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# **BEING MATRIXED: THE (OVER)POLICING OF GANG SUSPECTS IN LONDON**

Dr Patrick Williams  
August 2018

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StopWatch would like to especially thank Tony Corbin for his expertise.



# StopWatch Foreword: A Call for Action

Stopwatch commissioned this report in response to deeply worrying anecdotal evidence gathered through its community outreach engagement work with grassroots community organisations and individuals. It is clear from the report that the level and impact of police and wider state intrusion into the lives of people on the Metropolitan Police Service Gangs Violence Matrix cannot be underestimated. The people who are ‘matrixed’ are labelled and exposed to an increase in potential unlawful stop and search encounters and are subjected to draconian civil law and social welfare constraints. This report shows that the Gangs Matrix predominantly and disproportionately infringes on the rights and civil liberties of young black men. With similar gang databases in existence across the country, we recommend that Parliament and other stakeholders demonstrate responsiveness by robustly scrutinising this racialised form of policing and end its damaging effects.

- StopWatch calls on the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Cressida Dick, to abolish the Metropolitan Police Service Gangs Violence Matrix and any similar systems immediately. Safeguards must be developed and implemented to ensure that no similar gang database systems are created.
- The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime scrutiny of the London gang database should include an examination of the database’s, efficacy, racial disparity and the present-day data sharing protocols surrounding it be included.
- While the gang database continues to exist, it should be brought into line with the relevant data protection (including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and human rights legislation. Where policing practices involve children, the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child must be adhered to.
- The Metropolitan Police Service should officially inform all the people that are on the London Matrix of their ‘gang nominal’ status. Whilst the Matrix is still in operation, clear guidance on how people can be removed from it and how they can access and amend any inaccurate personal data that is held should be made available.
- Policing is a national matter and therefore the Home Affairs Committee should launch an inquiry into all gang databases used by police forces in England and Wales. Policing tools such as the gang databases should be transparent, accountable and compliant with all legislation and professional guidelines.
- Gang databases are largely unregulated. The Home Office should revise Code A of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to regulate the collection, retention and use of data on police gang databases.
- The privacy and discrimination issues exposed in this report warrant urgent attention. The Information Commissioner’s Office should act on these findings and launch an extensive public investigation into the impact and use of gangs databases by police forces and other public and private sector agencies.
- While gangs databases continue to be used as policing tools, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs’ Council should, on the advice of the Information Commissioner’s Office, issue clear and publicly accessible guidance to all forces stipulating the legally required data protection and information management processes.
- Adhering to the UK’s international treaty obligations, relevant case law and the 2004 Children Act,

the police have explicit obligations to children in their care. The Minister of State for Children and Families, within their remit of overseeing child protection, and the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for Children and Young People are compelled to investigate the issues raised. They must establish whether the police practice of adding children to the Matrix and the extensive use of stop and search is in the best interests of children; and whether the police conduct described in the report effectively safeguards and promotes the welfare of children.

- Stopwatch has for many years expressed concern about the conduct of police searches of children. We recommend that specific stop and search training that focusses on encounters with children is developed and provided to all police officers.
- Stopwatch calls on the government and all stakeholders to move away from policing practices that discriminate against, criminalise and exclude vulnerable young people who are at risk of harm and invest in a public health approach to community safety.

## About StopWatch



StopWatch is a coalition, which works to:

- Promote effective, accountable and fair policing
- Inform the public about the use of stop and search
- Develop and share research on stop and search and alternatives
- Organise awareness raising events and forums
- Provide legal support challenging stop and search

Since forming in 2010, StopWatch has led a wide-ranging campaign against the disproportionate use of stop and search, the use of exceptional stop and search powers and the weakening of accountability mechanisms. This includes research, legal and policy analysis, media coverage and commentary, political advocacy, litigation, submissions to national and international organisations and community organising. The unique mix of academics, activists, young people and lawyers has proved effective at challenging the inappropriate use of the tactic and drawing attention to the realities for those on the receiving end of police powers.

## About the author



**Dr Patrick Williams is a senior lecturer in Criminology at the Manchester Metropolitan University. His research is concerned with the disproportionate use of collective punishments (Joint Enterprise) and the ongoing problem of unequal treatment within the Criminal Justice System of England and Wales. He works with a number of charities, community organisations and activists, alongside making contributions to The Lammy and Young Review. Patrick is the author (along with Becky Clarke) of 'Dangerous Associations: Joint Enterprise, Gangs and Racism'.**

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# Executive Summary

It is undeniable that the media, police and political focus on street crime, urban gangs and youth violence has become more prominent over recent years. This increased attention has an impact on the criminal justice system, policing practices and the communities being policed. With the racialised perception of a gangs normalised, it is little surprise there is an over policing of the black community. Black men are bearing the brunt and feeling oppressed as they are surveilled and their movements curtailed. Infringing people's rights, police intelligence tools and police conduct can often contribute to alienating people and fostering animosity. With stop and search a frequently used policing power and often the first point of contact many young people have with the law, it plays an integral role in the formation of an individual's attitudes toward the police. Without the confidence and trust of a community, effective community policing is near impracticable. Considering the intrusive and historically contentious nature of stop and search and recent misinformation which seeks to justify calls for an increase in stop and search, through conflating serious violence with gangs, it is timely to explore how being labelled a 'gang nominal', placed on the Gangs Matrix and subjected to an enhanced level of policing and multi-agency interventions impacts on individuals.

Responding to the civil unrest that took place in 2011 across London and other cities in the country, the Metropolitan Police Service and former Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, introduced the Gangs Violence Matrix in 2012. The Gangs Matrix is a database, containing the names and personal information of people suspected to be "gang nominals". Underpinning the database is a set of algorithms that use an established scoring criterion to generate an automated violence ranking for individuals. Each person receives a ranking classification of either red, amber or green. Controversial at the time of its inception, the database was created as an intelligence tool that monitors and manages people identified to be involved in criminal activity. It has continued to gain notoriety over the years with critics highlighting its blatant racial disparity. In Amnesty International UK's recent report, Metropolitan Police data from October 2017 shows that there are 3,806 people on the Matrix, of which over three quarters (78%) are black. In contrast, according to other Metropolitan Police data only 27% of people accountable for serious youth violence are black.

Critics also have grave concerns about the lack of transparency and oversight around the actual process of how people are added to and removed from the database. Alarming, the findings from the Amnesty report reveal that approximately 40% of the people on the Matrix are not recorded as being involved in violent crime yet are subject to enhanced police scrutiny. The seemingly unrestrained sharing of information between statutory agencies, education institutions, potential employers and voluntary and community organisations also poses problems as the gang member label acts as a red flag and results in detrimental consequences for the person that is meant to be receiving 'support' to cease criminality. Unfortunately, the overrepresentation of black men in the criminal justice system, as highlighted by The Lammy Review last year, is not a new phenomenon and key to addressing this issue is a need for recognition from the State and wider society that tools such as the Gangs Matrix play a role in preserving the current status quo.

The research for this report was commissioned in a response to the anecdotal evidence StopWatch gathered through its community outreach engagement work with grassroots community organisations and individuals. For nearly a decade StopWatch has consistently raised concerns about the rate of ethnic disproportionality in stop and searches and the damaging effect that discriminatory over-policing has on an individual and a community. To address these concerns, politicians and police have advocated for an increase in targeted intelligence led stop and search.

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## Executive Summary

As the Gangs Matrix is a police intelligence tool, a person on the Matrix is likely have more interaction with the police on the street and be subjected to high levels of intelligence led stop and search. Frustrated and disgruntled about the persistent level of police intrusion into their lives, and tired of being judged on their association with peers rather than their actual behaviour, people spoke out about the ongoing distress and trauma of frequently being subjected to stop and search encounters.

### Methodology

In Spring 2017, StopWatch commissioned Dr Patrick Williams of Manchester Metropolitan University to carry out in-depth qualitative interviews with 15 Londoners aged between 17 and 32 who are on the Gangs Matrix. Temi Mwale also assisted with the research, performing interviews with respondents. All the respondents in the report identified as being either black, or Asian and only one was a female. The names of the respondents have been altered and any identifying information omitted to safeguard their anonymity.

### Part 1: Childhood Reflections

Underestimating the power and significance of personal direct experience, many in society propagate the belief that the black community has an inherent disdain toward the police and that their historic levels of mistrust and lack of confidence are baseless and without merit. Seeking to gain an awareness of the respondents' childhood perceptions of the police and whether those perceptions changed over time, this section of the report provides insightful background into their personal lives and indirect policing experiences.

Beginning with their early recollections of police encounters respondents, contrary to popular misconceptions of hostility toward the police, describe initially having a positive attitude and helpful experience of the police. As respondents grow older their stance begins to change and the issue of stop and search, especially their first direct encounter, becomes a recurring theme with itself identified as the catalyst for the onset of their negative relationship with the police.

This section illuminates why immense importance is placed on the conduct of the police during a stop and search encounter. It is valuable to highlight that the stops and searches described by respondents took place when they were children, and all stated that they had been doing nothing wrong at the time. Regardless of their youthful age, respondents hold a strong expectation that the police should carry out their duties in a professional, respectful and courteous manner. Thus when officers make the decision to act in an unbecoming manner they must be made to understand the repercussions of their actions, both in that immediate moment on themselves and the person being searched and in the long term on the police service they represent and the community they police.

Even those officers that act as by-standers watching their colleagues openly abuse the rights and civil liberties of people being stopped need to be conscious of the long-term damage of their perceived collusive inaction. Being humiliated, disbelieved and ridiculed is not meant to be part of the public service that the police provide and with the current mainstream discourse neglecting to address these valid concerns, the physical, emotional and psychological harm that can result from a stop and search is often downplayed, rarely discussed in detail or even acknowledged. As confidence and trust in the police continues to decline, the chasm between the police and the community widens.

For respondents, the idea of a safe haven is illusory and violence unavoidable as they recall violent incidents taking place at home on their estates and in school. Recent research by Brennan (2018:18) highlights the crime causing effects of negative stop and search practice where mistrust of the police and having friends who have been in trouble with the police increases the likelihood of weapon-carrying. The ongoing trauma of this precarious existence is evident. Respondents are living in a constant state of alert and fear, unable to escape their powerlessness and to opt out of the hazardous situations they face.

### Part 2: Being Matrixed

After setting the scene with insight into the respondents' early childhood experiences and first stop and search

encounters, this section examines the direct experience of being placed on the gangs' database. With a historic overview of the connections between the Gangs Matrix and the Metropolitan Police Trident unit, the squad formerly focused specifically on 'black on black' crime, a picture emerges of a concerted effort to develop racially targeted policing strategies. Thus the racial disproportionately that exists within the composition of the Gangs Matrix and stop and search rates is hardly surprising. Subjected to staggeringly high rates of stop and searches due to their 'gang nominal' label, this second section describes respondents becoming accustomed to their frequent routine police encounters and how the overfamiliarity expressed by officers toward them breeds contempt. It is evident that officers' lack of professionalism and integrity when conducting a stop and search directly connects to the low levels of trust and confidence that respondents have in the police.

Although a police intelligence tool, information from the Gangs Matrix is shared with statutory and non-statutory agencies. This section reveals how adopting this multi-agency approach acts to further criminalize respondents, with inaccurate information left unchallenged and influencing the opportunities that agencies make available. The non-consensual sharing of intelligence raises grave data protection concerns, as the human rights of individuals are diminished along with their ability to go about daily life undisturbed. For many of the respondents their accommodation, education, employment and training prospects and relationships with family and friends have suffered because of their being on the Gangs Matrix.

### KEY MESSAGES

Contrary to the mainstream narrative, the negative attitudes that the respondents have towards the police are not a result of their early childhood interactions with the police but rather stem from the stop and search encounters they experience as older children and teenagers.

**The stop and search encounters** experienced by respondents indicate a deficit in knowledge and understanding by police officers about their statutory obligations to children in their care. This disturbing lack of awareness about the importance of ensuring and safeguarding the welfare of children adversely impacts on an officer's ability to positively and effectively engage with children.

**Statutory agencies and to some extent families are unaware** of the high level of violence that young people living in socio-economically deprived areas or attending troubled schools experience. Perceived to have little protection, many young people are victims of crime; despite living fearful and traumatic lives they are not receiving the necessary therapeutic support.

**The deliberate racialisation of 'gangs'** is driving the over-policing of the black community. The respondents all contested that they were part of a gang and posited that they were being labelled due to living in a specific area and associating with certain people.

**People on the Gangs Matrix are subjected** to multiple stop and search encounters which seemingly lack any legal basis. This relentless searching without a demonstrable legitimate purpose is an intrusive form of surveillance and harassment that directly impacts on the trust and confidence people have toward the police

**Rather than preventing criminal offences**, stop and search has the potential to increase offending behaviour, as people being repeatedly stopped and searched may lose their temper and consequently be arrested for a public order offence.

**Despite knowing their rights** and the law, respondents essentially feel powerless during a stop and search encounter. The lack of professionalism and absence of any respect and courtesy from officers combined with their lack of due regard for the rights and civil liberties of the person stopped and searched only acts to further fuel the negative relationship that young black men often have with the police.

**The label 'gang nominal'** adversely impacts the opportunities available to people on the Gangs Matrix. The multi-agency approach designed to assist 'gang nominals' is not transparent, and information is being widely shared without consent of the person at the center of the intervention. This conflating of social welfare services with the criminal justice system needs to be addressed as it results in perverse outcomes and breaches peoples' rights to non-discrimination, privacy, family life, liberty and security.



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# Introduction

On 9th May 2018, Amnesty International launched their report entitled ‘Inside the Matrix’, an expose of the concealed use of police gang databases in England and Wales. Since 2012, the London Metropolitan Police Trident (gun and gang) unit have employed the Matrix as a critical tool in the fight against gangs and serious violence. The matrix is a database within which the names and personal details of over 3800 individuals, who are ‘suspected’ of being gang members, gang associates or ‘at risk’ of gang involvement have been registered. According to the Amnesty report, 87% of people on the Matrix are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background, with three-quarters (78%) being defined as Black. A large majority are aged under 21 years of age, with the youngest ‘suspect’ being 12 years old. All are male (99%) with a significant proportion having no previous violence convictions. ‘Inside the Matrix’ challenges the oft cited and yet un-evidenced associations between the number of gang members in London and the prevalence of serious violence, where it is reported that approximately 5% of serious violence offences are police-defined as gang-related. Of interest, the Amnesty report confirms previous analyses undertaken by Bridges (2015) which reveals the racialised construction of the gang in England and Wales and the hitherto concealed (criminal) regulation of predominantly young black people who the police and other criminal justice agencies define as gang members. Finally, the central findings from the report highlight the significant limitations of policing strategies conceptualised around the term ‘gang’ as a means to address the problem of serious youth violence in London.

For the purpose of this report, the data held on the Matrix are a product of and are derived from police intelligence sources, including through the contentious practice of stop and search. Further, according to a report published by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (2016:15-18), there are a wide range of strategies enacted to build police intelligence which include; the identification of community, family and friendship associations,

mobile phone information (telephone calls and text messaging) alongside other typical signifiers of gang-involvement such as dress style, colours, tattoos and self-disclosure. More recently, intelligence making is generated through the mining of social media accounts (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), and the use of ‘sophisticated’ algorithmic methodologies including social network analysis (Durrell et al 2016). Of concern, whilst the reliability and validity of such data has not to our knowledge been subject to independent scrutiny, information derived from the Matrix is central to London borough-level, multi-agency gang partnerships which have been implemented to respond to and manage the ‘risks’ associated with those individuals registered to the Matrix (Harding 2016). Such gang-management units comprise an array of statutory agencies including social services, the National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Companies, housing and accommodation providers, Job Centre Plus alongside voluntary and charitable sector (VCS) organisations who are charged with a statutory duty to identify and manage those individuals who are registered as at-risk of gang involvement.

Consequently, to be matrixed results in the individual being made subject to a broad range of concealed policing strategies and interventions designed to ‘manage, contain or reduce’ the risks (of harm and offending) for those defined as gang nominals. Yet, for one respondent who contributed to this study,

*“The thing what pisses me off is that they [police] have the power to do stuff, extra stuff, and their power derives from intelligence. You can ask them, ‘What’s the intelligence?’ They’ll say they’re not allowed to tell you. [I]t’s not proven in court. So why is it [intelligence] allowing you the powers to come to oppress me... [y]ou’re oppressing me with power that you shouldn’t even have.” [Garry, 28 years of age]*

For another, to be matrixed and subject to the

powers of gang management units means,

*“They think they know me. They don’t know me. That’s what these police officers go off. They think they know you because they see things on paper and they think they can make a judgement. It’s like, “No, you can’t search me. I am not going to bow down to you because you found out I have been in trouble with the police. I haven’t got any drugs.” [Paul, 21 years old male]*

### **Research aim and objectives:**

Despite the obvious value of the aforementioned reports, there is a dearth of qualitative research concerned with understanding the experiences of people who are registered to police databases as gang suspects in the England and Wales. It is with this in mind that the StopWatch charity commissioned this study in Spring 2017. The central aim was to ascertain the impact of police (and wider CJS) intelligence-gathering strategies with a particular focus on the use of stop and search. At the time of writing, there are very real concerns at levels of serious violence being perpetrated in some of the major cities across the UK. In London alone, there have been 100 fatalities within this calendar year, which appear to disproportionately affect young black and brown people. Whilst there is a commitment to sensitivity, there is also a pressing need to disambiguate the simplistic causal associations, which drive the application of the gang label, and in turn increases in the use of police stop and search powers.

By way of method, research participants were identified through VCS organisations who engage young people across the London area. Inspired by the methodological approach of Futterman et al (2016), research participants were asked to discuss direct experiences of the police and the ways in which being policed had affected their lives. Whilst on the surface this appears a simple undertaking, it is noteworthy that firstly, being registered to the Matrix is often unknown to the individual. Consequently, so-registered

individuals become reliant upon the disclosures of practitioners who are able to inform of and/or confirm gang nominal status. The practitioners were either statutory or VCS employees who by virtue of their role have access to the Trident Matrix or are representatives of agencies who comprise the aforementioned multi-agency gang management unit(s). Secondly, there is more than one gang database. As a result some research participants were registered to both the pan-London Trident Gang Matrix and a borough-level gangs dataset. Because of this, the following stories and disclosures should be read as illustrative of an awareness of registration to gang-databases generally and the experiences that such cognisance incurs.

Thirdly, for some participants, there was a momentary reluctance to discuss their experiences of being policed due to a fear of repercussions from the police. While this may be true of many social research studies involving people who have encountered criminal justice agencies, this reflection begins to reveal the significant effect of gang management strategies to which the research group are subject. Furthermore, this early finding points toward one of a number of individual adaptations and reactions to the experience of being gang policed.

Unashamedly, this report foregrounds the stories and narratives of 15 young people who are matrixed, revealing for the first time a documented account of those being policed as a gang-suspect. The method demanded in-depth qualitative interviews, or what we refer to as research conversations, in order to facilitate the telling of personal stories and reflections of being policed (Williams 2017). While similar to the open-ended interview, the research ‘conversation’ facilitates a more meaningful, personally driven retelling of experiences and critical events for the individual.

Further, whilst being matrixed resides at the heart of this study, foregrounding the perceptions and constructions of respondents rather than a reliance upon police data generated by gang-management units will present a significantly personalised perspective.

To this end, the data generated emerged through conversations representative of the guiding principle of ‘reasoning together’. From this position, stories are the “memories of the past that assembles us” and as such, this approach is mindful of the therapeutic qualities of storytelling where conversations facilitate the process of ‘giving accounts of ourselves’ and provides a space within which to make ‘personal sense’ of our self. This approach further supports an intimate, sensitive and respectful space for the telling of stories outside of the scripted methodological approaches adopted in many a research study. The basis of the research conversation therefore acknowledges the potentially emotional challenges in reliving encounters and episodes that produce our personal stories. Finally, all conversations were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Analysis sought to elucidate a series of generic themes which arose from the collection of conversations. Significantly, the stories present memorised encounters and experiences, which reveal the pervasiveness of being policed. Yet further, it is through the stories of the respondents that we find that being matrixed and being policed have a number of harmful collateral consequences which appear to contradict the risk-reducing claims of gang-management units.

### **The Matrixed Cohort**

Fifteen individuals aged between 17 and 32 years of age were interviewed for this study. All respondents lived in London and self-defined as belonging to a black, mixed or Asian ethnic group. One respondent was female, with all others being male. From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that the personal histories of respondents included the centrality and disclosure of significant events of violence. Almost all respondents had experienced serious interpersonal violence, including being victims of firearm and knife crime. Further, experiences of emotional violence and/or the witnessing of domestic violence perpetrated between parents and guardians was again disclosed in conversation. Consistently respondents acknowledged having been excluded from

mainstream education, with a smaller number disclosing that they had served some time in prison either on remand as a consequence of breach of community orders/statutory requirements or as part of a custodial sentence.

By way of structure and in adhering to the research principles introduced above, the report will firstly explore respondents’ earliest understanding of the role and function of the police. This line of inquiry will elicit attitudes to the police and how such views may intersect with eventual experiences and encounters with the police as young adults. Second, the report will move toward reflections upon first encounters with the police and, as will become significant, experience of being stopped and searched. Related to this, the report moves to interrogate the intersections between being stop searched and more widely policed as a gang suspect. Taken together, the forthcoming stories uniquely reveal the personal, and at times, painful reflections of being constructed as a gang nominal and the harmful effects of the police and wider gang-management arrangements for those black and Asian people who generously contributed to this study.

*DISCLAIMER: The views in this report are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect those of StopWatch.*









# Part 1: Childhood reflections



Uncovering the experience of being labelled as a ‘gang nominal’ and placed on the Gangs Matrix, lies at the heart of this report. The findings in part one provide an essential and timely understanding of the respondent’s perception and experiences of the police prior to their labelling and consequent over-policing. An area often neglected and omitted from the mainstream narrative, this rich and interesting insight into the respondents early understanding of the police describes positive encounters and perceptions. That is not to say respondents did not recall negative incidences, however their general attitude toward the police was one of trust, confidence and in some cases admiration.

Unfortunately, as the respondents’ recollections from their early youth shift to their secondary school years so does their initial positive impressions of the police. What becomes clear, is that often the emotional and psychological impact that a stop and search encounter, particularly a negative one, can have on a child goes unrecognised by the child’s parents, and wider society. The significance of these childhood memories is undeniable, whilst they encapsulate the fear and misunderstanding felt by the respondents, they also damningly highlight the misconduct of the police toward minors. For the respondents’ these initial

stop and search encounters serve as scars of the police humiliation they experienced as children and consequently severely impacted their trust and confidence in the police.

Through the conversational nature of the methodology adopted for this report, findings relating to the respondents’ experiences of school and living on an ‘estate’ are also shared in part one. Strikingly prevalent is a recurring theme of violence within both a school setting and living in certain neighbourhoods, with respondents’ recalling disturbing incidences occurring in spaces that should be safe but are in reality filled with danger. With a general societal lack of awareness and understanding about the level of violence occurring in schools and on ‘estates’, these recollections allow an insight and appreciation of the fragility and vulnerability experienced by many of the respondents. A fearful and traumatic environment, respondents actively attempt to avoid victimhood and adapt survival techniques.

Respondents were encouraged to reflect upon their initial understandings of the police, focused around questions such as ‘when did you first come into contact with the police?’ or ‘when did you first understand what the police do?’

Historically, studies concerned with exploring the police and black community relations have frequently framed the quality of such interactions as negative, being characterised by lower levels of trust and satisfaction with the police (Lammy 2017, MOJ 2017). Anti-police attitudes are often presented as being a reflection of such tensions and conflict with the police, including stories of ‘riot’, deaths in police custody, over policing through stop and search and the legacy of police racism(s). However, located within the extracts below, there emerges a surprisingly affectionate view of the police.

*Throughout this report, **bold** is used to indicate when the interviewer is speaking*

*“I just always thought police were the heroes in a sense...the way I got it explained to me, I thought they were people that saved you in a sense. [M]y mum she explained it to me. She wouldn’t say police are heroes, but she would tell me if I ever got lost, call the police and tell them where you live and...she always tried to make me repeat my address, my name and my mum’s name and stuff like that, just in case I got lost or if anything happened.” [Andrew]*

*“They used to come into my school – my primary school – and talk to us. They used to give us... I can’t remember it now, but they used to give us this [talk] about strangers. That stranger talk [laughs]. We had to memorise that and stuff and the only people who you should talk to who are strangers are [the] police and stuff like that. There were two officers that used to come into our school and give talks and had training days and stuff like... [T]hey were cool. I used to like those training days because there were different things you’d do on that day and you didn’t know what was coming in a sense. So, it was fun. So, until this age the police are great. Everything is good.” [Andrew]*

**So, when you were younger,**

**“You wanted to be [a] police [officer]?”** That’s just me just thinking like sirens, like blue lights, just... you

*get me? You don’t really understand what an actual police officer does until you grow up I guess, isn’t it? [I] wanted to be a police officer, fireman, everything probably like, no joke. Probably like five, six [years of age]. You know when you start playing with the toy police cars and that, all of them ones there. Probably yeah. It’s only when I got to like nine, ten I copped that I didn’t want to be one.” [Stephen]*

Retold with a youthful exuberance and affection, the police were described as “cool”, “trustworthy” and at times regarded as “heroes”. Such views were seemingly transmitted from parents and guardians and were confirmed through positive encounters with the police in schools. Furthermore, the police as remembered were instrumental in resolving disputes and conflict; so if there was a “problem”, the police could be approached to resolve it. Developing from such narratives is a construct of the police as providing a “helping” and support function. Such views were nurtured through childhood encounters, for example,



*“[M]y mum used to get into like arguments with her boyfriend. Sometimes he used to put his hands on her, and that. I’d always see them [police] come round and chat to my mum and all that. I wasn’t... that’s me seeing them...helping, you get what I’m saying? [L]ike my [father was] always arguing with my mum, and she was... we were just... do you get me? When I hear banging and whatnot, all of that. And ten minutes to fifteen minutes later see a policeman at the door. Yeah,*

and I just don't really understand what's going on them times as a kid, isn't it? You just know that they've come to help, you get what I'm saying? Because the situation is...there's no more shouting, everyone's calm now. That you can just clock that they'd diffused the situation. So it's like yeah, they've come to help, you get me?" [Stephen]

For Andrew, beyond the earlier disclosures of his mother educating him about the police, a more critical reflection ambiguously affirms the



role of the police. He is young and the encounter involves his mother.

*"I was very young, at my house. My house got raided but I didn't realise my house got raided. My mum told me there was a woman inside the house and [laughs] and the police are getting her up. I remember standing outside – it was daylight and police are raiding the house. They arrested my mum. It was crazy stuff. **How old were you?** I was young. I was so young that I could barely remember it. I just remember the questions and sitting outside and watching shadows going from upstairs in and out of my house. Yeah...mad...probably about five, six. My stepdad didn't come into the picture until late seven, so... this all happened before seven. **So they take your mum?** Mm. I think my nan and grandad picked me up. I wasn't really sure what was going on. I thought they were just going to interview her about... because they didn't handcuff her: they just put her in a car. I just thought they were going to interview her about people that have come in my house or something – try and burgle my house. I*

*didn't really understand it then. [Andrew]*

It is noteworthy that despite the significance of the event, his mother and other family members took steps to alleviate the potential emotional effect of the 'police raid'. When considered within his previous regard for the police, this episode becomes difficult to comprehend. There is a tension between the police as "helping" within the context of him seeing the police take his mother away. Yet, because they did not handcuff her, he is able to consider a more rational explanation – that of the police interviewing his mother about burglars. Again, there is a childhood innocence which allowed this respondent to retain his positive regard for the police.

For almost all of those who engaged in this study, negative experiences with the police commence in adolescence. Whilst the stories of "other people" being stopped are heard, it is not until "it starts happening to me" that their attitudes towards the police begin to change. It is apparent that contrary to the initial positive regard held towards the police, it is their direct personal experience of being stopped and searched that facilitates the development of negative attitudes to the police. Whilst this is something that the young Andrew cannot (yet) quite understand, it is pervasive, being sensed in the way that the people "move away" when the police came around his area.

*"We used to have these mad summer parties and stuff, so everyone from a different house would bring something out. One neighbour brought out a big swimming pool. Another one brought out a pool table. My mum brought out the gazebo and cooked food for everyone. Everyone would bring plates of food and stuff like that. It was live. People bringing their speakers out and playing music until crazy hours. When the police came or something, I would see the way that everyone would move. Some people would go inside [laughs]. The mood was just different. So, I understood that a lot of people don't like police now. So, it was just a time of why don't they like police? What's the reason behind it, in a sense? I'm more of a speculator – just sit down and speculate and see why people don't like*



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police or why I should be afraid of them in a sense. So, yes, after [my] first stop and search I kind of understood... yes, this is probably why people hate police." [Andrew]

As a young boy, Stephen recalls a police encounter when he was with his Uncle.

"One time me and my uncle was walking towards [the] Jobcentre and police swerved in front of my uncle like...you get me? I was only like ten, nine, ten years old. Swerved in front of him. Hopped out. Like obviously my uncle was known to the police, but still me being there and that, that shouldn't have happened in the way it did, do you know what I'm saying? Like they grabbed him. They dragged him. It was like 'wait there, child, just...' He's like, 'I've got my nephew with me'. I just remember all of this from me standing back. Anyway, they searched him, took him in a van. They took him in a van right there and then. I waited with a police officer. They searched him. After that they let him go. [I] didn't have a clue. Like I'm still young these times. Like obviously I know what a policeman is. I always wanted to be a policeman. I was a little kid, isn't it? I'm a bit baffled. They're not moving like they're trying to help him or anything. [Y]ou get me? That's when I first understood like the role of a police, you get what I'm saying?" [Stephen]

For Devon the memory is of the police attending the family home looking for his older brother who while in care would frequently go missing.

"I remember the Police knocked on the door. Dad would answer the door and he's the sort of person who would go into a blaze and he's a whole different character. So, the Police would knock on the door and he's answered it and straight away, they'd pitch in, 'Is this your son? Do you know where he is?' Then my dad just lost the plot and said, 'Right, shit's got to change?' Which, obviously, I understood because, looking at it from this perspective, now, for my mum and dad, at the time, it was a lot to suffer and he was only young, about twelve or thirteen. He's running

away, nobody knows where he is...so it was right stress." [Devon]

Again there develops a complexity for Devon in the police calling to the house looking for his brother. While the police appear to be "helping", his father's disregard for the police intimates something disconcerting. To this point, there is an inclination toward resisting negative views of the police. However, the above positive regard toward the police unequivocally subsides once they themselves become the direct objects of policing.

**Is that still your opinion [wanting to be a police officer]?** Nah [laughs], that's not my opinion now man. I think it started changing probably when I started at secondary school – that's when it started changing and that was from Year 8 really. Year 7 I've seen it. I'd see it happen to other people. People getting stopped. People getting arrested. People you hear of going to jail. Family members going to jail and stuff like that...I've always been optimistic about things. So, I didn't really form an opinion until it started happening to me. When it happens to other people, you don't actually hear the story, you just hear... 'oh, yeah, they've probably done something bad and that's the outcome'. So, I didn't form an opinion then, but I started forming opinions when I started getting stopped and searched." [Devon]

Because?

"I've seen [policing] in another aspect. You get what I'm saying? Of them like bullying us more than helping. That's when I kind of clocked it's not really what I want to do, when I started seeing the other side of things."

Mistrust of the police and poor police-community relations within black communities are frequently used to explain lower conviction rates and the ineffectiveness of police investigations related to serious violent offences (Lammy 2017, Macpherson 1999). Yet in relation to the above extracts and to be discussed below it is more the



quality of the interaction on first direct contact, which governs subsequent levels of trust and attitudes towards the police. Significantly then, the young people in this study develop their understandings of the police through their personal contact and direct encounters. Moreover, in learning the stop and search “routine” it is the quality of the ‘first time’ which emerges as critical in guiding future encounters. In relation to this, conversations moved towards reflections of the first experience of being stopped by the police.

### Being policed: Remembering the first time

All respondents who engaged with this study had been subject to police stop and search. More tellingly, for the vast majority their first police encounter took place when they were children or young adults and this had a significant emotional impact upon the respondents.

*“The first time I got stopped and searched [the first] ever one was summer time, just at the top of my close. I remember walking with one of my friends and police, it was CID, that stopped us. So, that was weird, because they just looked like ordinary people. When they grabbed us, I was thinking [laughs] ‘this is not police’. They can’t grab us like this [laughs]. I was scared. I can’t lie. I was scared. I’ve not come face to face with a plain clothes officer, I thought. So, they stopped me and just went through the routine. I think because we were young, they could speak to us in a certain way, because they probably knew these boys are scared – they’ve probably not really been stopped and searched before, they’re quite young. After that, I just thought, ‘Nah! I hate police.’ It was strong. I was just like...no, I hate police the way they were moving it was crazy man.” [Andrew].*

*“Yeah, I got stopped by the police outside my house. **How old were you the first time?** Thirteen. I didn’t actually do anything, I was with [friend] and I remember I was walking back to the bus stop, and then I saw a police van, it started to slow down. He said to me, “You don’t move,” and then he’s driven*

*across the road, like, he’s gone on to the wrong side of the road, and jumped out, and he’s grabbed me. Then he is searching, searching, searching, and then he let me go. And, yeah, that’s when I just started to dislike the police a lot. **Why, what was it about that interaction?** Because I didn’t do anything, and just because the police officer saw me walking. Obviously, I understand that other things were going on at the time in the area, but, like, I didn’t match any description.” [Nigel]*

*“The first time I got arrested I was thirteen.*

***Thirteen?** Yeah, thirteen. But everyone says this, but I*



*didn’t do what I got arrested for, do you know what I’m talking about? [L]ike literally my mum was sending me to [area name] obviously to get some [shoes] and that. So, everyone said everyone’s going to [area name], so I went there. I was in the shop. Bought the shoes, but like there was a robbery happening somewhere else. I was with the people, but I wasn’t at that robbery. They just arrested everyone, so nineteen of us got arrested. I was the youngest there. I had my [shoes]. I had the striped top with red for colours. I was saying to the [police] man, ‘Do I look like I’m coming to rob anyone?’ And again, kned in my belly, handcuffed at thirteen. I was thinking, ‘That’s it. It’s started’. [Paul]*

Paul continues,

*“I got arrested I was in there for five days. **You were in a cell for five days?** Because they’re allowed to hold you for three days and whereas I was young... there*

was like some legal issues with that ID parade. So, they moved me to another station in [area name], like get a physical one done so he could point me out like physically. So I got pulled for five days, so after that I just thought, 'Fuck that.' That was it. They arrested me for nothing. **Were you scared?** Huh? **Were you scared?** I was, kind of, you know. But that's what I'm saying, like before being arrested is like 'oh yeah, people have been arrested. I'd done all that.' But after being arrested for nothing, absolutely did nothing, I just thought, 'Do you know what? That's it.' I just came off the rails from there. I was just like, "I'm not scared of being arrested no more. **Right, so do you remember it as a decision like that or are you looking back and now saying that?** No, it was that, a trigger point, 'oh yeah, I got arrested, they slammed the door. I was in there. I thought I was going to panic, but I didn't." [Paul]

Admittedly the respondents acknowledge being scared and at times they were actually unaware of who was stopping them. However, what emerges as profound was being stopped when they have done nothing wrong. Furthermore, there was a consciousness of problems within the area which served to make sense of the police stopping people, but again they themselves had done nothing wrong to legitimise their first stop. What is striking here is the personal and emotional effect of being stopped. It is through our encounters with others that we develop a consciousness of the self, developing an awareness of how others perceive us (Williams 2015). Earlier, respondents note becoming aware of the attitudes of parents, guardians and friends, who 'don't like the police'. Clearly, once the young people themselves begin to have direct experience through contact with the police then this affirms what they have previously only been able to sense. It is in that first contact that they begin to dislike the police. This point was most clearly articulated by Elaine.

"I have always said this, young people don't grow

up hating the police. So, for a young people to hate the police, you don't know anything of them, you say hello to them, young people don't grow up hating the police unless they've family who're against them and are raised like that. Or literally it's just that or they've a bad encounter with them when they're older and that is the only time. And the majority of the time when they've a bad encounter, it's when it's stop and search. Because any other time apart from that a young people won't have an encounter with a police officer, do you get what I'm saying? **Yeah.** And if you ask young people how they feel about police, they hate them and why is that? Because of stop and search, there are no other reasons why they would hate them because they know the police are there for an emergency. Why else would you hate them? If they're there to protect you and help you, do you know what I'm saying. **So, how did you feel about them?** The police? **Yeah.** I don't really care about them, not like that anyway. Until I got to a teenager and I start seeing how they treat...I've always been a tomboy, so I used to hang out with a lot of boys, so I used to see how they used to treat the males and I didn't really like that." [Elaine]

For Paul in particular, his first time arrest results in him and 18 other young people being arrested. As a result, he was held in a police cell for five days. The traumatic effect of this moment is unfathomable for the 13 year old. Firstly, he concedes, "it's started" and yet, rather than panic, he did not. For another respondent,

"I was eleven or ten, [I was] young. The first time



was outside a block. It was my friend's block. The police pulled up on us, like three cars. Not all the police officers got out, it was like me and two other young, young...I say young boys, because we were young. So, they pulled up, four of them got out. They wanted to search us. They asked us what we were doing there. I asked them why they were searching us, they said, 'because I want to'. They conducted their search and they just went about their business. But there's a lot of things wrong with that. There was too much police. Too much. Two officers could have conducted that search. We were like this tall [gestures with hands]. Well not even, we're not even tall, we're like this tall. We're young. So, two grown men could have conducted that search, not four grown men. All of them didn't even get out the car. There was, like, eight of them in total. And, yes, they should have told us, 'This is why we're searching you.' At least say someone called. At least lie, have the decency to lie and say someone called. You just said blatantly, I don't care. Because 'I want to'. **How did that feel?** It was wrong, man. I can't really do nothing. What can you do?" [Bill].

Sadly, encounters also make reference to the "men" who are stopping them. As children, they are powerless and their powerlessness is exposed by the lack of regard for their rights or their feelings as children. Bill knows that "I want to" is not reasonable grounds to conduct a stop and search. That as young people they do not know their rights means that the police do not afford



them the decency of even lying. For him, it was "wrong". The arbitrariness and seemingly random nature of the "stop" serves to shock resulting in the dissolution of previously positive regard for the police. Again, for Elaine who was the only female to take part in the study,

**"You talk about being policed and searched. Is that because the police may have seen you as moving with boys?** Yeah. Literally because even the last time I can remember me and a group of girls... because this is the first time I started hanging around with girls, but the girls were all tomboys as well and a police van just jumped out on us and they were like, 'stop there, what is going on'? They're like, 'an armed robbery has just happened, a couple of boys'. I was like, 'boys?' We're not boys, and they were like, 'Yeah, but you fit the description'."

Added to the above, respondents disclosed being frustrated by what they perceived as the improper procedure of being stopped by the police. They recognise immediately the illegitimate infringement of their "rights". Many of the respondents are aware of what should and should not occur when being stopped. Again, it is not a legal procedural understanding they possess, they are after all "young", but one of decency and how they should have been treated as children. This is best demonstrated in Garry's recollection of his first stop and search which resulted in his eventual arrest for 'theft by finding'.

"I can't remember the first time I got stopped but I know it was around the first time I got arrested. **How old were you when you were first arrested?** Fourteen, I was arrested for theft by finding. **Theft by?** I was arrested for theft by finding. **Theft by finding?** Theft by finding, bro. So basically we used to do this football thing at my school and I found a credit card. And I remember the name on it was this artist – it was the same name as an artist that my dad used to listen to. I think his name was something like Dennis Brown. The name on it was Dennis Brown so I kept it because it was, like, 'oh, this might be my



dad's guy's card', kind of thing, because I was a little kid. And then later that night the police stop and search me and I remember – this is how I know that I'd been stopped and searched before this because I was going to the youth club and they were teaching us ways to combat, like, bad stop and search..."

"I remembered it on this particular day the police stopped us. I had a bike so they said to me 'where did you get that bike?' I said my dad bought it for me. So they said okay, there have been robberies with people on bikes. So I said 'oh, well that's fine because I got this bike today'. I actually got it on that day. So I said I got this bike today so was it earlier today? So this is what they said, they said yes, 'the robberies have been all



the time, so today, yesterday, all the time'. So I said 'okay, cool'. That was my first question. Then I said can I just ask you, 'what's the age of the people who are doing the robberies?' So they said between 16 and 25. So I said 'oh, that's good, I'm 14'. So they said 'oh, well we can't be sure about the age'. I said 'all right'. You could be 16. You could be deemed as 16. I said okay, cool. I said 'so what's the height of the people who are doing the robberies?' So the guy went like this, from here to here, yes? 'It's in between there. That's the height of the people, the robbers'. So I said okay, obviously I fit within those heights, basically from the bottom of the floor to the ceiling. Yes, all right. Then I said 'what's the weight?' They said all different weights. Skinny, fat, everything. Colour? They said all different colours. It's been getting done by loads of people. Anyway, I just knew it in my head [they] just want to search us. You're going to find any excuse." "So anyway, I forgot I had that card in my pocket, so

the guy searched me. So he found the card. So he said who does this credit card belong to? So I was, like, I found it. So he was, like, you found it where? So I told him where I found it which was somewhere far away and he was, like, yes, so I'm going to arrest you for theft by finding. 'Were you going to hand it in to a police station?' And at the time I said 'no', to be honest, 'I'm going to throw it away'. He's, like, 'why did you keep it?' I was, like, because the artist on the name was my dad's idol, kind of thing. Yes, my dad liked him. So he said oh, yes, well, you've had a certain amount of time – or some shit – to hand this in. You didn't hand it in so I'm arresting you for theft by finding, and nicked me, took me to the station for that when I was 14. **What happened?** I got a reprimand, yes. I went to the police station first, they released me, they bailed me pending investigation to see if that Dennis Brown had been robbed or whatever. There's nothing linked to the card. No crime or anything. It's just I committed a crime of theft by finding because I didn't hand in the card when I found it." [Garry]

Within his encounter, Garry questions the police who have stopped him. He asks for information related to the purpose of his stop, a standard question which he has been taught to ask to mitigate the effects of a "bad stop". However, his questions become subject to ridicule by the police officer. It is here that he recognises that being policed is not a crime control strategy. On occasions during conversations, the respondents understand that "the police have a job to do" yet the police are not stopping those who are "doing things". There emerges a contradiction, building towards a disdain for the police; if they have not done anything wrong and yet are subject to stop and search, what initiates the stop? Throughout discussions there is revealed a sense of trauma, where such encounters have a profound effect upon their sense of fairness, emotional wellbeing and ultimately leaves them feeling like "nothing".

"Wherever they stop you is wherever you get searched. I managed to get searched and that, I see my mum's friend, my trousers was all down. So, she's all



looking at us like the five of us, like we're criminals. Do you know what I'm trying to say like? And [then] you see another group over there getting searched. You don't even know them. They get searched as well. There's like some slave routine, like you're looking at them [other boys getting searched] like 'oh yeah, because you're black', you know. Like I'm telling you that's what they [police] used to say, like 'it's because you're black, that's why you get searched, man'. And that was it, man. I just used to laugh about it like. But now, it's just nuts. **Laugh about it?** Because man, you know that if there was more than three of you, if there is ever more than three black youths walking you're getting pulled. I used to roll with one white friend, that was it. But obviously he was known to the police, so we're getting stopped and he's getting the same treatment. He's getting roughed up. You get what I'm



saying? If I'm getting a beating, he's getting a beating because that's it man. But if you roll with two or more black youths in the neighbourhood that I'm from, you'll get a rougher stop. They don't care. Brutalities! It was real for that year, I'm telling you man...[T]hey'll beat you up as well. Police officers don't care. They'll beat you up. [Y]ou can't do nothing. Back then, it weren't like now. [J]ust that's it, you just get beaten up. Come through the block. Grab your arm. Pretend they're going to break it. Like they just used to do what they wanted. [I] was thinking, well they'll calm down. They're stopping you hard. Running you down. Back alley and everything man, it was just mad. You don't even need to be...you don't even know us. So, it must be because we're black. Because you don't know, man. Other police officers might know man, but you actually don't know, man. [T]hat section 60, I

think that's when they flipped a little, man. They abused it too much.' [Paul]

"You feel like a target; it's embarrassing, as well, man. You feel like shit because there's no courtesy of where they're doing it and who's watching. Like, you're on a public, busy road and they're telling people to go round us. Like, they've got us stopped, in the middle of the road and people are going past, buses going past and people are getting off the bus and they're just like, 'Put your arms out. Empty your pockets. Take this off. Take your shoes off.' This and that, da, da, da. People are looking and instantly, you're criminals, 'What the fuck have they done? Oh, look, they clearly deserve it.' And you get those looks and then when you're constantly operating in that area, the locals are now looking at you like that. People know who you are and think, 'Right, he's doing this, he's doing that.' Yeah, you feel, when all that's going on, when you're being stopped, you feel like nothing, sort of thing. They just pick you up and at that time, you don't know your rights, either and I feel like that's a key thing in their stop and searches and their engagement with young people. It's almost like they hope you don't know your rights. As soon as they realise you don't know what you're talking about, you don't know what you're saying, they take the piss out of you and, 'Oh, yes, you're being stopped for this and that.' 'Oh, that's not right, you can't do that.' 'Well, how do you know? How are you going to tell me what I'm doing is wrong? You don't even know the Law.' [Garry]

For Garry and in relation to the above 'theft by finding' arrest,

"I thought I was in trouble but dad said it's nothing. He said they're just being pricks, man. They wanted to get me on their database from a kid. **Yes.** He said they just wanted your fingerprints on their database, you get me? I can't remember how I felt. Actually I do. I remember just thinking these feds are pricks because I thought I'm a 14-year-old youth, all I did was find this card. And you nicked me with the thought in your head of 'I'm really

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doing outstanding justice, like, I'm really upholding the law here'. Is it necessary to handcuff me, 14 [years of age]. **They handcuffed you?** Yes, they handcuffed me and put me in the thing, crying as well. I was crying. I don't know why I was crying. Because I was, like, I just found it and I was bawling. I said to my bredrin I'm going to get beat." [Garry]

It is in such moments that the respondents disclose a general disdain for the police. Of interest, such negative attitudes are not confined to the individual officers who initiates the encounter but becomes attributed to all police officers. The disregard is awoken as a result of such humiliating encounters. The logic of projecting their negativity onto all officers reflects their anger of what can be described as a 'collusive silence' from those police officers who witness their humiliation and yet do not 'help' or intervene to stop the "wrong stuff" from happening. In Garry's words it was,

"...from then I just knew these guys are fuck boys, man, you know what I mean? I don't care. People can say whatever they want to say. Say oh, but they're not all like that. Alright cool, but the energy...I tell you what, if my bredrin's doing something and I leave him to do it and I'm with him, I'm going to jail. Police are the same thing. If a policeman is – it's even worse because you're the police and you're watching this man do something wrong in front of you and you're not addressing it. I said to a policeman the other day, I've never seen a policeman address another policeman in front of me. Never. And I've seen multiple wrong stuff happen with police and I've never seen another policeman stand up in front of them and say 'listen, John, you're taking the fucking piss.'" [Garry]

As intimated earlier, to be subject to the stop informs the respondents that their police encounters were not initiated by their offending behaviour but by their blackness. Significantly, Garry's father informs him of an alternative explanation which seemingly explains better the reason for his stop and search. "[T]hey wanted to get me on their database...they wanted my fingerprints on their database". His father's

explanation offers a clarity, making sense of what to this point feels as arbitrary police encounters, which saw him handcuffed as a child and placed in the police van. He was crying, but the police still proceeded to prosecute him for 'theft by finding'. He is not afforded any discretion for innocently keeping 'Dennis Brown's' card. To rehearse, being stopped and searched for all respondents precipitated any notion of offending behaviour, as children when they were stopped they had done nothing wrong.

The only viable explanation for them is he is a target because he is black and that the police use stop and search for intelligence gathering in order to put his personal details on their database. His and the other respondents disdain is uncompromisingly verbalised, "from then I knew they were fuck boys". At this point, it is worthwhile to reflect upon emerging findings from a number of important studies relating to the personal, emotional social effects of stop and 'frisk' practice in the USA (Stoudt et al 2011, Fratello et al 2013 and Haldipur 2018). The authors note how over policing results in depression, confusion, anger, frustration a 'loss of dignity' and the reconstruction of those who are stop and searched as posing danger. Similarly, for the parents and families of these young people Haldipur (2018) identified increased levels of stress, feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, fear and a sense of injustice. When read in the context of the stories as narrated above, the 'first time' will have had a profoundly sad effect upon those who have contributed to this study.

Before moving on to discuss the relationship between being registered as a gang nominal and the experience of stop and search, respondents organically moved to discuss school experiences. At the heart of these discussions was the prevalence of (familial, interpersonal and racialised) violence as a persistent feature of their young lives. Furthermore, violence was invariably present as a feature of their educational experience.

So, following a sombre interchange within one

conversation,

**“I’m gutted, it sounds this shit in London. And it may not just be London, this may be the same everywhere, No, you know what it is? but London feels, I think South London is just all so different. That’s why everyone’s like, ‘Oh, South.’ Sounds reckless. Stuff just happens. And how is this playing out, I’m thinking about your mum in this and your sister, how is this playing out for them? Are they not aware of this? Do you not... They’re not aware. No. No. No? They’re not really aware, no. They didn’t think, like... They’re not even aware yet. I say yet because this is like when I started getting arrested, when [I] started getting involved, when I got arrested with a knife, that’s when they found out and then after that it just got worse. How old were you when that happened? Fourteen. Same year I got kicked out of school. Was the same year that you got caught with a knife? Yes. Yes. Yes, yes. Let’s step back a bit, and I’m going to come back to that. So, that was 14 [years of age], same year you were excluded [from school], same year you were caught with a knife. Yes. Yesterday we were talking about stop and search, weren’t we? Yes. And the age. How old were you when you first got stopped and searched? I was eleven or ten. Young. Do you remember it? Yes, I remember it. Yes, yes, yes, yes.” [Bill]**

## Experiencing school

“School was, a big, big challenge because I was dyslexic, as well. So reading and writing was never really my strong point. Even then, even saying I was dyslexic, I don’t think it was that. Obviously, the stuff that was going on at home, I’m not paying attention to what’s going on at school, no way! I’d just watched my mum get beaten up [by his father] and then [I] get sent straight to school and having teachers telling me, ‘Do this. Do that. Look at the book. Write down this. Write down that.’ And I’m there, just not processing it, I’m just not getting it. Then, school was troubled and I done whatever I could to get out of having to do the lesson. [Devon]

So,

“My very first arrest was in school because there was

always nonsense with students and teachers. I got pissed off took a bat and broke a few windows. You know, criminal damage, they done me for. School called the police and got me done. **How old were you then?** I was in Year 8, so thirteen, maybe. Maybe younger, I’m not too sure. **That was your first arrest?** Yeah, that was my first arrest. Obviously, I’d been stopped and searched a few times before that, so that would be my first encounter. So, when I came out of that experience, I came out of the Police Station and was excluded from school for a little while.” [Devon]



For Bill recollections of secondary school were suffused with memories of extreme violence as the following sombre exchange reveals,

“Man got beat up. Different year groups fighting. People in the same year group fighting. Different occasions where man’s got stamped out and his arms broken and stuff like that. Different occasions where man’s got stabbed either inside of school or outside of school. Man then fighting outside of school that’s not from our school, because it’s like a meeting point for man and the beef.” [Bill]

“They have CCTV that’s connected straight to the CCTV operators and they call the police straight away. It’s not like just a camera. It’s connected to the whole system, do you feel me? Because we had problems with people jumping in [to school] trying to stab up man, letting off pit bulls in school, doing mad things. Gangs would jump in, because my school is, like...you’ve got people from Peckham, Brixton, you know, people from everywhere, Tulse Hill, everywhere. There’s bound to be some



tensions from outside that pour into school.” [Bill]

“School at that time? It was really bad. Really, really bad. There was so much violence around us, lots of bad influences, as well. That school was like a breeding ground. People, the older ones, they would come up to you and they would approach you and if they see something in you, like, see that you’re misbehaving, they would see that as an opportunity to make you go even further. They used to get at my friends or people that I used to hang around with to go to the shops and shoplift for them. All that kind of stuff, so they were making me get into crime from such a young age. School was so bad. **You say, ‘they’re making you’ what do you mean ‘making you’?** Taking me to the shops and standing outside the shops and forcing you to take stuff, literally. **And that’s what they were doing?** That’s what they were doing. School at that time was crazy. That was literally everyone in my year, that’s what they were being forced to do and if you didn’t, then they would come up to you and they would beat you up so bad. I got beaten up more than a couple of times. [Laughter]. **Serious?** Yes. [Laughter]. It was crazy, but it was so embarrassing. **Right, so give you a beat down or a physical beat?** Like a beat...like a proper beat down, stamping you on the floor because...the field was big inside the school, so teachers aren’t going to be walking everywhere in the field, are they? So, that was their opportunity to get you and that’s where they would get you and there was always a way to get away with it.” [Dean]

Whilst inconceivable, such disclosures of violence were not confined to one or two respondents; they developed as a significant and recurring theme for the cohort. Of relevance, Dean indicates that his school experiences facilitate the onset of “crime” or offending behaviour. Further disclosures make reference to “gangs” and ‘gang-talk’ (Hallsworth and Young 2008, Williams 2015) to describe those people who arrived outside school for conflict. There is a large body of academic literature related to the factors which drive the onset of offending behaviour (Williams and Durrance 2018) and yet very little of this research speaks to the

criminogenic potential of school environments as driving offending behaviour.

“Yes, Feltham’s [Young Offender Institution] fucked, man. But for me, it’s like I was going to an all-boys school. **Yes?** Yes, yes, but it is fucked, but the energy is – my all-boys school was a serious school. It wasn’t, like, nerdy. It was greasy. So going to Feltham it was, like Greasy. **Greasy?** Yes. Greasy is, like, it was bad. It was a rude boys’ school. **Messy?** Yes. So coming out of there and then going to Feltham, it was just, like, a graduation. It was just, like, you left there and now you go to Feltham. Feltham’s just like when I was in school. There was nothing different. You got education, you might have a fight, you got your bredrins, you get me? **Yes.** You have a joke. You have playtime, all that bullshit, you have exercise playtime. You go to the gym just like in school, you go to PE. There was nothing different apart from obviously it’s significantly more violent in there. Significantly because schools are not that bad. But the whole energy around it is the same. It’s the same thing.”

Specifically, work by Graham (2015) on the subject of the ‘school to prison’ pipeline theorises how poor performing schools acts as a process conduit through which school aged children are ‘prepared’ for the regulatory techniques and strategies of imprisonment. Of relevance here, for Graham it is not educational outcomes ‘or the lack of’, that was significant for men entering prisons, but the school experience. Whilst such ideas are more often presented as relevant to the control strategies exercised in school exclusion units, it is apparent that the schools which some of our respondents attended used techniques of pupil management and surveillance akin to those used in offender management and prison regulation.



Vividly, Bill notes that,

*“We had SSO’s, which is basically like enforcers. If people get into a fight, they’re the ones who stop the fight. If people are out of lesson, they’re the ones who grab them, yes? And what do they do when they’re out of lesson? They take them to LSU. It’s an inclusion unit, do you know what I’m saying? It’s a room, with all the windows boarded up and they sit there. You watch them and they watch you while you do your work, you feel me? You can’t go on the internet. You can’t do nothing, except do work from a book. If you go to your lesson or go online and do Bitesize. Like, BBC Bitesize maths or whatever. Do you know what I’m saying? That’s all we could do. Or we could write lines. Can’t really draw, that’s a privilege. It’s mad still. So, I felt like I was in prison.”*

That school is likened to prison also serves to highlight the ways in which our respondents ‘learn’ to negotiate encounters with interpersonal violence. At times their stories read as implausible to the point where it is unbelievable that such young and impressionable children have been exposed to such emotionally challenging environments. Furthermore, the school grounds were expressed as an extension, a continuation of the “estates” where the respondents lived. Unfortunately, there was little to distinguish between the violence that took place in school and violence encountered outside of school with “tensions” outside ‘pouring’ into school. To illustrate this important point, during one conversation, the vivid description of the violent school prompted the following discussion. Whilst the extract is lengthy it serves to highlight factors that may drive contemporary concerns around violent crime which eventuates policing responses.

*“In the years that I was going to school, alone, four people died in my school. **Died?** Yes. But only – **what year? In school or from your school?** Not in school, from my school. One of them was a medical issue, so I won’t say that. One got shot in his bed, one got stabbed in his heart, in [area name], and one got stabbed in [area name]. There was a time when man came outside*

*the school, as well, for me. Man came outside my school regularly for different people, there was a time when man got into beef, like, one youth got into beef and he shot at the youth that he was beefing, but we all go to the same school, so he shot at him and ran in the school [Laughter]. It’s mad still. It’s mad. I could talk on forever about school, so let’s move on. **I can hear you. I know, but I think school’s important? It’s the starting point, isn’t it?** Yes, yes, yes. **It’s interesting that you say it was like prison.** Yes, yes. **But then when you said four people died, [I’m thinking] what are you talking about?! When you were how old? When you were still at school?** When I was still at school. **So, four people died?** I was only at school for two, three years, three years. So, in that three years four people from my school died. **What does that do to a young school kid?** I didn’t really care. Well, I didn’t know that I cared, should I say. I didn’t know that I cared at the time. I didn’t really think too much of it. Even one of them was my close bredrin [friend], like, I didn’t really think too much of it. I just had to keep it moving, you know? If I don’t keep it moving, if I get too super fake then people going to start thinking I’m soft. A lot of things happen, a lot of things transpire but what can you do. That’s what a lot of people feel like; what can you do? You just have to make do with what you’ve got and do the best with what you have. Most people don’t even know what they have, you feel me? **Let me ask you a question. It’s something I’ve been thinking about. Do you get a choice? You’re telling me about school, you talk about all these experiences.** Yes. **Could you not have said... ‘I’m keeping my head down. I’m keeping out of all this drama. I’m not getting into this business.’ Is it possible?** I could have, but I would have...No [abrupt interruption]. **Is it possible?** Yes. It’s possible, but [pause] I would have got robbed a lot more often. **Right.** And I would have got victimised, like, it’s not just a verbal thing, it’s a physical thing as well. Man will just run up to you and punch you in the face and just walk away. Or come up to you every day and say, ‘Right. you got a pound?’ and you get a pound. ‘I’ll bring it back to you.’ and just never bring it back. Or just say to you, ‘Let me see your phone’ and rob you in school, because they know you’re not going to*

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*snitch...[N]o. I don't have a choice. No. I got you. Got you. I would say I don't have a choice because I shouldn't have to be victimised just to get through... Do you know what I'm saying? I wasn't even... When I first came to this country...it didn't even start at secondary school. When I first came to this country I was so calm. I had a fight in the first two days that I started primary school. Things are different. Things are different in London."* [Bill]

The above is sobering. Bill's reflection reveals that the choices and options available to him and other young people are severely constrained. To evade becoming a "victim" of the school and estate violence moves him towards defending or protecting himself from violence – to ignore it is not an option. Further, in defiance of contemporary political discourses, Bill's narrative is not imbued with masculinity or bravado, but more significantly fear. It is a fear aroused through the personal and emotional turmoil of the four deaths he has experienced at a point in his life when he didn't know 'that he cared'. The grief that accompanies bereavement and loss, alongside the reality that 'people had also come to school for him', affirms a reality of violence and for the school-aged Bill, death. Consequently, to 'put your head down' is not an option. To care, is not something to think about, you have to 'keep it moving'. Rhetorically, 'what can you do?'

Of extreme importance here, recent research by Brennan (2018:18) affirms the criminogenic (crime causing) effects of negative stop and search practices where mistrust of the police and having friends who have been in trouble increases the likelihood of weapon-carrying. The analysis reveals the complex and multiple factors involved in the likely weapon carrying of young people and importantly points to two factors. Firstly, there is doubt cast on the relationship between both poverty and ethnicity and weapon carrying; secondly the likelihood of having friends who have been in trouble with the police and having mistrust of the police are both significantly related to weapon carrying. For

Brennan (2018:18), 'the role of trust in the police in weapon carrying is a valuable finding as it reveals a new mechanism through which weapon carrying may occur', in some cases increasing the likelihood of weapon carrying by up to five times.

The research conversations centralise the significance of police encounters and interactions as crucial in informing young people of the role and function of the police. Surprisingly, initial perceptions of the police are positive, situating the police role as supportive and helping the young people and their families. Understanding the police therefore emerges initially through indirect interactions prior to their personal and direct encounters. As young people, they learn who the police are through the behaviours and responses of family members, parents and guardians. Of note, it is once the young people begin secondary school that negative disclosures and attitudes towards the police develop.

Disclosures reflect an understanding of the environmental contexts which contributes toward their exclusion from the (supposedly) 'protective' environment of mainstream education. Returning to Graham (2015) and drawing together the nexus between school experience and eventual criminal regulation, those young people who are excluded from mainstream education can become the 'collateral damage' of the educational system. However, she astutely argues that what we regard as 'educational failure is conceivably successful social control'.

Many of the respondents speak of their vulnerabilities and exposure to violence whether in their homes, in school or on the "estate". At times, the parents and guardians of these children were unaware of these experiences.

Equally, teachers and other school staff who were present are either unwilling or unable to mitigate the violence that many of the respondents disclosed. Sadly the police, as we have seen, are already marked as agents to be avoided. There is a learned distrust, developed as a result of those negative experiences of being stopped and searched. Because they have remembered the first time, they know the police do not help.



## Part 2: Being Matrixed

### WHO IS ON THE GANGS MATRIX?



Picture: Amnesty International

Beginning with a brief historic overview of the origins of Trident, the operational police unit with primary oversight of the London Gangs Matrix, an understanding of the potential underlying cause of the racial disproportionality found in the database is provided. Recognised to be a contentious and intrusive policing power, the stop and search experiences outlined below substantiate this acknowledgment and crisply detail how the power is primarily used as tool of harassment and surveillance for the police. However, the impact of being on the Matrix extends beyond police, as various state and private agencies are privy to receiving this police intelligence information and can covertly and overtly influence the life choices and outcomes of individuals. With attention scarcely paid to the lived experiences of people labelled as a ‘gang nominal’ a rich insight into the fearfulness, victimhood and powerlessness that being experienced by those deemed to be perpetrators of crime is provided in the findings of part two.

State perpetuated racial and socio-economical stereotypes are preventing black boys and young men, particularly those living on ‘estates’ and attending troubled schools, from freely and harmoniously associating with peers. Although the current legalisation, The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 - Code A, is unequivocal, in stating personal factors can never support reasonable grounds and that a person’s previous convictions cannot be used to form a legal basis for

conducting a stop and search; it seems a persons’ presence on the police intelligence gangs’ database has a direct bearing on them being targeted for more stop and search encounters and being subjected to a subsequent wider and heightened form of policing. It also appears that under the guise of intelligence led stop and search, the ‘gang nominal’ and ‘crime hotspot area’ labels insidiously enable police officers to abuse their search powers, fuelling the criminalisation of ‘estates’ as encounters with known and targeted individuals create frustration and often escalate resulting in an arrest for a public order offence.

People on the Matrix are having their civil liberties curtailed, they are not granted the opportunity to be socially mobile, nor able to fully participate in society and live free of state interference as their accommodation, education and employment opportunities and relationships with a range of agencies are all adversely impacted by their ‘gang nominal’ status. The lack of transparency regarding the database means that people are often unaware of the decision to attribute them ‘gang nominal’ status and are unable to review, correct, amend, delete or control the information being shared. These misguided multi-agency information sharing arrangements coupled with the convergence of the criminal justice system and social welfare system rather than operate as a mechanism of support for people, actually limit their life choices and encroach on their human rights to privacy, family life, liberty and security.

Earlier, research participants described a range of personal and highly negative events which contributed to and characterised their adverse childhood experiences. Sadly, respondents spoke of significant episodes of serious violence both within school and in those areas where they lived. At the core of such experiences were numerous disclosures of traumatic encounters with the police. Such encounters were central to arousing extremely negative attitudes and perceptions of the police. Such attitudes were not an intrinsic characteristic or trait of respondents but were nurtured through direct experiences of being policed. It was such experiences, induced through police contact, which lead to disclosures of significant levels of mistrust of the police, eroding any sense of police legitimacy and reaffirming community narratives and stories of racism(s) and discrimination.

Premised within the context of the above then, this report moves to consider the experience and impact of being policed as a gang nominal. Within the introduction to this report reference was made to the emergence of gang databases within England and Wales and specifically the Trident Matrix which was introduced to the Metropolitan Police in 2012. Trident is the dedicated gun and gangs unit, which was initially conceptualised around the need for a direct police response to what was then conceptualised as a ‘black on black’ violent crime problem (Scott 2018). However, the unit has since evolved its function, to respond to public and community concerns at the prevalence of violent crime across the capital. Today, a central concern of the implementation and maintenance of the gang matrix has been the significant over-representation of young black and Asian people who are registered as gang nominals (Bridges 2015, CCJS 2016, Amnesty International 2018). Arguably, this racial disparity can be attributed to the legacy of the Trident unit wherein the causes of violent crime across London were misconstrued as a specific problem of ‘gangs’ in predominantly black and Asian communities. Recent evidence however serves to challenge this view where for example the MOPAC report (2016) illustrates that the vast majority of violent crime in London is not related to

gangs. Furthermore, within the same report and related to ethnicity, violent crime is not the preserve of black and Asian young people, but is a feature of all communities and individuals across the London area (see also Brennan 2018). For Williams and Clarke (2015), the gang has emerged as a significant explanatory device for a wide range of criminal and social problems across England and Wales being driven by a range of ‘dangerous associations’ which serve to disproportionately criminalise groups of black and brown people and communities. Whilst a detailed examination of causes of serious violence fall outside the parameters of this study, it would be naïve in the extreme to ignore the earlier disclosures of violence made in Part 1 of this report. Four of the respondents to this study disclosed being shot. Added to this, five respondents reported being the victim of knife crime. Similar to conversations relating to school experiences, the majority of respondents had experienced extreme violence and many were bereaved of friends who had lost their lives to violence. Yet respondents were categorical that the violence they experienced was not gang-related.

***“Is that because of what happened when you were [younger] when you were shot? [B]ut I didn’t get shot to do...with gangs, or nothing. Was nothing to do with gangs. I’m sure that their information is never going to tell them [it was] anything to do with gangs because it’s nothing like that.” [Garry]***

Such views as above appear to support the findings from the aforementioned MOPAC (2016) report where the reality of serious violence in London cannot simplistically be attributed to the presence of police-defined ‘gangs’. There is an urgent need therefore to respond to the very real public concerns of violence across England and Wales. However current attempts to arrest levels of violence through the ‘war against gangs’ as waged through the Ending Gangs and Youth Violence (EGYV) [Ministry of Justice 2011] initiative have been largely ineffective. Therefore,

there is an urgent requirement for further research to enable a better understanding of the factors which lead toward the utilisation of violence, to inform the development of community based intervention strategies which are cognisant of the everyday realities experienced by countless numbers of young people across London.

To be developed below, the police and CJS preoccupation with the gang conspired to facilitate a plethora of significant problems for young people who are registered to the Trident matrix. In order to highlight these problems, the following will be structured around what arose from conversations related to the effects of being matrixed. Firstly, the purported intelligence-gathering function of community-based policing emerges as significant. Added to this, the multi-agency (mis)use of police constructed intelligence had a pernicious effect upon the life chances and opportunities or 'routes out' for many of the research respondents. As will be seen, being matrixed also had damaging effects on educational, employment and accommodation needs. To be clear, there were no positive effects to being registered as a gang member. Being matrixed served only to infringe the human rights of young people who reside in police defined gang affected communities and in turn, curtailed the possibility of prosocial self-beneficial opportunities.

### **Matrixed: Policed with impunity**

First, within conversation respondents reported that the most noticeable feature of being matrixed was that they were subject to astonishing levels of stop and search. In contrast to the earlier discussions of stop and search, when discussed within the context of their gang registration, narratives signify an extremely intensive form of being policing.

*"[S]eriously, I was getting stopped three times a week. There were times I got stopped three times a day. **That's a lot.** That's the thing, that was so normal. Where I lived, it was so normal. There was not a time where...there was not a week I can really remember*

*where I didn't get stopped and searched. To the point where, where I realised it was not a thing anymore, it was just a normal. You could be on your own and get stopped and searched. You could be going to meet your friends and get stopped and searched. [Andrew]*  
*"So, time went on... kept doing [it]. But then I remember a time – I think I was eight or nine, a year later or something, Year 9 or Year 10 – that's when stop and searches... I was getting stopped every week. Without a doubt, I'd get stopped all the time. At that time, I didn't really chill in my area. I wasn't chilling in [area]. I was more [area name]. It was weird man. Starting to get stopped and searched all the time to the point where it became a joke. It was just a normal thing like putting on your clothes. You knew you were getting stopped and searched. There was all times...I remember one time [laughs] I got stopped three times a day. I can't remember if they say if you've been stopped twice in the same day or something or three times in the same day, you don't have to get stopped the third time or something. But it didn't happen. I was still getting searched. It became so normal, it felt like I knew what was going on. Everyone around me was getting stopped and searched daily. There was no one around me that wasn't in a sense. So, I just thought, yeah, it's just a thing where they're just stopping young black kids."* [Andrew]



The frequency at which respondents reported being stopped, questioned and searched offends any



sense of fairness and justice. Two respondents describe the persistence of stop and search as being as 'normal', like "putting your clothes on". This is an exceptional remark! Andrew estimates that he has been stop searched over 200 times, where for Paul below, the figure is closer to 1000 times. Elaine estimated that she had been stopped and searched 30 times, and on one occasion she was stopped when she was pregnant. Such intrusive levels of stop and search are almost inconceivable, and yet the normality of such encounters meant one respondent was unable to recall a week when he was not stopped and/or searched. The stories suggest an absolute abandonment of their individual human rights and wellbeing of the respondents. Being policed is "common", like an "everyday thing". Surprisingly, the trauma of being so intensively policed aroused laughter, where respondents retrospectively contemplate their recollections (and the researcher's reactions to their disclosures) and the absurdity of over-policing. Because,

"[Laughter]. [I] can't count. There's no way I can count that. **How many times you been stopped? Go on [both laugh].** Can't tell you. I can't tell you. I can't tell you how many times I've been stopped or arrested, when they haven't followed procedure and I just thought, you know what forget it. I'm not going to report them because nothing's going to happen. I can't tell you." [Paul]

Again,

"**If I was going to ask you to say how many times you've been stopped searched?** I don't know. Well, I know there's more times than... you know, like, the number's so great I don't want to like just yeah, I didn't want to take one off it. It's just so great. Like it was just a lot. It was constant like obviously and like, I don't know, way in the thousands. **Way in the thousands?** Yeah. **Remember there's 365 days in a year.** It must have been every day then. Yeah. Even three times, four times a day. **In the thousands?** As I said, officers would literally use their every car patrol and under section 60 they had the right to stop people and just search people, you know what I'm trying to

say, without questions. That was it. They want to stop you and search you, that's what they're going to do. So, it's like a common, like everyday thing. Do you know what I'm trying to say?" [Paul]

"Some of the time I get arrested, straight up and down, stopped and searched, I couldn't tell you. I've been arrested over 50 times. **Over 50?** Easily. From the age of 12 to 18 [years of age], easily. I'm telling you, I would love to go in a station, get the print off [laughter]." [Reuben]

"Too many times. I have been arrested and taken to the station just because of something that has happened on the estate, like a strip search. I have been taken back for a strip search. I had to then wait for an appropriate adult because I am not old enough to get a strip search. They aren't allowed to strip search you when you are under age. That's why they used to have to wait for an appropriate adult. I used to always pull them up on that. One time when I was sixteen and I was in [area name] they tried to pull me into the back of a van and strip search me. 'Is that of age?' I said, 'I live right over there. I will run to my house.' They didn't strip search me. They took me to a police station. That's when they called my mum as the appropriate adult. It's mad though." [Stephen]

Again,

"**How many times have you been stopped and searched?**"

"That's crazy. I don't know, man. [Garry]."

"Too many to count. I could not possibly count. I've been stopped and searched, probably, I don't know, a couple of hundred times, probably, I don't know. Used to get it regular, I've got a conviction because I was stopped and searched three times in one day. Now if you're stopped and searched three times in one day, how are you going to feel? But a lot of times you get stopped and searched, you've taken the fucking piss, I flipped, I got done for public disorder and I was thinking, I haven't actually done nothing, you have stopped me three times in one day and obviously I'm going to be peed off, I'm a teenager as well at the time. So, I found it hard to hold my tongue and yes, I got a conviction for public disorder, I flipped, and I was thinking, well I was actually minding my own business,

*you saw me, you're pestering me, you've done it three times, what else do you expect me to do. You've actually arrested me, and I've got that conviction on my record but I'm thinking, well in actual fact, I actually hadn't done anything wrong. You've stopped and searched me three times. [Ricky]*

While retrospectively, the experience of intensive policing was discussed with amusement and memories of interactions are situated around a justifiable animosity to and disdain for such police encounters. A staggering finding within the recent Lammy review is that black people are over 400% more likely to be convicted for public order offences (Ministry of Justice 2017:46). For Ricky above, his frustration at being stopped and search three times on the same day meant he could no longer “hold his tongue”. His frustration and anger to his over-policing results in his arrest and eventual conviction for a public order offence. The virtue of a qualitative approach to the question of over-policing serves to reveal the interactions and encounters which are frequently concealed away from public view behind the more quantitative statistics and proportions found in many ‘disparity reports’. Evident here, it is policing that is criminogenic, the high incidence of stop and search drives the altercation that eventually results in the committal of a public order offence. To be stopped and searched with impunity drives offending behaviour.

How can any one individual be made subject to so many stop and searches that they cannot “count”? To be subject to this intensity of policing suggests that stop, search and arrest is not a chance encounter. There is no reasonable suspicion. Direct police encounters then are precipitated by a racialised stigma imposed by the police and other statutory agencies upon this group of individuals driving their increased levels of encounters with the police (Howarth 2002, Howarth 2006). Furthermore, the suspicion extends beyond this group towards their friends, their families, and the “estate” where they live. For Stephen below,

*“You know what? I could probably say the only time I've ever had, like, [a] calm search is when I've been*

*out of the area. All the police around here think they know me, because they see my name in the police station or whatnot and they try come and say, ‘Y'alright[name]’ like they know me. You get me? Like they know me from somewhere. You don't know me, bro. Then they're trying to chat to me, like, ‘Oh, yeah, you're living on the thing bro.’ Like, bruv, because you've seen it on the paper, stop trying to chat to me like you know me. It's mad. It's mad still. It's actually mad. [Stephen]*

That “they think they know me”, is significant as a reflection of the intensity of stop and search. Respondents knew the names, (or had given names to), the officers who they encountered. They were able to say if they were “CID” or “estate” police. Some recognised the surveillance role of the “PCSO” who would invariably call for back up and the duplicitous role of the “school police”. It was inconsequential whether the officers were black or white, male or female, you would get the same “rough treatment”. Such is the familiarity of intensive community-based policing for our respondents, that the newly (re)emerging concepts of implicit or unconscious bias (Holroyd 2017) are of no relevance here. For respondents’, “oppressive” levels of stop and search is the direct consequence of registration to multi-agency gang units.

Similar to Garry, Stephen remarks that his experience of stop and search are a particular feature of his community, in that he only experiences “calm” searches outside of his “area”. To be stigmatised or “gang-branded” as Nigel described it, marks him, other young black people and the community out for surveillance and intensive gang policing. The consequent criminalisation of his “area” explains the uncountable incidents of stop and search. Furthermore, gang branding the individual or specific communities serves to legitimise disregard for individual rights and the abuse of power reflected above.

In framing the experience above, it was Gordon writing back in 1984 who likened the then developing model of ‘community policing’ to living within a local police State (Gordon

1984:56):

‘coercive and consensual functions of government, [enable] the police to wield a frightening mixture of repressive powers, on the one hand, and programmes of social intervention, on the other, as mutually reinforcing tools in their efforts to control and contain the political struggles of the black and working class communities.’

Whilst the language used here could be read as controversial, respondents’ narratives are reflexive of living in a ‘local police State’. Further, the impunity by which, the police arbitrarily exercise their power without consent also reveals contemporary and concealed policing practices which infringe the individual liberties and pro-



social opportunities for those who are gang-branded. It underpins what Rios defined as the ‘youth control complex’, being a [regulatory] system in which,

‘[S]chools, police, probation officers, families, community centers, the media, businesses, and other institutions systematically treat young people’s everyday behaviours as criminal activity.’ [Rios 2011:xiv]

A central feature of community policing within the context of a youth control complex is the

centrality of intelligence gathering (and making) which subjects young people who are registered to gang databases, to a series of unmitigated ‘data harms’ (Hannah-Mofatt 2018).

### **Matrixed: The (mis)use of police intelligence.**

*“I got stopped one time, and they said, ‘Ah, he’s got...’ I think they said ‘a red mark by his name’. I don’t know what that means...I didn’t know what that meant at the time, and then I went into my school police officer and said, ‘Why have I got marks against my name?’ And she said to me, ‘Ah, it’s because they think that you are gang related’. I don’t know, like, the police officers, after they heard that, they just started treating me differently. They just started being rude to me, giving me attitude for no reason. You see, with me, I don’t give police officers attitude, because, if I don’t give them attitude, it just means I can be on my way quicker.” [Nigel]*

*“That’s that network. That little matrix that they have. They know that people who I know have been arrested for drugs so they assume that I’m going to have drugs on me now. I’m selling drugs now. So, they started searching me like that, like I’m selling drugs. Made me miss work and all sorts.” [Bill]*

A second consequence of being matrixed concerns the way in which police intelligence is utilised within the context of wider gang management units. As noted by Harding (2016) a reported ‘success’ of the government’s Ending Gangs and Youth Violence (EGYV) initiative was improvements in data sharing between multi-agency agencies on those who were registered as gang nominals. However, Clarke (2018) notes serious concerns relating to the quality and veracity of the data shared between the partners, given that police intelligence is derived through the oft-cited discriminatory policing of black and brown communities. On the surface such data is presented as objective and yet it is a police cultural product serving to reproduce policing realities and therefore confirms who the police believe to be gang suspects (Hannah-Mofatt 2018, Fraser and Atkinson 2014). Of concern and demonstrated in



the CCJS reporting into the problematic use of Joint Enterprise (Williams and Clarke 2015), gang intelligence serves a function which extends beyond tackling crime. Being registered to the Matrix is now a critical tool for ‘branding’ the non-criminal behaviours of young people as criminal and in turn to secure convictions

Whilst being suspected of being in a gang is not a criminal offence, where the police conspire to produce evidence that offending behaviour is related to ‘gang’ involvement, this now constitutes an aggravating factor, which subsequently increases the severity of punishment on conviction (MOJ 2017).

For respondents, and irrespective of their protestations, being matrixed emerged as a powerful process of criminalisation, which conspired to present the young people as gang involved and to significantly interfere and restrict their ability to navigate their own lives. Often disclosed with a sense of anger and incredulity, conversations painfully gave way to reflections of how the routine and non-consensual sharing of data had had an adverse effect on their lives. The production of police gang intelligence served to “paint a picture” which respondents argued misrepresented who they are. Yet, the imposition of the gang label also serve to legitimise the misuse of concealed powers and practices which was defined as “oppressive”.

*“The thing is what pisses me off is that they have the power to do stuff, extra stuff, and their power derives from intelligence. You can ask them, ‘What’s the intelligence?’ They’ll say they’re not allowed to tell you. ‘We’re not allowed to tell you.’ Now, your intelligence is not a proven piece of information. Intelligence that you might have got from a grass, you might have got from someone that just dislikes other people, they’re just chatting shit. You could have got it from anywhere. It’s not proven in court. So why is it then allowing you the powers to come to oppress me with – you know what I mean? You’re oppressing me with power that you shouldn’t even have.” [Garry]*

*“I promise you for certain. It’s because of the fucking*



*things that they read on the computer. They want to then judge me, and think I’m some next person, who I’m not. It’s mad. **Because you haven’t been found guilty for?** Do you know what the [police] are saying to my social worker? I sat here with my social worker, and my social worker was saying... ‘[w]as you a drug lord or something?’ **A drug lord?** That’s what she was [asking] me. I was sitting here, wow it’s for real man, ‘don’t listen to anything they say. Anything, I don’t know what picture they painted for you, bruv’. They [police] tell her that she’s not allowed to be in the area past 5.30 or something. You know if you are a social worker, you’re not allowed in [area] past 5.30? **Why?** For their own safety. Imagine that. She’ll get in trouble, if they knew that she came by herself. Imagine that. They paint us some picture on [area], yeah.” [Andrew]*

Firstly, above it is clear that the police non-consensually share ‘intelligence’ with the respondent’s social worker. However also relayed here are mistruths as the respondent has no convictions for drug supply or possession with intent to supply. It is this fact that is inconceivable to the respondent. The discussion is suffused with ‘gang speak’ and ‘risk talk’ (Hallsworth and Young 2008) wherein the seemingly infallible police intelligence data is used to construct Andrew as a ‘drug lord’ and a high risk to be managed. He is not

a “drug lord” having only one conviction for cannabis possession. However, it is his proximity to but non-involvement in a violent offence that resulted in his registration to the matrix. As a result, his ‘drug lord’ status is produced by the police and partner agencies to affirm his high-risk status which results in his social worker being advised not to enter the “area”, after “5.30pm”. It is a remarkable disclosure, where intelligence communicates to the practitioner the ‘risk’ she has to manage. Similarly, for Paul below, information sharing colludes to present an image of who he is not.

*“What is that? I don’t know. It’s just chapters. It’s a generation thing. When will it stop though? With the stop and search if you are stopped regularly your name is in the paper and everyone talks. Police talk to social services and YOT etc. When I got put on probation with the Youth Offending Service all of these people would come to my house. They would say, ‘Your house is a mess.’ It [house] doesn’t reflect the way you behave. When they first meet you when they come to your house, how would they know how I behave? That’s the way it is. It’s about authorities thinking they can always guess the way it is or who that person is.” [Paul]*

Explicitly, the individuals consulted for this study recognised that agencies shared information and “talk” to each other. They know that the multi-agency sharing of intelligence is used to “oppress” them. Gang-branding means having your name on their “list” or having your “picture” on the police station wall and legitimises powerful incursions into your life. In seeking to understand their matrixed status further, conversations facilitated discussion of the factors that drive registration to the matrix.

*“I got arrested two times in two weeks with a particular group of people and they assumed I was in the same gang as them, but obviously I know people from a certain area. That’s just it really. I was with someone, they did something, we got arrested for it. None of us really said anything. The person that*

*actually did it got away with it and from then they thought I was in the gang. That’s it really. Was it serious, what happened? Somewhat. Yes. Yes. Somewhat. Not life changing... [S]o, yes. [B]ut because I was arrested with the people I was arrested with, they was like, ‘Okay boom, you are a part of this gang. We have them in this file, so we’re going to take you and put you in this file also.’ But different police had me in a different file also, for a different gang. So, you were in two gangs? Yes. Allegedly. They had you down as being in two gangs? Yes.” [Bill]*

So,

*“Do you think you’re on the Matrix? I know I’m on the Matrix. You know you’re on the Matrix? I was told I was on the Matrix. [O]nce upon a time, something had happened where we couldn’t be with each other. So, the group that I was hanging around with, in [area name], we couldn’t be with each other. You couldn’t be with each other? No, because there was this thing with the Police where if you’re seen together, you get nicked. So, we’re walking down the road, we’ve obviously then seen the Police, dispersed. [S]o, as I’m walking [back] towards them, two of my friends were on the pavement, two of the police officers are standing next to them with the [car] boot open and one of them has a black book in his hand. [I] could see him [police officer], he’s holding a book and it’s got different pictures, different names, different areas. It’s got maps up there with red markers on different areas... [T]hen I met up with my friends afterwards and they [police] were basically saying to them, ‘Your name is so and so and you’re from that area and you hang around with this person, that person, this person.’ Obviously, we don’t know whether that’s what they call the matrix...but from what it had in it; loads of pictures, loads of names, loads of areas and it has a lot of details. [Devon]*

*“I don’t know at which time I was put on the Matrix. There could be plenty of reasons why they put me on the Matrix. I have been arrested for bare stuff but have only been in jail once. It has just been remand after that. Have you ever told anyone you were in a gang? No. I never saw it as a gang. I still don’t. It’s just*

where I live. **Does it make sense that other people might see it as a gang?** Some people might. Obviously I am not naïve. Some might. If that is the case then everyone on a council [estate] is in a gang, because they are all working for the same goals. Not everyone in this area are working for the same goals so I don't see it as a gang. I am here in this postcode with my friends and my family. If you have a problem with that then you have a problem with me. I don't understand why people think the term 'gang' means that if someone has a problem with Johnathan over there, who I have never met but who lives on the estate, then we are going to go and do something to someone from that estate. I don't know Johnathan. He can do whatever he wants with his friends. If you have a problem with my friends you can say so. I am just here with my friends and my family. I have never classed it as a gang. I say I am from here and this is where I grew up. This is where most of my childhood memories are from and they class that as a gang?"

**"Why would they [police] have you and your [friends] names?** That was, obviously, gang affiliation. So, they know the different gangs with the post codes. We were always hanging around in [area] and I never saw myself as a gang member. I understood what that whole aspect was and who I was hanging around with, I wasn't stupid but I just saw them as my friends. I liked these guys, hanging around with them, chilling with them in the park. Yes, got caught up in a few stupid things, stuff that goes on within that aspect, within that lifestyle. I would never say, though, that I was from this or that gang; I was from this or that area, sort of thing. Yeah, it was from affiliation and from them having that knowledge on us, in that area, there, without a doubt and they've obviously got it on other areas. They knew what area I was in and whatever gangs and that type of stuff. **Would you see yourself as a gang member?** No, never. Like I said, I wasn't stupid and I knew, hanging around with them, you're going to adopt certain traits and even from the outside, you're going to be seen as though you're a gang member. I understood that, totally but even to myself, it's a distraction, it's a side. I knew to myself that in another year, year and a half, I'm not going to be here. I knew I wasn't going to be there, sort of thing. It was, for the time being, while I'm figuring

things out and whatever, this is where I'm at."  
[Devon]

For Dean,

"I got told about that [Matrix] when... well, I didn't get told, I got shown the report and then afterwards when I asked my youth offending worker, that's when I got told. But then since I've been out of prison I've been told that I'm still on it. I'm not really sure about how it all works in terms of how long you stay on surveillance, but I've been told that they're watching me and they're looking at me and just basically checking out where I go and all these types of places and they're keeping in contact. But I don't think it's impacted me. I would say, in terms of employment, it has impacted me." [Dean]

**"Do you think there are people on the Matrix who haven't done anything that warrants being on the Matrix?** Definitely. We have been told [by non-statutory practitioner] that if you have been seen with someone that they suspect is in a gang they will put you down on the Matrix." [Paul]

Within the above, respondents recount the moments that they believed initiated their registration to the Matrix. On reflection, to be matrixed, 'listed' or 'registered' to a gang database is a hidden practice, often taking place without the young person's or their guardian's consent. Consequently, they become aware of their (gang) registered status in very different ways. Firstly, young people were informed by practitioners who had access to Matrix 'intelligence' such as their probation officer, YOT worker, school police officers, youth workers and specialist 'mentors' and workers who informed them of their "gang" status. Secondly, becoming aware of their matrixed status served to make sense of the sensation that they were suspects for police attention and this in turn was used to explain the experience of being over-policed. Invariably, the high incidence of police encounters and/or interactions endured served to mediate to the young people that the police regard them as a gang nominals. Further, respondents concede that their



associations and “affiliations” may have advertently contributed to being registered by the police, intelligence gatherers and the broader gang management unit, noting that to the ‘outsider’ it may seem that they associate with or are “affiliated” with gangs. Critically, for many registration occurred due to their proximity to people who were already (gang) registered or due to their presence in risky “areas” or for being present when “arrests” were being made or when ‘incidents’ had taken place. It was their non-criminal presence in police-defined risky areas which simplistically served to affirm to the police a gang suspect status.

*“I have been branded as gang member because I have lived in the area of gang crime and drugs and have associated with people who have been involved in certain activities. I think that is unfair and not just in my situation, it’s in every situation. People shouldn’t be branded because of their surroundings, their religion or what they do. I should be able to have friends that may do bad things but the police should know or be able to understand that I am not involved in that and separate it. They should be able to know that there are certain Muslims who try to kill in the name of Allah, but there are certain Muslims who believe that is wrong and go against all of that. It’s two separate things and that is why all of this gang branding and all of that shit is mad. That’s why the police don’t understand and that is what they need to understand.”*

[Stephen]

At this stage, it is important to note that some respondents vociferously dispute the attribution of the gang label. Despite this, for the police and gang management units it is inconsequential whether the young person was involved in gangs or not. Through respondents narratives it was evident that individuals were registered to the Matrix and made subject to gang-management suppression strategies having never been convicted of an offence. This finding echoes the work of Clarke et al. (2012) and Durrell (2016) where a significant number of individuals who

were flagged as gang nominals were registered for not for criminal behaviours, but their family relationships, friendship groupings, their proximity to what the police assessed as areas of serious violence, or remarkably being a victim of violent crime. The consequence of being matrixed is to be made subject to a deliberately created ‘hostile environment’ of police disruption tactics. As will be developed below, such management tactics are framed within the official language of help and support, such as ‘safeguarding’ of vulnerability or ‘protecting the public’. Yet for those who are forced to reside within such hostile environments, the effects are “oppressive”, paradoxically serving to increase the ‘risks’ that the police and gang-management units are supposedly designed to manage and reduce.

### **Matrixed: (mis)using their “...powers to come to oppress me with”**

Respondents’ stories further highlight the incredible ways in which being matrixed had a debilitating effect upon their lives. The incursion of the gang-management unit into the lives of all respondents was symbolic of the significant power (and resources) invested within such units, which was used arbitrarily against gang nominals. In the first instance, such powers are revealed through the procedurally unjust use of criminal justice



sanctions. For Dean,

*"I remember there was a time when I was with my brothers and sisters and we were at the bus stop and, basically, I think I was about fifteen years old and I was given a condition that I wasn't allowed to go out [in public] without anyone over the age of eighteen.*

**You weren't allowed to go out with?** *Yes, so, I can't go out by myself, basically. So, I have to get someone to do everything for me. I was at the bus stop and I was supposed to be a school, but I was with some people from my school and we were going to [area name], so we were waiting at the bus stop. There was a person I noticed at the bus stop and he kept looking at me, but I didn't really realise who he was at the time. Then, afterwards, I started to see him taking out something, like a phone kind of thing, but it was like... I wouldn't call it a phone, but it was like some sort of... I would say, a walkie talkie kind of thing but a smaller version, and then I realised his face and I was like, 'That's a police officer' but I was like, 'He can't do anything because he's off duty.' That's what I was thinking, that he was in plain clothes, he wasn't even supposed to be on duty. So, we all got on the bus. As the bus was moving, we were going towards [area name], the next thing you know, two police cars, they came and they boxed in the bus. [Laughter]. Can you believe that? I was fifteen at the time and they boxed in the bus just because I'm out without someone over the age of eighteen, just because of that condition. That's something you should do when someone has a weapon on them. They boxed in the bus and they took me off. The officers came on the bus, all the way up to the top and they took me off and then they took me to the police station."*

Consequently, Dean is taken to court for breaking this condition. However, it is through the Judge's comments that we can detect the police' procedurally unjust misuse of legal powers to which many of those who are matrixed are made subject.

**"So, they [police] literally stopped the bus because you were out without an adult?** *Yes, it's so stupid, and then they [police] were like...on the way towards the police station, they were like, 'You're going to*

*prison.'* [Laughter]. Like, 'For what? For that condition?' What kind of person gets sent to prison at the age of fifteen for that kind of condition? They took me to the police station and throughout the whole journey they were going, 'You're going to prison.' I was really scared. I was so scared, because I literally believed them. They were like, 'This is going to happen, that's going to happen.' They kept me in the police station overnight so they could take me to court the next morning. I got taken to the court the next morning. The judge was laughing. She was like, 'How can you take him? He's supposed to be in school. You could have just taken him to school. How can you arrest him because he's breached that kind of silly condition?' She was like, 'Whoever gave him that condition is stupid, anyway.' So, she was like, we're going to take him off that condition and we're going to wipe off all his referral orders that they gave me for the youth offending service. Everything was taken off."



A similarly arbitrary use of statutory conditions was disclosed in conversation with Nigel where his Intensive Statutory Supervision (ISS) requirements meant he was (court) ordered to join the police cadets.

**"Did you join Police Cadets out of your own free will, or were you forced? Forced to. How old were you, and how did this make you feel?** *I was fifteen. I didn't want to go, but I just learned a lot of things about the police that I just needed to know anyway. So, explain this whole process, how did it start, you getting towards that situation?* *I got arrested, they sent me to court. This is when they took you out of your*

**mum's car?** No, this was after. [I]t was ISS actually, ISS. They made me do, I think it was 21 hours a week of activities, so I had to go to school. If I didn't go to school, I was breaching the order. Then they put down Police Cadets. **When they first put it down, what were you thinking?** I was thinking, 'No way', I even told my mum, I said, 'Mum, I'm not doing this', but my mum wasn't hearing it. **She told you you had to go.** Yeah. **So, tell me about the first day now, you've gone.** It was weird, I was thinking 'So, I am on that other side of the desk.' [Laughter]. **Did you have to wear a uniform?** Yeah. I had to [laughter]. I had to wear a uniform, and when I am coming through the police station, I just have to hide my face and hope no one sees me. [Laughter]. **So, what kind of activities did you have to do?** I had to do marching, and that [laughter]. Marching, there was even one where they tried to come on to the local estate. **They wanted you to come to the estate in uniform?** Yeah. **What was going through your head?** I was scared, like. I said, 'Listen, I'm not doing that.' We then went back to the local gang unit of [area name], and said, 'Ah, he doesn't want to go here, because he has gang affiliations.'"

Of significance here and when read within the earlier context of a learned distrust of the police, Nigel's refusal to go to his estate in police uniform was utilised as evidence (intelligence) of gang affiliation with this then reported back to the gang management unit to be shared with other agencies. For another respondent,

"I got remanded for, like, some bullshit that I didn't even do. I breached a tag and they put me in jail. **And they remanded you in jail?** Yes. Remanded me for a month. But the reason why they remanded me, the judge was a prick, man, because basically I had been in hospital, I breached my tag. And the judge was, like, why did you breach your tag? I breached my tag by fifteen minutes. I'd been on tag for a year on a case on bail. It wasn't like I'd been sentenced to tag, I was on bail for a year and I'd never breached it. Never, not once. I breached it one time and they took me to court so when I went to the court the judge was, like, 'oh, it says on my paperwork that as well as you breaching your tag you missed a court date a month ago'. So he

was like, 'why did you miss a court date?' So I was like, 'I was in hospital'. So the judge said what's a young 17-year-old young strapping man - what's wrong with him so bad that he's going to miss my court to go to the hospital? So I said 'I got shot'. So this was the judge's words to me, he said so, 'you've been shot, you breached a tag and you're on bail for a stabbing. You just don't respect the law'. I'm on tag, on bail for someone getting stabbed, which later on I got a not guilty for." [Garry]

Beckett and Herbert (2009) note the increasing use of civil powers as a deliberate strategy for regulating the movements of people who are constructed as being risky. Within their work, such powers are illustrative of the re-emergence of banishment, a strategy evoked to remove or exclude particular members of society from specific public places. Dean's humiliating and forced removal from the bus is a classic example of such a banishment. The imposition of a patently unworkable condition (having an adult present when in public) represents an attempt to banish him from the streets. The serious implications of this emerge where we consider his need to travel to and from school, especially where his mother worked a number of part-time jobs. Similar to the findings to emerge from the Amnesty International report, such powers are used coercively as a way of leveraging compliance and to dissipate resistance. This was also evident for Garry where in missing a court date due to being in hospital bizarrely is (mis) read by the sentencer as defiance and disrespect for the law. He is therefore punished, not for the 15-minute infraction, but for his victim status and the charges for which he is eventually acquitted. For two respondents, the use of "gun markers" on their vehicles had a significant impact upon their lives.

"If you are known to them it's going to increase your stop and search. If you are known to them, you will be on that list and you will be stopped more. I was stopped one time when I was parked up near [area name]. I had been shopping. Two police officers walk up to me and say 'you are parked in a residential area, have you got a permit for parking here?' I said, 'No'



and this and that. Obviously whilst they were talking to me one [police officer] was looking at the licence plate and clocked that it was in my name. They asked if they could search me. I thought, 'search me for what?' I said, 'I know my rights. You can't search me. You have no reason. There's no cannabis. What do you need to search me for?' They said on a daily basis they run your name for weapons, drugs, this and that. He said, 'I'm Old Bill.' I said, 'You still can't search me. It doesn't matter what I did or what I am known for, you can't search me right now'. They then put a mark on my car and said, 'Every time police see that [the marker] they will stop you.' I said, 'What?' [Animated]. But, true to their word, every time they stopped me [pause]. This is what they do to a person and it's like they are taking away my freedom to drive just because they had a vendetta, because I wouldn't let them search me."

[Paul]

The following draws upon the reflections of a youth worker who unbeknownst to him had a number of gun markers registered to his car. So,

"I'm getting stopped every minute. I had my nephew in the car, guns in his face, mum in the car, gun in her face. I'm like, 'This is dead. You're going to try and kill.' And this weren't long after my man got shot by the police in the tube. Do you see what I'm saying? So, I said to my mum, 'Mum, just give me your shopping list.' And my nephew, I'm not taking him in anything apart from public transport. I'm not on that. [M]y mum's on this stuff, she's like, 'Listen, what are you doing? Because the police won't just target people like this for no reason.' I'm thinking, I'm saying, 'See what you lot are doing? You're up in her thing now, I've been stabbed, I've been shot, of course she's worried.' Now, the police are coming round, she's thinking, 'No, my son's on some shit.' I'm thinking, 'I'm a fucking youth worker, bruv.'" [Patrick]

Eventually, Patrick is informed that there are gun markers on his car. The 'markers' initiate his experience of extreme episodes of being stop and searched. There is an consciousness of the harms that accompany being policed. Within his disclosure Patrick recalls the killing of Charles de

Menezes, there is an acute awareness that police intelligence and being policed can have fatal consequences. Following yet another stop, Patrick asks the following.

"[W]hy do I keep getting stopped?" My [police] man said, 'Look, I'm not even going to lie to you, as soon as we put your plates into the system, all the tags come up.' I said, 'What tags?' He said, 'They're called gun markers so any time someone's got suspicion of doing a certain activity, the officer that's either seen the car or whatever can put on notes on the system.' I'm saying, 'So, how do I get them off?' Man's like, 'Well they're not really official. This don't go on your record or anything, but they just attach it as a note to your car and you've got twelve of these.' I said, 'Shit. So, I can't do nothing about it?' 'Nope.' 'So, what am I supposed to do then? Just keep getting stopped?' Like, 'Sorry, bro.' I'm thinking, and this is the fed that's helping me. He's telling me that it's a hopeless situation."

Patrick is a youth worker engaged in supporting young people who have experienced serious violence. However, his experience of being policed reflects not his involvement in violence, but his proximity to criminalised areas and communities. He knows that his estate is a "hot spot" with a reputation. The reputation therefore serves to legitimise the incursion of the police and the indiscriminate policing of its inhabitants. The extremities of these experiences alongside the numerous accounts presented above affirm that it is not the behaviour or the individuals which drives this perpetual state of policing, but the construction of his "estate" or community as being a hot-spot and therefore necessitating constant surveillance and intervention.

Further, throughout the stories is the pervasiveness of the multi-agency gang management unit, which colludes to restrict opportunities and curtail "rights" and individual freedoms. There is a powerlessness due to the concealed nature of how they are being policed. None of the respondents above have given their consent for personal information and details to become subject to statutory agency management and scrutiny. Yet, there is no point of recourse,

whilst Paul believed his details had been removed from a gang-management database he is soberly informed that he is still on the Matrix. On reflection,

*“My mum was going to change my name and my brothers to keep the heat off us. She wanted to change it to her surname. **When was she thinking of doing that?** She has always thought of doing that. [Name] brothers’ is like a label. Even at school, my younger brother’s school already knew he had older brothers. How does that work? I have never been to a parents’ evening and it’s not top of his list to say, ‘My brother is this person.’ They push him into a corner trying to make him act up and then when they get a reaction they say, “That’s that.” He is a sweet kid. He likes dancing. He isn’t the type of person to act up for no reason but they kicked him out. The same thing happened to my other younger brother who is in Year 7.*

For his mother, there is a sense of desperation to the point where changing her children’s names is a strategy through which to alleviate the intense level of policing and the destructive effect of being registered as a gang nominal. The above highlights the extremely negative features of gang policing and gang management infrequently heard in discourses concerning the fight against gangs. Within the Amnesty International report, it is recognised that invariably such policing approaches seek to exploit what they regard as the ‘Achilles heel’ - the deliberate targeting of parents, family members, the family home and school/ educational opportunities as a means to coerce a change in the behaviour of those who are matrixed. Within the remainder of this report, the Achilles heel of accommodation and education emerged through conversation with at times hugely problematic effects on the lives of respondents.

### **Accommodation**

For interviewees, being matrixed meant that police and gang management units were able to dictate where the respondents and/their families could live. During conversations respondents spoke of

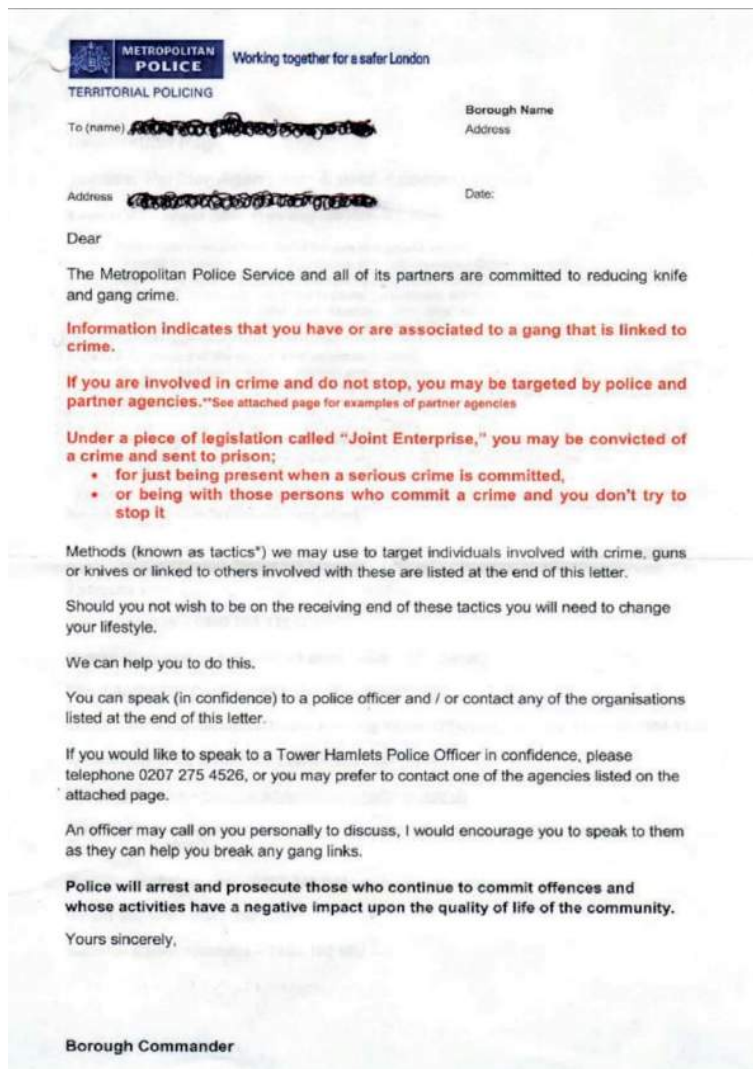
instances where they and their families were moved out of the community, or in one extreme case, where the respondent was placed in a care institution. Frequently, the threat of being made homeless adopted as another coercive strategy to place pressure upon parents/guardians in order to manage and regulate the young person.

*“When I was a kid, before I even fucking had any convictions, police was writing my mum letters talking*



*about I’m in a gang, she should kick me out of the house. This is what they said to my mum. She should kick me out of my house. [They said] I know about drugs, rape. I know about a robbery, burglary, things like this. The only crime that they didn’t write on that list is paedophiles. They wrote every single crime – sexual assault, rape, burglary, robbery, drugs. I knew about all of that. When my mum saw that letter, she was like, “What the fuck is this?” I was like, “I don’t know.” She was actually like, “How can you not know? How can someone be writing these things and you don’t know?” But I was like, “I don’t know. I actually don’t know.” You get me? **Where did the letter come from?** The police. I don’t know how they got my address. I don’t know why they’ve chose me. I don’t know. I don’t know. [Garry]*

Reproduced below is a copy of a letter first, published in the CCJS (2016) report *Dangerous Associations* (discussed earlier). The letter informs the recipient and other people who live within the household, that ‘intelligence’ suggests



they are ‘associated to a gang’ and informs the individual of the police ‘tactics’ available and to which they will be made subject. Further, the letter offers “help” to the recipient with an unashamed reference to partner agencies.

The recipient of this letter was not a gang member, but he was made aware that he is being monitored and under police surveillance. Such approaches raise acute familial strains. Similarly, other participants in this study had received such letters which they argue had a stressful effect upon their parents and guardians.

“No, but I moved back [to area] when I was sixteen

due to that. It’s weird because I come from one area and then I got...moved out...housing issues. I was living with my mum and family and that, and they moved us from area to area. And then the area that they wanted... the area that I was meant to settle in had little issues there and that. And then obviously it was like I couldn’t stay there because my area killed one of the top people from their area and it was just like it’s getting a bit too close for comfort, even though that’s why I wanted to be there. But me being there... so I moved out when I was sixteen but I kept on going back there. I kept on you know. Because that’s your mum. You get what I’m trying to say?”

So, “they” moved him and his family from “area to area”. Being registered and the stigma of being gang-registered empowers gang-management units to move the individual and their family away from their home. As a risk reduction strategy he moves out of his mother’s house but continues to return. The sharing of intelligence between the police and housing providers conspires against the family and serves to inform where they can and cannot live. Paradoxically, to be moved away reduces the protective factors deemed as essential for young people and therefore increases the very risks that the gang management unit are working to resolve (Williams and Durrance 2018). For Stephen, housing and his experience of homelessness are forthright in evidencing the significant harms of being matrixed, as in the lengthy extract below.

“So, explain that just briefly? I had housing before I went in jail. I got fucking, basically, I got put in Feltham [YOI] on remand for some bullshit, which I ended up getting a not guilty. Seven months later then I got released. [O]bviously, seven months, nobody was paying my housing benefit. I wasn’t getting no housing benefit or anything, so they took the property back. I was left homeless. All my stuff was moved and lost. **Still to this day, you don’t know where any of your possessions are?** I lost all of that shit, man...After that, I came out, I literally had nowhere to live...[T]hen I got in contact with this [gang mentoring] team, yeah. I had a meeting with them, they just basically told me everything that they



could help me out with...I can't lie, they were active, like. The next week I was in temporary accommodation. Then, they got me my passport. They got me a lot of things, you know what I'm saying? They got me into college. I had six bags (£6000) rent arrears, from when I was in jail. They cleared that. They got my housing [needs assessment] from band four to band two. They patterned me, you know what I'm saying? Everything was calm. I didn't get into trouble. I was just calm."

Then, Stephen was offered accommodation.

"She came to me. She was buzzing. She showed me the pictures. I was like, oh my days. [T]hey offered me that place. It was a brand-new build. I was buzzing. I was literally like, this is me, I can finally pattern up, you get me? I started college as well, so. I signed the tenancy papers. She was talking about getting me two bags (£2000) grant. So, I wouldn't even have to pay for nothing. I could have furnished the whole yard for free, basically. I was just calm, you get me? **So, this was the first time in your life you are thinking, yeah, finally everything is coming...?** Yeah. I come out [of prison]. I done a lot of reflecting time. Come out, normally I just. I'm not saying I came out and tried to be 'leg' [legitimate]. I still do what I fucking... I came out smarter, a lot wiser. You know what I'm saying? A couple of little things. I came to, 'bumf', things are looking bright.

"Then she gives me a text. Call me ASAP. I call her. She's saying, I got bad news. I just know straight away, bro. I know straight away, man. **What did you know straight away?** I knew that is was straight to do with the house. **What did you think it was? Did you think it was police?** I didn't think it was that. I didn't...I was like, go on let me know why? [The] Gangs unit got in contact. [T]he housing have to get in contact with the police first, isn't it? **Why?** Because I've offended in the past, or what not. In the gang matrix, or what not. Apparently, they have to basically check if I'm allowed to live there. There could be other gang members in the building, you know what I'm saying? They always have to check with the housing and shit. Obviously, so that's what's flagged it up to the feds. So, the feds know I am trying [to] move around in The Ends, you get me? They're like what? No, this guy is not living in

The Ends. They just cut that off straightaway. They said, they don't want me to live there. They put a safeguard thing on me. From then, it's locked it off. I didn't get offered a place for another five months. They offered me a place in [area name]. Right next to [area name]. Phew. Are you trying to mug me off? They had done, they don't know what goes on. **Explain?** They know the beef. They know the password. They know what is going on. They know everything. The feds are not stupid. Yet, they still want to try and endanger my life. **So, they're saying living on the estate is a threat to you. But you can live in areas where you have problems with people?** Pretty much, yes.

Despite being homeless, the gang management unit's intervention precluded Stephen from gaining the accommodation that he had already signed the tenancy agreement on. This is a cruel turn of events. Having already been subject to a 'banning order' from his community, and informed not to associate with his friends, to be denied accommodation again illustrates the strategy of coercive banishment where civil powers and arrangements are manipulated as a means to socially exclude young people from their community (Beckett and Herbert 2009). The decision to banish is taken as a 'safeguarding' measure! The gang-management unit have deduced there is a risk posed to his life if he remains in the area. Ironically, as a safeguarding measure, Stephen believes that he is at greater risk of harm in the areas that the gang-management unit assess as safe. However, their intelligence runs contrary to his lived experiences and his understanding of his own needs and safety. Some ten months later, Stephen speaks to a senior member of the gang-management unit.

"Yes. I had a meeting with [lead officer]. Just basically spoke about why he believes I shouldn't be in the Borough. Obviously, saying a bit of bullshit, he feels that I'm not safe here. Why I might feel that I am...even if I did decide not to get in trouble or stay away. I might get attracted back into it, after a certain period of time. He said, he feels that it's best that I

move away. Just avoid all of that. **How do you feel about that?** I don't think that's... that isn't a good way to deal with things. Realistically, push a man away, is only going to make me feel less safe. I won't be able to, even less safe, like in terms of needing things and that. If I ever need something I just go to my Nan's house, or my uncle's house. When you are far out, or you don't have a car, you can't do those things. They are going to push me somewhere far out, I've got no family around me. That's not right, man. I've got rights too."

For Bill, due to ongoing personal problems whilst registered as a gang nominal he was placed temporarily in the care system. So,

**"[I]ntelligence pulled you into the care system?** No, they put me in, yes. They told me, like, in your area you're at risk of this, because you have problems with dah, dah, dah, so we're going to move you. You're not allowed to go back to your mum's house. **So, they said because you were at risk of**—getting into problems. Whether that be me robbing someone, [a] car, there's not enough food in the house or whatever, I want something. Or getting in problems with someone and having a knife on me and stabbing them or whatever. Whatever. That's how they thought at the time. I won't lie. I was having conflicts. I was having conflicts at the time, so I guess it's a fair assumption. But they didn't know I was having conflicts. So then again, the answer's no. They just assumed. **So, you had to leave —your mum's house?** Yes. I had to live in a group [residential] home." [Bill]

In light of the now significant evidence base relating to the criminalising tendencies of the care system (Care Leavers Association 2016, Fitzpatrick and Williams 2017), it is inconceivable that the above respondent is removed from his mother's home and placed into residential care as a risk management strategy. Whilst he acknowledges that there were assumptions made as to his "conflicts", the resolution of such risks through his removal is a serious concern. Of relevance is the significance of (assessed) risk as generated through police intelligence and the consequences for respondents who are conceptualised as risky. Related to housing and

accommodation above, respondents also connote how being matrixed severely affected their educational opportunities.

## Education

Added to the significant disclosures of school made in Part One, being matrixed had detrimental consequences upon educational opportunities. Many had been excluded from school or had 'left' school with limited qualifications. Whilst, there is evidence that asserts a correlation with school exclusion and the onset of offending behaviour, the findings below reveal that being registered as affiliated or associated to gangs conspired to exclude them from formal education. Earlier, Bill had disclosed the pernicious relationship between the police and his school. However,

"What I was confused about, the [police] had me down in one gang and then when I got kicked out of school and I was trying to get into the learning centre. The police told us that 'you're in this gang and this gang has problems with gangs that go to here, so you can't come here.' **How old were you then?** Fourteen. **They said you can't go to the educational provision?** Yes. **Because you were in a gang?** Yes." [Bill]

Evidently, his presence on the gang database and the risk-creating intelligence generated by the multi-agency teams served to curtail his entitlement to education. His exclusion from school for an offence of burglary meant he was required to attend alternative education at a local "learning centre". However, police intelligence informs the education provider, which in turn excludes him (again) from education. For another respondent, in discussing how he became aware of his gang status, the extent to which the police influenced his educational opportunities emerges.

**"Okay, my question is, do you feel like you are a gang member?** No. **So, how did you first find out that the police believe you are a gang member?** Because I went to school with them. **Is it just your suspicion or you know that you are on a database?** I know. Because, every time that, there is a thing called a Child

Protection meeting, there was always the [borough's] Gang Unit there, they wouldn't stop grilling me. In what way? There was even one point he tried to get me to confess to something off tape, but he was applying a lot of pressure to me, trying to say, 'Ah, but you did this, didn't you, and you were involved in this gang, weren't you?' Okay, so they are telling you, you are involved with this gang, what are you saying? Yeah. I said, 'I just have friends.' I said, 'If you didn't push for them to kick me out of school, I wouldn't be here.' **The gang unit pushed for you to be excluded from school?** Yeah. **Okay, how did that happen?** Because, the first time I got arrested, when they pulled me out of my mum's car, it was someone from that gang that I had a problem with, and to this day, the police... I don't know, I don't know, they just label people with gang, gang, gang. The word 'gang' just gets dashed around too much." [Nigel]

Alongside being "confused" about the (mis) application of the 'gang' label, Nigel notes how their intelligence resulted in him being kicked out of school. Again, under the auspices of the "gang unit", his entitlement to education is rescinded and serves to initiate his exclusion. Here, being policed extends beyond the police, characterised by the "gang units" position in the multi-agency arrangements of a "child protection" forum. Ironically, the encroachment of the gang unit within this meeting facilitates the seamless yet concealed sharing of information which becomes critical in both producing and managing the police defined 'risks', and undermines the 'protection' of the child. Nigel's altercation with 'gang members' triggers his registration and in turn simplistically becomes suggestive of his gang-involvement. Inter-agency manipulation and management of intelligence serves to "push" and to get him "kicked out of school". He is acutely aware and concedes that the "gang, gang, gang" label is "dashed around too much". Whilst, analysis of the individualised 'risk factors' associated with the onset of serious violence has consistently identified school exclusion as a persistent theme, the causes for school exclusion are rarely considered in such analyses. In light of this finding, that statutory

organisations informed by police intelligence, "push" to exclude (at risk) young people from mainstream education is an area necessitating further investigation. Despite the difficult school environment that many of the respondents disclosed earlier, it is the intersection of factors that extend beyond the individual's school performance and conduct which ensures their eventual exclusion from mainstream education (Clarke et al 2012, MOJ 2016).

Conversely, to be gang-labelled and therefore subject to gang management strategies further results in the same young people becoming objects of intelligence. Within the above, the police seek to "grill" Nigel for information. He is not a "gang-member", but they attempt to get him to disclose information, to "confess to things" off tape. Sadly, his risked status now renders him powerless within such forums. And as we will see later, it is gang "branding" that leads towards his eventual



banishment from his community.

**"At that age, what do you think you were doing that made them feel like you were in a gang?** Because I had school friends, I was chilling with them at school, and then [the police are] just...yeah, 'he's that'. I was just getting labelled. **So, what were your friends doing compared to what you were doing, then?** They were doing much worse things than me. They were bringing knives to school, and that. I didn't even really...I wasn't involved, and then, yeah, they started sending me to these gang, um, where they put you in a room, and then they try to talk about all the gang, and that ...



I don't know. **Gang meetings?** They asked me, 'How do you know this person?' We weren't even in the interview. I was just thinking, 'No, way', I was thinking, 'No, this isn't real'. And, then, I woke up and realised that, actually, it was real. Me and my mum started to, like, fight against it, saying I am in a gang, and all that. **So, how did you fight it?** Er. It wasn't really me, it was my mum. She sent emails, and talking to the... I don't know if it's trident, or gang, or whatever it is, but eventually, everybody started to just chill out with the 'gang' word, and now, recently, it has started to [get] better."

[Nigel]

For another respondent, in attempts to make significant changes to his life, he enrolled on a course at a local college. However, being "known" to the police dramatically impedes his educational aspirations. At length, Paul discusses his experiences.

"So, I got into college now after that. The whole summer and that I'm recovering from being stabbed. Got into college, and then obviously I did Public Services, because back in the days I wanted to become a fireman. I just thought, it's interesting, you're saving lives. You're not the police, but you're still trying to, you know, save people's lives or do something and I just thought it was kind of good and back in the days the money was good. [I]t was like, a live [good] course because it weren't just writing down stuff, like you would do drills and all that."

"So... I was doing well, but then there was a problem. I don't know why the problem occurred but the Head of Public Services thought I was living a double life... It must have been like police advising them, do you know? Because they had police at the college and they come in and they [teach] like, obviously where I was doing a public services course, like police that know man, would be there. They'll come in. They'd do talks. And it's like 'you're the little shit from the area. Like, I know you. What are you trying to do man? Are you trying to do a public course?' Anyways, no explanation I come in one day and [Head of Public services course] [was] like, 'You're living a double life.' Kicked me off the course. **Are you serious?** Swear to God, like. I had a black teacher as well. His name was

[name]. He was just shocked man. [teacher's name] was just like, 'He's doing well in his class. Like, why are you kicking him off?' But [name], he was the head of the thing he was just racist, man. He was just... he wasn't having none of it man. I was just like to him, 'Even if I was living a double life, that's nothing to do with the college. I wasn't doing nothing on the college premises. You don't even know like what you're talking about it.' But anyways, he just kicked me off, that was it. So, a whole year's gone past, I'd just been doing like what I'd just been doing on the road. **Let me take you back on that, because you just said they must have been talking amongst themselves whether it's police or the neighbourhood police.** Yeah. **So you reckon that's what's going on there? I'm asking you.** That's definitely what's been going on. Because as I said it's a Public Services [course], so, I have seen police that obviously I probably ran into before and that, you get me? Probably yeah, there's some that I'd probably been rude to, do you get what I'm trying to say and that. After that conversation I just left and then a year went by."

Remarkably,

"I did another course. I did a business course at [area name] Sixth Form College. Anyways, exactly the same thing that... there was some policewoman, she opted to get me kicked out of college. Like I was just walking in one day, I saw her. She saw me. About an hour later I'm getting called to the head teacher at the college. I was thinking, 'All my life I've been in colleges I've never met a head teacher from my college.' Like why am I getting called into a meeting about some...? He was just like, 'Oh yeah, [police officer's name] said this. You're a gang member from that area. We don't need this. We don't...' I was thinking, 'What?' So



anyways, I got [my youth worker] involved. So I think that's how it got smoothed and that, but if I didn't have that support, I'd have been kicked out. **So you got called into the head teacher.** [head teacher's name]. I remember his name because it became a... not a teacher term. It became like [teacher's name] wanted to see me every two weeks just to make sure everything's running smoothly... 'Does everyone else get this attention or is it just me?... Why have I got to be the one to see you?'" [Paul]

The construction of a "double life" was used to refer to three of the respondents who contributed to this study. It elicits the view that an individual is 'gang-involved', but also presenting as not being associated or involved with gangs. In this regard, to be labelled as gang-involved seemingly negates the individual's attempts to ameliorate the personal, social and economic circumstances that accompanies living in a socially deprived community. To pursue educational or employment aspirations disrupts the police construction of these young people as having pro-criminal attitudes related to their gang member status, it goes against the intelligence that the young person is "active". Subsequently, their (pro-social) presence in college or in training workshop environments therefore cannot be interpreted as pro-social and aspirational, but is reconfigured as deceptive, the individual is living a "double life" or "double agent". Consequently, the individual's attempts at self-improvement are curtailed. Furthermore, other respondents had taken up opportunities with youth work organisations engaging in Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) or working as 'mentors' to other young people within their communities. For one such respondent, following his discussion at being denied access to an education provision he argued that,

"[T]hey didn't like what I was doing, because at that age I was getting arrested here and there, but I was going to community safety meetings, I was going to knife crime meetings. I was going to the House of Lords, I was going to [the] Home Office to talk about safety with the person in charge at the time, so they [local police] weren't feeling that. They really weren't

feeling that. They told my mum that I play for both sides, I'm a gang leader. This is a couple of years later when I was sixteen, fifteen. They told my mum I'm a gang leader, because she had to go to some... it was like a YOT [Youth Offending Team] parents group kind of thing. She has to go or else they'll try take her to court and do a mad thing because obviously I got arrested for something, so basically for me not to go jail, she has to go. If she agrees to go and she doesn't go then they'll try take her to court and that kind of thing. Do you feel me? **What was that called?** I don't know... [A] parenting course kind of thing, but it's like through youth offending team. So it's like the court will make her go because of me, because I got arrested. So they told her 'you have to go to this'. **And if you don't go then she could be...** then I could go jail and then if she agrees to go in court, which she would basically have to, if she doesn't want me to go jail, and she doesn't go, they could take her to court. **You're [joking] me?** No. No, no, no, no. So, when she was there, there was like a police officer, like a YOT officer, we met before at a community... I saw him at a community safety meeting and he's also my officer. Not my officer, sorry, he did a knife workshop with me, or a gang's workshop or something like that. A knife and a gang's workshop, so he knows me from work, like community safety charity work. And he knows me from carrying a knife. So, he's telling my mum, 'He plays for both sides', but obviously it wasn't like I was at the meetings and then I got caught with a knife. I got caught with a knife and then I was at the meetings. Do you know what I'm saying? But he made it look like I'm just going back and forth. I'm stabbing man and then I'm going to the meeting to see what happens, like I'm some spy, some double agent. He's making me seem like some... to the point where my mum came home and she said, 'Oh, you're in a gang. The police officer told me that you're a gang leader. You play for both sides.'" [Bill]

Alongside the contention that Bill is a "double agent" there emerges within the above extract further evidence of the policing methods and strategies used to manage those identified as a risk. Extending beyond the use of deliberate interventions to disrupt respondents' accommodation and education/employment

opportunities, being on the Matrix legitimises the coercive manipulation of parents and family members. That Bill's offending behaviour precipitates his involvement with programmes to help young people is inconsequential; the label of gang member and for Bill "gang leader" significantly undermines any attempts of moving away from his previous activities. He is therefore purported to play on both sides and seemingly willing to play for both sides, for as long as the police have him recorded as a gang member. Finally, for Dean being registered on the Matrix has hindered his employment prospects.

"I've applied for so many jobs within the youth sector, and they've told me that when they do like a CRB check, they told me that I'm on a 'watch'. A watch kind of thing. But they don't say exactly what it is. **Do they say that to you?** Yes, they say that to me. I've had people, like when I go for a job interview, they say, 'everything's okay. your interview went well', but a few days afterwards when they contact me to tell me why I didn't get the job, they found out. They knew that I had a record, these positions that I apply for, they know I have a record because I have to declare it, but they didn't think it was that serious. So, they say that they have a surveillance kind of thing on you and they saw my record, as well, so they found out that it was really. That's two reasons why. **They saw your record so they found out what?** They found out that I'm on a surveillance kind of thing. **A surveillance, kind of thing?** Yes, and I'm thinking that's the only thing it can be. **What do they mean, a surveillance, kind of thing?** I'm on surveillance by the police, basically. **Is that what employers have told you?** The employers are telling me...I'm under surveillance by the police and the courts." [Dean]

"...[t]he DBS check, so, I think maybe they contact the police to find out more information. That's what they must do, instead of just looking at the records. They must do proper checks and they end up finding out that I'm under surveillance and just talking to the police, I think that just destroys it all." [Dean]

It is difficult to consider how the young people who responded to this study can possibly distance

themselves from the debilitating effects of being registered as a gang nominal or a gang suspect. Even where they are seeking to turn their lives around or responding to the very real social and criminal problems that are present within their communities, their registration to the Matrix and the labelling that accompanies their registration dictates that they will always be viewed and policed as gang members.

### So what's driving it?

"This. [points to skin colour] This. What else? Like, come on, man. Come on. I've seen it with my own eyes. And the thing is, I don't even say it anymore. It's pointless because it's become the cliché thing to say it. It's the cliché. Yeah. I'm more worried to say it now. It's like there's no point in me even saying it. No point in even saying it cause they've made it out like you're wrong for saying it now. Or why is it that? Or because it is that, that's what you made it. You know what I'm saying? As much as it's the police as well, it's our whole society has a stereotype of young black men and black people in general. Do you know what I mean? I'm a black youth in a tracksuit. They have a perception of what I am. Yesterday I was riding from here, I was riding from boxing and this old woman – and I rode past her and she went...I couldn't believe it, I thought I was, like, scum – she'd grabbed her handbag. I haven't seen that for years. She went, "oh!" and grabbed her bag. I just stopped and I said, 'I'm not a robber.' That is mad. Do you know how mad it is that the whole society has a perception? Like, where was I?"

"It's will obviously always be there, you've just got to be able to live with it I guess, and accept the fact that they'll always be there. There's nothing you can really do about it. It's always going to be that prick of a [police officer] that thinks he knows you and wants to fucking take you to the station to give you a strip search because he thinks that you've got something on you because you've been arrested for previous before."





# Discussion and Conclusion

If stop and search were an effective crime control strategy, the tragic stories which unfold within this report would not exist. If being stopped by the police were an effective disruption strategy against violent crime, the encounters as described above would not be expressed as normal everyday occurrences. More controversially, whilst political and academic debate has centred upon the rights-infringing experiences aroused by the disproportionate episodes of police stop and search; in the context of the above, such debates have masked and concealed the harmful reality of 'being policed' for young black and Asian people living in London. The findings in this report represent what it is like to live in a police state, where police surveillance and intelligence gathering function of the multi-agency gang management units conspires to curtail opportunities for young black and Asian people under a guise of safeguarding and risk-management. What is evident is that gang-management unit intelligence sources inform where those who are registered as gang suspects or "at risk" of gang involvement can live. Such intelligence can obstruct education, employment and training opportunities, having further adverse effects upon parents and guardians, siblings and friends. Of concern, the intelligence that drives the decision-making of the gang management units is not verified, and yet it affords statutory agencies and voluntary/charitable gang services an incredible power and discretion to intrude into the personal lives of the most vulnerable and socially marginalised young people in London.

Many of the respondents who offered their experiences to this study had themselves been the victim of serious violence. Many had experienced intra-familial violence, endured violence as children at school and again had encountered violence on the streets where they lived. Sadly, two respondents likened their school experiences to that of being in prison. What is therefore evident is that despite the prevalence of violence within their lives, adults cannot protect them. Furthermore, given the centrality of the police in their everyday encounters, it is also clear that neither the police nor their schoolteachers can protect the young people.

Consequently the police did not protect them, nor

did gang-management units alleviate the risks they faced. Within the extracts from conversations then, it is not the interpersonal violence that causes harm, but the more structural violence confined to their stigmatised "estates". Added to this, the harm incurred from the intelligence data produced by the police alongside the extreme violence exerted by the police is in and of itself criminogenic and crime causing. For Brennan, mistrust in the police alongside having friends who have been in trouble with the police are significant factors that increase the likelihood of weapon carrying. Given the government commitment to 'End Gangs and Youth Violence' in 2011, it is evident that strategies to alleviate the violence experienced and endured by the young people of London can never be realised through the lens of the 'gang'. Paradoxically the policing of the 'gang' as defined by the police serves to criminalise and stigmatise whole estates and communities and their inhabitants and severely limits those opportunities that may improve the life chances for this cohort and facilitate lifestyle change.

To be registered to the gang database offers the respondents in this study little hope. "[I]t will always be there, you've just got to learn to live with it, I guess".

There is now an urgent need to shift away from policy positions which have conceptualised and in turn responded to stop and search as a seemingly extemporised random (and unfortunate) encounter with the police. The stories presented demands that we reconceptualise towards what it is to be policed in London and numerous other communities racialised as black. To be policed transcends street-based police-community interactions. For the young men who participated in this study, to be policed connotes the unmitigated criminal and social regulation of the individual. To be policed demands subjugation, to concede your humanity. To be policed is, to be made subject to swathes of at times known, yet in the main unknown, state powers which severely curtail legitimate, fair and obligatory claims to resources and opportunities and to surrender your claims to those resources.

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