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'So, you're from Brixton?': the struggle for recognition and esteem in a multicultural community

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Title: The Struggle for Recognition
and Esteem in a Stigmatised
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and Esteem

The Struggle for Recognition and Esteem in a Stigmatised Community

This paper examines how the struggle for recognition and esteem permeates everyday experiences in the context of young people living in Brixton, South London, UK. It begins with an explanation of the qualitative methods and thematic analysis used to research this issue in depth. The study consisted of 8 focus groups with a total of 44 teenagers between the ages of twelve and sixteen, and 5 interviews with the head teachers of Brixton's secondary schools. The findings are then discussed in three sections. The first section illustrates how identity is constructed through and against the representations held by others within particular social contexts. Focusing on the different strategies that different adolescents adopt in constructing a positive identity reveals the salience of racist representations in the social construction of Brixton. The second section examines the cost this can have on the self-image and self-esteem of many in the study. The concluding section illustrates how some adolescents collaboratively develop the social and psychological resources to protect themselves against the prejudices of others. Together this material reveals how social relationships and institutional cultures empower/disempower adolescents in their collaborative struggle for recognition and esteem.

KEY WORDS: Recognition, identity, representation, stigma, racism, empowerment, Brixton.

What must it be like to live in an area that is marginalised and stigmatised? What is it like to grow up in a neighbourhood that the media constantly associate with crime, drugs, violence and social deprivation? What are the social psychological consequences of being seen as part of a community that is labelled 'violent', 'criminal', and, 'unruly'? How do people respond to being seen as 'other' and 'inferior'?

In studying the construction of social identities in the context of Brixton, in South London, I seek to address these questions. Brixton, for many, indeed contains all of these elements: many who live in the area experience social exclusion (some of the highest rates in London, London Research Centre, 1999); it has high levels of violent and drug-related crime (Crime and Disorder Review, Metropolitan Police, 1998); those who live there are often represented as 'different', 'other' and 'inferior' (Gbadamosi, 1994).¹ Media images of Brixton, for example, portray the area and those who live there as threatening, aggressive and criminal. This is only part of the story of Brixton, however. Those who live there, and those who are well acquainted with the area, maintain that in spite of these perceptions, Brixton is a vibrant community, proud of a multicultural past and present. Hence growing up there presents adolescents with many dilemmas: Should they be proud or ashamed of their association with Brixton? Are people in Brixton criminal, aggressive and essentially 'bad' or are they tolerant, culturally sophisticated and caring towards others? Do people outside of Brixton dislike and mistrust them, or are they treated as equals?

¹ In some ways one could question the ethics of this research project and argue that it reifies otherising representations in selecting Brixton as an interesting, different, 'other' community. However, while recognising this danger, one of the aims of my research is to highlight both the partiality and the prejudice of these representations.

How others recognise us has an impact in how we recognise our selves. This is particularly true for the adolescent. It is at this time that “the problematic relationship between how we see ourselves and how others see us, becomes a central concern” (Jenkins, 1996: 67). Teenagers in Brixton spend a lot of time on the streets, travelling through the area on their way to school, hanging out with their friends, and, perhaps for the first time, venturing outside the area without the watchful eye of their parents and teachers. This means that adolescents begin to develop not only their own ideas about and relationship to Brixton, but they also become experts in understanding how others perceive Brixton. Hence they are ideal participants in this in-depth investigation of community given their current preoccupation with issues of identity and representations of where they live, as other community researchers have found (e.g. Gillespie, 1995).

In what follows, I explore the struggle for recognition and esteem in the context of the everyday experiences of those in this study. In order to present this research I first explain my methods and analyses, particularly the use of focus groups. Then I shall discuss three related issues that emerged from the findings:

1. Constructing social identities through representations
2. The psychological violence of stigmatising representations
3. Social relationships and institutional cultures in empowerment

Methods and Analyses

Focus groups are increasingly recognised as a valuable tool in the in-depth investigation and exploration of community, particularly when it is essential to access

participants' own points of view, given in their own words (Krueger and King, 1998). While rich and detailed ideas, experiences and feelings emerge in this forum, it is also a valuable method in exploring the range and diversity of attitudes, representations and practices, and the emotional intensity with which they are discussed. More so than one-to-one interviews, group dynamics stimulate reflection, leading to perceptive insights (Morgan, 1998). This "synergistic effect" allows participants to react to and build on the responses of others (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). This allows the researcher to explore the cultural basis of beliefs and ideas as well as examine individual thoughts and associations. If carefully thought out and systematically analysed they can be an extremely productive means of social inquiry.

I ran 8 focus groups with a total of 44 teenagers between the ages of 12 and 16, with an average of 5 participants in each group. The participants all lived in the general locality of Brixton, went to one of the three secondary schools in the area and were friends with others in the study. Selecting girls and boys of different ages, from diverse backgrounds (African, African-Caribbean, American, Asian, British and European - with many having multicultural heritage) and from different schools allowed for a fine-tuned analysis of the similarities and differences in dealing with stigma within the context of social relationships and institutional cultures. In the text the names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

All three secondary schools in Brixton were included. I have renamed these as Westborough Girls School, Riverview School for Girls and Charlton High again in the interest of confidentiality. These were broadly similar: they attracted students from the same area and had a diverse, multicultural staff and student body. Westborough

had the best record in terms of league tables, examination results and success in extra-curricula activities (with their choir singing in such prestigious London venues as St Paul's Cathedral and the Royal Albert Hall). Charlton High faced the challenges of a turbulent past, poor facilities and a high percentage of 'special needs' students. Riverview fell somewhere between these two, producing good examination results despite the challenges of meeting the diverse needs of a large school population. Charlton High was the only co-educational secondary school in the study and in the general Brixton area.

Within the first set of focus groups (total of 7), I began by asking teenagers to talk about Brixton, to 'tell me about Brixton - what it is like for you to live here and how people outside Brixton think about Brixton'. As is standard procedure in focus groups, I used a topic guideline to ensure that central research questions were always covered (on community, inclusion, exclusion, identity, ethnicity, the media, prejudice, racism, the school). The organisation of focus groups into friendship groups made it possible for participants to discuss these experiences with admirable confidence, maturity and understanding. It can, nonetheless, be difficult for the social researcher to access such sensitive material. When the moderator is an outsider, as I am, and when research participants assume (often correctly) that the researcher has little experience of the kind of discrimination and challenges to self-esteem that pervade their lives, mistrust and suspicion may harm the research relationship. As a white female researcher, with an expatriate past and a middle-class accent, my own social positioning impacts the research relationship. Recognising the differences between us, highlighting my ignorance and asking participants to share their stories with me proved to be rewarding, however, as the extracts given below demonstrate. Living in many

different multicultural contexts has meant that I am no stranger to at least some of the experiences they described. I sought to create a safe and open atmosphere within the group where the norm was to encourage differences of opinion, to explore these differences with sincere interest and mutual respect and, as the moderator, to place participants as experts who could enlighten my own understanding of the research questions. It was important to mirror their language, to seek for clarifications and concrete examples after vague or ambiguous comments, and to constantly check that I had understood (Morgan, 1997). Recapping, summarising what was said, probing contradictions and absences are all recognised ways of exploring the significance and validity² of what is said (and what is not said) in the duration of the group.

Another way of examining the generalisability of focus group findings is to triangulate the study, that is, to use multiple methods (Flick, 1992). In this present study, I also interviewed head teachers at the three schools which the focus group participants attended.³ In the text I have given them the pseudonyms Emma Baker from Riverview, Mrs Richards from Westborough and Mrs Nevis from Charlton High. (The use of first names or titles reflects the way they introduced themselves to me.) I interviewed all three before running the focus groups, and then Mrs Richards and Mrs Nevis again after completing the analysis of focus groups. Emma Baker had left her position and was unable to continue her involvement with the study. The other two heads were very enthusiastic about the study: Mrs Richards as a British-Jamaican-Londoner and Mrs Nevis as a white Brixtonian, both proud of their community and keen to establish

² Somewhat unconventionally I measure 'validity' as what participants themselves take to be valid, i.e., what for them is 'true'. I do not pretend that some measure of demonstrable objectivity is possible or desirable.

a multicultural ethos in their schools. The interviews with all three gave me the opportunity to develop a rapport with the staff, 'get a feel' for the schools, and explore research questions as well as establishing suitable terminology to use within the different schools. For example, while one school used the term 'mixed race', another 'multi-heritage'. These interviews proved highly illuminating. Not only did they provide essential information about the children in the school and the cultural composition of the school; they also revealed something of the institutional cultures of the different schools themselves. After the groups, the secondary interviews allowed collaborative post analysis discussion in enabling me to check my interpretations, to probe complex themes, and to assess the extensiveness of the ideas and experiences expressed in the groups.

Analysis is the interpretation of the research encounter. In this research project I developed a thematic framework which is systematic, comprehensive, and accessible to others. In keeping the research focused on the research objectives, themes that relate to the central questions were explored in depth both within the discussion group and in the course of analysis. This involves identifying and indexing recurrent themes, core themes, sub-themes and marginal themes. The analysis was also dynamic in that it began as soon as possible after the very first group and then elaborated over the subsequent analysis of other transcripts. Thematic analysis can be a valuable tool for managing research material which facilitates interpretation, conceptualisation and exploration (Krueger, 1998). Following Knodel (1993), Krueger (1998), Morgan (1993) and Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) I developed a coding frame on the basis of themes.

³ In a broader ongoing study on *The Role of the Media in the Social Construction of Communities* I have analysed these focus groups and interviews together with a television documentary on

I assessed each theme on the basis of ten criteria - intensity/emotion, perceived validity, contradictions, evaluation, group dynamics, absence, researcher identity, associated themes, frequency and extensiveness (see appendix 1).

In this way, themes were explored both within each group and across groups. The analysis included the notes that I made (a) before the group began on organisation and composition, (b) during the group on the relationship between participants, on non-verbal communication, and on the general atmosphere in the group, and (c) immediately after the group on my initial impressions, on individual comments made to me in private and on my evaluation of my own contribution. While the bulk of data was the transcribed speech from the discussions, I also included non-verbal communication (body language and gestures), laughter and voice-tone as additional ways of assessing all ten points. The shared nature of themes (frequency and extensiveness) was examined against the individual beliefs held by participants. Hence the material is analysed both from a cultural perspective (what attitudes, beliefs and practices are shared) and from a psychological perspective (individual differences, ideas and emotions). Once the analysis of all focus group material was complete I analysed the primarily interview material from school-heads using the same ten-point criteria and then compared themes across the two data sets. This enabled me to assess the occurrence of themes across methods. Once complete, I then returned to the field and ran one more focus group with Westborough pupils already involved in the study and two interviews with Mrs Richards and Mrs Nevis. In these I summarised my analysis of the whole research project and invited participants to respond. These last collaborative sessions proved highly informative as they not only confirmed my

analysis, but also added depth and clarity to the findings. Hence, each quote given below concisely represents a much larger collection of ideas and representations. Across the entire project there were over 200 themes – dominant and peripheral, not all relevant to this discussion. In the appendices I give four examples of the coding of each theme.

1. Constructing Social Identities through Representations

In these next three sections I draw on the research findings to illustrate that seeing one's claimed community re-presented in wider discourses leads to a heightened awareness of how others see you and therefore increased self-reflexivity. The self "is a project that the individual constructs out of the symbolic materials which are available to him or her, materials which the individual weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity" (Thompson, 1995, p. 210). When these symbolic materials (a) concern you and (b) are "demeaning" (as one of the girls in the study explained), the intersubjectivity of self and hence self-identity are threatened (Breakwell, 1986).

This current section illustrates that identity is constructed through and against the representations held by others, and bound to particular social contexts. In particular, I describe how representations penetrate the everyday practices of the teenagers living in Brixton. In the second section, I go on to examine the cost this can have on the self-image and self-esteem of many in the study. In the concluding section, I look at how the social relationships and institutional cultures empower/disempower children in their collaborative struggle to develop the resources to protect themselves against the prejudices of others.

Identity is co-constructed through the dialectic of self-other relations. A child has to take on the social representations of her communities and learn to see herself as others do (Duveen, 2000). The effects of this turning back on oneself are very different for particular social groups. For those stigmatised, questions of identity are painfully inescapable, as many in this study described. This 14 year old Nigerian girl explains to me, Caroline, the focus group moderator:

Caroline: So is being from Brixton important or not?

Danielle: Yeah, it is actually. Cos when you say 'I'm from Brixton', and then they all start saying 'Is it?' 'Gosh, she's from Brixton!' 'She's got a knife, she is carrying a gun, she got drugs, she got everything!'

This quote captures the resentment expressed by many in the study when describing how others' see Brixton. Many teenagers assert that the media play a role in disseminating such negative representations of Brixton. This was a particularly rich and dominant theme that often led to lively debates (see appendix 2). In acknowledging the media's representations, in developing them, and/or in challenging them, people who live in Brixton establish a relationship with others who live in the same area. They recognise that they are tarred with the same brush, so to speak, though responses to this are diverse. Hence the media can inform, develop and disrupt community identities. This is especially true for perceived 'minorities' within a culture who may not accept the media portrayals of themselves and their communities. Take this example:

Weona: I think everyone is going to have the same mentality about Brixton, about, you know, it is a rough place. I mean there was that thing in

America, whatever, the brochures about London. They said 'avoid Peckham and avoid Brixton'. And I don't think that is fair at all.

Caroline: I didn't hear about that.

Weona: Oh, that was ages ago. It was like all of Brixton is a really rough area, and Peckham as well. 'You are going to get murdered', or whatever, 'the crime rate there is sky high'.

Caroline: And how does that make you feel, like, living in Brixton?

Cheng: Like, maybe if you tell somebody you live in Brixton they will maybe look down on you. Like make you feel bad, like what are you doing here? Like coming from a place like Brixton.

Caroline: Do you think that that would ever create a problem for you?

Lily: No, not for me.

Ien: It depends. ... Some people have this image, the stereotypical image, and if you tell them that Brixton is where you are from, they are going to get instantly into their head that image. They've got already a bad image about you even though they don't know you or, um, got to know you yet. So they just think 'oh, because you live there, you're going to be this type of person'.

We can see here how the group dynamic stimulates reflection and comment on each other's views. While all these girls know that they are constructed as 'other' by the outside world through the news and other television programmes about Brixton, this has different consequences for them.⁴ For Lily this does not pose a problem, but Ien explains that representations of Brixton may encourage people to stereotype and stigmatise people from the area. When discussing the stigmatising effect of media representations, children often spoke passionately with anger, indignation and shame. As others have explained, these are common emotional responses to the realisation that "one is being illegitimately denied social recognition" (Honneth, 1995: 136).

People who live in the general area of Brixton are made self-conscious of their tie to Brixton through the gaze of the other in everyday encounters. In this way

representations of Brixton colour the way people who live in the area are “looked on” by others. The power of gaze of the other became apparent early on in this study. In the very first focus group I asked participants to explain its significance. This is an extract from my notes made immediately after this focus group finished:

I had asked them to explain what it meant to say “look on you”. The three boys act this out for me. Two of them act out walking down the street. The third, as a “white lady”, walks towards them and hesitates, unsure of where to hold her handbag as the two boys will probably walk on either side of her. What this showed is that slight movements and hesitations like this can reveal the deep-seated fears and prejudices of others. What the boys were trying to explain to me, I think, is how subtle racism can be, and yet how devastating it is to your self-image when a victim of it.

This experience is not restricted to Brixton. Representations of young black men as violent, criminal and overtly sexual are well-documented (Back, 1996; Hall, 1997a). The boys in my study suggest, however, that the label ‘Brixton’ intensifies the prejudice people already exhibit towards black men, as these 13 and 14 year old boys explain:

Caroline: So, do you think that black people who come from Brixton - is it worse than being black from Croydon (a nearby area) or -

Many (*shouting*): Yeah! yeah, it is.

Cliff: Yeah, cos you’re born in Brixton -

Connor: Yeah, cos you’re born in Brixton and you can’t even get a job in Brixton!

Dean: Say if you was to go somewhere, say me, I like playing football, if I was going to go somewhere and ask the team if I could play for them, they heard where I came from, they might like not kinda like me to play for that team.

We can see from Dean’s example that the struggle for recognition and the challenge of developing self-confidence and self-esteem permeate the practices of the everyday. In all focus group discussions many similar examples were given: walking down the

road, questioning a teacher, meeting a police officer, buying a Mars bar all contain the potential hazard of meeting stigma in the eye of the other. As such, these mundane practices may throw up deeply unsettling questions of self-identity and self-worth. "Any thought, feeling, action or experience which challenges the individual's personal or social identity is a threat" (Breakwell, 1983: 13). For those living in Brixton, such threats are part of the fabric of everyday life.

Both children and teachers maintained that prejudice intensifies in mixed contacts outside of Brixton. Mrs Nevis, for example, explained that for many students work-experience can be particularly "distressing" as, for some, it is the first time they encounter the full extent of institutionalised prejudice towards people from Brixton. Again, it is young black boys who bear the brunt of this.

Mrs Nevis: I think they (students at her school) are disadvantaged in the sense that when they go out into the world and they are trying to get jobs, there is, um, I like the term institutional racism. ... I'm talking about what would be termed good sort of employment in the city and places like that. They are trying to be very kind to people they see as being black. But they employ virtually nobody, or they only employ people on a sort of catering level, and are wary when a large black lad, who is probably smashing, comes across their threshold, you know, and are amazed that they are very human, polite, and looks nice, and you know, has done all the right things. I think our kids meet that a lot when they go out of this environment.

As this extract shows, many of the stigmatising representations about Brixton rest on broader racist discourses about black people. The central theme 'Brixton as Black' runs throughout the data, appearing in all focus groups and one-to-one interviews (see appendix 3). Hegemonic representations of black people, we can see, have a powerful effect on both the construction and the interpretation of everyday experiences in Brixton. Identities, I have illustrated in this section, are constructed through and

against representations of where one is seen to belong. In this context these representations rest on the ideology of racism.

2. The Psychological Violence of Stigmatising Representations

Teenagers in Brixton may see a reflection of an aggressive, deviant and potentially criminal stranger in the eye of the other. For some, the daily reminders that this is how 'the generalised other' perceives them are too much to withstand: they come to recognise the stranger as themselves. In this section, I explore how such representations become reality.

Many psychologists have established the importance of the recognition of difference to the emergence of a distinct identity (e.g. Mead, 1967; Piaget, 1968; Winnicott, 1971). What this study emphasises is that such recognition can be so debilitating that it endangers the possibility of challenging the perceptions of others, and so mutilates the reciprocal dynamics of the self. The significance of this can be devastating, as the label and meaning of stigma penetrate identity. The gaze of the other can tear the narrative of self, causing deep shame and crippling self-identity. It is well documented that there is psychological, as well as physical, violence to racism (Biko, 1979; Fanon, 1952; Hall, 1991). Many comments in the study illustrate this. For example, Theo, a 13 year old Nigerian boy who lives in Brixton but rejects any association with it, explains that the community suffers from a lack of self-esteem:

Theo: One of the reasons they (Brixtonites) don't work as a community is they hate themselves so, that's why. Hate yourself.

Caroline: What do you mean?

Theo: Like you don't like your colour, you know.

The voice and the representations of the other may be so destructive for some that they may attempt to deny or remove traces of their group membership. They attempt to “pass” without discrediting information being noticed (Goffman, 1968). Some teenagers in this study used this strategy to protect their self-esteem. One of the school-heads explained that some students who in her view were ‘from Brixton’ would deny this or be “ashamed” of this connection (Mrs Nevis). Very few teenagers talked about this explicitly. Those who did, who often came back to this issue repeatedly, seemed confident that they were among friends who would understand these feelings and support them (see appendix 4).

Some adolescents support a disparaging version of Brixton as a divided and violent black community, characterised by frightening and aggressive criminals, ‘weirdos’ and foreigners. In this way they avoid a *discreditable* identity by psychologically separating themselves from Brixton. In doing so they distance themselves both from Brixton and from the damage of stigmatising representations. By insisting that people from Brixton are ‘different to us’, they symbolically remove themselves from the area and so from the possibility of being seen as someone from Brixton. This strategy requires constant vigilance; it is essential to prevent others from discovering that they actually live in Brixton.

“Because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on occasion by intent” Goffman has theorised (1968: 95). Even those who defend Brixton against criticism admit that there are times when

they conceal their association with Brixton. Both girls and boys who identify with Brixton spontaneously gave remarkably similar stories of how and why they would do this in a job interview in protecting themselves against institutional prejudice. For example, these 13 and 14 old year black girls describe:

Jayna: I wouldn't want to say that I was from Brixton, if I was going to a really important job interview, cos when they see Brixton they don't see normal like, they see guns, drugs and everything. If they are not from Brixton themselves, if they are from a far away place, like I might want to work for a big company up the city somewhere, and I say I'm from Brixton, they will think 'No, I don't want to hire her, she's from Brixton. She might have all them negativity things and that'.

Mollie: Drugs, doing drugs in the workplace, selling weed in the workplace.

Jayna: I would never tell no one. I do, yeah, I come from Brixton, there is nothing I can do about it, but if I was going to a job interview, somewhere really, really far, I would tell, I would have to tell a little lie. Say I was from somewhere different.

For these children it is better to lie than to have to live with the consequences of being seen as 'from Brixton'. They know intimately just how crushing it can be to be only viewed in terms of this particular category membership. Whatever their own attributes, strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and fears, in certain contexts they may be engulfed by the other: they may not be recognised as they see themselves.

A common response to this is anger and depression (Branscombe *et al*, 1999). As angry and aggressive behaviour are part of the stigma of being from-Brixton, it is difficult for children from the area not to conform to prejudiced expectations. The boys elaborate on this in detail, and give examples of how stigmatising representations actually produce the reality they symbolise. They can operate, that is, as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Allport, 1954). Carl, for instance, describes how aggressive behaviour is sometimes "expected", and how such expectations upset and anger people from

Brixton. This results in certain social relationships where Brixtonites *are*, as well as *appear* to be, aggressive. Impressions of the observer, in this way, inform and so become the expressions of the actor (Ichhiesier, 1949).

What is both fascinating and disturbing about these stories is that the children clearly understand the dialectics of identity and the effect of the generalised other on self-consciousness. Tragically, a few adolescents “buy into” stigmatising representations of themselves (Crocker and Quinn, 1998: 541). They take the dominant representations of Brixton and they apply them to themselves. In this way they devalue their association with Brixton, and so, too, devalue their own identities (Breakwell, 1986). Cliff, a confident and eloquent 13 year-old black British boy, explains:

Cliff: They keep putting us down, and cos I think cos then that’s why Brixton is the way it is, so if they think we are scum, then we will act like it, and then we will go and shoot people and everything else. If that’s the way they want us to be, cos that’s the way that everyone is looking at us, especially at black people in Brixton, not so much white people in Brixton.

Although identity is rooted in our relationships with others, it is more than the simple taking on of the impressions of the other. Through their need to construct a positive social identity, many young people such as Cliff found ways to challenge and reject representations that they recognised as prejudice. Different people in Brixton adopt different strategies in negotiating an identity based on representations of Brixton. Some adolescents acknowledge the stigma of being-from-Brixton, but find ways to manipulate dominant representations in order to develop a community identity of which they are proud. Others struggle to develop such self-confidence, and accept the stigmatising representations of the area in which they live. This can lead to an ambiguous self-image. How can these differences be explained?

3. Social relationships and institutional cultures in empowerment

What this research has demonstrated is that the social relationships and the institutional cultures that permeate the everyday experiences of these teenagers may help or hinder the development of assertive, proud identities. The school and the family in particular play a crucial role in encouraging critical reflection and positive self-esteem. Significant adults can provide children with the symbolic resources to confront and contest prejudice. What was clear from the research is that some adolescents simply do not have the representational tools or social support to acknowledge stigma, let alone develop oppositional representations. As self-identity emerges intersubjectively, in relationship with the 'generalised other', a child cannot develop the confidence and the emotional strength to challenge stigma alone. In this way, the social context, the social relationships and institutional cultures around the child can help or hinder the co-construction of self-identity. Without encouragement from family and from teachers, the identity and the self-esteem of children is at risk. When the child lives in a stigmatised area, such as Brixton, the social psychological consequences of such neglect can be severe.

Both students and school-heads discussed the influence that parents have over their children in forming their own expectations, helping them overcome prejudice, and impacting on their self-identity and self-confidence (see appendix 5). Some of them, girls in particular, attributed their developing confidence to the values their mothers had taught them. Vicky, for example, declared:

Vicky: Cos my mum brought me up to say that I always deserve respect. She says that no matter what colour you are, no matter where you come from,

what you look like, how deformed you are: you deserve respect. It doesn't matter, you deserve respect. And I will have it no other way.

Inevitably, not all adults have the social and psychological resources to develop strong relationships with a child and so help them develop self-confidence in this way. Both teachers and adolescents, particularly boys this time, maintain that some parents "give up on their children too easy" (Dean) and may unintentionally lower children's self-expectations. In discussing this finding in the secondary interviews Mrs Richards claimed that some parents believed that black students are less able to conform to school rules. She gave many examples of parents complaining that the school was demanding too much of their child, misunderstanding the difficulties of black children, and, at the same time, ignoring the white culture of those with white heritage. Here is one:

Mrs Richards: I had another mother, who was busy defending bad behaviour, and trying to say that the teachers are racist here, they don't like black people, and they don't understand the way that black people behave. And what she was basically saying was that we shouldn't set our expectations of behaviour too high. And as I said I think that is so insulting, and in one sense (*laughs*) it's almost racist. In the sense, in what you are saying is that your daughter, because she is black, can't behave in the same way as a white pupil, which is not my experience at all.

Teachers agreed that these kinds of attitudes could have devastating consequences for the self-identity and self-esteem of their pupils. Without alternative representations children could grow up believing that they are less able to conform to discipline and less likely to succeed than people from other social backgrounds. However, representations are not taken on without reflection and revision; there is always the possibility of contesting and transforming these symbolic constructions. One of the girls in the study gave an example of this, suggesting that children and teachers could challenge parents' prejudice:

Chantelle: Some parents will want the children to sit next to a black person or a white person (in the classroom). The teachers help them work together as one. And when the children go home, the mummies will say 'Oh! Don't hang around with this person, because such and such a person is bad'. And they go 'No, Mummy, it's not what you want. It's what I want. I want to be with everyone.' And their mum might understand from them, (she) might learn from them.

All schools stressed the benefits of a multicultural school environment "as an educational resource" (Charlton High prospectus). In particular, Westborough stood out in asserting the importance of developing a positive multicultural ethos. This was apparent in terms of the multicultural heritage expressed in the posters, drawings and stories that decorated school walls. The head of this school felt "very strongly" about the need to challenge any form of prejudice and to promote discussion within the school on issues of citizenship education, cultural heritage, and community pride. So much so, in fact, that the school had developed a 'cultural heritage' module for students in their first year at the school, which enabled them "to examine their own heritage and share it with others, in a way that is really affirming" (Mrs Richards). In her first interview she explained:

Mrs Richards: We believe that we can't be a multi-, successful, thriving, multi-ethnic, multicultural community unless we pay attention to these things, unless we seek every opportunity to affirm the pupils as what they are. ... They know they are valued and they have a right to a cultural identity. ... I think that cultural identity is dynamic, is moving, and I think they are very much a part of what I would call the multicultural British experience. That their culture is not Jamaican, it's not West African, it's multicultural British. And I think that that is very important that they realise that, but I think that it's also more important that they realise they have contributed to this present culture, that they have a rich cultural heritage on which to draw. I think that they really need to know, you know, where they are coming from in order to be able to go forward with confidence.

Riverview and Charlton High also accepted the importance of encouraging cultural awareness, community identity and self-respect. However, Emma Baker and Mrs Nevis claimed that financial and organisational obstacles meant that, in fact, culture,

heritage and identity were given less attention. Emma Baker admits that they are “constrained” in what they can teach by the National Curriculum. She disclosed:

Emma Baker: But you see there are some things, I mean, which we can't. Though we try to address as much as possible. Even when I was teaching a Year 8 group, after about a term they said 'When are we going to do any black history, Miss?' I mean, you know, there are certain things that we just cannot change because it's all to do with the curriculum. ... Cos we are told what books to teach them, and blah, blah, blah. So it is a problem.

Failing to assert the needs of a multicultural community, failing to contest institutional prejudice and failing to find ways to affirm cultural diversity and community pride can have damaging consequences in the all-round education of the child (John, 1993). Indeed, students at Riverview appeared both less knowledgeable about their cultural heritage and less confident than students at the other two schools. I discussed this with Mrs Richards in the secondary interviews, and explained that students from her school appeared more confident and more proud of their heritage and community. She insisted that stretching the National Curriculum to encompass the concerns of many different ethnic groups in a multicultural area is a difficult but essential challenge for all schools. She went on:

Mrs Richards: You look for ways through the National Curriculum. There is so much wealth in the National Curriculum if you bother to actually work at it. Even History. English is so easy. History - we had people here from Kings College (University of London): classics students who helped our girls do a project on blacks in Roman history. It's easy, well not that easy, you just have to be creative.

Through collectively establishing a school ethos that respects difference, affirms diverse identities and challenges stigma, some pupils “leave school with a degree of dignity and confidence that astonishes people”, Mrs Richards claimed. They not only demonstrated a way of challenging stigmatising representations, they had also developed ways of making the experience of being

from Brixton empowering. Those who are fortunate enough to go to a school with the resources and the commitment to challenge institutional prejudice and encourage self-confidence and cultural awareness undoubtedly have a more optimistic future. Indeed, it was evident that students at this school had benefited tremendously from this dedication. They were a credit to the school philosophy and testimony to the importance of understanding the dialectics between identity and representation, institution prejudice and critical reflection and empowerment/disempowerment.

Given supportive and challenging social relationships, therefore, adolescents in Brixton can do more than simply reject stigmatising representations. In developing more affirmative representations, they form a secure sense of pride in their neighbourhood. In re-presenting Brixton as a multicultural community where cultural tolerance and respect resonate, teenagers collectively embrace an identity as Brixtonites. As Ien, an older Chinese girl emphasises:

Ien: Yeah, cos if I had grown up somewhere else, somewhere less multicultural, I won't, it would just be different. You just wouldn't be affected like the way you are. Cos it's doing something positive. It's opening your eyes up to different people. So, I am really proud of where I come from.

The experience of going "through the eye of the needle of the other", as Hall put it (1991: 21), is, for some children, liberating. The consequences of stigma, Ainlay *et al* (1986), have recognised, are both "dehumanising and inspiring" (p. 7). To overcome institutionalised prejudice, children need secure social relationships, the psychological tools to construct oppositional representations and the confidence to defend a positive community identity. To adopt the perspective of the other, acknowledge prejudice in the eye of the other and resist its threat, is a difficult feat. For those who achieve it,

there are significant rewards: tolerance of difference, community pride, and high self-esteem.

Living in a stigmatised area does not necessarily lead only to the trauma of recognising prejudice in the eye of the other. Psychologists are wrong to overstate the extent to which “stigma is a devaluing social identity” (Crocker and Quinn, 1998: 505). Teenagers in my study illustrate that the experiences of diversity, of dealing with difference and even encountering racism can be valuable tools in the development of community pride and positive self-identities. Through identifying with Brixton, manipulating dominant representations of Brixton and claiming a multicultural identity, these adolescents emerge as strong, confident and empowered.

Conclusion

“Cultural meanings are not only ‘in the head’”, Hall (1997b) has pointed out. “They organise and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (p. 3). What I have illustrated in this paper is that representations have a real, practical effect on the everyday experience of living in Brixton. I have shown that stigmatising representations of the area where one lives can profoundly impact on one’s self-identity. Challenging dominant representations and developing oppositional representations are tasks that require the love and support of others. The media, the school and the family, we have seen, may help or hinder the development of confident social identities.

I have argued that the key to success in the struggle for recognition and esteem is, therefore, access to, and ownership of, the representational resources to develop

alternative, oppositional versions of one's community and, so, of oneself. These resources, I suggest, emerge from social relationships and institutional cultures. This conclusion calls for further exploration and a more thorough application of these ideas into practice. For instance: How are cultural prejudices maintained, encouraged and contested within different social relationships? How can we begin to challenge institutional prejudices and assess the impact of critical and reflective cultures within different organisations? What are the cultural and institutional dimensions to the struggle for recognition and esteem? These questions are beyond the reach of this present project. However, if psychology is to contribute to the understanding of these issues, projects such as mine must sharpen their focus on the cultural and institutional level of analysis and move away from an assessment of individual strategies and coping styles. It is easy to criticise with hindsight; the challenge is to address the individualism within our discipline and within our own research projects. This is a difficult feat for social researchers as, products of our culture ourselves, it is hard to remove the powerful lenses of individualism from our sense making - in both everyday and research contexts. While I believe this project has made progress in accessing the social psychological dimensions to the struggle for recognition and esteem, there is still a very long way to go.

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Appendix 1

THEMATIC ANALYSIS:	
Intensity/emotion	The apparent intensity and emotion with which an idea/opinion is expressed. Levels of passion, anger, excitement and humour.
Perceived validity	The perceived validity of themes: are they seen to be 'true' or 'false'? There may be times when the same theme is both, for different participants, or for the same participant at different times in the discussion.
Contradictions	Contradictions made within and across themes; contradictions presented by group and by individuals.
Evaluation	The evaluation of themes as positive or negative by participants. This is often context dependent, and dependent on the relationship between participants.
Group dynamics	The impact of group dynamics (friendly, tense, neutral) on the theme. E.g., is this view encouraged? Admired? Or ridiculed?
Absence	The absence of themes within and across focus groups and interviews. The salience of themes through their absence.
Researcher identity	The impact of my presence on the theme: Does it relate to my social positioning? Or to what I am presumed to think? Co-construction of discussion
Associated themes	The networks of parent- and sub- themes; associations made within and across focus groups and interviews.
Frequency	The frequency with which a theme or idea appears. This may be by all, many, few or a single participant. E.g. repeated arguments by same participant.
Extensiveness	The extensiveness of a theme (the number of participants who assert this view). Different ways of using theme: e.g., agree, elaborate, reject.

Summary of coding frame used for all themes

Appendix 2

THEME: THE MEDIA	
Intensity / emotion	Those who were proud of living in Brixton were extremely angry about negative media images. So much so, that some debates on the media were quite heated.
Perceived validity	While media images of Brixton were 'true' for those who were not proud of living in this Brixton, they were 'false' for Brixtonites. Some claimed that stigmatising media images presented a reality and so constructed this reality.
Contradictions	Media representations are both true and false; Brixton is both a dangerous and safe place to live.
Evaluation	Even those who did not identify with Brixton asserted that there was too much of Brixton in the news. All participants felt that this was damaging to Brixton.
Group dynamics	When a focus group participant appeared to be less integrated into the friendship group, they were less likely to debate the validity of media images.
Absence	In a focus group were no one asserted a positive image of Brixton, there was less said about the media.
Researcher Identity	As I am outsider, it was assumed that I would know more about Brixton from the media, than from actually being there. When this happened, participants provided detailed accounts of 'how Brixton really is' - both positive and negative accounts.
Associated themes	PARENT THEME: Brixton's reputation SUB-THEMES: People in Brixton are aggressive Brixton is Black Life is difficult in Brixton
Frequency	Those who identified as Brixtonites gave more examples of negative media representations. Other participants argued that the media simply reported 'the facts', though these could be exaggerated.
Extensiveness	All participants in all focus groups spoke about the media. Hence it was one of the dominant themes.

Summary of coding frame for theme: The Media

Appendix 3

THEME: BRIXTON IS BLACK	
Intensity / emotion	Most references were made without much obvious emotion. Occasionally, negative comments were made about <i>black</i> Brixtonites being, or being seen as 'bad'. These generated much passion in a small minority.
Perceived validity Evaluation	The representation of Brixton as a black community is criticised by most of those who identify positively with Brixton. This is because they claim it is wrong. For them, Brixton is essentially multicultural. In contrast one Muslim outsider was adamant that Brixton is almost completely black.
Contradictions	
Group dynamics	Black people in Brixton are criminal and aggressive; Black people in Brixton are <i>seen to be</i> criminal and aggressive.
Absence	This theme often precipitated differences of opinion. Participants who said little in general, said extremely little about blackness.
Researcher identity	White students said very little about blackness. When they did comments were very positive (e.g. 'I like black people'). Mixed-heritage students generally spoke about being black when other black students had already raised the topic.
Associated themes	In most groups my whiteness became salient as participants tried to explain to me what it was like to be black in Brixton. This generated a lot of stories of personal encounters of racism as well as questions about my own experiences of multiculturalism and racism.
Frequency	PARENT THEME: Brixton's reputation SUB-THEMES: The Media Black is Bad Crime and violence Gender differences Racism
Extensiveness	This was a dominant theme. All participants referred to the fact that Brixton is often represented as black and has a large black population.
	While all participants mentioned this, those black students who did not identify with Brixton gave the most references to blackness. These were often negative.

Summary of coding frame for theme: Brixton is Black

Appendix 4

THEME: SELF-HATE	
Intensity / emotion	Those who did discuss self-hate did so with embarrassment, shame or anger.
Perceived validity	As little was explained in full, it is not possible to analyse this in full. However, for those who did mention it, it was a painful part of their reality.
Contradictions	While some teenagers spoke of community pride, a few talked about self-hate and shame.
Evaluation	This is seen to be an extremely damaging consequence of stigma, both in the views of most students and the school-heads.
Group dynamics	This was only mentioned when the focus group appeared to consist of very good friends and when they were respectful of each other's opinions.
Absence	Very few students mentioned self-hate. This could be because it is such a sensitive issue. All school-heads, however, said that they thought adolescents in Brixton suffered extremely low self-esteem.
Researcher identity	Because I am white, and because many would assume that I have not experienced threats to my identity and esteem, many would probably not want to discuss such a painful issue with me. Hence the few references to self-hate are all-the-more revealing.
Associated themes	PARENT THEME: Brixton's reputation SUB-THEMES: Self-Identity Community Pride People in Brixton are aggressive Life is Difficult in Brixton
Frequency	Few participants referred to self-hate. If they did, however, they did so repeatedly.
Extensiveness	The few who did directly mention self-hate all rejected association with Brixton, and were keen to assert that they were not from the area.

Summary of coding frame for theme: Self-hate

Appendix 5

THEME: THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY	
Intensity / emotion	Often when those proud of Brixton were explaining how they developed this pride, they referred to the influence of their family. These were often emotionally-charged moments as they were defending their version of Brixton against others'.
Perceived validity	This was not a central theme in the first set of focus groups and interviews. In the secondary focus group and interviews students and staff shared the opinion that the family had an enormous influence on children's developing self-identity.
Contradictions Evaluation	While girls seemed to agree that their mothers encouraged and supported them (therefore the influence of the family was positive), boys and the school-teachers agreed that parents often 'gave up' on their children (the influence therefore negative).
Group dynamics	
Absence	Those students who disassociated themselves with Brixton has little to say on this issue.
Researcher identity	In the groups with girls, our shared gendered experiences may have made it easier for them to discuss their relationships with their mothers. None of the boys mentioned their mothers.
Associated themes	PARENT THEME: Brixton's reality SUB-THEMES: Self-identity (Community) pride Racism Generational differences
Frequency Extensiveness	This was a marginal theme. It was mentioned by few participants only a few times. However, when it was it was discussed with passion and conviction.

Summary of coding frame for theme: The Role of the Family