

# Understanding the Lives of Disadvantaged Young People

*Literature Review*

January 2014

# This document is a synthesis of 2CV experience & literature review

## ADDRESSING GAPS WITH EXPERIENCE & EXPERTISE:

The following document includes a synthesis of relevant case studies, previous research findings and experience from three of 2CV's core areas of expertise:

- ✓ Digital Team
- ✓ Social Practice
- ✓ Lifestyle Practice

**Where applicable, these findings have been footnoted with an \*2cv**



We drew on 2CV previous research & experience in a range of industries to address literature gaps. This included previous research for:

- Top mobile phone companies
- One of the largest music corporations in the world
- Youth-based non-profit organisations
- Leading gaming and tech organisations
- Financial organisations
- UK government bodies/departments

## KEY CONSIDERATION:

Significant gaps in the literature on brands, trends & financial habits of disadvantaged young people specifically

# Desk-based literature on disadvantaged youth largely negative- focusses on the nature of being disadvantaged

## Literature tends to be negative

Existing literature on disadvantaged young people is quite negative- particularly for those in the UK. Social mobility is the lowest in the UK than nearly anywhere else in the developed world. A child born into a disadvantaged community in the UK is likely to stay disadvantaged more than any other child born in the developed world, except Portugal. And it's getting worse. 1

**In the UK...  
WHERE YOU  
COME FROM  
MATTERS**

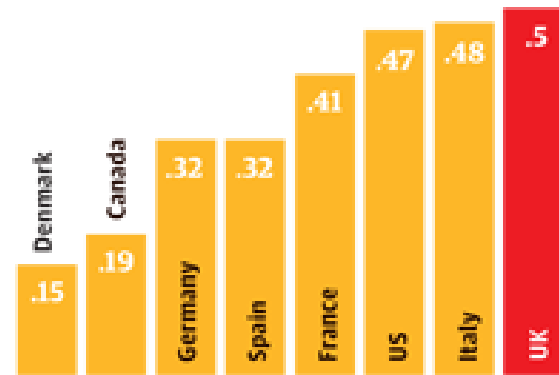
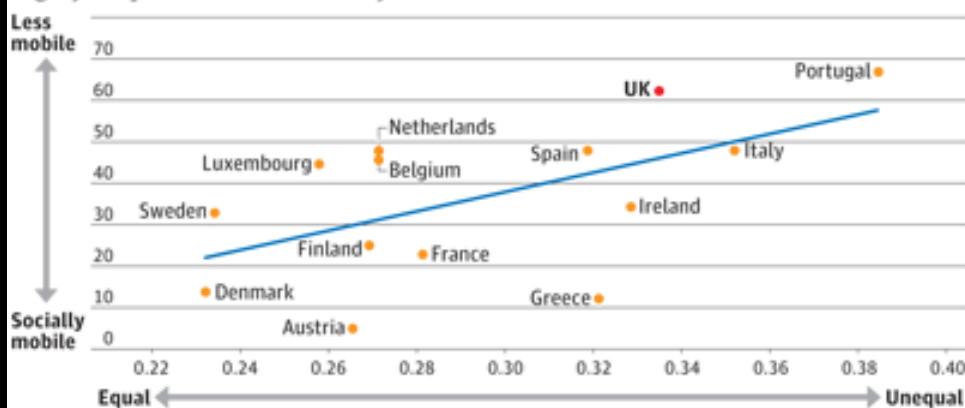
The UK has some of the lowest social mobility in the developed world

The UK has less social mobility...  
How sons' earnings reflect their fathers  
Higher score means less social mobility

Countries that are less equal also have less social mobility

There is a link between social mobility and inequality. See the UK - it is both highly unequal AND less socially mobile

Source: 1



Higher education: achievement  
Likely to apply to university and likely to get in  
Source: 1

## Low social mobility rates can perpetuate stereotypes of 'disadvantaged young people' which is not true for all

They are **often linked** to low levels of education, homelessness, crime and a range of anti-social behaviours- but this does

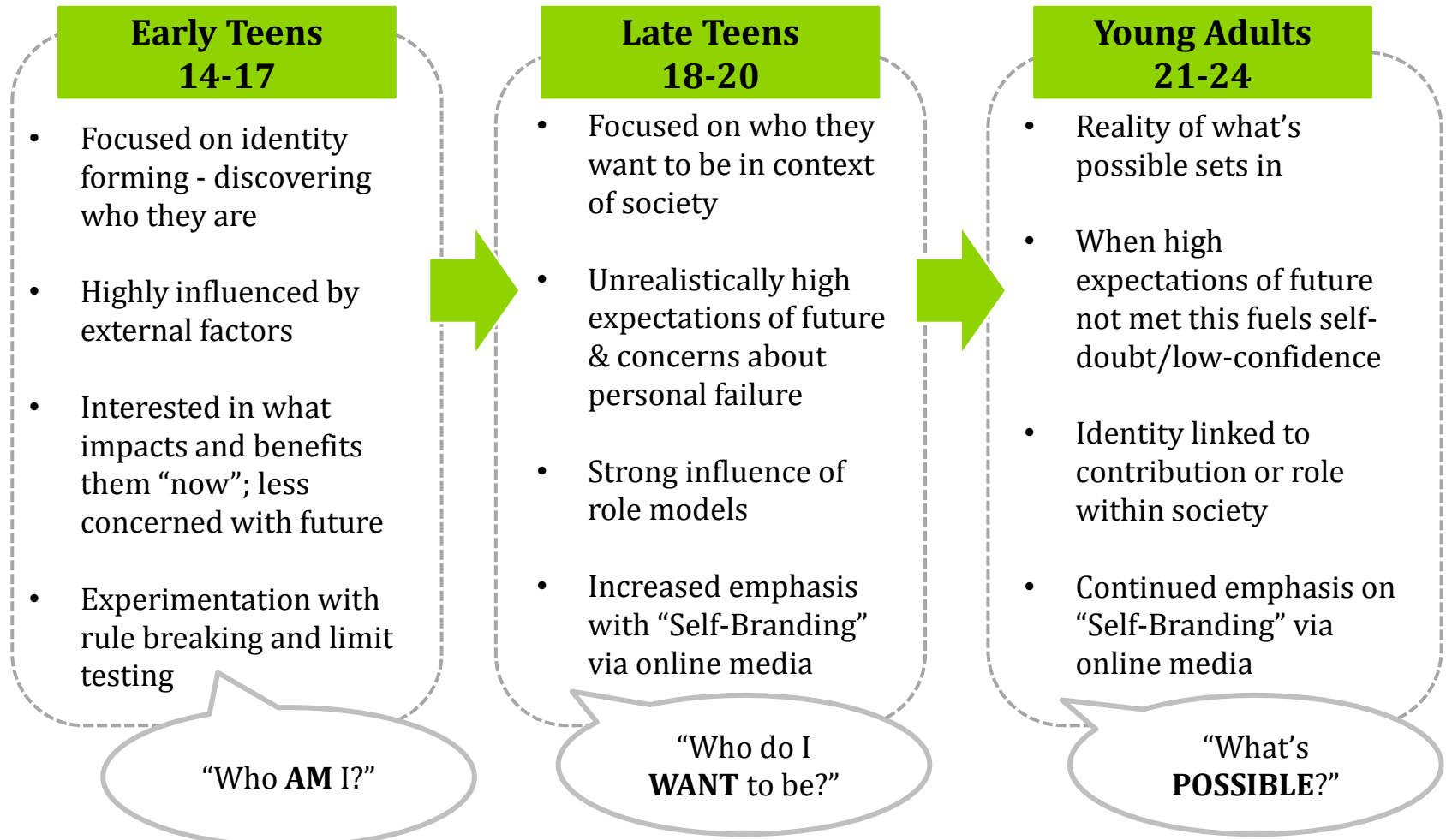
**not reflect the lives of all** disadvantaged young people. There are significant literature gaps regarding the differences between these young people specifically.

**Further research** is required to explore the lives, dreams, attitudes, motivations and aspirations of disadvantaged young people and how they differ on a personal level, between ages, and between sexes.

**Young adulthood is a vulnerable time regardless of where you live, this is compounded for young people who come from disadvantaged communities\*2CV**



# Over time, external factors inhibit aspirations which can lead to demotivation as reality sets in\*<sup>2cv, 2 & 3</sup>



Goals are short term and idealistic- an assumption that everything will be okay but no clear idea of how they will get there\*<sup>2cv</sup>

# Phone & constant connectivity is their lifeline; but there are upsides and downsides

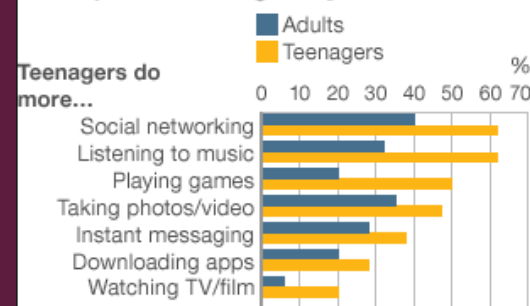
**BlackBerry**

Blackberry tends to be most popular phone brand amongst young people but losing appeal as status is greater for those with more expensive phones\*2CV



How young people currently use their smartphones 4

Which of these do you use your smartphone for regularly?



## The positives & negatives to constant connectivity \*2CV

Emphasis on peer approval and social image is particularly high amongst disadvantaged young people, making online bullying particularly relevant

**FEAR OF MISSING OUT**



**A DESIRE TO BE MORE**

Exposure to lifestyles outside local environment can increase ambitions & hopes to "be discovered"

➤ Insecurity, never being fully satisfied

➤ A desire to see more, do more, experience more

## Part of the “Brand Me” generation; young people are under pressure to form identities at very young

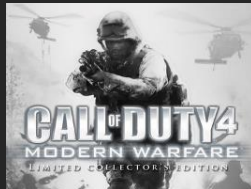
- Peer pressured to formulate an identity that expresses who they are and want to be at a very young age & to present this identity online <sup>5</sup>
- This means the early experimentation with self expression can leave a potentially damaging digital footprint
- Balance act of “fitting in” and “standing out” at the same time
- Social labels influence identity and have lasting effects, particularly for disadvantaged young people
- They may be more likely to take up behaviour, brands and activities that help them relate to given peer groups or solidify their identity <sup>6</sup>



# Brands are the ultimate expression of identity \*2CV

Male

Female



facebook



H&M

PRIMARK



TOPMAN



**Media, clothing and trends are consumed and propagated through friends – Peer to Peer communication & consensus is all important at this age**

\*There is an opportunity to explore the role of brands specifically for disadvantaged young people

## Increasing pressure on disadvantaged young people to spend more money:

*Instant gratification + poor money management = worse financial situation <sup>g</sup>*

Learnt **bad spending** habits from parents

**Instant gratification**

**More important to be seen as 'cool'** - must buy the latest things as soon as they come out.

Credit cards have become **status symbols**

**Unable to manage:** many don't have a bank account – might have parents managing their money instead

Extreme reasons to change how they view money; loan sharks demanding the money back

Many still 'clueless' about money matters, and unsure about how to manage their funds<sup>g</sup>

"I got offered my first card when I was 18," The credit limit was £4,000.... Within two years, Gemma had incurred £14,000 of debt"\*  
(Female, Essex)<sup>g</sup>

- Money is a real source of worry for young people and more so if you don't have any. This can be quite contradictory to habits of instant gratification.\*2CV

\*18 is a turning point where young people have access to a range of credit services

## Lack of support networks in family, community, school can lead to feelings of distrust and resentment

### NEET

Not In Education, Employment or Training

*'NEET' is widely used in policy circles but it dehumanises the personal stories of young people who cannot obtain and retain jobs after struggling at school & cannot find an employer to give them a chance.*

### *'Everyone lets me down'* <sup>10</sup>

They believe there are **significant gaps** in the basic services they need in their local community.

Young people realise **anti-social behaviour** holds them back, but they need tailored support to help them

- **Lack of support:** Insufficient services in their local community to deal with drugs, alcohol and substance misuse
- **Nothing to do:** Not enough activities for young people in their community
- **How do I get started?** No clear path to work - lack of support in school: teachers don't have much advise other than higher education

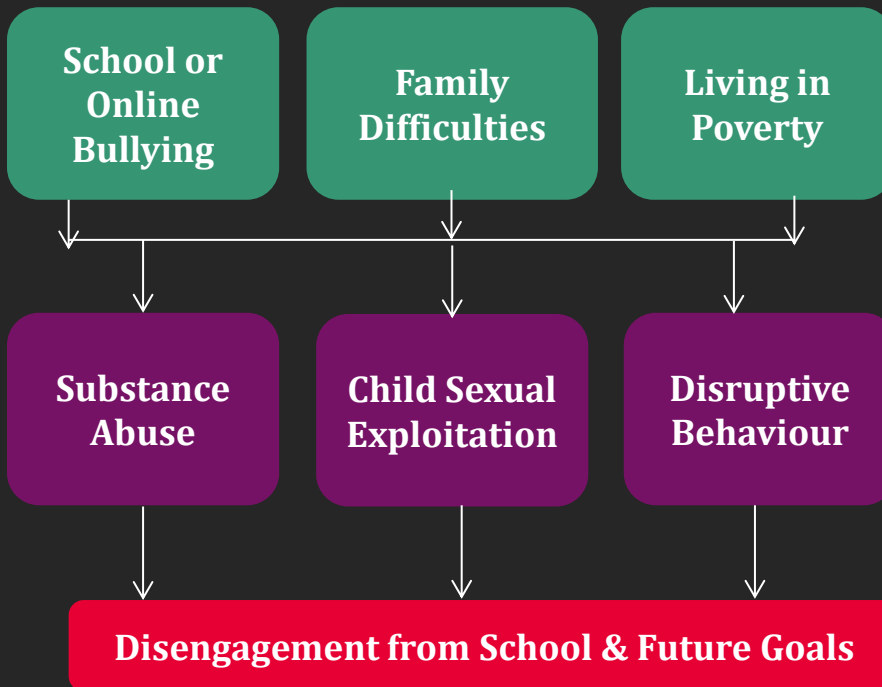
**"My music teacher is the only person who allows me to do what I'm natural at. No-one cares about my skills, my interests. They're not valued. They're not going to get me anywhere... apparently"** <sup>10</sup>



# They can feel cheated by the system; school can feel like a 'waste of time'

## Principal Barriers

Family influence over education is biggest in UK compared to other countries- and is just as important as quality of school 1



Even when young people from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve academically, they don't have access to the work experience opportunities that young people from more privileged backgrounds have *i.e. not having key contacts or having 5 GCSE's which prevents progression or led to them being placed on courses that don't lead to relevant accreditation* 10

## Behaviours as Barriers

## Outcome

50% of disadvantaged youth feel they are held back by substance abuse 10

**False Promises**  
 They have reported feeling subject to 'false promises' made by educators and service staff, which had serious negative effects in terms of their ability to trust and develop meaningful rapport

# Identity often shaped by feelings of failure

Desperately want to be employed; not just to be in a job but to have a **Future**

Being out of work can lead to feels of having nothing to live for- **being a failure**<sup>11</sup>

**There are some schemes that try to help, for example...**

- Cambridgeshire County Council has launched a pre-paid card scheme with £40 a month. to spend on positive activities such as sports etc <sup>12</sup>
- HSBC Future First programme continues to support disadvantaged young people <sup>13</sup>
- *Princes Trust: Enterprise programme*-supports unemployed young people aged 18-30 in developing potential business ventures <sup>14</sup>

"They feel isolated. They fall behind from their friends and peers. Then we have this whole section just sat on the sidelines, really just waiting. Because you try, get knocked back, try again, get knocked back again, and eventually you just stop trying."<sup>15</sup>

**Don't want to feel trapped in a vicious circle:** *Marginalization from society can have further negative consequences for the community*

**Ignored by  
Community**

**Low Self Esteem**

**I CAN'T  
ESCAPE**

**High Risk = Daily**

**TRAPPED**

**Angry**

**Disengaged from  
Society**

*Hopeless*

**Lonely**

Nearly half of disadvantaged young people claimed to not feel safe in their community, compared to 28% who felt 'very safe' <sup>15</sup>

**Potential to Lose Hope for  
Future as Reality Sets In:**

- Learning to accept environment
- Learning street survival skills
- Feel 'life isn't really going to get any better for them' <sup>16</sup>

**CRIME** **Drugs** **Gangs**  
**Homelessness UNSAFE**

## Don't want to feel trapped in a Vicious Circle: *Local Environment can be the biggest barrier to escaping the poverty trap*

### TEENAGE PREGNANCY

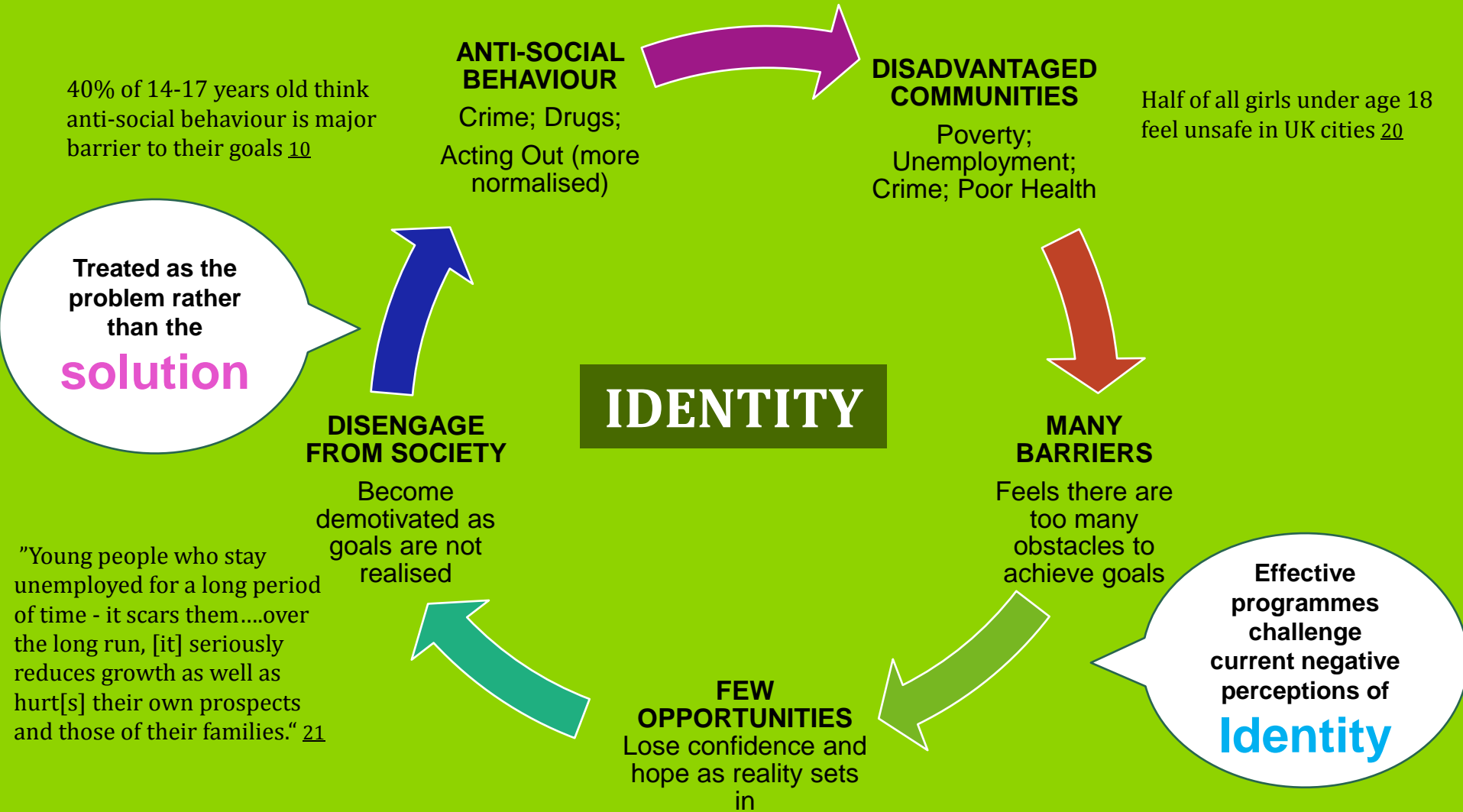
Teenage pregnancy is 8x more common amongst young people from manual social backgrounds than those from managerial or professional households. 22

### FAMILY MEMBER ROLE MODELS

Adult behaviour within the family has high impact on behaviour of younger family members. Research suggests that family life is the biggest predictor of a young person's education and employment preferences and opportunities; as well as likelihood of getting into trouble with the law 18

**Young adult carers** have been identified as particularly high risk subset of disadvantaged young people. Nearly 15,000 children up to the age of 17 are providing more than 50 hours of care per week 19

# Perpetuation of low social mobility: *Cycle of poverty, distrust & unemployment*





# Gaps in the literature helped us to identify 5 key themes we aim to explore in the fieldwork

*Most literature focuses on nature of deprivation, we aim to explore the human element of young people in a way that accounts for their individual experiences and attitudes*

1. **Favourite activities** that they enjoy doing
2. **Spending habits** of disadvantaged young people in particular
3. **Who is influential?** Pop-culture, role-models, celebrities
4. **Technology & Entertainment** (eg. Mobile phone use and connectivity) and the impact it has on their daily lives
5. **Gender** and **Age Differences** for all of the above

**Giving young  
people a  
voice**

**Focus on the  
individual, not  
on the  
disadvantage**

# Contact Us

[Rob.Hartley@2cv.com](mailto:Rob.Hartley@2cv.com)

[Jessica.Long@2cv.com](mailto:Jessica.Long@2cv.com)

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