, and others due to their occupations have not been able to amass the capital needed to return. Participants such as Mr Morris have not amassed enough savings for his return, perhaps never actually aiming to return. Mr Morris recounts:

> *I live in a council house and I don't get a work pension. It's not hard to manage; you*
> *have to know how to work it out. When you get your money you have to know what to*
> *do with it. I don't drink and I stopped smoking in my fifties.* (Mr Morris, 82)

In contrast, Mr Fraser is a homeowner and narrates how he was eligible for early retirement due to industrial injury. He receives a works pension, which has helped him to manage financially. Mr Fraser asserts:

> *I get enough money to pay my bills. I met an accident where I was working. I fell over*
> *in the kitchen and I hurt mi back so they at to finish me on health grounds. I was*
> *finished long before I should have retired.* (Mr Fraser, 71)

Mr Fraser's decision to stay is due, in part, to the way of life he has forged for himself in Britain and the difficulties and risks of being a stranger in his 'homeland'. Another

reason given by participants for not going back 'home' is that they feel increasingly remote from contemporary Jamaican society because of the coarseness exhibited in Jamaican popular culture, in contrast to the atmosphere of friendliness and civility that had existed before the island's independence. But the narrative of colonial Jamaica itself is subject to selective memory and repressed stories. For instance, Mr Fraser claims:

When I came here in 1962 Jamaica was a respectable place; law and order. From the day they get independence the whole place turned violent, no law and order. The place as gone to violent, and those who are going back to help their own country; if they don't get killed they have to run back again. Those who are coming here are carrying on the same way.   (Mr Fraser, 71)

Mr Fraser's perception of Jamaica is that it was a safer place to live under British rule – a belief held by many Jamaicans aboard. Mr Fraser and Mr Morris both argue that Jamaica has turned increasingly violent, with a steep rise in common disturbance and immoral acts (e.g. dancehall slackness). However, both Mr Fraser and Mr Morris also note the growth of crime in Britain, especially the growth of urban crime. The social reality and fear of crime creates invisible victims. Both participants testify to how crime has affected their everyday lives since they have retired. Mr Morris asserts:

Retiring is very good, because you have no work on mi mind. During the day I go and look for friends, I don't go out at night, people get killed out there at night...times get to serious. All my going out is during the day, even if somebody invites me out at night he'll get turned day...no going out at night. I think it is getting worse in Britain now...terrible. Mi have burglar bars all around the house now, if anybody goes on the back the lights shows. If mi non go out during the day I will cook and watch the box. I will watch anything as long as it is look-able. When mi come tings did work better but now everyday is getting worse. I use to be able to work at night but now I pack it up...to much bad man out there. Plenty of pensioners get killed that way, boxed down and killed in the middle of the day when they are coming from the post office. People watch for them. It couldn't get worse you know.   (Mr Morris, 82)

Mr Morris narrates how he stays indoors most nights because of his fear of crime. His daily routines are restricted to morning shopping trips and attending a circuit of lunching clubs for elderly Caribbean people. But Mr Morris is reluctant to leave the relative safety of his own home at night. Mr Morris particularly fears violence from within the black community. These two quotations illustrate the fear of black-on-black crime:

> *Some black men are out of order and do things they shouldn't do, some fight and cut up one another, some dreadful man, so dreadful. They grow up with them colleagues and take up with what them colleagues' carry-on...you just have to know how to carry yourself, how to shape yourself.* (Mr Morris, 82)

> *... there is an irresponsible minority of black men out there...* (Mr Mansfield, 59)

Similarly, Mr Fraser constructs 'Yardies' as a particular problem in Britain for black communities. The participants' testimonies illustrate how the perceived threat posed by 'other' black men impinges more and more forcefully on their daily lives. Mr Morris and Mr Fraser testify to a position in their local black communities where their age is no longer a guarantee of respect, but instead places them at risk of being victims of crime. Nonetheless, neither participant would trade this space for 'home', where they feel that they would fare a lot worse. Both Mr Morris and Mr Fraser can not imagine their quality of life improving if they had returned to Jamaica, but they recognize the limitations of staying in Britain. The next participant, Mr Williams, describes his industrial injury and how he used it as a turning point to go self-employed, with the aim of returning home one day.

Mr Williams experienced an industrial injury as a young man in the 1960s that formed a critical moment in his narrative. He made the crucial decision to go self-employed after an accident at work, which financed his return 'home'. Mr Williams explains:

> *In 1965 I was working at various building sites around London and I fell of some scaffolding and broke my wrist, sprained my knee, and split was out of joint. The person that was working with me was transferred to another job so I had no witness of what happened. They got rid of all the evidence; there was nobody to say how I actually fell*

of the scaffolding, so I got no compensation because they said it was my own fault. They said that they provided me with scaffolding but I chose to do what I did. I got nothing

for that except the experience and ohm I carried on with what I was doing and in 1967 I went self-employed. I always wanted to come back. My life was always geared towards getting back to Jamaica at some stage.

(Mr Williams, 62)

Figure 23 Photo diary: Mr Williams's self-portrait

Another returnee, Mr Mansfield, recounts:

Contrary to modern views held that we were recruited, we were very independent people who left Jamaica. It just so happened that the same people doing the recruiting employed us here. My first job was as a railway cleaner. I had no experience as a young person. I couldn't stand it but I couldn't turn it down because I had no other job offers. I worked with the railway first as a cleaner and then I went to college and trained as an electrician, then in construction, painting and decorating and my final job was with the NHS as a psychiatric nurse which gave me the ability to finance my return home. (Mr Mansfield, 59)

Participants who have returned testify to being more active than when they were in Britain, and experience a 'better quality of life'. Another participant, named Richard, recalls how his father returned to Jamaica in the 1990s after experiencing two strokes. Richard explains:

My dad will be buried there, that's one of the reasons why he went back there because he had two strokes, he didn't want to die here and basically six months later he'd packed-up and went. And now he's running around, he's got a new woman half his age. (Richard, 36)

Participants and their children report the improvement in their quality of life on their return home. Another participant who saw a marked improvement in his social life was Mr Mansfield.

At the time of his interviews Mr Mansfield (a returnee) continues to participate in the

freemasonry movement, is learning to drive, attends regular returnee community meetings and house parties, and has a close circle of (male) friends he regularly has contact with. Mr Williams (also a returnee) identifies that his usual week consists of routine repairs to his home, reaping ackee and an assortment of other fruits and vegetables from his garden, shopping trips, attending returnee meetings, charity work, and frequent weekend breaks away with his wife. What is more, Mr Williams still considers it as important to spend time in Britain. Mr Williams explains:

Figure 24 Photo diary: Returning home: Mr Mansfield of the left

I've never spent any longer than nine months in Jamaica at any one point. This is the longest time I've spent here. I keep going back to the UK for various reasons...the business was going down so I had to go back and straighten things out. But most

returnees go back for short and long periods to visit children and grandchildren, and for health reasons. But when I'm going back it's straight into a job and I would make sure that jobs are programmed for four or five months and then when that is finished I can come back
(Mr Williams, 62)

Figure 25 Photo diary: Mr Williams Fruits and vegetable yard

The problems that Mr Williams and Mr Mansfield experience are varied, but most stem from cultural baggage left over from their lives in Britain and from being viewed by some of their compatriots with 'jealousy and reserve' (Davidson, 1996). The Jamaican *'International Returning Residents Association'* (2002) reports that those who have returned have experienced great difficulty with government and other agencies. Some are exploited, treated like strangers, and feel isolated. However, returning participants recount how they feel that they contribute to the development of

the island and expect, therefore, to be afforded courtesy, rights, duties and responsibilities as 'true' citizens of Jamaica.

Spencer-Strachan notes how returning home can be both 'challenging and rewarding', and while some returnee participants might view themselves as 'cultural brokers and/or cultural carriers' (Spencer-Strachan, 1992, pp. 75-76) their transcultural knowledge is not always valued – especially when foreign values and norms conflict with how Jamaicans understand and perceive themselves. Jamaicans do not want a social ethos that promotes 'foreign values', which particularly intrude upon family relations (for instance, the concept of children's rights as opposed to children's obligations, where children talk back to their elders and 'beatings' are prohibited). Returning participants constitute a new constituency who have demonstrated their commitment to the island by their return. In spite of this, they seek greater recognition of their contribution to the economy and inclusion in social and economic policies to represent their needs.

Although some older participants do not wish to return to Jamaica there is no evidence to suggest that they would like to symbolically sever their ties with the 'homeland'. If anything the evidence points the other way. For instance, Mr Morris's reluctance to change over from a Jamaican to a British passport suggests a symbolic strengthening, and not a weakening, of his ties to Jamaica. Mr Morris robustly defines himself as a Jamaican, regardless of the amount of time he has lived outside of the island. Mr Morris asserts: 'mi still is a Jamaican, there is where mi born and grow'. Mr Morris attempts to keep abreast of the political and social developments of Jamaica by regularly reading Jamaican/Caribbean newspapers and via news conveyed through his network of friends who travel back and forth to Jamaica.

Mr Morris's set of circumstances illustrate how some migrants are somewhat divided between their roots and memories of Jamaica and their ties to Britain. This can be complicated by matters of aging. Similarly to other testimonies told by participants who migrated, when Mr Morris left Jamaica it was in body, not in spirit. In spirit, Mr Morris is embroiled in the embryonic story of Jamaica, but his way of life in Britain takes predominance. Mr Morris feels settled in Britain and recognizes it as his

'home'. Mr Morris's sense of belonging transcends at least two national boundaries, and encompasses and acknowledges a dislocation of time and space in how he conceptualizes his sense of belonging to Jamaica. Mr Morris, and other participants who have decided to stay, highlight their problems with how men back 'home' behave. They feel more at risk of violent crime in returning 'home' than staying in Britain, where they inhabit precious social spaces.

Absentee fathers

Bending the tree while it is young (Chevannes, 1999, p. 26)

Another difficulty that some older participants allude to (that has discouraged them from returning 'home') is the volatile relationships with their families back 'home'. Most of the participants who migrated from Jamaica suggest that they travelled to Britain to improve the life of their families. While most participants promised to return, only a few have travelled back regularly to see family members. Many participants have defaulted on their responsibilities. From the time of their arrival up until the present, these participants have not continued to correspond by telephone, or send letters and seasonal greeting cards. They have not regularly sent money back to their families – to children, siblings, spouses, and others. Mr Williams, who first travelled home ten years after his departure and then regularly until his repatriation thirty-eight years on, is a notable exception. With new families and responsibilities in Britain, most, if not all, of the participants who had migrated have found that the memories and connections with their past have faded. They have been substituted by memories of relationships formed in Britain. For instance, Mr Morris was a son, husband, and father before he left Jamaica. Mr Morris comments:

My family stopped in Jamaica and I'd planned to go and come and send money and give them. My wife never came to Britain. I will soon go back and look for them (wife and son) she never remarried. I married again in England and have two girls and three grandchildren.   (Mr Morris, 82)

It was difficult to assess whether (as in the case of Mr Fraser's situation) Mr Morris was legally married back 'home' or in a common-law relationship. Mr Morris's description of fathering children and the responsibilities he testifies to feeling towards his baby's mother, resemble marriage. Nonetheless, marriage has often been constructed as the exception and not the rule for Jamaicans. Family life is important in the participants' life-testimonies. Norris (1962) identifies three domestic structures that exist in the Jamaican context outside the Christian marriage:

- The maternal family, where the mother and her children stay in the grandmother's home.
- The trial union of a man and a woman, which may break up after a while or grow into the third structure.
- The common law marriage where couples live in faithful concubinage for many years and have a family   (Norris, 1962, pp. 12-13)

Mr Morris' family life fell into one of the two latter categories identified above. Chevanne (1989) notes how common-law unions, once the spouse is past thirty-five to forty years of age, thus tend to end in marriage at some point. What is crucial, is that Mr Morris' critical moment of migration occurred at the age when most Jamaicans would normally have settled into married life. Until that point, Norris (1962) asserts that both men and women value the independence they retain in relationships that are not binding. Nonetheless, Christian marriage is a socially constructed status symbol, and is an ideal many women aspire to achieve, because it signals their social advancement. However, a wedding without the lavish trappings (such as taxis, bands, fine clothes, and good entertainment) is not considered an apt wedding by Jamaican standards. Furthermore, there is a cultural expectation that a permanent home and help (that is, a maid) be provided by the groom. These factors perhaps explain why participants like Mr Fraser and Mr Morris delayed marriage until they came to Britain.

The absence of photos of back 'home' in the interviews hints at edited-out stories of how migration forced their baby-mothers to become reluctant household heads and single-handedly raise their children - living hand to mouth (see Chevannes, 1999). Mr

Fraser and Mr Morris reverted back to bachelorhood and acted contrary to cultural standards by putting personal gratification before caring for their families. Although migration was an empowering transition for the participants, it was fraught with difficulty for their families back 'home'. As a result, participants cite how relationships did not survive, and were beset with quarrelling, mistrust and hurt over unmet needs. Studies show that with no family and friends to go back 'home' to, the less likely returnees are able to settle. Participants suggest that they found it an 'emotional and financial strain' to maintain divided families (Davidson, 1966).

Mr Morris and Mr Fraser have had to confront the anguish of living double lives and dealing with the shame that split loyalties engenders. For instance, Mr Morris and Mr Fraser biologically fathered children in Britain and Mr Fraser also became a step-parent. These roles serve to undermine and subvert their ties with their other children. However, internal shame cannot be avoided so easily (we are our own judge and wrestle with our conscience) and is triggered by their 'failure to live up to expectations'. Therefore, staying is a rational avoidance technique. If they express guilt they have to acknowledge the trauma and upset they have caused. Lowenthal (1972) observes the 'acute distress' caused in families back 'home' by the absence of older migrants who are only now coming to terms with the impact of their departure. Mr Fraser and Mr Morris imply that they had troubled families back 'home', which prevented them from permanently returning. Whilst difference and similarity exist in diasporic families, they are littered with open wounds that threaten to destabilize identity projects that have often been constructed on the normalizing premises of the ideology of the British nuclear family. Mr Fraser and Mr Morris forwent their responsibilities to their families and this contradicted their values and relationships as the 'man' as provider and social father. This can have consequences in retirement, where there is an absence of family care of older people (such as adult children as carers and/or companions). The following life-testimony is by Raymond, the child of Jamaican migrants. I have used Raymond's story here to illustrate the effects of absentee fathers and mothers and their impact upon the cultural identity of the British born black Caribbean man.

British born

We now turn to Raymond's biography, focusing on how he adopted certain strategies in relation to being a black man. The struggles of children of newcomers take a different form, and while there is commonality of experience with their parents there are acute differences in how they have gone on to inhabit and fashion their lives in Britain. Children of newcomers have faced a different set of questions in their struggle to 'belong' and to create reciprocally reinforcing spaces that confirm their hybrid sense of (masculine) self. As Gilroy reminds the reader, 'British born, nurtured and schooled in this country are, in significant measure, British even as their presence redefines the meaning of the term' (Gilroy, 1987, p. 322). Raymond (forty-six when he is interviewed, single, a grandfather, and employed seasonally as an electrician) constructs his cultural identity as 'Black British'. Raymond wanted to talk most about his story of being a child 'looked after' and the particular problems this caused him as a (black) male growing-up. Raymond narrates his adolescent identity as structurally fixed at a specific time and location as a 'looked after' child, but also fixed as he perceived it as a non-authentic black person. Central to Raymond's accounts of constructing his British sense of cultural identity are the 'spaces', 'locations', and 'relationships' that have complicated or reinforced his black British masculine sensibility. Raymond's life-testimony brings to the fore the complexities of growing-up outside the black community and the processes of forced and voluntary separation. The black communities that Raymond narrates himself as being a part of have, at critical moments in his narrative, caused him to see himself in a less than positive light. At the start of our conversation Raymond takes out his self-portrait and speeks from the margins of what he describes as his 'local black community' and strained family ties. Raymond recounts:

> *I am a Barnardo guy, from the age of two to twelve I was in Barnardos and we use to go and see my mum – me and my twin sister – twice a year in Birmingham. She tried to blend us into the black culture in Birmingham and get us involved. At twelve she actually came for us and there was no going back. We screamed, we cried, we were crying for days, yeah, non-stop. We were just being taken from one culture into another. I was the strong one because I know that this was how it was going to be and we had to accept it. It took some time but we blended into the Jamaican way of life.*
> (Raymond, 46)

Figure 26 Photo diary: Raymond's self-portrait

Raymond's extract reveals how he left substitute care at the age of twelve and returned 'home' to be with his birth mother. Raymond's testimony illuminates how a black boy leaving substitute care faces risks and uncertainties in negotiating the socially constructed positions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' that thread throughout his sense of identity. Care leavers have historically been a socially excluded group. However, ethnic minority boys and girls have faced intersecting points of oppression because of their perceived racial/ethnic difference and potential rejection by black communities due to having undergone a whitening process (Tizard et al, 1989). The effects of being in care compound Raymond's worldview and cause him to feel episodically stripped of his Caribbean identity[9], as well as any sense of individuality. As well as overcoming a culture that is notable for making people dependent upon it, the pressures to achieve within the alienating care settings; invariably undermined his sheer integrity as a black person. Stories of being 'looked after' are an extreme example of how black youngsters are caught between two cultures, but no matter how rare their occurrence, they present a portrait of negotiating identity projects. Raymond recounts how he moved through his local black community:

I only had four years with my mum before she left me stranded again. I had never heard of my aunty before, never ever. This is the thing that I'm trying to tell you. I'd never seen my aunty before, and within a week of being introduced to her I think I was dumped onto my aunty. She was part of my mum's family and it was the old Jamaican way, they shift kids and I think this was implemented upon me...God bless my aunt. My mum literally left me on the doorstep of my auntie's and through my aunty I found a room with Miss Piper. I got the room within the same week and by the following week

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[9] Tizard et al (1989) argues that black children living with white substitute carers fail to develop a positive self identity. Instead, they suffer identity confusion and develop a negative concept of self, believing or wishing that they were white. Unless they are very carefully trained, white families (and children's homes) cannot provide black children with the skills and 'survival techniques' they need for coping with racist practices in society. The children will grow up unable to relate to black people and at the same time will experience rejection by white society (see Tizard et al, 1989, pp. 437-28).

my mum left for Canada. She'd left, she digged-up, she'd sold the house and I didn't
even know this until she'd gone. (Raymond, 46)

Raymond's extract points to aspects of enculturation and speaks of his individual isolation and remoteness within the context of the black community. It highlights a place of pain, discontent, anguish, confinement, and deprivation of sorts – especially leading to becoming a young man. For Raymond, the black community represents an emotionally charged and playful space at transformative periods in his life. But the black community he entered into also presents very real challenges that Raymond committed to memory. In search of his Caribbeaness – in the absence of his parents – Raymond confronted his cultural malaise, which has centred on his feelings of displacement. Raymond's feelings of cultural fracturing are bound-up in the cultural circumstances that led Raymond to be separated from his family and black contemporaries (migration, poverty, social exclusion and so forth) combined with the ease at which his mother gave him up without cultural sanctions or disapproval. The next critical moment in Raymond's narrative of self-identity is disclosing to his son his suppressed history. Raymond states:

> *I started singing out my Barnardo background ten years ago, as another skeleton in my*
> *closet. I kept it pretty quiet. When I decided to pull the skeletons out I took my younger*
> *son up to Sunderland and told him everything. I did it so he could identify with where*
> *I've come from, and my mannerisms, and why I'm not so loving is because where I*
> *come from. It was a help for me to take him, the only embarrassment to me is why did*
> *my mum give us up? Were we an embarrassment to her because of our dad? But she*
> *still will not tell us. I have seen my dad once in my life in Finsbury Park. We were*
> *eleven at the time and only spent a weekend. So I don't know what went off, was we in*
> *the way? Was she going through hard times because she was only in one room when*
> *she came from Jamaica? I don't know if she could cope? Were we an embarrassment?*
> (Raymond, 46)

We can see from Raymond's life-testimony that there is no adequate explanation for his complex set of circumstances. Neither the Barnardo home nor his local black community can serve to validate what he has experienced. Not accepting identity categorizes that control his reality, Raymond delves deeper into his Caribbean

heritage to try and uncover the 'truth' about himself; part of this being his cultural heritage.

From this perspective, Raymond's need to connect with the Caribbean is not necessarily a rediscovery of his lost history, but instead gives clues to how he might construct a credible public black persona. At its most basic, the idea of Caribbeaness provides Raymond with a vocabulary and a strategy to negotiate and navigate an otherwise antagonistic social world, where race matters as a master label to identities. The participants who define themselves as having more than one cultural dimensions to their identities see the strategies bestowed in the idea of Caribbeaness as a distinct way of life for Jamaicans in Britain. To construct greater understanding of his own sense of Caribbean identity, Raymond, like other participants born in Britain, turns towards the black communities for communal solidarity and plays with floating black signifiers to express a imagined 'truth' about himself. Raymond illustrates how he created a sense of 'security and stability' in his Caribbean identity partially through food.

Figure 27 Photo diary: Food and identification

Raymond consciously juxtaposes his cultural biography against a mundane image of a stocked fridge to exemplify the significance of food, but more importantly the role that Jamaican food has played in his sense achieving independence. A Caribbean diet (fused with European cuisine) is central to his subjective construction of self identity. Raymond asserts:

I like my food, I am a great lover of West Indian food, and I am a great lover of juices. However, I went through a bad phase when I had my first place and owed quit a bit of rent arrears and I had nothing. I had beans, self-raising flour, cooking oil. I use to call this my emergency grub. I could make myself fried dumplings and beans. That was a learning stage, after that I thought never again am I going to result down to the bare necessitates. I thought well, the fridge and cupboards will always remain

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stocked and I was quite content after that. Although I have owed money, food has always been there, no more worries, it's a security blanket, yeah a security blanket.
(Raymond, 46)

In terms of taste, Raymond describes his fried dumpling and beans (part of a Jamaican breakfast) as 'soul food' (in a symbolic and literal sense) which forms an important part of his cultural identity. From a different set of photos Raymond recounts how he visited his birth mother and twin sister in Canada in the 1980s, after a decade apart. Raymond often alludes to the condition of Canada's Jamaican community and its positive impact upon his sense of blackness and community identity. Raymond asserts:

I could have quite easily settled in Canada, there's a different kind of black community in Canada. I was surprised by how organized the Canadian way of life was and how decent the people were. They were all working which I think they've all had to do. Funnily enough they were Jamaicans that have settled in Canada. I was very surprised by the apartments and the cleanliness, and their friendliness. The funny thing about it was that my mum had organized an apartment for me. And I thought, what! She'd not said anything to me about it. She had already organized the apartment but I had my kids back here and we'd not talked about this but this is how she has always been. She will make her mind up and then I would have to accept... (Raymond, 46)

The first trip Raymond made forms a critical moment in his narrative and resulted in him forming his most stable sense of identity as a 'traveller', or very loosely a 'nomad'. Raymond explains:

After coming back from Canada I thought I like this travelling and ever since then it's been non-stop. Any time I get the urge I will fly or just go, you know, I've just come back from Cornwall...I love it. As a traveller, not in a gypsy's sense but as an explorer it is definitely interesting. I'm happy when I'm working, supporting myself, being a Barnado's guy there's always people...staff around you, caring for your needs. I'm independent now, I like to work and I like to holiday and see different places yeah. This is my ultimate goal yeah, to keep on working and putting aside the money and go and see all those different places. I find it interesting to see different cultures ...the Spanish culture I really like, just to see how the other side gets on with life. I find the Spanish

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culture very similar to Jamaican culture. This is where we go back to slavery, the
Spanish had a lot to do with slavery, a lot of the Jamaican feel as got a lot of the
Spanish influence. They are very similar in mannerism, laid-back, lovers of good food,
the sun, and music. (Raymond, 46)

Raymond's testimony suggests a number of areas that would be instructive in terms of developing our understanding of the ways identity projects are conceptualized and navigated in the context of the diaspora. Hence, Raymond's return from Canada is marked by internally defined difficulties, readjusting to an urban black culture with a different understanding of how to act 'black'. Raymond's need to be accepted as 'black' causes him internal discomfort. Lacking a strong cultural identity, Raymond conveys in his life-testimony the need to escape the stigma constructed around both of his identities, which has triggered different critical moments in his narrative. In search of his Caribbean heritage, Raymond intentionally orientated himself towards the black community. Raymond narrates how he set out to position himself at the centre of his local black community in an attempt to feel engaged, involved, accepted, and valued. Eventually he found the whole experience too problematic, because he did not share all the same cultural habits, traditions, and opinions of his black peers; due to him being bought-up in a white environment.

Raymond testifies to feeling disheartened and let down by 'other' black men who, in his view, choose to articulate and express themselves in increasingly narcissistic ways. Thus, after two decades of immersion and struggling with the complexities of constructing a convincing black persona, Raymond narrates that he prefers to position himself at the fringes, stepping in and out as he pleases. Raymond now narrates that he embraces and intermingles Jamaican vernacular, taking traditional British coach trips to the seaside combined with holidays to the Caribbean, as well as taking part in pub culture, car boot sales and other habitual practices not performed by other black men in his community. Raymond marks the boundaries between himself and other black men in mundane everyday practices, maintaining that the boundaries he has constructed around himself provide a sense of 'privacy' and 'safety' above full integration into his local imagined community.

Raymond's extract illustrates how he uses his agency to achieve a personal sense of belonging from a personal biography constructed on a premise of abandonment and displacement. The question for Raymond, as part of the second generation, was whether to make the psychological changeover or continue in the first generation's (his mother's) effort to return to the lands of his mother's origin. Raymond's dilemma is to be born in Britain and bought up by substitute carers, and to regard himself as British first and Jamaican second. Raymond says, 'I would actually say I'm black British; I was born here, with Jamaican parentage. As a consequence, Jamaica is not considered a place to which he is destined to return. However, the image of Jamaica persists in forming his sense of 'who he is' and where he belongs. Raymond's biography reflects how children of newcomers, whose very existence symbolically destabilizes the exclusionary idea of Britishness, has sparked something new in how Jamaicaness has been (re)imagined. The British population, like the Jamaican one, is forged from successive historical migrations and cultural influences. Raymond alludes to the fact that he consciously dances between the intercultural dimensions to his identity, in order to belong in multiple sites. These dimensions form the basis to how participants construct a stable sense of self. For instance, Peter self-categorizes himself as multi-heritage, comprising of Trinidad and Tobago and English parents. He suggests, 'My experience is being part of both those cultures and living and growing in the UK. .'In addition, Dean remarks:

As children we went to integrated schools and met boys and girls from different cultures, so I never really had problems about crossing racial boundaries in terms of relationships with other people, so it hasn't been an issue with me but sometimes I did feel when I was younger that older people in my community wouldn't approve of this.
(Dean, 36)

Being a child 'looked after' continues to play a role in how Raymond constructs his cultural identity. Carrying the shame and embarrassment of his history as meant wearing multiple masks to disguise his internal fracturing. Raymond exerts social control through his contrive fiction of 'blackness'. Raymond uses his ethnic identity to bolster his self-identity, especially among whites.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analyzed extracts in which I have asked participants to reflect and discuss their self identities as black Caribbean men. Participants at 'home' and 'aboard' align themselves around a number of issues in a thousand ways with an absence of fixity, certitude, and cultural allegiances to their natal country; blurring, among other things, national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries . The opinion of most of the participants is that the Caribbean is not conceived exclusively as 'home', but neither is Britain. This matter is acute among migrant participants, who experience a duality in their sense of belonging. They testify to being drawn to two dominant cultural impulses, but ultimately exist in an unnamed space that make their cultural identities somewhat subversive and open to misinterpretation. The next chapter looks at the relationship between the body and self identity.

Chapter Five

Relationship between Body and Self-identity

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed narratives of migration and settlement in connection with crafting meaningful cultural and gender identities. I now turn to the black body as a site of 'black subjectivity' and 'self construction'. In a similar way, this chapter has aimed to explore the participant's accounts of negotiating ideas of race, disability, and gender in their construction of self-identity. This chapter examines how participants' body images are an important part of identity projects. The participants' bodies serve as an anchor to the different constructs that they use to construct their racialized and gendered 'selves'. I demonstrate how body images and experience are narrated as central tools to how black men's identities are forged, transformed, and performed. Narratives about the body and bodily issues are linked to past, present, and future identity projects. The difficulties of narrating a stable story-of-selfhood are lessened by the multiple roles 'blackness' (both internally and externally defined) plays in moulding identities. I focus upon the black public sphere where bodies have been shaped and have often been experimented upon. Thus, the first section explores how sickle cell anaemia and cancer affects Dean's and Richard's conceptualisation of self-identity, the second section considers how they negotiate the meaning of their bodies between social assimilation and exclusion within black communities.

Representations of black male bodies

In this chapter, the idea of the 'body' is been theoretically deployed using poststructuralist and social constructionist paradigms that conceptualize the 'body' as a historically loaded canvass, capable through time, resolve, and effort of producing new meaning and insight into the human condition beyond its biological truths (Connell, 1995). In *'Masculinities'*, Bob Connell, argues that 'bodies, in their own

right as bodies, do matter' and 'bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are' (Connell, 1995, pp.51- 3). The postmodern phenomenon of continually recreating oneself is intrinsically tied to how we negotiate and narrate our bodies among other features of our identities in intimate interactions, in fluid public spaces, and intertwined in fragmenting social institutions. Studies on the negotiation of identities refer primarily to the intercultural or intracultural negotiations of groups or minorities that share the same public space (Kastoryano, 1997). From this standpoint, the works of Fanon (1970), Foucault (1991), Butler (1990), Bourdieu (1977) and Connell (1995) are the most notable in theorizing the body, and body practices, as it exists in the social world. For Bourdieu, modernity constructs and commodifies the human body; this is literally the case with black bodies[10]. Bourdieu makes links between capitalism and the body. Capitalism will valorise certain types of bodies (for physical labour or, increasingly, for mental labour) and awards certain person(s) physical and or cultural capital based upon their positioning from the notions of culturally defined 'body ideals'. Using a poststructuralist paradigm, Foucault understands the body to be the primary focus and locus of power, particularly in modern society. According to Foucault, the body is continually being trained and operated on by discourse in the social fabric. Foucault uses the idea of 'Bio-politics' to describe the politics which seeks to order and shape bodies so as to make them productive and functional: productive and functional for society, so that people with disabilities, for instance, are to be placed outside the 'norms' of the social and discursively disembodied in a divisive process to normalize the fiction of the able-bodied.

Following in the tradition of Foucault, Butler's (1990) work sketches a picture where 'bodies' can be seen to be purely discursive productions. She emphasises that we all perform identities through constant repetition of the identity, but since we cannot point to just a single performance the truth of identities lies in the difference between the individual performances (in other words, between the 'imperative' and/or 'performative'). From a different perspective, Connell captures the performance of

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[10] Descendents of African slaves are seeking reparation and a formal apology from the nations and private parties that profited from enslavement of the sons and daughters of Africa at the UN 2001 conference on Racism.

'acting out' masculinities through the intentional and/or unintentional social relations we conduct within social institutions, which he terms 'bodily reflexive practices' (Connell, 1995, p. 61). From Connell's perspective, bodies are seen to inform social agency and in turn shape courses of social conduct. His work argues that bodies are both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forms the structures through which bodies are constituted and defined. As men, when bodily capacities deviate from the norm the idea of acting out -or 'performing' - masculine identities can be used as an analytical tool to help capture critical moments in narratives of self-identity. Ill-health and physical disability produce ruptures in how self-identity is negotiated and instituted.

I have deployed this broad but persuasive conceptual approach to the 'body' because it does not discount the participants' different social histories in the telling of their bodies. It allows an insight into social structures that direct and/or shape how maleness is experienced and how culturally specific constructs of the hyper-masculine and overly signified black male body confronts black Caribbean men's self-identities. Participants prioritise critical moments in their life-testimony when they have experienced dilemmas with their bodies and body image. Most, if not all, the participants acknowledge the preoccupation of Westernised men (of all ethnicities and/or races) with sculpturing their physical appearance to achieve new cultural ideals of 'body beautiful'. They also all mentioned the necessity of accomplishing an holistic balance of mind, body, and spirit, linked also with the knowledge that black male bodies are sites of 'fascination', 'imagination', and 'regulation' of white society (Segal, 1995). In spite of the similarities in the participants' bodies and their shared male interests, individual particularities are not erased. Each participant is unique in how they conceptualise and narrate stories of their body, even though we are taught to think of a one true masculinity which proceeds from men's bodies (Connell, 1995, p.45); the accounts of the research participants suggests otherwise. Most participants' narratives indicate how subjectivity precedes the body, altering how they perceive and engage with their bodies, in certain cases to transgress rigid caricatures but also to accomplish hegemonic standards.

Studies have shown how factors of aging, disability, sexual orientation, ill-health, intense manual labour, and so on, impact on men's self-identities. Studies show a noticeable absence of black male voices in discussions on and about the body. The terms 'triple jeopardy' or 'multiple hazards' (Blakemore et al, 1994, p.40) applie here as a metaphor to indicate the intersecting levels of disadvantage that arise (at least in part) from bodily issues affecting some black men. Issues of race, ethnicity, gender and class intersect at the level of the body. The participants indicate in their life-testimonies the cultural dynamics that place them at a disadvantage, and the highly elaborate coping strategies used to mobilize their identities by the manipulation of their bodies and demeanour. Their concerns with being discursively and symbolically disembodied are linked to a society and to black communities obsessed with constructs of the 'body beautiful' and 'hyper-masculine performances'. Participants recognize that at critical moments in their lives they have felt open to being multiply 'othered' due to outward perceptions that they cannot accomplish or enact gender scripted roles that meet different cultural values of being a 'man'. Therefore, to express themselves through their bodies in ways other than in notions of normality is to court public ridicule, disapproval, or at worst alienation.

Drawing primarily on the life-testimonies of Richard and Dean, this section sets out critical moments (arrived at by the participants and myself as researcher) that are indicative of reflexive understandings of the participant's self-image as it relates to his body. My intentions are not to dichotomize discussion of the participant's life-testimonies. Discussions of both participants' critical moments are interwoven in order to expose points of commonality and divergence in bodily experiences. Through their narrated accounts participants convey stories of 'playing masculine' rather than simply 'being masculine' at critical moments in their lives; arising from or caused by changes in their perceptions of their bodies and body image. Participants highlight how such changes have affected their behaviour and attitudes, and have resulted in new cultural alignments and points of identification.

How ill-health and disability affects body-images

The following life-testimonies detail critical moments in both Dean's and Richard's lives where they have experienced intersecting levels of oppression, due to their race and disabilities, that have caused me to identify them as multiple marginalized. I met Dean following a recruitment exercise at a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered black public workers forum. A co-worker passed on the details of the study and I was approached by Dean. At the time of the interviews, Dean is , thirty seven, a father of two multi-heritage daughters and in an interracial marriage. He is employed as an Equality Adviser for a City Council. His role and responsibilities are to help develop policies and strategies to make sure all the services they deliver are equally accessible to people whether they are black, white, disabled, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, young or old, and so forth. Dean defines himself as an 'African' (although he is of Jamaican parentage) and describes his African sense of masculinity as being caring, exhibiting inner and quiet confidence. He also feels like a first class citizen but does not feel that he needs to get into fusses, fights, arguments or shout to assert himself, and he adopts a clean living lifestyle.

Dean's narrative of his body and body image centres upon his experience of sickle cell anaemia. His life-testimony illustrates how interwoven and intrinsic normalizing fictions of the able-bodied man feature in his daily life and self-conceptualization as a disabled black man. In reality, both statuses are not discrete but are positioned differently within the 'ideology of masculinity' (Thompson, 1993). This is a discursive construct which negates and denies the question of becoming in Daniel's self-identity. This is complicated further in Dean's case by the overly-signified black male body, which makes him prone to experiencing his body in a negative way because of the constant reference to black men's bodily strength, toughness, and sporting dominance. Sickle cell anaemia is a medical condition that affects the red blood cells, which contain a special protein called haemoglobin that carries oxygen from the lungs to all parts of the body (when it is working right). Dean suffers from

anaemia; this in turn can lead to a stabbing pain according to Dean, and can cause damage to his organs. Dean is at risk of damage to his liver, kidney, lungs, heart and spleen. These severe attacks are known as 'crises'. Death can be a result. Dean is only able to work under suitable conditions; he needs regular medical attention, particularly following crises.

Figure 28 Photo diary: 'The Chemist'

If I like it or not chemist, doctors, and medications are a major part of my life...taking medication is like taking food.   (Dean, 37)

As a consequence, special thought is given to strenuous exercise, family planning, suitable types of employment, housing and heating, which are all factors that impact upon Dean's quality of life. In other words, sickle cell affects ever sphere in his life. The onset of crises in adulthood means activities Dean would normally perform in his daily life, such as dressing, eating, toileting, managing money, preparing meals and so on, cannot be completed without assistance. Thus, one way Dean experiences his body and its capacities through being dependent on care from his immediate family and substitute carers when he is unable to care for himself. For instance, cookery is one of Dean's favourite activities but he relies heavily upon his family when he lacks the physical strength, or in crises. Dean comments:

Figure 29 Photo diary: 'Cooking Pot'
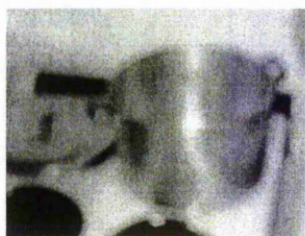
That pot had just been washed. I was cooking for a change doing Ackee and Saltfish that day. One of the rare times I do the cooking. I like cooking but I find that I don't have the energy to do it a lot. I'm talking about the stamina. When I finish work and come home I'm usually shattered and I wish I had the energy to stand up in the kitchen and do these big wonderful meals.   (Dean, 37)

In the extract above Dean testifies to how he perceives his body as fragile, which threatens his sense of independence, a building block to masculine identity. Dean's

sense of masculine identity is constructed, at least in part, within the limits of his bodily capacity. This affects his self-image and self-esteem. Dean comments:

> *At thirty-seven I've always been a bit small for my age, I was always really skinny. I always looked younger than my age, I wouldn't say I was small, I was tall often taller than my peers but looked really young, do you know what I mean. I was dead skinny, I was always conscious of being dead skinny. I don't know if it caused me any complexes but it was always something on the top of my mind...anything physical, physicality and you know, what I was capable of doing and what I wasn't capable of doing, and what I looked like to other people as well. Later on in my life I got it into my head that I was quite a handsome person even though I was skinny, and didn't mind it so much. Certainly as a young man I would have wanted to be a lot bigger than I was.*   (Dean, 37)

The archetypal Jamaican male is perceived as having a good looking face, a straight nose, a cool or smooth complexion, a small mouth, and are neatly or smartly dressed and tall (see Miller, 1969, p. 363). Dean's physical appearance conformed to most, if not all of these characteristics. In spite of this Dean was unable during his adolescence to cultivate a positive self-image. He was taught at an early age to be conscious of his body shape, size, weight and physical attributes. With a body that doesn't 'measure up', Dean learnt pretty quickly what his local culture wants from boys and men. In reality, not every able bodied black male matches up to the cultural ideals, so members of black communities have in the main been quick to incorporate men of all shapes and sizes into dominant cultural narratives of masculinity: these serve to universally raise self-esteem. For instance, slender men are called 'mawga' whereas fat men are called 'fatton', but each term is used in different contexts to imply 'otherness' or not. Dean's feelings of 'otherness' is reinforced in wider society. In contemporary British culture the belief that a man can be slender or heavy weight and desirable are constantly challenged by constructs of 'body beautiful' that see very slender and heavy men constructed as abnormal. The present contextualization of the 'body beautiful' carries the ideal of the male body as rigid, hard, and masculine (Easthope, 1986). Within this culture, having a visible or invisible disability is also viewed negatively. The current cultural 'norm' or ideal is unattainable for most men.

In seeking to cultivate archetypal bodies, therefore, men are quite literally embodying cultural values that reinforce their difference. Dean goes on to narrate how he felt different from other boys of his age:

> *It's hard to talk about the way it affects you, especially as children, sickle cell is a thing I didn't feel open to discuss at school, but I've always had a close group of friends who I've discussed it with because if you get ill you want people to know. So with close people I've always been able to be open to my illness and what my capabilities are...I can't run as fast as everyone else, and you can't stay out late playing football in the freezing cold like everybody else, and its good for your friends to understand that...so you know, you know I have for necessary reasons shared that with some people, but I have felt unable to share it with a lot of people. I think I probably worked harder at school to substitute properly for what I couldn't necessarily achieve physically.*
> (Dean, 37)

The extract above is the critical moment in Dean's narrative, when his identity as a sickle cell sufferer was kept secret from his peers in order for him to fit in. Street football is a community production that sustains friendships and structures performances among boys. However, Dean remained distant from his local street theatre because he felt unable or unwilling to share his illness. The next critical moment in the narrative of his life centres upon Dean's relationship with his younger sister and their shared experience of sickle cell. Dean describes a photo showing himself and his sister as children:

Figure 30 Personalised album: Sibling Support

This picture of me and my sister was when we were children. I think it was a time in our lives that we were really close because we were close in age and to be honest, we've been close in a lot of ways, mainly physically because we went to the same school and all that kind of stuff, and we both suffer from sickle cell anaemia. There are six of us but Maxine and I and one of our other brothers suffer from sickle cell anaemia. So we often had to go to the clinic together to get our blood tested, and when we got sick we all got sick, if one got chickenpox we all got chickenpox, and we all at to be in hospital together with three beds lined up, next to each other and all

these kind of rubbish. So that was Maxine and unfortunately Maxine died at the beginning of this year at the age of thirty-four. So that was a major tr,y and I really miss Maxine, she's been a major part of my life, even thou she's my younger sister she behaves like my older sister and I always wanted an older sister because I used to kind of envy my friends with do older sisters. Older sisters seem to be good, do you know want I mean, they just gave you things, they gave you money, bought you sweets and take you out. I had older brothers, they were neither use nor ornament and they still are to be honest; even up to this day. One of my brothers bullied me a lot........he would continue to do so if he had the opportunity, but Maxine....I think we had some great times. I think this is probably when I was just starting school and Maxine hadn't started school yet, so we were really close at that age, really close at that age.
(Dean, 37)

In the above extract Dean constructs sickle cell as a master label and mediator to identities within his family, which serves to normalize his experience of sickle cell anaemia. Dean explains how he became the focal point of bullying by an older brother. His bodily fragility and age positioned him in the lower strata in the family pecking order. This type of bullying within the dynamism of the family undermined Dean's ability to forge a positive self-image and structured the sibling power relations that followed him into his adulthood. Dean would still be an adult victim of bullying if he had not renegotiated the terms of his relationship with his older brother. In the following extract Dean reflects upon his bodily fragility and his daily dance with death. To explain this Dean looks to the specifics of his sister's death. Dean states:

We have full blown sickle cell, so we spent a lot of time in hospital. Maxine actually died as a result of the sickle cell virus, she died of complications. She had an infection which took her into crisis, the infection got worse her body could not fight it, her immune system disappeared because or blood cells kept splitting apart and she just couldn't cope, and she kept getting one infection after the other after the other while she was in hospital. When she went into hospital I think she died about three weeks after she went in. When she went in at first it seemed like a usual sickle cell crises, but we are aware of our mortality as sickle cell suffers. And I'm aware that anytime I go into hospital it could be the last time I go in, or last time to come out so I do anything I can do to avoid it. So me, Maxine, and Peter our relationship is about our health, how well

we are doing or not, do you know what I mean....we are getting sick, recovering from sickness, and things like that. So that has always been a major part of our lives.

Sickle cell is an inherited disorder from Dean's mother and father[11]. This next critical moment in his narrative of self-identity draws upon Dean's school portrait, which symbolically represents for Dean his special relationship with his father. This photo is cherished by Dean because it reminds him how his deceased father perceived him as a 'positive person'; but more importantly it suggests a fictional moment of 'normality' which serves as a yardstick for him to measure his bodily appearance. Dean goes on to explain:

Figure 31 Personalised Album: School portrait

I like this photograph because my dad had this photograph – I think he had a smaller version of this – later on when I became, I think 20 or 21 I started getting really ill with my sickle cell. When I was a child it affected me in different ways, but, you know I use to get painful crises once or twice a year, but when I was twenty-one or something I started getting crises, sickle cell crises every few weeks and months in hospital on a regular basis. Everyone used to have a laugh and say hospital was my second home and all this kind of stuff, and it was in all fairness. Where is Dean? He's in hospital, So one time my dad bought this picture in, I was at death's door and he said this is how you ought to be looking, he didn't actually say it in that phrase, and ohm he kind of bought it in to give me something to aim for. I don't know if he thought I was giving up but three or four times I've been in hospital people have wondered if I was coming out or not. They use to have these big prayer meetings and they had the nurses praying and everything. I think this was one of those low periods and he'd bought it in ....he liked that picture. My dad actually died in 1991, a year after I got married he had a heart attack one year, and had a following heart attack the next year and dead as a result of that second heart attack, but yeah, I think I like this picture because he liked that picture. If he didn't like it I don't think I

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[11] Sickle cell anaemia is called a recessive condition because you must have two copies of the sickle haemoglobin gene to have the disorder. Therefore, the genes the baby gets will depend on genes carried by its parents. If you carry one copy of the gene you can pass it on to your children and not suffer from it yourself. If both parents have the sickle cell trait there is a one in four chance that any given child be born with sickle cell anaemia.

would be interested in it. I hate school pictures usually, do you know what I mean, but
there you go. (Dean, 37)

The next critical moment describes Dean's sense of mortality and threads of interconnectedness with the next generation of males in his family. Dean testifies to his capacities for biological and social fathering.

I love Joe [my nephew] to bits, he's 19yrs now, and he's just had a birthday two days ago. He lives in Oxford...Williams's son, my biggest brother William. William is five years older than me. Useless dad, he used to be a great dad you know, he used to do gardens and all this kind of stuff but then he found the world of work and he split up with his partner Ann which is Joe's mum Ann and then found it really difficult to have a relationship with Joe. He's the only male to continue the family name, so do you know what I mean. Let's just go along with this theory that Joe is important. No I don't really see him like that but you know. Children give your life a lot of meaning it would be nice to have more, you always tell yourself you cannot afford more but I would like to have hundreds of Jenny's to love after – I just haven't got the energy. I get a big satisfaction out of fatherhood. (Dean , 37)

Dean's extracts illustrate how sickle cell can negatively affect black men's self-identity. Critical moments in Dean's narrative have undermined his sense of self-identity and were focused upon peer group acceptance and sibling bullying. However, parental and sibling support was present to raise his self-esteem. What is more, marriage, fatherhood, and being an uncle are central components to how he constructs a stable self-identity. His ill-health causes him to look at his narrative from a survivor's viewpoint and he appreciates the role his family plays in making his life feel worthwhile. He indicates that he feels defined as a marginalized person when he is open about his bodily experiences; that is, he is defined as a special group seen as apart from other black men.

HOW BLACK MALE BODIES EXIST BETWEEN SOCIAL ASSIMILATION AND EXCLUSION

The next participant reflects upon how his body image changed as a result of bowel cancer. I met Richard through a mutual friend and our meetings occurred either in my home or at the participant's home. At the time of the interviews Richard is , thirty-six and is employed as a computer writer. His main role is building computers and technical support, including support to the sales and purchasing department. He has worked for the same company for the last six years. Richard defines himself as a gay man and an absentee father to a teenage son, but nevertheless a central feature in his godson's and nephew's lives. Richard attaches importance to other people's opinions of him and intentionally courts public attention through body art, hair dye, body piercing, dressing-up and so forth. Richard defines his ethnicity/nationality as British Afro-Caribbean.

Figure 32 Personalised album: Richard's Self Portrait

I wouldn't describe myself as English, but British. I like the term Afro-Caribbean because it identifies both the Africa and Caribbean, and British because I was born here. So I am comfortable with British Afro-Caribbean. I don't want to lose my association with Africa or the Caribbean. The Caribbean is there, the family stuff, and Africa is where my ancestors were from. I know there was a time when I was growing up and someone called me an African......or a Caribbean person an African....they saw it as an insult. I see myself as Afro-Caribbean. (Richard, 36)

Richard is a child of Jamaican migrants, and in his life-testimony he illustrates how differences in perception, experience and culture caused a plurality in his sense of belonging. He attributes this in part to his bodily experiences. The first critical moment in his narrative of self-identity, described below, centres on a set of self-portraits. These put into pictures the story of a biological event, which served as a catalyst to Richard coming-out (to himself) as a gay man and which caused him to change his attitude towards his body. At the age of twenty-four, Richard testifies that he was diagnosed with bowel-cancer and began a series of therapies. Richard describes the set of circumstances that defined his identity at the time of the diagnosis:

Figure 33 Personalised album: ANC T-shirt

This photo would be just before I went into hospital for the first time for cancer. The T-shirt I warn was making a statement. Apartheid was still there and I felt that the British government at the time didn't want sanctions and all that but most black people believed that sanctions would have helped. I was working at ohm Loom......I started there in 1984, probably at that time I was shop steward. I wanted to move into management but I found it difficult to get on supervisor training courses. I felt it was because of my colour. From school, Loom was my first permanent job. (Richard, 36)

Above, Richard draws together distinct cultural references as he pieces together the social context behind his experience of cancer. Leading up to the diagnosis he situates his narrative in a racialized local and global context in order to illustrate his 'life-politics' (Giddens, 1991) at the time. Richard understands that being seen, and treated unjustly, as a black person (a member of a culturally excluded group) informed his initial experience of being a 'patient'. His body image comprises of three dimensions, consisting of his blackness, sexual orientation, and cancer. His blackness is narrated as the central mediator to his self-identity at this time; symbolised in his anti-apartheid t-shirt. Richard refers to himself as a 'black person' first and a 'patient' second, triggering him to engage with, question, challenge the formulation of his treatment, and empower himself in the process due to a fear of more unjust and unfair treatment. There are other threads to this critical moment that resulted in an alteration in how Richard sees himself. Richard went on to explain the unexpected death of his boyfriend:

That's the time I had mi ohm operation, [see figure 34] I was on chemotherapy then I had mi break away from chemo. I was getting eight months paid leave. This lad I'd been seeing (I'd been seeing him off and on) he became involved in drugs and things, but if I wasn't focusing upon my health and battle with cancer and so forth, I would have noticed he was crying out for help but at the time I couldn't see it. Maybe I should have done but that's the only one time in my life when I wish I could turn the clock backwards. Somebody's life was lost. (Richard, 36)

While Richard was fighting to halt his body's biological decay, his boyfriend brought about his own untimely death by suicide. This is the definitive critical moment in Richard's narrative of his self-identity. His experience of cancer and events happening on the periphery caused him to see his body from a different vantage point. During this period in his life, the central concern identified by Richard was with his own survival. His own health needs and wellbeing prevented him from hearing a cry for help and caused him to associate the sentiment of 'guilt' rather than 'joy' with his cancer treatment. Richard's silent grief for a secret lover is further complicated by the stigma and messy emotions involved with suicide. He faced two cultural taboos that prevented him from outwardly voicing how and what he was feeling. His despair was instead silent and gingerly expressed through the awkwardness he felt towards his own body. Richard's realization of the vulnerabilities attached to his body (that is, the inability to practice the full range of bodily activities usually expected of a positive young man) and the death of his boyfriend galvanized Richard to re-evaluate his life. This critical moment in his narrative brought about Richard's decision to 'bruck-out' (break-out) and develop a strategic approach to his life; taking into account his new expected lifespan and sexual orientation. He moved beyond the secure cultural barriers and rules of his faith and ethnically-defined communities that had governed his way of life. He rejected most of the rigid body regimes he had learnt within his local culture and started imagining his body image anew. This new image saw a greater emphasis placed on his sexual identity. Richard's next critical moment soon followed and it indicates how he started to reorient himself as a black person away from the black community following his first trip to Jamaica. Richard states:

Figure 34 Personalised album: Respite from Chemo

This is when I went to Jamaica with the family for the first time in '94. They'd been saving up and when I was in hospital on chemo (I started chemo in 91) and when everything had settled my mum wanted everyone to go to Jamaica. I heard my parents talking about it and I always wanted to visit the country where my parents were born, the country they spoke highly of, and I wanted to know why they were still staying in the UK. I known my dad moved back now but he could have moved back earlier. I had to hide parts of myself I could not be open [about sexuality] as I am in my life in

general. I feel partially Jamaican, I don't fell completely Jamaican. I wasn't born there
and lived there long enough to call myself a Jamaican. Being a Jamaican is about the
whole different lifestyle over there... (Richard, 36)

At a crucial time in his recovery, Richard's first experience of Jamaican society caused him to feel incomplete and marginalized. This was due to his inability to reveal who he really was because of local taboos around homosexual practices, coupled with the disquieting unease towards sick bodies. Doing otherwise would have compromised how his family were perceived and treated back 'home'. From this cultural context, Richard suggests that his slender body did not so much belong to him but dwelled rather in the restricted social patterns and constraints of Jamaican society; from which he felt increasingly alienated. The island's strict cult of black hegemonic masculinity restricted how he wanted to move, adorn, articulate, and experience his body. This critical moment in his narrative created a deep sense of urgency to transform his body image – mainly through clothing at this stage – and emerge from the margins to project a more positive appearance. In the following critical moment, Richard goes on to explain how he had struggled to maintain his self-image back 'home' in Britain as a 'native' but also as a child of migrants.

At the forefront of Richard's life-testimony is his social experience of becoming a 'black cancer patient'; it served as a catalyst for him to address the question of his difference. In the background, the experience of being black and gay causes him the most amount of annoyance and trouble inhabiting his body. Richard's demeanour serves to disguise the 'truth' about who he was before he developed cancer. He narrates that his appearance reflects a contrived fiction to pacify watchful eyes. This multiplicity in his identity creates the possibilities for Richard to navigate the either/or dichotomies of 'blackness'/whiteness, masculinity/femininity, gay/straight, and professional/street. It also helped him to experience his body differently by integrating different referents for his own bodily standards. He manipulates his 'bodily demeanour' (Giddens, 1991) in order to reflect an acceptable outward appearance but also to subvert dominant hegemonic representations, which he feels contradict how he sees himself. Richard modifies and adapts his appearance, most notably on his facial

surface. He uses techniques to change his facial appearance, including the use of coloured eye lens, the absence or stylization of facial hair, and elaborate hairstyles.

Figure 35 Personalised Album: 'Post-Cancer'

When I was at school I was told I had lovely eyes...I've got very seductive eye. Eyes can do a hundred and one things. I also used to wear glasses. I use my eyes for various moods and things, whether I've got lens in or not I used my eyes to attract attention, scrawl, and to get a smile from somebody's face to get a reaction. And I think being black having different colour lens in you get more attention, its more striking; especially white lens.   (Richard 36)

Although, Richard works upon the surface areas of the body, his transformation is not restricted to his physical appearance but is also reflected in other bodily practices

I'm tired of seeing negative images of black people. I'm trying to get people to see beyond the typecast of black people, I'm always conscious, especially in public how I conduct myself because I want anybody who meets me to think positive, positive image of this black guy. There is a lot of nastiness around black people. I know some people get themselves into trouble with the law, are disrespectful, and when you do all those things and you are black it gets more noticed. I never wanted to be seen as a stereotypical black guy, I wanted to be taken more seriously, people saw me basically as a nice lad, smiling, didn't get in trouble with the police, and that I could do more and achieve more. I didn't really distance myself at that early stage, I think my mum and dad had the shop for about two or five years by this time so everybody knew us and I saw myself as an example to other black people my age. Black people can hold jobs, we can own our own business and it's not the case that we have to work for somebody else all the time. My dad had respect, but saying that he would tell kids off when they were doing wrong, he wouldn't just sit around and let kids smash windows or whatever, he would get up and say something or he would be more forceful.   (Richard, 36)

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This extract from Richard's narrative captures how he performed existing between assimilation and exclusion. In his view, he was respected because he stayed on the right side of the law, he showed respect, had a happy appearance, and was seen as an achiever. In reality, Richard's public face was a production. Richard's history has been created within and outside his local culture; in closets, in biological fathering, in his family, in his work, and where he has lived. Richard's identity is multi-dimensional. As a consequence, he is able to anchor his histories and experiences through his body. He often wears a mixed assortment of masks (publicly and privately), trying to pass as something other than himself and to get over, to cope with, his in-between-ness. Richard's life-testimony suggests how his body has been tactically re-appropriated through subjective acts to articulate or mask components of who he is. Bodies do matter. Bodies do not only reflect the social fabric and chronicle the ebbs and flows of our unique histories, they are also essential aspects of 'strategies of identity'; as sites of scarification, empowerment, and possibly starting points for something new. Richard's experiences of wearing multiple masks have been created silently, loudly, playfully and traumatically, through his body and sometimes under watchful eyes. Richard has experienced inside and outside anomalies to his body that have heightened his awareness of performing 'masculinities' and 'blackness'. This has caused him to subvert (and at other times play with) sensationalistic and fetishised representations of the black male body. Below, Richard reflects critically upon his distancing from the black community in his adolescence:

> *I don't feel conscious being black, I don't think colour is an issue really, nowadays everyone gets treated the same. When I was living in Clifton I would say ninety-eight percent were white, it was a white housing estate. So moving into the Meadows was a very mixed community, I didn't feel out of place growing up in a large (white) estate. People know me round there. I believe I would have lost some of my black identity if I would have stayed there. There were only two or three black families in the whole of this large estate, my very close friends were white and the other black families. One of the lads was in the same year as me so obviously we hung around together. But outside school I was mostly with my white friends. I didn't experience any from of racism from my close friend. The only time I experienced any real racism was -.I'm not quite sure if it was racism as such. It was*

in the early 80s you had the skinheads, mods, and rockers and that kind of fashion
young kids identified with. I like mi soul, blues and early black American 50s music,
so I identified with the mods. At the time, I can remember arguing with my friends
who were into rock and roll about who was the so-called king of rock and roll. I
would say it was Little Richard and they would say Elvis. If Elvis were black then it
wouldn't have been. That was the first time I had an argument based upon race and
I realised that colour can affect who you are and how people see you. It doesn't
matter how good you are, but it's whether the system and people accept you. That's
probably when I first realized that ohm colour can affect how you are treated in life.
(Richard, 36)

As an 'assimilation response' (Bhui, 2002) (or compensatory strategy) Richard testifies to have constantly juggled his bodily appearance, covering-up and disguising 'unacceptable' cultural differences (such as his Afro, thick Jamaican accent, Jamaican folk beliefs and attitudes, and so forth) when in the company of white people in the hope of increasing his chances of being included. The company Richard shares affects how he defines himself. He retained links with the black community mainly through members of his family. In the above critical moment in his narrative, the self-defined choice for Richard was to both retain those black components and moral differences (which he calls superstitious mumbo-jumbo) that validated his cultural identity, but to remain socially excluded, or to modify those differences in the hope of being more easily socially included by white people. Whereas other participants experienced their social exclusion as a 'normal' part of life (Bhui, 2002), Richard often chooses to disguise his differences to overcome his social exclusion. Bhui (2002) suggests that the strategy of assimilation involves two parallel process: firstly, 'a modification or elimination of those cultural differences that the mainstream deems to be unacceptable'; and secondly, 'an adoption of the mainstream's values, attitudes and practices' (Bhui, 2002, p. 76). Dean, whose narrative was considered in the pervious section, reflects upon a critical moment in his adolescence when he attempted to assimilate (into the (able bodied world) but struggled to accomplish a meaningful social presence:

And as I got older and became an adolescent it became more of an issue, you're
less able to share anything that's not perfect about yourself. A lot of people,

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especially young people with sickle cell, and I was no different, don't like to take tablets, it's a sign of weakness and it's a sign of illness, etc. You try and forget about your illness as much as possible because it does not fit in with your perception of what you should be doing as a young person or as a young man. You just try and do everything your friends do as a young person, so you will go to a night club, drink as much alcohol as you can afford, if you're working class you will properly be walking home from the night club because you haven't got enough money to take a taxi and you will be wearing the thinnest clothes possible because its in fashion and you are just increasing your risk of getting ill. But when you get older you become more philosophical about it and you kind of realize that you are not apart from the rest of humanity, most of humanity is suffering from one infliction or another. (Dean, 37)

Richard and Dean illustrate how male bodies are tools used to mediate one's way through society and how 'blackness' is intrinsic to this mediation. Theorists such as Fanon (1970), Gilroy (1997) and Rose (1998) identify how 'black skin' carries some potent meanings beyond its surface reading, to the degree that some black people can and do feel 'imprisoned' (Gilroy, 1987, p. 226) or 'trapped' (Fanon, 1986) within their skin and struggle to escape the biologization of their socially and politically constructed subordination. Bhui convincingly argues 'our skin will always remind us of the truth of our being and we will know in our hearts that we will first and foremost always be seen as black and may never be accepted on truly equitable terms' (Bhui, 2002, p. 76). Neither participant can escape the reality that blackness has served as a master signifier to their bodies. It is left to them to negotiate how they reflect this category called 'blackness'. In terms of representation their bodies are a constant reminder of their social division within black communities and how they are caught inbetween assimilation and exclusion in the wider community.

In their life-testimonies, both participants indicate how they have used their bodies to constitute and construct subject positions that have shielded them from the peculiar hazards of being caught between assimilation and exclusion. Many people assume that the socially excluded identity of the black man is determined and rigidly fixed by the time they have developed their adult body. This hypothesis suggests that the 'body' must precede 'subjectivity'. I have argued that black subjectivity precedes the

'body'. Black bodies are visibly politicized and disenfranchised bodies. Although theorists suggest that we live in an era where the body is thought of, not only as a political instrument, but also a personal project its meaning can be manipulated and performed in a multitude of different ways and can still be constrained as object and agent. For example, at critical moments in Dean's and Richard's narratives they have been culturally prevented from being whom they really are (Bhui, 2002). Through acts of black agency participants creatively make choices and craft new meaning from their bodily experiences that shape their social and self-identities. Both participants seize upon the cultural currency in the signifier 'blackness' with the knowledge that self-identity is negotiable both inside and outside black communities.

Bodies in transition

In their life-testimonies, Richard and Dean indicate that they take a fluid approach to constructing their bodily appearance, and to bodily reflexive practices. When asked, participants' implie how they have intentionally crafted their bodies and demeanour at crucial moments in their lives to evade being invisible, disliked, or even hated. For example, Richard testified to episodes before his illness when he felt drawn to the 'street' but got himself into difficulty with other black men (for instance, rude boys and Christians) who read his bodily practice as being not black enough or not straight acting. Richard described how his appearance was frequently commented upon and undermined by neighbours who thought he was 'hightitity' (that is, a bit 'stuck-up') and a 'face-man' (namely, a pretty-boy who should be dating plenty of girls). As a direct result of their observation of Richard's self-indulgence with clothing and his looks , problems developed in the negotiation of the 'true' meaning of his cultural identity, putting his sense of 'blackness' – and by association his masculinity – in jeopardy.

Edley et al (1995) note how decisions are routinely made about a person's masculinity on the basis of certain arbitrary social and bodily clues and signs. Rather than being taken seriously, Richard was instead seen as a bit of a sissy and/or feminine. 'Feminine' black men are especially open to being ridiculed or ostracised. Before his

diagnosis Richard testifies that he had kept a close spatial proximity to his local black community as a way of preserving his anonymity. Thus, venturing momentarily onto the 'street' is perceived as an extension to this process as it is a space where his shared social history should have provided a veil of invisibility to mask his internally felt difference. However, conscious of the effects of negative labelling, the dress codes and empty gesturing, Richard suggests that he felt troubled and that he could not entirely conform to the standards of the 'street'. This does not suggest negative self image, but hints at why he might have felt awkward or uncertain imagining himself as part of a collective identity based primarily upon shared racial/ethnicity attributes. More often than not, Richard narrates a positive sense of self, but less frequently a positive racial reference group orientation (Baldwin et al, 1991). The assumption that self and racial/ethnic identities are necessarily interwoven and interdependent is not always obvious.

...at one point I couldn't really identify with being...with my own community..., hanging out together on a social level. I hung around with some black guys who expected me to hang around in a gang but I didn't fit in. I had Asian friends as well so sometimes we'd be having an argument and I would stick up for whoever but they expected me to be on their side regardless; even if their point of view was wrong or whatever.
(Richard, 36)

By the end of his interviews, Richard's black skin is not narrated as an essential part of who he is. Rather, he haphazardly juggles his idea of racial/ethnic identification. In order to be accepted in wider society, Richard modifies his outward appearance of 'blackness' and might well experience his life in 'fragments' (Bauman, 1992). Richard's life-testimony illustrates how he relentlessly addresses the question of his 'blackness' as something separate, but at the same time as part of how he sees himself. In a localized context he also testifies to adjusting his spatial and emotional proximity to black institutions (for example, church, imagined community, peers, and so on) and black social patterns to purposely hybridise himself; to absorb into his daily gender practice those bodily aesthetics and cultural idioms that indicate his identification with Britain, at the risk of being rejected by his black peers.

Richard is skilled in subjectively forging new meanings that best represent his body, bridging hip-hop, R&B, dance hall, and mainstream British street styles. Richard's body image intentionally bridges images that originate from inside and outside his local black community. On one level, this allows him to avoid undesired social labelling and rejection by both sides. He seems comfortable in his multiple contextual identities. However, it does not diminish the difficulties of living with cancer or the fear of its return and the difficulties of existing between assimilation and exclusion.

> In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of uncertainty. Fanon, 1970, p. 78

Richard's past and present identity projects coexist and have had to be navigated and negotiated in a multicultural and/or intercultural context. His local black community retains a structuring force that shapes the collective identity. Cultural identity is a community production, defining the limits of recognition and the terms of belonging as it is materialized through bodily practices and aesthetics. Richard draws upon cultural impulses that come from outside his black community. As a result, the challenge for Richard in crafting his self-identity has been how to consolidate the different cultural influences into his bodily appearance. Usually beset with narrow constructs of the black male body (for instance, as uncomplicatedly pure, youthful, and heterosexual) Richard identifies critical moments in his narrative when he has experienced performing identity projects at the intersection of different worlds; worlds that often clash and increase the potential of rejection.

Acting as a black man on the 'street', Richard testifies that he manoeuvred himself skilfully around other racialized bodies and seized upon techniques and tools that matched his broadening sense of identity. His broadening identity was kept secret from black peers because it did not fit easily into the normalization strategies adopted on his local streets. As a result, Richard speaks of concealing, transforming, and

integrating the emerging intercultural components of his past identity as part of a secret projected identity. By extension, the reality of the intercultural 'self' is that black components are retained (even when modified) and remain part of bodily schemas and part of masculine repertoires required to sustain personal dignity and self-respect. Richard's departure from the 'street' did not mean a total abandonment of his 'blackness'. That would have served to silence and continually marginalize social and cultural aspects of his body. Richard's refusal to be defined by the 'street' marked how he started to interrogate and how he played with the notion of 'blackness'.

On a personal level, Richard's difficulty with centring his identity purely around the black community is eloquently spelt out in his relationship to his clothed body.

Figure 36 Personalised Album: 'Clothes'
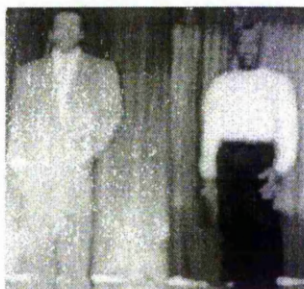
Even here its two mes really, there's the serious professional image, and then there's the go lucky, manic type. That's the casual and smart stuff I would be wearing around this time. I was going to various interviews and looking to move from Looms. That was just a suit I was wearing at the time I was planning to present a professional image but also at the weekends and during the evenings I wanted people to see me more seriously, to take me more seriously. Sometimes I wore those outfits even though I bought them especially for interviews. Sometimes that does cross over; I like to be comfortable, I'm not comfortable being totally serious in that professional image all the time. Sometimes I like to just blend in and not stand out too much, but sometimes I really want to stand out: personality as well as my clothes, and how I present myself. I just change to reflect that. The thing is I try to appeal to loads of people at the same time, do you know what I mean. It's like when I'm in the Meadows with the black guys my Jamaican patois will come out, whatever. When I'm with my English/white friends I speak Standard English. Before I came out the way I dressed was rather...I wouldn't say risky....what I can say is well dressed. I wear stuff to get attention to turn heads. When I came out I decided to tone myself down but now I dress for who I am or what kind of statement I'm trying to make. When I go out I will put on a

shirt, not a tie and shirt, but a smart shirt, sometimes I will dress in trainers and jeans whatever, even in some formal places. I don't like to be, I don't want to be set in one mould. I have realized the way you dress, the appearance you put on affects the way people treat you. So, if I want to be taken seriously I will dress accordingly, but sometimes I don't want to do that. Other times I say to myself, why should I change my appearance for people to treat me differently, people should take you for who you are without looking at your clothes whatever. (Richard, 36)

Likewise, another participant, Trevor, recounted his critical moment of coming out as a gay man as causing a shift in how he positioned himself within his own local black community signified by his relationship to clothing.

I have changed, in terms of the way I dress since coming out. I dress in more designers and up market clothing. Back in the day I would wear lick-suits, baggy clothes and all that's out of the window. I tend to wear more fitted clothing than I use too. I used to wear all baggy clothing. (Trevor, 24)

Another participant, Raymond, identifies in his narrative how there is a clash in how he likes to dress and how he is perceived as an older man.

Clothes either make or break you yeah. Even when I was a youngster we use to judge people by what they were wearing. We still look at men and judge them by what they're wearing. I don't personally. At a certain age you have to dress to a certain standard, all right...sometimes I dress trendy, they must be saying that old man is trying to dress like a youth boy, but I am not. It is just clothes that I like to wear; do you know what I mean? I am not going to regulate myself into that kind of clothes division; young boy, roud boy, then middle age. (Raymond, 46)

Unlike other participants, Richard does not want to adorn himself in beaver hats, trainers, track-suits, camel coat, kongol hat, Oz suit raga style, netted vest, Evis Jeans and so forth, like his peers. Clothing is described by many participants as an imperative in 'street culture'; as a sign of group belonging and a way to get respect.

Wearing lots of gold was a kick off from America in the 1980s. It was the big cross even with diamonds in and that made the person. That person was supposed to be into drugs or something big, or he could be the most innocent man who had the money and could afford to buy this jewellery. The actual jewellery labelled that man as a 'bad man' or that he had money behind him. To me it was all false and a lot of jewellery was not solid gold it was just like plastic .I would see – especially in London - middle age men wrapped up in it. They are entitled to wear that gold if they want to, but I have always said that gold does not make the man. When you are hungry you cannot eat the gold, but the more gold you have the bigger your self-esteem and it seems to be coming back again. I think at the moment though it is the car. I think if you have a certain car that sort of raises your self-esteem, and not so much with clothes now. It uses to be look at what I am wearing. I can survive and I can support myself. Now it's about the car you drive. (Raymond, 46)

I think what comes with that kind of dressing is about opulence and success. I kind of think that's what it is about...furs are always associated with money away, furs big rings, being camp, but somehow it also marks someone as being successful. I think that this is also read into this kind of dressing. Basically, it's not just about one's sexuality but about one's position and class relation to all that as well. (Akem, 36)

Returning to Richard; in performing the desired image of the 'professional male' he invites acceptance from his local group of peers, as clothing is a vital act of embodiment. Richard's speaks of the workplace as the most validating space in which his 'serious' and 'professional' public persona is accepted. This image of himself has been built up over time by the favourable reactions of co-workers and his customers whose opinions he values. At work Richard wants to be seen as a straight acting professional. Richard goes on to state:

My whole approach to doing my job is professional and dedicated. I think my co-workers see me as having strong opinions and also very professional, very customer orientated, and ohm doesn't suffer fools gladly. If someone is being unprofessional I will say so, but I wouldn't say it in front of somebody else I would take them to one side and just comment on how they could do things better. (Richard, 36)

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Richard begins his interviews by testifying how 'black skin and appearance are denigrated' in Western society. He echoes Bhui's comments, that 'skin colour, one of many characteristics, is a powerful badge that is used by observers as a master label' (Bhui, 2002, pp.11-12) and that it acts against him in prejudicial and discriminatory ways. However, by the end of his interviews Richard testifies to how his skin colour is now less of an organizing feature to his identity. Richard speaks of a 'utopian colour blindness', where he constructs his own identity, and how he feels he is seen as an equal by 'others'

Back to Black

My 'blackness' was there, dark and unarguable. And it tormented me, pursued me, disturbed me, angered me.

Fanon, 1970, p. 83

Paul is , thirty-three at the time of his interviews (I met Paul at a recruitment talk at a black gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered black public workers forum). I first noticed Paul because his body appeared out of place among other delegates. Paul's darkness is not immediately visible, and his blackness is debatable. Paul describes himself proudly as multi-heritage. Paul testifies to how racism caused his older sibling (some shades darker than himself) to migrate to the Caribbean, whereas Paul has been able to assimilate into hostile racist environments because he looks 'white'. 'White' served as a master label until he identified himself as 'black.

I spent two and a half years in the police service as a special constable, where I first started coming out. I was not coming out as a gay man; I was coming out as 'black' to a group of officers who had assumed that I was 'white'. I had pleasure in watching their jaws drop when I outed myself as being mixed race. The guys started backtracking, "Ohm...I didn't mean it about you!" My first experience of coming out was interesting. (Paul, 33)

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This next critical moment in Richard's narrative relates to the issue of how participants play with the different material stylizations of 'blackness' to articulate their bodily identities. In past projects, Richard testified to discarding traits of the 'street' that formed part of his public image; but he later chooses to deploy aspects of its surface meanings (such as being youthful, subversive, and ghetto fabulous) and imagine himself as 'black'. Thus, the challenge for Richard is to take the messages perpetuated by the 'street' and apply it sparingly to his constructed public persona without embodying the realities of the masculinity cult of the 'street' and the 'gun'. West (1993) notes that one irony of our present time is that just as young black men are murdered, maimed, and imprisoned in record numbers; their styles have become disproportionately influential in shaping popular culture. For most young black men – including Richard's peers - power is acquired by stylising their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies reflect their uniqueness (West, 1993, pp.88-9). But as Gladwell (1997), Levine (1997), and Ross (1998) note, it is not just black boys behaving in this way, but 'white boys from the suburbs who don hip-hop clothes, shave their heads, go step with a macho urban bounce, boys from across the world also can be found mimicking the gestures, styles, and lingo's invented by and associated with young African American men' (Ross, 1998, p.2). There are multiple roles that the signifier 'blackness' plays in mainstream culture. It merges the market-savvy rhetoric and aesthetics of individualism – an identity that 'travels' – with a communal Afrocentric sensibility – an identity that Dean orientates himself towards and which is dominant in the black diaspora.

Similar to 'wiggers' (young whites with a seemingly insatiable taste for 'blackness'), Richard also adopts the market-savvy rhetoric and aesthetics of individualism. Richard's concern with 'blackness' is not to do with reconnecting with the imagined community or with the rediscovery of his roots. He is a black man, acting as a white, and then acting as a black man to ease his assimilation into the mainstream. Richard's contrived black appearance (that is, the bling-bling jewellery, excess lifestyle, and leisure clothing) is built into a strategy to take advantage of the multiple points of his identification, but relies upon his local knowledge to evoke the 'threat' or 'pleasure' in the signifier 'blackness'. This

strategy consists of the Ragga look, with its Jamaican inspired flamboyance and the R&B look, with its American inspired Bling-Bling, which gave birth to the Faggamuffin (as opposed to the hetero Raggamuffin) and the HomoThug (as opposed to the hetero Thug) within black gay communities. Richard has started playing with his sense of 'blackness', using subtle signs of dress that were unreadable to the mainstream eye. Everyone is at it, fusing black styles to other hybrid forms to transform the body and invite new bodily experiences. The qualitative experience of performing masculinity from this context is open to new possibilities given that 'everyone's identity has been thrown into question' (Mercer, 1994p.4). 'Western individuals have become bombarded with a plurality of images, symbols and identities in which they may put together in any combination they wish' (Conrad, 1995). For this reason, the structuring force of 'blackness' becomes questionable to identities that are in constant flux and amalgamated without any certainty of cultural affiliation. Much of Richard's narrated bodily reflexive practices rest in intercultural social interactions, but since these interactions are awkwardly juxtaposed, much of his physical performances are also in many ways contradictory.

Richard's local black community differentiates itself from other local communities by their language, their culture, their spirituality, and their local histories. This is conveyed through Richard's descriptions of hairstyles, ways of walking, talking, standing, hand gestures, body art, and so forth that demonstrate to him different ways of reflecting membership to his local culture. Richard's peers adopt styles that are symbolic of aspects of their resistance: their determination to be identified different from 'others'; and their desire to have something they say that is their own that sets them apart from other racialized bodies. Modified symbols, such as the raised fist, the Afro and dreadlock hairstyles, and African and Caribbean inspired clothing are also incorporated into their localized politics of difference. Their local street theatre employs culturally-bound practices formed in the Caribbean and modified in Britain to structure gender identities and the nature of social interactions performed on the 'street'. Commenting on how gender identities are practiced, Judith Butler (1993) argues, in *Bodies That Matter'*:

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Performativity cannot be understood outside a process of iterability, a regulated and constrained repetition of norms...a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not...determining it fully in advance.   (Butler, 1993, p.95)

Akem's narrative reflects how he played with his bodily appearance using bodily clues and props representative of different black cultural niches and how his demeanour was often read and shaped his social interaction with other black men.

The Muslim image I draw upon is about a certain type of masculinity that I find sexy, but also problematic. What I find interesting when I am wearing my Muslim skull cap is the brothers that greet me, you know, and I greet them back and I am on my way. The next day if I feel if I am in the 'fag club' I will be wearing my leather trousers and white T-shirt and the same Muslim brother look at you but don't greet you, because they are trying to work out is he Muslim or not. Then the next day I might be in my Muslim drag then they great me...for me I have always been aware how fashion plays itself out in terms of identity. The interesting thing is that if I go to a black gay space and wear the trouser and T-shirt a lot of black guys will not approach me, there is an assumption that you were only into white men. I have always been into leathers but never explored it practically and it's the last six or five years it's been about exploring that other part of my identity, including the S&M and the whole drag thing was about dressing-up, having sex and role play in drag.   (Akem, 36)

The following critical moment refers to the experiences of masculine role models and the racial stresses of fulfilling cultural expectations when they cannot be accomplished. In fact, most of Dean's bodily problems stem from a feeling of annoyance and regret with not being able to match-up to masculine ideals. Black manhood (see Chevannes, 1998) is clearly defined (e.g. sexual prowess, man's primary role as provider, and scriptural authority for man as family head) but was increasingly difficult for Dean to achieve. Dean asserts:

I do love football, but as you know it's a very physical game, unfortunately I can't get involved in football as I would like to because of my health problems. I think

that's properly one of my regrets in life that I was never really able to participate more fully in football. Masculinity is a definite physical aspect, it is one of the ultimate expressions of being masculine that your able to perform at an high standard on a football pitch full of very fit athletes and if you can excel in that environment you know you are expressing masculinity in one of its purest forms. I do admire that aspect of the game, not the physical aspect but the test in strength, test of stamina, and also the test of psychology. (Dean , 37)

Dean's beliefs about body image and his physicality seem to be connected to a wish for control and a sense of well-being as much as about appearance. It is as if these beliefs serve as general containers for thoughts, desires and fears about the self. Like all ethnic/racial groups black men range in physical appearance in terms of body mass, height, shading, personal grooming and so forth, but some participants place a greater degree of importance on the body because it has been open to public scrutiny, lacked outward praise, and restricted their ability to provide for themselves and their families. From this background Dean narrates how he developed an adult body that he felt negative about until he navigated in way into the sphere of black politics; typically associated with a hard edged, uncompromising type of black masculinity.

Bonds of intimacy, mutual support and physical contact throughout life are crucial in how Dean sustained and reinforced his body-image. In adulthood Dean narrated how he as participated in sickle cell self-help groups (which helped him to apply for disability benefits, and gave him advice about his employment rights) which became a social network of sympathetic listeners who also suffered from sickle cell anaemia. Most crucially he narrates how being in contact with 'normal' and positive looking people with sickle cell anaemia boosted his self-esteem (at least in part) and enabled him to construct a positive body-image. Dean states:

I no longer felt so much as a social outcast; disability can make you feel like a social outcast. I just couldn't participate. I identify as a disabled person, yeah I do, I go by the social model of disability and ohm as far as I m concerned the world isn't accommodating enough for people who suffer from sickle cell. You've

just been recovering from quite a serious illness and you come back (e.g. to work and/or university) and your put under serious stress because you are doing what you should be doing plus what you should have been doing when you were ill. That's not accommodating somebody's health needs, for some of those reasons I do easily identify as a disabled person.   (Dean , 37)

To reiterate, 'bodily performances are called into existence by these structures' and are 'social and bodily' at the same time (Connell, 1995). Thus, the challenge for the black community is negotiating the ways and means of including the dynamics of racism and disability (for example, the disabling effects of cancer) as a combination of black men's self-identities. Writers such as Oliver (1990) and Stuart (1992) both identify the need for the development of a coherent theory-based approach to better understand the 'double disabilities' bought about by race, gender, and disability. 'For men, as for women, the world formed by the body-reflexive practices of gender is a domain of politics- the struggle of interests in a context of inequality' (Connell, 1995, p.66). Would Dean's body image be so problematic if there had been greater social awareness and acceptance of disability? His self-perception of his body varies as a response to how he's been seen and treated by society, nowhere is this more telling than in his relationships with women. More specifically, how he perceived women to have perceived his male physicality.

Richard also talked about influential black men that he had used as role-models that have helped him sustain a positive image of him. Richard moulded his identity around black cross-over artist such as Terrence-Trent Derby and Little Richard that gave clarity and cohesion to his bodily practices. Richard goes on to explain:

Figure 37 Personalised album: 'Role models'

I was 22yrs at the time and into Terrence-Trent Derby. I was quite into James Brown at school, we use to have school disco's and I use to get up and do my James Brown thing, the splits and things like that. Hence, Terrence-Trent Derby style was borrowed from James Brown. I could do

all those things. I could do all those things so I decided to do that and take that image off. I kind of rehash James Brown. Terrence came and gave me the chance to do the stuff I use to do at school...get people's attention properly...it worked. I had mi hair do (it took me hours to do), braided, it took me sixteen hours to do. My dad didn't really like it, it remind him of dreadlocks. For my dad's generation, people of my dad's generation don't like locks. I'm sure he asked me if I was going to be a Rasta, my dad prefers me being gay than a Rasta. It's funny but it's true. I think the people who take it on now are more about fashion.

(Richard, 36)

Similarly, Akem highlighted how Malcolm X was used as a role model. at a critical moment in his life when he started to relate politics to his identity.

....I became very conscious that Malcolm X was my role model. His autobiography was actually the first book I read around the black experience. His auto biography I think was very central to the question of my own identity, in terms of flirting around Islam and I guess I identified with him in the sense that he went through a lot of changes very quickly. So basically from bad boy to prison, converted to Islam, a particular strain of Islam, and then to an authentic Islam, black Muslim, to Muslim and all those questions around his identity just changing very-very quickly. I was going through a lot of changes in terms of my politics towards race in a small town you know. Even changing his name from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X I think is how I relate my own politics to him. My name changed from Collin Lewis, to Akem X, to Akem Koi. It was the influence of Malcolm X. I took on an Africa name and there was resistance by some black people to call Africa names and white people –I cannot pronounce that or it sounds funny whatever – and I guess I was questioning what that resistances was all about? He also had a hard edge type of masculinity as well that I am kind of draw to. He's a kind of non nonsense type of masculinity that I find problematic but I find very sexy at the same time. (Akem , 36)

The extracts demonstrated how participants modelled themselves at critical moments on other black men. The formations of bodily images are co-constructions and have often been reciprocal and relational to other male bodies.

For Richard, critical moments in his life have caused him to rethink his attitude and behaviour towards how he conceptualises social aspects of his body (such as health, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality). They have been intrinsic components to his narrative of becoming a 'man'. Richard dealt with his bodily fragility, bodily scaring, and realizing his desires for other men, by deconstructing and reconstructing his self-identity as a way of disguising dimensions to his identity he was not yet ready to enact and communicate to others. As Bauman puts it,

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go in each other's presence. 'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty. (Bauman in Hall et al 1997, pp. 19-20)

Richard appears to have a stable narrative of change in relation to the self. Ironically, the way he transforms the message in his appearance, without changing his 'life project', resembles how most, if not all, the participants narrate how they relate to their bodies. Richard's 'life project' as remained unchanged since his diagnosis, although the messages in his appearance have changed. He aimed to live for himself and not how others expected. Richard's experience of wearing multiple masks to hide (internally and externally) defined differences in his identity sketches a picture of his struggle for identification and recognition. Since identity is partially a community production the body is the prime, immediately visible way to articulate identification and belonging.

Dean's narrative exposes how he constructs his bodily identity within traditional modern discourses that present all the appearance of stability and cohesion to his identity. Dean internalizes notions of masculine identity that stress strength, control, and independence as graduating indicators of his self-identity. Whereas, in reality, his adult body is perceived in terms of sickness, concerns over reproduction, and providing for his family. Dean's relationship to his body and self-identity is mediated through the body's ability to perform. As a consequence, Dean has been unable to

view himself from any other position than as an outsider for much of his life. For both Dean and Richard the body has been periodically symbolic of their social exclusion. As the black body is synonymous with ugliness in historical stereotypes, subordinate forms of masculinity are synonymous with weakness. The way participants have been seen has sometimes meant being marginalized by the mainstream and within their own local cultures. Despite the multiple hazards participants have encountered in constructing a positive sense of self-identity, neither participant sees their bodily incapacities as a personal tr,y. Instead, they have reflected upon the limitations of fragmented social institutions (such as imagined communities and social interaction) to adjust to their bodily issues and accept their complexities. And although they indicate a kind of disempowerment in their partial marginalization –(although they admit to not surrendering the 'truth') they both implie that they have made choices when it comes to how the body is constituted.

Conclusion

Richard's and Dean's critical moments in their narratives focus on their changing attitudes and behaviour in their self-identities as an effect, catalyst, or result of their bodily issues. This chapter demonstrates how the lived experiences of cancer and sickle cell anaemia have been implicated in choices made about how self-identity is constructed and constituted. The combined structures of ethnicity, gender, and disability have been constraints that objectify and make Richard's and Dean's identities invisible. Their stories of existing between assimilation and exclusion highlight how bodies have been mobilized and have resisted controlling norms of able-bodied black masculinity. They have seized upon a plurality of cultural resources to articulate 'who they are'. In the next chapter, I examine how participants have forged and negotiated sexual identities, practices, and partnerships that are ridiculed, tabooed, and stigmatized within black communities. I specifically focus on the implications for how masculine identities have been positioned and negotiated within black communities.

Chapter Six

Contexts, Cause, and the Meanings of 'Othering' for Gay Black Men

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the pivotal role the 'body' has played in the self-conceptualization of black men's identities. This chapter explores in depth critical moments pertaining to the participants' sexual identities, practices, and relationships and considers how, at least in part, sexual identities have shaped and influenced the construction of the participants' self identities. The central aim of this chapter is to throw light on how participants form different conceptualizations of their own self identities as they dance between different sexual identities, practices, fantasies and desires from within black communities. In the first section, I consider critical moments in the narratives that highlight changes in knowledge and mobilization in their sexual identities and that have altered their self-identities as black men. In the second section, I focus primarily upon same-sex relationships, but broaden the discussion to include opposite sex relationships in which participants have experienced being 'othered' because of who, how, or what they have practiced in relation to their sexual lives.

Representations of black sexuality

The sexual identities of gay, bisexual, and transgendered black men are seen as a racial death wish from within 'homophobic black popular culture' (Julien, in Wallace, 1992, p. 257). Non-heterosexuality is presented as the antithesis of 'blackness' and 'black masculinity'. However, black communities are not unique in their homophobic beliefs. Many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people of all races, raised within homophobic and heterosexist communities, struggle to confront and accept themselves; to recover or gain the core of self-love and wellbeing because they are constantly threatened and attacked from within their respective imagined communities. In spite of this, there are particular cultural differences in the way in

which black communities manifest and vent their homophobia that are difficult for non-heterosexual black men (and women) to either ignore or negotiate. This chapter explores the multiple layers of oppression that research participants have had to navigate and negotiate because of homophobic prejudice (sometimes, painfully, from within their own communities), and racist attitudes (sometimes, from white lesbians and gay men). The impact of this can make black gay men marginal, silent, and invisible. Nevertheless, performance of normality is still something many non-heterosexual black men try to attain; doing otherwise brings into question their family life, their religious beliefs, and their political priorities. For this reason, West (1993) argues that the crisis over identity is worse for black gay men, who reject the major stylistic option of black machismo, yet who are marginalized in white communities and penalized in black communities for doing so.

Non-heterosexual black men are often isolated and rejected by members of black communities because they choose to articulate points of identification outside of the conception of a 'collective one true self'. Hence, Mays and Cochran (1994) use the term 'intense homophobia' to describe the level of bigotry directed at these men, given voice through what Griffin terms 'negative labelling' (such as 'Uncle Toms', 'sell outs' or 'traitor to the race', and so forth). Cool (2003) argues that this produces a situation where black gay men are 'doubly othered' (Cool, 2003, p. 3). Likewise, Boykin names them 'sexual mulatto' (Boykin, in Constantine-Simms, 2000, p. 162). Negative social labelling has been seen by all the aforementioned theorists as a powerful weapon used to silence any black person who criticizes institutions: for instance, a black church system that has historically subordinated women, lesbians, and gay men alike. The 'sell-out' label is a fear tactic to ensure that these groups will not speak against exclusionary practices (Cool, 2003 p. 112).

In spite of this, the belief that black homophobia is more widespread and deep-rooted than in other communities needs to be challenged. The commonly held belief that homophobia is more prevalent in the black community than in society at large (Brandt, 1999, pp.8-9) is not borne out in this study. The study produced no evidence to say that black people are more homophobic than white people. Molefi Asante one of the most outspoken proponents of heterosexism in the wider black communities has

recently changed his position regarding homosexuality. He has come to understand that homosexuality was not a matter of choice and feels that the black community in that regard is not a special case of homophobia than the white community. Asante feels that both black and white communities are moving towards a more progressive view. Also, the black theologian Victor Anderson (1998) combines cultural sensibilities with gender politics in his understanding of black homophobia. He is part of a black Christian gay movement that fights to stamp out homophobia in the black church, and understands that one can be unabashedly Christian, unapologetically black, and also uncompromisingly gay. In Britain, black gay and lesbians have had to carefully balance where and how they position themselves in the struggle for visibility. In doing so ethnic loyalties are questioned and more fluid sexuality has become a potent political issue. Black gay writers such as Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien have been instrumental in mobilizing black gay and lesbian communities to resist the organising principle of traditional sexual identities in black British communities. In turn, this has positively altered perceptions in black sexual culture of same-sex intimacy. Thus, black homophobia is not constructed in this thesis as being any more prevalent than the prejudices society holds at large. Nevertheless, homophobia remains a problem and the progressive view of the black community have not detracted from how black homophobia interlocks with other systems of oppression and impact upon how some black men's self-identities are formed.

With this dilemma in mind, the overarching theme binding each of the gay male participants' life-testimonies is making liveable lives possible as non-heterosexual black men. Chapter Two outlined how 'othering' (Said, 1978) and the 'outsider-within' perspectives (Collins, 1991) are theoretically central to this work. These ideas help broaden our understanding of how cultural exclusion (and its mechanisms) serve to oppress non-heterosexual black men, and the effects this has on the formation of self-identities. Two kinds of critical moment have emerged from the data to reveal the dynamics of 'othering' in how sexual fantasies and desires are constrained and sanctioned within black communities.

Negotiating Race, Sexuality, and Gender

Black and queer

Akem is aged thirty-seven at the time of his interviews. I was introduced to Akem through a co-worker who had also worked with Akem on a previous project. Together they produced a monograph on being 'black and queer'. Akem embraces all his self-defined contradictions and idiosyncrasies as a queer black man who practices forms of sadomasochism (that is, consensual gratification gained through inflicting or receiving pain). Akem tells in his stories of 'self' how he has channelled his lived experiences, thoughts, and feeling into his nude photography and theoretical ideas around sexual 'play' and identification. His work challenges traditional ideas around the idea of 'body beautiful', 'race', 'gender' and 'sexuality'. Akem inhabits a politicized subject position, balancing somewhat precariously his racial and sexual points of identification. What is more, Akem is of Jamaican parentage, but finds greater meaning in being 'black British', and although critical of mainstream politics he nostalgically connects with the north of England as his 'home'. He is out to his family and since the early 1990s he has lived an open life as a gay man within his local black community. Akem is not his birth name but signifies the identity he has cultivated. Akem is the self-defined concentration of lived experience, sexual experimentation, the artist, and the scholar.

Akem recounts the traumas and stages of 'coming-out' firstly to himself, secondly to his family, and thirdly to members of his local black community. Akem recalls:

> *I was born and raised in Macclesfield and I left when I was...actually I got ran out of town when I was nineteen-twenty - well I was just a big old puff wasn't I - and moved to Sheffield for about four years and then came down to London. When I left town I came into my sexual identity, it is one of these towns whereby people told you before you know what you were. I was a black kid growing up in predominantly a black*

area, into rock music, punk music, and new Romantics; wearing lipstick and nail polish and all that kind of stuff. My family were just cool, because I have always been

kind of slightly different anyway and so basically that was just his thing. So I guess it was because I was always close to my mum, I always had the space to play out want I needed to play out. So as far has she was concerned I was being me. So when I came out as gay she was surprised that I hadn't told her before but she wasn't shocked and the rest of my family were not shocked, maybe surprised.

(Akem, 37)

Figure 38 Personalised album: Akem's Family Portrait

In the next extract, Akem recalls his earliest memories of his life as a black man on the local 'gay scene' and his experience of being constructed as a racialized 'other'. Akem recalls:

The one gay bar in Macclesfield I went too was called Leo - which opened in 1983. I went to the opening night and met my first boyfriend there. He was the only black guy that I know was gay in the town. And Leo was that kind of club that was all white with guys in leather trousers and white t-shirts, so hence, I thought this is what gay means, hence I was walking around Macclesfield in my leather trousers and white t-shirt because I was coming out as gay, not knowing gay is so different and diverse but this was all I know, this uniform with my little cap. It was kind of nice being a young man, coming out, going to the gay bar, being the only two black guys there and getting drinks bought for you, and being taken out that kind of stuff. Dealing with your traumas of isolation being black and gay, you know, and then there is these white men treating you like you were some kind of god.   (Akem, 37)

Akem describes the bonds with both black and white gay men that helped him to navigate the unknown and potentially racist space of his local gay scene. His relationships with other gay men at this critical moment of his narrative helped towards developing a positive self-image. Akem goes on to explain:

There was this weird kind of dynamic going on; I was in Macclesfield coming out as
gay, being told that you were not black because how I dressed. You were not black
and this for me, if I was not 'black' – and I could see that I was black – what is this
'black'. I tried to question that then and told that you were a batty-man even before
you acknowledge it to yourself. It was a question of who am I? And what am I? I was
lost; I was lost actually and suicidal. I was asking myself, who am I? Where am I? I
am told not this, but I am this, if I am told that I am a batty man, well what type of
black masculinity should I be or don't want to be, whatever. In 1983 I just got to the
point were I was dating this girl, going out with Richard, I was in a small town, told
that I was not black, you're trying to explore your own sexuality, I am wearing
leathers and white t-shirt, listening to white music, seeing images of black men and
saying that I do not look like that or I can't relate to that, I just felt kind of lost. The
only person I could have spoken to was my cousin, but it was still difficult to
articulate who am I and the trauma that comes with that question. I have been to
places were lots of men have not come back from you know. I have had friends who
committed suicide because they could not deal with their sexuality, fantasies, desires,
and race. (Akem, 37)

The experiences of homophobia originating from his local black community are
central to Akem's account. Akem and other participants refer to 'black homophobia'
in a concerted voice, invoking a range of critical moments in their narratives. Akem
explains his crisis in identity as arising in part from his local black community's
negative response to his shift away from 'black aesthetics' that defined black (that is,
the unsaid codes of black male dress, musical taste, and so on) towards a 'hybrid
aesthetics' (Bailey, 1994, p.6). Akem remarks:

Masculinity was embodied in a hard-edged kind of way, so there was no room for any
looks/behaviour that were perceived to be different or feminine. Being different from
the acceptable 'norm' was equated with being a batty-man/sodomite   (Akem, 37)

Similarly, Richard, another participant, recounts the negative reaction from his black
'friends' on suspecting that he might be gay. Richard recounts:

Before my operation I was seen with girls and discretely in the closet. I think ohm I
wasn't quite sure what I wanted. I think I was trying to conform to please my family.

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Then after the period in hospital, after I had my operation I said to myself that I have to be myself. I had time to sit and think; I could die at any moment and not have lived how I wanted. I'd lived how friends and family wanted me to live. I didn't really distant myself at that early stage, but my friends all disowned me, one guy that really disliked me was quite vocal, he would see me on occasions and would be quite vocal shouting his regular batty-man. (Richard, 36)

Peter also refers to a crucial point of self-imposed detachment from his family because he felt emotional support and understanding would be lacking on realizing that he was gay. Peter recounts:

I think realizing as a young person growing up, not only was I different because I was black mixed raced in the UK, I was bought up as a Catholic in a largely Protestant country, I came from a large family surrounded by predominantly smaller families, my dad was a teacher at my school. I already had a lot of baggage y to deal with, and then

I realized I was gay. I deliberately isolated myself from my family because I know my emotional needs wouldn't be resourced, if you like, purely from my family, just in case it would be one day withdrawn
(Peter, 33)

Figure 39 Personalised Album: 'Family Reunions'

A range of other practices and viewpoints are identified as challenges that participants encountered. Stories of 'black homophobia' contain frequent references to the existence of norms and moral codes to how 'black masculinity' ought to be performed. However, gay participants learn – like heterosexual participants who have struggled with 'black anxieties' (about dating outside of the race, homosexuality, poverty and so on) learn – to keep their issues secret to avoid undue personal scrutiny. Gay participants have been especially concerned with the effect of their families being stigmatized as a result of their sexuality. Same-sex love threatens to destabilize or subvert the central tenets of black machismo (that is, Christianity, pro-blackness, and heterosexism). Some participants choose to operate under cover out of fear of ridicule,

attack or worse. They will do so, not only because it is a safe option, but because many of these participants feel under pressure to have children and families, or perhaps want to become responsible fathers or been seen as fully deserving and contributing members of their local black communities. It is from this axis that black homophobia is endured and gains its momentum.

Homophobia, or 'homoantipathy' as it is sometimes called, is particularly intense in Anglophone Caribbean, with Jamaica perhaps heading the ranking of all the islands (Chevannes, 2001). Chevannes describes 'the intensity of homophobia, as the antipathy to homosexuality (Chevannes, 2001, p.218). Same-sex relationships among Jamaican men are thought to arise from an inability to attain certain aspects of the culturally defined ideals of manhood. Heterosexual Jamaican men are supposed to have accomplished these ideals and are unsympathetic towards other men who do not. This belief is concentrated in Rastafarian communities, where homosexuality goes against their scriptural teachings. In this respect, gay men are tolerated provided 'dem never inna fuss wid anybody'. However, a man is not a real man unless he is heterosexually active, and instead remains a 'boy' or 'male'. In the deliberate construction of these pairings is an implicit superior/inferior meaning, and they are used as agents of social control. According to Chevannes 'a male heterosexual identity is not only a matter of personal choice, but is also an issue of concern to the wider community. Many parents are therefore quite anxious to confirm their sons heterosexual orientation' (Chevannes, 2001, pp. 217-18).

Amongst the 'old-guard' of the black community (of Jamaican heritage) there is little doubt that many people view homosexuality as a 'white man's problem' or a symptom of modern Western decadence. Some black communities are open to outside influences, causing real and imagined disruptions to how identity formations take place among black men, instead of looking inwards at normalization strategies that deny and mask principles of diversity and inclusiveness. Most individuals would not dream of killing gay people but may feel affronted by public demonstrations of same-sex intimacy (for example, holding hands in public or camp behaviour). Homosexuality has been a punishable crime in Britain for centuries. The 'anti-sodomy' laws were only repealed as recently as 1967 (Weeks, 1985, 1991). Most

former British colonies have not only kept these laws but they also enforce them. The punishment against same-sex relations is enshrined in the penal codes of almost all former countries of the British Empire. So are our views on the subject a result of a colonized mind? The roots of 'black homophobia' derive partly from the conservative white Christians who were outwardly sex-negative and opposed to homosexuality, and who mainly converted enslaved peoples of the Caribbean to doctrines of Christianity. They stressed biblical teachings that viewed homosexuality as immoral. Thus, many black Jamaicans have recognized that conspiring with mainstream society in targeting homosexuals as the 'despised other' frees them somewhat from the deviant label of being sexually immoral and provides a degree of social acceptance. Secondly, the condemnation of gay and bisexual men has been a characteristic of much of the Black Nationalist rhetoric that has reappeared in the aftermath of the civil rights era. Amiri Baraka (1961), Frances Cress (1991), Molefi Asante (1980) and others attribute homosexuality to an attempt by the white race to destroy the black race and argue that it has never been a part of authentic black culture (Cools p. 3). They claim instead that black lesbians and gays 'severely undermine the heterosexual family' (cited in Constantine-Simms, 2001, p. 118) and the survival of the race. This is quite an alarmist standpoint.

For the reasons above, to be gay, bisexual, or transgendered is considered to be a deviation from Afrocentric principles because it supposedly makes the person evaluate his or her own needs above the teachings of 'national consciousness' (cited in Constantine-Simms, 2001, XIV). Black gay and bisexual men have had to address the fact that the influential voices of their communities condemn what they represent without attempting to understand their plight. However, an irrational fear or hatred of same-sex relationships within black communities does not prevent homosexual intimacy. Even in Jamaica, I learnt at a gay man's forum called J-Flag (an abbreviation for Jamaican Forum Lesbian and Gays) that since the 1950s gay men have had their discrete networks to meet other men. As a form of social control, homophobia drives men to hide who they are and their intimacy with other men and/or women. While same-sex intimacy appears to be the most vocalized taboo, it is not the only form of sexual practice stigmatized by the black community. Sexual practices such as sadomasochism are equally problematic for the imagined black

community to confront (due to collective memories of 'bondage'); as a consequence it is seldom discussed. However, AIDS has forced an awareness of the need for an honest awareness of our actual sexual acts.

Sadomasochism

Akem describes S&M practices as being at the edge of what is perceived as culturally acceptable. In particular, this status is in regards to what some of the 'toys' signify (whips, collars, chains, handcuffs). Akem argues:

Figure 40 Photo diary: 'S&M, Childhood memories, & personal politics

The issue of sadomasochism, in my view the most intellectual of the sexual practices, has always fascinated me, on a physical and political/philosophical level. These so-called 'dangerous games' or 'forbidden desires' raise many problematic and uncomfortable issues for many black people in my view. In particular, this is in regards to what some of the 'toys' signify (the whips, collars, chains, handcuffs) or let's say master and slave scenarios. I have wondered is there such a thing as a black collective memory around slavery? Can S&M offer or create a peculiar kind of radical black subjectivity? Can a black person or anyone perceived to be 'other' embrace S&M as purely pleasure without it being seen as pathology? Within the context of S&M I am always dominant; in regular sex I am versatile. So far in this part of the world I have been playing top and master, I would only play the role of being submissive, in terms of S & M if I met the right kind of black guy. Who understood or experience those kinds of things already yeah, the few black guys I've met in this country are friends of my anyway and that cuts them out, so there's a barrier. (Akem, 37)

The extract above illustrates how S&M is a reflexive practice of the self where Akem is able to experiment with and perform – or act out – different dimensions to his self-identity. Illustrated in figure 40 are a set of Akem's boots which he narrates as having symbolic significance to his sense of masculine identity. How he

constructs himself as a boy is represented in the pair of Monkey Boots; his flirtation with a hard-edged sadist role is captured in his knee length boots; and his non-defiant pro-black and pro-gay stance is symbolised in his pair of Doc Martins. For Akem, his ethnicity, gender, and sexuality coexist and reflect the multiple dimensions of who he is. Akem's only challenge is finding other black men who are ready to move beyond (black) anxieties that make them feel uncomfortable participating in S&M play.

> *The only kinds of guys that I have met have been guys in the states. In 1993 or 1994 there was the New York Pan-Sexual S&M group and I went there you know and met the group of men and women. I did an explicit interview with them and they talked about S&M sex from a black perspective. And for me that was kind of mind-blowing. Just to sit down and I'm talking about other black men and women who have the same kind of perversions. But not only having the same kind of perversions but talking about it publicly in the community and then go out to groups and talk about that as well, the things we get turned on by are also political as well. And I guess the few guys I met stateside I would easily do certain things with. In fact, there was one guy I met called Clint, big and butch, walks around smoking his cigar. The first time I met him I just fell for him and one night he just picked me up off my feet and gave me a kiss and dropped me down onto my knees. He was a typical black guy, into S&M, very stereotypical. Now with him I would play the role because as well as knowing what to do it's also how does those pleasures and desires sit within the public domain into the politics and space we create for it.* (Akem aged 37)

The theatre of S&M enables Akem to play out a variety of roles. The roles he plays are not all tolerated or accepted in black communities, wider society, or even in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. Akem does not aim to be politically correct or get at an 'authentic black self'; he constructs his narrative of self-identity as being part of a black gay S&M sub-group. His identification with a black, gay, and S&M sub-group challenges the black community's perception of black gay men choosing one identity over the other. Akem's narrative of his sexual identity exposes how multi-dimensional his self-identity really is and the different performances he enacts as part of his identity project. The following section considers blurred points of sexual identification for gay participants.

BLURRED POINTS OF SEXUAL IDENTIFICATION

What Akem's life-testimony highlights is how black masculinity and homosexuality cannot be discussed in mutually exclusive terms, suggestive of a split life. There is a strong perception within black communities that *all* black gay men knowingly choose, or must value, either their 'blackness' or 'homosexuality' as the central organizing referent to their identity. Little thought is given to the interdependency of masculine identities that draw upon, disrupt, or even subvert the either/or structure which seemingly encapsulates all black masculinities. Akem's life-testimony brings to the forefront the potential of such an interconnected reading, where awareness of this interdependence is seen as an alternative to the either/or binary in which black gay identities are locked. Along these lines, the theorist Johnson (1982) has done the most extensive research examining the dynamics of primary group affiliation and the justification for that choice among black gay men. Johnson sampled sixty African American men (using questionnaires) to see whether they saw their black or gay identity as being central to them. He called those men who chose the predominantly heterosexual black culture as their primary group communal affiliation 'black-identified'. These men were generally less open about their sexual preference (but still felt positively about it) and were uncomfortable about expressing any form of intimacy with other men in public. They also had a greater involvement with other blacks, and preferred black lovers. They felt their 'black' identities were more important because skin colour is more visible than sexual orientation, which they hide. Thus, 'they believed skin colour has a greater influence on how others interact with them' (Johnson, 1982, p. 8).

Nevertheless, Johnson's analysis has been criticized, most notably by Constantine-Simms (2001) who terms the study deterministic. The study did not question the variability and vitality in the forging of black gay identities. For instance, Akem's life–testimony illustrates how his 'sexualized' and 'racialized' identities are both felt to be important to him. He has both interracial and intraracial relationships, and is unashamed to display same-sex intimacy in public, while still seeing himself as black-identified. Thus, Johnson's study would deny Akem's more complex experience because he would not conform to the ideals of black masochism. Johnson's

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respondents chose these ideals as a means of protection/survival strategy; most living 'double' as opposed to 'integrated' lives, because they feared discrimination on the grounds of their sexuality. In contrast, Akem makes doable what seems an integrated self-image, without emphasizing individual components to his identity, through his photography, sexual attraction to other men, S&M practices, and political activism. Johnson's study would insist upon Akem having a primary identity choice that would not reflect how he changes over time, giving the impression that once the choice is made, it is fixed. Johnson's study forwent any serious analysis that shows black gay men as existing beyond the binaries of 'race' and 'sexuality', instead of acknowledging the *queer* points of identity and identification which are being articulated. In reality, we all have mixed loyalties and contradictions to our identities, which draw upon a rich tapestry of sources on a regular basis. In the same sense, Barth argues that there are a multiplicity of 'categories of ascription and identification' (Barth, 1981) chosen by actors themselves. This calls into question the social and personal fractures that arise as non-heterosexual men negate identities and points of identification. So far, I have discussed Akem's history of coming out and have not interrogated the complications of being in the closet. The following section examines critical moments in Trevor's narrative of negotiating self-identities from inside/outside the 'closet'.

Living inside the 'closet'

I met Trevor through a contact I had recruited in the police force. Trevor is the youngest of the participants and is aged twenty-four at the time of his interviews. We tried several different locations before we both settled upon his home as the most suitable space in which to meet. Trevor possesses a strong sense of regional/local identification and a growing sense of his masculine and sexual identity. Trevor constructs his gender identification through an archetypal notion of black machismo, which is central to his narrative of self-identity. In public, Trevor stressed that he masks his sexual identity (that is, his attraction for other men) with his performance of hard-edged hetero-blackness; but in private he reverses this process in his interracial intimacy with men. Trevor has very strong ties with his sister and mother. He primarily keeps his sexuality secret from his (Christian) mother and his

neighbourhood brethren, and is only 'out' to his sister, mentor, and close circle of white friends. His mentor made a lasting impression on him. She is a black female police officer who supported him through his teens and early twenties and helped him to come out to himself. She intervened in his life and halted his risk of exclusion from school and his descent into gang culture. Trevor is a graduate who is looking to join the British police force, which he sees as institutionally heterosexist and racist. However, he feels equipped to confront these challenges. Ultimately, Trevor plans to move away from his birth community to live as a black, gay, police officer elsewhere. Trevor told me why he lives in the 'closet':

> *I've been out for about two years. Only my sister knows the rest of the family do not know about it. First of all I told my sister I was gay because I tell her everything. And only a certain amount of friends know about it as well. I'm not 'out-out'; it's just a select few who know so far. Being black is hard enough but turning out to be gay is a double-whammy. I'm more interested in being black, then being black and gay at the same time. I lost my virginity when I was nine to a girl. At this age I looked older then I actually was. You couldn't tell then but I was twelve, and everyone was doing it, I didn't think that it was unnatural to do it. It was just progress really, I used to enjoy it, and I used to do the tracing thing as well. At that point in time I was not gay. The only time I knew I was gay was when I went to junior school. I started going swimming and started seeing naked men in the shower and I didn't know why I kept staring at that point, but I did. I didn't think anything of it, I didn't know about homosexuality at that age anyway, I didn't know it existed, I was just staring. I know why I was looking now but at that point I didn't. At the age of eleven I never acted upon it, it was just a thought at the back of my mind. I know from when my sister kept playing Shabba Ranks and than I saw the film 'My Beautiful Laundrette'. That was the first gay thing I saw and that was when I first realised what I was. I realised that I was gay.* (Trevor, 24)

Trevor recounts how his attraction and intimacy with other men was performed in a paranoid privacy, shrouded in secrecy and guilt. Trevor recounts the anonymity and freedoms of being a student:

In my second year at university I went on holiday with a group of union friends to
America. I was going through a lot of stress and problems because all these people
and even some of my black friends as well were all asking me about girlfriends. I had
to reaffirm my masculinity to make sure that I wasn't camp or anything like that,
make sure that I was seen looking at girls, I used to trace girls purposely. I even
pulled girls as well. I came up with stories and lied. I think a year before that was
when I had my first gay experience. Back to the holiday, they kept on asking if you
were gay and I thought that they know something, obviously they didn't since I came
out and told them. I got them all around at the same time; I told them all at the same
time. They said they didn't know, it was just a joke, they felt really shit for doing it.
The badgering and pushing, I just couldn't be bothered to hide or have the energy to
make up stories. I wanted to start dating people and one of my union friends lived
with me at the time. I couldn't bring no one back even if I wanted to because he didn't
know that I was gay, it was just too hard. It came to a point it was affecting my work
as well, I just couldn't be arsed to hide anymore   (Trevor, 24)

The extract above describes how Trevor performed and adapted certain techniques to
disguise himself as heterosexual. In Trevor's critical moment in the narrative of self-
identity, the performance of playing hetero itself brought about its own pressures and
paranoia because of constantly wearing different masks. Trevor privileges the realities
of racism above homophobia in his narrative. Although he disapproves of
homophobia, if he were to take homophobic remarks on board and challenge his
friends he fears that would expose his sexual identity as being different and perhaps
gay. As a result, Trevor does nothing when he hears homophobic remarks. Trevor's
story is suggestive of a split or double life. His black and sexual identities reside in
different spaces and belong to different identity projects simultaneously negotiated. In
the following critical moment in Trevor's narrative of self-identity he describes bonds
that have enabled him to come out and live a more integrated live:

If I hadn't have gone to university I probably wouldn't have met anybody because I
felt crushed. University changed a lot of things, through my union mates I went to gay
clubs for the first time. As soon as I told them that I was gay they offered, I wouldn't
ask. I didn't have my first sexual encounter until I was twenty-one, so I had good
eight or nine years to think about what I wanted to do. At this moment in time
homophobia does not really bother me, probably due to the fact that most people I

know are homophobic and come out with things I can't really react and raise too...
I'm gay and I don't really want them to know so. That's probably why I let it go over
my head. I assume within time I would get offended the same way I do with racism. I
class them the same – no different. I've not told people I really want to tell actually
that I'm gay yet. Some of my closest mates, people I've known for ten or fifteen years,
I'm just really, really hesitate telling them that I'm gay. My friends as well at Co-Op,
some of them know that I'm gay, one found out in a way which really pissed me off,
however she's cool about it now. I think as soon as I tell my mother, I think, I will tell
everybody. Until that point comes I will try and keep it as quiet as possible. Some of
my friends will react badly, but I will cross that bridge when I get to it. I will properly
wait until I find someone I'm really in love with. I see myself staying with them for
most of my life. I would feel more at ease with my sexuality but I haven't reached that
point yet. Thankfully, my mother doesn't bug me about girlfriends. (Trevor, 24)

One of the major obstacles preventing Trevor from coming out as a gay black man is because his religious family background. Trevor recounts his relationship with his mother and their shared sense of Christianity, its teachings, values, and beliefs:

Figure 41 Photo Diaries: Sites of faith'

The only thing I got worried or depressed about is my mother and the religious side of it. It stressed me out a bit, it still does to an extent, I just don't dwell on things due to the fact I know that I never decided to be gay. I know that I was born this way. I still feel that's its wrong in Gods eyes to be gay. To give into urges and needs it's all about having strength or not. I would describe myself as weak. I've not dwelled on it or think about it because I just don't know what I'm doing; I'm still torn between the two in that sense. It's hard, I'm just trying to stay away from it and not dwell on it too much. The Bible is interpreted the way that it say homosexuality is wrong, no matter how much you attend church or do the right stuff you are still doing the wrong thing. I will just ask God to show me the right way.

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I know black people can be homophobic but that wouldn't deter if I decided to be gay or straight. It is only my family that would hurt me. In a way my mum's side of the family I know I wouldn't get disowned, it's just the family environment and the way the family is loving they would rally around me. If I knew my family were really-really homophobic they would have made my choice very hard, they are religious but through their religion they wouldn't abandon me because of my sexuality. They would just try and convert and try and change me. Which would be annoying but they wouldn't abandon me.   (Trevor, 24)

The extracts from Trevor's narrative of self-identity suggest that to be gay is to be 'weak'. In this line of thinking, a man cannot be strong and gay at the same time. Trevor's faith has caused him challenges in constructing a masculine sense of identity free from guilt and moral introspection. Trevor constructs his self-identity in consideration to his faith community, which causes him problems of self-acceptance.

The causes of otherness for gay and straight men

The adverse affects of 'otherness' upon the self-identity of participants in the 'closet' can mean the absence of 'safeness' experienced in 'sameness' (where one's identity is defined as part of the collective identity). Hence, loneliness and isolation are real fears among some participants, a state of affairs which is played out on a daily basis in their negotiations over the social boundaries they inhabit at home, in the community, and workplace; spaces that define their norms, values and voices. Black men such as Trevor, whose sexual identification departs from mainstream definitions of black masculinity, are routinely required to negotiate who they are with self and others to avoid total objectification. Thus, he is prepared to compromise his sense of masculinity to avoid being visible. This situates him in an ambiguous social space/place that sees gay black men as non-conformist and conformist, insider as well as outsider, to black mainstream goals and aspirations. This is so much so that Trevor's life is not prescriptively played out or easily read, but shielded in a haze of secrecy and privacy. He exists in a space where multiple masculinities are routinely

performed to simultaneously retain his proximity and distance from the black community and (white) gay community.

In recounting their histories, Akem, Trevor, Richard, and Peter touch on critical moments related to the navigation of social spaces and institutions that are exceedingly male dominated. Critical moments of coming out (primarily to themselves as men attracted to other men and on occasion women) are played out in a number of different localities (including in gangs, churches, Territorial Army, black community groups, athletic club, police force, and so forth) that point to their split lives. The gender ordering of these spaces and institutions enforce the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which demand performances of a hyper-masculine order. These spaces and institutions resource the identities of participants and how most of the gay participants preformed heterosexuality. Participants describe their short-lived attraction to such sites and institutions as an attempt to hold together and conceivably disguise their shifting sense of self-identity.

In Robin Williams' examination of gay black police officers, she found that the concept of 'openness' is central to how black officers construct their masculine identities. She suggests that openness influences all aspects of her participants' lives, usually in a negative way. Openness, or the absence of openness, is the common denominator in virtually all the officers' experiences. Not being able to be open is a form of discrimination. What emerges is that officers often live 'double', as opposed to 'integrated', lives, and have highly developed and elaborate coping strategies to secure their identities. Gay policemen who lead 'schizophrenic lifestyles' (Burke, 1993) thus assume a heterosexual identity that could lead to mental illness, a nervous breakdown, or even suicide. Thus, the insider/outsider dichotomy provides a glimpse into Trevor's life, shedding light on the obscured in-between positions he inhabits. Spaces we do not always recognize as places of 'othering' take on particular resonances in Trevor's narrative of self identity; namely friendships, family relations, occupational relations, and so on.

The common perception amongst the black community is that non-heterosexual black men are an identifiable mass of 'men', unconnected to their families and heterosexual

friends. This concept is not borne out in this study. In reality, the participants illustrate how they are friends, neighbours, siblings, sons, nephews and co-workers, living their lives intertwined with others they deem important to them. In the next critical moment, Trevor describes subtle alterations in his physical appearance that have enabled him to stay visibly connected with his family and heterosexual friends, but also remain stereotyped in the gay community because of the way he looks. Bearing in mind that the concept of a gay community is built around the exclusion of other ethnic identities (Loiacano, 1989, & Ridge et al, 1999) it is conceivable how the black body is tied to performative associations of racial stereotypes. He recounts:

Figure 42 Personalised Album: 'Family Bonds'

Since coming out I've changed the way I dress, how I think, like before back in the day you use to wear click-suits, baggy clothes and all that's out of the window now. I tend to wear more fitted clothing than, more designer and up-market clothing. I use to wear all baggy clothing. I think since I came out I have become more body conscious and I go to the gym more often. Before I came out onto the scene I wasn't body conscious at all, since I've come onto the scene I've become more body conscious, didn't think I would be like that. I think because I am more muscular now I'm more likely to wear tight fitting shirts when I go out just to show people how big I am, that's the only noticeable difference. I don't realize how big I am or how muscular I am and people come up and say that you're massive, I look in the mirror and say oh you are big aren't you. I feel small, I don't feel as tall as I am and I don't think I look as muscular as I am. If I wear certain clothing I feel O.K I feel big as I am. I think that a lot of gay white men out there like going out with black guys, not because of how they look because they are black, they just have this thing for black - they trace you. They come out with the same couple of remarks about black men. They have a need to find out...you get people who are interested in your muscles as well but I think in the same way its more to do with colour. (Trevor, 24)

Trevor's narrative reveals how his muscular appearance is appreciated by both blacks and whites, for reasons discussed in Chapter Five around the 'body beautiful' and 'body ugly'. Because Trevor's body matches up to the normality of the butch archetypal black male, this increases his ability to negotiate a contrived fiction of

himself in the black community. One stereotype that Trevor draws on in his interview is how athletic-looking black men are seen as 'super-studs' and/or 'brainless athletes'; either way they are constructed as 'superior athletes' (Pieterse, 1992). Carrington observes how black sportsmen have been reduced to objects of sexual desire and envy, their performance linked to an 'active sexualisation' of their bodies linked to 'black animalism' (Carrington, 2001, pp. 97-101). The animalistic myth about the violent and aggressive and overly sexualized black male is perpetuated in its exaggerated forms (Mercer, 1994). The black sportsman ultimately embodies the bestial and dangerous black male and the fantasies and foreboding of whites (Lashley, 1995, Nayak, 1997), whether this is in homoerotic (Mapplethrope) or heterosexual (Friday, 1975, Marriott, 2000) forms. Trevor goes on to describe his decision to date exclusively white men. Trevor asserts:

> *I used to be quite bad, I used to say that I was only hundred percent attracted to white men and there has probably be a point were I found light skin black guys more attractive then darker skin, I don't think I would have ever gone with one. I didn't see any black men that I was attracted too. I can't explain. I just didn't find them attractive. It's properly the facial features because black and white guys are different facially and that's the only basis that set them apart. Then I got out more and saw more people. I didn't go out that much before, you grow, you keep on growing and growing and mature, and your eyes open a lot more. I thought that there weren't many gay black men in Bristol but then my perception changed. I always thought that there were black gay men because I know I couldn't be the only one.* (Trevor, 24)

Trevor describes being an object of stereotypical interest, personified as a 'big black dick' on the gay scene. The dominant myth of black men's sexual prowess makes black men desirable sexual partners in cultures obsessed with sex and the body (West, 1993). So Trevor's interracial intimacy is not that unusual; clearly Trevor is entitled to love whoever we choose. But there is a critical distinction between dating because you love someone and dating in order to be accepted. This raises the question of what prevents greater intimacy among black men and among their heterosexual counterparts? In Britain, over fifty percent of black males born here are with partners of other races. Perhaps one explanation for the lack of black intimacy in Trevor's

narrative is the constant reminder of the unspoken and systematic hate directed at non-heterosexual men by members of the black community; a situation that prevents him from achieving a positive self-image.

Returning to Akem, he describes his experience of coming out onto the gay scene and being positively treated as an 'exotic object' to be desired and pursued, which served momentarily to raise his self-esteem. Akem's experience of interracial intimacy has been an unusual one. His S&M fetish has brought him into contact with men of different races and/or ethnicities who like being dominated; that is, dominated by black men. Another participant, Richard has flirted with S&M whilst with a white partner who was much more involved with the scene than himself. However, Richard's experience of the skinhead, gay, S&M scene has left him feeling devalued. Richard's only enjoyment comes from the pleasure of dressing up.

Participants narrate a mixture of desire, eroticism, and attraction that binds their bonds of intimacy with men of other races/ethnicities. Sexual identities are relational and the dialectical meanings that racialized bodies connote (for example, master and slave scenarios) speak of more than just subjective acts of desire and pleasure; they rely on cultural narratives for their meaning. Although liberals envisage interracial intimacy to be a positive by-product of a multicultural society (Kennedy, 2003) Jamaican social history suggests otherwise. Power relations (real or imagined) exist as part of the dynamic that make up interracial intimacy. 'Blackness' and 'whiteness' are negotiated against the backdrop of a value system that privileges white culture. As a consequence, exclusively black-on-black same-sex relationships are rarely reported among gay participants in this study. One exception has been Peter, who I have introduced as not looking 'black'. Peter recounts:

I had a number of partners of white backgrounds and black backgrounds. My two longest relationships have been with black people and part of that was intensely brilliant and fantastic because there was a level of appreciation of homophobia and racism that just hasn't been elsewhere and that's tremendous'. However, in interracial relationships black gay men run the risk of 'encountering direct racism. (Peter, 33)

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Needless to say, a lot of the non-heterosexual participants were not in black-on-black relationships. Some participants avoid their own kind out of the sense that their own may devalue them. Told that they are not affluent, attractive, or authentic enough, they peddle their wares elsewhere. This shift away from other black men prevents mutual support with coping with racism and homophobia. This works against them, and as Peter identifies in his extract, can lead to racism within relationships.

Yet still, it is not only gay participants that often avoid their own out of a sense that their own might devalue them. Some heterosexual participants live outside of the 'normative' pro-black platform that would suggest that men like them have abandoned the race. The analysis suggests that different contours of straight interracial and intraracial practices form a spectrum from exclusively dating white persons to only dating black persons. The former position might see participants as duplicates of the white male ethos (Madhubuti, 1990), and the 'sell-out label' is frequently applied here. Kobena Mercer (1994) notes how some black men use patriarchal models fashioned by white men to define their own manhood. At the other end of the spectrum is being pro-black and Afrocentric in orientation.

Several of the heterosexual participants' concerns with cultural identification have been with how interracial intimacy as an effect, cause and catalyst to identity projects. In their life-testimonies, Akem, Raymond, Dean, Daniel, Mr Fraser, and Richard all emphasize the critical role of interracial intimacies as a focus of constant and acute concern. From different temporal and spatial locations, interracial intimacy defines black men's identities. Participants allude to shifting boundaries of acceptability and decency in hetero behaviour. Richard recounts:

> *One time I was seeing this white girl and one of my mates said to me, "I didn't think that you would go out with white women being so principled", being so pro-black and that kind of thing. They didn't expect me to be checking white girls, "I thought you would be with somebody from your own background". Although I wasn't racist they didn't expect me to be chatting to white women.* (Richard, 36)

Thus, some participants make it a political principle to not forge intimate relationships with white women. Daniel asserts:

From the age of fifteen I came to a conscious decision that I wouldn't go with a white girl, there are enough black girls you didn't really need white girls. Under the age of fifteen, whatever, you mess around. I've always been very pro-black, black women, black families, everything yeah.   (Daniel, 36)

In contrast, Raymond reflects back to the 1970s and 80s, when he suggests it became hip among some black men to date white women. Raymond asserts:

At the time it was the thing to go out with white girls. It didn't change my identity and I know as a black man where I was coming from. She was never on my arm; I made sure of that, you know, we walked together and never got steers on the street. I use to get complements you know, as she was an attractive woman. It was the norm at the time. She was very special as a white woman. It was a pretty long relationship.   (Raymond, 46)

The heterosexual participants' critical moments in their narratives of interracial intimacy are concerned with negotiating cultural constraints that often make them appear weak, needy, or dependent through the reactions of others as much as it says anything about actual sexual desire (West, 1993). Whether they conform to stereotype in performing the sexual prowess of the consummate black lover (Lester et al 1999), or not, they are unable to articulate their worries and questions of sexual identity in the way gay participants interrogate themselves. Heterosexual acts are seen as a stable definition of identity, even when interracial intimacy disrupts the naming of identity.

Although we are taught to think that heterosexuality is a deeply ingrained set of ideas and practices (in which homophobia is a key aspect) there are lots of hidden uncertainties and ambiguities in how the heterosexual participants construct their masculine identities. The participants' underlining homoantipathy is superseded by their own anxieties and unease in accomplishing heterosexual roles. While none of the participants testify to being homophobic or misogynist, a number of participants do testify to their heterosexist beliefs being central to who they are. The heterosexual

participant's prevailing belief in 'normality' states that the only valid 'normal' and 'natural' forms of relationship are heterosexual ones. Nonetheless, not all the heterosexual participants feel empowered as black straight men. Some have felt disadvantaged. Heterosexuality is structured within a hierarchy of power relations; as a consequence not all forms of heterosexuality are valued and afforded equal respect and social status from context to context. For example, participants recount being treated by other black men as 'boys', emasculated in their relationship with women, seen as harmless and de-sexed when they have wanted to be seen as tough. Bonds between men have been affected, owing to them deviating from cultural beliefs and practices that constitute the standards of black heterosexism. There is no mistaking the strong impulse of heterosexism, as participants construct a sense of masculine identity and try to describe normative standards and benchmarks as guides to their way of life. Even participants who are gay often refer to critical moments in their narratives when they imagine 'homosexuality' to be a corrupted or failed form of heterosexuality. For example, Trevor continually wrestles with unfulfilled heterosexual goals, and thus still tends to court girls to bolster his public image. At critical moments in their narratives, some participants testify to an attitude or frame of reference that can only be described as 'institutionalized heterosexuality' (Weeks, 1985).

The different ways participants have aligned themselves (albeit tentatively) to biblical scriptures, codes of language, courtship rituals, and family patterns, suggests ways in which heterosexuality has been institutionalized and endorsed in everyday practices. However, heterosexist practices and beliefs are described in ways that are provisional, shifting, and changeable. For example, white women are status symbols in one context and whiteness is excluded from black sexuality in another context. Changing attitudes towards marriage, differences between social and biological fathering, and the adoption of politically hard-edged identities all raise questions around sexual identities. As such, the analysis exposes numerous moments of fragility and contradictions in performing black straight masculinities. What is more, some participants involved mobilizations around new poles of masculine identification that were not always accepted on moral and pragmatic terms in the black community. As a

consequence, some participants have conducted their relationships in secrecy or at the edge of their local communities to evade yet another layer of prejudices.

Therefore, it is not only non-heterosexual black men that experience a hard time because of their sexuality and sexual identities. Most of the participants' apparent need for affirmation in their masculine identities results largely from the fact that straight black men have experienced forms of rigid social control that have curtailed, ridiculed, emasculated and now commercialize black male heterosexuality. Everywhere participants testify to being confronted by images and discourses (perpetuated through the media, by politicians, the police, and feminists), which reaffirm negative viewpoints about the black man's sexual identity. Typically, participants testify to decoding messages latent in cultural imaginary that speak of a would-be threat from black men towards individuals, families, the community and society as a whole (Ross, 1998). Participants have had to self-consciously survey their own sexuality and sexual identities due to the level of scrutiny and social anxiety that exists around black heterosexuality.

In this chapter I have analysed how participants have subjectively constructed and negotiated their sexual identities amidst normalizing ideas and practices that structure their social interactions. In this work, sexual identities have often been described as points of identification and not essences. Participants testify to moulding sexual identities that have often been poised between the boundaries of rejection and acceptance within heterosexual black communities, black gay communities, white heterosexual communities, white gay communities and all the groupings inbetween. As a consequence, in the construction and articulation of sexual identities, participants are aware of cultural perceptions and directives, whether white or black, gay or straight, towards the question of sexual fantasies, desires, and pleasures. Nonetheless, the production and articulation of sexual identities do not always occur as society expects or dictates. Conclusions can be drawn from the participants' critical moments in mobilization; from their knowledge of how alternative sexualized identities often draw upon different images of black masculine identities, and how local theatres are often experienced as the most constraining and homophonic.

Homophobia is not dependent upon evidence or information that participants are gay. It can thrive simply on suspicion and gossip. Characteristics that are deemed feminine (which equates to not being black enough) attract criticism from macho (groups of) men. Participants who articulate aspects of their identities that fall outside of heterosexist norms are suspected of being gay (even before they came out to themselves) by macho playa type men who might fear finding femininity in themselves. Furthermore, critical moments contain frequent references to the existence of censorship surrounding sexual identities. This censorship comes from the 'old guard' or 'black secret police' (bell hooks, 1994) who think it is their role to maintain the unsaid codes and standards of local black cultures. Thus, a common dilemma that most of the gay participants experience is the refusal of their local black communities to embrace new stylistic options that fall outside of heterosexist norms. Thus, to paraphrase hooks (1994), in disassembling and reassembling the traditional definition of black masculinity there is a need for a space for a homosexual definition of black masculinity. Like other masculinities and like masculinity throughout history, black masculinities are constantly being re-invented (Cools, p. 11) and are simultaneously relational. The rejection of alternative black masculine identities creates yet another 'black tragedy' (West, 1993) in which participants are forced to question their socially constructed position as an immoral minority within a racially self-reverent minority.

The question of whether participants are more identified with the political struggle of their race/ethnic group or the gay rights struggle is redundant. The idea of 'divided loyalties' (Bennett, 1990) is not reflective of the social basis to critical moments raised in this study. Most, if not all, the participants do not feel compelled to choose one identity over another, but manage to amalgamate different dimensions to their identities. This point is exemplified by straight participants, who have dated or married white women and acknowledge that, although it has created strains (upon their families, friendships, and with neighbours), they still perceive themselves to be 'black' in the most conservative sense of the term. Only a few participants testify to feeling inauthentic as a black person and/or caught between white exoticism and black antipathy. I feel that something else is happening here that goes beyond a simple lack of responsibility to one's own race or imagined community, and cannot be reduced to

split-loyalties, self-loathing, or narcissism. For some black men it is much more straightforward to resist defining themselves within an either/or structure. It is easier to reside instead in ambiguously described spaces/places where they do not feel compelled to disguise themselves as straight, or out of necessity open up as gay, bisexual, or transgendered people. Compliance with the either/or structure runs the risk of reproducing the position of oppressor and oppressed and re-creating relationships that control and repress rather than support and renew. It necessitates the need for safe spaces to exist in the consciousness of black men; safe spaces that transcend the informal and formal relationships black men negotiate on a daily basis in their families, on the streets, and at work. In response to the former point, this project goes some way to address the gap of understanding we have regarding alternative black masculine identities and the issues around sexuality these involves. The latter point has been tackled by not restricting black masculine identities to the normative processes of racial-sexual association and identification, but by presenting the shifting points of self-referencing and expressions of belonging occurring for black gay, bisexual, transgendered, and straight men alike.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Akem's and Trevor's life-testimonies and provides a glimpse of how sexual identities, practices, and partners have influenced and shaped the way black men's identities have been constructed. There are many ways black men construct themselves as gay and straight. I have focused upon the dilemma of 'black sexuality' within the context of the black public sphere as multifaceted and complex. There is no consensus among the gay participants as to whether contemporary the black community is more accepting of homosexuality. There is consensus how the fallacies of black heterosexuality promoted within black Caribbean communities produce negative implications to how men bond and openly negotiate the terms and conditions of their membership to local communities. The final findings chapter explores classing and consuming black men's self identities.

Chapter Seven

Classing and Consuming Black Men's Self-identities

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on two participants' life-testimonies to illustrate how some participants have constructed their self-identities, as a result or effect of their sexual orientation, partners, and practices. That chapter considered how sexual dimensions to black men's self-identities have brought about their partial marginalization from black communities. It revealed the potential complexities of how sexualized, racialized, and gendered components to the participants' self-identities have been willingly or forcibly negotiated into identity projects in their local cultures. The format followed in this chapter will again cover critical moments in which participants have negotiated equally problematic components to their self-identities. This chapter focuses on the dimensions of race, class and gender, and examines how participants have formed identity projects linked to the question of 'black authenticity' from their local cultures. The question of 'black authenticity' refers to an essentialist stance which is applied to define black subjectivities but which may vary from context to context. Bearing this in mind, the first part of this chapter presents life-testimonies of class and the second part examines commercial aspects of black men's self-identities.

Representations of black upward mobility and immobility

Few studies have chosen to focus upon attitudinal differences arising from class disparities among black Caribbean people. The presumption in Britain is that *all* black people form part of the underclass; thus no disparities really exist in terms of class identities. In his book entitled, *Race and Class,* Collinicos, explores how the 'concept of the underclass is wholly misleading in suggesting that black people typically occupy a marginal economic position in the advance countries' (Callinicos, 1993, p. 45). It would be misleading to presuppose that hierarchies do not exist within black communities and are not structured on notions of class. One of my concerns in this

chapter is the strong 'class-colour correlation' (Nettleford, 1998, p. 194) in the collective memory of participants from the Caribbean. Skin complexion has been used as a social signifier to divide groups and position individuals in a social hierarchy in Caribbean societies. Therefore, the lighter the complexion the higher the individual is likely to be positioned. From this social context, 'social class is an important mediator of culture in black as it is in white communities' (Tieard & Phoenix, 1989, p. 433). On their arrival, most, if not all, migrant participants (regardless of their skin complexion) experienced downward mobility and were categorized from the outside as one homogenized and indistinguishable group. Back migrants were 'lumped together' with the mass of white working class, and when they dared to claim higher aspirations, were told they were 'reaching above themselves' (Williams, 2000, p. 2). Add to this the uncertain role that class now plays in defining British identities, and it becomes clear that the black middle classes do not mirror those of the wider community. But old class prejudices and privileges that structured aspects of social identities back in the Caribbean do exist. Class identification has not been totally abandoned, but has been modified to make sense of personal biographies and adaptations to the British social landscape.

With this matter in mind, my interest has been how participants have gone on to define their own social positions in Britain. If upward social mobility from a British context might mean that a black man's loyalty to his local culture is questioned, and a black man's immobility might mean being branded 'wotlis' (that is worthless), how do black Caribbean men construct their self-identities within or outside socially constructed notions of class? Studies show that professional and intellectual black men (who symbolises the black middle classes) are confronted with an either/or impasse or double jeopardy when they try to attain upward social mobility: in reality, having to choose between the suggested authenticities of the street or the socially constructed fables of (white) success. Discussions of the either/or dichotomy revealed how cultural attitudes were formed around upward mobility that potentially problematizes how 'blackness' and 'maleness' are defined as part of identity projects. This can broaden into moral condemnation or resentment if a black person is seen by the wider black community to have integrated 'white idioms' into his or her identity. This might occur even though their very identity as a professional or intellectual in the

larger society may be founded on such idioms. From the viewpoint of the wider black community, the black man becomes caricatured as 'a white-identified uncle tom who must also, therefore, be weak, effeminate, and properly a fag' (Lester et al, 1999, p. 450). As a result, the socially constructed black middle-class male might be spoken of as 'inauthentic' (white-identified), and his binary opposite of the black working-class male is perceived as the 'authentic' (black-identified) embodiment of black men's true identity.

This outlook is problematic on a number of levels. Firstly, the authentic working-class black man is believed to have to articulate a ghetto mentality in order to be seen as 'black'. Secondly, the 'ghetto ethos' only recognizes its own constructed sphere of reality as a legitimating narrative in which 'black masculinity' should be constituted. The presumption here is that all black people must share a common social history, a collective experience, and perhaps even a collective consciousness. In reality, black people represent divergent and contradictory levels of consciousness, which produce different kinds of uneven social histories. Thus, in this chapter I argue that participants represent different points in a 'fluid continuum of blackness' (Julien, 1992, p. 255). Debunking the one-class-fits-all model allows for a trans-class interrogation of black men's self identities, and pays due recognition to the wide-ranging ways that black Caribbean men mould their race, class, and gender identities into malleable narratives of self-identity. Thus, in this chapter I refer to the 'ghetto consciousness' as a metaphor to describe a dominant narrative and not as a pathology that reveals some kind of truth or lie about the participants self-identities. Studies suggest that some black people subscribe to the ghetto ethos as a means to cope with the mix of 'psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair' (West, 1992, p.11) that results from social marginalization. Nevertheless, the ghetto ethos also inspires meaning, hope, and self-love in a common gangster and street culture in which 'black masculinity' stands at the centre. Cornel West terms it the 'gangseterization of everyday life' (West, 1992, p. 107). From this context the ghettocentric and gangsta image serves as a meaningful cultural frame of reference that warrants its analytical inclusion.

To recap, my specific interest in this chapter is how class and lifestyle practices, codes, motifs, and signs were intertwined in the formation of self-identities and gave rise to critical moments in the participants' life-testimonies. Most, if not all, the participants spoke of 'blackness' as an organizing referent to their identities, but went on to explain their experiences of 'race' in quite different ways owing to their socioeconomic circumstances. Therefore, I aim in this section to explore the complexity and multiple layers and/or realms of meaning that thread through the participants' life-testimonies, and which have produced different class allegiance, affiliations, and subject positions within the black community.

Focusing on the life-testimonies of Daniel and Mr Williams, this section explores how two participants were aware of, or subscribed to, class and consumer distinctions in their narratives of self-identity. Class and consumer choices were described as central mediators inside and outside local black cultures. Mr Williams and Daniel begin their interviews by referencing their racialized identities in association with cultures of poverty and affluence, and describing how these shape how they think, feel, and perform self-identities. As a result, I was able to observe a discrepancy in life-testimonies in how class disparities influenced beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations among the participants. Therefore, I have identified two kinds of critical moments in the participant's life-testimony pertaining to points or periods identified by either myself (as researcher) or the participants as shifts in how they construct their 'masculinity' and 'blackness' as a reaction and/or symptom of upward mobility or immobility.

NEGOTIATING CLASS, GENDER, AND RACE

The following section explores how class and lifestyle signifiers were negotiated into Daniel's identity projects at critical moments in his life-testimony to form his cultural identity. Daniel was aged thirty-six at the time of his interviews and was initially recruited as part of the pilot project. Most of his interviews took place in his workplace, which I suspect shaped how he narrated stories about his self-identity. Daniel worked for and within his local black community providing advice and

resources to community based groups, and on a more infrequent basis performed as an MC at local community events. Daniel describes himself as an African of Caribbean parentage. Daniel constructs his masculine identity as uncompromising; this is reflected in his Afrocentric ideals of the self-sustaining 'black family' and 'nation'. Daniel lives apart from his only child but also describes fatherhood as an organizing feature to his identity and maintained strong ties with his extended family. What is of particular importance in Daniel's life-testimony is how his childhood experience of poverty structured how he narrated critical moments in his social history. This dimension to his life-testimony was played out in the domestic sphere and in the theatre of the 'street'. It is also symbolized in his consumption of black signifiers (for instance, expensive clothing, footwear, cars and music.) and echoed in his accent as a marker of his group belonging. I now focus upon his notion of 'black talk' as a central signifier to his cultural identity.

Daniel describes himself as:

> *...a very down to earth person. I can use language of the academic and I can use the language of the street lets say in an academic argument. Say you have an individual come from the street, they are not going to see me as anybody who is other than themselves, I don't have to wear shirt and tie to work, or right, I haven't left my community both physically and mentally so I'm not apart from them, so I don't have any conflict with [black] people at the moment. I suppose if I then moved on and I had to wear a suit everyday and deal with institutionalised people then it becomes more difficult, but I wouldn't like to lose connection.*

In all appearances, Daniel's identification with his local community in regard to language seems as complete as it is in regard to other aspects to his social identity; however, it would be incorrect to presume that the English language used by Daniel is classless. Daniel's adaptation of 'black talk' signifies in part the internalization of his mother's social position back 'home', intertwined with his hybrid British experience. Daniel's mother, like many other participants who migrated to Britain, learnt 'broken' English (which represented the regions and classes of the British transients who first came to Jamaica). The Jamaican creolization of the English language has resulted in

subtle changes of rhythm and inflection. It borrows from other language systems, and, above all, contains a curious division between the way Jamaicans speak (and properly think) and the way Jamaicans write. Daniel remarks,

It wasn't until I went to school that I began to speak what they would call correct English because I'd been around my mum and her friends and nobody spoke good English....I mean from the 1950's, 60's, and 70's people did not speak good English, you learnt good English in school. It's only in the last eight or ten years that my mum can speak good English, do you know what I mean.

Chevannes (1989) highlights the old prejudices, where 'good' English (known as speaky-spokey) is considered the preserve of the upwardly mobile and 'bad' English (patois and or Creole) is considered the speech of the supposedly uneducated and/or ignorant masses. However, in England, Jamaican patios[12] has undergone subtler changes[13] that take into account local and regional dialectics but remain a marker of an individual's social position within local black cultures.

As suggested by the extracts above, Daniel is proud of his ties to the 'street', which manifest themselves through his language identity. He is especially proud of his linguistic strength to be understood by different audiences whilst still staying true to the language codes of the street. Daniel narrates his unwillingness to cross cultural and language boundaries (due to the oppositional nature of his cultural frame of reference) and adopt a totally English way of talking. To deal with the majority community, 'black talk' can be seen as part of his boundary-maintaining mechanism (Fordham et al, 1986). Thus, Fordham et al suggest that some black people have no desire to overcome cultural (and language) differences, because that would threaten

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[13] Jamaican patois is a richly expressive language with songs, folklore, grammar and imagery of its own, and is now recognized as its own language system (as in the case of American English). As Carolyn Cooper (1990) asserts, the language system addresses the social and political ethos of the island (from the term 'Irie', which is commonly used as a salutation, to 'booguyaga', which refers to a classless and unkempt person, and lastly to 'scandal bag', which refers to transparent plastic shopping bags which invite gossip). A few African words have survived (Norris, 1962), which have enabled Jamaicans to have bilingual – and in some cases multilingual – language patterns. Yet English remains the accepted dialect in the public domain especially among the middle and ruling classes (apart from within the private domain) .

their cultural or language identity. The orientation is not simply a cognitive adaptation to a limited set of opportunities; it is internalized as part of 'black identity', 'self-worth', and 'security' (Fordham et al, 1986, p. 178). To summarize, Daniel's sense of self-identity first emerged through his uses of language. Languages were narrated as a pivotal component to how he navigated different social spaces and also how he narrated his cultural identity.

The effects of council housing upon self-identity

In the following extracts we see how Daniel's sense of self comes to the fore through in his descriptions of childhood poverty. Particular attention is paid to structural constraints and choices made about his agency that arises out of his housing circumstances. Daniel recounts:

> *We moved from Abbey Road which had a high concentration of black kids and Asian, and we moved to Appleton. At Abbey Road we lived in a tenement house on the middle floor with a Jamaican Indian family. An Indian family owed the house. We lived in two rooms at that time. I remember the Indian man never wanting me to play with his daughters, two daughters that were around my age. He was telling them not to play with me. We pretty much left that area when I was around five. My mum came to England in 1955, at that time to get council housing you have to have a residential qualification. You would have had to been working within the city for fifteen to twenty years, so she only became eligible for council housing around the early 1970s. So the only places they would offer her accommodation was in Clipstone. I think she refused the house up there, so they offered her one in Dalton Street in Appleton and she took that house. So with five kids you know, we moved to a three bedroom house on Dalton Street and lived there for five years.*

Environmental poverty characterize Daniel's narratives of his early life. Already social boundaries were being erected limiting the scope of his sense of identity, in regard to permitted playmates and the parameters within which it was safe to play because of racist incidents. The narrated episodes of 'over-crowding', 'white/Asian racism', and living in a 'multiracial slum' reveal how Daniel perceived his earliest memories of being a racialized 'other'. Daniel's racialized narrative of self came to

the fore again when he moved onto a series of mainly white council estates. Daniel explains:

> *Appleton was predominantly white working class in the 1970s. I remember the first day of school having to fight. It was a bit traumatic because you know that certain people would come and you would have to fight them again whatever mood you were in. Women would come and pick-up their kids and I would have to fight the women, "you little black this, you little black that", and the amount of abuse we use to get from adults in those days, we at to fight the adults. Fighting was a constant theme in those days. When I look back at that period I can see the negativity, there's a lot of negative things that happened, but there's a lot of playing, just being a boy that happened at that time to. I also remember being on a park with my friends and I'm only ten years of age and playing on a roundabout, and nobody wanted to push it and one of them said, "Daniel you push it because back in the olden days black people use to be slaves". I remember beating them up. Yeah, it was a turning point. It was something that made me understand myself fully.*

The next extract recounts Daniel's move onto another predominately white council estate, which further challenged how he negotiated his racialized identity.

> *We moved on to another white area but people were a bit more coward up there so you fought a few times then they would leave you alone, but there were certain areas you could not walk. Boxwood estate when I was growing-up, you could not walk in Boxwood estate at night, it was a risk. You could come across the wrong group you would have to fight, run, or get beaten up. You know you took the chance. Getting older and starting to go into town yow would fight in the city centre, it was constant. You fought....you also fought the police, because the police would stop and search you, harass you on a daily basis you know.*   (Daniel aged 37)

Moving from a multiracial district into predominately white working-class areas heightened Daniel's sense that his local communities rejected his self-identity. During these crucial moments in the narrative of his early life Daniel experienced his first real 'home', but endured a sharp increase in racist assaults (both verbal and physical) by both children and adults. This meant developing a tough skin, learning to reflect a hardened black persona (even when he did not feel so inside), and developing the

knowledge needed to protect himself (in a physical sense at least) from protagonists. Ironically, the hardened black masculine persona organically arrived at through necessity in Daniel's case has been transformed into an influential commercial image (which I have outlined in previous chapters). Many young people in urban and rural centres reject or fuse the stylistic options of white bourgeois culture, and Indian and Chinese machismo practices, in their hero-worship of black rappers who epitomise the hard-edged black persona (West, 1993, Boyd, 1997, & Ross, 1998). Gilroy argues that this persona has 'been racially endorsed and invested with special glamour and authenticity' (Gilroy, 1994, p. 8). Yet, the reality, according to Harris, is that urban black males experience a different type of poverty unlike that of the white poor, who suffer 'chronic despair', and unlike the 'envy' (Harris, 1981, p. 125) that erodes the softness of young black males. This constant assault on his external difference caused Daniel to reject the narrative of white working-class identity. Commenting on the dynamics of hybridization and class identities in Britain, Gilroy comments:

> *In the encounter between black settlers and their white inner-city neighbours, black culture has become a class culture. There is more to this transformation and adoption than the fact that blacks are among the most economically exploited and politically marginal sections of the society, over-represented in the surplus population, the prison population and among the poor. From the dawn of post-war settlement, diaspora culture has been an ambiguous presence in the autonomous institutions of the working class. Two generations of whites have appropriated it, discovering his seductive forms meanings of their own. It is now impossible to speak coherently of black culture in Britain in isolation from the culture of Britain as a whole. (Gilroy, 1994, pp 34-5)*

From this social context, Daniel's narrated memories are of powerlessness and frustration in his preadolescent identity (due to his marginalized status within education and his white working-class neighbourhoods), and especially in his family identity, which required routine performances to disguise their financial hardship. Daniel asserts:

> *You grow up penniless yet you leave the house looking shining and good, you might have one shirt but when you get into the house you have to take it off and wash it, you know, tomorrow it is fresh and clean, so it's about pride. We grow with secrets;*

I grow up...all the children apart from my youngest brother whose eight years younger than me grow up on benefit, free school meals, free uniform, you know free anything. I remember one Christmas my brother was in the Salvation Army, they bought us Christmas presents, when I think back you have to be poor for the Salvation Army to give you anything. They gave us Christmas presents, you know, I remember that it was black trainers. I remember I couldn't go out and play in the yard because they had a whole in them, and the yard uses to be to hot or wet and either way you couldn't play because if it was hot the concrete would burn your foot, yeah, and if it was wet you could not play because it would wet up your socks. That was a regular theme of growing up, nobody ever knew. Everyday you were clean and you were tidy.

The following extract illustrates how financial hardship and the re-emergence of racism challenged his sense of masculine identity as family protector; a building block to Caribbean masculine identity.

On another occasion my mum had paid her gas bill, she paid it late, she got a knock on the door and there were two fat white men who were bailiffs along with a police man. While my mum explained that she had paid the gas bill and everything they took her gas fire, she sat there cried and cried and they stood up there and laughed. And I was stood there and I couldn't do anything. There was nothing I could do, I felt so ashamed and I could see how those men really enjoyed what they did to my mum. That changed me a lot.

Daniel's narrative of childhood poverty alludes to the chronic vulnerabilities, anxieties, and victimizations that transpired in his past self-identity out of social and cultural exclusion. Daniel makes enduring links between his experiences of 'poverty', 'race' and 'maleness' in the mist of his preadolescence angst. As a consequence, Daniel conceptualises himself as a 'purveyor of black rage' (Harris, 1981, p. 67) as he struggled to navigate his schooling, (white) friendships, and family pecking-order against a background of poverty and the foreground of racism. Class distinctions implicitly built into Daniel's self-conceptualization at this critical moment in his life-testimony, structurally fixing his social identity. Another thread to this critical moment was his need to identify and belong to his local black culture, which meant

travelling beyond the boundaries of his council estate to connect with other black people.

> *Being at secondary school age opens you up to a wider area you can travel. So from the age of thirteen I use to travel down to Wells Road. Wells Road was like Sodom and Gomorra and the greatest thing was it was full of bloody black people. There were lots of things that were happening down there. I realized that the black people I was around up in my area were quite full of it, because I know some really soft and backward black people.*

However, Daniel's new links with his local black culture served to entrench his viewpoint of the social world as a racialized 'other'. His local black community reciprocally fed into his socially disenfranchised understanding of himself and he began to close off his identity. Doing otherwise would have undermined his emerging sense of the exclusivity of the 'black community' (Gates, 1996). In other words, Daniel orientated himself increasingly towards a stance of 'racial balkanization' (West, 1992, p. 107). The participant assumed the existence of a homogeneous black culture and community, distinct and different from a supposedly homogenous white culture. The acceptance of being a despised racialized 'other' dominated his self-perception, and prevented him from narrating self-identity in other ways. In his book entitled *Black Skin, White Mask* (1986), Frantz Fanon, a French doctor and psychoanalytic thinker, argues that the black man and white man are trapped in their respective skins. The white man is seared in his whiteness, the black man in his blackness, but each is a slave to the other (Fanon, 1986, pp. 41-42). By extension, Gilroy asserts that the 'self can be safely cultivated when it remain behind the closed shutters of black particularity while the storms rage outside' (Gilroy, 1993a, p. 188). The storm Gilroy is describing is a metaphor for the terror of racial prejudice Daniel alludes to in his narrative.

In the following critical moment in his teenage narrative of self-identity Daniel highlights his commitment to 'blackness' as it is defined on the 'street'. This idea of 'blackness' anchors his narrative of self-identity and also his worldview. Influenced by Black Nationalist teachings he now perceives himself as a doubly-exploited

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second-class citizen. Black people have often been criticized by the mainstream for relying too much upon a racial narrative of 'victimology' (McWhorter, 2000) to explain their precarious juxtapositions, where 'blackness' is thought to equate to immobility and has caused paralyses to many black communities (West, 1993). In his life-testimony it transpires that the black community was the only stable referent where Daniel was not entirely excluded and tainted as the subalterned 'Other'.

The effects of public education upon self-identity

Daniel uses 'blackness' at this critical moment in his narrative as a fixed organizing referent to his identity. The politics of the 1980s drew Daniel out of the security of his 'home' and outer road, onto the 'street'. From here, he began to forge an independent identity as a young man, transgressing the 'third-class' status he felt he had been assigned in society. According to Garrison (1983), British black youth - of Daniel's generation - found themselves torn between two cultures and two sets of values and expectations; and alienated from both. The two systems were the 'parental values and morals formed in small rural and often religious communities' in Jamaica and the other 'secular urban industrial environment of Britain in which they have grown' (Garrison, 1983, p. 011). Daniel describes a strategy used by black peers at school, which momentarily stabilized his displaced sense of identity and which acted as a means to cope with the pressures to achieve in alienating circumstances that undermined his integrity. He testified that black pupils would organize themselves differently from their white counterparts; a categorization based essentially upon 'race' (not strictly by age, gender, or academic ability). The black pupils formed large groups, which offered security and comradeship within the school environment and provided a safe space where (hybrid) black male performances could be realized and practiced on a regular basis. Another participant, Dean, recalls not really grasping the racial/ethnic make-up of his friends until he had left school:

> *Our classes were separated into seven streams based on the theory of academic ability. I was in the top stream, we use to be friends based upon what class you were in, so everyone in class C were enemies with all the other classes, but the day I left*

school it all changed. I realized that I only hung around with African Caribbean people in the school and one Asian guy called Aadil. (Dean aged 37)

Returning to Dean who I introduced in the last chapter, he prided himself in being in the top stream and defined his self-identity accordingly by IQ, he overcame the potential stigma of his success by bonding most of all with other black boys in lower streams. For black boys in Britain, success in the education system can be seen as feminine and as a peculiar betrayal of blackness. This may cause black academic achievers to become isolated (Brah et al, in Williams, 2000, p. 184). As a result, Daniel's rage is fuelled by an anti-school sentiment and contextualized in a political era when images and ideas of an 'archetypal black masculinity' were widespread: an image manhood Daniel hoped to replicate. He reports being constructed by peers as the mouthpiece for the black student body. He also represented the school stereotypically in sports, but refused to participate in the prescriptive curriculum (for example, history) because he felt it undermined 'African people'. This led to corporal punishment and the school referring Daniel to an educational psychologist. Garrison argues in the 1980s how 'the ethnocentric nature of the British education system with its accent on assimilation helped to undermine the black child's self-image and self-confidence with lower performance' (Garrison, 1983, p. 12). The educational system (that is, schools, colleges, and universities) is arguably one of the central institutions in society involved in shaping and framing racial discourse and producing racialized identities (Fuller 1992, Wright, 1986, 2000, Gillborn et al, 2000). The educational system is seen as failing black boys in significant numbers by adopting white male heterosexual middle-class identity as the norm. The supposed 'underachievement' of black boys (Troyna et al, 1989, Gilborn, 1990) has been stereotypically attributed to pathological aspects of black culture and family life, something that leads some black individuals, regardless of age, to act in aggressive and challenging ways (Wright, 2000). As a result, Williams observes that 'exclusion rates for black boys are five or six times greater than for whites (Williams, 2000, p. 5), and black boys are more likely to be filtered into lower strata's or 'special needs' programmes. School exclusion still remains a particular problem for black boys, their disruptive behaviour sometimes being a response to the quality of their school experience.

Nevertheless, Daniel's actions earned him respect and status within his peer group, who he narrates, perceived him as *'quite stable, quite political, and quite knowledgeable'*. The 1980s was an important decade in the social histories of Dean and Daniel, who were both school children when the race riots took place. Even though both participants were from different urban centres they experienced the race riots in quiet different ways owing to their proximity to the 'street'. It was not solely working-class black youths who protested, rebelled, and took to the streets in the 1980s riots, but in Daniel's narrative the riots radicalized his self-image; unlike Dean who belonged to a black faith-community and did not take to the streets.

> *When the riots happened I was basically not on the streets, if I was going out I would have to be going out somewhere specific and particular. I never spent that amount of time on the street at that age. My parents weren't really good about letting us out the house and that was always an issue to be honest with you...its dangerous out there, things happened, the police will get hold of you.* (Dean aged 37)

Daniel raged against the symbolic violence of the judicial system, social injustice, and institutionalized racism and this fixed his oppositional/resistant identification into a practicing way of life. His social observations and lived experience installed a deep mistrust of white people and social institutions that had previously governed his social life.

Figure 43 Family Album: Male family bonds

In 1981 my brother got caught up on his way home in the riots. Picked-up going home....and was said to be perching the peace. They sentenced him to three months. He did about four or five weeks in jail...ohm when the trail came up they shipped in an inspector called inspector Bird, and this man is known to my mother and father. He came in and my dad and my mum was there, they said hi to this man and talked to man and he walked away and you see their face push-up. This man gives evidence at the trail against my brother. What I found out later was this man know my father back in the 60s, a way to get at my father, he said, " if I can't get you, I will get your son", and he came back and told lies on my brother in 1981. My brother didn't have to go back to jail, he'd already done about four or five

weeks of a three months sentence anyway. I stood in the court and saw how it carried out its injustice, I saw how it can fit people up for things they really didn't do. You know this has happened to my family....I've seen how a man can carry his venous for twenty odd years and weep it on somebody's son. I was so angry I could have let out violence in any way. I think I walked from town to Boxwood because I needed to be on my own. I walked it because I couldn't deal with anything after that. Those things bring out a lot of rage. (Daniel aged 36)

This critical moment that is narrated in this life-testimony spawned a new layer of self-awareness and pride in his ethnic background. He no longer felt apologetic for being socially constructed as an outsider and no longer felt responsible for his failure to achieve under the educational system. This critical moment marked an increase in Daniel's self-marginalization from mainstream institutions and more liberal-minded black people. It initiated the coming together of the 'truth' of his internal and external identities, thus enabling him to craft his future identity from the margins to the centre of his local black community. Elroy (his older brother) became his role-model, a signifier of hope, and his teacher of manhood. Daniel narrates that once he had learnt his lessons in masculinity he needed to break free of the female hegemony that had always controlled him.

I've got three older sisters, my eldest sister was always the nice one, the two which are above me –four and six years older than me – were always in the house, always dictating what went on in the house, that dictated how my life went within that house, so they were my main advisories but also my main teachers. And my brother was my saviour; because they would beat me up constantly and run me, and you know when their playmates came they did not want me around whatever no more. Oh god...ohm it was hard because there is a big respect thing in the family that goes down, you do what your elder tells you to do, so you are always caught in that position because you're the youngest there nothing you can do...You're at the bottom of the pecking order full stop. All I wanted was attention in the house you know, and he would come in and say to them 'leave him alone' I was pretty much the baby for a long time. But Elroy was my saviour; if Elroy was there I was alright. He taught me how to box, fight, play football and different things, do you know what I mean. He

was there for those things do you know what I mean? You learn how to be a man
yourself by breaking away from those women who control you. (Daniel aged 37)

The race issues of the 1980s dominate Daniel's narrative of his adolescent self-identity. His self-identity was compounded by personal traumas occurring within his home. Black femininities feature equally in Daniel's story of his construction of a counter-hegemonic sense of masculine identity. The importance of his female siblings and mother to his sense of cultural identity is clear; they instilled in Daniel a sense of pride in being black and a sense of respect for women. Hence, an affirmation of a proud sense of 'blackness' emerges, giving Daniel a clear standpoint from which he articulates his cultural identity into society, and which also enabled him to forge a meaningful voice within his own family. This standpoint signifyies a clear vanguardism, the type characteristically associated with the black revolutionary lumpenproletariat (Harris, 1981, p. 75) where success is measured in Afrocentric terms (for instance, harmony with nature, humanness, and rhythm). Daniel reports adopting a voluntaristic approach towards his local black community. He asserts:

From the age of fifteen I came to a conscious decision that I wouldn't go with a
white girl, there are enough black girls you didn't really need white girls. Under the
age of fifteen, whatever, you mess around. I would never have spent time being out
with a white girl. If it never happens that's very good, I don't seek it, I don't wish it, I
don't want it, you know so, I've always been very pro-black, black women, black
families everything, yeah so. At the time was great, great for everything social life
good, the politics very, very hot. Politics in Frankford was at the forefront. In the
80s it was...to be around then you had enough Rasta, so on the street level you could
get political understanding, black academics, you come into the area of
Afrocentrism, you've got loads of organizations, loads of organizing that's going on,
you have organizations that's dealing with the local authority, and because of the
work your doing you are involved with that, Yeah that's the late 80s early 90s. Yeah,
so it was good, it was a good time to be growing up, becoming a man at that time.
So you leant a hell of a lot, there was a hell of a lot of things that I got involved in
and a lot of things that I did...it's good, it keeps me in good stead now. I enjoyed
that time a lot, that time was very good, no sleep thou.

Daniel transformed his identity into an Afrocentric one during this critical moment. The growing influence of 'street culture' (Chevannes et al, 1998) upon Daniel's way of life is evident. More often than not an opinion or view emerges in the interviews condemning or justifying the 'gangsterization' and 'ghettorization' (West et al, 1996, p. 107) of the black public sphere; to the degree that the 'street' is deemed the repository of all that is real and all that is 'black' (Gates, 1996, p. 21). Most, if not all, the participants discretely describe how working-class black men maintain hegemony within the black community and have utilized existing boundary-maintaining systems (Fordham et al, 1986) to define what is legitimately 'black' and what is not (for example, through peer groups/gangs, television message, dancehall/DJ culture, drug don and gunman role models, and material consumption patterns). Criticism has been levelled at the moralities of the ghetto-fabulous culture that encourages narcissistic spending habits and a narrow vernacular of 'blackness', but which is overlooked due to its resistance to white society. What is more, 'the ghetto child's latter experiences in the street are properly just as important in shaping his adult instrumental cognitive, linguistic, motivational, socio-emotional, and practical competencies as his early childhood experiences in the home' (Ogbu, Vol 17, 184). From a criminological perspective, Wilson refers to a distinctively working-class black performance in which 'ghetto related behaviour, culture, and attitudes emerge that reinforces the economic marginality of inner-city residents who live in areas of high joblessness [and] abide by social norms that would inhibit their adaptation to changed opportunity structures and it seems that they lack the personal resources to succeed when given the opportunity' (Wilson, Vol 17, p. 175). Ogbu extends the argument, which I have adopted in the study, that forms of black behaviour and attitudes are not deviant or pathological but are adaptations to the identity necessitated by the ecological structure or effective environment of the black community. What this demonstrates is that social sites are important to the internal workings of black communities and to how black men perform and narrate the meaning of their self-identities.

The work of Ken Pryce (1979) and Paul Gilroy (1994) offers contextual knowledge of the social sites and dynamics of black British communities, which supports the claim I make above. Pryce (1979) identified in the 1970s how Caribbean people

faced a series of problems in adapting to life in Britain. He looked at Bristol's black communities and the different strategies Caribbean men employed to survive 'structural racism' (for example, in employment), 'institutional racism' (in education and so forth) and the effects of 'culture-shock'. He suggests that they tried to solve those problems in different ways by forming a number of distinctive subcultures. Pryce found two distinct groups of Caribbean men, which he describes as 'expressive-disreputable orientation' and 'stable-law abiding orientation'. The former group are believed to have rejected the society that rejected them, while the latter group are willing to accept or at least tolerate their situation and are more likely to adopt the values of white society. Gilroy (1994) distinguishes two distinct and assertive groups that emerged between the 1980s and 1990s, which he loosely describes as 'commercial-orientation' and 'political-orientation'. The tendency of the 'commercial-orientation' (that is, the sell-out) is thought to be centred upon the marketing and commodification of black signs, aesthetics, and cultural processes into saleable depoliticized items. This is supposedly done so that 'blackness' can be easily sold to a multiracial consumer market. In contrast, the belief of the 'political-orientation' (those "keeping it real") is that black culture is nothing but its politics. Black cultural politics then becomes confined to the tasks of producing and defining racial particularity and identity, as well as policing anyone who is either bold or stupid enough (using Gilroy's language) to disagree with its narrow formulations (Gilroy, 1994, pp. 3-4). Hence, the problem with Pryce and Gilroy's analysis (which I overcome by not treating the orientations as discrete entities) is that each reflects a fixed one-dimensional either/or perspective, erasing all the fuzzy grey areas of self-identities and group identification. Both models have a tendency to restrict the possibilities of fluidity and variation of orientations.

Although Daniel narrates his self-identity from an essentialist stance and feels able to judge who was not black enough in culture and attitude because of his politics, his self-identity is subjectively constructed in-between orientations. The next participant, Mr William was reluctant to form rigid categories and pigeonhole other black people as simply 'white-hearted' because they did not share in politicized identities. In their stories, Daniel and Mr Williams personify the essentialist and pluralist standpoints that run through black communities (Gilroy, 1994). Daniel's

essentialism distorts divisions in black communities, whereas Mr Williams's pluralistic libertarian stance affirms and seeks to celebrate complex representations of a black particularity that is internally divided (Gilroy, 1994, p. 123). Mr Williams's narrative stresses how his personal ethics emerged and the impact that growing-up among self-governed Jamaicans (never having to view himself as a racialised 'other') had upon his conceptualisation of self-identity. Mr Williams's narrative of self-identity (see details later) is forged as a lineal process that progresses from migration to an interest in real estate, then onto commercial success, and private education, early retirement, and finally repatriation. Thus, Mr Williams's story of self-identification is a monetary escalator rather then a racialized story describing his changing sense of self-identity. In contrast, Daniel's sense of self-identity has been cyclical in process, dominated by the idea of dominant – hegemonic - blackness that subsequently reinforced his ridged social position. This position exemplifies the decentring of identity that can arise out of environmental poverty, racism, and black political saturation among alienated young black men. The only recourse for these men is to construct masculinities that are able to survive life on the street. Yet still, both participants share stories about themselves that are institutionalized in larger society but admit to varying degrees of internalization and separation from scripted class narratives. Neither participant chooses to situate themselves fully in the established class system (from the context of Jamaica or Britain) but describe themselves as being on the peripheral or simply in-between groups.

THE EFFECTS OF CONSUMERISM ON SELF-IDENTITY

I now look at Mr Williams's life-testimony and the critical moments he uses as defining characteristics to his self-identity. This section explores how Mr Williams's self-identity is constructed, in part, through consumerism and how this is used as a potential marker of his upward mobility. Mr Williams was sixty-two at the time of his interviews and in the main he focuses upon his steps towards financial security. Mr Williams became self-employed almost immediately on arriving in Britain and over the decades built up a successful construction firm, employing a culturally diverse and

multiracial workforce. Mr Williams grow up in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, in the 1950s and was encouraged by his parents to leave and make something more of his life in Britain. Within weeks of the decision being made for him, Mr Williams's father had saved up enough money to book his passage to England. Unlike Daniel's narrative, which externalizes failure in his ritualized blaming of the racist system, Mr Williams narrates a strong belief in his own self-identity that transcended notions of 'race'. Mr Williams reports that he felt responsible for his own problems and if he failed it would be because he did not try hard enough or that he made serious errors. This is perhaps linked to Mr Williams knowing himself in a predominantly black society in which skin colour was a dimension but not the only determinant of success or failure (Payne, 1998, p. 147). In his narrative, Mr Williams downplays the importance of racialized identity in the process of negotiating the maze of relationships of employer/employee, tradesman/customer, and middleclass/working class in his life in Britain. To paraphrase Payne (1998), the ability to avoid becoming immobilized by 'race' is a result of how black people perceive problems. Mr Williams constructed and overcame problems in monetary terms (this will be discussed later). Hence, Mr Williams's concerns have all been financial and tied to his past, present, and future identity-projects of providing for himself and his family. Financial security has been an imperative to his sense of masculine identity.

> *I'm quite contented with my life, I'm not wealthy but I have enough to get me by here...and ohm I can drive the car I want to drive and I can go on the holiday I want to go on, get the things I want in life. What's important is that you enjoy what you do because if you don't when you go you would have worked, saved, die and leave it for somebody to fight over. In my case I have worked, saved, and enjoyed it.* (Mr Williams aged 62)

Mr Williams's self-identity was narrated very differently on his arrival to Britain. His first critical moment in his narrative occurs after he found suitable accommodation. A room let with a Jamaican family led to his marriage. Mr Williams married his landlord's daughter (a life-long companion) and this signified for him his first critical moment in his narrative since arriving in Britain. However, he also reveals how his

sense of masculine identity was challenged by the scriptural authority of his father in-law. Mr Williams's recounts:

> *A lot of people taught that we were brother and sister and when they heard that we were getting married. They were all a bit surprised. In 1967 we got married, the same year we move to a house in Wilton Green owned by her parents and me. Well it should have been sorry; I backed out in the last minute. I didn't put any money into it at the last minute. I just sensed that the atmosphere wasn't going to be right and I just backed out. I get on like a house on fire with both of Mary's parents but she's daughters who grow up in a home, she went and gets married, and they couldn't accept that she's now a married woman. So when they gone to work they expect to come back home and she's at home and everything to be done for them....a continuation of things. And she's now got a husband and a child on the way, it is not working out. So I could see that and I didn't want problems so I actually bought a house in Wembley and we lived there for five year. But once we got that – a three bedroom house – we never had tenants we were able to keep my head above water and ohm I moved from Wembley to a bigger house.*

In conversations between interviews Mr Williams describes the tenant culture of the 1960s (when the second wave of migrants from the Caribbean arrived in Britain) as difficult due to racial discrimination and archaic housing law discussed in Chapter Four. As a response, Jamaicans resourcefully pulled together to collectively purchase properties. Mr Williams highlights the problems he incurred that stemmed from nearly investing in a property with his father-in law. The problem was that he struggled to re-negotiate the power imbalance in their relationship. As business partners the boundaries were blurred from the outset and were complicated further by their close physical and marital proximity. His father in-law had too much control over his living arrangements and marriage, causing him to subordinate himself much of the time to his wishes. This undermined the participant's sense of being an independent married man. Yet still, Mr Williams felt financially able to opt out of the business arrangement and began to live privately and proudly with his young family. Once establishing a stable home life, Mr Williams began implementing his personal plan of constructing a financially secure future for himself and his family. His

affirmation of success is symbolized in his accomplishment in completing this plan, and in his possessions. Mr Williams explains:

> *I got my first mortgage which was 4,800 my repayment was 32 pounds a month, most people would pay for that and that would be the end of everything....right. Then I stepped up to another one which was 14,700 and I think my mortgage was.....I caught remember but it went up quit a lot from the 32 pounds I was paying on the first one. And then my next house was 55,000 so....each house I extended or modernized or do something....to increase the value. And what ever I get out of one I've never bank it, I would put it into the next one.*

From this critical moment onwards in Mr Williams's narrative he symbolises his self-identity increasingly through his material possessions and status symbols, which constitute his sense of success and pride in his identity as a businessman.

> *We went back to Wembley and bought a detached house in Preston Road and that house must have been the best years of our live, we only lived there for twelve years but it was a nice house. Off the road, trees around the house, you caught see the house from the road, it was pretty secluded. The same year we moved there we actually bought our very first new car. Before that it was all pre-owned, I bought myself a new, not new, but the newest vehicle yet, a Volvo which was only two years old, which was coming from a eighteen year old car to a two years, that was a big step-up, a big step. So we were able to move there in our new Volvo. What we had we extended, the minute we could afford a bigger mortgage you moved onto it, the minute you can afford a better car you move onto it. Within three years of owning the car we sold that and bought a Mercedes, we just moved gradually.... make yourself that bit more comfortable.* (Mr Williams aged 62)

Mr Williams narrates how his venture into real estate and his progression up the property ladder altered his self-perception. Moments of pride and self-affirmation are expressed through his homes, cars, and jet-setting lifestyle. The participant narrates that he managed to provide for his family well above the average standard of living by self-sacrificially working long hours to build a successful business. His success is reflected in his network of friends, and affirmed in the degree of control he feels he

has over his own life. To quote West (1992), the principles of black upward mobility are the protestant ethics of 'hard work, deferred gratification, frugality, and responsibility' (West, 1992, p. 11). Some of these principles are echoed in the participant's life-testimony. Mr Williams did not always apply himself strictly to cultural conventions and alienated himself from other construction workers because he earned more money than they did. He narrates that as a young carpenter he was paid on a piecemeal basis. By lunchtime his contemporises stopped work for the day, content with what they had earned, and they would convene to the pub. However, Mr Williams ignored local practices and worked the permitted full day. As a consequence, there was some resentment that Mr Williams earned more than his contemporises. However, West points out that some 'black people do act on the Protestant ethic and still remain at the bottom of the social ladder' (West, 1992, p. 13). This sets Mr Williams's narrative of his self-identity apart from other narratives and has caused him to be judged as different by watchful eyes.

How occupational success affects self-identity

I now look at how occupational success is played out in the domestic and public spheres of Mr Williams life-testimony. As described in Chapter Four, prior to coming to Britain many Jamaicans looked fervently to England as their mother country. Mr Williams is an exception. It was with ambitions, low-expectations and belief in himself that Mr Williams set out with his carpentry bag for the large industrial metropolis of London in the 1960s. He narrates that at this critical moment in his self-identity he was full of hope and intent on making a fortune in Britain. Despite great hardship due to occupational pressures and racial prejudice (causing injury to his body and pride) Mr Williams suggests that he internalized his bitterness of leaving as one day he known he would return home. Mr Williams affirms:

> *I always wanted to come back. My life was always geared towards getting back to*
> *Jamaica at some stage. I've never had any reason to want to live the rest of my*
> *life in England. I feel once you've played your part and when you get older you*
> *should be able to sit back and not having the hussle and tussle of everything,*
> *especially because I worked for myself and with my job I have no control over the*

amount of work I have or haven't got. I've geared my life around that and hopefully within three years I will reach pension age, which means the little I'm getting now will be subsides by the pension, so I will be a little bit more comfortable. That should see me getting by as long as I can drive my car and have my daily bread and get a holiday from time to time, go to Negril three or four times a year.

Mr Williams's narrative typifies the black business man characterized by Marable, who claims 'the non white businessperson is the personification of the legitimizing and rational character of capitalism…the black business person accepts and lives by rules of the games' (Marable, 1983, p. 138). The aim of returning back 'home' to Jamaica compelled him to earn as much as he lawfully could. But going home also meant going back with a sense of success as well as with the agreement of his wife. Thus, returning home was not just an economic consideration but required a joint decision for it to really work. To paraphrase Garrison (1983), a common wish, which exists among almost every Jamaican migrant aboard, is that of returning home as soon as their goals are fulfilled. Their goal prior to migration is simply to raise enough money aboard to return home to build a house and live a normal standard of living. However, as you will see, the decision to leave becomes less easy for Mr Williams the more he acquired, and the more he realized he would have to leave his children behind as they do not consider Jamaica as 'home'. Mr Williams states:

Figure 44 Photo Diary: Mr Williams's retirement home

We have three children, two girls and a boy…..ohm the eldest is Mary born 1967 the same year we got married and ohm the boy Ben was born 1969 and Dianna 1972. All independent individuals and have no children, they have careers. Therefore they haven't got any significant other at the moment or so they tell me, but on the whole we have a very good relationship, we rely upon one another, they contact us. I don't think a week as gone by when we haven't been on the phone to each other and even thou they have e-mail and everything they still….even after a few e-mails and phone

calls or phone call important....especially to the mother. I am not the one that receives the phone calls to I must admit, they communicate to their mother. So we have a very good relationship.

Although a father of three adult children and in early retirement, Mr Williams is content with not being a grandfather and proudly reports his children's decisions to follow their careers instead of starting families. Mr Williams's sense of masculine identity is constructed around his accomplishment of having provided for his family. Mr Williams explains:

At the moment its great that they have three flats, each one has their own flat and I have the studio, so when I go back, if I don't want to stay with the children I have my own studio. What it means is that we can all live under the same roof but not in one another's pockets. That is my outright, the rest are sold and cleared up all my debt and gave the chance to do things that I would like to do. We've never lived apart at any time because when they were small, we moved from house-to-house but the thing about it we've kept what I may think is an unusual family relationship.

Mr Williams narrates how he created the living arrangements to keep his family intact and together, even though he and his wife spend most of the year in Jamaica. Mr Williams considers regular holidays as an essential component of his identity as a retiree. He goes on to explain during his interviews:

I'm looking forward to our curse down the Yahsee River in china. We are going first go to Singapore, than Hong Kong and them Bangkok.Its one of the things I've always wanted to do, not necessarily cursing down the Yahsee river but I always wanted to try and see the whole of the world. China is one of the places I want to see. if life offers we the opportunity the next one possibly will be Australia and New Zealand... you know... I really want to see a lot more of the world. This is something I will take with me once.......I will take nothing else. So at least people can say that he enjoyed what he earned, he may not have leave a lot behind.

The following extract reveals how Mr Williams perceives how other people have interpreted his lavish way of life. Mr Williams states:

A lot of people see what I do and say "boy, he must have money, I wish I had his money". And I'm saying to them I wish I had your money and would be using it. A lot of people who tell me they wish they could do what I do, their bank balance it a lot better than mi, because when I want something I reach out and get it. In England we never had any vast amount of savings at any time, we never see the need for it, we have some money, we need a holiday, and we take one. We never actually borrowed money to go on holiday but we saved towards it, we get that one out of the way, now we've done that one we can think about the next one...and ohm fortunately for me I was able to earn enough ......was part of our livelihood so she wanted to work and she did work from time to time, so she was a full time mother for most of the time but when she work, she worked with a bit of a routine, she would do night work so I would be there to look after the children at night whilst she does some night work and she work at various places. But then we always use those funds for holidays or for something extra, something for ourselves. You know, because obviously I was able to keep things ticking-over.

Mr Williams narrates how holidays have been an essential part of his way of life but also alludes to the sacrifices he has made in order to privately educate his children. He takes pride in fulfilling the traditional role of being the main breadwinner in the household, and his wife is referred to as the auxiliary wage earner. His income affords his family security and his wife's contributions allow for the extra luxuries (for instance, exotic holidays, expensive furniture for the home, expensive clothing, parties and so forth).

Figure. 45. Photo Diary: the backdrop to Mr Williams's home, his cars and 'help', symbolize his identity has a Jamaican returnee.

Mr Williams took pride in being able to finance his children's private education on the assumption that they were receiving a good education. From Mr Williams's perspective, he felt success as a father and pride in creating a loosely liberal atmosphere for his children to forge for themselves an 'open-ended identity'

(Julien in Wallace, 1992, p. 255) beyond the narrow categorizations of 'race' and 'gender'. Mr Williams taught his children by his own lead to divorce the experience of racism from self-esteem. Although economic advancement has enabled some black families like the Williams to put their children through the private educational system, a downside has been greater opportunity for friction with the black community because of their greater intimacy with white people. Mr Williams recounts the crucial decision he made to privately educate all of his children. He asserts:

> *We have three children and none of them have gone to a government school until university, they all went to private school. The reason why we went private was when the first one was born Vic insisted the state system a lot of black children were classified as educationally sub-normal and we know it happened. It wasn't a case of it might or might not, we know it happened, we decided from day one, no she decided from day one that she will not wait until they classify them as educationally sub-normal she's going to start giving them private education. The problem I face is that I don't think that you can treat one child better than another. So when it was one it was great, as the next one come to that age you have to do the same because you don't want to have rivalry or problem with it. After they left infant school the girls went to Guildhall in Harrow and the boy started at Tomas High School, the junior school. And when he was eight...he was always at the lower-low end of the form not the upper end. There would be 26 in the form and he would be 19-20 he was not at the very bottom but he was nearer the bottom than the top. The pressure was very hard on him to...but the girls were relatively right where you expect them to be....so we then started sending him to the stage school were academic was not at the top of their priority but fortunately for him he was now in the top three, so he'd gone from where he was in the bottom seven into the top three in Corona.*

As a consequence, Mr Williams goes on to narrate how he perceives that privately educating his children has set them apart from other black children.

> *In fact when Ben was at Tomas High School there was only two black boys in the in the school but they weren't in the same class, in was the only one in his class at the time bearing in mind that Indians weren't that prevalent in Wimberley at that time. But the girls were the only two black girls at Guildhall so to speak and ohm*

the remained so. When they started at stage school however there was a bigger mix, there mighty have been about ten black children in the entire school system at Corona but then you know they never encountered a lot racial problems to the best of my knowledge. Cause they intermixed with the other children quit well and as you know with racial problems comes from homes and if the parents are not that racially motivated then the children......bearing in mind that most of the children in Britain that go to private schools are from business or affluent families and they haven't or most of them haven't got time for petty racial hatred because a black man as to come in to support their cause whatever business they are doing. They may not mix with them but they haven't got this hatred, Ben uses to be invited to all his class mates parties and in return they get invited to his parties, you know they all mixed and we never seemed to see that...racial thing is more in the public, the government school system then in the private school system.

Mr Williams reflects upon how the black community perceived his decision to opt out of the public system and go down the private route:

Some people weigh it up different ways, some people think that we did it to show off, which we were never bothered about, and some people saw it has a good thing to do because some tried to follow. But we weren't bothered who followed us. We did what we thought was right and that's all that matters. My children at the age five and up were told one thing and one thing only on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis. Take all you can now because don't expect me to die and leave anything for you. So the education I'm giving you is my gift to you, that's what I'm willing to you right now; take all you can right now. And right through their lives they were told don't wait for me to die to inherit what I've put together, take what you can now and go on and get on with your live. I've always told them that and I will always give them what I can now and I'm not going to wait until I die and leave them thousands of pounds for them to squabble over.

The Jamaican proverb, *'Labour for learning before you grow old because learning is better than silver and gold. Silver and gold will vanish away but a good education will never decay'*, is the sentiment Mr Williams reports that he stressed to his children. This type of upbringing is thought to create fewer stumbling blocks to future advancement by stressing values that endorse mobility. Williams notes how 'black

people entering Britain came from a rich and positive education culture' (Williams, 2000, p. 2). The education culture of the colonies gave the impetus to the independence struggles and produced the historical figures that led them. Black people arriving in Britain saw education as a vehicle to enable them to move away from plantation economies and the mediocrity of illiteracy, to become people able to realize their full potential, take charge of their lives and make an impact in society. As a result, Mr Williams notes that his family and friends responded both negatively (accusing him of showing-off) and positively (using the public education system themselves) to him privately educating his children. He reports that his children did not have a bad experience, but acknowledges that there were few black peers in his children's lives as a result of their schooling and the neighbourhood in which they chose to live. Mr Williams is also conscious of the wider black community's perception that living in the neighbourhood in which he did must have meant he was attempting to escape the black community.

Black authenticity

To recap, Mr Williams does not explicitly specify any class loyalties in his life-testimony, but narrates critical moments that have caused or resulted in changes in his self-identity. He describes himself as a simple man without airs and graces. In the main, critical moments in Mr Williams's narrative give discrete clues to his affiliation with British bourgeois cultures. His reality of being an outsider/insider in both countries - despite his personal successes —reinforce the uncertainties of using class as a master label to his self-identity. Mr Williams's dilemma is more generalizable than it first appears. In *Keeping Faith* (1993), West describes the dilemma of the black middle classes. West asserts that the opinion held by the wider black community is that the black middle classes (for instance, black intellectuals and professionals) consciously choose to use the rationale of the either/or dichotomy to escape the negative stigma of 'blackness'. Hwang et al go one step further and suggest that middle-class blacks have been 'ashamed of identifying with blacks in general and lower-class in particular' (Hwang et al, in Frazier, 1957, p. 369). The latter point can be observed in Mr Williams's life-testimony, where he limits narratives about friends

and relations to only those that reflect or reinscribe his way of life. There is no mention of socializing or involvement with principally black men that were positioned outside his socio-economic grouping. The middle-class torment does not stop here; the flip side to this argument is reached by West who proposes that to become a black intellectual or professional (which is likened to being black bourgeois) 'requires immersing oneself in and addressing oneself to the very culture and society which degrade and devalue the black community from whence it comes' (West, 1993, p. 72). This results in an 'assured peripheral status' (West, 1993, 67-8). This perhaps connects with why Mr Williams is so reluctant to identify himself as middle class, because in doing so he would have to swallow his black pride and subordinate himself to a set of ideals, beliefs, and values that were perhaps different from his own.

Lester et al point out that 'professionalism is the costume that allegedly signals for some black males' equality with white males' (Lester, 1999, p.448). In other words, as signifiers of white society are negotiated into identity projects (such as education, financial success, economic stability, ambition, goal orientation and lastly being in control) the more likely it is that black men will believe that they are seen as equal. The historical role and responsibility of the black middle classes has been to lead the struggle for black social equality. Thus, West argues that the 'messianism' that once united the black middle classes has shifted to malaise, which impedes the development of a coherent set of values. It has also led to a paralysis that has taken two distinguishable forms. Firstly, the black middle classes's preoccupation with white peer approval has tended to yield a navel-gazing posture; and secondly, it conflates the identity crisis of the black middle classes with the state of siege ranging in poorer communities and the obsession with white racism. The political scientist, Jennifer Hochschild, calls the paradox, 'succeeding more and enjoying it less' (Hochschild, in West, 1992). The wider black community respond in numerous negative ways; one example is a general mistrust and suspicion of the black middle classes. Thus, West (1993) distinguishes two types of black intellectuals: 'successful' ones who are supposedly distant from the black community; and 'unsuccessful' ones disdainful of the white intellectual world. In the same way, the unsuccessful black child is perceived as the assimilated student and the successful

black child is the one disdainful of the Eurocentric curriculum taught in schools. What is more, low expectations of other black men have transpired in 'jealousy rituals' or 'battle royals' for white spectators (West, 1996, p. 103) in which the trashing of black successes has followed. Pearson also suggests that there 'is a strong competitiveness among individuals, particularly with regard to money and material possessions. As a consequence, a person's wealth is often surrounded by secrecy, mistrust, and considerable gossiping and relationships are marked by anxiety and fear of being disliked but also intense jealousy' (Pearson, 1981, p. 38). This forms the basis to the authentic/inauthentic binary of the black middle-class and working-classes identities.

As a consequence, questions of who is a 'real indigenous' black person, what counts as a 'real indigenous voice' and the criteria used to assess the characteristic of authenticity, are increasingly determined on and by the 'street'. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six I have presented the dynamics of how street culture (de)legitimates a range of black male identities. As the marked other black professionals and intellectuals are also sometimes forced to live double lives. Some apparently choose a self-imposed marginality (West, 1993), others choose to adopt the morality of the street to lessen the effects of social abandonment and the disrespect of their peers. Isaac Julien quotes the lyrics of Ice Cube in the essay *'Black Is, Black Ain't: Notes on De-Essentializing Black Identities'*, who asserts 'true niggers aren't gay or yuppies' (Julien in Wallace, 1992, p. 258). For those reason Gates suggests, 'we need something we don't yet have: a way of speaking about black poverty that doesn't falsify the reality of black advancement: a way of speaking about black advancement that doesn't distort the enduring realities of black poverty' (Gates, 1996, p.38). It is difficult to talk about class identity without emphasising divides and denying the idea of black unity.

As a result, in *The Future of the Race* (1996), Gates et al emphasisehow the risk of class affiliation among black people serves as a potential rejection of the often unifying metaphor of race. This perhaps accounts for how Mr Williams and Daniel discuss class disparities in a cautious and awkward way. Studies from North America indicate that economic class has divided the black community in the way black people

explain inequality and how this affects how racial identity is perceived. Weitzer (1999), Mc Dermont (2001) and Wilson have investigated the class structure and racial consciousness among middle-class Americans on issues such as the criminal justice system, investment in crime protection, and beliefs on black separatism. Each study suggests that there is a clear divide among black Americans based upon their socio-economic position. So it stands to reason that black people from different socio-economic backgrounds conceptualize their self-identities differently and in relation to one another. Data from this study suggests that 'blackness' and 'masculinity' are conceptualized differently, based (at least in part) on socio-economic differences. Socioeconomic change —which can be equated with lifestyle - has meant that race no longer affects all black people in the same way (Gates, 1996), even though each participant shares the marks of oppression on their subjectivities (Marable, 1983, pp. 27-8).

Critical moments expose, among other things, how participants have adapted strategies, personas, and lifestyle choices, and where self-identities have been altered (permanently and momentarily) in order to buffer social interaction and relations in a social world where class, race, and gender matter. In fact, the lived experience of racism sustains and rearticulates class divisions, so much so that strategies of identities in this specific context are shown to be formed in intersecting spheres of life and respond to this dialectic process in renewable self-conceptualizations and social positionings. Today, black men still deal with the same intensity of psychological and cultural assault but conceivably in more covert forms, which necessitate coping strategies that are 'fluid' and 'mobile' and can respond simultaneously to a pluralist and individuated culture and community. As a result, Daniel's and Mr Williams's class identifications are not so easily read, as they are temporal juxtapositions and rest on the self-absorption of floating black signifiers. Current strategies of black men's identities call for postmodern interpretations to account for the subjective ruptures, tensions, and contradictions in uneven social biographies. At the same time these strategies must no denounce a person's 'blackness' because they do not conform to dominant ideals, beliefs, and values. Central to these attempts is the constant pressure upon the black community to

reformulate ways to forge 'liveable lives' here in Britain without the temptation of constructing narrow portraits of black men's self-identities.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed Daniel's and Mr Williams's life-testimonies. The critical moments in their narratives of self-identity conform to the poststructural assertion that 'class' serves an increasingly uncertain and ambiguous role in defining social identities. However, within the wider black community, class narratives appear not to have abated, and they still function as a marker of a black man's membership to his local black community. Participants position their own biographies in cultures-of-poverty and affluence, which shape or influence how they think, feel, and perform self-identities. So even as they made choices in their lives, the choices are truncated by other more powerful cultural and socioeconomic forces that set constraints based on either chosen or imposed ethnic, gender, and class allegiances and affiliations. The final chapter discusses the major themes of cultural, bodily, sexual, and lifestyle identities and the implications in the assertion of self identities.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: How Dominant Representations and Discourses were Negotiated and not Wholeheartedly Internalised

Introduction

The research project has explored how black Caribbean men's identities have been constructed, negotiated, and navigated in black British communities. In section one, of this final chapter, I bring together the emerging themes and discuss in turn how participants have amalgamated or rejected normalizing fictions of 'black Caribbean masculinity' in their self-identities. In section two, the themes that have emerged in the life-testimonies and in the analysis provide a good foundation for discussing the implications of multiple marginalization regarding black Caribbean men's self-identities.

What the study set out to do

The thesis has provided an overview of multiply marginalized black Caribbean men's self-identities in Britain. I aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of the diverse ways in which 'black manhood' is culturally represented in modern Britain, and to explore the implications of these representations for black men's self-identities, with specific reference to their domestic, community, and paid-work environments. In order to address the aims of this study I have used a qualitative research strategy and developed an innovative ethnographic interviewing approach, which has enabled the eleven participants in the study to construct and convey their own conceptualizations of self-identity. Black Caribbean men's self-identities must be understood on their own terms. The research strategy aimed to generate ethnographic knowledge about the challenges that exist within the black public sphere. It has focused upon three questions:

- how black hegemonic discourses influence and shape the way black men construct and express self-identities;

- the role the black community plays in regulating such identities; and

- how black men navigate and negotiate interpersonal relations with 'other' black men.

I now detail how each theme emerged from the life-testimonies and analysis, and how it addresses the questions posed.

'Inhabiting the grey spaces' – theme of Chapter Four

Chapter Four examined the ambiguities of 'space', 'place' and 'belonging' linked to the lived experience of the black diasporas (Mirzoeff, 2000). Critical moments of displacement and relocation exposed the tensions between normalizing strategies of old and new constructs of dominant – hegemonic - black masculine identities. The analysis suggests that the unsettling experiences of displacement and changes in locality have been both empowering and disempowering, which confirms Uguris's (2001) thesis. It has brought about new avenues to how self-identities have been crafted and articulated. Together with new constructs of masculine identities, new ethnic positions are narrated, which modify traditional narratives of practicing men's identities. One of the postmodernist twists to identity projects is the unscripted terrain of aging as a migrant in Britain and the possibilities open to craft self-identities with the minimum of constraints (Jones, 1989). Cultural constraints can be adhered to or subverted. The fragmentation of institutions gives impetus to new mobilizations and groupings. The analysis exposed some of the concerns participants have experienced in formulating a meaningful sense of self-identity from within their families, communities, and paid-work environments, which have not reciprocally reinforced how they see themselves. Most notably, they weave together well-defined markers of blackness into new formulations that speak of new ethnicities forged in hazy and often obscured social locations. New articulations of blackness are constantly being negotiated and worked through on a collective and individual basis. In the context of Britain, we are led to believe that everyone is 'hybrid' and involved in a

metamorphosis of social identities regardless of our gender, sexual, religious, class, and ethnic identities, or our regional, national, and political loyalties.

I have used the idea of hybrid identities as a metaphor to describe the dynamics of the participants' assimilation into British society. However, hybridization does not exist outside of power relations. I have argued that the black community is undergoing its own peculiar changes (for example, aging population, repatriation, third and fourth generations, and so forth), which are captured in how participants are refiguring their ties to the diaspora and synthesizing dimensions of British culture into their lives. At one time it was fair to say that newcomers functioned within two cognitive worlds; now those worlds have collapsed to produce something quite different. Rather than black masculine identities being in crisis, the analysis suggests that the experiences of displacement and changes in locality has spawned a new sense of ethnicity (Hall, 1992 &Anthias, 1998), among men traditionally (and more recently) excluded by their own communities back 'home'. The boundaries of the black community in Britain and elsewhere are being reshaped to accommodate new ethnicities. None of the participants are searching for futuristic identities that exist outside of their cultural frame of reference, but at the same time they are not reliant upon the one ontological viewpoint of the social world. What appears paramount amongst most participants is the need for self-governance, which means either erasing or playing with the cultural limitations that restrict, rather than extend, their individuated sense of masculine identity.

'Disabilities, ill-health, and the body' - theme of Chapter Five

Chapter Five examined suppressed stories of body image and capacities in specific reference to black Caribbean masculine identities (Miller, 1969). It is apparent in this study that the body is narrated as an important medium to communicate how participants have negotiated the meaning of their masculine identities from different positionalities. Narratives of masculine embodiment are captured, along with narratives of how masculinities are routinely performed in accordance with, and sometimes in contention to, rigid black gender roles. The analysis suggests a number of different ways that bodily capacity and body-image have been integral to how

participants position themselves in order to acquire cultural capital and accomplish the feeling of power and respect; these are the main building blocks to masculine identity (Grogan, 1999). Without a doubt, some participants experience undue pressures from social and cultural ambitions that they must appear healthy, able-bodied, and have good physical capacities as black men. These perceptions of black masculinity might originate from racist stereotypes, but it is highlighted in the study how such perceptions are perpetuated by members of the black community, affecting how individuals see themselves. I have asked the uncomfortable question of how participants who do not conform and match up to this cultural ideal negotiate their bodies from this position and form friendships with other black men. Participants have testified to the different techniques they use to achieve this aim, by disguising or modifying their bodies to meet culturally accepted standards. Techniques include the stylization of clothing, which demarcates among other things how participants embody the different layers of the black community. Participants play with jewellery, body art, coloured lenses, hairstyles and dye; they indulge in nostalgic, politicized, and religious dress and integrate other artefacts into their lives that invoke contradictory and often multiple meanings to their bodies and resonate somewhere in the collective memory of their local black cultures. Dress should not be underestimated in how participants narrate their sense of masculine identity. Like most social groups, cultural capital is accomplished according to how well individuals conform to cultural ideals or even sub-cultural rules of how men should look. Therefore, most participants expose in their narrations how they utilize and manipulate a variety of cultural signifiers selected to offset the stigma associated with aging, cancer, sickle-cell anaemia, skinniness and so forth, that blight their body images.

In terms of practicing masculine identities, most participants narrate how they dance between performing 'butch' (that is, hard-edged masculinity), 'middle class' (for instance, acting bourgeois), 'street' (that is, acting authentically black) (Boyd, 1997), and so forth. These are analogies of positions of power and respect, which I repeatedly encounter in the life-testimonies. How participants perform in more private spheres of their lives is reflected in the former metaphors. Intermittently, participants have had to navigate their way through various social spaces and locations that

demand that they adopt a different script or posture to how they dress, talk, and behave. As a result, participants cite that they often perform multifaceted, contradictory, and sometimes complimentary, masculine roles. The mismatch of repertoires in how participants perform black masculine identities (not tied to stereotypes) provides insightful clues into how participants use bodily performances to neutralise criticism about their manliness. Each participant performs masculinity differently and testifies to doing what is required in order to safeguard themselves as individuals. The participants' masculine performances seem to be connected to a wish for control over how they are perceived – a sense of well-being – as much as judgements about appearance and inclusion. It is as if the participants' masculine performances serve as general containers for thoughts, desires, and fears about the self. The study does not claim to understand the difficult locations each participant inhabits, but presents a glimpse into the safe spaces where participants experiment with new ways of being. What is borne out in this study is the importance of how masculine identities are subtly and overtly performed in order for participants to truly feel like 'men'. The variety of ways in which participants have narrated their body images, and how they self-consciously narrate the crafting of their bodies, crucially offers insight into their personal acts of agency. Acts of agency are reflected in the non-arbitrary decisions participants have made about 'peforming' masculinity.

'The masquerade of being gay and straight' - theme of Chapter Six

Chapter Six dealt with issues surrounding black sexuality and sexual practices that are tabooed or ridiculed from within black heterosexist communities (Mercer et al, 1998). In previous chapters I have attempted to outline constructs of stigmatized, tabooed, and ostracised black masculine identities. Most participants share common elements and codes in communicating how they subjectively construct their masculine identities to avoid the implicit effects of cultural constraints. The analysis reflects, in part, the boundless ways that agency is negotiated and spoken about against a torrent of structural constraints prevalent in contemporary black communities. Participants testify to moments of mobilization and changes in knowledge about their sexual identities, which have loomed large in the study. Few participants deny ever constructing a masquerade to their sexual identities to avoid the sort of detection that

leads to confrontation. Because of this, I argue that hegemonic black men have fewer capacities for agency than do marginalized black men. Black gay participants understand that play of identities (Loiacano, 1989, Constantine-Simms, 2000). The participants testify to critical moments when they have had the capacity, in their gender-role relationships, to influence events and to behave independently of the defining constraints of their local communities.

The sociologists Anthony Giddens (1994) refers to reflexive people as the 'knowledgeable agents' who construct perceptions of the social world in which they are located, who know a great deal about the circumstances and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives, and who articulate what they do and their reasons for doing it. Hence, one analytical abstraction I capture is the construct of black gay identity which illustrates, at least in part, how black subjectivity (Mama, 1995) is constantly being negotiated from within black communities. The analysis suggests that for black gay participants sexual identities represent the power of ambiguity and paradox in the forging and acting out black masculine identities. The analysis captures moments when participants self-define themselves as gay and/or straight and all the analytical simplifications that exist in-between. The common argument thrown in the face of gay participants is that they must have chosen at some point to be gay, and they must have chosen their 'gayness' over their 'blackness'. These points are reported as internal dilemmas as much as they are external markers of group belonging. But in the realm of 'reality' these issues are never resolvable and become lived ambiguities. Without a doubt, all the participants make choices in their sexual identities. To not make choices makes for a rather sluggish cognitive-world. I argue that choices are made on a day-to-day basis on a micro level, in connection to how sexual identities have been forged and performed. Most participants report a blurred focus in how they have chosen to portray their sexual identities in public. Participants narrate elements of deception and a lack of openness in their self-defined sexual portraits. The participants' perceptions of their sexual identities invite oxymorons (that is, blurred focuses) to describe how they are negotiated (for instance, toughness/sensitivity, foresight/impulsiveness). The mixing of sexual repertoires is on one level the only way to grasp the ungraspable, since sexual identities usually become indistinguishable from the participants' sense of self.

It would be easy to stereotype gay participants and presume that they all perform flamboyant masculinities; it is just as easy to stereotype the behaviour of straight participants who supposedly perform hard-edged scripts. However, in reality we see how some gay participants align themselves closer to hegemonic ideals than some straight participants have. Without a doubt there are taboos formed in the cultural construction of Jamaican men who do not father children, men who want control of the domestic sphere, and men who have relationships with other men. The participants' acts of agency reveal the self-conscious decisions that they have taken to sidestep these and other binary positions. Most participants do not feel compelled to choose one identity over another. For most participants it is much clearer-cut to resist defining themselves. The study presents the shifting points of self-referencing and expressions of belonging occurring for black gay, bisexual, and straight men alike, as a rapidly moving, indistinct phenomenon. Even the most self-assured participants I have collected testimonies from have made conscious decisions about how they relate to other men and how they include or exclude them from their immediate social world. Participants cite coming out and staying in the closet, marrying late in life, marrying white, not marrying at all, performing sexual fantasies in public, leaving and entering groupings, and dating exclusively black as factors affecting and shaping their friendships with black men.

Thus, the analysis does not reinforce societal expectations about gender roles: that men are not sexually knowing and more emotionally distant. Although participants have been victims of restrictive and challenging sex-roles because of their sexual identities, their breaking down of sex-roles appears to have benefited who they are. Few participants have felt permanently trapped in playing sets of stereotypical roles and have not accepted the punishments of non-conformity. The analysis suggests that participants are emotionally and socially responsible in their sex roles. For instance, most participants accept the responsibility of being a father – even gay participants (although they may not accept being a husband) – and see their roles as siblings, lovers, husbands, grandparents, uncles, sons and so forth as equally intrinsic to being a 'man'.

"Lifestyle choices and the glamour of the ghetto" – theme of Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven examined issues of immobility and upward mobility in specific reference to the question of black authenticity. To reiterate, the study is exploratory and far from comprehensive and does not attempt to illustrate every positionality and cultural fiction of black masculine identities. This study expands the analytical abstraction of the 'street' as a construct to describe the contours of how some participants construct their masculine identities, at least in part, in terms of social mobility and immobility. I do not propose that the categories of social mobility and immobility have a political value, for the sole reason that non-hegemonic masculine identities are uneasy fantasy figures to fit neatly into anyone category. Many cultural theorists and artists celebrate 'black masculinity' in the context of the 'street', without probing for voices that do not conform to the temporal regularities of street culture. Street culture is not a homogenized institution: it is fractured, fragmented, and comprised of people of different ages, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, sex, religious groupings and cultural practices. It is usually found in densely populated urban areas. There are multiple layers of meaning to describe street culture. I have specifically chosen to examine how black men of Jamaican descent inhabit the street. When participants talk about street culture they commonly fix it in a reformulation derived from a blending of popular Jamaican and British cultural practices (Cooper, 1989). Because much of Jamaican cultural life and male socialization takes place outer road it is no surprise to find this pattern being repeated in Britain. British influences reveal themselves implicitly in the growing gender neutrality of the street, the houses, the churches, the workplaces, the bars and the shops that lie within the participants' life-worlds. Such localities are quite simply the places where participants live their everyday lives.

Street culture is still deemed by some participants to be the most authentic locality of 'black culture'. This is a key to understand why many of the participants have felt the street to be structurally constraining. Most participants I have spoken to have a problem with this cultural construct and feel that street culture differentiates black

men, not only in terms of dress, talk, walk and values but also in terms of how others recognize them. The young and newly old participants whom I loosely term the 'bling-generation' recognize themselves in part as belonging to a street scene. They have knowledge of the sychronization of depoliticized and detraditionalized black signifiers and symbols (for example, black dance, music, and clothing) and how it forms part of a standardized consumer culture, making everyone who adopts this referent system seem more or less the same. This supports their aim of concealing internal and external differences with black men: appearing on the surface to embody street culture whilst simultaneously inhabiting other spaces. This reality and play on 'blackness' undermines the political dimensions to black signifiers, especially for the few participants who felt that street culture is a scared site where black masculine identities are defined in their own fixed terms. This sentiment has spanned generations. First-generation participants inhabited 'street corners' back 'home' where they developed their masculine identities on their own and through peer group inventiveness and ingenuity. The socially constructed environment of the street is commonly pertained to as a buffer to external hostility and a reciprocally reinforcing space for the construction of masculine identities.

The power and allure of the street, with its excess and surplus representations of 'black masculinities', still manages to overshadow alternative narratives which chronicle the barriers black men routinely confront in other social sites. Participants have given different vantage points of the street and testify to different cultural experiences: not always positive. The analysis suggests that participants wrestle with an imaginary site of authenticity combined with the unremitting project of identity management. Some participants narrate a passionate agency in how they navigate and make choices to connect with the ethos of the street. The adoption of the street ethos serves as a catalyst to new ways of being and living that extend beyond the confines of their local life. Participants imply that part of knowing who they are transpires from submerging themselves periodically and/or momentarily in street culture. They give analogies of their cultural experiences of the street as a site of playfulness, politics, and becoming. Experiences derived from the street have been intuitive and a precursor for change, empowerment, friendships with men, and most importantly new ways of seeing themselves as 'men'. Most participants have referred to street culture

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as an all-encompassing identity scheme. However, only a few participants still claim to invest great emotional weight in the street. The street no longer offers the majority of the participants any overall template of social and personal identity.

Although class constraints have loosened (Balibac et al, 1991, Callinicos, 1993) and participants define themselves less and less in terms of class, this does not erase the fact that the spectrum of the British class-system has not gone away and still resonates in the minds of participants. To make it worse, part of the Jamaican malaise is its fascination with class. Class identities are a community production in which lifestyle choices are an abstraction. Lifestyles are consumer driven with less emphasis placed on horizontal shifts (which centre and round group identities) and more on vertical shifts (intended to confirm status and class) to broaden masculine identities. New consumption patterns across commodities, from food and clothing to health and holidays, verify how participants incorporate new lifestyle choices into their lives. As a result, consumer culture has altered the way many participants conceive and position themselves as men. The processes of consumerism have signalled a loss of political agency; instead consumerism becomes an all-encompassing identity project. The pressure to conform and achieve social expectations through consumer practices is a reality most participants try to minimise in their lives, with only a few taking it to its excess. This throws up the question of autonomous agency in the construction of self. Participants spin a web of deception around their masculine identities to simply present an outward appearance of normality. This could not be farther from the truth; participants do not easily endorse norms, standards, and systems derived from street culture that throw light on their points of differentiation (for instance, white and black racism, homophobia, ageism, disablism, classism, and so forth). Participants adopt different masks and personas from consumer culture (which is infused with many black signifiers) to overcome these insecurities. Vulnerabilities are a clear and coherent way of talking about black men's self-identities. The study exemplifies how the participants' innermost feelings and fears are, at least in part, a community production and require community solutions.

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FRAMING POST-MODERN BLACK VOICES AGAINST A UNIVERSALIZING CHORUS

The preceding chapters have detailed the themes that emerge from the life-testimonies. A synthesis of lived experiences, aspirations, desires, and institutional relations emerge, which demonstrate how the participants' identities have been tentatively poised and pieced together. As detailed in Chapter Four, black Caribbean masculine identities are constituted and constructed in a variety of different social sites and are influenced by a multitude of different socio-cultural scripts that come from Jamaica, America, and Britain (Hall, 1995). However, I must reemphasize that there are no pure cultural forms. The way identities are reformulated and narrated by participants is achieved through highly complex processes of selective reading and deciphering of cultural narratives, to convey stories of 'selfhood' still in the process of becoming.

We all have incomplete and contradictory identities. An inevitable part of postmodern living is the dislodging, instability, and the constant shifting in subject positions, which encompasses the transient patterns in which identities are captured and reconfigured. As such, the participants' life-testimonies have offered illustrative accounts into how and why they have momentarily/periodically experienced internal and external divisions in their self-identities.

As detailed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, external divisions in self-identities are recognizable in institutional relations that occur on the street, in family networks, and in other shared bonds where there is unevenness in respect and power. Power is held by some black men who subscribe to most, if not all, the norms that regulate culturally specific local theatres. Social spaces serve to undermine how participants feel about themselves and how others treat and interact with them. If participants feel that they are not bestowed with respect and wealth it is likely that they hold limited power to negotiate their own identities from the centre of those social sites. It appears that the participants' relationships with other men are dependent upon their subordinate position and their demonstration to achieve or subordinate themselves to

normative standards. Yet still, I must note that black communities contain a number of expanding social sites and a divergent number of subject positions (some more respected than others) that allow for different points of view and for hegemonic discourses to be filtered into and/or rejected from the participants' own conceptualizations of self-identity.

The ideas of 'race', 'ethnicity', and 'masculinity' are contested concepts, which hold no monolithic or essentializing value to this work except in how participants invest them with meaning. The study demonstrates how a multitude of interpretations are offered to how each concept is incorporated and/or rejected into identity projects. These social concepts were used to guide the analysis where literature and life-testimonies suggest they could be of use as markers of similarities and differences. There is a sense of security in knowing how people around you should behave and look; especially when outside you have little or no control over how you are perceived and represented. It becomes more urgent and empowering for communities to control their own identities. The aforementioned concepts associated with the question of identity are bestowed with ideals, values, and beliefs that help shape and inform group identification, and thus can serve to constrain self-identities that fall outside its political, cultural, or moralistic boundaries. It is ironic that nobody really lives within these tight restrictions, but some participants aspire to achieve and mimic them in order to be socially recognized and included. To do otherwise has meant some participants have been periodically/momentarily excluded, ostracized, stigmatized, made fun of, or at worse physically attacked because of their differences; not from 'reality', but from the idea of what a black man should be. The normative standards of 'black masculinity' were expected to be present in the practice and appearance of each participant. Whether participants reject or subscribe to this normative logic of a racialized masculinity, most, if not all, the participants construct their own identities in recognition.

It has been demonstrated in the study that the concepts 'race', 'ethnicity', and 'masculinity' still persist in the conscious or subconscious selfhood of the participants. But similar to most postmodern agents, there is some degree of ambiguity in how such notions are applied to their daily lives and how other social

agents have responded to how they have chosen to assemble and reflect 'who they are'. To reaffirm, the concepts were deployed to theoretically ground how participants conceive their identities and black subjectivities within the study. The study highlights, among other things, how the construction of black masculine identities is changeable and is practiced in accordance to the different spheres in a black man's daily life. There are recurring themes in how self-identities have been narrated. It is worth commenting briefly of each of these concepts in turn, in specific reference to the questions posed.

The first question I aimed to answer was how hegemonic discourses influence and shape the way black men construct and express self-identities. In terms of 'ethnicity', black Caribbean men are marginalized in the British cultural landscape without undermining the impact of Jamaican masculinities in the global village. On that basis, notions of Jamaicaness come to the fore and are typified in language-identities. Most participants feel that judgements are made about a person's identity based on whether they speak in dialect and/or standardized English. Most of the participants prefer to retain their Jamaican accent; only a few participants highlight why they have adopted a principally Standard English accent. The cultural and linguistic differences (central markers of 'ethnicity') among participants were one example of how hegemonic discourses have influenced and shaped how identities are articulated. In the interviews, participants' intonation and pitch make a difference in how their masculine identities are conveyed. Gestures are also a part of the communication process, but few studies emphasize this point. A few participants remark that they have toned down their gesticulations because it has often been interpreted as aggressive outside the boundaries of local black communities. This has restricted how cultural identities have been articulated (hooks, 1991). Those participants that do not tone themselves down acknowledge that they ran the risk of being marginalized in mainstream society or scorned by other black men who devalue this type of communication as being too overtly 'black'. Similarly, problems have arisen in life-testimonies when participants have chosen to use Standard English (as opposed to 'black talk') and have been ostracized or ridiculed by other black people. Jamaican dialect has been transplanted and modified in black British communities with

'philosophical guidelines and analytical tools and concepts' (Keesing et al, 1998, p. 32), which construct formulaic identities.

On a different level, some participants try to avoid being associated with the stereotypes that besiege black Caribbean men's identities. Although black Jamaicans share a common ancestry, their histories have taken divergent paths. Participants who came to Britain as young men construct their earliest sense of masculine identities from where their leaders were 'black'. As a result, they lack the understanding of their children and grandchildren experiences, which are tinted by the reality that in Britain they are in the minority and are taught to see themselves through the eyes of 'others' as a subordinated and inferior people (Mason, 1995). Some go on to construct their sense of masculine identity from a position where they feel more deprived and disenfranchised than their parents, and feel resentful of their parents' sense of place in the world. Although some participants have lived in Britain now for the major part of their lives, their self-identities are still resourced, in part, from dominant stories back 'home'. Criticism is levelled against subsequent generations for their malaise and inability to strive for their independence as men. This argument reveals potential motivations and triggers as to why participants align themselves, albeit tentatively, to racial discourses that sometimes position them in opposition to other black men.

The second question I aimed to answer was the role the imaginary black community plays in regulating black men's identities. Participants testify to a number of different ways they realign themselves to collectivise and groupings within modern society that bespeaks very specific types of community identities. These collectives and groupings afford participants the experience of self-governance, even if this means the concealment of certain aspects of their identities. Participants construct their masculine identities in safe spaces that give contextual meaning to otherwise fragile and contested identities. These men's masculine identities are constantly being questioned and challenged when they stand alone, and indeed when they have formed links with tabooed groups. Self-constructions of black masculine identities are played out on a number of different levels and through a variety of discourses that combine a variety of cultural niches. Although the participants are a heterogeneous grouping they do share a common frame of reference. I feel that to manage social encounters,

participants skilfully fuse and/or span common frames of references to retain some degree of (cultural recognition and) access to power (or the illusion of power) which membership to black communities affords them. Without this connection to a collective identity, self-definition and self-image is seriously undermined. Yet still, participants testify to the possibilities of re-defining their masculine identities partially within black communities, but also within more familiar and less subversive groupings. While some participants search for their 'roots' in order to create strong foundations for their identities (and in the process limit their identity projects), other participants reside in the fact that they share in a multicultural story emerging from a British cultural context. They exploit inhabiting a third alternative space.

Participants allude to the fact that masculine identities are observed and assessed as indicators to signify the degree of their 'blackness' and inclusion into black communities. Many participants refer to an archetypal black man, the no-nonsense type of person who puts his community first before his own concerns. The pressure of voluntarism and responsibility towards local black communities connects with how most, if not all, the participants understand their masculine identities. However, the rigid typologies that serve to polarize black masculine identities in other studies are not borne out here. Neither have I tried to use any kind of analysis that collapses black masculinities into classifications or deviations of white masculinities. Such studies routinely fail to capture the posturing, posing, and peculiarities in black masculine formations as this work as done. The idea of masculine identities here reveals a variety of different formulations that have been spontaneous, complex, ambivalent, culturally criss-crossing, contradictory, fluid, reflexive, and so forth in their narration.

The third question I posed was how black men navigate and negotiate interpersonal relations with 'other' black men. In terms of 'masculinities', different life-testimonies present gender divides in their relationships with other black men. Participants choose to construct their identities in different communities other than their black communities, as a cause or effect of their homosocial relations with black men (Bean, 1996). What the work demonstrates is that the idea of 'masculinity' acts as a master label that informs and determines how participants relate to other men. Like the explanation of community identities I have detailed, ideas around 'masculinity' are an

extension to how black men bond and find grounds for their commonality and shared sense of the social world. But while a shared sense of masculinity promotes oneness and allegiances, it also engenders competition and rejection.

The process of hybridization appears in most life-testimonies and constitutes, at least in part, why participants have had fraught relationships with other black men. The hybrid space (internal and external) is conceptually defined as a problematic space, but also a tremendously creative and liberating social space in which masculine identity has less constraints and restrictions placed upon it. For this reason, participants grouped themselves increasingly around other black men that share in their interests and concerns of outsiderness. Although they frequent other groupings they find solidarity and clarity in the relations they experience with other black men. At the risk of excluding themselves from segments of the black community, and in certain cases their families, some participants wholeheartedly inhabit in-between spaces. Other participants often live 'double' as opposed to integrated lives and skilfully negotiate their way across different communities, fashioning different masculine personas and ways of being to cope with their marginality. Inhabiting in-between spaces must not be confused with forced marginality; the freedoms in agency allow participants to recreate their own points of identification and communities of belonging, and choose the terms of their own marginality. When there cannot be openness around masculine identities and loyalties are questioned, black men's relationships are prone to difficulties. Black masculine identities represent a kaleidoscope of lived experiences and a blending of voices which cover a whole range of social relationships.

The metaphor of potentiality in multiple marginalization

To reiterate, this study has been concerned with cases of multiple marginalization experienced by black men. We can draw several conclusions from this study to deepen our sociological understanding of the limitations and implications of constructing black masculine identities from the axes of intersecting levels of oppression. I feel that this study demonstrates the peculiar way some black men see and negotiate their masculine identities amid the presence of normalizing black

structures and regularities. Black hegemonic discourses, representations, and practices have set participants apart and denied them, at critical moments in their lives, the recognition of respect and power commonly conferred upon men (in patriarchal ideology) because they do not conform to cultural ideals, beliefs, and values. Some participants are not only marginal but also invisible as a consequence of intersecting points of oppression. This study has shown how some black men are outsiders and see the black community from a range of voyeuristic angles. Within the defined 'common culture' there are, of course, many different sub-cultures around which participants align themselves. Participants have not left the black community entirely. The way participants have approached their masculine identities have not necessarily been forged or determined upon how 'blackness' is conceived by the common culture.

What is revealed is that intra-racial relationships are an important area of concern and a neglected focus in much social research, especially studies that pertain to investigate the condition and circumstances of black people. More studies need to focus on how black men define their own masculine identities in recognition of their complexity and multiplicity. Otherwise we simply run the risk of silencing yet another group of people and compounding their experiences of marginality. I feel that there is some urgency to present voices that represent multiply marginal black positions, in order to understand the dynamics of their heterogeneity and the stratification of power experienced among black people to define 'Black Britain'. The hidden stories of black marginality are diverse and to a large extent not mapped-out. Elderly participants need their stories of migration, settlement, and repatriation recording before it is too late. The migration boom generation are either dying or leaving Britain. The loss of the first generation (Blakemore et al, 1994), the fracturing of black communities, black men marrying white outside the black community, and the steady assimilating into British society signals a loosing of ties with the Caribbean. But what will be the effects upon the next generation of black men (of one and two parents)?

The limit of this way of thinking is that there is no way to generalize or validate the idiosyncratic and individuated ways black men or groupings perform their realities and connect with other social worlds beyond their own constructed world. However, what I have been able to accomplish is a glimpse into the different facets and layers of

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black marginality. For example, success has been shown to breed contempt and jealously, and produce a form of self-marginality. Non-heterosexuality can lead to cultural rejection and force marginality, but seldom are participants ostracized by their families. can intensify the feelings of estrangement, whether you return 'home' or stay in Britain, causing feelings of social marginality. Physical disabilities and severe ill-health can be awkwardly experienced because of the pressures to identify with overly-signified body cultures and enact hyper-masculine role relationships. Defining one's identity as being black British (Davison, 1996 & Owuou, 2000) can also be destabilizing and contributes to split loyalties and defining oneself in opposition to the Caribbean. Participants testify to inhabiting ambivalent grey spaces that predominates in how stories of black men's self-identities have been told. No two participants are alike in their social circumstances and view of the black community. The obscure grey and 'fuzzy' areas of social life frame how black men see and engage with each other on local and national levels.

I have started this process and put together the participants' suppressed stories of subordinating their own masculine identities and/or subverting constraining fallacies of 'black masculinity' at critical moments in their lives. I have been able to capture the haphazard and fuzzy presence of agency as participants negotiate their way around new relations in their local communities, among family members, and in their global position. The strength of using a social constructionist approach has been the ability to capture personal stories where participants have been truly wide awake to social life and the workings of social power, and where they have constructed their own realities. One might argue that the less powerful black men are the better endowed with knowledge of the dynamics and workings of power, while the more privileged are deprived of the experience of such knowledge. Most, if not all, the participants were conscious of how dominant narratives of Jamaican social life simultaneously constrain and validate gender scripts. These gender scripts are not always visible but their power and influence in how participants narrate their self-identities as black Caribbean men cannot be underestimated. When I scratched beneath the surface of life-testimonies I found latent Caribbean masculine repertories that had obviously been constructed in a different temporal and spatial location, but had been dislocated. In part, what is inherited is the ability and knowledge to negotiate a larger social life

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comprising of competing gender regimes. How this knowledge is translated and reformulated and imagined to fit with their lives in Britain warrants investigation.

Participants who speak from inner cities often put the necessity of daily life before links with their past. Work needs to be done to define these necessities. Likewise, black men who see themselves as globally well positioned and who take advantage of the world as a big structure also warrant further investigating. For instance, if the Europe Union is not being redefined in terms of Christianity or racial biology, how do black men figure in this reformulation? How do black men weave together notions of Caribbeaness, Britishness, and Europeaness into a coherent and meaningful sense of belonging? Shifting national boundaries do present new and interesting challenges in the ways in which black men see and construct who they are. As constant outsiders with no precise answers to where they belong, some participants lay claim to Europe as 'home'. Other participants look towards Africa and Jamaica. Even so, I am talking of shifting national boundaries where the sense of belonging is not necessarily reciprocated. Some participants define themselves more from regional or local contexts and do not really look beyond the confines of their local theatres for the impetus to who they are. This dimension to their character is seldom analytically considered and brought to the surface in studies. Commonly, black men are constructed using an exclusively urban typology and seldom seen from other, more compelling, angles. Although there is evidence of the presence of agency in this study, what has been most insightful, and is clearly an area of concern, has been the obstacle of larger structures that penetrates how participants imagine and describe themselves. On reflecting on the participants' cognitive worlds questions have been raised about the forbidding features of British culture that encircle their lives as a constant reminder that they are partial insiders and outsiders. I would hope that studies in the future explore hidden stories of black masculine identities and build an oral history of the precarious cultural positions black men inhabit in Britain. More importantly, these studies must consider the affect this has upon how black men's self-identities are forged.

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Appendix 1   Recruitment Letter

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Darren Sharpe and I am a Ph.D. student from Nottingham Trent University. I am currently undertaking a study on black masculinities using a Sociological approach. I need your help in recruiting a number of adult black male participants who would consider themselves marginalized or at odds with the black community for various reasons (i.e. sexual orientation, disability, profession, mental health, etc). The study will involve three one-hour interviews over the following year, in which the topic of discussion will center upon the participant's own sense of 'self. This is an exciting opportunity to take part in a research project that aims to bring voices often ignored to the forefront.

To find out more please ring me on Tel: 0115 8485638 or 07974290501, or alternatively you can e-mail me at   darren.sharpe@ntu.ac.uk

P.S. This message will be followed by a phone call in the following weeks

Yours faithfully

Darren Sharpe B.A (Hons) M.Sc.

Appendix 2   Written Instructions for taking Pictures

What to do with the disposable Camera

For the following seven days, I would like you to take the camera out with you wherever you go and take pictures of images or symbols (for example, advertisements, buildings, posters, paintings, spaces, etc) that you feel best represents your own sense of identity. Once the film is complete, you need to return the film in the pre-paid self-addressed envelope provided.

Thank you for your participation in the study.

Appendix 3   Interview Schedule

Attitudes towards advertising

- Is there a crisis in the way black masculinity is represented in advertising?
- If so, what are its possible roots and effects?
- More, importantly how have you overcome or avoided such difficulties?
- How much control over choice do you feel you have over your social identity? Your work identity? Your family identity
- Although there is an increase in images of black men now on billboards, in books, magazines, over the internet, on television and on big screen what affect (perhaps non) as this had on your sense of masculine identity?
- What are your views on commodified black images used to sell consumer goods?
- Does the emphasis upon athleticisms, dance, and dress make or break black men?
- We know how white society perceive black male bodies, but how do you relate and feel about your own body?
- What level of importance do you attach to your own body? In what ways?
- Do you see advertisements featuring black men with disabilities?
- How much significance is given to the myth of the 'big black penis' when you think of black masculinity?
- What images best represent you?
- Are there any images of black men that you would accept as being true or out rightly reject as false?

Work Identity
- Are there images of black men in your workplaces?
- If so, what do they depict?
- Do you feel that being educated is consistent with having a dominant black masculine identity?
- Is being professional in your work and conduct consistent with having a dominant black masculine identity?
- If not why?
- What problems have you experienced at work that you can attribute to being a black man?
- What benefits do you receive at work that you could attribute to you being a black man?
- Do you identify with recruitment posters (produced by the arm forces, the police force, and the NHS) featuring black men?
- What black images do you encounter in other professional contexts you visit?

Community Identity

- One criticism made against the 'black community' by black members is the level of secrecy that prevails that allows layers of oppression to occur, what has been your experience?
- Is the portrayal of black-on-black violence a reality or a myth created by the mass media?
- Based upon your own experience what are the most frequently used public spaces you use to with friends?
- Based upon your own observations what are the passages and or stages black men pass through from boyhood to manhood to develop their sense of masculine identity?
- What cultural images best represent these stages?
- Is it acceptable or appropriate to uses non-black role models?
- Are British black men represented differently in visual culture from black men elsewhere in Europe, USA, and Canada?
- Are black middle class men automatically stigmatized? If so, why?
- What are the images that typically depict them?
- Is being born and raised in'ghetto' legitimacy enough of an authentic black identity?
- If so, what are the images that best depict them?
- What does the idea of 'internalized racism' mean to you?
- In what ways is it present in cultural images?
- Can we use the idea of 'multiple oppression' to understand the situation of certain black men in Britain?
- In what way does your religious or non-religious believe impact upon your sense of masculine identity?
- How are black men represented in images produced by the black community?
- Where are you most likely to socialize?
- Is it a typically black or mixed race venue?
- How would you describe other black men there?
- Do you socialize with other black men?
- What images do you look for in a flyer advertising a black community event/dance?
- Does the shade of the black man's skin make him more or less acceptable or desirable in the black community?

Family identity

- What images represent your domestic role?
- Are you a carer?
- What images of fatherhood have influenced you most?
- How as parenting affected your sense of masculine identity?
- Does being alone undermine your sense of masculinity?
- Is there a stigma attached to admitting that you might be lonely?

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- How much time do you spend with your extended family?
- Is being family-orientated consistent with popular images of black men?
- How are black families represented in visual culture?
- What type of households do you think produce non-dominant black men?
- Do you think that black men really experience 'emasculation' by black women? Truth or fiction?
- Moreover, marginalised because of this fact?
- How would you describe your relationships with your male family members?
- How would you describe your colour? What about your families' colouration?
- Are their any other terms that you find unacceptable about your colour?
- How would you define your masculine identity?

Appendix 4 Recruitment Flyer

What does Black Manhood mean to you?

This is your opportunity to take part in research that will give voice to your experience....

Are you a black West Indian male?

Are you aged over 21yrs?

Are you willing to take part in discussions on issues that concern black men?

Anonymity is assured, but the stories you give will form part of a wide-ranging collection of narratives on doing black masculinity in present-day Britain.

Please telephone/email Darren Sharpe on 0115 8485635 mobile 07974290501 or at <u>darren.sharpe@ntu.ac.uk</u>

Appendix.5 Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

My name is Darren Sharpe. I am doing research on a project entitled 'black masculinities'. The project is sponsored by Nottingham Trent University. I am directing the project and can be contacted at 0115 8485635 mobile 07974290501 or at darren.sharpe@ntu.ac.uk should you have any questions.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before we start I would like to emphasize that:
- Your participation is entirely voluntary;
- You are free to refuse to answer any questions;
- You are free to withdraw at any time;
- You are free to withdraw any written or visual text at any time;
- Your approval of any information written about you will be sort before publication.

The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Excerpts from the interview results may be part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your
Name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign and date this form

.... (Signature)
.... (Print)
.... (Date)

Appendix 6 Research Participants Profiles

SELF SELECTED NAME:	AGE:	ETHNIC LOCATION:	PERSONAL BACKGROUND:
PARTICIPANT ONE Daniel	37	Afro-centric Second generation Jamaican	'Defines' identity in terms of 'street culture', 'childhood poverty', 'black politics', &;fatherhood
PARTICIPANT TWO Peter	33	In political terms 'Black' Second Generation Trinidad & Tobago/ English	Defines identity in terms of being multi heritage';' gay', & 'catholic'
PARTICIPANT THREE Mr Morris	82	Jamaican-British First Generation	Defines identity by 'migrant status', 'aging', 'retirement' and 'Jamaican roots'
PARTICIPANT FOUR Mr William	62	Jamaican-British First generation	Defines identity by 'early retirement'; 'returning 'home', 'fatherhood'; & 'entrepreneurialism'.
PARTICIPANT FIVE Mr Fraser	71	Jamaican-British First generation	Defines identity by 'early retirement due to ill-health;' 'home ownership'; & 'aging'
PARTICIPANT SIX Raymond	46	Black British Second generation Jamaican	Defines identity by being a child 'looked after'
PARTICIPANT SEVEN Trevor	24	Black British Second generation Jamaican	Defines identity in terms of 'Christianity'; 'being in the closet', and 'projected occupational identity'
PARTICIPANT EIGHT Richard	36	British African Caribbean Second generation Jamaican	Defines identity by being a 'gay man'; 'survivor of cancer'; & 'active uncle and godfather'
PARTICIPANT NINE Dean	36	Afro-centric Second generation Jamaican	Defines identity by being a 'sickle cell suffer'; 'fatherhood', 'marriage', &

			being a uncle
PARTICIPANT TEN Akem	37	Black British Second generation Jamaican	Defines identity in terms of 'queer& black politics'; 'SM play', & 'photographer
PARTICIPANT ELEVEN Mr Mansfield	59	Jamaican-British First generation	Defines his identity in terms of returning 'home', being a 'Freemason', and 'marrying late in life'