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Black role models: Which messages work?

Testing the impact of role models' messages for

Black boys and Black young men



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Key Objectives:

- *Does hearing about role models have any impact on Black boys and young men?*
- *If so, which qualities and messages communicated by role models most effectively reach and inspire them, and challenge negative stereotypes, to raise their aspirations and potential to achieve more?*
- *Are there any unexpected or unintended negative consequences of these particular messages from role models on Black boys and young men?*

Participants

- Pilot Experiment
 - 8 types of role model messages
 - 209 (62% Black) school-aged boys
 - 14 Black young men
- School-aged Sample
 - Aged: 11-15
 - London schools
 - 364 Black boys (51% Black African, 18% Black Caribbean, 31% 'mixed White and Black' or 'Black other')
- Young Men Sample
 - Aged: 16-26
 - FE Colleges, Job Centres, support agencies, and leisure centres
 - 154 Black young men (46% Black African, 25% Black Caribbean, 29% 'mixed White and Black' or 'Black other')

Role Model Messages:

- Scale of Achievement
- Type of Success
 - “I have had a large-scale achievement and attained material success.”
 - “I have had a large-scale achievement and attained social-moral success.”
 - “I have had a small-scale achievement and attained material success.”
 - “I have had a small-scale achievement and attained social-moral success.”

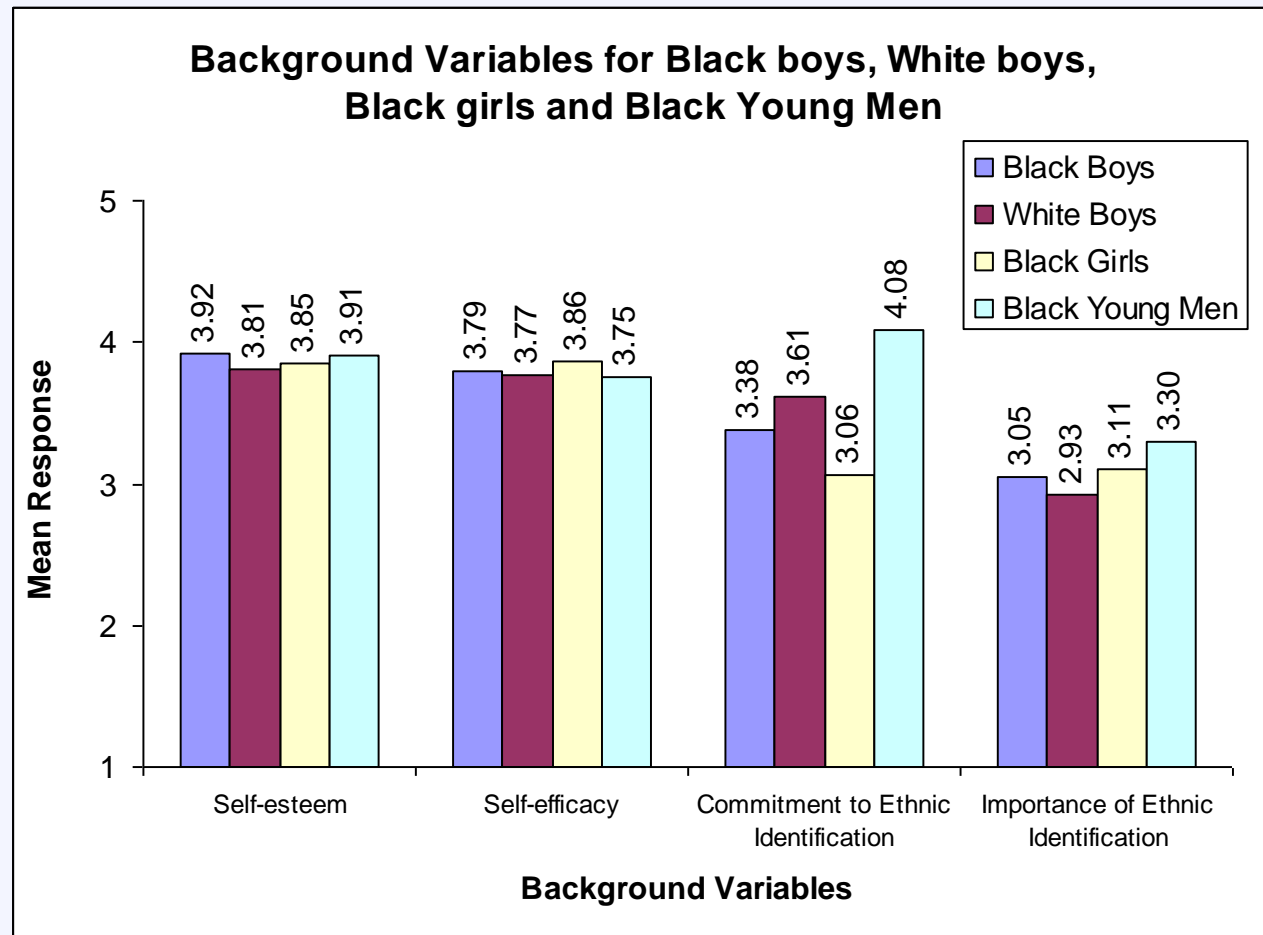
EXAMPLE: Large Scale of Achievement, Social-Moral Success

This is Robert's story: I am from a Black family. My father left home when I was about 10 years old and I do think I suffered from not having a male role model. I was trouble in class and a pain to my mum. In school, one thing I was good at was science and it really helped that my teachers often pushed me to keep studying. I worked hard and was able to find work in a hospital. I then trained to become a doctor. The hard work paid off and every move up the ranks taught me more about myself. I learned there are many ways to be successful but the truest and most honest form of respect a person can get is to be valued by other people as you help your community.

Questions

- Participants who heard about a role model
 - how much they liked and felt similar to the role model; and
 - how much others would describe the role model in terms of potentially stereotypical characteristics.
- All five groups of participants were then asked to:
 - identify the stereotypes they believe others hold about Black men;
 - describe how they feel about themselves;
 - name and describe their own personal role models; and
 - say which types of careers they aspired to and thought were possible for them.

Background Demographics



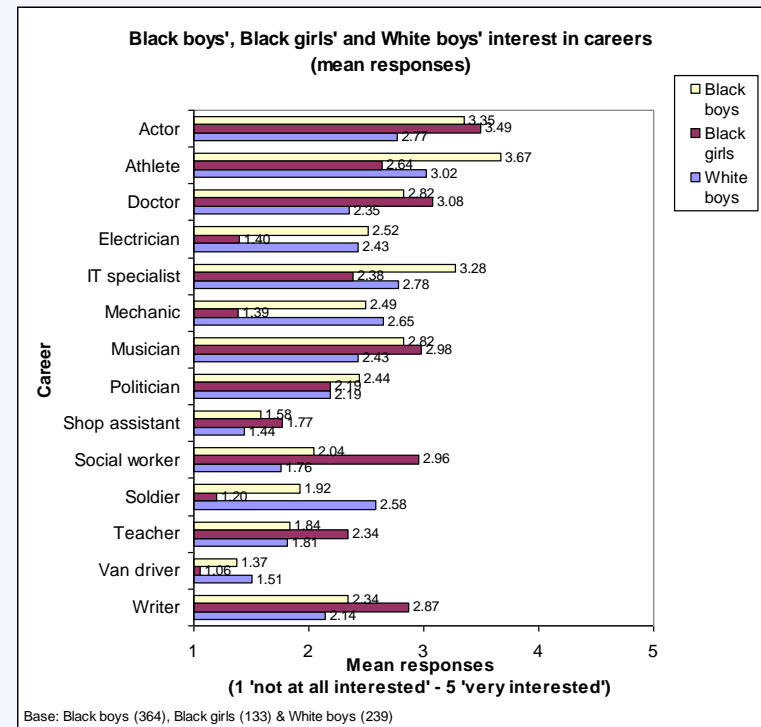
Career Aspirations

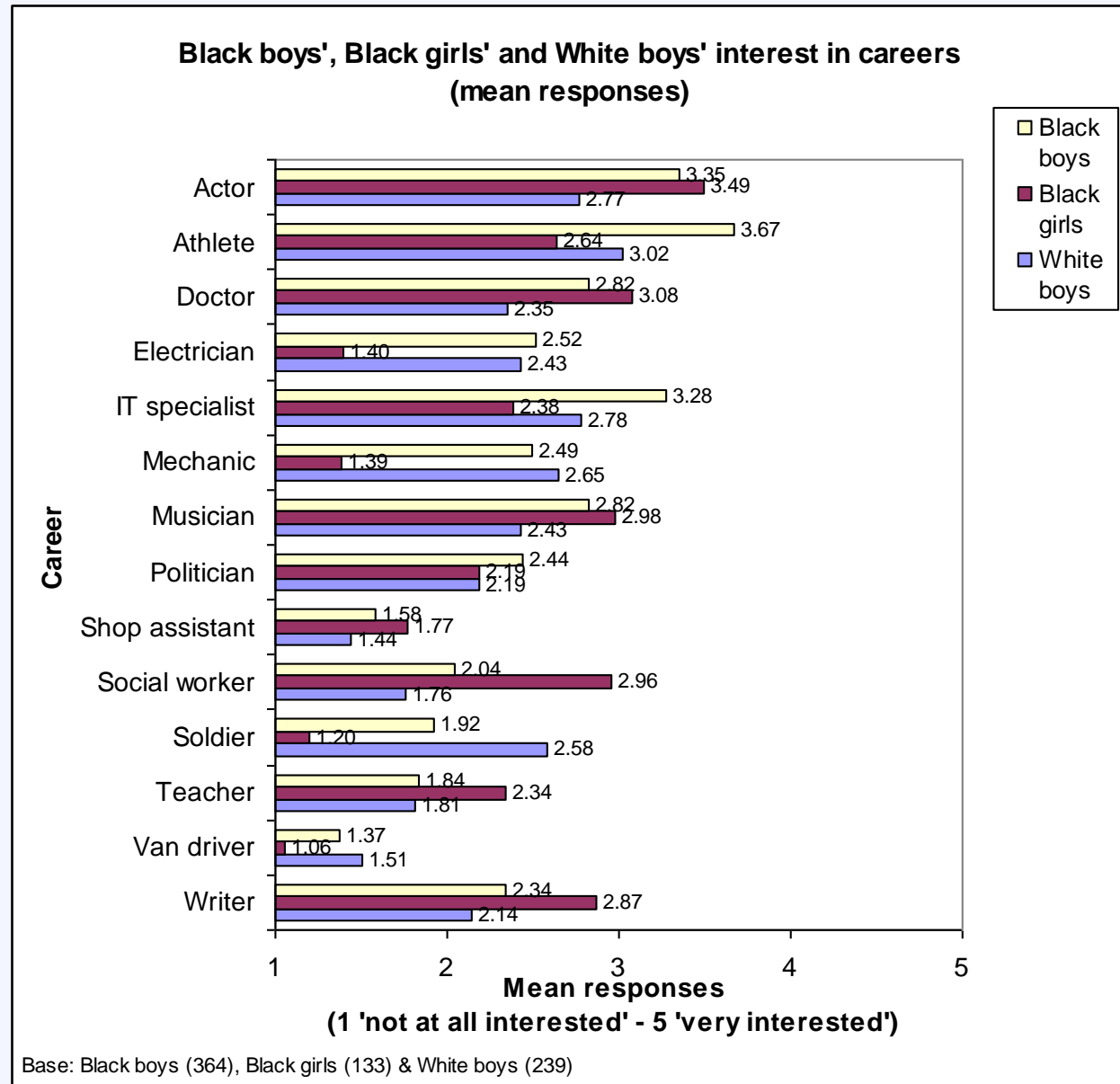
- **What were Black boys' and Black young men's career aspirations?**
 - Black boys were most interested in becoming an athlete, actor or IT specialist and felt that these were the jobs they would be most able to do. They felt least able to become a teacher, van driver or social worker.
 - Black Young men were most interested in becoming an IT specialist, athlete or IT specialist. They felt most able to become an IT specialist, athlete or shop assistant and were least confident in their ability to be a politician, doctor or writer.

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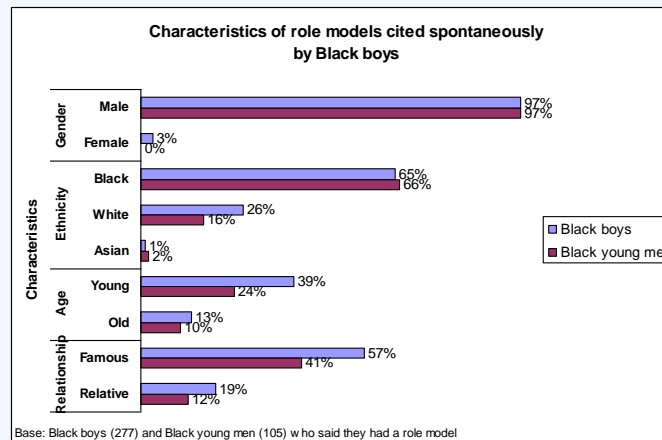
Own Role Models

- **Who did Black boys and young men cite as their own role models?**
 - Three quarters of the Black boys (76 per cent) and two thirds of the young men (68 per cent) stated that they had a role model.
 - These were typically Black (66 per cent) men (97 per cent), but a quarter of boys (26 per cent) and a sixth of young men (16 per cent) cited a White role model.
 - Athletes (especially footballers) were most popular among boys. When asked again a month later, boys were more likely to choose a business person (although athletes were still the most popular) and they were less likely than before, to choose an athlete.
 - Business people were most popular among young men, with athletes second.
 - The top reason given by both boys and young men for admiring their own role model was that they had attained material success (56 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).
 - Black boys and young men chose their role model because the role model had achieved material success (56%, 31%), they are seen to be generally inspirational (46%, 23%), and they saw themselves as being similar to the role model (23%, 14%).
 - Only 9% of the boys and 11% of the young men who cited a role model said that Black ethnicity was a reason for their choice.

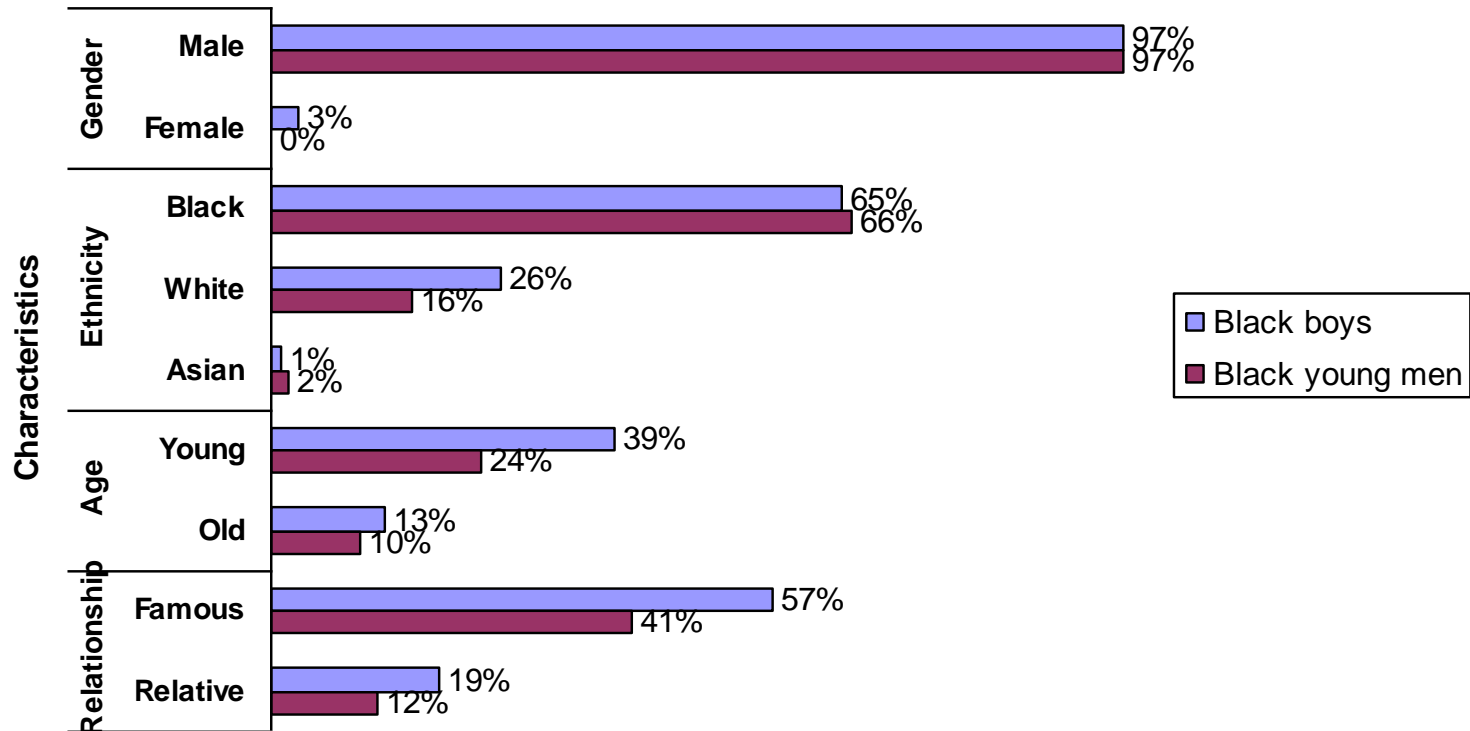
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Characteristics of role models cited spontaneously by Black boys



Base: Black boys (277) and Black young men (105) who said they had a role model

Does hearing about role models have any impact on Black boys and young men?

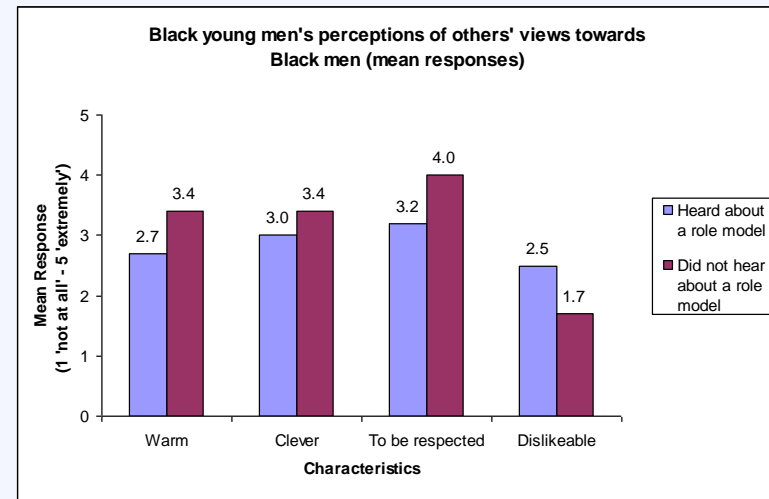
- **Black boys' and Black young men's views of role models.**
 - All role models were generally considered to be positive examples of Black men.
 - However, neither the boys nor the young men thought that the role models were very similar to themselves.
- **How Black boys and Black young men view themselves.**
 - Boys who heard about a role model viewed themselves as cleverer and more skilful than those who did not hear a role model.
 - However, the role models had no effect on the young men's views of themselves.
- **Career aspirations.**
 - Hearing about a role model had very little effect on Black boys' and Black young men's expectations or aspirations towards specific careers.
- **How Black boys think others view Black men generally.**
 - When asked one month later, boys who heard about a role model reported thinking that others would perceive Black men as warmer, more skilful, more popular, more successful and more admirable than they did when first asked. This was not the case for boys who had not heard about a role model at all.

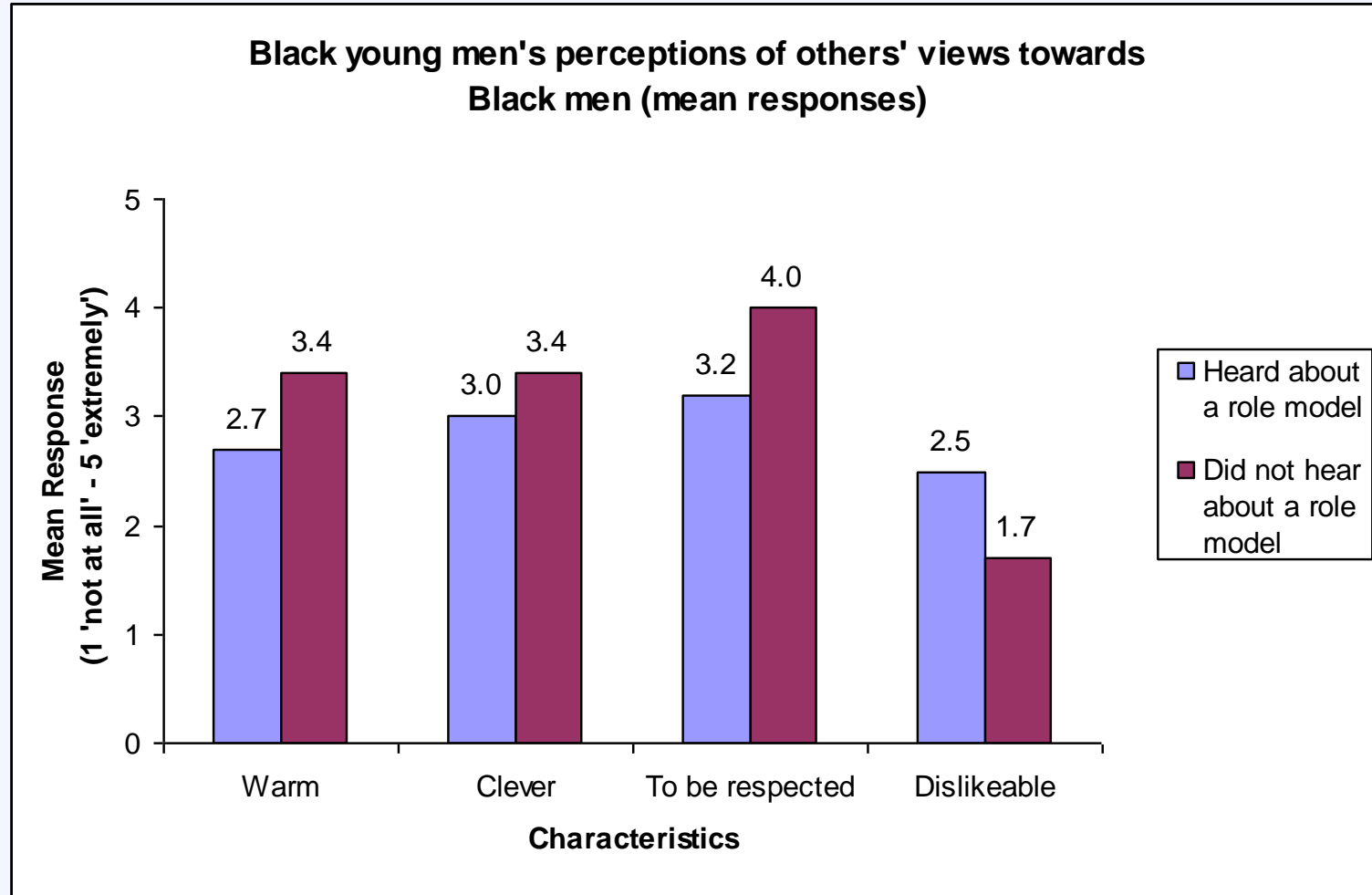
Which role model qualities raise Black boys and young men's aspirations, as well as challenge negative stereotypes?

- **Response to specific role models**
 - Materially successful role models were viewed more positively than the social-moral role models, by the boys and the young men.
 - Black boys and young men who heard about materialistic role models were more likely to say that they wanted to be like them than those who heard about social-moral role models.
 - However, Black boys were more likely to say that they *could* be like those with a small scale of achievement.
- **Perceptions of other people's views of the role models.**
 - Boys who heard about social –moral role models thought that other people would view them as kinder and less pitiable, but also less clever, skilful and successful than the boys who heard about materialistic role models.
 - Young men who heard about social-moral role models thought that other people would see them as kinder and less disliked, but less popular and competitive, than the men who heard materialistic role models
- **Impact over time.**
 - After a month, the boys' interest in all the role models had decreased.
 - However, those who heard about materialistic role models were more likely to say that they remembered their stories.

Are there any negative consequences of these particular messages from role models?

- **Perceptions of other people's views of Black men generally.**
 - Compared with those who did not hear about a role model, young men who had heard about any role model thought that other people would view Black men in general as less warm, less clever, less respected and more disliked.
 - Similarly, compared with those who did not hear about a role model, Black girls who had heard about any role model thought that other people would view Black men as less popular and less enviable, but also less disliked.





Recommendations

- Overall, the positive effects of the experimental role models and particular messages are evidence for the value of the REACH national role model programme, and for its development and possible expansion. It should be noted that contact with real role models, rather than recordings, may have more numerous and greater effects.
- Focusing on concrete material achievements may be a way for role models to reinforce their impact and value to their audience.
- Role models should explicitly ask boys to think about people they know, or have met, who are like the role model. This may encourage the boys to contact these people and follow their example, as well as boosting their self-image.
- Role models should be advised that messages about their achievements and qualities may have a greater impact on boys than on young men. Role models generally did not have an effect on young men, and may have some negative impacts. Different approaches or messages may be required to influence young men as positively. However, these would need to be identified and tested.
- Black young men may be more engaged with role models who also provide practical advice on how to access career paths (e.g. contact details for helpful organisations, workshops for gaining job skills); however, this needs to be tested.
- Role models' initial presentations should emphasise particularly memorable messages, such as those about material achievements. Messages are likely to be most effective if refreshed or added to, e.g. by repeating exposure to the role models. However, this has not been tested.
- Black boys' and young men's spectrum of career aspirations should be broadened, including showing routes for entering different professions. Role models may be able to help widen career aspirations by highlighting their own chosen career paths.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Where relevant, it would be useful to explore ways to deliver role modelling programmes to additional groups.
- Further research should be undertaken to establish how to increase the perceived prototypicality of successful Black role models.
- A follow up experiment is needed to test strategies for countering potential stereotype reinforcement with Black young men and Black girls.
- Further systematic quantitative evaluation is recommended to ensure future development of the REACH programme is as effective as possible and to learn from the presence or absence of effects of the programme.