In what ways does the Christian faith impact on the desistance of black male exprisoners?

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In what ways does the Christian faith impact on the desistance of black male ex-prisoners?

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Thesis resubmitted for the Doctorate in Theology and Ministry King’s College London

September 2019
Abstract

My inspiration for conducting this study was based on my personal experience as a black male Christian ex-prisoner (BMCEP) and my successful desistance that I attribute largely to my Christian transformation. It is often the claim that Christianity has the power to transform the lives of black prisoners and ex-prisoners like me, to be able to overcome the many barriers to desistance. Nevertheless there are other Black Male Christian Ex-prisoners (BMCEP’s) who made a commitment to the Christian faith who were unable to overcome the barriers to desist. This study acknowledged that BMCEP’s contend with additional barriers to desistance based on race and the need to contend with institutionalised racist structures. The focus of this investigation is not how the Black Church can attempt to change these structures to accommodate the desistance of BMCEP’s but how the Black Church can facilitate black empowerment and the self-determination of BMCEP’s to enable them to desist.

There is a limited body of literature on the subject of black male desistance and to my knowledge, none that demonstrates how Christianity can specifically reduce re-offending for black men. Nevertheless there is a substantial body of literature investigating whether Christianity reduces re-offending rates or improves desistance
generally, however the studies that were able to establish Christianity made a positive impact on desistance did so only for particular categories of ‘criminals’. Additionally, those studies that were able to demonstrate that Christian programmes delivered positive desistance outcomes were unable to explain what elements of Christianity impacted the prisoners or ex-prisoners and in what ways they specifically influenced the mind, emotions and behaviour of prisoners and ex-prisoners. I believe this lack of understanding of the therapeutic impact of Christianity on the desistance of prisoners and ex-prisoners in general inhibits the advancement of knowledge in this field. This leaves BMCEP’s further marginalised based on their additional racialised barriers to desistance.

This study initiates the development of knowledge and resources for the Black Church to support BMCEP’s better and builds the therapeutic bridge between desistance and Christian theology for BMCEP’s.

This investigation was rooted in my personal experience of incarceration, my Christian conversion in prison, my journey of desistance, my experience as a criminal justice professional for over fifteen years and a minister in the church.

The study focused particularly on the theology of black liberation
because my Christian faith that, began whilst incarcerated, and my past experience as a member of the Nation of Islam relates to this particular theological position. For instance the gospel message of Jesus the liberator, connects with my journey as an oppressed black man, an ex-prisoner who has been set free, physically and Spiritually, someone who has been forgiven, reconciled to God, embraces suffering as part of the journey of faith and maintains the notion of black empowerment.

Whilst this auto-ethnographic study allowed me to bring my experience and knowledge to this study, eleven other BMCEP’s and four Black Male Ex-Prisoners (BMEP’s) were interviewed for the purpose of comparison and critical analysis.

This research found that many of the factors that were identified as desistance strengths also had the potential for impacting BMCEP’s desistance negatively. These included resilience, motivation, autonomy, Christian identity, black identity, masculine expressions and even the Christian faith. This investigation explored the factors that might make them either desistance opponents or strengths. The study considered ways to identify or assess how these factors could be influencing the BMCEP, so that ‘countermeasures’ could be applied to support them by their church.
Factors that were clearly opposed to desistance such as various forms of trauma, shame, and the engagement of negative defence mechanisms and coping strategies to deal with distress were also explored. I presented ways that the impact of these factors on the BMCEP could be identified by the Black Church so that measures to reduce the damage they might cause could be applied.

The study concluded with fourteen recommendations in the form of guidelines for the church and resources that could be developed to support BMCEP’s desistance, thus improving the therapeutic bridge between the practice of Christian theology and desistance for black men.
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Chapter One – Introduction and rationale

This study is born out of my personal experience of desistance and experience as a criminal justice policy influencer, a criminal justice rehabilitation practitioner, a prisoner resettlement manager and a minister of the Christian faith. As this is an auto ethnographic study it means my journey, history and experience is fundamental to it and therefore the introduction takes the time to introduce the study and myself as central. It is additionally supplemented by interviews of fifteen other Black Male Ex Prisoners. Eleven are Christians and the other four are not.

I spent many years ‘on road’\(^1\) engaging in crime and served three separate prison sentences in that time. Nevertheless, since my release from my last prison sentence I have risen to become an advisor to the government on reducing re-offending and a member of the following expert advisory groups. The Youth Justice Boards BME\(^2\) Forum, the advisory group for Tackling Race and Equalities within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) Task Force, the UK Boarder Agency Jamaica Reducing Re-offending Stakeholder Group (supporting offenders deported to Jamaica), a lead campaigner on the Race For Justice Campaign to end the inequalities faced by BME groups and to strengthen their voice and role in the

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\(^1\)Being on road is dealing drugs or trafficking. – Urban Dictionary
\(^2\)Black, Minority and Ethnic Group
criminal justice system. I was also a member of the advisory board of the
governments DWP and Home Office Joint Committee to tackle the
challenges of employing ex-offenders. I was a member of the Young
Review Independent Advisory Group informing the Ministry of Justice
and National Offender Management Service on the challenges facing
Muslim offenders. I was invited as the guest speaker at the ‘Making it
work for offenders’ international conference in Brussels organised by the
Centre for economic and social inclusion, and a trustee of Clinks who
engage in government policy making and supporting third sector
organisations who are engaged in the CJS.

Additionally, I was responsible for one of the five national pilot
programmes preceding the probation ‘part-privatisation’ process and I
implemented a number of prisoner rehabilitation and desistance
programmes for BME offenders. I am a trained Samaritan listener
supporting suicidal prisoners and a consultant Samaritan resilience group
leader providing suicide prevention training for prisoners. I co-founded
Transformed Ministries (a ministry for prisoners and their families), I
foundered Way4ward Solutions CIC and act as their CEO providing faith
and secular solutions for reducing re-offending and the prevention and
diversion of young people from crime. I implemented a number of
successful programmes to prevent young people at risk of imprisonment
and supported other disadvantaged groups such as the homeless, those recovering from addiction and people suffering with mental health issues.

My own previous experience of incarceration and involvement in criminality includes many years of criminal activities escalating to organised crime and organised group crime leadership. These experiences included the involvement in and the witnessing of serious violence on the street and in prison. I served time in both juvenile and adult institutions. My first experience as a young service user was an 18-month period of imprisonment. This began with time remanded in custody in a young offenders institution. I quickly learned how to stay safe by applying the social psychological interplays I learned on the streets to survive and adopted them in the prison environment to enable me to climb the prisons and criminal hierarchy.

When I was incarcerated the first time I was sent to a young offenders institution, and quickly learned that the dangers in prison were similar to those on the street accept the close confines and limited space meant that danger was ‘in your face’. Whilst many attempted to rise through the prison hierarchy by challenging those above, my strategy was to build alliances with those from other ‘postcodes’ with a view to collaborating on the outside. I recognised that by creating alliances with those with
reputations in other parts of London would enhance my reputation and safety when transferred to other prisons and ‘on road’ when I was released. For instance, once released there were times I was in other parts of London and when approached by other young men I could mention a name of someone with a reputation that they knew, thus turning a potentially dangerous situation into an opportunity for creating further ‘collaborative’ opportunities. In this way my name became known in various parts of London, not as an enemy but at an ally.

In prison, those who were most respected were called “Top Dogs” and this title was based on their reputation, networks, physical prowess, speed and agility, allegiances and intelligence. In other words, those at the top of the pecking order tended to have hyper masculine ‘qualities’, which I adopted and developed and my survival motto for prison “success” was the same as that on the street. I would deal with the first person that took the smallest liberty, in such a way that it would be remembered and others would think I was ‘crazy and unpredictable.’ In this way I would never need to fight again, as that reputation would follow me.

As soon as I turned 18 years old I was transferred to HMP Brixton, an adult institution. There the rules of engagement changed somewhat. Reputation was still important but allegiances and intelligence were much
more important than in a young offenders institution (YOI). For instance, leadership can be attained in YOI’s based on physical prowess and reputation alone. “Top Dogs” in an adult institution were not loud and in your face but tended to be quiet and less assuming. People followed them for their “business” acumen. I was soon taken under the wings of some of these older “Top Dogs” who began to show me the ropes. I was accepted in this ‘new community’ and although I knew little about “organised crime” I was ‘schooled’ in a variety of criminal activities.

I was incarcerated at the time for a post office robbery, for which I was given a ‘high status’ by other prisoners. Therefore, based on my offence I gained an instant reputation in both the juvenile and adult institutions. Even the older men were impressed as I told them how I had planned and executed robberies without using firearms so if we were caught they wouldn’t be classed as armed robberies. Prison is supposed to be a place of reformation and rehabilitation, however I was affirmed for the crimes I committed by these older men who I looked up to and respected. Not only did I have a sense of belonging, my offences and associations with these men gave me an increased status. I was introduced to all kinds of criminal activities including ‘A’ class drug dealing, trafficking, various forms of fraud, car ringing, counterfeiting, commercial burglaries, acquiring and selling stolen goods and long firm fraud. It was literally a
university of crime and once released I pursued a double life of criminality and legitimate employment whilst staying out of prison for four years. My personal motives, beliefs, values, social capital and identity were conflicted as I had networks in both criminal and non-criminal communities and I was accepted by both.

I believed in God and I was exploring various faiths in prison. I read the bible when I was on remand in the hope that God would release me from prison. I was introduced to the autobiography of Malcolm X, leading me to becoming a member of the Nation of Islam, which I discuss in Chapter five.

When I was released from prison this first time after some months I was fortunate to secure a good job at British Telecom but left after 3 years following very unfair and what I perceive to be racist treatment. This experience caused me to vow that I would never work for anyone again. I started a financial services business, which went bust in the 1990 recession. I met someone at this time that I had spent time in prison with and we collaborated in selling A-class drugs which led me back to prison by the end of 1991.

This time I was sentenced to 2 years and decided I would make the best
of the ‘networking’ opportunity to meet people higher up the pecking order. I spent most of that time in HMP Belmarsh the newly built top security prison. This time I had risen to the rank of a “Top Dog” and I implemented how I would conduct “business” whilst incarcerated. I did this as a challenge to myself, to make some extra money and to maintain and elevate my status. My view was that if I could conduct “business” in a high security prison establishment without being caught, then I could certainly do so on the outside without detection. At the same time I could use this time in prison to identify and select the best people I could work with on the outside. Once I was released I put my criminal plan into action with only one intention and that was to make as much money as possible. Once again I led a double life but this time it was “on road” making money whilst studying towards a degree in Business, two evenings a week. My intention was that once I had completed my degree I would have amassed enough money and knowledge and would go ‘legal’.

At this time I was not only a member of the Nation of Islam but I was into New Age spirituality such as shamanism, mysticism, occultism, astrology, fortune telling, magic and alchemy. In my view this kept me safe from those who intended to rob me and from the police. I spent four years out of prison and believed I was untouchable as I witnessed my
spirituality saving me time and time again from those who wished to rob me, do me harm and from the police. So when I was arrested and charge it came as a surprise.

As I languished on remand in HMP Wandsworth I expected that I would be freed based on what I saw my spirituality save me from in the past. Although I was an avid anti Christian, I had a Damascus Road experience in my prison cell and made a Christian commitment, which completely changed my life. I realised that as a Christian I was forgiven and although I did things in the past that I regret, my faith maintained that I still had value. This led me to consider my purpose in Christ, to turn away from criminality and pursue a completely different life. When I went to court I was found guilty and sentenced to 13-year and lost everything I owned. I served six and a half years of that sentence.

When I had a “Damascus Road” experience I had a revelation that Jesus came to set the captives free (Luke 4:18 & John 8:6). In other words Jesus came to set me free. In this process I would describe my theology as shifting from the black (Islamic) form of liberation theology to a black Christian liberation theology. Both my black Islamic and Christian theologies of liberation arose out of my social contexts as an oppressed black man in prison. My black Christian theology of liberation
corresponds with the purpose and mission of Jesus who liberated me whilst incarcerated, from sin, from guilt, from shame, from the negative affects of racism and from the impact of having a criminal record.

This raises the question, what kind of upbringing did I have and did that in any way influence my life of crime? Considering this study is concerned with how my Christian faith influenced my desistance, it is important to reflect on my early faith experiences. My experience of the church before I became a Christian in prison was limited. My family were not church attendees and my early experience of church was Sunday school, choirboy and as a Cub Scout. The Cub Scouts met in a church mid-week and we attended Sunday school as part of our duty. My mother did not participate in church and my father was absent. I lived in a small town in Yorkshire called Morley nr Leeds that was a predominantly white community. I attended church from the age of eight to eleven but remember very little from those Sunday school lessons. When I reflect on what I learned from Sunday school I only remember the story of David and Goliath, and I didn’t realise at the time that it was a true story.

I left the church when I left the Cub Scouts and joined the Boys Brigade at eleven. Although, the Boy’s Brigade met in another church we were not obliged to attend on Sunday’s and I never returned to attending
church until I became a Christian in prison about twenty years later.

I lived in this principally white community until the age of thirteen then I moved to London with my mother and two younger siblings. I was the ‘man’ of the house as my father was absent. Therefore, I had to navigate what it meant to be a black man at a young age. Black masculinity is complex, diverse and contended. My perception of masculinity in the church was not strong, confident and cool, which were the traits I aspired towards and also observed in the Nation of Islam.

Boyd (2011: 4-7) maintains a deficit exists for rites of passage processes for boys to understand what it is to be a man in the UK. My boyhood to manhood rites of passage took place for me in prison, which is the case for many other black boys in particular. Between 2006 and 2018 the percentage of black young people in prison has doubled³.

It might also be argued that rites of passage for girls is also lacking however girls are more likely than boys to share their experiences, challenges and emotions with others thus finding healing from their internal ‘wounds.’ Additionally, I found that Black Pentecostal Church

worship was more attractive to females than men and was not a place that I felt I could discover my manhood.

Boyd (2011: viiii) maintains, what are supposed to be the ‘natural and essential roles’ for black men can become a confusing social construction of gender, race, culture and class that is in flux. The examples of black masculinity that I observed and aspired towards as an adolescent were ‘sound men’, who for me had status, were popular and cool. From the age of fourteen I started to follow sound systems like Saxon, Viking, Gemi Magic and Rootsman Hi-Fi. By the age of sixteen I owned my own sound system called Black Phoenix. There were eight of us in the sound and we lived in New Cross and Peckham.

Whilst this allowed me to express my masculinity with the status of having a sound system, which attracted the girls and had the ‘cool’ factor, maintaining a sound system costs money and for me, being a man also meant having money and independence.

I was introduced at the age of 16 to people who were planning to rob a Hi-Fi and PA equipment store because they were told I might be interested in buying the equipment. I didn’t have the funds to buy the equipment they planned to steal and I became involved in the crime with
them. On reflection my motive for this act of criminality was to build my status as a soundman and as Glynn maintains, to ‘express’ my masculinity in a way that I was unable to do legitimately.

A year or so later I broke away from those in New Cross and Peckham and joined forces with friends who also had a sound system in Brixton and Clapham. My criminal involvement escalated as these guys were street robbers and didn’t go to college like my other friends did. I continued to attend college studying a diploma in microelectronics in the day whilst being involved in criminality in the evening. I gained a reputation ‘on road’ as I felt I had to prove that going to college didn’t make me ‘soft’. Before I had the chance to complete that course however I found myself in prison on a post office robbery charge.

As I stated earlier, I read the autobiography of Malcolm X and became a member of the Nation of Islam. It was eleven years later when I was in prison the third and final time where I became a Christian. The Nation of Islam offered me many of the factors associated with desistance such as self-belief, motivation, values, social capital, a new identity, self-esteem, acceptance and a sense of belonging. Christianity offered me all of these values plus forgiveness from sin and the alleviation of shame. I have discussed these in more depth within this study.
When I became a Christian in prison. I taught bible studies and became an Alpha course leader. As a long-term prisoner I would observe men becoming Christians but unfortunately I would also witness a number of them returning to prison. Those returning were predominantly black men, and when they returned I would ask ‘what went wrong?’ The common themes that emerged were that they did not feel a sense of belonging in ‘their’ church, people in the church did not understand their challenges or were unable to relate to them, and they felt judged or perceived they would be judged if they shared their problems. I also witnessed this ‘failure of the church’ to reintegrate Black Male Christian Ex-Prisoners (BMCEP’s) into the community when I was released, compelling me to ask the question for many years, ‘what difference does the Christian faith really make for the desistance of black male ex-prisoners?’

On my release I joined the Baptist Church because I met the Minister of that church when he visited a prison where I was serving time, to preach. His church was in Brixton where I intended to live on release and he was also an ex-prisoner, so I took the name and address of the church. I knew he would be less likely to judge me, and it would be more likely that I would be accepted. Denominationally I have been referred to as a Baptist however I do not refer to myself as a Baptist; I just happen to attend a
Baptist church.

In this study I use the terms Black Led Church, Black Church and Black Majority Church (BMC) interchangeably. I define each term the same for the purpose of this study. The Black Led Church, the Black Church and the BMC must all have a majority black leadership and a majority black congregation. With this definition in mind the two pastors that have led the Baptist church I have attended over the years are both white. Nevertheless, the leadership team are majority black and the congregation are also majority black. Therefore, it fulfils these definitions of a Black Church. Additionally, in my roles as Deputy CEO at Peckham Churches Action Network (PECAN) and co-founder of Transformed Ministries\(^4\) I worked with, preached in and provided training for many Black Churches, with respect to working with offenders, families and young people.

Although I had some degree of success in getting churches involved in social action, it was always more challenging for me to get the BMC’s to partner in ministry to address issues of the rehabilitation of offenders, youth crime or the overrepresentation of black people in prison in the

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\(^4\) A ministry for ex-offenders and their families, led by ex-offenders.
UK. Even now the churches supporting the Way4ward ministry for offenders, families and young people are white majority churches.

Beckford maintains that some Black Churches have become so spiritually minded and dislocated from society that although they engage in praying for the problems they do so without an understanding of the causes rendering the church of little use to those in need (Beckford 2004). Nevertheless, there are some great examples of Black Churches doing brilliant social action. For instance the New Testament Church of God (NTCG) trains and commissions ministers to become chaplains in prisons, hospitals, schools, the armed services and emergency services. Bringing Hope ministry to offenders and young people was birthed out of their Birmingham network, and their prophetic work is ground breaking.

Additionally, the Black Church in the UK is relatively silent on issues of racism and black oppression that is happening all around them and to them. Cone (2010) argues that the Black Church that is aligned with the white theology of privilege is misguided. He maintains that white theology is derived from the culture of white supremacy and is therefore not a Christian theology. He explains that understanding Christianity from a white supremacist viewpoint is like trying to understand Christ from a Roman point of view.
Therefore, Christian theology may be likened to a theology of liberation from oppression, which is particularly poignant for black prisoners and ex-prisoners, where daily oppressions based on blackness and a criminal past can be discerned through a theological lens. The starting point for churches to respond appropriately to the crisis facing black men in prison, reintegrating into the community and desisting is to become better informed about our plight (Glynn 2014: 44). However it is not enough to understand the issues black men face but also to understand how and why these issues exist. This may require that the Black Church read’s the bible again through the lens of their black oppressed experience rather than through the inherited white privileged lens. Nevertheless, this study considers the strengths and weaknesses of black theology for supporting BMCEP’s desistance. The study is structured as follows.

Chapter Two – Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology selected for this study and the rationale for that selection. It discusses the various forms that the chosen auto-ethnographic methodology can take and the position taken in this study.

Chapter Three – Desistance for Black Christian Men
This chapter explores the relationship between Christianity and desistance for me as a black man, to determine how Christianity influenced my desistance. It sets out benefits and challenges of a black theology of liberation for black male desistance, and how it might impact the external and internal obstacles that I had to overcome to desist.

Chapter Four – Black Masculinity
This chapter discusses the complex nature of masculinity for me as a Christian black men and the challenges men like me face to understand masculinity in its different forms and in various spaces and places, and its relationship to desistance and offending behaviour. It explores my journey of masculinity and the role the church plays in facilitating masculine expressions for black men like me.

Chapter Five – Black Male Christian identity
This chapter considers my own Christian identity, black male identity and personal identity, and how identity impacts my journey of desistance. It outlines the obstacles that can make it challenging for black men like me to form positive black identities. For instance, negative stereotypes, negative media images and the associated lack of self-belief and confidence formed by racial oppression. I also discuss the role of the Black Church in connecting Christian identity with black identity.
Chapter Six – The Role of Autonomy, Resilience and Motivation for Black Men to Desist

Autonomy, resilience and motivation have been declared as requirements for desistance. This chapter explores how these factors impact on the desistance of BMCEP’s.

Chapter Seven – The Role of Shame in Black Male Desistance

This chapter explores the role of shame in the lives of black men, how shaming is used in the CJS, the role of shame in the bible and the impact of shame on the desistance of BMCEP’s.
Chapter Two – Approach and Methodology

Methodology

The topic of this doctoral study was selected on the basis of my personal experience and interest. Therefore the auto-ethnographic methodology was selected to enable me to draw insights from my personal experience and the experience of the other participants. This means I was able to bring my personal perspective on the investigation of the impact of Christianity on the desistance of black male ex-prisoners.

My initial consideration when selecting a research methodology was the sense that my personal experience of the issues would need to be suppressed to fulfil traditional research criteria where a researcher’s influence is thought to diminish the validity and reliability of the investigation. Although most researchers have a personal interest or experience of the issue they investigate, many are surprised at the suggestion of writing themselves into their study, because for them that is a display of subjectivity that would somehow infect the quality of their work. However, Muncey (2010: 2) maintains, “where a researcher does not write themselves or their views into the study, they would need to consider what filters they are employing to separate their own experiences from the study and it would have to be a very powerful
It is therefore healthier to acknowledge the link and purposely build it into the work, or make oneself, as the researcher the focus of the study.” Therefore, I have not only acknowledged the link between my experience and this study but I have made myself as a BMCEP, the main subject of this study.

Reed-Danahay (2017: 144) maintains that critical auto-ethnography should not only acknowledge the context, the nature of the personal narrative and identity but must ask the question, whose interest is it serving? This auto-ethnographic study is written critically as well as evocatively. This auto-ethnography serves the interest of the Black Church, black people in the criminal justice system, the black community and my own interests. My own interests are served by gaining a doctorate and personal insights that will in term enable me to better support the black community, church and those engaged in the justice system.

In many traditional research studies the significance of the researcher influence is ‘ignored’ or it is assumed that the researcher can easily create a separation between them and their study. However I do not believe it is possible to eliminate researcher influence, for instance even deciding upon a research idea the researcher inevitably influences the study.
In a qualitative study of this nature the researcher influence extends to every part of the study including the research approach, the design, the formation of the research, the interview questions, the way questions are asked, the interpretation of the responses to those questions, as well as the assumptions in the development of the study, the way the study is carried out and how the data is analysed.

Therefore I had to consider not only how my interest in the study and my personal experience of the subject matter would influence and direct the study but also find ways for it to be incorporated. Whilst it was important to mitigate researcher influence it was also important to be transparent about the inevitability of researcher influence.

It is not unusual for an auto-ethnographic study to include participants with a similar demographic as the auto-ethnographer. This allowed for the voices of fifteen other BMEP’s to be heard and to recognise the mutuality of knowledge and experience that exists between us. Nevertheless a power differential exists between me and the ‘other’ participants and this unbalanced mutuality is based on my enhanced status. This heightened status is based on me being a doctoral student, a company director, a church minister and a policy influencer within the justice system. This differential could cause the researched to want to
please me rather than answer the questions genuinely. Therefore my influence over the participants in terms of guiding this study might be higher than that of an ‘outsider researcher.’

Glynn maintains a separation between the researcher and researched can ‘create’ barriers from gaining hidden information and insights about the lived experience of the researched (Glynn 2014: 32) and these barriers might include distrust, lack of personal experience and understanding of the subject and lack of mutuality with the researched. Although auto-ethnography acknowledges the link between the researcher and the research subjects, Chang (2008: 46) maintains that auto-ethnography can also achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation, which means not focusing on the self alone but searching for understanding of the cultural context and the understanding of others through self. This was certainly the case in this investigation where I am not only the participant in this study but also the lens through which the social context of the shared experiences were interpreted. In other words I was an observer of my own story, an observer of the accounts of those with similar stories and an observer of the social and cultural contexts.

It is sometimes questioned whether auto-ethnography is a research method, methodology or an approach to conducting a study. Chang
(2008: 59) maintains that it can be used in any of these forms yet Muncey (2010: 2) contends that auto-ethnography is a research approach and not a methodology. Wall (2008) suggests, auto-ethnographic styles vary in their emphasis on Auto (self), ethno (cultural link) and graphy (application of a research process). I selected auto-ethnography initially because I required a research process where my voice was not silenced. Therefore, I focused on my story and experience, and made links to desistance in the ‘unique’ context of BMCEP’s. Therefore, the auto-ethnographic emphasis of this study is balanced between the focus on self, cultural links and as a research process.

In addition to auto-ethnography’s fluidity in terms of its use as a method, methodology or approach, some tend to be more autobiographical than auto-ethnographical. This study however does not just present my story as an autobiographical account but as an analysis of my personal experience of faith and desistance from criminality. Consequently, this study took the auto-ethnographic position where I was the channel through which my story and the story of the participants were understood (Reed-Danahay 2017).

Therefore, I was the subject that was exposed to self-examination and the lens to see through for the comprehension of self, others, the
environment, experiences, faith, and cultures, in the context of the past, present and predicted future, which forms the underpinning for this study as the research methodology.

In this way it allowed me to gain first hand personal insights, learn about the experiences of others and their social world. It permitted access to my own and the participant’s motives, meanings, actions and reactions in the context of our daily lives (Minichiello et al 1995: 10). Nevertheless it is contended that the focus should be on the way participants interpret their own experiences and construct their own realities. This implies a phenomenological perspective is taken to determine the participant’s point of view (Burgess 1984: 3), which raises the question as to the difference between a phenomenological and an auto-ethnographic approach. Similarities include giving the participants a voice, understanding lived experience and being interpretive. If we compare phenomenology and ‘ethnography’ in the first instance, in their traditional sense they have different purposes. Ethnography is intended to be culturally specific, writing about the attributes of cultures and what we have learned about them. Phenomenology is about getting at the essence of a particular experience. The use of self is also possible in phenomenology, which highlights the blurred lines between both methods (Wall 2008).
The advantages of auto-ethnography for this particular study are that it challenges convention, gives a voice to black male ex-prisoners in a way that other methods may not offer, the ‘insider’ may have a more authentic voice than an outsider, accounts of events and relationships tend to be more factual than if inferred by other peoples experiences.

On the other hand the disadvantages of auto-ethnography are that we can’t be sure whether the results are applicable to other cultures and contexts, memory as a data source is unreliable, auto-ethnography is viewed as self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, individualistic and removed from context by some, it is also said to provide a psychotherapeutic benefit for the researcher rather than making a social science contribution and it lacks systematisation and methodological rigour (Wall 2008).

Delamont (2007) argues that auto-ethnography is antithetical to the progress of social science, because introspection cannot be substituted for data collection to move a discipline forward. The sources of data for this study came from memory, interviews and self-observation or self-reflection, which Wall (2008) maintains has a degree of unreliability. As the auto-ethnographer and narrator in this study I acted as a point of
‘triangulation’, interpreting and constructing the participants and my own reality in the data analysis and write up. Like me, all the other participants were black men and ex-prisoners. Nevertheless more insights were gained when I was not only trying to identify the similarities in experiences but also in understanding the differences within our experiences and why this might be the case. No human is complete, our views and opinions change and we all experience the same events differently e.g. imprisonment. Therefore I recognise as the auto-ethnographer that my views will have changed through the process of this study and the implications of a changing ‘lens’ might produce mutable results. Therefore, my role is also to observe my own learning and changes in my viewpoint within the study (Muncey 2010: 33).

Silverman (2016: 415) maintains that one of the main factors in ensuring the validity of the research study is “transparency of analytic claims.” In other words when I make a claim and interpret it, validity is upheld when I am open and transparent about the ‘lens’ through which the information is viewed and interpreted. In the research process the auto-ethnographer must recognise the difference between the meaning ‘of’ an experience and the meaning ‘in’ an experience including those of the other participants (Muncey 2010: 42).
Fifteen black men were interviewed for approximately one hour, for the purpose of comparing views. All are ex-prisoners who have desisted from crime for at least five years. Eleven are Christian and four are none Christian. Transformed Ministries, PLIAS Resettlement and Way4ward Solutions identified and referred the participants. I was mindful that I needed these gatekeepers to identify participants who matched the criteria and were not chosen to participate because they knew me. Those who were referred were offered supervision meetings with their referrers to identify any physical or mental support requirements.

Although the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) considers one year an adequate length of time to measure desistance “success⁵”, I selected five years for the length of desistance for two reasons. Personally I had a four-year gap between my three terms of imprisonment. Therefore I wanted participants who had desisted for longer because four years desistance for me didn’t stop me from reoffending twice. Secondly, I wanted the participants to have been out of prison long enough to have a credible desistance story to tell. Additionally, desistance is ‘measured’ from the time of release for the purpose of selection however my desistance began at the beginning of my last period of incarceration when I became a Christian.

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⁵Within their PbR contracts the final payment is made when an offender has desisted for 3 years
I chose case study and semi-structured interviews to collect the data from the other participants. Nevertheless, auto-ethnographic ‘data’ emerged within the process of reflecting on my personal experiences whilst conducting the literature review, interviews and writing up the study.

The research questions were designed around 5 themes that are thought to have an impact on desistance for black men. These included religious experience, masculinity, racial discrimination and discrimination based on their criminal record. These themes also provided an initial framework for reviewing the literature and reflection.
Chapter Three – Desistance for Black Christian Men

According to Maruna and Mann (2019: 6) desistance research is concerned with individual success stories rather than programme outcomes. It recognises the individual as the agent of change, where the investigation is centred on the exploration of the individual’s social contexts, social networks and subjective interpretations as keys to understanding long-term life change.

Desistance for black Christian men is associated with various internal and external factors as well as cultural, faith and environmental ones. Segev (2018) claims that every ‘agent’ is shaped uniquely by these factors, and as it is the agent that propels the desistance process and does so distinctively. Burnett and Maruna (2004) maintain that internal factors such as hope, optimism and self-efficacy, which are powerful indicators for desistance, are influenced by external circumstances on release. Reflecting on my own desistance I had to consider my personal motives and motivations, beliefs and values, social networks and social capital (to access support services as well as employment and training), psychological capital, my degree of autonomy and agency, negotiated transitions of social and personal identity, a sense of belonging and having a role within the wider community (Best et al 2017). Whilst on the
surface these factors may seem to be generic for the desistance of all ex-offenders, black men like me have unique cultural and social restraints to overcome. For instance I had to contend with discriminatory practices inside and outside the CJS, which required me to demonstrate patience and self-control in the face of blatant inequality by using the psychological capital I had in the form of resilience (Henry and Kettle 2014: 2-3).

Farrall and Calverley (2006: 49) examined the meanings that desisters gave to their lives, to explore the internal resources required to promote desistance. Through their examination of the emotional trajectories of desistance they found that desisters went through a series of emotions on their journey from the active involvement in offending towards desistance, with the personal emotions of hope at the beginning through to more ‘negative’ emotions of shame and finally more ‘positive’ emotions of trust and pride. The Christian faith offered me hope, helped me to develop trust beginning with trusting God and ‘pride’ whilst addressing the emotions of shame. Although Farrall and Calverley suggest pride is an internal resource required to promote desistance, in the Christian faith it is not always viewed positively. For instance James 4:6b says, “God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble” and James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift
I suggest the ‘pride’ that I obtained in my Christian faith was as a result of the form of black liberation theology that I accepted and describe later in this chapter. Whilst this ‘pride’ may support my desistance it might be criticised by some as ‘un-Christian’ by nature.

Some criminologists maintain that successful desistance is predicated on the ‘offenders’ ability to formulate a crime free future (Maruna et al 2006: 179), in the midst of hopelessness. Formulating a crime free future for me was a critical part of my desistance journey. Without the formulation of a crime free future, in my mind the question would remain, desist for what? Although the response might be to desist to avoid returning to prison, Chapter Six highlights the weakness of this form of avoidant motivation. Additionally, in a Christian context our motivation for desisting ought to be connected to our God given mission and purpose. A prisoner reflecting on their future invariably leads them to reflect on and to make sense of their present predicament as well as their past actions (Glynn 2014: 128). This implies the offender has either made a conscious choice to change, is engaged in the mental process of making sense of their past and formulating a crime free future or is in the process of working towards their crime free aspirations.
An external factor, such as access to the labour market is critical for the successful desistance of black men. Pager, D and Western, B (2009: 4) found that a criminal record reduces the chance of a call back or job offer by nearly 50% and the negative affect of the criminal conviction affects black applicants twice that of their white counterparts. Therefore, a criminal record is more disabling for black job seekers.

I found that outcomes improve when black male ex-prisoners were explicit about their criminal records to employers, had a coherent explanation of their reason for committing the crime, that indicates it is unlikely to happen again and when they had an advocate speaking on their behalf. These outcomes are base on an independently evaluated pilot project to employ BAME offenders that I developed and ran from 2005 – 2009. The employers I worked with explained that this clarity enabled them to risk assess the applicant. They were also reassured that there was a mentor supporting the applicant who would maintain contact with the employer throughout the probation period if the applicant agreed.

Although I didn’t have someone supporting me in this way to gain employment, I always made sure I explained my past to potential employers and gained a level of success in getting employment that I
didn’t gain when I kept my past a secret. Nevertheless I never shared my past criminal record on an application form but did so face to face in the interview. I found that every job I applied for since my release from prison was successful. I attribute this success to my Christian faith and calling. I believe that when I am journeying according to the purposes of God he opens doors and creates opportunities to fulfil His purpose in my life. I made choices based on what I believed my God given purpose is and God would answer by saying yes, no or not yet. When I was in prison I prayed that God would create a job opportunity for me on release from prison. I was transferred to an open prison with more than a year to serve to my parole date. When I arrived I noticed that the white prisoners were in the best jobs, just the same as every other prison. Although I attribute what happened next to God, I also demonstrated a degree of agency. I heard about an organisation called Training for Life from another prisoner who had a job there.

Although he worked in their gym and I was also a qualified gym instructor, he told me they also ran youth projects. I informed him I wasn’t interested in working as a gym instructor but would like to volunteer in their youth project. I created a CV and asked him to give it to the manager. Shortly afterwards there was a volunteering opportunity and although I had requested that the prison consider me they sent one of their
usual candidates. This white candidate had already been given an opportunity in another community project and was sacked. Even though the prison overlooked me, the organisation requested me based on my CV. We both interviewed and to the prisons disdain I got the placement. After about eight weeks into the placement the prison told me that I could no longer volunteer there, as I needed to look for permanent work because the prison was a ‘working prison.’ Therefore I was told I had one more week and I would be assigned to Job Club. When the placement heard this they decided to offer me permanent employment. In my view this is a clear act of God where it says in Romans 8:28 “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes.” As a black prisoner my chances of getting a job like this a whole year before my parole date was slim to say the least. This smoothed my reintegration, as I was able to save some money, get a laptop, complete my Open University degree and continue in that job when I was released. My Christian faith, the Spirit of God cut through the oppressive, discriminatory obstacles I faced.

This unequal treatment in prison is not unique to me. For instance, most of the participants in this study stated they had also experienced unequal treatment in prison. Participant NA1 said, “I was in one particular open
prison and in that prison you was allowed to do community work, and I found that some of the prestigious placements was always to a certain race, a certain type, you know, the average one.” And participant KH6 said, “you find all the good jobs (in prison) they’re given to the white prisoners.”

Another external factor for successful desistance is the integration into a pro-social community and the development of a pro-social identity. Robinson-Edwards and Pinkney (2017: 50) state that Ibrahim’s successful desistance was due mainly to him being recognised and accepted within the Islamic community. Being accepted as belonging to a pro-social community and being recognised and appreciated, plays a significant role in black men expressing their masculinity and desisting, which is discussed in the next chapter (Jackson 2006). When I was released from prison I did not disclose to my church that I was an ex-prisoner until I had been out for two years. So my acceptance into the Christian community was not initially based on my ex-offender status. When I was asked to join the leadership team to become a deacon in the church, it was time to share my testimony and the church accepted me onto the diaconate all the same. I made the decision to wait before informing the church based on my experience of hearing the stories of other prisoners who struggled to reintegrate into the church and returned
to prison.

The experiences of those I met in prison who were released and struggled to reintegrate suggested to me that I would be better disclosing to the church once I felt I had ‘reintegrated’. Nevertheless, I have worked with churches since, to identify potential mentors with the right attitude and theology, so they could be trained to support offenders (Squirrel 2008).

Calverley’s (2008: 2) study stated that family provides aspirational values, access to resources, and a willingness to offer acceptance and forgiveness. She found that the family played an integral part in the desistance of both Bangladeshi and Indian ex-prisoners. By contrast black and dual heritage offenders’ desistance was found to be a more individualistic endeavour, rather than a collective experience involving their family. The desistance of black ex-prisoners was characterised by greater isolation and disengagement from their community. This suggests that with limited external support structures, black and dual heritage ex-prisoners may need additional relational resources to maintain their desistance. Fader and Traylor (2015: 253) concur that black men in particular have limited access to social bonds, which renders them more likely to re-offend.
I spent much of my time in prison estranged from family and friends and in the six and a half years I spent in prison, the last time, I didn’t get a visit, letter or card from my mother, father, siblings or friends. Although my Christian faith helped me to cope with this situation I also dissociated myself from the situation and the outside. Dayton (2007: 78) maintains that dissociative coping strategies can cause psychological harm and might result in personality altering consequences. I didn’t realise I was using a harmful coping strategy at the time however I felt I had no one who cared enough for me to shape my life around on release so I planned to start a fresh life in a therapeutic halfway house on release. A couple of years before my release however I was reconciled with my two children and their mother, so decided to build a life with them on release. So I would say a large part of my desistance in prison was individualistic however the relationship with my partner and children were significant for my desistance as well as the Christians I met in prison that I remained in contact with on release.

If I was asked what theological perspective I espouse that informs my purpose, mission and desistance I would say I am a born again Christian who is water baptised, baptised in the Spirit, called to make disciples, a believer that Jesus is the only way, the truth and the life and that the kingdom of God is within me. In addition to this I would say my
theological perspective also includes elements of Black British Liberation theology. To understand what I mean I would need to describe a little of my journey of faith. Before my Christian conversion in prison I was a follower of the Nation of Islam believing in their philosophy of black supremacy, which liberated me from my state of black oppression. I thought that black people who were Christians were brainwashed. I couldn’t fathom how a religion that was used by the slave masters as a tool of oppression could attract black people. Although it made no sense before I became a Christian, now as a Christian it makes complete sense. When I consider my black liberation theological position I recognise that the Christian and biblical history came way before slavery. I recognise that my ancestors were kings and even demi-gods before they were slaves. I recognise that life began in Africa or the Middle East as it is called today and by definition the first people were either African or Middle Eastern. I know that Moses, Joshua, Joseph, The Pharaohs, Jesus and many of the other bible characters were not Caucasian as depicted in films. Therefore, the bible does not negatively affect my black consciousness but enhances it.

There are a number of examples in the bible where we see that God has a particular solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. We have the story of Exodus where God uses Moses to lead the Israelites out of captivity
(Exodus 2:11-15). The story of Joseph is also an example of being oppressed by his brothers and later being wrongfully imprisoned, nevertheless God raises him to a high position. Additionally, Jesus was accused of associating with sinners (Mark 2:13-17).

Baldwin (1985) maintains, “the white man discovered the Cross by way of the bible, but the black man discovered the bible by way of the Cross. In other words, as a black man I ‘discovered’ Christianity in my desperation and continued a walk with God that was often in the wilderness. Therefore my Christian experience and theology is rooted in an understanding of oppression and suffering, and the redemption that is associated with the Cross. Baldwin suggests it is not possible to understand the Cross- through a white privileged Christian theology because Christianity is a journey of oppression and marginalisation. I was in that place of suffering (the Cross), I experienced years of black oppression, I had reached the point of giving up on life itself, I was in need of a saviour and a liberator and it was through that experience of suffering that I discovered the bible.

Cone (2010) states that Christianity is not a theology of the privileged but a theology of the oppressed. He explains that the Jesus that the slave masters prayed to for the success of their mission to get as many slaves to
market was not the same Jesus that the slaves prayed to for their freedom. He suggests that we can only see Jesus through the eyes of oppression and the suffering on the Cross. My black Christian theology of liberation, as I stated in Chapter One, corresponds with the purpose and mission of Jesus who liberated me from incarceration, from sin, from guilt, from shame, from the negative affects of racism and from the impact of having a criminal record.

Participant 13FS (P.11) also found liberation from Christ when he cried out in desperation to God. He said “the person leading me to Christ, and encouraging me became very very judgemental... because I was smoking weed and I just couldn’t stop. I didn’t get any help from the church but when I cried out to God in desperation He gave me the strength to stop”

This is a problem I personally have with the black majority church. The propagation of rigid doctrines of faith that lack forgiveness and love is not only unattractive but it can also be harmful, as demonstrated above. Jesus speaks of forgiveness and love and when the message of Jesus lacks love and forgiveness it can be received as judgemental.

There are a number of benefits as well as challenges of incorporating black liberation theology to support the desistance of black men. The
benefits for me are that it is able to relate the black struggle for freedom and equality with the Christian faith. It is able to connect the gospel of Jesus to the experience of oppressed black people and their struggle for justice. In this way the gospel connects with my struggle to navigate an unequal system, my struggle with covert racial discrimination, which often can’t be spoken about because of its clandestine nature, and my struggle with having a criminal record and an ex-offender label. The black theology of liberation connects God’s salvation with human liberation. For instance the “liberation of the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt is connected with Jesus the new liberator who was anointed to preach the good news to the poor and to proclaim release to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Cone 1984: 79-80) Luke 4:18, 19. This connection gives the gospel real power in my everyday life. Christ has set me free physically, psychologically and spiritually.

Black liberation theology for the support of black male desistance also has its challenges. Where black theologians place too much weight on the reaction to racism and lose sight of the power of the gospel to set the captives free. In this case I am not saying that white society and the white church should not be challenged but as black Christians we must remember that our freedom does not come from the white community but from God. ” Therefore our black theology should not be created out of
our negative reaction to white people, which is often the case, rather it should be a positive reaction to the rich history and culture of black people. This requires that black people gain the knowledge of their rich cultural history. I believe this should become part of the present Black Church culture and not just at black history month. If a black theology were founded on the basis of racism and oppression alone however, then if they were eliminated there would be no need for the theology based on the history and culture of black people (Cone 1984: 87). Another challenge for some Black Churches is the focus towards the spiritual and personal salvation to the detriment of action to address social injustice and the needs of the oppressed (Beckford 2004). The Black Church needs to be balanced in their focus between salvation and social justice in the way it was demonstrated by Jesus.

Imprisonment for me was a place of deep mental and spiritual reflection (Glynn 2014). Prison was where my desistance began, although measures of desistance tend to begin on release from prison. Prison was a time and place where I considered what my God given purpose was and what I was going to do on release. It was a place to prepare for the challenges of reintegration. I had to reconstruct my future narrative and begin to work towards that new narrative, starting with changing my associations (Maruna 2001: 114). I had been contending with white privilege and a
society that racially oppressed me, and the Nation of Islam offered me an alternative that didn’t render me inferior but actually gave me a sense of superiority. Now as a Christian I still held onto the ‘black dignity’ I gained as a member of the Nation of Islam but without the sense of superiority. Although at the time I knew nothing of black liberation theology, my interpretation of the gospel was ‘liberationist.’ I trusted that God would get me through any situation, regardless of my disadvantages.

Although studies investigating the impact of Christianity on delinquent behaviour and re-offending reported that offending and delinquent behaviour was not improved by church attendance, religious commitment or participation on Christian programmes (Hirschi and Stark 1969; Burkett and White 1974; Jensen and Erickson 1979; Johnson 2004), others had found that there is some inverse relationship between religiosity and crime reduction (Hercik et al 2005; Johnson and Schroeder 2014).

These inconclusive results motivated me to explore why this was the case. Additionally, to my knowledge there were none that looked at desistance for black Christian men who contend with the added disadvantage of racial discrimination. When I was released from prison and returned to the community I needed particular tools and resources to
enable me to desist and Christianity offered some of these resources to “add value” to my desistance. The significant gap that I was fortunate to have acquired from my past membership of the Nation of Islam was an understanding of ancient black history and a rejection of the idea of black inferiority.

I believe the Black Church can be a solution for black male desistance by offering help to access support to address their needs that may be practical, social, educational, psychological and cultural. To do so however requires they have the ability to recognise those needs and have strategies for addressing them. Examples of Christian based organisations that are endorsed by the government to provide this support are rare in England and Wales. The only two of significant national scale include Caring for Ex-offenders (CFEO) and Community Chaplaincy (CC). Both organisations are white led, they argue however that they are culturally relevant because they have black led church ‘partners’ who can provide black mentors. Nevertheless, there is no training to recognise the unique challenges facing BMCEP’s who are subject to unequal access to support and daily oppressions based on their criminal record and race.

Any government-funded programme for black Christian men would face opposition and/or have directives imposed that wouldn’t allow them to
proselytise and teach a black history that has been omitted from mainstream education.

Cone maintains that the Black Church was birthed out of the struggle but many have forgotten their roots. As such, many have turned to the propagation of the gospel of success and lost its message and mission in the process. He suggests the Black Church should focus less on success and more on a form of success through ‘failure’ where failure is at the heart of it, as this is the message of the Cross. A black led church that is focused on the gospel of success will not necessarily be effective or appropriate for black male desistance success.

Therefore the high reoffending rates for black ex-prisoner’s requires a particular form of cultural and theological engagement that is culturally relevant. White led churches that according to Jensen (2005: 46-47) may experience a degree of ‘white guilt’ are not best placed to train a black-led church how to support black men returning from prison. Many Black Churches according to Beckford are already predisposed to either avoiding discussions about covert racism, feel that it is not a relevant conversation for the church or prefer to ignore its existence. They need to be challenged and trained and a white led church that is predisposed to ‘white guilt’ is not in a position to do so.
Addressing cultural relevance for black male ex-prisoners is much more than one Black Church connecting with another or one black person engaging another. It requires a particular black theology that recognises that the intersecting oppressions of being black, male, an ex-prisoner and a Christian carry particular internal and external struggles that must not be dismissed because we are Christian, but must be acknowledged. For instance, studies have demonstrated that black ex-prisoners tend to struggle more than their white counterparts to engage with support services on release from prison. Black people contend with inequality in the employment market, getting finance to start a business, securing housing etc. and a criminal record intensifies these problems, particularly if you are black.

Beckford points out that many secular activists view the Black Church as ineffective in challenging issues of racism, as well as moral and social decay. Even though many of these congregations are located in the heart of cities facing increasing levels of crime, drugs, violence and sophisticated forms of racial exclusion the churches response is limited. He suggests that one reason why the Black Church involves itself less on issues of racism is an attitude that stems from what he calls ‘transcendence’. This is their capacity to live above and beyond race and
racism, which means that Christian identity takes priority over black identity or black experience. This coupled with the ‘Spiritualisation’ of the issue, to the detriment of action, as well as the theology that states we should ‘trust in the Lord and not on our own understanding’ can make ‘action’ less likely in the Black Church (Beckford 2004: 2-3 & 33).

Therefore Black Churches that avoid conversations about racism leaves many black men feeling the church has no relevance for their daily lives. The Black Church does not only need to be prepared to speak about the reality of racism but also to be aware of the complex racialised experiences of black men in order to support their desistance.

Participant ML3 stated that “nowadays it’s happening (racism) but because it is done in a covert way, you just have to humble yourself and say, you know what, because you making an allegation like that you gonna have to make sure you back up that allegation”.

What makes addressing issues of racial discrimination in the CJS more challenging are not only its covert nature and the objections from the white community about discussing racism, but also objections from the black community ourselves, and particularly from middle and upper class black people (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 99-101). Most definitions of racism
suggest it is not possible to be ‘racist’ towards someone of the same race (Fitzgerald 2015: 59). The phenomenon of ‘black racism’ from other black people is termed black self-hatred and is also described as internalised racism (Hipolito-Delgado 2010: 319-331; Levine and Pataki 2004: 44).

Jackson (2015: 40) declares that the negative images of young black males, the internalized black self-hatred, and the dehumanising effect of systematic institutional and interpersonal racism manifest themselves in the development of self-destructive behaviour patterns or transference in some black youth. Therefore, black self-hatred when internalised may present in behaviour that condemns other black people or self-condemnation.

Johnson (2011) suggests racism only exists where there is an uneven power dynamic between races, which implies class differences between people of the same race, could facilitate classism. To complicate matters further racialised hierarchies exist within black communities privileging lighter skinned black people over darker skinned black people, which are given the term ‘colourism’ (Walker 1983: 290-291).

According to McConahay and Hough (1976: 34) the racialised
experiences of black men has changed from what they describe as “old-fashioned racism” to “new-fashioned racism”. Old-fashioned racism was unsophisticated, opinionated, uneducated, and based on hatred and doctrines of racial inferiority. ‘New-fashioned’ racism or ‘New Racism’ practices are subtle, institutional and apparently non-racial (Bonilla-Silva 2010: 4), because those expressing these ideologies do not define themselves as racist (McConahay and Hough 1976: 34).

Some participants when asked about their experiences of racism answered ‘defensively’ that they had not experienced racism, but later when pressed, they were able to give personal examples of racism they had experienced!

For instance, participant 7SG said, “I never experienced discrimination colour-wise directly”. Later in the same interview he said “And when you look around (the prison) most of the people with the best jobs were first of all none blacks and I call that a discrimination…”

When participant 4PD was asked if he experienced racism he said “to be totally honest no, I have to be honest, no”. When he was asked again in the same interview if he had experienced racism he said “yes, but Steve, there are so many that I forgot……..yes of course with jobs, in the
workplace, on the street, racist comments, yes my whole life, “in prison,” my whole life. But you become numb to it, to be totally honest, I mean it’s a shame to say, now that I’m thinking about it, because I’ve never thought of it before, its tragic to say that it becomes like part of the norm……. When I was growing up it became quite normal, in prison as a young man to be called Nigga and coon and because I was never called by my name as a young person in detention centre and YP (Youth Prison) and that. And the jokes in the workplace cause I was in the building trade……. I’ve been for interviews and when they see a black person all of a sudden the jobs gone.

I found in this study that the Christian participants either denied they had experienced racism or struggled to recall these experiences unless prompted. When the non-Christian participants were asked about their experiences of racism they were able to articulate it clearly and without hesitation. Participant 6KH for instance said, “I have experienced many many examples of racism. My life is dotted with the racist attitudes that you find, and I’ve not always handled it very pleasantly. I’ve experienced not getting a job because of my skin colour. I have been stopped and searched not once or twice but repeatedly only because of my skin colour. I’ve been given longer jail sentences because of my colour.”
The fact that the Christian participants struggled to share their experiences of racism leads me to consider two points. Firstly where participant PD4 says, “there are so many (experiences of racism) I forgot,” might mean that recalling a memory represents pain, shame, guilt, or other negative emotions. In that state the individual may not only deny the reality of the experience or its memory but may create a mythology in its place (McKenzie-Mavinga 2009: 90). This might also relate to what is known as dissociative amnesia explained in Appendix Two. For this study it seemed that this was particularly associated with Christians. Five of the participants had to be prompted before admitting to experiencing racism or being able to give examples of racism and all of these participants were Christians. One participant even said he no longer experienced racism because he is now in the church. When challenged about experiencing racism outside of the church he said, “it no longer affects him as before because he is a Christian”. Eleven of the fifteen participants struggled to speak about racism and all of these were Christians where as all the non-Christians were very vocal about their experiences of racism. This suggests it wasn’t that racism changed since they converted to Christianity rather being a Christian had changed their perception and experience of it.

Secondly, the reason why these Christians struggled to speak about their
experiences of racism might be what I suggested earlier as ‘transcendence’. Beckford explains that this is where Christians live above the plane of racialised experiences.

Nevertheless, I seem to have no problem recalling raced experiences and articulating them as a Christian. This might be due to my past as a member of the Nation of Islam and sensitivities around issues of race. If the Black Church is to support other black people suffering from racial oppression, they need to understand these obstacles and overcome them.

There are a number of ways that religious convention can constrain or control offending. Akers maintains, strengthening the connections between would-be criminals and society through the conscious and unconscious acceptance of mainstream values is one way that can encourage desistance (Akers 1999: 89). Such bonds are established by emphasising religious beliefs (such as loving one another and fellowshipping together), commitment, positive activities, and behaviours that are incongruent with law breaking. Social learning theory maintains that religion can provide the would-be offender with ‘definitions’ that are opposed to crime and reinforced through exposure to law-abiding role models, and encouraging participation in non-criminal mainstream activities (Hitlin and Vaisey 2010: 9).
Religion is also seen as a self-regulatory mechanism that enhances self-control and influences how goals are adopted, pursued, and organised. Self-regulation serves to select out criminal behaviour and promote pro-social behaviour (Vohs and Baumeister 2013: 425).

Specifically, in western society the notion of punishment in the afterlife is assumed to be a powerful deterrent from deviance and is the bedrock of the way many religions seek to control human behaviour (Topalli et al 2012: 2). Offenders that accept the idea of punishment in the afterlife as a deterrent may judge themselves as unworthy and worthless rendering it more difficult for them to make sense of their criminal past behaviour, which is a critical part of the desistance process. In chapter five we see participants Stunna and Cool justifying their continued criminal behaviour whilst maintaining their Christianity. This particular Christian theology that is based on a lack of understanding of the connection between Gods grace and justice may cause impasse and emotional confusion for black male Christian prisoners and ex-prisoners, when they encounter Christ and their moral nature is challenged (Molnar 2007: 396).

Pembroke explains that having acted against the moral order, the prisoner or ex-prisoner might feel ashamed of their past actions (Pembroke 2010: 59).
34), therefore, rendering the encounter with a righteous God a painful and shameful experience. I suggest the pain is the result of an inability to reconcile the idea of judgement (justice) with forgiveness (salvation). In Stunna and Cool’s case they justify their criminality to avoid the emotional pain that an encounter with God may cause when they lack an understanding of Gods grace and justice (see Chapter Five).

To remedy this feeling of self-condemnation, rather than attempting to justify criminal behaviour the ex-prisoner needs to recognise the magnitude of their wrongdoing and also recognise that there is forgiveness from God, to accept this forgiveness, forgive others and then to forgive themselves.

Theologically, any Black Church working with BMCEP’s must teach the acceptance of Christ’s completed work through His death and resurrection. This means there is no longer a requirement for an earthly mediator between the believer and God, as was the case in the Old Testament. Christ has restored the relationship between God and man by virtue of the Cross-. Therefore the role of the priest today is to support the development of that relationship between man and God.
Summary

The desistance of black ex-prisoners is characterised by greater isolation and disengagement from their communities than other races. This limits their external support structures, making it more likely that they will re-offend.

I suggest trained volunteers supporting BMCEP’s from the black majority church could be assigned, who are aware of the obstacles BMCEP’s face in building a pro-social support network and gaining and sustaining employment, housing and other required support based on their race, criminal record and past experiences.

A form of black liberation theology supported my desistance where my personal experience of suffering and oppression connects to the message of the Cross- where Jesus is the saviour and liberator. I believe that BMCEP’s need this black theological position as a foundation for their personal Christian journey, to support their desistance.

The black liberation theological position of the churches that are supporting the desistance of black men ought to have a balance between the personal salvation of those they encounter and social justice.
Many Black Churches propagate a gospel or theology of success where as the message of the Cross- is about suffering and oppression where ultimate success comes via failure. The gospel of success may not provide the BMCEP with the resilience to go through the struggle and oppression, and is less likely to support desistance.

A black theology that is focused too much on the reaction to racism and negativity towards the white church as the detriment of the central message of salvation and liberation is less likely to support the desistance of BMCEP’s.

Where the Black Churches focus is so much towards the spiritual to the detriment of action to address social injustice and needs of the oppressed, it is less likely to support desistance.

Successful desistance is based on the BMCEP being able to formulate a crime free future (Maruna et al 2006). This requires them to make sense of their past and present, and to formulate a crime free future (Glynn 2014: 128). The foundation of a crime free future for Christians should be based on the foundation of Gods purpose and mission for their life.

For me to establish a crime free future I recognised my purpose was to
encourage those who have been to prison or at risk of imprisonment, their families and their communities. Then I had to navigate the labour market, entrepreneurial opportunities, housing, education and the development of a pro-social support network. I maintain BMCEP’s require mentors who are trained to understand racialised complexities that cause barriers to desistance. Mentors need to have an understanding of their own racialised position and their own racialised experiences, to enable them to gain some insight of the mentees racialised position and help the mentee to reflect on their own. This includes understanding the complex nature of the concept of colourism where the black community discriminates against their own based on skin colour, causing self-destructive behaviour and black self-hatred.

The covert nature of racism must be acknowledged and forums provided so that BMCEP can share these experiences and receive practical and psychological support. Racialised experiences for BMCEP’s include their disproportionate treatment; unequal access to services and poor quality of provision that suggests we are contending with forms of conscious or unconscious bias.

Trying to tackle an issue like institutionalised racism is immense and there is little a BMCEP can do to change this in the short term.
Nevertheless, we should be aware of diversionary tactics in discussions about racism to prevent debates on the subject being taken off subject.

Christians in this study struggled to recall experiences of racism, which might be a case of suppression of painful memories or the phenomenon known as ‘transcendence’ where Christians live above the plane of their racialised experiences.

Theologically the BMCEP must understand the extent of and the nature of sin but also the nature of God’s grace and forgiveness. It is important for the Black Church to support the BMCEP in understanding and balancing this theological position.

Additionally, the BMCEP must recognise the completed work of Christ. This means that the Black Church theology must also accept this theological position and as such, teach the BMCEP to develop their relationship with God, so they are not taught to be dependent on a pastor or priest but work towards dependence on God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. In other words, they must adhere to the idea of discipleship (Matthew 28:19–20).
Chapter Four – Black Masculinity

Glynn (2014: 4) maintains some black men commit crimes as a consequence of not been able to realise their masculinities through legitimate means, and Denmark et al (2005: 94) agree that some black men as a way of expressing their masculinity perform violent acts. This highlights the importance of masculinity in terms of Black male desistance. My own search for an understanding for what it means to be a man and my search for a male role model in an absence of my father was outlined in chapter one.

Participant 5JM who is now the pastor of a church stated that he never met his father. He stated that impacted everything that he did and does now, and shaped who he is today. He said, “I think the impact of a father in a son’s life is absolutely critical. So I think that, it’s definitely one of the reasons I got involved in crime and things like that. Why? Because I found male relationships with my pals and my boys who were into crime. It impacted me then and it still impacts me today because I find it absolutely, I find it annoying, is that I meet so many other black kids with no father figures in the same cycle.”

Nevertheless, now as a Christian, my perfect example of a man is Jesus
who does not look like the Jesus in the films, pictures or effigies that depict him as white, blonde and blue eyed.

My choices of masculine expressions as a boy becoming a young man in the absence of my father also caused me to take a path that led me to prison. In the context of this study I consider what masculine expressions are appropriate for aiding my desistance.

Successful desistance for black men according to Glynn (2014: 10) is bound up in making successful masculine ‘transitions’, for instance the transition towards maturity might be described in particular contexts such as into employment, towards independence, towards imprisonment, reintegration and also becoming a Christian, and the journey that follows.

Masculinity is a complex expression and distinguishing which particular characteristics and concepts denote ‘masculinity’ for black male Christian ex-prisoners can be tricky (Owen 2012: 974). Hooks maintains that most definitions of black masculinity are base on “problematic” patriarchal characteristics and violence, which she believes can be remedied to some extent by the adoption of matriarchal feminine characteristics (Hooks 2004: 60). Leverenz (2012: 22-23) suggests the term ‘honour’ is preferable to the term masculinity because honour is based on traditional
ideals of manliness that connects him to a community. Whereas both masculinity and honour demands dignity, the quest for dignity in terms of masculinity is preoccupied with an individualistic, all consuming endeavour that lacks concern for others. Honour on the other hand is about personal honour as well as honouring your fellow man. Therefore, the promotion of honour as a form of manliness for black men and boys may go some way to encourage them to avoid causing harm to other black males (Hebrews 13:18; Romans 12:10). Moore and Gillette (2013: 149) claim that honouring a child defuses much of the immature masculine energies, by enabling them to feel validated and no longer needing to act out through their lives.

Benchmarking definitions of masculinity as well as femininity is challenging. This is due to their socially and culturally constructed nature and particularly in the West, where the changing roles of women and men in the family, the workplace, in society and politically have influenced notions of masculinity and femininity (Owen 2012: 974). Therefore notions of being a black man in the twenty first century are thwarted with ambiguity and uncertainty which black men may find unsettling. (Boyd 2011: 4-7). Additionally, the journey for boys becoming men in the West is not only obscure but also non-existent in many instances.
Conceptualising masculinity in Western cultures is also influenced by the changing dynamics of sex, sexuality, gender and gender identity (Franklin 1984: 2-4). The Christian context of this study adds another layer of complexity and the creation of more diverse notions of gender and sexuality for black Christian men can cause confusion. I often find myself working with young black men who are struggling with their sexuality. Helping them to explore their ‘masculinity’ I have experienced what Purnell (2007: 70) describes as ‘Traumatic Countertransference’, which produces in the therapist precisely the same feelings that the traumatised client experienced. He suggests this countertransference can undermine the therapist’s competence and confidence in the process that is meant to bring the client to the point of reconnection with the emotional pain that is part of the recovery. Additionally, I must be aware that I could unconsciously and consciously transfer my own personal beliefs in terms of masculinity and my Christian values upon them. For instance, I consciously do not impose what my Christian theology tells me about appropriate sexual relationships, so that I can create a safe space for my clients to share their views. This often makes me feel disingenuous and underlines the importance of good support and supervision for the therapist/mentor.

Glynn proposes a model of masculine transitions for black male
desistance indicating the transitions from subordinated masculinity to positive masculinity, passing through the phases of hyper-masculinity, prison masculinity, confused masculinity and grounded masculinity (Glynn 2014: 107).

Moore and Gillette (2013: 6) suggest the growth towards mature masculinity is a series of nurturing and healing wounds. They present four mature masculine archetypes that work together to provide a framework for a balanced masculinity. In their childhood states they are described as the divine child, the hero, the precocious child and the oedipal child. In the adult mature state the divine child becomes the sovereign/king, the hero becomes the warrior, the precocious child becomes the magician and the oedipal child becomes the lover. Each of these archetypes in both the adult and child states have what is known as the shadow or dysfunctional states that arise through lack of development or warped development that Moore and Gillette (2013) call wounds. This model of masculinity offers a way to identify specific forms of dysfunctional or childlike behaviour (Appendix One).

I experienced the impact of the archetypes in my own life as a participant on a programme called A Band Of Brothers (ABOB). This is a programme to address behaviour that could impact on the desistance of
young men. I did not plan to participate in this programme but had intended to develop a partnership arrangement with ABOB to support black men coming out of prison and it was a prerequisite that I experienced the programme. The programme exposed my internal dysfunctions and identified the impact that past traumas had on my present life, relationships, faith and work. I recognised that I had a number of very deep wounds, based on my father's rage and absence, my mother's rage and stress, the trauma of racism and inferiority, deaths of close friends and girlfriend, being suspected of her murder and the trauma of imprisonment. I recognised the concept of being a wounded healer, helping my ‘clients’ to recognise and heal their wounds whilst reflecting on my own wounds and personal continuous healing.

Although the programme was ‘spiritual’ it was not Christian and there were times when I had to wrestle with my Christian theology and the sort of new age spirituality that the programme promoted. This was particularly the case when it came to the idea of calling upon the spirits of the ancestors. In my mind when the group were calling upon the spirits of the ancestors I was calling upon the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, it was my conclusion that this type of rites of passage for men in the Black Church is missing (Sedgewick 2017: 23).
My functionality and dysfunctions in terms of the archetypes do not express themselves in isolation and my personal experience of Glynn’s model of masculine transitions are similarly fluid and overlapping. For instance, my hyper-masculine expression ‘from road’ remained whilst in prison. Therefore, the prison masculinity and hyper-masculinity co-existed when I was in prison and when I was released after my first two periods of incarceration. When I became a Christian in prison I still expressed forms of hyper-masculinity in prison, which I would explain as my wounds or shadow dysfunctions that I have developed from years of experiences of the criminal lifestyle, prison and violence. This form of masculinity for me maintained my status, sense of dignity and self-esteem (Moore and Gillette 2013). According to Maycock and Hunt (2018: 164) black men in particular express hyper-masculinity in prison as a way of navigating prison life. Glynn’s concept of prison masculinity for me was expressed through the ‘prison code’ and the established prison hierarchy, and although he suggests that the dislike of the prison environment encourages black men to consider going straight, this was not the case for me (Glynn 2014: 114). Once I had experienced imprisonment the first time the fear of imprisonment was dispelled and I reasoned, if I had to return I knew what to expect. I was released in a hyper-masculine state that was enhanced by prison masculinities and an increased network of criminal friends and associates, which was certainly not a recipe for
When I was released from prison as a Christian on this final occasion I had a completely different mind-set and contended with subordinated, hyper, prison, confused, grounded and positive forms of masculinities simultaneously. In addition to dealing with various forms of masculinities I had to cope with what Du Bois\(^6\) refers to as ‘double consciousness’ which is an occurrence that black ex-prisoners are predisposed to experiencing. This is where I view myself through the eyes of others based on my ethnicity and criminal past, and make a judgement of how I am perceived. This is an experience where identities are divided and takes place constantly for me. It causes me to behave differently with black people than white people, church people and non-church people and also differently with those who have disclosed their criminal past than those who have not (Glynn 2014: 109).

Glynn suggests some desisting black prisoners revert to ‘hyper-masculinities’ on re-entering the community as a way of coping and regaining the status they had lost when going to prison.

My experience when I was released after my first time of incarceration concurs but I expressed the same hyper-masculinity in prison as well as on release. Additionally, I also learned to deal in prison contraband thus acquired a form of prison masculinity that was arguably non-compliant. Nevertheless, on the day of my release I committed an offence in front of my peers, which on reflection I conducted for the purpose of regaining my status at the head of the group to demonstrate that prison had turned me into a more ‘serious’ person. I believe that forms of prison, hyper and subordinated masculinities coexisted for me, on my reintegration in that instance.

Whilst I suggested my criminal actions when released was based on regaining the status I had lost, on further reflection my imprisonment actually enhanced my ‘on road’ status because I had ‘networked’ with men who were higher up the ‘food chain’, which elevated me on release. For instance I became the ‘go to’ person for most things people wanted (items stolen to order, cars, counterfeit documents, drugs etc).

Mosher and Sirkin (1984: 94) maintain that hyper-masculinity is characterised by three elements, endorsing callous attitudes towards women, viewing violence as manly and viewing danger as exciting. On the road and in prison my ‘hyper-masculine’ behaviour was based on
survival of the fittest, my need for status on the road and in prison, and to protect my ‘business’ interests.

Black masculinity is not the same as hyper-masculinity although sadly associations have been made and labels applied (Wright et al 1998: 85). Jackson (2006:134-135) maintains that there are five constructs that appear in the literature on black masculine positions as opposed to hyper-masculinity. These black masculine positions include the struggle, the community, the achievement, the independence and the recognition. The struggle is a group experience that is not limited to or unique to particular ethnicities or genders, but can be a struggle with a particular class, economic status, joined experience such as imprisonment or a cause. I have found that the term ‘the struggle’ is a great unifier between black men. For instance, when I am in a debate about faith with other black men of other faiths, whenever it starts to descend into an argument, I interrupt the argument by saying “listen, we are all fighting the same struggle”. This always stops the argument in its tracks and refocuses the conversations on our unified ‘struggle’. I rarely need to explain what ‘the struggle’ means to another black man because most experience being demonised, misrepresented, oppressed, discriminated against and feared, which is our experience of the struggle. Once we as a group of black men unify under the joint experience of the struggle is promotes the idea of a
‘community’ of men with similar understandings. You will rarely hear a sermon about these subjects in a Black Church and even talking about it with other black men can feel pointless unless we are talking about strategies to navigate through the struggle. If we try to change the racialised structures that cause the struggle we can become increasingly frustrated, as I have become. Cone (2010) maintains that black liberation theology is characterised by the struggle and the need to be set free. In terms of the Black Church in the UK it is associated with black people being made to feel unwelcome in the country and churches when they arrived in Britain. They were discriminated against, patronised, disrespected and treated unfairly which led to the planting of Black Churches. Therefore the Black Church was born out of the struggle but nowadays according to Cone, the Black Church has too much piety and it is not coming out of struggle but out of privilege.

For BMCEP’s to realise the other three constructs of achievement, independence and recognition associated with black masculinity according to Jackson requires real future opportunities, the ability to make positive choices, the ability to overcome challenges, the motivation to change and recognition of achievements (Ibid 2006: 134).

Connell (2000: 71-72) argues that the structure of power in our society
creates different forms of masculinity for different groups of ‘men.’ He describes forms of masculinity as they relate to ‘hegemonic masculinity’, suggesting it is the benchmark for ‘manhood’, however it is a status held disproportionately by white upper class men. Glynn (2014: 4) suggests black men need to overcome their subordinated masculinity in order to strive towards this ‘masculine power and status and maintains that white working-class men share similar subordinated masculinities.

I have always considered myself working-class and remember being in a lecture at the beginning of this course and the subject of class was discussed. Every other person in the group considered they were middle class and when I suggested I was working class I was challenged that based on being a doctoral student I could not call myself working class. Being the only black person in the class I contended with internalised feelings of inferiority, which caused me not to disclose my criminal past throughout the course. This was an example of the difficulty of breaking from the subordinated masculinity and the battle with the idea of double consciousness and the constant evaluation of the self through the eyes of self and others.

As a ‘reformed’ ex-prisoner I continue to contend with subordinated masculinities, in arenas such as the boardroom where hyper-masculine
expressions are inappropriate. My grounded masculinity and positive masculinity contend with subordinated masculinities that are external and self-imposed. My Christian faith helps me to develop my grounded and positive masculinities but they are also informed by my prison masculinity and hyper-masculine past. For me those experiences and masculine expressions still influence who I am today, with values such as pushing the boundaries, power, risk taking, the need for status and ambition. These form part of my identity that was a good ‘fit’ for on road and prison life. These parts of me are now realized in new non-criminal ways. I have personal needs based on my identity and the need to express particular forms of masculinity that are not necessarily perceived as ‘Christian’ or positive. My masculine identity traits such as the need for risk taking, power, pushing the boundaries, status and ambition contend with traditional Christian values of humility, temperance etc.

I argue that recognising and accepting the existence of our negative traits, in the way that I just did is the starting point for consciously allowing particular areas in our lives that need to be addressed to be exposed to the Christian faith, otherwise the Christian faith might subconsciously act as a mechanism for suppressing what really exists within, only to surface at some point in the future. I suggest the former is more likely to promote long-term sustained desistance.
The argument that some churches have become more feminised leading to a loss of masculine power within the church is not new. Usry and Keener (1996: 109) maintain that the effeminate Eurocentric nature of Christianity means some men who express particular forms of masculinity may feel they need to conform to more effeminate personas in church. Nevertheless, DeBerg (2000: 92) contends that Christianity does not depreciate ‘manly’ virtue. Rotundo (1993: 62) suggests that in the mid-nineteenth century the disproportionately high number of women in the church threatened male hegemony. This perceived threat led to the creation of the “Muscular Christianity Movement” in England. This was a Christianity committed to “manliness” through the exertion of control and influence over one’s surroundings and valued male aggression and physicality as natural and essential to the success of the community.”

In prison the form of masculinity I expressed, as a Christian was not weak or effeminate. In one high security prison along with a number of other Christian prisoners I created a counter cultural community on the wing, where certain activities were not tolerated. i.e. drug dealing, bullying and drug taking. This was certainly not a community of weak men as we ‘policed’ the wing, whilst keeping the ‘prison code’. An example of this was when I intervened in stopping someone getting
stabbed. When the person who was almost stabbed said he was going to
tell the prison officers, I had to explain to him that he would end up on
the protection wing if he did that because he would be labelled an
informer and we would not be able to protect him. I informed him that
whatever prison he went to he would have to serve his time in isolation
because the word that he was an informer would follow him wherever he
got. We assured him that he would be safe on the wing and the matter
was finished but if he went to the prison officers the matter would be out
of our hands. It was then up to him to make an informed decision. Even
when in prison as a Christian, the ‘prison code’ was an unwritten rule that
was upheld.

In my experience many churches lack the ability to address many of the
issues facing black men who might express masculinity in ways to cope
with feelings of inadequacy or shame. Additionally, BMCEP’s tend to
express forms of dysfunctional masculinities or ‘shadows’ that are not
always received favourably in the church on the outside. Many ex-
prisoners tend to struggle to find a church they feel connected to and able
to express their faith in the way they did in prison.

The difference between the stereotypical ‘masculinity’ associated with
the BMCEP and the stereotypical Christian masculinity might be what
makes the transition from prison and into a church on the outside a challenge for some BMCEP’s. There are a number of characteristics that are associated with masculine self-expression that are also associated with effective coping strategies for black men who experience low self-esteem, limited opportunities for self-actualisation and susceptibility to experiencing hopelessness and depression. Therefore, the ability to present appropriate masculinities may be limited by the desire for self-actualisation and could impact on desistance (White and Cones 1999: 94).

The enduring oppression and subordination that many BMCEP’s like me experience based on race and a criminal record may affect our psychological health and impact on our ability to self-actualise and become authors of our own lives. This may limit our choices and increase the propensity to engage in criminality. Hooks (2004: 104) suggests that healthy psychological development for black men should consider self-esteem (a warm regard for self), self-awareness (knowing our personal experience and sharing it), boundaries (self-protecting yet able to connect with others), interdependence (identifying needs and wants of self and others), and moderation (experiencing and expressing oneself moderately). My personal work on these abilities has been facilitated through my faith, my reflective interactions with others and my group and one to one engagement in ‘therapy’ using the archetypes model in
ABOB, has improved my ability to self reflect and acknowledge my emotions. As I remain in the process of increasing my self-awareness and addressing what Moore and Gillette (2013) calls my dysfunctional shadows, my masculine expressions will become less about coping with adversity and more as an expression of my personal identity. To obtain the attributes proposed by Hooks and to engage in the process of change and desistance requires a degree of emotional awareness and vulnerability which men who present particular forms of masculinity, may find challenging (Solomon 1993: 128).

Allowing myself to acknowledge emotions and leaving myself vulnerable is not in my nature. I recognised that even though I was a Christian suppressing and repressing emotions remained my default position for coping with emotions and trauma, and it was also the way I coped with imprisonment. Subsequently, working through my past traumas I have recognised how suppressing and repressing emotions affects how I ‘present’ within particular dysfunctional shadows (Appendix One). For instance, I recognise that I have developed from the precocious child shadow, the know it all trickster to the magician shadow the detached manipulator. It requires openness and honesty to recognise and accept our shadow, and as a Christian I needed to understand the forgiveness of God so that my acceptance of the shadows does not burden me with shame.
Hooks (2004: 97) states that some black men suppress their pain and anger, suffering the consequences, rather than opening up and talking about their feelings. This may lead to unproductive ways of coping with emotions such as drinking, overuse of tobacco and substance misuse. Encouraging masculine expressions that promotes the expression of emotions is a particularly challenging for those ‘on road’ and in prison. Examples of ‘masculine’ black men who are prepared to leave themselves vulnerable by expressing emotions is rare in prison or on road.

When I delivered a suicide prevention workshop in prison and a young black male prisoner asked me whether I cried when I was in prison? I told him and the group yes. I told them that when I was behind my door at night sometimes I thought about the mess that I made of my life, the people I had let down, and sometimes I cried. I told them that there is no shame in crying but I also understand that in prison it is a sign of weakness that others may exploit. Whenever I share that I cried there is always a deafening silence because a lot of men in prison do cry but rarely admit it. Therefore, there is no forum for men to express emotions in prison, on road and even when struggling to desist back in the community. Each time I share this in prison there is always a time of
acknowledgement and a silent connection that takes place that declares, as a prisoner once said, “this is real, and this is a time when we can be real”. Creating moments like this in prison is very rare and priceless.

To avoid using unproductive ways of coping, black men need to feel they are safe to share their emotions and recognise some emotions are self-involved whilst others tie us to other people. Solomon (1993: 128) refers to ‘personal’/self-involved emotions as pride, shame, self-love and guilt. Emotions that tie us closely to other people he refers to as bipolar, such as love, hate, anger and jealousy. This allows us to recognise that self-involved emotions are personal and when addressing them should be treated as such. Bipolar emotions are about relationship and exist with another. These traits are integral to the transition of boys as they become men and these are learned within the child’s relationships.

Summary

Defining and benchmarking black masculinity is tricky because it is sometimes based on roles for black men and black women as well as sexuality, which are predisposed to cultures and in a state of discontinuous change, rendering it a somewhat elusive concept. The obscure notion of black masculinity must be considered in the context of this study because some black men commit crimes as a consequence of
not been able to realise their masculinities legitimately (Glynn 2014).

Additionally, White and Cones, maintain that when black men are unable to express their masculinity they are less able to cope with unequal treatment and have limited opportunities for self-actualisation, rendering them more susceptible to the experience of hopelessness and depression.

According to Glynn, successful black masculine transitions may relate to successful desistance however when I applied this model of black masculinities to my own desistance I noted that I didn’t express specific forms of masculinity in silos. For instance, I could express two or three forms of black masculinity simultaneously within Glynn’s model.

On the other hand Moore and Gillette (2013: 6) suggest the growth towards mature masculinity is a series of nurturing and healing wounds from past experiences and trauma. Their model presents four mature adult masculinities or archetypes that we should aspire towards by addressing presentations of child masculinities and shadow or dysfunctional characteristics (Appendix One).

The term ‘honour’ according to Leverenz (2012) is preferable to the term masculinity because black masculinity tends to be an individualistic endeavour lacking concern for others, where as honour is a form of
manliness that is connected to the community, respects your fellow man and avoids causing harm to others.

Additionally, an assessment tool to evaluate the masculine position for BMCEP’s in particular contexts might be useful for churches supporting them on release.

I argue that most churches are lacking in their ability to address many of the issues of masculine expression for BMCEP’s to desist and male expression in the church has been referred to by some as weak and effeminate.

Another construct that the church would find useful in supporting BMCEP’s is Jackson’s (2006: 134-135) proposition that black masculine expressions include the struggle, the community, the achievement, the independence and the recognition.

Struggle – The barriers or the cause
Community – Belonging and mutuality
Achievement – Overcoming challenges and reaching aspirations
Independence – Autonomy and choice
Recognition – Identity appreciation
Churches supporting BMCEP’s will need to understand the effect of enduring racial oppression and subordination on the BMCEP’s ability to express the appropriate masculinities. This will help to identify internal psychological barriers such as lack of autonomy, limited self-belief and inability to overcome temptations to offend.

It was suggested that healthy psychological development for black men might include the improvement of self-esteem (a warm regard for self), self-awareness (knowing our personal experience and sharing it), boundaries (self-protecting yet able to connect with others), interdependence (identifying needs and wants of self and others), and moderation (experiencing and expressing oneself moderately) (Hooks 2004).

Hooks contends some black men prefer to suppress their pain and anger rather than talking about their feelings. This sometimes leads to unproductive ways of coping with anger such as drinking, overuse of tobacco and substance misuse.
Identity is shaped by our experiences and informed by our internal psychology and the perceptions we hold about our world and our place within it (Crowe & Cuenca 2016: 42). When I was participating in criminality that was part of my identity and my behaviour lined up accordingly. My identity was also tied up with being black and being a man, in addition to all my associated experiences and relationships.

Each of my experiences of imprisonment led me to question my self-identity, self-worth and purpose, and in that state I was predisposed to seeking a positive future through faith. The first and second times I was incarcerated I explored ancient religions, the occult and as stated previously I was also a member of the Nation of Islam. Therefore, my identity was shaped by values that were very anti Christian, anti white and anti establishment. I never engaged in an intentional search for meaning through the Christian faith, however my Christian conversion which took place on my third period of incarceration was akin to the Damascus Road experience that Paul was subjected to in the bible (Acts 9:1-19). It happened in my prison cell as I read the bible with the intention of disproving it was the Word of God but was struck by a
revelation that was two-fold and had a profound impact on my identity. Firstly, I had a revelation of how far from God I had become and the extent of the sins I had committed and the condemnation that I was under. Secondly, and at the same instance I had a revelation of who Christ is and the depth of the grace and forgiveness that surpasses all the wrongs I had done. I was broken to tears of gratitude and this Christian conversion created a new positive identity for me, which led to a reinterpretation of my past, present and future (Kerley and Copes 2008: 2).

I needed to understand and make sense of the way I felt about the past crimes I committed as part of my ‘rehabilitation’ and desistance journey. I had to deal with the guilt, shame and other negative emotions associated with my perception of the type of person that would commit those offences. I had to learn ways of dealing with these negative emotions as a black Christian man with a criminal record.

As a successful desister, Christianity became for me a source of positive behaviour change and re-conceptualised self-identity. It aided my ‘emotion coping’ process and underscored the importance of ‘forgiveness’ that promotes a peaceful life, hope and a better future. Christianity introduced positive emotions into my life that was previously characterised by turmoil (Schroeder and Frana 2009: 736).
Transformation as a Christian is dependent on understanding the process of forgiveness and engaging in it. Jesus said in part of what is often called the Lords prayer Matthew 6:12 “and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.” And also in Matthew 6:14-15 he says “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Therefore, this highlights the importance of forgiving others so that we can receive forgiveness. I express caution at this seemingly Calvinist view of forgiveness. Forgiveness ultimately comes from God and is initiated by God. The conditionality here in my view is that we are just conduits of forgiveness and the ‘rule’ is conditional for it to work through us.

Karl proposes a forgiveness model, which I adapted for BMCEP’s. He suggests its impact is determined by the responsiveness of allowing the Holy Spirit to work through the stages of forgiveness. These stages include:

1. The BMCEP should understand that he has been forgiven
2. The BMCEP should be willing to forgive the other person
3. The BMCEP should be prepared to forgive himself
4. The BMCEP should recognise that the power to forgive comes
from God

5. The BMCEP should understand when we forgive it must be specific and we must mark the specific time with a form of ritual

6. The BMCEP should recognise that understanding the depth of God’s forgiveness is a continual cyclical process

7. The BMCEP should understand that forgiving others is a continual process (Karl 2009: 49-81)

This continual process relates to the identity development process where the forgiveness for salvation, a relationship with God and our Christian transformation are dependent on the grace of God. The idea of the grace of God in some interpretations however has enabled some people to continue committing crimes feeling they can simply ask for forgiveness.

An example from Topalli et al’s (2012: 12) study highlights a particular take on faith and grace that in my view had little impact on challenging criminal identity. In this study a 25-year-old male drug dealer called ‘Cool’ said, “the way it works is this. You go out and do some bad and then you ask for forgiveness and Jesus have to give it to you, and you know wipe the slate clean. So, I always do a quick little prayer right before (committing a crime) and then I’m cool with Jesus. Also another thing is this; if you doing some wrong to another bad person, like if I go
rob a dope dealer or a molester or something, then it don’t count against me because it’s like I’m giving punishment to them for Jesus. That’s God’s will. Oh you molested some kids? Well now I’m [God] sending Cool over your house to get your ass. Another young man called Stunna said, “you do get punished for doing wrong, but not if you don’t have no choice…..I’m still going to Heaven because….. Jesus knows I ain’t have no choice, you know?

Whilst both men believe in Jesus, this doesn’t cause them to cease their criminal behaviour. Nevertheless I obtained a profound revelation of Gods grace revealing my wrongdoings and my need for Gods forgiveness. The issue with these men’s ‘Christian identity’ seems to be based on justifying their sin as opposed to addressing it, providing them with a form of ‘grace’ that allows them to remain criminally active.

The idea of the transformation of a black male ex-prisoners old self into a new self tends to be communicated as though it is always a positive experience, Noonan (2003: 107-108) however describes the process of Christian transformation as the “destruction of personal identity”, that is replaced by a new identity. An encounter with God might cause emotional and psychological conflict as knowledge from or of God clashes with previously held knowledge obtained through our experiences
causing a sense of antagonism that might be experienced emotionally as confusion, fear, anger or rage (Sully 1892: 24). Therefore, many of the churches methods and theologies can actually contribute to the breakdown of the ex-offenders self-esteem and identity (Anderson 2001: 249).

Ephesians 4:22-24 facilitates the ‘separation’ of old and new self. It says “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” According to Maruna et al (2006: 163) this is a form of ‘knifing off’ which helped me as a BMCEP to cope with the shame of the past.

When I asked participant 10RC what enabled him to desist, and he stated, “I’m an ex-offender, and as part of my walk with Christ, erm giving my testimony is a part of my ministry. The transformation that I made when I found Christ Jesus, when I met Jesus, my Lord and saviour, I was a new creation. Err, I would like to quote a scripture from second Corinthians 5:17. And it says, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old has gone and the new has come.”
This Christian process of replacing the old for a new self might also be described as a psychological coping strategy but might be harmful when it takes the form of repression, suppression or dissociation. Dissociation tends to happen as a coping mechanism in times of trauma. The form of dissociation the BMCEP tends to apply is a ’disconnection’ with the past because the traumatic past experiences cause the present feelings of guilt, shame and trauma, as the ex-prisoner tries to come to terms with their past crimes, the people they have harmed and their experiences of racial oppression. These experiences can lead to the onset of mental illness as some coping mechanisms when utilised by ex-prisoners may not only assist in forgetting past ‘painful’ thoughts but make them completely unaware of whole aspects of themselves. This may “lead to losing parts of their self-identity, motivations, guilt reactions, memories and defences” (Blackman 2004: 76).

Some therapists have reported that as a result of engaging defence mechanisms to cope with the trauma of imprisonment and racial subordination have developed alternate personalities. They theorised that dissociation is a process where entire aspects of the personality can be “split off” and may become unconscious (Brenner 2001: 76). Therefore, a theology that supports a complete disconnection from the past and the desistance theory that promotes a complete ‘knifing off’ of the past could
both cause an ex-offender psychological harm. Therefore, the risk of psychological harm for BMCEP’s may be increased if our faith is used as a form of dissociation for dealing with the shame from past wrongdoings as well as for racial oppression.

Most churches are unaware that the Christian faith can cause psychological ‘harm’ for BMCEP’s and I experienced this first hand shortly after my Christian conversion in prison when I almost took my own life. I was in a state of emotional turmoil in my prison cell and was unprepared and unaware of what was happening to me. It was brought about after I was sentenced to 13-years and as I reflected on my failed life. I describe this spiritual experience as a battle of good and evil, which took place in my mind. I lost everything I owned and everyone that meant anything to me. Additionally I perceiving there was no hope of recovery from the situation I found myself in and with a long prison sentence ahead I was almost compelled to give in to the negative voices I could hear in the room reminding me how much I would suffer and the suffering I have caused for those I love. The voice in the room was ‘real’ saying that even if I do get out of prison I would be of no use to anyone, that I would be a burden on those I loved and a burden on society, and suicide was the best and only way out. At that point in time I was not able to make sense of my life or form a positive ‘life story’ or ‘self-narrative
that McAdams (1988: 7) claims is the starting point for the process of desistance. I was lacking hope, purpose and motivation to act and the idea of taking my own life was the only route of escape I could see from my predicament and made complete sense to me at that point in time.

As I contemplated how I would take my life in my prison cell that evening a scripture verse that was given to me by the prison chaplain appeared in my mind, opening a part of it that was closed to any other option and ‘saved my life’ that evening. It was Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” These verses changed my perspective of the situation and gave me a choice where as before I perceived there was no option. When I became a Christian I wasn’t told about the battle of the mind that might ensue, leaving me unprepared and vulnerable. However, that scripture didn’t only ‘save my life’ but enabled me to put my messed up, hopeless life in the hands of God because I didn’t know what else to do.

The bible says “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in
hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10)".

Being a Christian in prison and on release can be challenging because you tend to be observed with suspicion by the authorities. Some prison and probation officers suspect that a born again Christian prisoner might be putting on an act in the hope of early release. I understood their scepticism because I also observed some fellow Christian prisoners with suspicion, particularly when I would see them behaving in a particular way on the wing, then differently on a Sunday in the chapel when we had outside visitors. In an attempt at not being tarred with the same brush, I avoided talking about my Christian faith with prison, probation and parole officers.

Participant NA1 said, “When I spoke to my probation officer about my faith and how I changed, it was like it was a joke, like I was playing a game.” He said, “The prison environment is an environment where, they say time and time again, oh he’s found religion? So when you come up with professing a faith especially Christianity that already, they say, ha he’s a joke.”

Therefore the BMCEP for fear of a negative response and/or accusations
that their faith is disingenuous they might hide the impact of their
Christianity and transformation from the authorities, as I did.

My Christian identity was influenced by my faith experience in prison
according to Meissner (1987: 82) our spiritual identity is also influenced
by our prior personal identity and builds upon it. This suggests that
BMCEP’s who contend with the ex-offender label, racial discrimination
and oppression in their Christian context will have developed a particular
personal identity to enable them to cope with their socially challenging
contexts thus informing their spiritual identity.

Although Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012: 15) concur that healthy
identity development occurs when one experiences and resolves crisis or
conflict. I am unable to ‘resolve’ the fact that I am an ex-prisoner or
resolve that every time I complete my DBS my criminal record is on
view, nor can I resolve that racial discrimination exists and I will
experience it, and therefore I have to learn to live with it. Consequently,
my identity does not just become stronger as I resolve each crisis but also
as I learn to live with and deal with the pain and predicament of being an
ex-prisoner and a black man by committing to reconstructing my
perceived negative identity into a positive one.
Healthy identity development may protect against depression, encourage optimism, self-esteem, resilience, intimacy, generativity, and integrity which are all desistance promoting characteristics enabling BMCEP’s to deal more effectively with the challenges of reintegration (Poll and Smith 2003: 129; Erikson 1950).

**Black Male Identity**

I was brought up in an area of West Yorkshire where I was the only black person in my school and the only black family in the area. All my friends were white, until I moved to South London with my family at the age of 13. Then I became the victim of the Suss Laws in the 80’s where I was stopped and searched on numerous occasions for no other reason but because I was black, I attended a school in New Cross at the time of the fire where 13 young black people died in what was described as racially motivated murders and I lived in Brixton at the time of the riots in the 1980’s.

These early experiences shaped my racial and personal identity and I believe they also primed me for the acceptance of the ‘rebellious’ Black Muslim and Black Israelite religions. My experience of unequal treatment and police brutality encouraged me to reject authority that I presumed were unjust. Black men contend with racial subordination and may react
to oppressive labels imposed on them in different ways (Glynn 2014: 4). In response black men might decide to adopt a persona that is acceptable to ‘white society’ or at the other end of the spectrum they may decide not to compromise.

I recall a time as a serving prisoner sitting in the canteen with three other black male prisoners. We were all at the tail end of long prison sentences and one man said, “When I’m out, I will never be the token black man.” This conversation was based on the reality that all three of us were in ‘token black man’ jobs in the prison. I was the gym orderly and the other three were the grounds man, chapel and education orderly’s. I argued that I had no problem with being the token black man if the opportunity helps me to achieve my goals. That started a heated debate where two of us said we didn’t mind being the token and two disagreed. Consequently, the two of us who were prepared to compromise have been particularly successful ‘career wise’ compared with the other two. Whilst the evidence that being open to being the token is associated with career success for black men is debatable, I have stayed in positions where I was unfairly treated with the view to gaining experience to move on. Now I have my own company and so does the other ‘successful’ person.

Whilst I have taken a conformist stance of dealing with racial
subordination by accepting the label of ‘the token black man’, the non-conformist stance accepts the “black and proud” label. Whilst the labels we accept is central to our identity and might even increase our self-esteem, it could present is either healthy or self-defeating. Self-defeating pride is conceited, pretentious and arrogant whilst healthy pride is a realistic sense of one’s own self-worth, dignity and self-respect (Schiraldi 2001: 29-30). Nevertheless, the question remains, how we know whether our pride is self-defeating or healthy and who is the judge?

Therefore, as a black man living in a white privileged society I must recognise the degree to which I am taking up a conformist or non-conformist position and the degree to which I take on the tokenistic or black and proud labels. The questions for me and any other BMCEP should be, how does this stance facilitate my God given calling and does it line up with New Testament morality?

I recall my first prison experience (as a non-Christian) where I felt I had destroyed my life irreparably, ruining any hopes that I could ever achieve my potential. I searched for a new hope and identity in male role models around me who in this environment happened to be older “successful” criminals. I was also introduced to the autobiography of Malcolm X and the teachings of the Nation of Islam. In addition to this multifaceted
search for a new identity I received a letter from my father on headed paper. I don’t remember the contents of the letter, but I do remember seeing for the first time his credentials. I remember it saying Captain R A Rawlins BA, DMS, MSc, MBA MCMI. I felt so proud I showed it to my prison “associates”, who swiftly brought me back to earth with the comment that he must be really disappointed with me. This just reinforced my feelings of worthlessness from being in prison. Although I was searching for hope in a black male role model my fathers achievements seemed way out of reach and imprisonment for me was a major obstacle for achieving anything of that nature. With hindsight his achievements were an immense subconscious internal inspiration, propelling me to similar accomplishments, but at that particular time I felt I needed to find a route to success that seemed achievable from my position as a prisoner. This ‘achievable’ route I believed could be found in what I could learn from older ‘successful’ criminals and the inspiration of Malcolm X.

Glynn (2014: 134 & 60) maintains that a lack of positive male role models causes young black men to be more susceptible to criminality and fatherlessness and fatherhood are significant factors for black male identity and desistance. I am a product of an absent father and I remember as the eldest sibling feeling a responsibility for helping the
family escape the poverty and suffering we experienced. I experienced a lack of security, guidance, and love, which led me to become obsessed with making money for the purpose of security, engaging in multiple intimate relationships in a quest for love and a tendency to manipulate to maintain control. The act of positive fatherhood according to (Roy 2006) can improve human agency, give meaning to life and reduce the likelihood of criminality or gang-related activity.

A lack of positive male role models in my life clearly made me more susceptible to criminality, particularly as a major part of my search for a positive male role model took place in prison. Malcolm X also became a role model for me as a black man who was in prison who became one of the most influential and respected black activists in America. I wanted to be like that man whose life and faith demonstrated that it was possible for a prisoner like me to achieve something positive in life. My membership of the Nation of Islam gave me a new positive black identity, and a sense of belonging and confidence.

Participant 8EM said, “the differences with the say Christian religion and the Muslim religion is that I find the Muslim religion there was more togetherness and their commitment to things to me is more deeper. Because I know that in the Christian religion they have Lent, and in Lent
you have to give up something that you like, right? But in the Muslim religion, their Lent is like Ramadan, yeh? And they give up everything.... When they (Muslims) commit to things they commit big time, it gives you a more... it seems more solid.”

Participant 8EM has explored a number of faiths and still searching. He describes himself believing in Christianity, Islam and Rastafarianism. I agree that in general, the Muslim and Rastafarian faiths appear to provide more togetherness and commitment for black men. If I were not a born again Christian, Islam or Rastafarianism might be my preferred religions for that reason. It is the unity of black men coming together that attracts me and many other black men I know who have converted to Islam. I contend that the Black Church should provide a similar comradeship for black men in the church.

Haley (1965) highlights how Malcolm X’s faith transformation and desistance was as a consequence of his desire to create a replacement ‘self’ that was not shaped by ‘white expectations’, or notions of ‘black subordination.’ For me the Nation of Islam replaced my ‘black subordinated self” with a ‘black supremacist self”. The Nation of Islam’s narrative enabled me to negotiate a morality where my actions were less criminal than the activities of a government that gained wealth and power
by ‘stealing’ from the less powerful, enslaved and robbed Africa of their riches and selling arms for profit whilst denying black people success by using oppressive laws. Nevertheless, my actions were criminal as I reasoned that my activities were not as bad as theirs.

In hindsight I recognise how my worldview and identity were distorted based on my encounters with racial injustices, and the Nation of Islam and later the Black Israelites gave me a platform for my voice to be heard and understood. My worldview and identity was shaped by negative beliefs emerging from my lived experiences of racial subordination and negative self-perception (Glynn 2014: 4).

Denzin (2003: 257-78) argues that for ‘subordinated voices’ to be heard, they must be offered channels through which they can be heard and empowered to speak. It is therefore appropriate that BMCEP’s who are subordinated on the basis of their ethnicity and criminal past are given a platform for their voices to be heard, understood and not distorted. Nevertheless, the platform and a voice that was afforded me via the Nation of Islam and Black Israelites might address experiences of racial subordination however it is questionable whether replacing it with a black supremacist philosophy was the solution. This study offers the subordinated voices of BMCEP’s to be heard and my voice in particular.
The lack of positive black identities in the bible however means it is not easy to extrapolate positive black identities from it (Xoliswa and Anass 2011: 507).

Participant KH6 who is not a Christian said “When I was going to Church it didn’t sit good with me when I kind a see this stained glass with always these white folks, you know, Jesus and everybody around them, not a black face in sight. And I’m wondering how can that be for me if I can’t see people like me actually being part of this? So that’s where I had deep suspicion. And then when I look back at my history to see, how these so called erm, people went over there with the bible and converted so many of us when we had a perfectly working community and systems in place that worked for us. But we were told it was not good enough for us…….”

I suggest for Christianity in Britain to have a positive impact on black male identity we cannot ignore the fact that the colour of the deity matters for some black people because some have rejected the Christian faith for that very reason. Therefore, the Black Church could allow the debate to take place for those BMCEP’s where the colour of God is important.

Glynn (2014: 3) suggests some black men in prison on their search for a
new identity “construct insights and understandings of the desistance trajectory by ‘ontological reflection’ in a liminal space where the psychological ‘mask’ ought to be removed and replaced with a more positive self-image”. This took place for me where I had the time and space to reflect with other likeminded prisoners in fellowship and discussion groups. In these groups masks were lowered at times and deep personal insights shared, however what was missing were discussions about where the potential barriers that need to be overcome on the outside will be and how to surmount them. I was unable to find a similar liminal environment on the outside particularly in a Christian context because I did not trust that what I might disclose in the church would remain confidential. Additionally, I am predisposed to suppressing my emotions and my desistance journey has been a somewhat individualistic endeavour. I recognise this is not necessarily a healthy pathway and I am only just beginning to reflect more deeply on the impact of my suppressed and repressed traumas on me and those I interact with.

Desistance is a minefield and for me I must navigate the biases based on my race and criminal record for a lifetime. A Christian friend recently told me that it has been such a long time sense my release and the fact that I have done so much good work I can forget the ex-offender label and put the past behind me. I explained that I am legally obliged to
disclose my convictions every time I apply for a job or contend for contracts in prisons, local authorities or schools. I have to be prepared to engage in being risk assessed. I am always wondering what impression others have of me after they have read by Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. I experience psychological feelings of shame, and I live with this every day. Where Glynn quotes the African-American poet Paul Dunbar, who suggests ‘ontological reflections’ must take place for black men in prison, otherwise they will be unable to lower their mask to gain a positive self-image. I contend that even where ‘ontological reflections’ took place for me in prison, I have never discarded my mask.

I recognise my need for continuous self-reflection and counselling and I agree with Glynn that it is important to remove the mask and reframe the context for defining desistance, insights and black male identity. Nonetheless, I argue that as a black man I need to be careful to whom I reveal the mask. I’ve witnessed BMEP’s with great potential lowering their mask to the wrong people or person and seen their progress curtailed and in some cases their dreams destroyed. Therefore, where Glynn suggests for black men to transcend their ‘racial subordination’ they need to reveal their own truths and stories to understand and make sense of their lives. Although I agree, I caution that we ought to be selective with whom we share our stories and what stories we share.
Identity formation for black men is more difficult and problematic due to
the need to overcome and deal with the psychological impact of ‘racial
subordination’ that is exacerbated by the negative messages we receive
from society as members of a disadvantaged, devalued and stigmatised
minority group (Browning (2008: 94).

Slaughter-Defoe contends that negative black identities are racial
stereotypes exacerbated by the prevalence of negative black media
images (Slaughter-Defoe 2012: 29). Nevertheless, Jagessar and Reddie
(2007: 125) suggest the idea that racism exists in the UK is contended
and even some black people are in denial about racism, sometimes saying
it does not exist, to either deal with their discomfort, sense of fear,
unwillingness to rock the boat or they say they have not observed or
experienced it. This causes some black people to question whether their
everyday experiences of what they perceive to be racism actually is
racism, resulting in them being less likely to speak out unless
overwhelming evidence of it exists. As racism becomes more covert and
definitions of racism become increasingly ambiguous it is more difficult
to gather evidence of its existence. For instance I might ask, was I
unsuccessful securing that job because I am a black man or was the
successful candidate more qualified? Was I stopped and searched because
I genuinely fit the description of someone who has committed an offence or was I stopped because I am black? I might be concerned that I am doing everything in this job that is asked of me yet my white colleagues get promoted ahead of me? These are just some of the questions I’ve asked myself throughout my life and I presume many other black men have also asked. I contend that just because the evidence is lacking does not excuse that these are ‘real’ experiences. I maintain that, if my experience is one of racism, then it is irrelevant as to whether it was intentional or not. My experience of racism should not be silenced because I have to live with its traumatic impact and I should be remedy it.

Therefore a tailored set of interventions and support to address the complex mix of experiences that have made us who we are is required. When the Black Church supports BMCEP’s it must take into account our complex experiences, faith, experience of imprisonment, class, race, gender and recognise that life experiences influence desistance in different ways.

**Summary**

Conversion to the Christian faith supports the creation of a new positive identity, enabling BMCEP’s to make sense of their criminal past, reinterpreting their past, present and future, which is an important part of
the desistance process.

As a Christian a new identity is shaped around ultimate questions about life’s purpose and meaning, and assumes there is more to life than we can understand or see. A Christian commitment may enhance a BMCEP’s desistance by improving self-worth, hope and purpose, thus developing a positive identity. However it may also initiate the breakdown of personal identity causing emotional and psychological harm.

Christianity might be used as an emotional coping mechanism as a form of dissociation to deal with the trauma of imprisonment, the shame of past wrongdoings and the shame imposed by racial oppression. This helps BMCEP’s to forget painful thoughts (dissociative amnesia) and emotions but in the process can make them completely unaware of whole aspects of themselves, and develop alternate personalities, which may lead to mental illness.

Christian transformation and identity development is dependent on forgiveness and it is for that reason Christ died and rose again, so that there was forgiveness of sins. Were Jesus says in Matthew 6:16 “but if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”, he is saying that we are just conduits of a completed work of
forgiveness that is 100% the work of God. Nevertheless, our will is necessary for the power of forgiveness to work through us and in us by his Spirit.

It was also suggested that BMCEP’s need a genuine understanding of the process of forgiveness to deal with the emotional and psychological affect of coming to terms with their past wrongdoings and developing a positive personal identity.

This also requires a balanced understanding of the grace of God, because the idea of the grace of God is sometimes misrepresented to enable some people to continue committing crimes with impunity as long as they ask for forgiveness.

Healthy Spiritual identity development provides intimacy, generativity, and integrity and protects against depression, encourages optimism and self-esteem, which all promote improved desistance. Nevertheless, the church needs to recognise that Christianity can actually contribute to the breakdown of the BMCEP’s self-esteem and identity if they are to prevent this taking place.

Another challenge that BMCEP’s might face regarding their new
Christian identity is the accusations that they may be disingenuous causing some to hide the impact of Christianity and their transformation from the authorities.

The invisibility of positive black identity in the bible or in Christian tradition is not debated and it is much easier to extrapolate a white identity from the bible as it mirrors white society, which suggests white, is ‘normal’. I contend if Christianity in Britain is to have a positive impact on black male identity today we cannot ignore the fact that the colour of the deity matters for some black people.

Black Churches should encourage BMCEP’s to discuss their racialised experiences and explore how they feel about these experiences and how it impacts their life.
Chapter Six – The Role of Autonomy, Resilience and Motivation for Black Christian Men to Desist

Autonomy

Autonomy is a basic human need that is about ‘freedom’ and when I pursued a criminal lifestyle, I perceived that criminality gave me autonomy, power, freedom and choices that I could not have acquired otherwise (Forsyth 1997: 29). Zehr (1995: 37) maintains that those who demonstrate autonomy are more likely to desist. BMCEP’s who experience oppression based on their race and discrimination based on their criminal record might find it more challenging to acquire an autonomous position.

An increased reliance upon another presumes a reduction of autonomy and when I became a Christian dependence on God was a requirement. This dependence on God assumes a loss of autonomy; nevertheless I did not experience a lack of autonomy but an enhanced degree of autonomy. I describe this as accepting that God created each person with a particular purpose in mind, and that any creator knows the purpose of his creation better than anyone else. Therefore, if we want to know our purpose we should ask God the creator. This suggests, the most progressive autonomous position lies within the creator. This calls for a reintegration
and desistance process that seeks God for purpose.

Burrell (2010: 186) maintains the Black Church sometimes encourages black people to turn their personal power over to church ministers who encourage them to “wait on God” or depend on external forces, which he suggests promotes dependency, impotence and impacts negatively on their psychological development. As a Christian I believe the work of Christ on the Cross- offers all believers and me direct access to God and there is no longer the requirement for a priest, pastor or church minister to intercede for us as was the case in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the role of the church leader is to point believers towards God, although Burrell argues that autonomy is relinquished in this way.

I declare that Christians cannot be autonomous apart from God because we are not only less knowledgeable about ourselves than the creator but also dependent on Gods forgiveness and grace. Haight (1979: 115) suggests the grace of Christ constitutes human autonomy and expands human freedom, giving it a new depth and power. I have experienced ‘Gods autonomy’ many times, for instance, when I have thought about a future plan, only to find that when God steps in and showed me the full extent of his plan for me, that I had limited myself.
Successful reintegration requires that BMCEP’s attain autonomy by obtaining particular resources to address their practical external needs as well as their emotional, psychological, spiritual, economic and social need for ‘freedom’. This will address emotions such as self-esteem, self-worth, shame, anger, fear, depression etc. and promote desistance by helping BMCEP’s to create new possibilities and a new future.

A reason why my reintegration was successful was not only based on my personal autonomy and agency but also my ability to get the support needed and to learn how to navigate and overcome barriers to desistance (Goett 2017: 114).

**Resilience**

Resilience in its simplest sense is the capacity to do well in adversity, which is a requirement for the desistance of Christian black men in prison and returning to the community. Shani (2014: 177) however proposes that resilience can function to impoverish autonomy and prevent humans from comprehending risk, uncertainty and danger, which imply that resilience might oppose desistance.

Resilience according to Titus (2002: 11) has beneficial characteristics and comprises three main components. These are described as the ability to
cope, resist and construct. In short **coping** is about dealing with, handling or surviving our present circumstances. For me, examples include the loss of loved ones, family, friends, the loss of livelihood, possessions and hope.

**Resisting** is about consistency, and opposing or avoiding those things that might hinder or divert us from reaching our destination or goal. For me this included the offer of illicit ways of making money, being unsupported, finding employment (even though I had vowed never to work for anyone again following unfair treatment in the past), limited job opportunities, redundancy, unemployment, being let down by the church and divorce. In all these situations I had to remain consistent.

Finally, Titus suggests the last element of resilience is to **construct**. By constructing he means to construct a future, a goal or purpose.

The Christian faith is particularly concerned with resilience and was and is central to my desistance. For instance the Christian faith helped me to **cope** with the challenges of imprisonment. I had to trust God and rely on His strength Psalm 31:23-24; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 6:10-14 and Proverbs 3:5-6.
The Christian faith also helped me to resist and remain consistent in the face of challenges. I was able to bounce back after trials and keep moving on 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, I was able to remain focused under pressure Joshua 1:9 and recognise that in adversity there is always something positive to learn from it (Romans 8:28-30).

The Christian faith helped me to construct a positive future by seeking God for his purpose for me whilst in prison (Proverbs 19:21) and (Hebrews 6:17).

James Cone stated that the Black Church ought to recognise that their experience of oppression aligns with Jesus message of liberation and the power of the Christian faith comes by engaging in that ‘fact’. He suggests that the Black Church should consider whether it is called to save its own life or whether it is called to lose its life for the sake of others. He maintains that it is so concerned with saving its own life because it is so concerned with the gospel of success. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a gospel of success but a gospel of ultimate success through failure. It is God that turned the failure of Jesus journey to the cross into success. This journey of ultimate success through failure is characterised by resilience in terms of coping, resisting and constructing. I argue that the gospel of success also typifies a form of resilience based on coping, resisting and
It may be contended that coping with the hardship of imprisonment might increase a BMCEP’s resilience thus enabling them to better cope with the challenges of reintegration. However the ability to cope with imprisonment is not necessarily the same as the capabilities required to desist.

Nevertheless, I found the strategies I used to cope ‘on road’ and in prison were similar forms of hyper-masculine expressions, however coping as a new transformed person, who is living a none criminal lifestyle in prison and returning to the community requires a completely different set of abilities and strengths.

The Christian faith for me was instrumental in me coping with imprisonment, release and on going desistance, because the number of obstacles and barriers for my successful reintegration into the community were overwhelming. In times when I was unable to cope, I knew I had prayer, fellowship with other Christians and faith in God to give me the strength to persist. As I persisted I would be strengthened by the eventual positive outcome.
The coping strategies I adopted in prison before I became a Christian took the form of behaviours that precluded me from becoming a victim however that same behaviour increased my chances of re-offending. The mask that is worn as a protection in prison is difficult to remove when released. Wearing this ‘mask’ in the community made building and maintaining positive, meaningful relationships problematic because the ‘mask’ was based on the premise of distrust.

The first I became aware of this ‘mask’ I was wearing for years, was following my release from a 13-year prison sentence. I would sit in the front room with the rest of the family but one by one they would leave until I was alone. After observing this repeatedly for some time and assuming I wasn’t welcome in the house, I questioned my partner who stated that they sensed that I wanted my space. It was then that I realised that I was still wearing the subconscious ‘mask’ I wore in prison to demarcate my space and territory.

Resilience as resisting or constancy is what Titus (2002: 229) suggests is the ability to remain patient (Romans 12:12; Revelation 3:10) and to persevere (Galatians 6:9) through adversity. Resisting requires that we learn how to wait, how to be persistent and make efforts. According to Titus this entails the adoption of the virtue of fortitude.
Titus (2002: 47) states that ‘constructing’ is the final part of the resilience process that requires clarity of purpose. Based on my experience I contend that positive construction was not the final part of the process for me, but rather the starting point. For instance, the motivation for me to ‘cope’ and ‘resist’ the adversity of imprisonment, resettlement and desistance came from the construction of the vision and the determination to achieve that goal.

In addition to the ability to cope, resist and construct, I also needed self-belief and hope in my ‘vision’ providing me with the fortitude to desist. It was hope that enabled me to construct and it was the vision I constructed that gave me hope. Maruna (2001: 87) refers to a positive future hope that a prisoner constructs in their mind that promotes desistance and calls it a ‘redemption script’.

Participant 3ML stated that when he had no hope for the future and focused on the negative things that were happening to him [no job, no prospects and dealing with rejection] he felt like ending his own life. However, when he focused on the ‘sovereignty of God’ he realised that there were reasons for the ‘bad’ things that happened that only God new about (Romans 8:28). He explained how it lifted a burden from him and
enabled him to cope with adversity and continue to strive in stressful situations. His faith in God provided him with the resilience to strive through adversity and overcome obstacles. White and Cone (1999: 53) maintain the Black Church has provided the resilience for black people to survive racism, and economic, political and psychological bondage.

Imprisonment can have a detrimental effect on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of black men due to their loss of autonomy, their estrangement from the community, family and friends, the breakdown of relationships and their loss of purpose and hope (Reeves 2016: 326). Although the traumatising prison experience can impact negatively on their ability to cope Lankelly Chase Foundation (2014: 7) and Dayton (2007: 103) maintain that paradoxically resilience tends to counter the damage caused by traumatic experiences, yet resilience is also developed in adversity. In other words resilience may be developed in the same conditions that caused the trauma. This makes it difficult to know when the ‘traumatic’ experience is supporting the development of resilience or exacerbating the trauma.

BMCEP’s who survive imprisonment and trauma may experience “emotional constriction” which is a restricted range, or lack of authentic emotional expressivity. In the prison environment where authentic
emotional expression might be viewed as weak, the prisoner might perceive “emotional constriction” as necessary and positive. Traumatised people who are aware of the difficulties of controlling their emotions tend to avoid anything that might cause emotional distress, rather than deal with the challenges, which would ultimately develop their resilience to overcome the adversity. The defence mechanism such as suppression used by the traumatised person may present as depression, lack of motivation, psychosomatic reactions or dissociative states (Dayton 2007: 79).

Some BMCEP’s experience “helplessness” which could be caused by a lack of autonomy or resilience where they feel there is nothing they can do to affect or change their situation for the better. Therefore, many remain inactive and passive, degenerating into a state of hopelessness. Whilst a Christian response for me was to trust in God and to have faith that God would bring me through that situation, a “loss of trust and faith” was also a consequence of the trauma of imprisonment. This is sometimes due to relationship trauma, which could be the consequence of being let down by a “trusted” person, for instance, a parent, a partner, a close friend or even God. This could lead to the perception that no one can be trusted and when things don’t go to plan, that the world is unfriendly and unpredictable and those within it are unreliable (Dayton
Additionally, the trauma experienced by the prisoner is not only attributed to the prison experience alone but may be intensified or alleviated by previous ‘traumatic’ experiences. Resettlement and desistance interventions rarely account for the impact of past traumas. Without considering historical and baseline trauma ‘measures’, the interventions offered are unlikely to be effective. For instance, I had a propensity for anger, which was related to childhood physical and psychological abuse and neglect. I also had an obsession for making money that I now understand was based on childhood lack. i.e. homelessness, poverty and the fear of destitution growing up. This was exacerbated by racism, which for me meant I would have to work ten times harder than my white friends. When I left school and was unable to find work I chose a life of crime.

According to Martino and Meyenin (2001: 150) some black boys receive messages about the notion of their inadequacy from teachers who tend to be white females; nevertheless my sense of inadequacy or inferiority came from my personal experiences and observations of black men when I was a boy.
Participant DD12 said, “a teacher once told me I would amount to nothing and I never forgot that, I had constant feelings of unrest, erm. Yeh its just that emptiness, because again because I was in care and all that type of stuff, so every environment I was in it doesn’t take long or too far when you’re coming back from school and you’re walking into a children’s home that you know that things are unsettling. Things ain’t right and the friends that you’re going to their houses and they’re with their family and you’re not. So I mean, it was a constant daily, constant wrestle with dissatisfaction, lack of significance, not feeling a part of anything yeh.

Past traumatic experiences such as this could accentuate the traumatic impact of imprisonment. Almost 50% of children and young people in prisons were in care and experienced particular traumas that were not addressed which made them more likely to offend and more likely to re-offend. Therefore, this must be considered in any programme of support for BMCEP’s.

BMCEP’s often carry traumatic experiences, which they feel ashamed of sharing with others, particularly those in church. ‘Confessing' secret traumatic experiences with a trusted person can improve personal wellbeing (Tavris 1998: 156), however confessing secrets may not be
without its challenges for BMCEP’s. Trust was and is something I struggle/d with and I attribute some of this distrust, to a very uncertain and unstable childhood and the ‘unwritten’ rules that I lived by in the criminal fraternity for years. One of these rules was ‘if you trust no one you are less likely to be caught or let down. Therefore, getting some BMCEP’s to take that leap of faith and trust someone with their ‘secrets’ may be challenging.

Whilst Pennebaker (1988: 158) maintains that confessing a traumatic experience is not about reliving the trauma however, there is a danger that by confessing it an ex-prisoner may relive it. There is a distinct difference between speaking about an event that makes it either a re-traumatising or healing experience. One of the roles of the person listening to the BMCEP e.g. the church minister or mentor, is to recognise a traumatic conversation and ask the person if they are happy to be referred for professional help.

Pennebaker claims the professional should assist the person in reinterpreting the event by finding ‘meaning’ in it, allowing them to put it behind them. It is the meaning that the person attaches to the event by the end of the conversation that will determine whether that engagement

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7 Ibid P.158
becomes a re-traumatising or a healing experience. I believe the black
majority church is ideally positioned to encourage and support this
‘confessional’ process. Nevertheless, those in pastoral and counselling of
BMCEP’s must understand the concept of trauma, the impact of racial
oppression and the effect of suppressing and repressing traumatic
experiences.

My journey of desistance could be described as a demonstration of
coping, resisting and constructing. However, my display of ‘resilience’ in
overcoming challenges was achieved to some extent by the use of
negative coping strategies such as suppression and dissociation. Before I
became a Christian I employed negative coping strategies such as drug
taking and involvement in illegal activities. These ‘negative coping
strategies’ were not conducive for improving my desistance outcomes.

Therefore improving resilience might enable a prisoner to maintain a
positive outlook and hope for the future. The positive relationship
between exposure to traumatic events and recovery (positive life changes)
is termed Post Traumatic Growth (PTG). There are five areas of a
‘survivors’ life where this can be observed, positive relationships with
others, positive self-perception, positive outlook of life, spiritual beliefs,
and their appreciation of life.
The concepts of PTG and resilience are often confused because they are interrelated however one distinction is that PTG is a measure of recovery from a traumatic experience where as resilience is the ability to strive through adversity and stress, which may or may not be traumatic (Mahdi et al 2014: 197 & 199).

When Participant 10RC was asked what impact his last prison term had on his life he said, “this might sound really strange but erm. In my distress I call on the Lord and He answered me and He delivered me from all of my affairs. So my time in prison, after the first 6 months I was not in the prison any more, because I found Christ you see. And after that 6 months it was more like in a Monastery, I was more in a study school, I was more in like in a in a different place, I was in, praying, and fasting and reading and studying. That’s what I was, I was in a different (place) ... I wasn’t in prison cause I was free. Not physically free but free, from my troubles, things that used to trouble my mind, you know my anger I can’t control. I was free from a lot of stuff that I struggle with over the, like.... I could sit down and study and be frustrated and can’t change nothing and for hours and weeks and someone do me something and just plot for them for months until I get them, you understand? These things used to bother me, its something that used to haunt me you know. And I
Participant 10RC’s narrative explains how his faith promoted PTG. He suggests that his faith has changed his perspective of his circumstances from being stressful, frustrated and angry to being “free from all a that.” My Christian conversion in prison also freed me from many mental and emotional struggles. It encouraged positive relationships with others, a positive self-perception, a new positive outlook on life, and a fresh appreciation of life with a purpose.

The ability to trust and have faith in others, self and God are strengths that support PTG and desistance. This remains a challenge for me following experiences of being let down by “trusted” people including parents, partners, close friends and family. This has led me to perceive that no one can be trusted and the world is unfriendly and unpredictable, and those within it are unreliable (Dayton 2007: 79).

Participant 15AB said, “I did go through a very nasty divorce and I wanted to commit suicide, but because I was a Christian I knew it was the wrong thing to do so I didn’t do it. And I suffered for a long time with grief for the loss of a partner.” He says it didn’t affect his faith in God but it did affect his view of people and women in particular. Similarly,
my experiences of disappointments destroyed my ability to trust others and even initially affected my ability to trust in God. These ‘baseline’ trauma experiences need to be measured as they can impact on our relationship with God, others and ourselves and therefore influences our resilience.

The experience of imprisonment and ‘road life’ induced various states of arousal that impact on my resilience, motivation and desistance. These include states of hyper-vigilance, hyperactivity and hyper-arousal (Dayton 2007: 78). In a state of hyper-vigilance I over read signals and signs from others. I scan my relationships and environment for signs of potential danger, and closely observe repeated ‘insults’ and anything threatening to my sense of self. I continue to address this by having a safe place and person to help me to reflect on my actions and emotions as well as revealing hidden parts of myself with a view to personal growth. The remedial position for me in the Christian faith is to trust in God to reveal the learning in the experience (Isaiah 41:10; 1 Peter 5:7).

My past experiences of trauma have also established in me a state of hyperactivity. This means I am predisposed to over-responding to stress, and as stress is particularly high when released from prison and every time I have to disclose my criminal convictions. According to Dayton
(2007) a state of hyperactivity may increase the likelihood of re-offending. For me this is particularly poignant because on the surface I tend to look very calm which suggests I repress these feelings effectively. I have used strategies to recognise my emotions such as refocusing on the positives, taking emotional care of myself through physical exercise and talking with a trusted person. Romans 8:26-27 is a particular remedial scripture that is about refocusing on God, who provides the strength, to cope, to resist and to construct. Those who are in a state of hyperactivity are prone to using forms of negative ‘coping mechanisms’, such as excessive drinking or drug taking (Dayton 2007: 79).

I have also suffered with hyper-arousal, which made it difficult for me to pay attention to my current circumstances and surroundings. I perceived this as beneficial in prison as it helped me to cope with the trauma. This physiological state however interfered with my capacity to take on and retain new information, to concentrate, to make sense of, draw meaning from and learn from my experiences (Dayton 2007: 79). Although I have begun to address this and learned to self reflect it remains as area of weakness that could have a negative impact on my desistance and resilience.

Therefore, hyper-vigilance, hyperactivity and hyper-arousal can support
ways to cope ‘on road’ and in prison, but they can be detrimental for resilience and desistance, and must be kept in check.

**Motivation**

For black men to desist we do not only need to build resilience but we must also be motivated to do so. According to Mishra (2017: 6) motivation is the reason, stimulus or incentive for acting or behaving in a particular way. Where resilience according to Titus (2004) is to cope, resist and construct, it is the construct element that is tied to our motivation and motives. That is why I argue that constructing should be the starting point as it provides the drive for me to cope, resist and desist.

I also had to recognise that there are inevitable obstacles I had to be motivated to overcome if I were to desist. This motivation is the driving force that provides the energy to overcome challenges. This ‘energy’ is routed in a ‘motive’ and not an ambiguous motivation to change. Therefore the ‘motive’ for wanting to desist indicates the drive and ability to overcome adversity to enable me to desist. To assess the magnitude of this driving force or energy I must ask ‘why’ have I decided to desist? The answer ought to be tied to a purpose or goal that can enable a black male ex-prisoner to resist opposition to their efforts to achieve the goal and to desist.
According to Elliot (2008: 226) every motive has a goal and a ‘motive’ for desisting that is based on not wanting to return to prison is described as an avoidance goal. An avoidance goal is not driven in the same way that an approach goal is driven. For instance, behaviour to achieve a positive goal i.e. to get a particular job is motivated toward gaining competence where as the behaviour to avoid a negative outcome such as avoiding imprisonment is motivated toward avoiding incompetence (Elliot and Harackiewicz 1996: 461). The most common response from BMCEP’s when asked why they want to desist is to avoid returning to prison.

Although my motivation to desist was because I wanted to use my experience to support prisoners, ex-prisoners and to prevent young people from going to prison, encouraging me to gain competence in many areas, my motivation was also based on my belief that God had called me to this particular work. As a Christian I believe that every individual (Christian or otherwise) has a God given calling and our purpose is to find out what it is and to pursue it.

Most Christian and non-Christian prisoners leave prison with the inclination not to return, and even armed with clear goals and furnished
with both an ‘away from’ motivation (recognising the consequences of re-offending) and a ‘towards’ motivation (having a positive future goal), many still return to prison having succumbed to the environmental and psychological obstacles that they believed they could overcome. Therefore, churches and others supporting BMCEP’s are encouraged to understand their motivations and motives, and where they are lacking, coach them in developing them (Wake 2010: 157). The black majority church is one of the few total black controlled institutions playing a major role in the self-determination and self-affirmation of its people. People become self-determined when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled, and in these conditions BMCEP’s will achieve psychological growth.

**Competence:** The BMCEP needs to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills to ‘construct’, which relates to the development of resilience. When I began to develop my skills I felt that I had the potential needed for success. I was motivated to take actions to achieve my goals

**Connection or Relatedness:** People need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people. This is also a desistance requirement and I built a pro social network through church, work and
sports activities, to counter the criminal networks that were prevalent in my life.

**Autonomy:** People need to feel in control of their own behaviours and goals, and have the freedom to make positive choices as discussed earlier in this chapter. My Christian faith afforded me the sense that I could make choices that were not limited to my circumstances and gave me the drive to take direct action to change. This increased self-determination and vision for my future led to progress in my life.

The Black Church could play a major role in assessing the motivation for BMCEP’s based on competence, connectedness and autonomy, as well as considering whether they are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated towards desistance, overcoming racial oppression and faith.

**Summary**

Zehr (1995: 37) states that offenders often get into trouble because of their inability to self-govern and prison deprives them further of this ability. Those released from prison who experience less autonomy and choice are less likely to desist.

BMCEP’s who experience oppression and discrimination based on their
race and criminal record will find it more challenging to acquire autonomy and choice.

It is often presumed that by trusting God with our future reduces our autonomous position however if God created us for a specific purpose, and knows us and our purpose better than we do, then trusting God with our future will enhance our autonomous position. Christians can’t be autonomous without God because we are dependent on Gods grace and forgiveness. However it is contended that when we trust a church minister or priest with power over our future then that diminishes our autonomous position.

The simple definition of resilience is the ability to cope with adversity, however coping strategies can be positive or negative where negative strategies may cause psychological harm. Titus (2002) proposes that resilience is the ability to first ‘cope’ with the hardship, secondly to ‘resist’ temptations and, finally to ‘construct’ a new positive future that relates to Gods will and purpose. I contend that constructing a positive future first worked best for me because it gave me the motivation and the energy to cope with hardship and resist temptation.

The Black Church may support the development of resilience for
BMCEP’s to cope, resist and construct and conduct some form of trauma screening assessment.

The black majority church is ideally positioned to support BMCEP’s who may have suffered the trauma of imprisonment and racial oppression, but may have suppressed or repressed these traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, those involved in the pastoral care and counselling of BMCEP’s must understand the concept of trauma, the impact of racial oppression and the effect of suppressing and repressing traumatic experiences. Additionally, they must be aware of the BMCEP’s past trauma’s and be aware that some traumatic experiences can build resilience whilst others may exacerbate the trauma or cause re-traumatisation.

Confessing secret traumatic experiences can help the BMCEP build resilience around that experience. The Black Church can support the BMCEP to reinterpret the traumatic event by finding ‘meaning’ in it, allowing them to put it behind them. It is the meaning that the person attaches to the event by the end of the conversation that will determine whether that engagement becomes a re-traumatising or a healing experience.
The black majority church may facilitate the need for BMCEP’s to ‘confess’ traumatic experiences with a trusted person to prevent suppressing them, which will improve personal wellbeing and improve desistance outcomes.

The trauma of imprisonment and ‘road life’ on the BMCEP can cause them to feel helpless, a loss of trust and faith, hyper arousal, hyperactive and hyper vigilance. This requires support to self reflect and understand the personal impact of hyper vigilance, hyperactivity and hyper arousal to identify actions to address it.

Motivation was identified as the driving force or the foundation on which resilience is built. To identify the degree of the BMCEP’s motivation we need to identify the source, which was, said to be located in the motive. In simple terms we would ask the BMCEP, why they want to desist? A motive is weaker when directed towards the avoidance of a goal rather than focusing on gaining or achieving a goal. Therefore, a strong motive is tied to their purpose or goal.

I also suggest the black majority church can assess the BMCEP’s motivation based on competence, connectedness and autonomy. They should also consider the BMCEP’s intrinsic and extrinsic motivations
Chapter Seven – The Role of Shame for Black Male Desistance

My upbringing was personified by experiences of discipline, chastisement and shame, which is the childhood experience of many black men. As the eldest child of three I remember receiving physical beatings from my father that made me fear him greatly. As an adult my father explained that I was heavily chastised, as an example so that he wouldn’t need to chastise my siblings. He stated that it was his own fathers way and as the eldest child that experience worked for him.

Participant QG9 who was in care for a large part of his childhood said

"there was a period when I had a lot of resentment towards my parents and because I started to see some of the relationship to why I was making the decisions I was making and it was.... some of it was from their impact of how they conversed with me, how they spoke to me, you know, what decisions they made. Then I had to come to the realisation that anger toward them is pointless ...... because at the end of the day, they learned it from somewhere and then....... if I’m blaming them the buck can’t just stay with them, then I would have to chat to my granny.”
I witnessed domestic violence and as I grew up I vowed never to chastise my children in the way that I was or to be violent towards my partner. Although I refrained from the heavy chastisement of my children, I was unable to contain my rage towards my partner at times. In my work with prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people I witness this pattern of wounded abused ‘shamed’ black boys becoming wounded abusive ‘shaming’ black men.

Every person’s story of change is personal and unique, and although ex-prisoners like me contend with the shame of having a criminal record and the memory of a shameful past, we experience it in distinct ways because the crimes we have committed are different and so are the reasons why we committed them. Therefore, it might be assumed that we moderate or regulate feelings of shame in unique ways.

As a black boy, brought up in a white community I have experienced the shame of not having my father around, whilst my white friends dads were visible. I remember not experiencing a father’s care or recognising what it means to be intimate. The harsh discipline I received from my father before he divorced my mother did not only inflict physical but psychological wounds that when confronted by the prospect of expressing
intimacy, I was filled with mistrust, insecurity and fear, triggering feelings of shame. According to Hooks (2004: 110-111), men mask emotional vulnerabilities, which tend to move them from helplessness to dominance and transmute their pain into rage. Many black men who know their fathers remember his rage and the traumatic bond it created that fuels pain and shame (Ibid 2004: 107). I remember my own father’s rage, resulting in my own pain, anger and mistrust. This affected my own relationships negatively with my ex-wife, siblings and children, which I often feel ashamed of.

As a BMCEP I contend with the shame of imprisonment and a criminal record, which I will discuss later. Nevertheless, according to Alexander (2012:17) there are imposed structural disparities that demonise and criminalise black men, which can intensify the sense of shame and self-hatred. For instance, Lamb (2013: 9-12) maintains that self-hatred is a form of mental slavery where black people are ashamed of other black people and themselves, which is not necessarily a conscious process but one that can result in poverty, ignorance and criminality. We deny and repress the self-hatred of our black selves, which manifests itself as shame. The vicious cycle of self-hatred leads to self-destruction and is remedied by black men being re-educated to know who we are. I found that negative media images of black men influence how other black men
think about each other and themselves. I experience feelings of inferiority at times, lack confidence and self-esteem.

Boon et al (2011: 291) suggests that responding to shame requires that we first recognise it and where it comes from because it presents in different forms, appears in different places and is difficult to detect. For instance, it might appear as worthlessness, self-loathing or self-perceptions of being inadequate and incompetent. External presentations of shame may include depression, withdrawal or rage against others or self. Self-directed anger could lead to patterns of self-harm and self-destructive behaviour.

Lutwak et al (2001) maintains that those experiencing shame are likely to engage in avoidance, inward anger, blaming others, experience low self-esteem, lack empathy and perspective taking. Kaufman (1996: 38) maintains that shame inflicts upon the person a false identity resulting in painful feelings of depression, alienation, loneliness, inadequacy, failure, and hopelessness. It is a wound felt from the inside, dividing us from ourselves and from one another. The remedial response is that of atonement, to make amends, to correct a mistake, or heal a hurt.

According to Leverenz (2012: 26) however, racial shaming as opposed to
the shame based on a criminal past, is a form of humiliation that is unmerited and imposed on black people by white people to affirm their dominance. And it is the lack of self-knowledge that helps to support and maintain that racial dominance. Pattison (2000: 127-128) maintain that those experiencing black shame often seek approval from outside themselves and may lie or be dishonest in an effort to gain approval. I advocate for black people to be empowered and to reach levels of self-determination that will enable them to navigate institutionally racist structures, rather than plead with white people to be treated more fairly. Whilst I believe there is a need for campaigning against these racial injustices, more energy ought to be focused on black empowerment.

Whilst Doris (2003: 155) suggests that shaming in the context of deterring offenders from committing crime is intended to heighten the offender’s internal awareness of wrongdoing. Racial shaming strikes at the heart of the person’s identity as inherently ‘bad’ and because it has nothing to do with any immoral action we have done it cannot be remedied by retributory action. For the healing of racial shaming to take place it is necessary to engage in forgiveness. This is not only to recognise Gods forgiveness but also recognising the need to forgive others (Karl 2009).
Shaming relating to past crimes and/or race increases the degree of self-condemnatory emotions but for different reasons. Racial shaming is so illusory that many of us do not even realize we suffer it.

Shame from a criminal past however should be remedied by Christian theology that says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Yet Participant PD4 who has desisted for over a decade and speaks often about his life transformation in Churches says

“Every week when I go to the Church and I testify and I speak about my past, and I’ve got to be honest, I do feel quite guilty and quite ashamed about my past, yes I do, I can’t deny that”.

In this case it is his ‘Christian duty’ to share his faith and testimony that is causing him to feel ashamed, and it is something that is rarely addressed in the church because Romans 8:1 tells us we should have no self condemnation, so when we as Christians feel ashamed of the past, that has been forgiven, we condemn ourselves further for feeling that way.

Therefore I suggest that Christian remedy for shame based on past wrongdoings requires an understanding of redemption and the grace it
affords BMCEP’s. Racial shaming on the other hand requires an understanding and acceptance of the self that is not inferior to others. When I became a member of the Nation of Islam it was in some way a response to my experience of racial shaming that suggested I was inferior. Therefore, the acceptance of the Nation of Islam was not just a form of dissociation from the white supremacist influence, but a reversal and acceptance of their black supremacy position for me.

Where an ex-prisoner is clearly ‘responsible’ for their wrongdoing, they may cope with the shame by dissociating from it in different ways. Participant EM8 used ‘moral interpretation’ which compares the immoral acts of others who are still viewed as upstanding.

“For me there is not a lot of guilt and shame [regarding past crimes] because it’s the way I perceive it. If you want to go into it yeh, a lot of reputable companies in the West yeh, they made their bones [money] by enslavement, robbing other countries, doing all kinds of really bad things. Worser things than I can even think of, right. And they still have their honour.”

Leverenz (2012: 22) claims that honour is a form of ‘manliness’ that demands dignity and respect for black men and boys, and shame destroys
Black Masculinity. Therefore, participant EM8 who is not a Christian deals with his guilt and shame by comparing his past wrongs with those he perceives committed more serious wrongdoings, yet maintain their honour. I held similar belief’s before I became a Christian and it allowed me to justify my criminal lifestyle, as a form of social and moral payback. Another non-Christian participant KH6 was philosophical about how he deals with the shame of the past. He says, “

Everyone makes mistakes…. I have to live with the things I did for whatever reasons I did them…. I have to learn lessons from these episodes in my life.

He also maintains,

“I always forgive myself because its learning lessons from your actions, and what can I put in place to reduce that from reoccurring. This is why I go to the gym, this is why I do yoga, this is why I do other things, to give me a balance, to give me a release because if you have no release your gonna have a powder keg.

Participant KH6 dealt with the shame of his past criminal behaviour by reasoning that it was about the lessons learned and found avenues for
release through physical activities. The use of the term ‘powder keg’ suggests the significance of this shame for black men.

My criminal past was recast, not as shameful failings but as a prelude to a God ordained calling where my past experiences provide particular insights and compassion to enable me to engage with prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people in unique ways (Gadd 2003: 318). Nevertheless, I still experience emotions of shame for past wrong doings, even though I know God has forgiven me, which suggests a lack of forgiveness of self.

The act of ‘giving back’ particularly to the next generation is described as a form of shame management and (Maruna 2001: 53) terms this generativity. Where this is lacking in an offender’s future story it renders them less likely to desist (Wilson and Curran 2006: 181). My act of ‘giving back’ or generativity was not a form of shame management but as a thanksgiving ‘response’ to the grace of God. Whilst the grace of God is the forgiveness of all sin based on Jesus suffering, death and resurrection, in other words Jesus was offered as a sacrifice for our sins. The ‘response’ is our ‘offering’, which is ‘thanksgiving’ (Langford 2007: 58). Therefore, the BMCEP’s action in ‘giving back’ is not as a form of shame management because the shame is dealt with at the Cross. The
dilemma is that the actions of ‘giving back’ as a form of shame management and ‘giving back’ as a thanksgiving offering look exactly the same in practice.

Not only is it difficult to distinguish whether the act of giving back is motivated by grace or the need to manage shame, the BMCEP’s actions may not be deliberate or conscious. Nevertheless, I contend the act of giving back for the purpose of shame management might create a strong connection between the action and personal identity. Where as the ex-prisoner giving back as the thanksgiving offering has less connection between the action and their personal identity because they receive forgiveness and grace regardless of the act of giving back. For the former this suggests without the opportunity to give back the likelihood of re-offending and mental distress are higher than the latter due to the connection between the action and personal identity. In other words, if I am unable to partake in generative activities it may impact my self-esteem, self-worth and mental health negatively.

My experience of this grace of God was the time I was languishing in HMP Wandsworth, in my prison cell awaiting trial and reading the bible with scepticism. I was a member of the Nation of Islam and only read the New Testament to prove it wasn’t true. Nevertheless, I received a
supernatural revelation that revealed the magnitude of my personal transgressions, the enormity of my wrongdoings and the extent to which I had sinned against God. Simultaneously, I had a revelation of the extent of Gods forgiveness that completely surpassed the level of all of my transgressions. This revelation of Gods holiness, as well as His mercy and grace completely overwhelmed me, leaving me in floods of tears of joy, wonder, remorse and gratitude. I made a commitment to follow Christ and He “removed” the shame of my past actions.

I was converted from being a member of the Nation of Islam, practicing witchcraft and engaging in remorseless criminality to becoming a Christian. This was the start of a completely new life for me as my Christian journey and my desistance journey began in a Wandsworth prison cell.

As for black shame, this Christian theological remedy also applies, however black shame is more difficult to recognise and acknowledge in us as black men. Therefore it is not easy to apply a remedy to something you do not recognise or accept. Therefore, BMCEP’s need to deal with shame as a consequence of their past crimes and racial oppressions using complex forms of dissociative states. Brenner (2001) \(^8\) suggest this causes

\(^8\) In Blackman (2004: 76)
entire aspects of the personality to “split off” and become unconscious, which could cause BMCEP’s psychological harm. Therefore, the dilemma that stigmatising shame as well as dissociative coping mechanisms may cause psychological harm requires a solution.

Participant PD4 states, “I deal with my guilt and shame by taking it to the cross basically. I know that might sound cliché but it’s the only way I can deal with it. I deal with it by talking, talking to my spiritual father..... I read my bible, I acknowledge what Christ has done for me, and that’s how I deal with it.”

So in this sense I believe participant PD4 is referring to the atoning grace of God. Atonement in its simplest sense is that God offers forgiveness for our transgressions based on Jesus dying and suffering for our transgressions and those of the whole world. Baker maintains the significance of the Cross- “proclaims the profound forgiveness and possibility of new life” (Baker 2006: 77).

Whilst this requires the acceptance of the Christian faith, I contend that doing so does not guarantee a Christian will not still experience shame. Although Christ removed the shame of my past actions, there are still times when I feel ashamed and embarrassed about my past. I reason that I
still feel ashamed of my past from time to time because where the bible says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Romans 8:8)”, this means that spiritually the shame is gone but physically I am still being transformed i.e. the shame is going.

Some Christian beliefs could heighten feelings of guilt and shame and even cause psychological harm if the forgiveness of sin based on the cross is not understood and accepted (Kierkegaard 2011: 176). In that context I needed to understand the concept of ‘faith’. For instance the principles of faith is that we believe before we see. This is a spiritual principle where as in the natural world or sciences ‘understanding’ is based on the evidence of what we observe. The idea of believing before we see is countercultural to human nature. This relates to scriptures such as “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7) and “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1).

I have witnessed this in my desistance journey by allowing God to minister into my life at times when it might make sense for me to engage my own ‘human’ solution. Although I had issues regarding trust, the fact that I had failed so many times using my own intellect compelled me to
‘try’ Gods solution. I learned that the power of the Spirit that is unseen was more powerful than physical or intellectual power.

This does not however remedy racial shaming, which I suggest, looks to forgiveness and the focus of who we are in Christ. In terms of forgiving others we should look to Matthew 6:14-15, Colossians 3:13 and Ephesians 4:31-32. In terms of focusing on our identity in Christ we can meditate on John 1:12, Jeremiah 1:5 and 1 Peter 2:9.

The Christian faith however may be deployed as a form of negative dissociation where the forgiveness from God is accepted with little recognition of the extent of the transgression or without taking any personal responsibility. Bonhoeffer (2006) calls this cheap grace. This is a grace lacking repentance, discipline and the cross. This raises the question, when the BMEP accepts Christ how can we distinguish the difference between the ‘genuine’ atoning grace of God and faith that is used as a form of dissociation, when dealing with the ‘emotions’ of guilt and shame?

I maintain the BMCEP must understand the gravity of the ‘sin’ that is forgiven, which relates to the extent of Christ’s suffering, the magnitude of the grace of God and the significance of Gods justice. In other words,
Gods grace says there is forgiveness for even the gravest of sins and Gods justice says that there has to be a punishment and a consequence for sins. Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection satisfy both claims.

Participant PD4 although being a Christian for some years, does not only deal with his “shame by taking it to the cross” but states, “testifying is not something I enjoy doing because of the feelings of guilt and shame.” By taking the shame to the cross implies that he recognises the atoning grace of God but the avoidance of testifying because of the feelings of shame implies the acceptance of this grace is limited or that he has a heightened concern about the ‘judgement’ of self and others. Therefore, there may be a dissociative element to his Christian faith in terms of his feelings of shame. This suggests the need for a deeper understanding of the atoning grace to deal with the shame he feels that is associated with his view of what others think of him.

Summary

Some black men, like myself have experienced an upbringing that included heavy chastisement, shaming and rage, which can become a generational cycle of the abused becoming the abusers. Shaming within the CJS is sometimes used as a ‘tool’ to deter offenders from committing crime but it might also cause re-traumatisation, intensify mental illness or
cause its onset.

Shame is an elusive concept that can be difficult to detect because it can present internally as worthlessness, self-loathing, or feelings of inadequacy or incompetence. Externally it might present as depression, withdrawal or anger against others or self. Self-directed anger or disgust could lead to patterns of self-harm and self-destructive behaviour. Additionally, suppressing feelings of shame might effect memory and cause us to ‘forget’ certain experiences [Appendix Two].

Shame based on an immoral past may be remedied by the theology of Gods grace that implies there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Racial shaming impacts on the person’s identity because it has nothing to do with a their immoral action and therefore it can’t be remedied by retributory action nor arguably the theology of grace. The remedy for racial shaming requires an understanding and acceptance of the self that is not inferior to others. An understanding of the history of the success of black people in the past, great civilisations and inventors will go some way to remedying black inferiority complex.

I suggested that Christianity could be a solution to the negative impact of shame but could also intensify its negative impact. For instance, the
Christian faith might increase the BMCEP’s moral compass, increasing their propensity towards self-condemnation and stigmatising shame. Therefore, it was proposed that an understanding of forgiveness and the grace of God would alleviate the pain of shame. Nevertheless, it is important that the BMCEP understands that grace is not a ‘ticket’ to continue to commit crimes. i.e. it is not a dissociative tool. To avoid dissociative forms of Christianity the BMCEP must understand the significance of God’s justice, the gravity of sin, which relates to the extent of Christ’s suffering and the magnitude of the grace of God.

It is also important to identify the way BMCEP’s cope with or avoid the pain of shame i.e. the form of defence mechanisms they may use.

The way that black male ex-prisoners who were not Christians in this study dealt with their shame was also complex. Ways of dealing with shame included making moral comparisons, i.e. “everyone makes mistakes” or that others have done worse yet maintain their honour. Other coping strategies were based on learning lessons from the past and blaming others such as parents for the way they were raised.

The act of ‘giving back’ or generativity is sometimes viewed as a form of shame management in criminology however in the Christian context,
‘giving back’ ought to be a ‘response’ to the grace of God i.e. a form of thanksgiving. However, on the surface they look the same and the actions may not be deliberate or conscious, making it difficult to detect the difference.
Chapter Eight – Reflection and Conclusion

Reflection
This study explored how the Christian faith impacts on the desistance of black male ex-prisoners. To my surprise, in my initial investigation of the literature I found the majority of studies exploring the impact of Christianity on desistance, recidivism and delinquency were inconclusive, and those demonstrating an inverse relationship were still unable to establish why or how this impact came about. This came as a surprise to me because I attribute my successful desistance in the main to my Christian transformation. Some of these studies cited that the reason they obtained inconclusive results was due to inconsistent measures of religiosity, minimal consideration of the type of behaviour the faith was intending to address, and little understanding of the therapeutic impact of Christianity on the desistance of black male prisoners and ex-prisoners.

I was the main participant in this auto-ethnographic investigation, which was supplemented by me interviewing fifteen other BMEP’s for the purpose of raising the validity of the study and for the purpose of comparison and analysis. My personal reflection of my Christian transformation and my desistance is evident throughout this study.

A major theme of this study was concerned with the ‘therapeutic’ nature
of Christianity on the process of desistance for BMCEP’s, which is an area of research that is under investigated. To my knowledge there is no other studies researching the impact of Christianity on black male desistance in the UK that is conducted by a Christian black male desister.

**Structural support for BMCEP’s**

A lot of the literature on desistance centres on ex-offenders overcoming the structural and environmental barriers to desistance. Generally, they identify housing, employability, family and social networks, drug and alcohol misuse etc. I suggest that specifically trained culturally relevant keyworkers or mentors who can support BMCEP’s to navigate support services and networks are required. In addition to external support structures it is agreed that BMCEP’s attitude, thinking and behaviour needs to be addressed to support desistance. Internal and external support structures assessments rarely ask the questions about the impact of being black. For instance, the BMCEP may find securing housing or employment more difficult based on their ethnicity and criminal record. Their ‘perception’ of the barriers will have an impact on their motivation and resilience. The support that BMCEP’s require will be informed by their perception and we can only know this if the question is asked and explored. This can then be included in a support plan and a draft template for the Black Church to use to support BMCEP’s is presented in
recommendation one in chapter nine. This will enable the Black Church to play a meaningful role in supporting BMCEP’s to navigate the unequal support structures and networks required to desist by identifying the appropriate resources and training to facilitate the necessary resilience and motivation. Existing Christian based services rarely assess the existing support that is in place or evaluate the BMCEP’s abilities or work with existing keyworkers, probation, youth offending services, drug intervention, housing, job centres etc, to ensure they are advocating on behalf of the BMCEP rather than duplicating services.

Additionally, the Black Church must be aware that the behaviour required to prevent a BMCEP from offending as they did in the past, is not the same as the behaviour required to enable them to desist.Whilst I suggest the BMCEP requires both, to be able to overcome the barriers to desist, this study focused mainly on the latter. Nevertheless, the Black Church might better support the BMCEP if they understand their offending history, what triggers cause their offending behaviour and the mitigating protective factors.

The BMCEP must realise their need for change, desires it and believes it is possible for secondary desistance to take place.
The need for BMCEP’s to be part of a pro-social support group has been identified as a desistance requirement. My own experience and the experience of many BMCEP’s is that church in general does not necessarily offer a safe place to share challenges and difficulties because our perception is that most people in church are unable to relate to our past experiences and understand our problems. I always ‘test’ a person before I feel safe to disclose things about myself. i.e. I might tell them a story about another person who committed a particular crime to judge their response before telling them about myself. As a practitioner I witness others testing me in the same way.

In addition to the problem of dealing with the obstacle and stigma of a criminal record BMCEP’s contend with institutionally racist structures, racial discrimination and unequal access to support services. I encourage the Black Church in this study to play a key role in supporting BMCEP’s however Beckford (2004: 33) maintains that the Black Church avoids conversations about racism which I suggest leads some BMCEP’s to feel the church has no relevance in their daily lives. Beckford suggests the reason why the Black Church avoids ‘raced’ conversations is based on them relegating black identity and the black experience under their Christian identity. I agree that Christian identity ought to be preeminent, however I advocate that black British churches should promote the
importance of justice and equality, and not to remain silent on the issue. Particularly as it affects people in the congregation and in their community. Therefore, racism and injustice should be spoken about more often in the pulpit, campaigned against in the community and the congregation should be made aware of racial issues so that they can empathise with those who suffer discrimination and the church can empower BMCEP’s to navigate racialised structures. Additionally, support for the BMCEP should include spaces where conversations about race can take place. I suggest safe spaces and fellowship communities of BMCEP’s are developed. In these forums BMCEP’s can share their concerns or celebrate successes. The few that I know in London are locally based and only operate monthly. Bringing Hope Birmingham and PLIAS Resettlement London successfully provide support to cater for BMCEP’s and their families, but support to empower them to overcome specific racialised barriers could provide a meaningful addition. I suggest a model of supporting BMCEP’s by providing training to develop the competence within the mainstream body of black led churches would be a positive way forward.

**Autonomy**

Successful desistance for BMCEP’s is more likely for those who have the ability to self-govern according to (Zehr 1995: 37). In other words, those
who are characterised as autonomous rationalists rather than passive recipients are more likely to desist (Trigg 1999). The implications for the church is the acceptance of Christianity is based on faith which some suggest is opposed to autonomy. Therefore, BMCEP’s contend with becoming increasingly autonomous whilst at the same time being progressively ‘passive’ recipients of Christ by faith. I believe this may be a factor why some Black Churches demonstrate passivity in relation to racial oppression and discrimination.

The idea of being ‘passive’ recipients of Christ or a ‘passive’ obedience to the will of God is one thing but they must not remain passive recipients of injustices. Accepting Christ by faith or being obedient to God’s will may be interpreted as ‘passive’ by some however the human will to accept Christ or to be obedient is an active exercise (Blake 2009: 203). I explained in this study that the Christian faith for me is not a passive exercise because when we become Christians we are entering into a battle and as such we are engaged in an active battle with the enemy. Therefore we need to understand the nature of the ‘battle’, who the enemy is, the weapons at our disposal and the autonomy we have to use them.

Another issue for some BMCEP’s with respect to Christian autonomy is trust. Living with a sense of distrust of everyone and everything as I have,
means even trusting God fully can be a challenge. However, as Christians we can’t be autonomous without trusting God because we are dependent on Gods grace and forgiveness.

In recommendation three of chapter nine I have presented a questionnaire to explore the BMCEP’s autonomy and particularly where their trust is placed in terms of faith in personal abilities and God. I contend that trusting in God does not reduce our autonomy but enhances it however paradoxically we need to relinquish our autonomy to God to obtain this enhanced autonomy. This is a piece of work the church needs to do with the BMCEP that will be on going. This will include understanding trust/faith and its orientation, understanding autonomy and the difference between trusting in self, others and God. This will also include understanding the relationship between faith and trusting in God. The guidance questions in recommendations three, chapter nine will help the Black Church to evaluate the needs of the BMCEP and provide the appropriate support.

**Resilience**

Resilience was another factor that BMCEP’s, the church and those supporting them need to understand. Resilience for BMCEP’s was defined as much more than coping with adversity. It also requires the
ability to resist the temptation of returning to the former way of life and being able to construct a new positive future. I presented coping, resisting and constructing as necessary for the resilience that is required to desist and suggested that the order is paramount (Titus 2002: 11). Where the Black Church might begin with scriptures for coping and resisting, I advocate the best starting point is to construct. The construction of a positive future goal or vision will support the coping and resisting process. This might include the use of scriptures for constructing purpose, vision and goals. For instance, Jeremiah 29:11, Proverbs 29:18 and Jeremiah 23:16 all state the importance of vision and goals that come from God.

Although the ideal starting point might be to ‘construct’ there are many BMCEP’s who struggle with the constructing process and it might be necessary to provide some support to help them to cope and resist, whilst supporting them to seek God for their God given purpose and vision (Dayton 2007: 78). My experience when I almost took my own life is a case in point, where I was given a scripture that I didn’t know was going to save my life (Chapter Five). Nevertheless, once I survived that ordeal my mind was on seeking God and constructing a future.

I argue that God is the creator and he has created each person for a
specific purpose. Therefore, we should be motivated to find out from God what our purpose is. Many churches have their programmes that relate to the purpose of the church and rightly encourage people in the congregation to take part. There is little guidance in the church when it comes to supporting people to identify their individual purpose. God revealed my future vision to me when I was in prison. It didn’t just come to me but I had to seek God through prayer, prayerfully reflecting on my past and present and hearing from God. However, it wasn’t completely clear initially but eventually it started to become clearer. It was based on my passion for helping those in need, my personal experience and God given ‘competence’. These guided me towards my God given purpose and mission in life. This informs me that the black-led church needs to develop ways of coaching BMCEP’s through this process of identifying their purpose. Therefore, I have developed a tool to support the Black Church to coach BMCEP towards identifying their mission for God (Titus’ 2004). This is set out as recommendation four which explores the strengths and areas for development for the BMCEP in terms of coping, resisting and constructing. The results of this can feed into a support plan for the BMCEP.

**Motivation**

I proposed that motivation was the main driving force behind resilience to
enable the BMCEP’s to desist and the source of the ‘drive’ required to sustain motivation can be identified in the motive. A strong motive is directed towards a purpose or goal where as a weak motive is directed towards the avoidance of a ‘thing’, therefore it relates to the ‘constructing’ element of resilience. For instance, a BMCEP who says the reason they will not commit a crime again is because they don’t want to return to prison is a weak motive on its own. Therefore, it is the ‘purpose’ that is constructed and the motive that provides the motivation to work towards a goal. This highlights the importance for the Black Church to develop ways to help BMCEP’s to construct their purpose. It must be noted that the motivation towards a goal is a striving towards improving competence where as the motivation to avoid the ‘thing’ is a striving towards the avoidance of incompetence. The ‘motivation towards’ process provides the energy to ‘cope’ in adversity and ‘resist’ temptations on the journey of desistance towards the purpose and mission. Therefore, successful desistance for the BMCEP is not a focus on desistance but a focus on a goal that requires desistance to achieve it. I suggest it is the role of the Black Church to instil in the BMCEP the importance of a purpose and to support the development of their God ordained purpose to promote what I describe as an enhance level of resilience because it’s power and source comes from God.
Additionally, the BMCEP needs a degree of self-determination to desist under pressure and to overcome covert racial inequalities. I was able to do so by developing competence, relational connectedness and autonomy.

Recommendation five in the next chapter provides some guidelines for exploring the BMCEP’s motive, motivation, motivational direction and the necessary competences required to achieve their goals. This will enable the Black Church to develop an appropriate motivational support plan for the BMCEP.

As motivation is tied to our faith and expectation, managing the expectations of BMCEP’s is an important exercise. If expectations are not met the chances of re-offending increase. For instance those released from prison may expect their Christian faith to give them an advantage in getting a job, building relationships, resisting the temptation to offend etc. Learning for the BMCEP about what to expect in terms of ‘the battle’ i.e. as a Christian they need to recognise there will be opposition from the enemy on route to our God ordained goals. Some questions to understand the BMCEP’s expectations are offered in recommendation six in chapter nine that can be utilised by the Black Church.
Trauma and Imprisonment

The Black Church should recognise that imprisonment can have a negative impact on the resilience and emotional wellbeing of BMCEP’s, which can hinder their desistance. Black people in prison are more likely to experience estrangement from their family, friends and the community, suffer breakdown of relationships, loss of purpose and hope and a loss of autonomy than other ethnic groups.

Survivors of imprisonment trauma may experience a number of symptoms. These include ‘emotional constriction’ which is a lack of emotional expression, lack of emotional regulation, depression, lack of motivation, psychosomatic reactions, dissociative states, helplessness, lack of trust, hopelessness, hyper-vigilance, hyper-activity, anger, sadness, fear and the use of negative coping methods such as excessive drinking and drug taking.

In the process of exploring the degree of trauma suffered, the church ought to consider that BMCEP’s may carry traumatic experiences from the past, which the trauma of imprisonment may aggravate. The defence mechanisms BMCEP’s tend to use to cope with these past traumatic secrets are suppression and repression. People with the ‘resilience’ to cope in this way are more likely to suffer mental and physical illness. I
propose that confessing traumatic secrets with a trusted person might improve personal wellbeing. Nevertheless, many BMCEP’s like me find the idea of trusting someone with these secrets challenging. Anyone engaging in this ‘confessional work’ with BMCEP’s must do so with caution, as these traumatic conversations can lead to re-traumatisation.

The guidance for the trained professional working with the BMCEP is to assist them to reinterpret the traumatic event so that they can find ‘meaning’ in it, for healing to take place (See Recommendation Seven).

**Identity**

Christianity could support the creation of a new positive identity that will enable the BMCEP to reinterpret their past, present and future Kerley and Copes (2008: 2) thus encouraging successful desistance. A Christian commitment can support the development of a positive identity by enhancing self-worth, hope, purpose, and meaning in life (Liebling et al 2011: 58). It can also protect against depression, encourages optimism and self-esteem (Poll and Smith 2003: 129), and promotes, intimacy, generativity, and integrity (Erikson 1950). On the other hand, particular Christian theology has the potential to cause emotional and psychological harm, and the breakdown of personal identity, which was something I experienced when I became a Christian in prison and almost took my
own life. Nevertheless, it was the Christian faith that also prevented me from doing so.

Therefore, the Black Church should recognise that the ‘exchange’ of old identity for the new identity might heighten the BMCEP’s moral compass when they encounter Christ, resulting in them casting a self-condemnatory eye on their past wrong-doings. Perceiving they have been judged harshly by God, they might judge themselves as deserving of punishment, unworthy and worthless causing them to feel ashamed of their past (Molnar 2007: 396).

BMCEP’s may use forms of dissociation to cope, which might lead to memory loss, demotivation, guilt reactions and loss of parts of their self-identity that changes their personality (Blackman 2004: 76). I will explain later in this chapter that the Christian remedy requires the use of the ‘stages of forgiveness’ and an understanding of grace.

Identity formation for BMCEP’s may be more difficult and problematic than their white counterparts due to the negative stereotypes, racial oppression and the lack of black imagery in the bible (Browning 2008: 94). Therefore, it requires the integration of at least three forms of identity. These include personal identity, Christian identity and racial
identity (Chestang 1984). Nevertheless, identity is much more complex and multifaceted where the answers to the question ‘who am I’ might include father, brother, graduate, friend, driver, teacher etc. However, we can’t really know ‘who we are’ without knowing our purpose (Cash 2011: 17-18), which is determined by God. I recommend the Black Church explore the BMCEP’s roles and identity using the pro-forma set out in recommendation eight in chapter nine.

**Shame**

Naming and shaming practises have been used in the CJS to deter offenders from crime for some time. The harmful consequences however have been either ignored or justified as deserving for those defined as reprobate. Naming and shaming has not always delivered the intended outcomes because shaming might not only deter people from offending but additionally cause mental illness, self-destructive and/or criminal behaviour.

BMCEP’s need to be able to make sense of their shameful past but in addition to the feelings of shame based on their past crimes or their ‘judgemental’ theology they might also feel shame based on their ethnicity. The negative racialised media images of black men may not

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9 In Browning (2008: 94)
only cause black communities to turn against each other but BMCEP’s may internalise these negative images of themselves resulting in black self-hatred and stigmatising shame. Sometimes these feelings are suppressed, repressed or dissociated and may lead to self-loathing, self-directed anger, self-harming and unpredictable self-destructive behaviour.

Shame is linked to our emotions and identity and promotes avoidant behaviour such as withdrawal, inward anger and blaming others (Wong and Tsai 2007: 210-11). I have presented an adaptation of Webster et al (2002) ideas of orientations to explore the extent to which the BMCEP’s experience might be defined as shame. This does not only help to identify whether the BMCEP is experiencing shame, but helps to pinpoint how the shame is impacting on the BMCEP to find a remedy for that particular orientation. I have developed an assessment, which is presented as recommendation nine in the next chapter. It begins with general areas of shame, and then it explores shame based on the orientation of the transgression; the orientation of self and others; and the internal or external orientation (See Appendix Three).

The orientation of the transgression focuses on whether the BMCEP attributes their wrongdoing to their stable state or their transient state. The stable state is where the BMCEP perceives they have no control over
their actions, their environment and lack the competence to do any better. The BMCEP will experience shame in this state. When the transgression is attributed to the transient state, where the BMCEP perceives he had a choice but chose to transgress, then they will not experience shame.

The orientation of self and others distinguishes whether their negative self-evaluation is based on the judgement of others or themself. When the BMCEP’s negative evaluation of self is based on the judgement by others they will experience shame. When their negative evaluation of self is based on their own judgement they will not experience shame.

External and internal orientation relates to standards we set ourselves internally and standards set externally by others or the environment. External orientation is associated with shame and is a fear of exposing our defects to others. Internal orientation is not associated with shame and is the fear of not living up to our own standards.

Exploring the BMCEP’s shame state using these ‘orientations’ could provide the range and the depth of information required to gain invaluable insights. In each of these orientations that are not associated with shame, the BMCEP will likely experience guilt. Guilt is not tied to our identity in the way that shame is and therefore it is ‘easier’ to remedy.
Becoming a Christian has the potential of addressing a BMCEP’s feelings of shame as well as the associated emotions. The concept of Christian forgiveness can be a remedy for shame that must be understood and accepted.

I proposed the seven stages of forgiveness model adapted from Karl’s (2009) six-stage model, for BMCEP’s, which are as follows

1. The BMCEP should understand that he has been forgiven by God
2. The BMCEP should be willing to forgive others
3. The BMCEP should be prepared to forgive himself
4. The BMCEP should understand that the power to forgive comes from God
5. The BMCEP should understand when we forgive it must be specific and we must mark the specific time with a form of ritual
6. The BMCEP should recognise that understanding the depth of knowing God’s forgiveness is an ongoing process.
7. The BMCEP should understand forgiving others is an ongoing process.

This ongoing process relates to the identity development process where the forgiveness for salvation, a relationship with God and our Christian
transformation are dependent on the grace of God. The idea of the grace of God in some interpretations however has enabled some people to continue committing crimes feeling they can just arbitrarily ask for forgiveness.

Therefore, the church must teach the BMCEP to recognise that the grace of God is much more than comprehending the extent to which God forgives but also understanding the magnitude of sin in the eyes of God. Jesus’s suffering and death on the cross represents the extent of sin.

It was proposed that ‘reformed’ offenders are characterised by their tendency to want to give back. This is referred to as generativity and described as a form of shame management. In this way, the BMEP attempts to make sense of their criminal past by putting their shameful past to good use. This form of shame management operates for Christians as well as non-Christians. The BMCEP on the other hand, who has made a Christian commitment and where their guilt and shame is addressed by the grace of God, may have a similar response of ‘giving back’. Although both acts of giving back may look the same, the motives are different. Whilst the first is described as ‘shame management’ in the second instance the shame is dealt with by the grace of God and the act of giving back in that case is thanksgiving, or appreciation for the forgiveness and
Shame can destroy black men and boy’s dignity, honour, reputation and masculinity, which demonstrated the importance of tackling shame for BMCEP’s.

**Black Masculinity**

Forms of masculine self-expression can act as coping strategies for black men with low self-esteem, susceptibility to experiencing hopelessness and depression, and for those with limited opportunities for self-actualisation due to unequal treatment (White and Cone 1999: 94). Black men who are unable to realise their masculinities through legitimate means may commit crimes as a consequence (Glynn 2014: 4). Therefore, facilitating BMCEP’s masculine expressions is likely to improve their desistance chances and wellbeing.

I argue that most churches are lacking in their ability to address the issue of masculine expressions for BMCEP’s to desist and in some cases Christian leaders have rejected traditional masculinities in favour of effeminate forms of Christianity (Toswell 2008: 6-7).

I have observed four ideas of masculinity for black men that could
provide some guidance for the church in their quest to support BMCEP’s.

The first is Glynn’s (2014: 107) model of masculinities for black male desistance, the second is Jackson’s (2006: 134-135) black masculine positions model, the third is Hooks (2004) healthy psychological development for black men and the fourth is Moore and Gillette’s (2013) archetypes model of masculinity. I can relate all four to my journey of desistance.

Glynn’s model of masculinities for black male desistance presented masculine transitions that take place for black men in the community, in prison and returning back to the community. He proposed six masculine forms including subordinated masculinity, hyper-masculinity, prison masculinity, confused masculinity, grounded masculinity and positive masculinity. Relating this model to my own desistance I realised that I expressed each of these masculinities but not always in the order outlined. Additionally, it was not easy for me to differentiate the prison code from the code of the streets from my experience. For instance, gang affiliation and criminality tend to cross the boundaries between prison and community with particular rules that apply whether in or out of prison. Therefore, prison masculinity can be expressed on the street and hyper-masculinity in prison. Additionally, even as a Christian in prison,
expressing grounded forms of masculinity; I also expressed prison, hyper
and confused masculinities simultaneously. Therefore, this model can be
adapted and ‘scaled’ in order for the church to identify the BMCEP’s
masculine positionality, so that targeted interventions to address
masculine expressions can be conducted. A model such as this however,
does not overtly discuss black male masculine relationships in particular
contexts. For instance, masculine expressions in certain relationships may
differ and the BMCEP may or may not be competent at ‘switching’ from
one to another. Therefore, a discussion to explore masculine expressions
within family, education, work, prison, church etc could be explored
within the masculine transitions outlined by Glynn.

Jackson presented five masculine constructs for black men, which
included the struggle, the community, the achievement, the independence
and the recognition. For BMCEP’s the struggle might include racial
discrimination, oppression, dealing with a criminal record etc. The
community will include family, friends, church, neighbours, others we
need support from, those we can support and those we might have
harmed. The achievement includes the positive choices made, ability to
overcome challenges, motivation to change, what you hope to achieve in
the future and the support you will need to get there. Therefore,
achievement is about personal and collective goals. Independence relates
to BMCEP’s self-efficacy i.e. the autonomy and agency one feels they have over their life. Independence also relates to symbiosis, which is the attachment one has with their culture, personal history and particular circumstances. Recognition requires that ‘others’ recognise our authentic self and offer their permission to proceed with a particular behaviour. The understanding of ‘other’ is significant because for a gang member, ‘other’ might be others in the gang. Therefore, the behaviour to gain acceptance from the gang would differ from the behaviour required to gain acceptance from ‘mainstream’ society. It is important to understand whom a BMCEP aspires to gain recognition from and what they would like to be recognised for.

According to Hooks (2004: 110-130) The enduring racial oppression and subordination that many BMEP’s experience may affect their psychological health and identity development negatively impacting on their ability to become authors of their own lives, limiting their choices and increasing their propensity to engage in criminality. Therefore, masculine expressions should not only be about coping with adversity but an expression of their ‘healthy’ personal identity. Masculine expressions for healthy psychological and identity development should consider improving self-esteem (a warm regard for self), self-awareness (knowing our personal experiences and sharing it), boundaries (self-protecting yet
able to connect with others), interdependence (identifying needs and wants of self and others), and moderation (experiencing and expressing oneself moderately). BMEP’s and BMCEP’s who work on these abilities are more likely to improve their wellbeing and desistance.

Moore and Gillette (2013: 6) suggest the growth towards mature masculinity is a series of nurturing and healing wounds from past experiences and trauma. Their model presents four mature adult masculinities or archetypes that we should aspire towards by addressing presentations of child masculinities and shadow or dysfunctional characteristics (Appendix One).

I have drafted tools for Black Churches to evaluate masculine expressions based on Glynn’s and Jacksons models in recommendation twelve in Chapter Nine. I will work on templates to evaluate masculinities further based on Hooks, and Moore and Gillette’s models on conclusion of this study.

**Black Liberation Theology**

Before I conducted this study I didn’t intend to include the idea of black liberation theology because I didn’t consider my theology as black liberationist and the church I attended was led by a white pastor, even
though the majority of the congregation were black.

As this was a study of black men who are Christians and ex-prisoners I explored black liberation theology and concluded that my theological position and personal experience related significantly with black liberation theology. This led me to conclude that any work with BMCEP’s must include an understanding and acceptance of particular black liberation theological principles. Nonetheless, I emphasised that there are significant weaknesses in elements of black liberation theology that should be understood and avoided.

The focus of black theology should not be based on racism and oppression alone because if they were eliminated there would be no need for the theology based on the history and culture of black people.

Whilst the church supports equality, social injustice and issues of racial discrimination it must not place more weight on these issues than the power of the gospel to set the captives free. The Black Church needs to be balanced in their focus between salvation and social justice in the way that Jesus was.

The individuals and churches involved in work supporting BMCEP’s
ought to accept a theology of black liberation that connects the gospel of Jesus to their experience of oppression as black people and their struggle for justice and equality.

Due to the increasingly covert nature of racial discrimination in the UK, which more often than not goes unspoken, the Black Church must acknowledge this takes place and be prepared to address it. They should create gateways for these experiences to be spoken about in a safe place, so they can understand what they experience is real.

Relating the black struggle for freedom and equality with the Christian faith gives the gospel real power in my everyday life. Christ has set me free physically, psychologically and spiritually.

Our black theology should not be created out of our negative reaction to white people; rather it should be a positive reaction to the rich history and culture of black people. Therefore black people should gain the knowledge of their rich cultural history. I believe this should become part of the present Black Church culture and not just at black history month.

Black Christians must remember that our freedom does not come from the white community but from God.
Conclusion

I found that most of the factors that were identified as required for desistance success also had the potential for desistance failure. This is rarely considered in Christian research and practice for the desistance of BMCEP’s. When research and practice in this field does not consider their potential negative impact it is not surprising that the results of such studies deliver inconsistent outcomes. This has an impact for practise, particularly for the Black Church. The Black Church when working with BMCEP’s must consider the potential negative outcomes that can arise from the factors outlined for successful desistance. These are as follows...

Christian faith – The Black Church must consider all the factors below that will also influence their theology and that of the BMCEP when they accept the Christian faith. Where the concept of Gods grace and forgiveness are not understood correctly and accepted, the encounter with God can accentuate the BMCEP’s moral compass and feelings of shame of past wrong doings, thus causing emotional distress. The BMCEP has to know that as Christians they have direct access to God and the pastors role is to point them in the right direction and support their relationship with God.
The concept of the process of forgiveness must be understood, where they have accepted the forgiveness from God but also forgive others and themselves. This may be an on going process. The BMCEP must be offered the opportunity to work through experiences of discrimination, given the tools to work through the emotions of these experiences and to be able to forgive and not maintain negativity towards white people. BMCEP’s must be empowered by their positive rich black heritage.

Resilience – The Christian faith can provide resilience required for BMCEP’s to desist by increasing the ability to ‘cope’ (Psalm 31:23-24; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 6:10-14 and Proverbs 3:5-6) to ‘resist’ (2 Corinthians 4:8-9; Joshua 1:9 and Romans 8:28-30) and to ‘construct’ a positive future with purpose (Proverbs 19:21 and Hebrews 6:17). The sense of purpose that the Christian faith offers BMCEP’s also provides hope that does not only enhance resilience but also motivates the BMCEP towards achieving their God ordained purpose and goals.

When the Christian faith is accepted and understood theologically incorrectly in my view, it can cause forms of mental and emotional distress and even changes in personality. For instance, the Christian faith should not be employed as a form of defence mechanism to suppress or
repress emotions as a coping strategy. This can be avoided by focusing on the process of forgiveness and an increasing understanding of the grace of God. A sign that the Christian faith might be used as a psychological defence mechanism is when real personal emotions are denied and replaced by a bible scripture.

Motivation – When motivation is just viewed from the surface and the source and direction are not recognised i.e. where the motive is merely the avoidance of imprisonment rather than a purpose that is aligned with the purpose of God, then what may appear to be a strong motivation can quickly turn to demotivation when faced with adversity, in the absence of an anchor which is the purpose of God. Therefore, the Black Church must encourage the self-determination of BMCEP by finding ways for them to develop the competence to achieve their purpose and connecting then with the people who can support them.

Autonomy – As a Christian, if autonomy is based on personal competence and this becomes the BMCEP’s usual mode of operation, it may oppose the idea of faith where trust must shift from self to another (God). The Black Church must ‘teach’ the BMCEP to understand that trusting in God is an enhanced level of autonomy. This might mean paradoxically that the God given purpose is not based on the BMCEP’s
competence that provides ‘human autonomy’ but based on autonomy that comes from God and that operates out of incompetence or our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Christian identity – Christian identity can diminish the perception of the importance of Black identity. Christian identity can somehow ‘trump’ black identity to the extent that black Christians avoid conversations about racial discrimination and often deny it exists. Whilst I believe Christian identity should have more significance than black identity, it is crucial that black identity is given credence. Additionally, it was found that BMCEP’s tend to suppress experiences of racism, which seems to affect their memory of the experience/s.

Black identities – Some black people hearing negative messages about other black people, particularly in the media, as well as personally experiencing racial oppression they may feel ashamed of their ‘blackness’ but internalise these feelings of shame, causing them to experience black self-hatred. Black people may also suppress or repress the pain of racial oppression and may suffer mental distress as a consequence. I suggest BMCEP’s are made aware of their rich positive black history and for black success stories to be told.
Masculine expressions – It was noted that black men who struggle to express their masculinities in positive ways are likely to express themselves in hyper-masculine ways, that renders them more likely to offend. Masculinity is associated with the idea of honour and dignity for BMCEP’s therefore what they identify as honourable and dignified as a man will be tied to their masculine identity. It was also suggested that the development of black masculinity requires an understanding of the struggle, a position in the community, the need for achievement, the ability to be independence and to be recognised for their achievements. Black masculine development also required self-esteem (a warm regard for self), self-awareness (knowing our personal experience and sharing it), boundaries (self-protecting yet able to connect with others), interdependence (identifying needs and wants of self and others), and moderation (experiencing and expressing oneself moderately).

Christian praxis is not necessarily expressed in masculine forms in my view. Women may find it easier than men to love Jesus and enter into a relationship with the man Jesus, particularly if the mans relationship with his earthly father was dysfunctional. Christianity might be described as more fluid and flexible than religions such as Islam or Rastafarianism where traditions and rituals are arguably clearer and practical. Men respond to action and ritual, as it conveys commitment. Therefore, the
Black Church should ritualise the idea of black men expressing their faith.

Black theology – Elements of the black theology of liberation should be adopted that recognises the black male struggle, empowers black people to navigate unequal racial structures, speaks out on the subject of racism, acknowledges and promotes the rich black cultural history and balances salvation with social justice.

Additionally, I suggest a theology that recognises and accepts the complete work of Christ that no longer requires an earthly mediator between the believer and God, as was the Old Testament pattern. Christ has restored the relationship between God and man by virtue of the Cross-. Therefore the role of the priest today is to support the development of that relationship between man and God.

I have established that structural support; autonomy, resilience, motivation, trauma, identity (black, Christian and personal), black masculinity, guilt and shame as well as the expression of positive Black Theology are factors that churches supporting BMCEP’s should consider in their work. The recommendations in Chapter Nine outline how this might take place based on some of the theories discussed and provides
guidelines from which resources can be developed.

Chapter Nine – Recommendations

This final chapter sets out recommendations based on the findings in this study. It consists of general guidelines from which tools can be developed to enable Black Churches to support the desistance of BMCEP’s. The tools once developed will require training for their effective use. Some of the details for using the tools are minimised until they are fully developed and piloted.

It must also be noted that many ex-prisoners have been ‘assessed’ so many times that they may not engage in a process that feels like they are being clinically assessed. Therefore, the training to use the tools will demonstrate how they can be used to facilitate discussions and conversations to gather information to support BMCEP’s.

Recommendation One: Identifying the structural support requirements and existing support networks

This is an example of a template that the church might use in the initial engagement with the BMCEP. The purpose of this tool is to identify existing support and identify gaps so that a support plan can be developed.
to assist the BMCEP. The gaps or issues identified might be described as barriers to desistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support needs</th>
<th>How does the participant view the barriers due to their race and criminal record? (1 – 10)</th>
<th>Details of need Actions to address them Support required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations and expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment or Work Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and living arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and alcohol misuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support and networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude, behaviour and self-control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental and physical health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support and debt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation or Youth Offending service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith experience (past and present)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills/independent living</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was accepting the Christian faith an active or passive exercise for you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your Christian walk so far been an active or passive exercise for you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Recommendation Two: Identifying triggers to offending behaviour

To be able to conduct this the Black Church will need access the BMCEP’s offending history. This exercise must be conducted very sensitively as it can be a very painful, emotional and shameful experience for the BMCEP. You will need to demonstrate to the BMCEP how this process will benefit them and how the information will assist you to support them and additionally it will act as an assessment of risk for the Black Church. To gain this information either from probation, youth offending services or the court the BMCEP will need to agree to disclose this to the church in writing. Once this information is obtained a discussion to agree the triggers and how to mitigate this risk can take place with the BMCEP. Training is required to conduct this to understand the sensitivities and the emotional harm that can be caused if not conducted correctly. Additionally the engagement with the church can take into account this risk. If a conversation with the probation officer or youth offending officer is possible they can also tell you about the BMCEP’s offending behaviour triggers. Once the triggers are established you will agree a support plan.

Recommendation Three: Identify and Assess Autonomy and Faith
It was stated in this study that autonomy was important for desistance yet faith entails trusting in ‘another’, which arguably opposes the idea of autonomy. I maintained that trusting in God is the ultimate autonomous position because the creator understands the purpose of its creation better than the created being. Therefore, it is important to identify the BMCEP’s personal autonomy as well as their standing in terms of their faith in God as well as themselves. This will enable the Black Church to recognise the degree of alignment between the BMCEP’s dependence on self and dependence on God/faith (Astley and Francis 1994). The two assessments below are a work in progress that are not intended as ‘clinical’ instruments but tools to facilitate discussion and understanding of the BMCEP’s faith.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomy Statement</th>
<th>Score and details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have the ability to set the goals that I think are most appropriate to meet my needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the freedom to choose the tasks that I think will make the most difference to my goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the ability to schedule what is required of me to do, as I see fit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the freedom to complete goals/tasks in the manner that I believe is best.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to choose those around me to help me to complete my goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am clear about my future and have the ability and resources to achieve my objectives

It is important that my personal goals are endorsed by God

It is important that my personal goals are given to me by God

How much do you trust others?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith Statements</th>
<th>Faith in my abilities and those in my network</th>
<th>Faith in God Scores and details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My faith helps me to set the goals that I think are most appropriate to meet my needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My faith empowers me to do the things I love to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My faith compels me to do the things I don’t want to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to apply my faith to political and social issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My faith fills me with meaning and purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I devote time to reading and studying the Bible

I have a real sense that God is guiding me

I like to worship and pray with others

I talk with other people about my faith

Once this is completed an autonomy and faith support plan can be developed for the BMCEP.

**Recommendation Four: Evaluate the Components of BMCEP’s Resilience**

Resilience was presented as having three main components. These were coping with adversity, resisting temptation and constructing a new positive future. A tool to collect information in relation to these elements would look something like this.

**Coping with adversity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>General responses</th>
<th>Response based on race and dealing with a criminal record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify experiences where they have struggled to cope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Find out what strategies they have used to cope (if they struggle with this provide a list of positive coping strategies they can choose from)

Discuss negative coping strategies to see if they have engaged in any, i.e. drinking and drug taking

Do you have anyone you can speak to about your problems?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>General responses</th>
<th>Response based on race and dealing with a criminal record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find out what their main temptations are that might negatively affect them achieving their goal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can work with ‘triggers’ and ask how they intend to avoid or deal with these issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the consequences that concern you the most if you were unable to resist temptations?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Constructing the positive future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>General responses</th>
<th>Response based on race and dealing with a criminal record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your future goal?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the time scale?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify sub goals with time scales?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out how they will feel and what they will do once they have achieved their goal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out how they will feel and what they will do if they do not achieve their goal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where the future goal is not clear facilitate a conversation to discuss interests and experiences when they remember feeling happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct abilities, passions and values that will help in identifying possible goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses would be used to construct a resilience support plan for the
BMCEP.

**Recommendation Five: Identify BMCEP’s Motivation and Motive**

I proposed that motivation is the driving force behind resilience and the source of that drive can be found in the motive or the ‘why’?

Based on this theory from the study a tool to identify the BMCEP’s motivation or motive might look like this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation/Motive</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>With reference to yourself and those closes to you</th>
<th>With reference to your faith (God)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Give three reasons why you need to change</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify weather these reasons are motivations towards a goal or avoidance motivations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coach the BMCEP to understand the importance of ‘towards’ motivations and work with them to word the motivations in a towards a goal style.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consider the competences required to achieve the goal and develop a plan to develop competence where necessary.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the goals do not relate to their Christian faith or Christian mission, repeat the process by asking reasons why they need to change based on their faith, and develop some missional goals.

The responses would feed into a motivation support plan for the BMCEP.

**Recommendation Six: Managing Expectations**

In addition to motivations, the BMCEP’s expectations need to be managed. The following questions can help to explore these expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on your Christian faith, how do you expect your life to be in three years time? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will it mean for you and your faith if you didn’t achieve this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your view of suffering now that you have become a Christian?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has your responsibility changed since you became a Christian?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will you feel and what would you do if you are treated badly or unfairly in the church?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A support plan will be developed to manage the BMCEP’s expectations from the responses.

**Recommendation Seven: Exploring BMCEP’s Traumatic Experiences**

Addressing the issue of trauma is another area to explore with BMCEP’s and someone who is trained to understand the dangers of re-traumatisation should conduct this. A template for exploring this might include the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe one or two experiences that you would describe as traumatic from your past.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel at the time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel now talking about it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask if they have suffered – relationship breakdowns, loss of purpose, depression, lack of motivation, hopelessness, lack of trust, anger and sadness. If yes, explore the circumstances surrounding that. Describe how God can make all things work together for the good of those who love him, according to his purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they have a person they can trust to share their problems with?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have they ever felt like taking their own life or self-harming?

The responses would provide the information to establish a support plan for the BMCEP. Take advice from a trauma specialist to implement safeguards before using this.

**Recommendation Eight: Explore BMCEP’s Roles and Identities**

The concept of identity is multifaceted and somewhat complex however for the purpose of this study I have focused on personal identity, Christian identity and black identity. The answers the BMCEP provides for these questions below will give some indication to how they perceive their personal identity, Christian identity and black identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions should first explore their various roles and the importance for them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In each of these roles explore if they feel they have the resources to fulfil that role, explore their main challenges within that role, in what way their Christian faith will help or hinder them from fulfilling that role and how their identity as a black man can help or hinder them in each role.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A proforma will be developed to identify identity imbalances that will be used to create the action plan.

**Recommendation Nine: Identifying BMCEP’s Guilt and Shame Orientations**

The concepts of guilt and shame are central to the idea of the rehabilitation of offenders as well as Christian theology, however both concepts may sometimes oppose one another. For instance, shaming is used as a form of punishment to reduce re-offending where as the bible most times contends with shame and provides a way of deal with it through forgiveness. Nevertheless, the engagement with the Christian faith might increase the BMCEP’s moral compass, leading to self-condemnation. Therefore, there is much to explore for the BMCEP regarding the impact of guilt and shame and below are a few guidelines (Appendix Three).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever think about the things you have done in the past? What do you think and how do you feel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you felt ashamed of your past?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you view yourself as good?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you feel angry with yourself based on what you did in the past?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you felt you had to withdraw from others to cope with your emotions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways did you cope with imprisonment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever felt ashamed of being black?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever felt inferior based on your ethnicity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Shame Orientations**

(Transgression - Self and Others – Internal/External)

(Transgression)

I had very little choice but to commit the crimes I did based on my circumstances
The crimes I committed were based on my own choice and there were no circumstances forcing me to make those choices

I have no concerns about how others will judge me (based on what I have done or who I am (black man)

I often judge myself harshly, based on my past actions or who I am

I fear other people will think my past will stop me from achieving my goals

I fear my past will stop me from achieving my goals

The responses will be explored to develop a support plan to assist the BMCEP with their guilt and shame orientations

**Recommendation Ten: Teach BMEP’s the Process of Forgiveness**

The BMCEP’s understanding and engagement with the concept of forgiveness can help them to deal with guilt and shame as well as other forms of internalised suppressions, repressions and acts of self-
condemnation. Within the Christian tradition the statements/questions for assessing the BMCEP’s position in relation to forgiveness might look something like this…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forgiveness Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you feel completely forgiven for everything you have done by God?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you forgiven all those who have wronged you in the past?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have you forgiven yourself for all that you have done in the past?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you explain how we gain the power to forgive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you make a list of all the people you have forgiven for doing you wrong and all those you have yet to forgive? Ritualise the process i.e. burning papers containing those people’s names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you think receiving Gods forgiveness is an on going process? Explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you think forgiving others is an on going process? Explain (Karl 2009).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A programme of support to address issues of forgiveness would be created based on the BMCEP’s responses.
Recommendation Eleven: Establish the BMCEP’s Understanding of the Magnitude of sin

When we understand the extent of Gods forgiveness, there is a danger that wrongdoings may be committed with the understanding they will be forgiven anyway, if the magnitude and consequences of sin is not realised. Therefore, the question, how serious do you consider sin to be should be asked? Ask them to explain their response to gain further insight about their understanding of sin.

Recommendation Twelve: Black Masculine Expressions

This evaluation will enable the church to assess the BMCEP’s masculine proclivities based on black male masculinity models. In these evaluations we are assuming masculinities are expressed in nuanced ways. For instance, BMCEP’s masculinities are not necessarily limited to their environment. Although I have discussed a number of masculinity models in this study I have selected two of the four models that I can relate with personally, and drafted tools that Black Churches might use to identify BMCEP’s masculine strengths and weaknesses. The tools below relate to black masculine models proposed by Glynn (2014) and Jackson (2006). Additionally, I have discussed Hooks model of psychological development for black men and Moore and Gillette’s (2013) archetypes
model of masculinity that I will develop on the conclusion of this study as the limitations of this study does not allow me to do it justice here (Appendix One).

The first masculine expressions assessment tool is based on Glyn (2014). An initial discussion to explain the various forms of masculinities should take place with the BMCEP to understand what they mean. Each question under a particular masculine expression might contain a follow up question that asks ‘to what extent their Christian faith influences this expression and in what way.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine expressions</th>
<th>Description of masculine expressions</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subordinated masculinities</td>
<td>Where you feel your masculine expressions are limited by other people or the environment</td>
<td>Can you describe a time when your masculine expression has been limited?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyper-masculinities</td>
<td>Where you express your masculinity in ways to oppose those limits – ‘aggressively’. This might include ways to gain respect from others.</td>
<td>Can you describe a time when you had to express your masculinity aggressively?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison masculinities</td>
<td>Where you have expressed forms of masculinities that are conducive to the prison environment. This might be to gain or maintain respect, or to keep yourself safe, or to feel good that you are able to impose yourself over others</td>
<td>Can you describe a time when you expressed your masculinity in prison to gain respect, keep yourself safe or establish your status?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused masculinities</td>
<td>Where you are in the process of considering positive change and turning your life around. This may be when you are in prison or in the community and trying to maintain respect and self-confidence whilst finding new positive ways to be. This may be a time when the new and old self contend</td>
<td>Can you describe a time when you reflected on change and had to battle mentally or emotionally with how you would maintain your self-confidence and status if you changed for the better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded masculinities</td>
<td>Where you are beginning to work through your ‘new self’. This may be a self that becomes increasingly confident with and in themselves.</td>
<td>Can you describe a time when you went through the process of change? What were the benefits and challenges you faced regarding your black masculinity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive masculinities</td>
<td>When you become more confident of who you are and have a purpose and meaning for your life.</td>
<td>Can you describe a time when you felt confident about your future and your black masculinity as a BMCEP? How clear are you about your purpose and meaning for life? Can you describe your journey of coming to realise your purpose?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering my argument that these masculine expressions are not necessarily a linear process and the positive masculine position might be interrupted or influenced by other masculine positions there are some further questions that could be asked to support the BMCEP. Therefore, the follow up question are as follows
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Black Masculine Expressions Follow Up Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would they feel if their positive masculinity was challenged or limited by another person or their environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would they feel if others who would previously ‘know their place’ disrespected them? How would they deal with this situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you feel if you failed to resist the temptation to do something you used to do in the past?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jackson (2006) maintains there are five constructs appearing in the literature on black masculine positions. These include the struggle, the community, their achievement, their independence and recognition.

The struggle can mean different things to different people however in this context we are talking about the black male struggle in whatever way the BMCEP interprets it.

The Struggle

<p>| When you hear the term “the struggle” what does that mean to you as a black Christian man with a criminal record? | Score each area out of 10 i.e. being black, being a man, being a Christian and having a criminal record |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What support would help you in this ‘struggle’?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What support has already helped you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can the church help?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has the church helped?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could you help other black men?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Community can be defined in different ways. In this context we are talking about those who can influence the BMCEP positively or negatively.

**The Community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which people have a positive influence on your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This might include, family, friends, acquaintances, church, people from gym or club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once the positive influences have been identified they should be scored out of 10, then a plan set out to best utilise this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which people have a negative influence on your life? This might include, family, friends, acquaintances, church, people from gym or club

Once the negative influences have been identified they should be scored out of 10, then a plan set out to best mitigate them.

Do you have a community of like-minded people around you? If so, who are they and what is it that makes them like-minded.
If not, what would a community of like-minded people look like to you?

The achievement is also nuanced and relates to the BMCEP’s goals, mission, purpose, the extent to which they believe they can achieve it and the impact of their past achievements and failures.

**The Achievement**

<p>| What are your long-term hopes and aspirations? | To what extent do you see this as achievable (1 – 10) |
| What is the first step you need to take in achieving this | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any thoughts on what God's purpose is for your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have anything that you feel you have achieved in your life?</td>
<td>What have you learned from them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even the most successful people have ‘failed’ at some things and state that experiences of failure are good preparation for success. What are your failures?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does your achievement include others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The independence is about autonomy, freedom, choice and self-expression.

**The independence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what way would you like to be more independent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It what ways do you see yourself as independent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you feel you are able to make the choices you would like to make?

The recognition is about visibility, agency and affirmation.

**The Recognition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent would you like to be recognised for your achievements? How?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you feel appreciated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would you like to be appreciated by?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways would you like others to see you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation Thirteen: Black Theological Position**

I recommend that a black theological position be taken up that relates to the black liberationist theology discussed in chapter three and chapter
eight. The ‘assessment’ questions below can help to identify particular ‘gaps’ in the understanding of those people who would like to be involved in supporting BMCEP’s. This will also help to identify if certain individuals or churches have the right fit for this particular ministry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does the term the black struggle mean to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does your life relate to the black struggle?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any comparison that you can make between the life of Jesus and the disciples and yours</td>
<td>Sinners, looked down upon, none religious, flawed, non-deserving, faithful, fearful,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any relationship between Jesus setting the captives free and your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do you experience racism?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should churches be involved in speaking out about racism?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation Fourteen: Next Steps

I will explore each recommendation in depth and shape each assessment and the training that will be required to implement them. I will also develop talks based on these recommendations that I will be able to present to Black Church congregations.

Word Count – 43,062
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Appendix One – Masculine Archetypes

Child Masculinity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Divine Child</th>
<th>The Hero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The High Chair</td>
<td>The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrant</td>
<td>Weakling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prince</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Hero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Grandstander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Oedipal Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Know It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Trickster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dummy</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dummy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Oedipal Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Mama’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dreamer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dreamer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active
Dysfunctional
Shadow
Passive
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Dysfunctional
Shadow
Mature Masculinity

The Sovereign in his fullness

The Tyrant
Active Dysfunctional Shadow

The Strong in this fullness

The Weakling
Passive Dysfunctional Shadow

The Sadist
Active Dysfunctional Shadow

The Masochist
Passive Dysfunctional Shadow

The Magician in his fullness

The Detached Manipulator
Active Dysfunctional Shadow

The Denying “Innocent” One
Passive Dysfunctional Shadow

The Lover in his fullness

The Addicted Lover
Active Dysfunctional Shadow

The Impotent Lover
Passive Dysfunctional Shadow
Appendix Two - Dissociative disorders

Overview

Dissociative disorders are mental disorders that involve experiencing a disconnection and lack of continuity between thoughts, memories, surroundings, actions and identity. People with dissociative disorders escape reality in ways that are involuntary and unhealthy and cause problems with functioning in everyday life.

Dissociative disorders usually develop as a reaction to trauma and help keep difficult memories at bay. Symptoms — ranging from amnesia to alternate identities — depend in part on the type of dissociative disorder you have. Times of stress can temporarily worsen symptoms, making them more obvious.

Treatment for dissociative disorders may include talk therapy (psychotherapy) and medication. Although treating dissociative disorders can be difficult, many people learn new ways of coping and lead healthy, productive lives.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms depend on the type of dissociative disorders you have, but may include:

- Memory loss (amnesia) of certain time periods, events, people and personal information
- A sense of being detached from yourself and your emotions
- A perception of the people and things around you as distorted and unreal
- A blurred sense of identity
- Significant stress or problems in your relationships, work or other important areas of your life
- Inability to cope well with emotional or professional stress
- Mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal
There are three major dissociative disorders defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association:

- **Dissociative amnesia.** The main symptom is memory loss that's more severe than normal forgetfulness and that can't be explained by a medical condition. You can't recall information about yourself or events and people in your life, especially from a traumatic time. Dissociative amnesia can be specific to events in a certain time, such as intense combat, or more rarely, can involve complete loss of memory about yourself. It may sometimes involve travel or confused wandering away from your life (dissociative fugue). An episode of amnesia usually occurs suddenly and may last minutes, hours, or rarely, months or years.

- **Dissociative identity disorder.** Formerly known as multiple personality disorder, this disorder is characterized by "switching" to alternate identities. You may feel the presence of two or more people talking or living inside your head, and you may feel as though you're possessed by other identities. Each identity may have a unique name, personal history and characteristics, including obvious differences in voice, gender, mannerisms and even such physical qualities as the need for eyeglasses. There also are differences in how familiar each identity is with the others. People with dissociative identity disorder typically also have dissociative amnesia and often have dissociative fugue.

- **Depersonalisation-derealisation disorder.** This involves an ongoing or episodic sense of detachment or being outside yourself — observing your actions, feelings, thoughts and self from a distance as though watching a movie (depersonalization). Other people and things around you may feel detached and foggy or dreamlike, time may be slowed down or sped up, and the world may seem unreal (derealisation). You may experience depersonalization, derealisation or both. Symptoms, which can be profoundly distressing, may last only a few moments or come and go over many years.
Causes

Dissociative disorders usually develop as a way to cope with trauma. The disorders most often form in children subjected to long-term physical, sexual or emotional abuse or, less often, a home environment that's frightening or highly unpredictable. The stress of war or natural disasters also can bring on dissociative disorders.

Personal identity is still forming during childhood. So a child is more able than an adult to step outside of himself or herself and observe trauma as though it's happening to a different person. A child who learns to dissociate in order to endure a traumatic experience may use this coping mechanism in response to stressful situations throughout life.

Risk factors

People who experience long-term physical, sexual or emotional abuse during childhood are at greatest risk of developing dissociative disorders.

Children and adults who experience other traumatic events, such as war, natural disasters, kidnapping, torture, or extended, traumatic, early-life medical procedures, also may develop these conditions.

Complications

People with dissociative disorders are at increased risk of complications and associated disorders, such as:

- Self-harm or mutilation
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviour
- Sexual dysfunction
- Alcoholism and drug use disorders
- Depression and anxiety disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
• Personality disorders
• Sleep disorders, including nightmares, insomnia and sleepwalking
• Eating disorders
• Physical symptoms such as light-headedness or non-epileptic seizures
• Major difficulties in personal relationships and at work

Prevention

• Talk to a trusted person such as a friend, your doctor or a leader in your faith community.
• Ask for help locating resources such as parenting support groups and family therapists.
• Look for churches and community education programs that offer parenting classes that also may help you learn a healthier parenting style.
Appendix Three – Guilt and Shame

According to Bradshaw (1996: 2) shame is tied more closely to our identity, actions and emotions than guilt. In other words, "guilt says I've done something wrong; whilst shame says there is something wrong with me”. Therefore, guilt is less harmful that shame although they are not always easy to differentiate.

Smith et al 2002: 210-211) maintain the difference between guilt and shame has been characterised in emotion research in three different ways. These are on the basis of the orientation of the transgression, self and others, and internal or external orientation.

Therefore, black male ex-prisoners tend to attribute a transgression either to their stable state or to there transient state. Where the transgression is attributed to their stable state i.e. where they perceive they have no control over their action or their environment, or where the transgression is based on their incompetence then they will experience shame. But where the orientation is that the person attributes their transgression to their transient states i.e. where they perceive they had a choice not to transgress but chose to do so, they will experience guilt. In other words, the person will experience shame when they attribute their actions to their
own incompetence or immorality. However, they experience guilt when they attribute their actions to their temporary poor mental state or illness (Levesque 2011: 2153).

The distinction between guilt and shame can also be observed in terms of the orientation of self or others. Shame is the negative evaluation of self by others whilst guilt is a negative evaluation of self by oneself (Wong and Tsai 2007: 210-211).

Internal and external orientation relates to self or other orientation. In this case, shame has an external orientation where as guilt has an internal orientation. In other words, shame is associated with the fear of exposing our defective self to others. Guilt is associated with the fear of not living up to one’s own standards (Tracy et al 2007).