

Guess Who?: Exploring the public's perceptions of perpetrators of crime

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Abstract

This pilot study looked into who is perceived as the 'typical offender' by the public based on the characteristics of gender, race and age for murder, rape, child sexual offences, robbery, fraud and phishing. The field research was conducted in Birmingham and the questionnaire sample consisted of 156 participants (53.8% male and 46.2% female). The findings suggested that the perceived typical perpetrator for all crimes is male, white (except for robbery) and aged between 25 and 34 years old (except child sex offenders and fraudsters who would be older). While most of the public's perceptions of perpetrators were consistent with the existing literature and official statistics, indicating that the public have become more educated about crime, disparities also suggest media and other sources of information also play a role in creating their ideas.

Keywords

Stereotypes, offenders, age, gender, race/ethnicity

Introduction

This article presents findings from a pilot study that investigates public perception of the identity of offenders. It examines whether certain demographics (ages, sexes and ethnicities) are associated with specific offences. The way in which society forms collective opinions may become warped leading to stereotyping. This generalised belief about a particular group can create out-groups or an 'us' and 'them' mentality (Becker, 1963). Roberts and Stalans (1998) suggest the belief that crime is committed by a distinct, separate group can lead to a wish to distance oneself from former prisoners. Stereotyping

encompasses personal beliefs about individuals or groups who are deemed to have certain attributes and are judged accordingly (Macrae, et al., 1996). This can be in a positive or negative manner. One negative example is that black males are more likely than others to be associated with street crimes. This is visible through the stop and search policy where black males are disproportionately targeted (Waddington, et al., 2004). The media has been accused of perpetuating racism and Islamophobia by 'othering' those deemed as 'alien' and culturally separate to other British citizens (Saeed, 2007). The press may have a role in perpetuating racism by attributing specific forms of criminality to certain demographics (Van Dijk, 2012).

Bull and Green (1980) found no evidence that physical characteristics are related to a specific type of crime but concluded that the public and police often believe that they can tell if someone is a criminal by his/her appearance. They sought to explore whether people linked certain crimes with specific populations by showing photographs to members of the public and police who were asked to match them with a list of crimes (including rape, theft and robbery). The results showed no significant differences for age and sex across most types of crimes meaning that the identity of the participants did not appear to be a significant factor. While Bull and Green (1980) carried out their research almost 40 years ago, it is important to note that they found that police and public perceive that one can tell a criminal by appearance – despite results suggesting otherwise, given the disparate opinions of participants (Bull and Green, 1980). Time has passed, and the social context has changed, creating the need for new research on this topic.

MacLin and Herrera (2006:4) investigated the criminal stereotype by asking “what are the first 10 things you think of when you hear the word criminal?”. The findings showed participants believed the archetypal criminal to be black and male, Madriz (1997) yielded similar results. It must be noted that Bull and Green’s (1980) methodological differences may have contributed to differing findings. Alternatively, these could also have been due to societal changes including a rapid evolution of technology and spread of information by the media. Furthermore, the ongoing contentious debate regarding increased immigration, the growth of fundamentalist Islamist terrorism, changing perception of female criminality and the increasing criminalisation of juveniles, may now play a role in the shifting perceptions of the identity and nefarious intent of the 'other' (D’Cruze and Jackson, 2009; Huysmans and Buonfino, 2008; Squires, 2008). The evolution of social norms and shifting media focus may impact upon the public’s level of trust/distrust, e.g.,

if male offenders are receiving much news coverage, at a time of heightened racial tension, we may expect the stereotypical offender to be non-white and male. Perhaps, this concerns changes in perceptions of specific types of offence as opposed to crime in general, as studied by MacLin and Herrera (2006) and Madriz (1997). This link is complex – specific conclusions which appear to be drawn regarding criminal identity, for example that offenders are male, appear to have little to do with moral panics and may be linked to general perception and facts. It is important to note that racist sentiments do not necessarily stem entirely from media hostility and may be linked to other institutions, including the education system (Gillborn, 2008). Similarly, xenophobia can be linked to the positionality of the individual and perceptions of threat to social status (Harrison and Peacock, 2009). These complicating factors suggest that distrust of the ‘other’ cannot necessarily be linked to media bias, although the role of the press is essential to consider, it is significant not to over simplify the relationship between media and stereotyping. Furthermore, considerations must be made in terms of perceptions of desirability. Agnew (1984) found a link between unattractiveness (as perceived by interviewers) and self-reported delinquency. It is imperative to note that this discussion specifically centres around the United States but may have ramifications for the UK owing to similarities in environment, such as an alarmist media and the politicisation of the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Attractiveness is a subjective variable which seems to be associated with undesirable traits. Roberts and Stalans (1998) suggested that the public generally believe offenders to be unattractive, unemployed gang members. Cavior and Howard (1973) found that faces of ‘delinquents’ were deemed less attractive by participants asked to compare photographs and darker skin was associated with criminality across racial boundaries. Notably, this study was conducted over four decades ago and based in the United States, again highlighting the need for ongoing research in the UK. Goldstein, et al. (1984) suggested that there is a general perception of what an offender looks like and that individuals tend to assume specific occupations (particularly criminal ones) correlate with a certain physical appearance, to the extent that this biases juries. This contrasts with the findings of Valla, et al. (2011) who suggested that whilst their (student) participants could predict criminality with general reliability, they could not distinguish between offences. Research by Yarmey (1993) suggested that although there may be agreement between people on who is likely to be a criminal, this is not necessarily accurate despite the possibility that it may affect decision making. Yarmey (1993) found

that whilst participants were confident in their ability to recognise offenders, they were surer of their recognition of non-criminals. Research by Gross and O'Brien (2007) suggested that misidentification of black suspects is disproportionately high owing to white populations allegedly finding identification between different black strangers difficult. Given the racialised nature of this assertion it is important to examine society's current construction of attractiveness or desirability, its relation to race and ethnicity, and where these norms might be created.

Although studies around perceptions of offenders are important to consider, it is necessary to examine where people acquire their understanding of crime. Hough and Roberts (2005) suggest that while there is a strong appetite amongst the wider community for information regarding crime, public knowledge is limited. There is a plethora of information regarding crime available to the public through a variety of sources: government websites; newspapers; television. However, some sources are more accessible than others. This, and the way in which offences are reported, can influence the public's perceptions of crime (Jewkes, 2004).

It is worth noting that the 'dark figure' of crime means that many instances of criminality are not brought to the attention of the police and, therefore, are not officially recorded (Brookman, 2005). Additionally, changes in practice and operational priorities may influence police recording of certain types of crime. The combined result is that the picture of criminality offered by police statistics may not accurately reflect reality and should be treated with a degree of caution (Tilley and Tseloni, 2016; Van Dijk and Tseloni, 2012). Even if the public seek to examine official statistics, it does not mean they will learn the 'truth'. The CJS deals with an array of offences, some receive more academic and media attention than others. Both the media and many researchers focus upon serial homicide offenders (see Flowers, 2003; Hickey, 2015; Yardley and Wilson, 2015). This has arguably impacted public perception of what a murderer 'really' looks like. The same applies to other serious crimes, including sexual offences.

Following on from previous studies, this research focuses on six types of crime: homicide, rape, child sexual offences, robbery, fraud and phishing, examining the public's perceptions of the offenders' gender, age and ethnicity. This wider range of crimes include a mixture of high and low-profile offences, from homicide which receives a lot of attention, to the comparatively neglected offence of phishing. Table 1 presents a brief summary of the literature on public perceptions and official statistics, specific to these

types of crime, which will be used as a basis to compare the findings of this research. Owing to the lack of consistent academic focus on the subject in the UK, it is necessary to consider international literature that can be somewhat transferable due to similarities in how stereotypes may be created and how the public gains information, for instance via a ‘free press’ and state funded education system. For the sake of brevity only particularly relevant studies have been discussed in depth throughout this paper, these have been selected owing to their direct relevance to findings presented here and/or the methodology utilised. Overall, it is often not clear what age the typical offender is, as can be seen in Table 1. Previous research appears to concur that for most crimes the likely perpetrator would be male and white.

Table 1: Summary of the literature on public perceptions and official statistics.

| Crime | Demographics | Literature on public perceptions | Official Statistics (convictions in the UK, unless otherwise stated) |
|-----------------|---------------------|---|---|
| Homicide | Gender | Male (Brookman, 2005) | Male (UNECE, 2015) |
| | Ethnicity | White, but BME overrepresented (Brookman, 2005) | White, but Black overrepresented (principle suspect) (MOJ, 2015) |
| | Age (yrs) | Not distinctive, but comparatively young (Brookman, 2005; Roberts et al, 2007) | 16-24 (suspects) (ONS, 2018) |
| Rape | Gender | Male (Craissati, 2005; Polaschek, et al, 1997) | Male (Home Office, 2013; UNECE, 2015) |
| | Ethnicity | White, but black overrepresented (Craissati, 2005) | White (Home Office, 2013) |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|---|--|
| | Age (yrs) | 18-35 (Scully, 1990) | Not found |
| | Gender | Male | Male (Home Office, 2013) |
| Child sex offences | Ethnicity | White (Milner and Webster, 2005) | White (Home Office, 2013) |
| | Age (yrs) | Over 30 when convicted even if behaviour begins earlier (Murray, 2000; Hanson, 2001) | Not found |
| | Gender | Male (Monk, et al., 2010; Smith, 2003) | Male (UNECE, 2015) |
| Robbery | Ethnicity | Black (Yapp, 2010) | White, but overrepresented (UNECE, 2015) Black |
| | Age (yrs) | Under 25-30 (Smith, 2003; Yapp, 2010) | Not found |
| Fraud | Gender | Professional – male; Opportunists or average fraudsters and partakers may be female too (Baldock, 1997; Hayes and Prenzler, 2003; Kapardis, Krambia-Kapardis, 2004; Smith, 2003) | Male (principle suspect) (Ministry of Justice, 2017) |

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|-----------------|-----------|--|-----------|
| | Ethnicity | Not distinctive – dependent upon type (Baldock, 1997; White Hayes and Prenzler, 2003; Kapardis, (Ministry of Justice, 2017) Krambia-Kapardis, 2004; Smith, 2003) | |
| | Age (yrs) | Potentially over 30 (Baldock, 1997; Hayes and Prenzler, 2003; Kapardis, Krambia-Kapardis, 2004; Smith, 2003) | Not found |
| Phishing | Gender | Not distinctive (Allison, Schuck and Lersch, 2005; APWG, 2015; Koops, 2011) | |
| | Ethnicity | | Not found |
| | Age (yrs) | | |

Methodology

This pilot study aims to ascertain whether members of the public associate a particular gender, age and ethnicity with any of these six crimes: murder; rape; child sexual offences; robbery; fraud; and phishing. To generate this primary data, a closed-ended questionnaire was produced which aimed to identify and explore the public's understanding of a 'typical offender' based on demographics which in turn could then be compared with literature.

Data collection was conducted between April and June 2015 and involved five researchers approaching people, on four separate occasions. The researchers were two white British men (aged mid-twenties and late fifties), two white women (one British, early-thirties and one Portuguese, mid-twenties) and one British Asian man (mid-

twenties). It must be acknowledged that it is possible that a social desirability bias could cause participants to respond differently to researchers with different identities, for example if speaking to a person from a BAME demographic they may be reluctant to suggest that someone from that background is most likely to commit an offence, for fear of upsetting the researcher and appearing racist. However, it is unlikely that this had a strong impact as results did not vastly differ, depending upon the individual approaching participants. Locations consisted of a shopping centre in Perry Barr (Birmingham) and a park in Birmingham City Centre. These were chosen due to their heavy 'footfall'. Given its cultural diversity, Perry Barr was an appropriate location for a study of this nature. Perry Barr is one of four non-white majority districts in Birmingham where BAME groups make up over 50% of the overall population. This is over five times the national average (Brown, 2013). Nearly 50% of Birmingham residents are under the age of 30 years and 42% are described as non-white, making it a multi-cultural and ethnically-diverse city (Birmingham City Council, 2001). This can be seen by comparing these statistics to the UK as a whole where, as of 2011, 85% of the population consider themselves white. In some areas such as Cumbria this was much higher at 98.5%. On the other hand, in some areas the BAME population is significantly higher, for example, in Newham the white population is only 29% (Gov.uk, 2011). This differentiation could have ramifications for how representative citizens of Birmingham are in their attitudes. The differing social context in which they operate may alter perceptions regarding those who might otherwise be 'othered'. Frequent interaction with diverse populations can reduce distrust (Marschall and Stolle, 2004). Birmingham is also Britain's second city and is home to five universities, two of which rank among the top 400 in the Quacquarelli Symonds world university rankings (Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, 2018). With the number of foreign students doubling in the last decade, this may also impact the attitudes of those residing in Birmingham (Espinoza, 2015).

The participants constituted a convenience sample, limited to those individuals present at the time of data collection and willing to participate; this also may have ramifications for generalisability (Bryman, 2016). However, data collection was approached in this way to represent those members of the public who would be out in busy areas, interacting with others in a typical, every day, manner, such as shopping, in a multicultural area, meaning a certain profile of participant was included. Utilising the internet to collect data

may have reduced the social desirability bias but would have removed this aspect of the research process and skewed the sample towards those with an active interest in learning about and discussing crime. It would also have limited the amount of clarification researchers were able to offer participants. Another advantage of a face to face questionnaire is the likelihood of capturing the participants' immediate responses. The pressure of completing a brief structured questionnaire does not allow the time for the reflection that an online version may provide. There is more incentive to immediately answer and provide a 'gut' reaction as opposed to a considered response. This pilot study is identifiable as focused upon a multicultural, urban area, allowing future research to differ in scope and focus and build upon this. It was deemed too ambitious for this preliminary research to attempt generalisability across the UK, thus collecting data at specific points of human contact, in a diverse city, was appropriate. In terms of demographics it is important to acknowledge that participants come from a specific population, comparatively young and ethnically diverse. Therefore, this study has less relevance for groups which are older and ethnically more homogenous but is indicative for younger, more ethnically diverse populations.

Researchers approached members of the public with the intention of asking for their participation in the study. Participants were then briefed on the aims of the research, informed of their right to withdraw at any point and assured that the information they were to provide would be guaranteed anonymity. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to disclose basic demographic information including their gender, ethnicity and age. They were then guided through the questionnaire by the researcher and encouraged to respond as openly and honestly as possible through statements such as "please provide the first answer that you think of." By way of example, the researcher drew the participant's attention to the crime of fraud and stated, "which ethnicity do you think would be most likely to commit fraud?". The researcher clarified that questions concerned the entire UK population (within a white majority society), and not simply which demographics are overrepresented. For example stating that most fraudsters were black would suggest a belief that a typical fraudster would be black, not that black people commit a disproportionate amount of fraud relative to the size of the black population. Once the participant had provided an answer, the researcher then repeated the question, but lent focus to the characteristics of gender and age, before

shifting the focus to other crimes and repeating the process (see the questionnaire sample in appendix 1 which was explained to participants). Researchers also ensured that participants understood all questions asked, for example, by defining terms such as 'phishing' and 'mixed ethnicity/multiple ethnic groups' (one individual with mixed or multiple ethnicities instead of no typical ethnic group for that crime). The time taken to complete the questionnaire did not exceed three minutes per participant.

Results

A total of 156 individuals (53.8% male and 46.2% female respectively) from a range of ethnic backgrounds (52.6% white and 47.4% non-white), aged between 16 and 70 years answered the questionnaire. These demographics are similar to the ones reported for the areas in which the data was collected suggesting the sample was fairly representative of Birmingham and the surrounding areas (Birmingham City Council, 2001).

Table 2 indicates that participants generally believed that typical perpetrators of all crimes are male. In relation to ethnicity, many believed white people tended to perpetrate most crimes with the only exception being robbery. The results for robbery suggested males of mixed ethnicities as most likely to perpetrate robbery. In terms of age, homicide, rape and phishing were deemed to be perpetrated by those aged between 25 - 34 years old whereas child sex offenders were considered older (45-54 years old) as were fraudsters (35-44 years old). Concerning robbery, participants' answers suggested the age range would be larger, 16-34 years old.

Table 2: Most common characteristics perceived for each type of offender

| Crime Type | Gender | Ethnicity | Age (years) |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Homicide | Male (96%) | White (50%) | 25-34 (46%) |
| Rape | Male (99%) | White (40%) | 25-43 (50%) |
| Child sex offences | Male (95%) | White (72%) | 45-54 (37%) |
| Robbery | Male (96%) | Mixed (36%) | 25-34 (42%)* |
| Fraud | Male (90%) | White (66%) | 35-44 (40%) |
| Phishing | Male (90%) | White (47%) | 25-34 (51%) |

*also 16-24 (41%)

Discussion

Participants' answers, literature and official statistics present mostly similar or approximate results among these different crimes, except for phishing. This suggests that the public may be better informed regarding crime and likely perpetrators than previous academic findings suggest – although it is important to emphasise that this is a pilot study. The principal conclusion drawn by the researchers is that this is an area in need of greater research and exploration. Table 3 offers a summary of the comparison.

Table 3: Comparison between the literature on public perceptions, official statistics and this research results on who is more likely to commit certain offences

| Crime | Demographics | Literature on public perceptions | Official Statistics | Findings | Notes |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Homicide | Gender | Male | Male | Male | Similar |
| | Ethnicity | White (BME overrepresented) | White (Black overrepresented) | White | Similar |
| | Age (yrs) | Not distinctive, but fairly young | 16-24 | 25-34 | Approximate |
| Rape | Gender | Male | Male | Male | Similar |
| | Ethnicity | White | White | White | Similar |
| | Age (yrs) | 18-35 | Not found | 25-34 | Approximate |
| Child sex offences | Gender | Male | Male | Male | Similar |
| | Ethnicity | White | White | White | Similar |
| | Age (yrs) | Over 30 | Not found | 45-54 | Approximate |
| Robbery | Gender | Male | Male | Male | Similar |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|--|--|-------------|-------------|
| | Ethnicity | Black | White (Black overrepre- sented) | Mixed | Different |
| | Age (yrs) | Under 25-30 | Not found | 16-24/25-34 | Approximate |
| | Gender | Not distinctive, most types male | Male | Male | Approximate |
| Fraud | Ethnicity | Not distinctive | White | White | Similar |
| | Age (yrs) | Not distinctive, potentially over 30 | Not found | 35-44 | Approximate |
| | Gender | | | Male | Different |
| Phishing | Ethnicity | Not distinctive | Not found | White | Different |
| | Age (yrs) | | | 25-34 | Different |

The literature appears to present mixed demographics for fraud and phishing, with professional fraudsters being overwhelmingly male. This research yielded similar findings, developing a more holistic picture of fraudsters being mostly male, white and falling into an age range of 35-44 for fraud and 25-34 for phishing. Official statistics concur that those who commit fraud are likely to be white (MOJ, 2017). The choice of a younger age-bracket for phishing may be due to the cultural belief that ‘young’ people tend to be ‘better’ with technology, technology reliance is seen as disadvantaging older people (Kottorp, et al., 2016). Fraud may be associated with white-collar crime, informing the public’s belief that individuals who commit crimes are white males (Allison, et al., 2005). Despite some differences, findings for fraud show greater similarity to the literature and official statistics than those for phishing.

Concerning gender when related to other crimes (homicide, rape, child sex offences and robbery), participants perceived males as likely offenders which is similar to the literature and official statistics. Such findings are unlikely to be influenced by the respondents' gender as the percentage of male and female was roughly equal.

Regarding ethnicity for homicide, rape and child sex offences, participants perceived white as the most likely ethnicity which concurs with the literature and official statistics. However, for robbery, literature suggested that the typical offender would be black while participants believed 'he' would be mixed ethnicity and official statistics indicated white. The latter is unsurprising as the general population figures indicate the majority of inmates are white (86%), however, BAME individuals are overrepresented, as is often reported, which could potentially influence the public to believe that BAME individuals are more likely to commit this crime. Additionally, it is also a crime often associated with deprived socioeconomic status - BAME people are overrepresented in this economic bracket (Jefferies, 2005; Institute of Race Relations, 2017; ONS, 2011; Rees, et al., 2012). In terms of age, participants' perceptions seem to be equivalent to the literature and the official statistics (when available) for all crimes (apart from fraud and phishing). However, participants drew slight distinctions where the literature and official statistics did not, finding an age range where research suggests this is not a significant factor, or selecting a narrower age band than the literature would support. This represents a departure from the literature and official statistics but perceptions concerning age could be influenced by our methodology and how brackets were pre-defined. For homicide, respondents selected mainly the interval 25-34 years old and the literature offers a smaller range pointing to between 31 and 35 years old (Brookman, 2005; Roberts, et al., 2007). With rape, the literature suggested a wider range, 18 to 35 (Scully, 1990), whereas results were focused on a smaller range, 25-34 years. Typically, the literature found child sexual offences were carried out by those over 30 (Hanson, 2001). Respondents seem to agree to an extent as they concentrated on a range of 45-54 years old. In relation to robbery, two categories received focus: 16-24 and 25-34 years. However, the literature indicates those under 25 years (Monk, et al., 2010; Smith, 2003).

This research suggests that when asked to choose from a list of potential demographics, the public's views on who is likely to commit these six crimes aligns, which is similar to a

conclusion gathered by Bull and Green (1980). More recent research suggested that society's perception of perpetrators was narrow and the public believed criminals were mostly black males (MacLin and Herrera, 2006; Madriz, 1997). It appears that they have become more educated about crime and who seems likely to commit particular offences. It is important to acknowledge that these results could be in part due to the specific sample surveyed.

However, it seems that even now, certain preconceptions exist. Assumptions, if accepted (inter)nationally, may shape policy, action, media and politics which in turn influence people's perceptions. This cycle would need to be broken to challenge preconceptions and include an acknowledgement that the 'dark figure' of crime may complicate the picture. For example, a woman may find it easier to avoid conviction for child sexual abuse if investigators assume perpetrators are male and accept stereotypes of passive, nurturing women and threatening, predatory men, resulting in a lack of clarity concerning female perpetrators (Wakefield and Underwager, 1991). Although it must be acknowledged that (as seen in Table 3) statistics show that men commit a vastly disproportionate percentage of sexual crimes.

There are still some deviations from official statistics, suggesting an acceptance of some stereotypes. It is notable that there is a lower level of agreement between participants with regards to age and ethnicity and greater agreement concerning gender. Age is considered difficult to approximate and if participants recall the faces of offenders from the media, they may not feel confident in aging them (Voelkle, et al., 2012). Respondents appeared to agree that men are the 'criminal sex', reflecting older studies, as seen in Table 1. This may be related to growing public understanding of 'toxic masculinity' and the link between perceptions, and projection, of hypermasculinity and offending (Valenti, 2018). It could also be connected to society's attitude to femininity, that female criminals are 'doubly deviant', disobeying not only the law and social norms but their own feminine nature. This is illustrated by the comparative notoriety of women accused of notable crimes, some of which are considered worthy of celebrity status (Middleweek, 2017). The connotations for the consideration of men as more criminal are worthy of further research, as is the prevalence of this view. It is important to ascertain how accurate this perception is, Tables 1 and 3 illustrate that official statistics indicate men commit a

disproportionate amount of crime, but it is of academic interest how the public become aware of this.

Conclusion

The public's perception of homicide, rape and child sex offences was found to be generally consistent with the literature and official statistics. Most respondents believed perpetrators were white males. In comparison, participants' overall expectation was that those most likely to commit robbery were males of mixed ethnic heritage which demonstrates a distinction between the public's perceptions of crime and ethnicity and that of the literature. The consideration of age was more complicated as, in most categories, it differed but not significantly. It is important to note that while this research adds to the existing literature, it does not suggest demographics are permanently fixed for these crimes.

The comparative similarity between these findings and both the literature and official statistics is promising given concerns regarding misinformation by the media (Carter, 2016; Narayanan, et al., 2018). This may be due to the availability of information about crime over the last few decades coupled with how the media reports particular offences (Jewkes, 2004). People may have garnered information from a wider network via social media (Mahtani and Seetharaman, 2017). Stalans (1993) suggested that interpersonal experience can help to neutralise recall bias and contextualise media overreporting of particularly serious crime.

This research represents an important step in the academic analysis of public perceptions of who is likely to commit certain offences. The anonymous, informal nature of data collection reduced the social desirability bias. However, this could have still had an impact as it is natural that people wish to be liked by others. Therefore, when communicating face to face with a researcher, a participant may fear expressing views that they may perceive as bigoted, reducing honesty (Krumpal, 2013). The research is geographically limited but represents a significant development as it is fairly representative of Birmingham, a diverse city, considered the 'second city' of the UK, and taken as a key example of a 'large urban area' by previous research (Charlesworth, et al., 2003). This research is more relevant than ever owing to current political divides and a

rise in hate crimes, similarities between public perception and official and academic findings are encouraging and suggest a lack of stereotyping and suspicion concerning people with different identities. It is acknowledged that this pilot study was conducted in a multicultural area and this may have implications for generalisability.

Future studies may utilise different methods and seek to probe why respondents draw their conclusions, Hough and Roberts (2005) highlighted the importance of qualitative data in assessing public attitudes to crime. This pilot study may provide a basis from which to further explore them, including samples with demographics. Further research could use focus groups to explore why participants choose certain groups as likely offenders over others, and the influences that have shaped their understanding.

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Appendix 1 – Questionnaire sample

| Gender | |
|---------------|--|
| Male | |
| Female | |

| Ethnic Group | |
|------------------------------|--|
| White | |
| Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups | |
| Asian | |
| Black | |
| Other ethnic group | |

| Age Range | |
|------------------|--|
| 16-24 | |
| 25-34 | |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 35-44 | |
| 45-54 | |
| 55-64 | |
| 65 and over | |