# Fire Fighters, Neighbourhoods and Social Identity: the relationship between the fire service and residents in Bristol

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# Abstract

Although sporadic attacks on fire crews have long been acknowledged as an occupational hazard facing the fire service, in the mid 2000s, attacks seemed to be increasing in both prevalence and severity, accompanied by a feeling that fire safety messages were being resisted in certain communities. However, those communities were also those typified by numerous fire risk factors, potentially endangering people and property. In recognition of this growing problem, Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS) and Great Western Research (GWR) established this research project at UWE to explore issues of hostility and resistance to fire safety messages, particularly in certain communities. The research is underpinned by social identity approaches, which look at the nature of the group dynamic and interaction between residents and fire fighters, positing that group membership has the potential to lead to conflict in and of itself, but especially where those groups are in proximate and appropriate contexts, such as those found in hard pressed neighbourhoods. This research project utilised qualitative methods to examine this relationship, starting with an ethnographic enquiry alongside operational fire fighters. A second study used focus groups in three neighbourhoods to examine residents' perspectives, and a third looked at a series of interactions in community settings. Findings suggest a mutual distrust of non-group members, whereby residents resent fire fighters for their intrusion into neighbourhoods and fire fighters resent residents for requiring interventions into their community. Both parties had strong feelings about what fire fighters *ought* to be doing, and this fitted in with ideas of traditional roles of fire fighting and gender distinctions within communities. There are a number of implications for the FRS in this research project, including an ongoing need to address expectations both of operational fire fighters, for example through recruitment, and residents themselves who engage with fire fighters as one of a panoply of public services, rather than as the unique service provider that fire fighters consider themselves.

# Contents

Acknowledgments ..... 1

Abstract ..... 2

Preface: All in a day's work ..... 8

Chapter One: Introduction ..... 10

This research project ..... 10

The structure of the thesis ..... 11

The research context ..... 17

Introducing Avon ..... 17

Chapter Two: Background Literatures from Social Psychology, Human Geography and Urban Studies ..... 19

Thematic literatures ..... 19

Identity ..... 20

Self Categorisation Theory ..... 22

Stereotyping ..... 23

Social conflict ..... 24

Crowds ..... 26

Theories of the crowd ..... 27

The St Pauls Riot ..... 29

Football and protest crowds ..... 29

The contact hypothesis ..... 31

Community engagement ..... 35

Police engagement ..... 35

Engaging communities to reduce ASB ..... 39

Summary ..... 41

Place ..... 41

Place identity ..... 42

City-Identity-Sustainability ..... 44

Place as a social construct ..... 46

Neighbourhoods ..... 48

Exclusion ..... 49

Social capital ..... 51

Anti social behaviour ..... 52

Broken windows theory ..... 53

Summary ..... 54
Chapter Three: Fire Service Literatures ..... 56
Introducing fire fighter identity ..... 56
Fire service/police similarities ..... 58
Fire fighter identity ..... 64
Sensemaking and the collapse of fire fighter identity ..... 66
The fire service in local government ..... 68
Modern Local Government ..... 74
Crime prevention and community (fire) safety ..... 74
Summary ..... 79
Chapter Four: Methodology ..... 81
Introduction ..... 81
Locating the research ..... 82
Research questions ..... 84
Qualitative research ..... 84
Reflexivity ..... 86
Writing as research method ..... 87
Analytic strategy ..... 88
Study One: Ethnography with Avon Fire and Rescue Service ..... 90
Negotiating Access ..... 92
Visiting stations ..... 94
Interviewing fire fighters ..... 96
Study Two: Focus Groups in Neighbourhoods ..... 100
Identifying and recruiting the sample ..... 102
Developing the schedule ..... 105
Group dynamics ..... 106
Running the focus groups ..... 106
Study 3: Observations in the community ..... 109
Community interventions ..... 112
First Phase ..... 113
Second phase ..... 115
Summary ..... 116
Chapter Five: Ethnographic Work With AFRS ..... 118
Within AFRS ..... 118

Data gathering and analysis ..... 119
Research questions ..... 119
Analysis ..... 121
Fire fighters have a strong group identity distinct from the public ..... 123
Social contract between fire fighters and the public ..... 124
They ought to be held in high regard ..... 126
What fire fighters joined to do ..... 127
Busy stations ..... 129
Busy areas ..... 131
Normative distinction between busy areas and the communities in which fire fighters live ..... 133
Opposing contract of resentment ..... 134
Discussion ..... 136
Summary ..... 142
Chapter Six: Focus Group Study ..... 144
Data gathering strategy ..... 144
Analytic strategy ..... 144
Research Questions ..... 146
Themes ..... 147
Neighbourhoods ..... 148
Positive and negative views of the neighbourhood ..... 149
Sense of making do ..... 150
Interaction with other services ..... 151
Microgeographies ..... 153
How participants judge residents in other neighbourhoods ..... 155
Making judgements about their own neighbourhood ..... 156
Self esteem ..... 158
Change over time ..... 160
Life stage ..... 160
Decline in respect ..... 164
Involvement in and experience of emergencies ..... 165
The association between fire fighters and emergencies ..... 166
Expectations about involvement in emergencies ..... 166
The presence of fire fighters ..... 167

Speed and sirens ..... 168
The size and physicality of fire fighters ..... 169
Fire fighters as authority figures ..... 172
Association with health and safety ..... 173
Interfering fire fighters ..... 173
Easy targets ..... 174
Doing their job ..... 175
Discussion ..... 176
Chapter Seven: Observing Interactions ..... 180
Introduction ..... 180
Delivering targeted interventions ..... 181
Community fire safety interventions ..... 183
Home fire safety visits ..... 186
Vignettes ..... 188
Emergency call in Wootton ..... 189
Upperfield community festival ..... 192
'Warm calling' in Warwick Lane ..... 196
Summary of vignettes ..... 198
Analysis and Discussion ..... 199
Context ..... 200
Physical presence ..... 203
Intrusion ..... 205
Summary ..... 206
Chapter Eight: Discussion and Implications ..... 207
Introduction ..... 207
Bringing together the analyses ..... 209
Suspicion of non group members ..... 210
Traditional roles ..... 212
Entitlement and resentment ..... 213
Answering the research questions ..... 214
What are the roots of hostility and resistance between fire fighters and residents? ..... 214
How do social identity approaches explain this? ..... 216
Are engagement mechanisms effective? ..... 222
Implications for AFRS ..... 227

Reflecting on the process: looking back and looking forward ..... 229
References ..... 234
Appendix 1: Field work contact with AFRS personnel ..... 249
Appendix 2: Outline for Fire Fighter Interviews ..... 251
Appendix 3: Letter to HFSV participant ..... 252
Appendix 4: Script for Focus Groups ..... 253
Appendix 5: Debrief sheet for neighbourhood focus groups ..... 262
Neighbourhood research project ..... 262
Appendix 6: AFRS community interventions ..... 263
Appendix 7: Research Participants Briefing ..... 265
Neighbourhood research project ..... 265
Introduction ..... 265
My research ..... 265
More information ..... 265
Appendix 8: Aide memoire for use with HFSVs ..... 266
Appendix 9: Subordinate themes within superordinate groups ..... 268

## Preface: All in a day's work

*Three fire fighters accompany me to the front door of a house on a peripheral housing estate, where they are greeted by a woman, in her pyjamas. The Crew Manager (CM) apologises, but it transpires she was expecting them. It is around midday. She is at home with her four year old (also in his pyjamas) and her partner, who does not live there, but who is dressed. He is smoking and watching television. She shows us into the sitting room to the right, activating a wall mounted aerosol air spray as she goes past it. If it is to detract from the smoking partner, it does not work.*

*This house has clearly not been refurbished, perhaps for twenty years. The floors are bare lino and concrete – standard practice in council houses. The little boy is shy, and runs to his mum. She tries to distract him with toys, but he curls up on her knee with a dummy. I wonder if I should try to distract him with the toys on the floor, but am reluctant to seem gender stereotypical.*

*They do not have smoke alarms, and so two fire fighters go upstairs to fit one on the landing. The CM and I stay downstairs in the sitting room to go through the leaflet with the householder. By way of small talk, he asks how she heard about the service, and when she had booked her home fire safety visit (HFSV). She doesn't remember, and is not all that keen to chat about it. She doesn't seem that interested in what the CM is saying, and gives one word answers. Her partner continues to watch television, and to smoke, putting his cigarette out in a brimming ashtray balanced on an arm of the sofa. In my attenuated state, caused by proximity to a lot of fire safety information, I can't help but feel that this is very dangerous. He has not acknowledged the crew's presence.*

*It feels quite awkward to be asking 'household' questions of the resident with her boyfriend in the room. He is not going to be drawn into the conversation, and it seems wrong to talk about him, and their routine without his involvement. It is not an environment which is conducive to giving fire safety messages, but the CM soldiers on. Yes they smoke in bed, yes they have a chip pan, yes they use candles. He outlines all the key messages from the leaflet, too loudly for the boyfriend, who turns up the television. It is clearly interfering with his viewing pleasure.*

*The smoke alarms are fitted, and tested, and the CM wraps up the conversation. There are no questions. The little boy is entirely uninterested, and his mum does not say 'come and look at the fire engine' or anything which might pique his interest. The boyfriend doesn't look away from the television as we leave.*

*No one is actually aggressive towards the crew: no missiles are thrown, there are no abusive words. Nevertheless, this disheartening experience is all in a days work for the crew.*

Amended excerpt from field notes

# Chapter One: Introduction

## *This research project*

In 2005, the Fire Brigades' Union published research on attacks on fire fighters (Labour Research Department 2005). This was followed by guidance from central government to fire services on how to deal with assaults on their staff (Communities and Local Government 2006). Although assaults on fire crews had been endemic in some areas for a number of years, these two reports were indicative of a perceived rise in assaults on crews across the country, including in the South West. Further research suggested that residents of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas were twice as likely to die or be injured in fires than residents of more affluent areas (Arson Control Forum 2004), whilst fire fighters reported that hostility was developing in exactly these areas. However, as the preface suggests, not every interaction with the public was typified by violence or assault, nor by engagement and communication. As such, this research project was envisaged as a way to come to an understanding of what the fire service perceived as hostility towards them and their crews, combined with increasing resistance to fire safety messages, particularly, as I shall discuss below, in those areas most susceptible to fire.

This thesis, entitled 'Fire fighters, neighbourhoods and social identity: the relationship between the fire service and residents in Bristol' seeks to address these issues, by aiming to come to a better understanding of the relationship between residents and fire service. It will do this through three specific research questions:

1. How does hostility and resistance between the groups arise?
2. How do social identity approaches explain this?
3. To what extent are current engagement mechanisms effective?

This research project was initiated by Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS) and the University of the West of England (UWE) and made possible by funding from AFRS and Great Western Research (GWR). GWR is a part of the regional development agency for the South West and aims to promote international quality research within the region through collaborations between industry and academic institutions. In this instance, my industry partner is, of course, the fire service, with support from both UWE and Bristol University. In the true spirit of collaboration and multidisciplinarity, the project has been supported at UWE between the Faculty of

Environment and Technology (FET) and the Department of Psychology. The project comes under the auspices of GWR's psychology stream, but, as I shall discuss in the literature review, includes debates from contemporary social psychology, human geography and criminology. It also invariably draws on urban studies literatures, which themselves draw on these fields. A further section of literatures pertain particularly to fire and rescue services, both in this country and abroad. Due to my lack of language skills, and in some small part to the cultural similarities afforded by remaining in the Anglophone world, the majority of literatures are concerned with the UK, Australia and North America.

## *The structure of the thesis*

The first part of this thesis introduces the literatures which support and underpin the work. The first of these three chapters (Chapter Two) presents background literatures from social psychology, human geography and urban studies, which are particularly concerned with themes of identity and place; the second presents literature which takes the fire service as its subject matter; and, the third considers the methodologies used in these literatures to present the methods used for this research project.

Chapter Two will start with an explanation of the social identity approaches in which this research programme is rooted. Many of these studies started in the laboratory, but as time has progressed, so too has methodology with a number of groups of researchers taking social identity approaches into the field and examining them in relation to football and protest crowds. The similarities of these types of groups and the dynamic between them and the police mirrors, to an extent, the relationship between the fire service and groups of young people in certain communities. A further set of theories within social psychology covers the issue of contact between groups as a way of minimising conflict. Although these studies originated in racially divided communities, such as South Africa, they have crossed easily into policy parlance, and the fire service certainly seem to subscribe to many of its tenets. However, a number of researchers are now critical of such approaches, and so contact theories and their opponents are examined in light of fire service / community engagement.

Moving on from social identity approaches, other branches of psychology, including environmental psychology, also have relevance to this research project. The social

identity of groups that has such a bearing on intergroup situations is formed, in part, by residential experience, and for many people geographical identity and social identity go hand in hand. Environmental psychology is thus examined in terms of place identity and associated concepts which might influence the nature of interaction between different groups, both because of where those groups originated and where that interaction takes place. Environmental psychology uses many similar terms around place and identity to human geography, which considers the interaction between people and place and which problematises much of the relationship between humans and their environment. A particular area of interest both to environmental psychologists and to this research project is the impact of neighbourhoods and the neighbourhood environment on residents, and vice versa. This taps into many urban studies discussions of what the neighbourhood is, and how it impacts on residents' life chances. This forms the next section of this literature review.

Over the past two decades, neighbourhoods have become subject to numerous initiatives from central and local government and have become the default unit for interventions across the board, from regeneration to education and housing. The fire service are not immune to this and so the nature of neighbourhoods and the prevalence of neighbourhood based initiatives are covered in this section of the literature review. A particular concern of residents and fire fighters in many neighbourhoods in Britain today is anti social behaviour (ASB), although this is hard to clarify and categorise. ASB has become synonymous with 'broken Britain' and encapsulates issues as diverse as young people hanging about (not in fact a crime at all), littering and dog fouling, arson and drug dealing (which are clearly criminal) and physical disrepair, which in many cases is not the 'fault' of the community at all, rather the responsibility of the landlord or council. The fire service are in an interesting position with regard to ASB, being both the victims of it (through attacks), dealing with the consequences of it (by putting out rubbish fires, dealing with hoax calls) and trying to prevent its occurrence in the first instance, for example by involvement in community safety partnerships. ASB is therefore covered in this part of the literature review.

In Chapter Three, literatures which take the fire service as its subject are considered. It has been claimed (Brunsden 2007) that the fire service is an under researched area, but an increasing number of studies are being published that take the fire service as its subject, and in the past few years, the field has bloomed.

These include, but are not limited to, studies which take an ethnographic approach to the fire service and which inevitably study fire service identity and culture from a variety of different perspectives, as well as cultural studies examining representations of the fire service made to and by non fire fighters ('civilians'). A particular area of interest to a number of these researchers has been the male-ness of the fire service, and fire service masculinity has been covered in a myriad of ways, from its construction and reproduction (Baigent 2001), the way in which recruits are acculturated (Myers 2005, Childs 2005, Scott, Myers 2005) and the way it is challenged by work which does not conform to traditional modes of fire fighting (Childs, Morris et al. 2004, Tracy, Scott 2006). A logical extension of this work is to work on fire fighter sexuality, which is covered by Ward and Winstanley (2007).

The next section presents a discussion of an instance where group norms failed. Sensemaking literature comes from organisational studies, and is touched on here as an important sensemaking study concerns the fire service. The incident in question occurred in the US in the 1940s, but was reconstructed first for a book, which was then filmed, and then by Weick for this 1993 study. It examines how a group of fire fighters come to be in a situation which proves fatal for a number of them, and raises a number of questions about group identity which link it both to social identity literatures and to the fire service identity papers reviewed above.

The final part of the literature review examines the social policy context within which the fire service operate, and how this has changed over the previous decade. This sets the context for the ethnographic study, but also goes some way to explaining the provenance of this research project and starting to address some of the context in which the fire service operate, whereby the majority of fire fighters join to do just that, as in Weick's study, yet the prevailing thought, not just in the fire service, but across the public sector, is focused on prevention, which is seen as far less appetising to fire fighters, and indeed divergent from their 'actual' jobs. This section has been prepared for publication in a social policy journal, in part because of the perceived lack of policy literature which covered the fire service, despite their ongoing role in society and changing role in local government. This section also concludes the literature review.

Chapter Four presents the methodology used in this research project and outlines the methods used in the three discrete studies. As this research project aimed to come to an indepth understanding of the role of the fire service in a number of

different communities and the nature of the interaction between residents and fire fighters, qualitative approaches were chosen. Although quantitative approaches are usual in a number of the fields covered in the literature review, perhaps particularly environmental and social psychology, quantitative approaches were rejected for this study. The qualitative approaches used will be discussed in this chapter, stemming from a broadly ethnographic approach, but which utilises semi structured interviews, focus groups and observations alongside traditional ethnographic techniques. Having discussed these issues in broad terms, this chapter will then turn to the methods used in the individual studies.

The first study, in Chapter Five, used a broadly ethnographic approach to access staff within the fire service. A number of hours were spent in various fire service locations, shadowing and observing staff at Control, HQ and in two different stations. A number of other contacts included meetings with staff and union members, attending fire service conferences and visiting other services around the UK. In this study, I was particularly looking at how fire service identity forms and functions, what fire fighters' experiences of different neighbourhoods were like, and how they explained this to me. I found that participants were quick to tell me about instances of attacks, perhaps because that's how they understood my research, but were less receptive to ideas of lower level hostility. Many of the fire fighters I spoke with were passionate about their jobs and their roles, but only really when discussing fire fighting. They have a strong social identity, particularly compared with non fire fighters, or 'civilians', and, broadly felt that they were deserving of respect for providing a universal service. They particularly enjoyed fighting fires, and their identity was very much tied up with this, rather than with community safety work. Further, although they provide an emergency service in all neighbourhoods, they held a number of preconceptions about some, and were particularly keen to attend fires here, but not to undertake preventive work. This leads to a cycle of resentment, whereby they resent residents for requiring interventions, and residents resent them for interfering. This leads to the next study, presented in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six covers the second study, in which I conducted focus groups in the three neighbourhoods of Shiregreen, Upperfield and Hilton[1]. Shiregreen and Upperfield had been outlined to me by the fire service as 'problematic' neighbourhoods that

[1] These are anonymised neighbourhoods, discussed below.

they would like me to consider. Hilton was chosen as a comparator as it too is a post war estate, in a geographically marginal part of the city. However, despite some crime and associated ASB problems, AFRS have not experienced the same problems in Hilton as in the other two neighbourhoods. Participants were recruited in two different ways: in the first tranche, I recruited participants from groups that met in community facilities. In this way, I recruited a wide range of people, including unemployed young people (aged sixteen to twenty five), a local history group, a parenting group and an older people's afternoon club. In the second tranche, I worked with AFRS to identify recipients of Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) over the last few months. These recipients were then invited, by letter, to attend a focus group at a given location on a certain day. The focus groups explored residents' experiences of their neighbourhoods with them, asking them how they found living where they lived, and whether they thought the areas were unique in any way. Discussions also covered how participants formed preconceptions about residents in their own and other neighbourhoods before moving on to issues around the fire service. Whilst residents from the second tranche of recruitment had all had HFSVs, a number in the first tranche had done too. This gave some useful tools for discussion around people's different experiences with the fire service at emergency incidents, in the community and in their own homes. Not surprisingly, findings from this study covered ideas around neighbourhoods and the FRS, although a number of other themes also came up. Participants discussed how their neighbourhood relates to their self identity, and spoke positively and negatively about their neighbourhoods, claiming they were either full of problems, but good places to live, or outlining the positive aspects before saying they were bad places to live. As such ideas of neighbourhood were complex with residents contradicting each other and often themselves. Views of neighbourhood were also bound up with ideas of who lives where and what people in other neighbourhoods were like. Participants often stated a reluctance to judge people on their neighbourhood, and then went on to do just that. Participants tended to express shock at the idea that people might be hostile to fire fighters, but invariably then went on to express hostility or resentment themselves. They also had very strong opinions of what the FRS should be doing and, like, fire fighters themselves, felt that this was principally fighting fires. However, there was also acknowledgement that prevention work did serve some purpose. What people were less happy about was being on the receiving end of these interventions themselves.

The third study, discussed in Chapter Seven, built on the findings of these two studies and examined instances, through observation, of the fire service engaging with the community. This included community events and HFSVs and allowed me to observe the interaction from a greater distance, and with improved impartiality, than instances where attendance was alongside the fire service. Further, this study allowed me, to an extent, to 'test' the findings from the other studies: in the first study I was concerned with how fire fighters spoke about themselves and their interactions with residents; in the second study, I was concerned with how residents spoke about themselves and the fire service. In this final study, I could examine how these assumptions were played out in the intergroup context. This also particularly relates the studies back to some of the theoretical literature described in the literature review.

In the final chapter I will reflect on the work undertaken through the duration of this research project, presenting both a discussion of the research project and a number of implications for AFRS. As this research project is part funded by AFRS, I intend to describe some of the implications for the service from the research, lessons which will also be transferable beyond the Avon area, so that, through mechanisms such as the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and initiatives including workplace violence and social marketing, recommendations made to Avon will be of benefit to the fire service nationwide. There are also benefits for the fire service at a more strategic level: Avon have been innovative in developing and sponsoring this research, and demonstrating to other FRS that there is a place for high level academic research in this field. Greater understanding of the fire service and its role and functions will have positive and ongoing ramifications, as will an ongoing academic focus on the service and further links between fire services and universities. These issues will be discussed in this chapter in order to locate this research as having real world applicability and use beyond the academy. This chapter will also start to frame some of the discussions arising from the work in academic terms. The studies will be drawn together, and consideration to how the research might be conducted differently, should it be done again. It has long been said that the purpose of research is to ask three questions where only one previously existed, and so in this light I shall propose areas for further consideration as a result of this research project.

## *The research context*

For the most part, this research is set within three neighbourhoods in Bristol, and a number of Bristol fire stations, as used by Avon Fire and Rescue Service. The use of neighbourhoods as a unit of research is discussed in greater detail in the first Literature Review chapter, and the neighbourhoods where the research was conducted are introduced in the Methodology. Suffice to say, environmental psychology (Proshansky, Fabian et al. 1983, Pol 2002, Lalli 1992) has much to say about residential environments, and the impact that they have on our identities. As such, neighbourhoods are used in this programme of research both to reflect the way in which we as residents navigate our cities, but also to reflect the way in which the fire service delivers policies at a local level. Although many of us would struggle to define the neighbourhood (Galster 2001), we are broadly familiar with what it comprises. Conversely, the definition of the fire service is relatively straightforward, yet its internal workings remain a closed world to all but fire fighters and the small number of support staff who work with them.

## Introducing Avon

The county council of Avon ceased to exist in any real sense in 1996, when it became the four unitary authorities of Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset (BANES). The historic name of Avon persists in a number of local authority settings, including the police (Avon and Somerset Constabulary) and the Fire Service (Avon Fire and Rescue Service – AFRS), and the four unitary authorities are sometimes referred to as 'CUBA': the county that used to be Avon. Avon Fire and Rescue Service covers these four unitary authority areas. It employs over one thousand people, around nine hundred of whom are operational fire fighters, and the other deployed in support. There are a further two hundred retained fire fighters providing cover in their local communities. Avon's headquarters (HQ) are co-located with a fire station in the centre of Bristol, and Control (from where emergency calls are handled) is near Bath. There are a further 23 stations, and a training centre (near Avonmouth) which is shared with a number of other fire services.

Although Avon covers four local authority areas, the majority of residents and incidents occur within the Bristol area. Further, the Bristol area is the most socially diverse and tends to present the most challenging conditions in which crews work (although that is not to say the other areas are entirely unproblematic). As such, the

majority of the work undertaken in this research project has been in Bristol stations, and in certain neighbourhoods. Whilst it would be disingenuous to Avon to disguise their involvement, it would also be hard to disguise the area and city, as the most diverse and populous within the South West. So, Avon and Bristol both remained named within the study. However, in the interests of confidentiality, I have disguised neighbourhoods and stations.

# Chapter Two: Background Literatures from Social Psychology, Human Geography and Urban Studies

In this and the next chapter, I propose to examine the literatures which underpin this programme of research, covering two linked but distinct areas: literature relating to the themes of this research project and literature which takes the fire service as its subject matter. In a third chapter, linking the literature reviews with the studies, I will consider literatures which relate to my proposed methodologies. These literatures help to pose the research questions. As discussed in the Introduction, the aim of the research is to explore the relationship between residents and the fire service in Bristol, by asking questions about how hostility and resistance arise, what social identity approaches can tell us about this and the extent to which current engagement mechanisms are effective.

## *Thematic literatures*

This first chapter of the literature review deals with the themes and theoretical areas which inform this programme of research. This research project is very much grounded in an interdisciplinary approach, and, as such, the literatures necessarily draw on a number of different fields, including social and environmental psychology, criminology and human geography. However, as I will discuss, these are linked through the broad themes of identity and place, providing a coherent underpinning and context to the research. In the first instance, I will look at social identity approaches, considering the ways in which group and individual identities are formed, and how this informs people's actions, allowing conflict between groups to be examined without apportioning blame to either group. This covers social identity and self categorisation theories, as well as issues around bias, stereotyping and social conflict and issues which arise in crowds before considering the contact hypothesis which proposes mechanisms for reducing conflict between groups. Social identity approaches to an extent provide the theoretical underpinning for this research project, whilst the subsequent areas provide context and depth to the different fields that are touched upon. Another way in which particular groups, notably the police and regeneration workers have sought to improve relations within communities has been through engagement, and so this forms the next section.

Identity is not solely formed by group membership, rather becomes salient in a variety of contexts. One such context of relevance to this research project, and forming the second major theme, is place. Debates around place have a number of theoretical underpinnings, including from environmental psychology and human geography. I will start by looking at ideas of place identity, linking between this and the previous themes, and briefly discuss how place is constituted as a social construct with relevance to identity, the political aspects of which inform a number of conceptualisations of exclusion. Processes of exclusion are, inevitably, geographically concentrated, most notably in neighbourhoods, and these are discussed next, alongside social capital, which is often used as an explanatory mechanism for this trajectory. Issues of ASB and incivility are of particular concern both to the fire service and to residents in many neighbourhoods, and so this forms the next section, which concludes this first literature review chapter.

## *Identity*

In this section of the literature review, I will look at social identity approaches within social psychology and examine their relevance to this programme of research. This does not purport to be a comprehensive review of this area of literature, something which has been attempted by many others (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004, Brown 2000b), rather it sets the scene for a number of different literatures (including those around crowds and contact theory, as well as pertaining to environmental psychology) which will be introduced in subsequent sections. This section forms the theoretical underpinning for this research project, and provides the lens through which many of the findings are viewed.

Social identity approaches include social identity theory (SIT) and Self Categorisation Theory (SCT), and seek to explain how individuals behave in group situations, and how groups themselves behave. It evolved in Europe in the latter half of the twentieth century as an attempt to address the wider social context of group behaviour without recourse to individual aggression or pathology (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004). Social identity approaches are based on the assumptions that individuals are members of certain social groups, and that those groups have meaning to them, as well as contributing to the image that they have of themselves. Tajfel (1978) defines social identity as:

> *that part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership* (page 63)

As such, social identity occurs along an individual-intergroup continuum, although this was not addressed until the later development of SCT, which is described in greater detail below.

Early theorists such as Henri Tajfel (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel, Turner 1986) set up experiments (the 'minimal group paradigm') where participants were randomly assigned to groups, and examined the way in which they then behaved as group members. In contrast with earlier work, which had suggested that people formed groups with people they felt an affinity towards, and therefore were in natural antagonism with people in other groups, Tajfel and his colleagues concluded that being in a group was a necessary and sufficient condition for favouritism towards the ingroup (one's own group), and against the outgroup (other groups). Indeed, they were surprised to see that it was not just enough to do better than the alternative group, but to maximise the difference between groups – even at the expense of group gain. From these experiments, Tajfel deduced that there was a part of identity that was distinct from personal identity (those facets that make us unique), and that this was social identity – that part of self that functions in group situations. Further, social identity also linked into self concept, with aspects of group membership contributing to ways in which the self is defined. Being a member of a group thus provides the impetus for comparison with other groups, and which gives the individual a 'system of orientation' for self reflection (Tajfel, Turner 2003 (1979)). These aspects comprise a 'conceptual tripod' (Tajfel 1979) underpinning social identity theory in which it examined collective psychology whilst looking at status differences between groups in society and the propensity for people to consider identity issues in group or individual terms.

Social identity theories do not just attempt to explain, however, how groups behave in relation to one another, but also to examine the relationship between groups and

the societies which they comprise (Reicher 2004). As such, social identity approaches link groups of individuals back to the social world, and to the socio-economic and cultural factors that impinge on it, as groups cannot be understood without reference to one another and links to the politics and ideologies that constitute those group identities and their internal traditions. As such, identities are dynamic and contextual, whilst an individual can also demonstrate different identities, depending on the context of the occasion and the intergroup encounter. The context of group behaviour has particular relevance to this research project, where fire fighters take on group identity whilst at work, and residents do so in their home neighbourhoods, and the use of social identity approaches allows the examination of conflict and hostility between groups without apportioning blame to either party – although, as will be demonstrated, this is not to suggest that conflict is either inevitable or intractable. Further, social identity approaches have been used in a number of studies that have relevance to this research project, including in small groups (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004), organisations (Haslam 2000) and a number of studies on crowds and crowd behaviour (Reicher 2001, Stott, Hutchison et al. 2001, Drury, Stott 2001), which will be addressed below.

## Self Categorisation Theory

Social identity theory only goes part of the way to explaining what happens in groups: it can account for processes undertaken once group membership is assumed. What it does less well is account for how group membership occurs in the first instance, and how the individual is affected by group membership, points which are undertaken by self categorisation theory (Turner, Oakes 1989). Although SCT developed later than SIT – and, to an extent, in response to its perceived shortcomings (Abrams, Hogg 1999) – it deals with those parts of the cognitive processes which occur prior to group membership, namely the categorisation of the self into groups. Turner (1989) suggests that the process through which self categorisation occurs is depersonalisation, the cognitive process through which consensual behaviour within a group and expectations of consensual behaviour in the outgroup is generated. As such, the level of inclusion at which and the degree to which the individual categorises the self and others as similar or different varies depending upon the social context in which it occurs. Further, the salience of social identities shared between individuals leads to the depersonalisation of self perception, and it is this depersonalisation that produces group, or social, behaviour

(page 245). In this research project, and demonstrated by geographers such as Massey (1995), who is discussed below, place is determined to be a social construct, and can, therefore, contribute context to encounters between fire fighters and residents. As such, the identity of particular neighbourhoods impacts on the social identity of residents, thereby determining, or at least contributing to, their response to intergroup encounters with, for example, the FRS.

Haslam (2000) states that social identities can occur at greater and lesser 'levels of abstraction', which are more or less exclusive, and which become salient in different contextual conditions. As affiliation is felt at one level of abstraction, the salience of the categorisation at other levels becomes less relevant. Further, affiliation with a particular group, at whatever level of abstraction, will lead to comparison and feeling of similarity with the ingroup, and differentiation from the outgroup. This sense of ingroup distinctiveness/outgroup differentiation is crucial to the formation of social identity. As such, self categorisation is the 'trigger' that turns on social identity, and allows for people to behave in an intergroup context (Turner 1982).

## Stereotyping

In addition to ingroup favouritism, there is a linked process of outgroup differentiation, or stereotyping. In this process, individual group members cease to be seen as individuals, but become seen as polarized prototypes (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004) of members of that group, whereby ingroup members are seen as more similar, and outgroup members more different, whatever the subjective situation. Stereotyping is a form of shared social behaviour and as such analysis of stereotypes must not look only at individual psychology, but also at groups and intergroup relations. This process of depersonalising and stereotyping is an essentially social activity, taking place as it does within the confines of the social group and its norms, which are routinised within social groups, and occurs both individually and within and between groups as group members identify their category identities in relation to the context of the situation, and under the expectation that other group members will behave similarly. Turner (1989) describes this in relation to Athenians and Spartans being mortal enemies, who unite in antipathy to the Persian invader, but in this research project, it might be more

relevant to refer to the genial rivalry between one watch and another, which then become united against changes imposed by 'Management' (Brunsden, Hill 2009b).

Stereotyping is of particular interest to this research project, and social identity approaches have made a number of contributions in this area. Prior to the developments made by social identity approaches, stereotyping tended to be considered as a distortion of individual psychology, whereas social identity approaches viewed it not as a distortion, but as culturally rooted, potentially not only a reliable indicator of in and outgroup behaviour, but also highly contextually contingent (Brown 2000b). As such, stereotyping can be seen as '*expressions of cognition, of people's attempts to make sense of the world, to create meaningful but collectively shaped representations of group realities*' (Turner, 2004, page 271). Social identity theorists addressed stereotyping as an internal categorisation process, through which members of the ingroup see members of the outgroup as having commonalities to one another that are different to ingroup members' commonalities. As such members of one group are more like members of their group than members of other groups, although of course this is contextually dependent. As such, it is a collective misnomer within social identity approaches that this 'homogeneity effect' (Turner, Reynolds 2004) is multiplied in perceptions of outgroup homogeneity. Rather, different studies have shown different effects, depending on strength of identification with the ingroup and differences in status between groups, amongst others. Further, stereotyping does not equate, nor does it necessarily lead, to ingroup bias. Rather bias is just one of a number of different social strategies which might also include individual mobility or social creativity (page 264). The outcomes of these inevitable social processes therefore have great relevance to the study of the relationship between two distinct groups: the fire service and residents.

## Social conflict

There is also a development through comparison, via bias to social conflict, although this does not occur in all instances and all the time. Indeed, '*some people will display hostile intergroup behaviour under a great variety of conditions… and in some conditions most people will display hostile intergroup behaviour*' (Tajfel, 1978, page 70-1). Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest three preconditions essential for

comparison: firstly, it is necessary that the ingroup identity has been sufficiently internalised for comparison to occur; secondly, the social context must be conducive to comparison; and, thirdly, there must be an outgroup available for comparison who meet conditions of sufficient similarity, proximity and situational salience (Tajfel, Turner 2003 (1979)) page 60. Further, intergroup comparison does not *inevitably* lead to intergroup bias (Turner, Reynolds 2004) as often presupposed, rather, in social identity terms, a positive social identity requires ingroup distinctiveness, which does not directly equate to bias (although of course, bias can arise from the operationalisation of distinguishing behaviours). Indeed, bias is only one of a number of strategies for dealing with intergroup situations, which depend on the relative status position (page 265) of the respective groups, and the perceived permeability and legitimacy of group boundaries. Even the process of self categorisation serves to highlight social comparison and group distinctiveness, as the depersonalising process reinforces the perceived homogeneity of each group separately and distinctively from one another. It is an irony of the group process that groups whose norms promote individuality may be less cohesive than those who promote uniformity (Haslam 2000, Fincham 2007), and there are clearly implications in this for the way in which organisational identity develops in the uniformed services, and how they are positioned relative to the community, issues which are discussed both in the following chapter and in Chapters Five and Seven, on the findings from my studies with the fire service.

Following categorisation in terms of group membership, and then self definition with regard to that social category, '*individuals seek to achieve positive self esteem by positively differentiating their ingroup from a comparison outgroup on some valued dimension*' (Haslam 2000) page 21. Such depersonalisation leads to the perception of '*oneself more as the identical representative of a social category and less as a unique personality defined by one's personal differences from other ingroup members*' (Turner, Reynolds 2004) page 245. As a corollary to this, outgroup members are also depersonalised. Further, there is a normative dimension to this process, for if one group's identity is formed around their social norms, and the outgroup's identity is seen as distinct from this, it is not inconceivable that the outgroup's social norms are seen as not only distinct, but also deviant, paving the way for social conflict to occur, as examined in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

However, social conflict is not just the outcome of psychological processes (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004), but also of the interplay of socio-economic and historical factors, including the possibility of a realist competition over finite resources. As such:

> *social antagonism can be a (psychologically) rational reaction to people's collective understanding of themselves in interaction with their theories of the social world and social structural realities*' (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004) page 273.

Further, that social conflict occurs in space as well as time since '*one cannot physically separate the group from its environment*' (Paulus, Nagar 1989) page 136, - adding additional layers of complexity to the context surrounding social identity processes. These ideas are explored further by Dixon (2001), who takes up four different conceptualisations of space, arguing that in some instances, space is used as a 'backdrop' to interaction (Dixon 2001) , which will be discussed in greater detail below, and which link identity and place in this study of how groups behave in contact with one another.

So, social identity approaches show us that intergroup comparison is inevitable where proximate groups are in appropriate social settings, and that conflict is a ready result of these situations where people strive to achieve maximal group distinctiveness in a positive dimension. This helps us to see conflict as a natural, if not inevitable, adjunct to intergroup relations and a potential outcome to any intergroup encounter, including those between residents and the FRS. This is particularly examined below in relation to conflict emerging in crowd situations.

## *Crowds*

One sort of group of particular relevance to this programme of research is the crowd. Firstly, crowd situations most closely resemble the type of hostile intergroup encounter which, although not typical of every hostile encounter the fire service experience, make up the most high profile and most significant intergroup events.

Secondly, research has looked, as I shall discuss below, at football and protest crowds involved in intergroup conflict with police officers. As discussed elsewhere, there are a number of similarities between the police and the fire service that make such studies of relevance here. Thirdly, there is a relevance of social identity approaches to fire, both with fire as a dynamic outgroup (Weick 1993) and as a symbol of the crowd (Canetti, Stewart 1984). By looking at the intergroup dynamics of social situations, we can better understand how fire fighters deal with fire, how this contributes to their identity and what likely outcomes there are from these encounters. This section builds on the social identity approaches outlined above, showing how they have been used in different research projects and also building on the theory towards the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM), which is discussed below.

## Theories of the crowd

Reicher gives three criteria which must be met for a group to be considered a crowd (Reicher 1984): firstly, group members must be present and proximate, secondly their situation must be 'novel or ambiguous' and, thirdly, 'formal' means of reaching agreement must not be available (page 4). Traditional analysis of crowd behaviour looked at crowds as separate from their social context. However, society and crowds are linked through identity and mechanisms of identity processes (Reicher 2001) and as such it is necessary to look at identity in terms of how it is shaped by society, as discussed above, and how it informs crowd action. Social identity approaches have proved to be particularly useful in this matter.

Historically, it was suggested that crowds were largely irrational (Le Bon 1896 / 2006), with individual identity being subsumed by the mass, and primitive behaviour being unleashed, with the crowd representing a threat to social order. However, early researchers, such as Le Bon, were keen to understand the power of the crowd in order that they might harness it. Like fire (Canetti, Stewart 1984), crowds were capable of inspiring both horror and fascination. Le Bon's conception of the crowd relied on the core concept of the submergence of the individual into the crowd. As such, individuals lost all sense of self and of responsibility and, because of the combined force of their disinhibition and their numbers, became unstoppable. Such conceptions of the crowd were entirely decontextualised, ignoring the social and

political factors that had caused the crowds to gather in the first instance and any external inputs, such as violence from authorities, that they might encounter. In this conception, the crowd acts as an ‘off’ switch to individual norms, and in political terms this allows for the denial of the voice, the demands, of the crowd (Reicher 2001) as such collective action cannot be meaningful. Later thinkers on the crowd, such as Floyd Allport, disregarded the group mind proposed by Le Bon, instead asserting that the crowd accentuated individual tendencies and identity, although this was typified by instinct, and again, decontextualised crowd actions and social identity. Reicher (2001) describes how subsequent thought on the crowd came then from sociology, in the form of Emergent Norm Theory (page 192). As this suggests, these ideas propose that crowd behaviour is not pathological, but that collective behaviour is determined and governed by norms which emerge from the crowd. However, what this theory does not explain is the mechanism through which this occurs.

As seen above, one set of theories that seek to link the group and society are proposed by social identity approaches, and a number of researchers have attempted to apply these approaches to the study of crowds and intergroup dynamics. Reicher (2001) suggests that crowd behaviour is actually rational and that, further, it is socially and historically contingent, being both shaped by society, and in turn, potentially resulting in social change. These links between society and the crowd are formed through psychological processes of identity (Reicher 2001), and to understand this process properly requires a ‘*model of identity which explains both how society structures identity and how identity organises action*’ (page 185). Reicher suggests that social identity approaches can meet this challenge, both experimentally and in the field. A number of studies of crowd participants have been conducted in the intervening years (Reicher 1984, Stott, Reicher 1998, Drury, Reicher et al. 2003, Drury, Reicher 2000), with the first looking at the St Pauls riot in 1980, and subsequent studies looking also at football supporters and environmental activists, leading to the development of the ESIM. Most recently, work in this vein has looked at slightly different sorts of crowds, examining the behaviour of those involved as victims and bystanders in the 2007 bombings in London (Cocking, Drury 2009 ).

## The St Pauls Riot

Crowd members rely on inductive processes of categorisation, as described above, to understand the context of their behaviour. In this way, they come to understand what is appropriate in the context in which they find themselves, and as members of a particular category. The process through which this occurs is deindividuation, which has been studied in both lab (Reicher, Spears et al. 1995) and field settings. The first field study to look at identity processes in crowd situations was Reicher's 1984 study of the 1980 St Pauls riot. The St Pauls study, which took data from a number of sources including official, police reports, eye witness interviews and media recordings, linked crowd behaviour to ideas of social categorisation (Turner 1982). Reicher suggests that in crowd situations, behavioural norms will be extrapolated from the behaviour of fellow crowd members if they are seen as belonging to the ingroup and are acting within the understood attributes of that group. In St Pauls, this behaviour was seen to limit the geographical reach of the riot and the actions of the crowd who, for example, refrained from attacking locally owned businesses. In one instance, Reicher describes one stone thrown at police being followed by a volley of other stones, but a rioter throwing a stone at a bus being told to desist by fellow crowd members, demonstrating contextual social norms. Of particular relevance to this study are anecdotal reports that although the police were chased from the neighbourhood, fire engines were allowed through. Reicher concludes that '*not only is crowd behaviour moulded by social identity but conversely, crowd behaviour may mould social identity*' (page 19). As such, crowds give individuals a sense of power which enables them to express group identity even in the face of opposition.

## Football and protest crowds

Following studies then looked at the escalation of violence (Stott, Reicher 1998) in the context of football crowds, utilising these social identity approaches. Much attention had been paid in the past to football violence and 'hooliganism' with various explanations being given for it. These studies viewed fans (blinkeredly) as not *actually* violent (Armstrong, G and Harris, R 1991) or (reductively) as expressing their working class masculinity (Dunning, Murphy et al. 1991). However, these studies tended not to pay much attention to the actions of the police, and as such did not socially contextualise the violence which they purported to study, just as other studies of attacks on fire fighters have not looked at the role they play in these

encounters. Stott and Reicher demonstrated that crowds, including football crowds, are made up of many, mostly non-violent, sub-categories. However, the police tend to view them homogenous, and as homogenously violent or threatening. Importantly, the police then have the operational and organisational capacity to treat the crowd as violent, and as such they are able to act on their view of the crowd. In such conditions, crowd members would come to see the actions of the police as illegitimate, and so their own actions are seen as self defence. This would have the effect of altering the self categorisation of many crowd members, ironically turning the crowd into the homogenous and hostile crowd that the police had so feared – a process seen to full effect in the student fee protests over late 2010.

This study came a long way to explaining crowd situations as an intergroup dynamic, but the researchers admitted that due to lack of access to the police in this and previous studies, it was necessarily partial – an issue that the same group came to explore in greater depth in a later paper (Drury, Stott 2001). A subsequent paper (Stott, Reicher 1998) introduced the police perspective by studying material from a poll tax protest. The culmination of this work was a reformulated version of social identity approaches, which came to be known as the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM), and which served both to develop approaches to the crowd and social identity approaches per se (Drury, Reicher 1999). The ESIM suggests that outgroup power is closely related to ingroup identity, and that the link between the crowd and society and socio-political factors is reinforced. This is because outgroup power, such as in the case of the police, creates the context (page 383) in which ingroup members categorise themselves as homogenous. Further, the crowd situation does not just provide the inclination to resist the demonstration of outgroup power, it also presents the means through which this can be expressed.

A further example comes in the case of environmental protestors (Drury, Reicher 2000). In this situation, the protestors felt that their cause was legitimate and their means non-violent. However, the police supervising the event saw them as law breakers (for impeding bailiff action) and acted in violent ways towards them (page 590). Many of the protestors had previously seen themselves in a ‘neutral position’ with regard to the police, but the police treatment of them as a group caused them to challenge this idea. As such, the intergroup context of the police encounter caused them to reconsider their identities, and to see themselves as more ‘radical

and oppositional' (page 596). This demonstrates the link between identity, intention and consequence, where police actions came to be seen, by mostly previously law abiding residents, as representative of police action as a whole, and there are certainly implications for the fire service in such reconceptualisations, where they, like the police (Drury, Stott et al. 2003), have the legal sanction to act on their perceptions of crowd identity and intent, and to influence the context in which they find themselves (Reicher 2004) – linking also to Skogan's (2006) thoughts about asymmetrical views of the police.

Over the years, a greater emphasis has come to be placed on football crowds (Stott, Reicher 1998, Stott, Adang et al. 2007, Stott, Hoggett 2007), as researchers have firstly been granted access to the police perspective (Drury, Stott et al. 2003) and have then been sponsored in their research (Stott, Hoggett 2007, Stott, Livingstone et al. 2008). An advantage of this model is that not only does it describe and account for behaviour, it also suggests ways in which behaviour can be changed. This is taken up by Stott and colleagues looking at football crowds, and has seen changes in operational tactics. These theories have also been applied to look at emergency situations, for instance the 7/7 bombings in London, concluding, once again, that crowds can be rational and impact on social identity (Cocking, Drury 2009), bringing the research focus back to the fire and rescue service and the potentially growth areas of responding to terrorist attack.

In this section, I have looked at how social identity can lead to conflict in theoretical and crowd situations, forming the basis to addressing the aim of this research project, to come to a better understanding of the relationship between the fire service and residents.  However, social identity approaches are not just concerned with explaining conflict, but also in challenging it. This is covered in the next two sections, on contact theory and community engagement, which start to consider the context in which these relationships occur.

## *The contact hypothesis*

One further set of theories from social psychology that have sought to explain conflict are contact theories. These are of relevance to this research project for a

number of reasons. Firstly, contact theories, as will be discussed below, are often promoted as a natural counterpoint to social identity approaches and as an appropriate way to reduce the social conflict explained by these approaches. However, as we shall see, this is not necessarily straightforward. Secondly, contact approaches have passed, uncritically, into community use, both by the fire service and other service providers. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven where I examine fire service / community interventions, and alternative approaches, through engagement, will be discussed below. Thirdly, if contact is proposed as an option by AFRS, despite seeming not to be entirely effective, theoretical reasons for this failure need to be addressed.

The contact hypothesis suggests that hostility and conflict between groups are fuelled by uncertainty and separation (Allport 1954), whereas if groups are brought together under certain conditions, hostility will be reduced and cooperation promoted. As such, contact between groups can improve relations between those groups if certain conditions are met. These conditions are that contact promotes social norms towards intergroup cooperation which is reinforced by authority; that interactions occur in a situation of equality of status;  that the situation promotes 'cooperative interdependence' and that these are promoted by working towards common goals. Later researchers have also added that individuals are able to make 'intimate contact' with individuals from other groups, and that, as such, contact situations have friendship potential (Pettigrew 1998). Clearly these conditions are a lot to ask in contact situations that occur outside the laboratory, and to an extent this lack of groundedness forms part of the critique of contact theory that I shall come to below.

Whilst Allport's hypothesis predates SCT by some time, a number of researchers have sought to explain it in social identity terms (Hewstone 1996, Brewer, Gaertner 2004). In this way, social identity approaches are often simplified to the following schema (Brewer, Gaertner 2004) which is typified by preferential treatment of the ingroup, suspicion of and between ingroup and outgroup and intergroup competition. The challenge then is to reconcile categorisation processes with what is known about contact situations. One such interpretation suggests that if group conflict is the result of processes of depersonalisation, by addressing the stereotyping and depersonalising processes inherent in self categorisation, the need

to achieve group distinctiveness will pass and intergroup conflict will be decreased, and indeed three different processes that build on this have been suggested: decategorisation, recategorisation and mutual differentiation (Brewer, Gaertner 2004). Decategorisation addresses the individual level processes that are enacted in intergroup situations, whereby individuals work together and get to know each other, to 'decategorise' the other from their social category. However, even if this does work at an individual level, it does not necessarily carry over to the group level, and in some cases can reinforce group animosity (Brewer, Gaertner 2004). The second method, recategorisation, promotes a higher level category to which members of both ingroup and outgroup can belong. However, this can be construed as assimilationist as both groups are likely to carry with them their group norms, with the more powerful group's norms prevailing over the less powerful. Further, building on ideas of the salience of different identities at different levels of abstraction (Haslam 2000), it could be entirely possible for group members to hold onto different levels of identities, such as identifying as Bristolian, but being from a particular neighbourhood or ethnic community. In fire service terms, there is strong fire service identity, so that staff could easily identify as belonging to AFRS, but also have a strength of identification as operational or support staff. The third area, mutual differentiation, is based on the premise that cooperative interactions can be maintained *alongside* social categories (Brewer, Gaertner 2004), such as when groups bring particular strengths to working together to reach a common goal. However, this approach risks essentialising different groups, which in turn could lead to reinforcing negative group stereotypes. Further, it should also be remembered that in social identity approaches, as discussed above, social conflict is only one of a range of social strategies that are employed in intergroup situations, and whilst these approaches to prejudice reduction have been broadly adopted and used, often with no theoretical underpinning, in diverse situations, one has to question the efficacy of undermining group identity in the context of uniformed services, where the cohesion of the group is its operational strength, as in a fire service context. Furthermore, neighbourhood based initiatives frequently try to promote distinctive neighbourhood identities, which, in this context, could come to be counterproductive, especially if they entrench anti rather than pro social norms, an idea which brings these debates round to neighbourhood context, which will be discussed below in relation to place and to social capital.

Further critiques are offered by Dixon (2001) and Dixon and Durrheim (2005). In the first paper, Dixon builds on Sibley's work to look at the spatial aspects of intergroup relations. As I shall discuss in later sections on place and environmental psychology, social constructions of place reflect social and political issues made, quite literally, concrete. Real and imagined boundaries divide communities, and as I shall discuss, space is not just a 'backdrop' to social interaction (Dixon 2001). Further, Sibley's work on the psychological affect of boundaries suggests that the way in which we internalise ideas of outsiders can make outgroup members appear not just other, but transgressive and dangerous, and that our physical location (for example within our own community) gives strong contextual salience to social categories. The location of contact, or indeed of any intergroup encounter, is then not something to be ignored.

The second critique of contact (Dixon, Durrheim et al. 2005) takes this real world approach further, following comments made by a headteacher from a northern secondary school at an academic seminar on the contact hypothesis. As many non-academics might be tempted to do, he suggested that contact hypotheses required a 'reality check' (page 697). The first of their critiques, as mirrored above, is that the contact hypothesis is essentially utopian inasmuch as it postulates an ideal world in which optimum contact can occur. In contact situations beyond the laboratory, this is unlikely to happen, and indeed, the situations in which contact is attempted, if non ideal, can reinforce rather than redress intergroup differences, hostility and conflict. In the second critique, it is suggested that contact situations neglect participants' own constructions of the contact situation. As both stereotypes, as demonstrated above, and contact are essentially socially constructed, this represents a significant shortfall in the stretch of the hypothesis. In the third critique, and similar to some of the categorisation issues outlined above, it is suggested that contact hypothesis relies on individual and not group change. This is problematised less from the perspective in which stereotypes are social constructions, not individual ones (as in self categorisation), but more from the failure to address underlying socio-political factors. As such, the contact hypothesis fails to take into consideration the political situation that inspired the enmity, with the implication that if change should occur, it is likely then to be shortlived. It also has the potential to pathologise the individual for failing to change, and by transferring the focus from the social to the individual, does not effect political change (Dixon, Durrheim et al. 2005).

## *Community engagement*

A singular example of contact and categorisation being played out in a community setting comes through debates about engagement. Although the FRS are relatively new to this area of work, police forces and neighbourhood workers have practised engagement in a number of ways for some time (although with mixed success rates). In this section, I will look at police and regeneration work in community engagement, outlining the milieu in which the FRS find themselves, and demonstrating how engagement functions (or not) in differing contexts. These two areas are chosen for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, the fire service, as with many other agencies, experiences particular problems in a number of regeneration areas. This is not intended to paint a picture of regeneration areas as entirely deviant (Kearns, Parkinson 2001), rather just to suggest that there are, within this country, areas with complex and multiple needs. Secondly, much of the regeneration agenda is particularly concerned with resident engagement (MacLeavy 2009) both in terms of residents engaging with regeneration processes, and with service providers understanding local needs and requirements (although, of course, this is not unproblematic in itself). Thirdly, the police have a number of similarities to the fire service as members of the emergency services family, which make them a useful proxy in these settings. Fire service work is notably under-researched (Brunsden 2007) and has broadly escaped the scrutiny afforded to both police and local authorities, who are much better researched. Further, the place in society of police and fire (and of course ambulance) services ensure that they fulfil similar functions in the public imagination (Cooper 1995), if not necessarily in reality. Whilst the fire service do not face the extent of problems in their community relations that the police experience (Bradford, Jackson et al. 2008), their relationships with community are not unproblematic.

## Police engagement

Skogan (2006) describes the relationship between the police and the public as ‘asymmetrical’ in that positive encounters are seldom recalled, whilst negative encounters are not only recalled, but seen as emblematic of generic encounters with police. At a personal level, a number of characteristics influence public confidence in policing, as do neighbourhood level factors, which determine to what

extent the police are seen as being effective (Skogan 2006) and also, from the police perspective, how they are likely to act in different neighbourhoods (Lersch, Bazley et al. 2008). This survey research suggested that the impact of negative encounters on levels of public confidence was up to fourteen times that of positive encounters, and that the coefficients associated with a positive experience were 'not statistically different from zero' (page 100). Skogan concludes, rather depressingly, that 'you can't win, you can just cut your losses' (page 119), and there are important implications for the fire service with this.

Lersch et al (2008) add a spatial dimension to this avenue of research, questioning the link between police use of force and neighbourhood characteristics. Their research opens with the observation of irony that activities which are meant to guarantee social 'tranquillity' often have the reverse effect and inspire discord, the same as which could be said for the fire service, and which certainly reiterates Stott (1998). Lersch et al's research compares police use of force records with census tract information in a large south-western US police department. It is interesting to note that this data does not consider handcuffing to be use of force, nor (particularly interesting perhaps to UK readers) do they consider 'pointing a weapon' to be use of force. The authors acknowledge that certain social groups are likely to have greater experiences of coercive police force than other social groups, and they extend two explanations for this. The first is that the police are more likely to be in certain neighbourhoods, as crimes, like fire, tend to be concentrated amongst the very poor, including poor minority group members. Further (page 285) if there is a greater number of contacts in a certain neighbourhood, then there is the potential for a greater number of uses of force. However, whilst this is true for total numbers of uses of force, it would seem that there should be no need for a greater proportion of the interactions to involve uses of force. The second hypothesis they present is hardly more reassuring: the threat hypothesis suggests that economically disadvantaged groups pose a threat to more dominant groups (page 285), and that the police respond to this as the protectors of these dominant groups by exerting greater social control on the disadvantaged groups, which in social identity terms, suggests strong ingroup bias and active stereotyping, with little impact of contact and no socio-political change.

The research concludes that use of force is not randomly distributed about the city, but is indeed concentrated in areas with high numbers of minority residents (page 295), and that this is consistent with the threat hypothesis. However, it does not address the questions of whether criminality is genuinely higher in these populations, or whether this is emblematic of ongoing poor relations, perhaps caused by civil unrest episodes in the past (page 282). Although the fire service do not use force in their relations with the community, it is feasible that they remain 'guilty by association' with the police, especially from times of civil unrest, as in Shiregreen, which experienced riots in the 1990s. It is also possible that they retain their place alongside the police in the popular imagination, whereby good service and positive experiences are expected, whereas bad experiences are weighted very strongly and remembered for a long time.

The spatial dimension is continued by Williamson et al (2008) who take a British example to look at how different neighbourhoods experience crime differently, and that different types of policing might be appropriate in certain circumstances. By applying geodemographics to policing practices, they aim to look at relative levels of risk in different neighbourhoods. This is done by combining census and survey data to consider differing levels of social capital (page 199). They conclude that interventions that are reassuring in one neighbourhood will not necessarily be so in other neighbourhoods, Neighbourhood Watch being a particularly strong example. Although other policy areas are not analysed in any detail, it is also observed that health and education data can be compared with geodemographics in a similarly rewarding fashion. This is also likely to be the case for victims of fire, who tend to share a number of characteristics and risk factors as victims of crime (Kershaw, Nicholas et al. 2008, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2006). These are clearly areas of work which could be very beneficial to fire services in their developing service delivery, which, like policing, is increasingly about 'managing risk' (page 190) rather than maintaining order.

Other studies depart from Skogan (2006) in different ways. Like Skogan, Bradford et al (2008) maintain that public contact with police can, at worst, be damaging for public confidence in policing, and only negligible at best. However, they take the view that there are a number of different facets within confidence, including

effectiveness, community engagement and procedural fairness. As such, they maintain that:

> *Feeling one's community lacks cohesion, social trust and informal social control was much more important in deciding public confidence in policing than more instrumental concerns about personal safety* (page 6).

This is broadly similar to the approach members of the public take towards their own fire risks, feeling that if they are not in control of a number of aspects of their lives, they have a higher risk from fire (Communities and Local Government 2008). Bradford et al conclude that with this further developed model of community confidence, they were able to establish some positive correlations between police and public, particularly in terms of community engagement and perceived fairness (Bradford, Jackson et al. 2008). This relates strongly to Sunshine and Tyler's (2003) conclusions about procedural justice, discussed below.

A further study (Murphy, Hinds et al. 2008) builds on these ideas, addressing both the group dynamic of police cooperation and ideas about procedural justice (Sunshine, Tyler 2003a). They consider various different facets for police cooperation, including instrumental reasons, reasons of 'substantive morality' (page 137) and reasons relating to perceived legitimacy, based on procedural justice. In this instance, procedural justice is described as being motivated by concerns relating to group membership and status. Further, experiences of treatment from authority figures informs people as to whether they are valued members of a valued group (Lind, Tyler 1988), potentially demonstrating a link between public cooperation and group identity, which can well be transferred to the fire service context. Murphy et al's research is conducted via survey, relating to six measures covering procedural justice, distributive justice, police performance, legitimacy, cooperation with police and demographic control variables. This is not dissimilar from Sunshine and Tyler's related work on procedural justice, which enumerates a number of these variables in relation to social identity (Sunshine, Tyler 2003a). Engaging in the community to inspire confidence clearly has ramifications for the fire service too, especially when, if this is not well considered and properly executed, it

is likely to leave residents more disgruntled than if there had been no attempt at engagement.

## Engaging communities to reduce ASB

Literature on ASB links to both policing and regeneration literature, as ASB tends to be focussed in those geographical areas that are regeneration areas, but is also clearly crime related, with a number of anti social behaviours also being criminal. Engaging with communities to reduce ASB is important both to the police and those who work in regenerating communities, as ASB is seen as both detrimental to the community, but also indicative of its decline. Broken windows type theories (Wilson, Kelling 1982) suggest that where low level crime and incivility occurs, tolerance levels are eroded and over time more serious criminality can take hold. This is discussed in more detail below. Although this has been widely critiqued in academic circles (Taylor 1999, Sampson, Raudenbush 2004, Crawford 2006), it is a popular theory in non academic circles, like the contact hypothesis, and permeates social policy agendas such as 'cleaner, safer, greener' campaigns (Home Office 2007) and much fire service work. This points strongly towards arguments about the 'criminalisation of social policy' made by, amongst others, Crawford (1999) and Squires (2006), and I will discuss this area again in more detail and with relevance to the fire service in the next Literature Review chapter.

Casey and Flint's (2007) work on non-reporting of ASB clearly links to both the above literatures on police engagement in communities, and the following section on engaging residents in regeneration areas. Using focus group data, and secondary data from the BCS, they present a series of reasons why people do not report ASB incidents which demonstrate a number of different ways in which the resident does not engage with appropriate agencies. For instance, where the resident does not define the incident as ASB, this could suggest that ASB in that neighbourhood is so normalised that residents do not recognise the incident, or that they engage in that behaviour themselves. A further reason stated is that residents have a 'culture of non-engagement' with agencies, where the prevailing paradigm within that community is for 'minding your own business', with a culture of distrust of authority and non cooperation with agencies perceived to be in authority, such as the police and local authority, and also potentially the fire service. This

demonstrates that engagement is a two-way process, not something that is done to residents, rather, something they can choose to engage with, or, as discussed below, actively resist.

## Engaging in regeneration areas

The theme of distrust is taken up by Mathers et al (2008), looking at why residents do not participate in New Deal for Communities (NDC) schemes. They find that for many residents, participation could threaten the 'survival strategies' that they develop to navigate their extreme poverty and multiple disadvantages. In the case of young mothers, participation with the health visitors consisted of extending the contact that they had with services telling them what to do, with the implicit threat that their children would be removed if they were not compliant. For young men on social security, participation was thought to come between them and their illicit survival activities, fuelled by a sense that the NDC and social security were all linked in some way (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008). There are clearly implications for the fire service with this, both in terms of not presenting messages that feed into the 'bad parent' discourse disliked by the mothers interviewed, and in not threatening those people who may not always be on the right side of the law with disclosure. Presenting messages to these groups requires an active recognition of the context in which residents make some of these decisions, as much for the fire service as for regeneration agencies.

Gosling (2008) and MacLeavy (2009) go further to address the purpose of participation in the first instance. Gosling's work looked at women in regeneration areas, who often felt that the regeneration process was contributing to their ongoing exclusion through the destruction of existing communities. She comments on the utilisation of the word 'community' as one that is frequently used in policy discourse, but which frequently reflects those ideologies which identify poverty with particular neighbourhoods and areas, placing the responsibility for it with residents, rather than giving them real power (Gosling 2008). MacLeavy echoes this in her discourse analysis of a Bristol NDC, suggesting that the rhetoric of community and self determination is used to impose responsibility onto communities for their own exclusion, through the notion of self help and self government (MacLeavy 2009). The message of HFSVs is very much consistent with this, although they do not

purport to improve community life, they do very much buy into the message of self improvement for the individual and should be viewed in this context, positioning AFRS alongside other agencies attempting behavioural change of residents.

## *Summary*

In this section, I have set the theoretical context for this research project by examining a number of theories stemming from social identity approaches including social identity theory, self categorisation theory, contact, engagement, crowds and the ESIM, looking at how fire fighters and residents form identities in groups and the implications of this for working in communities. I have also started to examine the milieu in which AFRS operate, looking at engagement with regeneration and police, and starting to discuss the neighbourhood context. Despite assertions that identity is contingent upon context and that place can form boundaries to identity based action (Reicher 1984) and is more than just a backdrop to identity (Dixon 2001), social identity approaches have tended to ignore (or at least neglect) spatial characteristics. Nevertheless, in this research project, place forms an important focus for local identity and in the following section I shall look at this more closely.

## *Place*

In the next thematic section of the literature review, I will look at a number of debates from environmental psychology, human geography, and urban studies, particularly relating to neighbourhoods, exclusion and ASB. In the previous section, debates were characterised by the social, in so much as they pertained to social identity and to the way in which this is expressed, both by the fire service, and by groups (including crowds) in general. This section will be more characterised by discussions about place and the spatial dimensions of social life. One of the linking factors between the two sections comes from the field of environmental psychology, which will be discussed in relation to place identity and to work conducted looking at particular aspects of the urban experience relating community and sustainability to identity. I will then move on to discuss some particular aspects of the social construction of place and how this is defined in debates in human geography. These are not straightforward concepts in any way, and the way in which these terms are conceptualised and operationalised has an impact on how individuals act in different places, and how they are viewed in relation to these places. These dynamic factors

take us back, to an extent, to the debates discussed in relation to social identity approaches, and to the ESIM proposed by Reicher and colleagues, as place identity forms part of the changing context for social identity. One particular theme in human geography that is attended to is geographies of exclusion, and although this research project is less concerned with trajectories of inclusion and exclusion and regeneration per se, an amount of literature on social exclusion is considered in the light of these discussions around place and neighbourhoods. Again, this sets the context for this research project by beginning discussions about where and how it is located. Following from this, I will look at the idea of neighbourhoods in particular. The fire service describe a number of neighbourhoods as being problematic, and residents tend to describe themselves in terms of their immediate residential neighbourhood, which is also becoming the unit of delivery for a number of 'area based' regeneration initiatives, but defining what we mean by 'neighbourhood' is not, of course, a straightforward matter. In this section I will also be looking at one of the biggest problems we are told faces neighbourhoods today – anti social behaviour – and the way it is differently conceptualised by incivility or broken windows hypotheses.

## *Place identity*

Despite a number of attempts over the previous two decades ( Proshansky, H 1983; Lalli,M. 1992; Twigger-Ross,C.L. 1996) the links between place and self remain under-theorised in social psychology (Twigger-Ross,C.L. 2006). Some of the first thinkers to conceptualise place identity were Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983), writing in an early volume of the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. Although not the first to discuss place in psychological terms, they were the first to use the term 'place identity' (Twigger-Ross,C.L. 2006). Disputing the assumptions of earlier theorists, that the individual develops a sense of belonging through place attachment, and that this 'rootedness' is a subconscious state (Proshansky, H 1983), this conceptualisation of place identity posits that place identity is a 'complex cognitive structure' (page 62) which represents a 'sub structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of, broadly conceived, cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives' (page 59).

An advantage of Proshansky's conceptualisation of place identity is that it posits a flexible orientation to the surroundings in which the individual finds themselves. Further, it is also has a degree of temporality, examining as it does the 'environmental past' of the individual and the ability of different environments to satisfy different needs and requirements at different times. However, his view that, unlike the social, the spatial is a backdrop (page 63) runs at odds to developments made in human geography by researchers such as Massey and in social psychology by Dixon, to whom I shall come later. Proshansky also relates place identity specifically to the city environment through the medium of *urban* identity, implying that there are specificities about living in a city that impact on the individual in a number of different ways, matters taken up by the CIS network, which I shall explore below.

However, Twigger-Ross (2006) argues that the cognitive focus of Proshansky's place identity gives it a rather individualistic focus, suggesting that the individual is more in control of their physical surroundings than may actually be the case. Nevertheless, the idea of place identity also suggests a social component, albeit tenuously, through the norms and behaviours associated with a particular environment (Twigger-Ross,C.L. 2006), which, as discussed above, can provide context to inform social identity. As such, if place identity has a social component, it could also be suggested that social identity has a spatial component.

Lalli (1992) also sees place identity as a part of self identity, although he too objects to the cognitive focus of Proshansky's conceptualisation. He focuses on a particular facet of place identity, which he calls 'urban related identity'. This is the 'complex association between self and urban environment (page 294). This bears similarities with Valera et al (1998) and Pol et al (2002) who also see the urban environment as having a unique and distinct impact on identity. Bonaiuto and Breakwell (1996) concede that place attachment and identification with place are two of place identity's most studied facets, but that it is not simply reducible to these two components, whereas Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) maintain that place identity *is* reducible to place identification (a social category) and Proshansky's more cognitive concept of place identity. More recently, writers have embraced this array of terminology as 'terminological conceptual confusion' (Hidalgo, Hernandez 2001) page 274 or 'theoretical quagmire' (Pretty, Chipuer et al. 2003) page 274, although

each have added to the quagmire with their own definitions building on the literature. Hidalgo et al's conceptualisation of place attachment follows closely from Proshansky's cognitive place identity and Bowlby's ideas of personal attachment (Hidalgo, Hernandez 2001), whereas Pretty et al separate the concept out into place identity, sense of community and place dependence (which takes a behaviouralist focus) (Pretty, Chipuer et al. 2003).

Other writers have continued to combine place attachment and identity claiming that it has 'significant overlaps' (Mannarini, Tartaglia et al. 2006), or that it is used 'interchangeably' (Lewicka 2005). Additional concepts have also been added to the mix, including sense of place and place based identity (Carter, Dyer et al. 2007) and social space (Liu, Sibley 2004). Further, other researchers have claimed conversely that the lack of these conditions, especially place attachment and neighbourhood cohesion, is correlated with levels of incivilities that are conducive to increased levels of anti social behaviour, disorder and crime (Brown, 2004), arguments which are also made about social capital, and which make ideas around place attachment of relevance to the FRS and this research project. These points will be addressed in a later section.

## City-Identity-Sustainability

Another way of looking at the city comes from the City-Identity-Sustainability group (CIS), which attempts to link social identity approaches to facets of place. The CIS project (Pol 2002) is based on the premise that 'the conditions of modern life, especially in the cities, are a major obstacle to the adoption of sustainability values' (page 10) and that this is characterised by 'an increase in poverty, the presence of deviant behaviours, a lack of social cohesion in its social fabric and the implementation of 'individual survival strategies''. This is clearly redolent of much of the literature on incivilities and broken windows, which will be discussed below, although these words are not expressly used. They suggest that social networks are required for pro social behaviour, potentially forming a useful theoretical underpinning for work undertaken by the fire service, as conversely, the lack of these networks might be conducive to anti social behaviour.

These researchers contend that the city frames social activity in two ways (Pol 2002): firstly as the physical setting which facilitates or impedes social interaction, and secondly as '*a shared symbolic universe and as a community*' (page 15), factors which should be borne in mind for FRS/resident intergroup relations. For the CIS Network, this occurs particularly at the community level, '*based on symbolic mutual interaction via an ecological relation linked to specific local areas*' (page 15). Needless to say, community is not equivalent to neighbourhood, however, the neighbourhood does represent the city at a social – that is to say human – level. These two characteristics of the city, (physical and the social properties), are easily identifiable in different conceptualisations of the neighbourhood, not just in social psychology but also in human geography and wider urban studies. The CIS network:

> *Assumes that sustainability is not possible without a well-established social fabric that allows people to recognise themselves as a group or as a community sharing prototypical features and having achieved certain levels of social cohesion.* (page 9).

And indeed, this is what they mean when they refer to identity. Based on social identity approaches, this form of identity is constructed via identification, during which characteristics and values of the group are assumed by the individual. For the CIS network, this identity is facilitated also by urban 'quality of place'. The network looked at a number of issues around place and social identity, including area quality, residential satisfaction, cohesion and sustainability, with the aim of determining to what extent these former factors promote sustainability, and whether their lack impedes it, with studies conducted in the UK (Uzzell, Pol et al. 2002), Spain (Pol, Moreno et al. 2002, Valera, Guardia 2002), Venezuela (Wiesenfeld, Giuliani 2002), Paris (Moser, Ratiu 2002) and Mexico (Jimenez-Dominguez, Aguilar 2002). Determinants of pro social behaviour, as seen in this way, have aspects transferable to the study of FRS, although, in this research project, it is more the lack of these which is of relevance.

## *Place as a social construct*

These ideas of particularity of place, used by the researchers in the CIS network and by others in environmental psychology owe a debt to a different field entirely, to human geography. Human geographers have long argued for the social component in the spatial, that is that the spaces and places we visit and inhabit are formed by people's uses of them and are viewed differently by different individuals. Places are not just objective spaces, rather they are socially constructed and dependent in part on our use of them. Massey argues (1999) that for too long, whilst geographers have accepted that the spatial has a social aspect, other social scientists have neglected the spatial aspect of the social, and although some in the social sphere have examined the spatial (Burley 2007, Gieryn 2000), it is really the social turn in geography (Massey, 1995) that has had the greater impact.

Coming from outside of geography, a number of these issues have been addressed by Dixon and colleagues (Dixon 2001, Dixon, Durrheim 2004, Dixon, Durrheim 2000) taking a social psychological perspective, in papers which address taking a discursive approach to place identity (2000), place in relation to contact theory (2001) and how place is transformed through processes of desegregation (2004). In the first of these papers, Dixon addresses fundamental issues relating to social and spatial identity. He contends that questions of 'who we are' tend to be closely allied to questions of 'where we are' (page 27), and argues that not only do social sciences tend to evade the spatial, but that even social psychology avoids environmental psychology (potentially a comment in itself on intergroup hostility at a specific level of abstraction). In the context of this, he identifies three limitations to the pursuit of the spatial in social psychology. The first of these is that social identity approaches tend to ignore the 'rhetorical traditions' through which places and their associated identities are constructed and given meaning, that is, social psychology often views place as neutral, a point he revisits in the subsequent papers. Secondly, the current relationship between social and place identity ignores how assumptions about place are imbued with power, and used to justify certain socio-spatial relations. Thirdly, he identifies a marginalisation of the political aspects of this at an individual level.

These factors are revisited in his 2001 paper on the contact hypothesis. In this paper, he identifies four different ways of viewing space in contact research,

although in many cases these are likely to hold for much of social psychology. The first conception is that social space is a neutral backdrop to activity, with the implicit assumption that it is not, therefore, relevant. The second is that there are ‘ecological variations’ (page 591) in different locations of contact, and that these do imply a contextual specificity, but one which is arbitrarily constructed. This then serves to make the preconditions for successful contact increasingly and minutely rule-bound. The third conception views social space as something which, by distance or proximity, as opposed to any innate or constructed quality, acts to facilitate or impede contact. This ignores wider dynamics of power, such as who lives where and how ‘outsiders’ (Sibley 1995, Sibley 1999) are recognised and treated in communities, which governs people’s real-life experiences of mixing with different people. The fourth conception Dixon views as a latent conception, although it is the one that to him is the most meaningful. In this view, space is seen as having an effect on contact participants, but it tends not to be noted in a meaningful way by these researchers, rather just recorded as an aside or an interesting observation. Dixon then links these conceptions of place to Sibley’s work, as discussed elsewhere, on boundaries and the way in which others and outsiders are perceived on a psycho-social level. With the FRS persisting in utilising contact approaches in specific geographical locations, this clearly has ramifications for this research project.

To reiterate, place is not merely a container of social activity (Massey, Allen et al. 1999, Massey 1995), rather it contributes to the nature of that social activity. For Cresswell (2004), place is the interplay of people and the environment, but more specifically, it is also ‘space invested with meaning in the context of power’ (page 12). As such, discussions of place are inherently political, as is the constitution of place. One of the ways in which this is particularly apparent is in the delineation of neighbourhoods, which I will discuss below, and in the ‘deciding’ of who gets to live where (Cresswell 2004), whether through housing policy, house prices or neighbourhood reputation. In extremis, this can lead to the exclusion of substantial groups or indeed, whole neighbourhoods. This is discussed in the subsequent section.

## *Neighbourhoods*

Neighbourhoods have been taken as a unit of study in sociology since the 1920s (Bridge 2006), when the Chicago School studied the way in which economic forces reordered the urban neighbourhood. More recent developments in sociology have included those around social and cultural capital (Putnam 2000), which are seen as located in specific neighbourhoods at particular times. Other developments have come from human geography and environmental psychology, in addition to urban studies and policy studies, following from social policy where the neighbourhood has increasingly become the subject of area based initiatives. The neighbourhood is of relevance to this research project as both the unit to which AFRS interventions are directed and the location for much of the research. Further, it is also the level at which, as the CIS network suggest (Pol, 2002), social identity functions within the city. Whilst there are a number of theories of the neighbourhood (Sullivan, Taylor 2007), the aim of this section is less to assess the theoretical nature of the neighbourhood, more to examine how it is constituted at a social and spatial level, proposing it as a unit of study for this research project.

Galster (2001) takes a primarily spatial view of the neighbourhood, defining it as 'the bundle of spatially based attributes associated with clusters of residences' (Galster 2001) (page 2111) in his attempt to provide a rigorously quantifiable conceptualisation of the neighbourhood. He critiques previous attempts to define neighbourhood as focussing on the social aspects of neighbourhood, which can only be measured, he claims, once the location has been specified. However, he does not deny that there are social aspects of neighbourhood, although he views these in economic terms, stating that '*the consumers of neighbourhood can be considered the producers of neighbourhood as well*' (page 2116).

This view of the attributes of neighbourhood being mutually causal over time is reiterated by Forrest and Kearns (2001), who view the neighbourhood as 'community', 'context', 'commodity' and 'consumption' (page 2141-2). Defining neighbourhood as 'overlapping social networks with specific and variable time geographies,' (page 2134), their definition is essentially social, although it does also recognise that, unlike 'community' neighbourhood does require a degree of physicality (Forrest, Kearns 2001). They also provide some critique of other

neighbourhood research which they see as being overly focused on poor and degenerate neighbourhoods, at the expense of more less extreme environments, and potentially also at the expense of those neighbourhoods which are studied, as they are further stigmatised (Atkinson, Kintrea 2001) – aspects which I have been careful to avoid in this research project. Both of these theorists demonstrate – perhaps unwittingly – that the neighbourhood is both a social and a spatial construct. From a theoretical perspective, the distinctiveness of the neighbourhood as the place in which people live relates to personal self image and sense of community (Mannarini, Tartaglia et al. 2006) and also to place attachment and cultural capital (Lewicka 2005). From a pragmatic level, a number of interventions are currently made at a local level, for instance Neighbourhood Renewal, and information is collected at this level by the fire service and other agencies. Further, studies themselves do not occur entirely out of place, and a neighbourhood scale is a manageable, navigable, human scale area in which to undertake a study, an issue which will be addressed in greater detail in the Methodology Chapter.

## *Exclusion*

This idea of social and spatial exclusion has been picked up by many, including policy makers and theoreticians, as the way in which complex problems become manifested in a neighbourhood context. Many works, both popular and academic, discuss what it means to live in an excluded area, and to deal with exclusion (Hanley 2007, Hare 2005, Power, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion. 2007, Davies 1998, Campbell 1993), but fewer discuss the processes through which neighbourhoods become excluded. Sibley (2001, 1999, 1995) draws on object relations theory to address ideas of social exclusion, partly in regard to gypsy traveller communities, but also more generally. He contends that from childhood, via processes of ‘introjection’ and ‘projection’, we create a sense of border between ourselves and others, which are conceptualised as either good or bad. Further, this process can also be considered in terms of place, and particularly the people that inhabit those spaces, whereby ‘power is expressed in the monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments’ (Sibley 1995) (page 1).

Social exclusion has crossed the divide from academic to policy audiences and was a mainstay of government policy between 1997 and 2010, with the development of the Social Exclusion Unit and its evolution into the Social Exclusion Taskforce. Although the idea of social exclusion covers a number of different facets of poverty and deprivation, its definition is not clear cut, and it is used in a number of different ways by policy makers and practitioners. Levitas (1998) identified three separate discourses which are referred to in social exclusion talk, and which present both different causes of exclusion, and consequently different paths for its amelioration. These are commonly referred to as MUD, RED and SID, which represent a moral underclass discourse, similar to Murray, where poverty is seen as the consequence of the degeneracy of the poor (Murray, Lister et al. 1996); a redistributionist discourse, which has a particular focus on material poverty; and, a social integrationist discourse, which is most closely allied to the New Labour ideology of social inclusion through paid work (Levitas 2005). Key to the translation of these concepts into policy work has been the recognition that in many areas, and for many people, problems are multiple and complex, typically comprising unemployment, low skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (Social Exclusion Unit 1997). Inevitably, these groups present the greatest risk factors for fires (Communities and Local Government 2008) and are also concentrated in those areas that tend to be most problematic for the FRS. As such, concern for exclusion has a corollary with concern for community fire safety. Further, as will be discussed, the FRS have taken up a number of these exclusion discourses, leading them to view certain neighbourhoods in certain ways through the ways in which they speak about them.

Areas that experience social exclusion are covered by a number of area based initiatives aimed to address these issues in whole or in part. They are also, inevitably, the same areas that present the fire service with much of their ‘business’, with residents of neighbourhood renewal areas twice as likely to die or be injured in a fire as residents of more affluent areas (Arson Control Forum 2004). The moral underclass discourse is redolent of Victorian beliefs about the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, and re-established itself in the 1980s on the back of neo-conservatism in both the UK and the US (Levitas 2005). Although early commentators on the underclass wrote about underclass as exclusion from society and shorthand for the multiple problems of structural poverty, it was taken up by the right to imply moral degeneracy on behalf of the poor, which spreads, like a disease,

through society (Murray, Lister et al. 1996). Further, it particularly stigmatises certain groups, such as young men (who are idle) and single mothers (who are feckless) (Young 2002, Young 1999). There are similarities here with the way in which the fire service target their interventions (Communities and Local Government 2008), and with the transfer of responsibility for community fire safety away from those in power – the planners of overcrowded communities, the housing allocators, the landlords with substandard furniture – to those in deprived neighbourhoods, who are increasingly made to seem responsible for their own fire safety (or lack of it) (MacLeavy 2009).

## Social capital

One of the ‘solutions’ that is frequently suggested to revitalise neighbourhoods, promote social inclusion and reduce ASB is social capital. However, social capital has its own heritage and a particular set of ideas which originate with Bourdieu (1986) who discussed three different forms of capital: economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu 1986). This has been expanded and elaborated by a number of commentators (Forrest, Kearns 2001) including Putnam, who developed distinctions between ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital and the different impacts that these can have on communities (Putnam 2000). Social capital refers to the connections that members of communities have with one another, and the resources which may be linked to these networks. In the past it was believed that communities which were low in economic capital ‘compensated’ in some way with higher social capital. However, modern urban planning and the associated dynamics in communities (Hanley 2007) have eroded this, so that deprived communities are frequently seen as lacking social capital in addition to economic capital. Putnam’s contribution about bridging and bonding types of social capital extends this into an explanatory mechanism for positive and negative types of social capital which can inhibit or enhance community relations. Bonding social capital is seen as the preserve of poor communities, which encourages a ‘we keep ourselves to ourselves’ mentality and which is not conducive to welcoming outsiders or to extending links out of the community, and by implication, also inhibits social mobility. By contrast, bridging social capital is linked to more affluent areas, where more heterogeneous groups can engage in social networks, bolstered by the commonality of class and affluence.

Encouraging informal social interaction is seen as key to the development of social capital and, in turn, of the neighbourhood improvements which are believed to follow from enhanced social capital. However, there is something of a tension between the encouragement of social capital and the growth of diversity (Crawford 2006), which may have ramifications for both the fire service and some communities. There is a body of research to suggest that the fire service is neither porous, nor outward looking (Baigent 2001, Bain 2002), although the situation is seen to be improving (Audit Commission 2004). Whether the fire service are best placed to be advocates for this type of approach could therefore be questioned to some extent. Further, interventions which bolster community norms and bonding social capital, where those norms present or permit hositility to fire fighters could also be seen to be counterproductive. Further, ideas around social capital, although helpful in understanding the trajectories taken by different neighbourhoods, and the type of social life to be found there, fail to address the intergroup dynamic that occurs when certain groups meet in particular places. And so, although social capital has its uses in understanding neighbourhoods, it falls short when it comes to explaining the relationship between groups. Nevertheless, like many other of the concepts covered in this review, it is used as an explanatory mechanism by many in the community sector, the fire service included, and as such, provides part of the context in which they operate.

## *Anti social behaviour*

One issue seen as particularly problematic to British neighbourhoods in the early twenty-first century is anti social behaviour (ASB), which is often seen as a symptom of social exclusion and a lack of social capital, frequently ‘blighting’ communities beset by the other conditions of poverty and social exclusion. Rhetoric around ASB is closely linked to that around broken windows theories, again, discussed below, whereby small acts of ASB are seen as precursors to more general crime, and also of symptomatic of the moral decline of certain communities in particular and of society in general. Young people are frequently seen as the sole perpetrators of ASB, and indeed their very presence in public now constitutes an indicator of ASB in the British Crime Survey (Kershaw, Nicholas et al. 2008), however this neglects the fact that young people are also often the victims of both ASB and the restrictive practices that police it (McIntosh 2008). Although there is no one agreed definition of ASB (Prior 2009, Ramsay 2004, Home Office 2004) it is

seen as including a number of different types of behaviour, some of which are also criminal, and ASB has been a priority for community safety partnerships for a number of years. The inclusion of fire authorities in community safety partnerships in 2003 transferred a degree of that responsibility to the fire service, as discussed in the next chapter, as has the inclusion of a number of fire related behaviours in definitions of ASB, including vehicle arson, making hoax calls, misuse of fireworks and attacking fire crews. As such, the FRS are not immune from debates around ASB and are themselves party to practices which both define and police it.

## *Broken windows theory*

Although the focus on ASB in Britain is relatively recent, and very much associated with the 1997 – 2010 New Labour government, broken windows theory has addressed similar concerns for a number of years and there are parallels between the concepts and their use. At its most reductive level, broken windows theory suggests that where a broken window is not fixed, residents will construe that the neighbourhood is not cared for. This will result in more windows being broken, resulting in physical degradation that paves the way for petty criminals to arrive, safe in the knowledge that they can go about their business unhindered by concerned residents. This set of theories has a number of different iterations (Taylor 1999) but is most famously linked to a piece in *Atlantic Monthly* in the early 1980s (Wilson, Kelling 1982). Key to this piece is the temporal aspect of the incivilities process, whereby informal social control decreases relative to the length of time incivilities go unaddressed. Further, these physical signs of degradation present young people and others prone to ‘delinquency’ with opportunities for further, social incivilities (Cloward, Ohlin 1960). This then has an impact on fear of crime, which again, is self perpetuating. Further, many aspects of physical decay, including burnt out houses and cars, and the presence of rubbish used to make fires or to throw at fire service personnel, have particular relevance to this research project, as does the assumption that neighbourhood degradation is the fault of residents, not a consequence of poverty, wear and tear and institutional neglect. As with a number of ideas discussed above, broken windows theory informs the context in which the FRS work and, as will be described below, also informs a number of their practices.

Broken windows theory is popular amongst practitioners. It is easily understood and 'seems' to work. However, some of the underlying assumptions reveal rather less pleasant aspects of neighbourhood analysis, and the theory has been widely critiqued (Sampson, Raudenbush 2004, Herbert 2001). Sampson et al (2004) examine the multiple ways in which perceptions of disorder have social meanings beyond the overt, questioning whether different lifestyle choices are inherently disordered, and whether, if they are, disorder is inherently problematic. Geographers such as Jacobs famously find disorder part of the dynamism of city living (Jacobs 1961), whereas those on the left of criminology find the focus on lack of informal social control simplistic (Crawford 2006). Further, broken windows theory does not take socio-economic factors into consideration, assuming that ongoing physical degradation is the result of malice and incivility, rather than a symptom of poverty. The implication is that residents in degraded areas are somehow themselves to blame for this situation, rather than victims of a system which does not prioritise their needs (MacLeavy 2009).

## *Summary*

In this chapter of the literature review I have looked at a number of different areas of literature, mostly pertaining to identity in its broadest terms, and again, in broad terms to place. This provides the theoretical underpinning for much of this research project. Social identity approaches provide a specific lens through which the relationship between FRS and residents will be examined, and enable potential hostility and resistance to be viewed as emanating in part from the intergroup dynamic between the two groups, and not as the result of particular flaws in the psychology of the individuals that comprise those groups.

This is particularly the case given the contextual aspects of social identity approaches. As discussed, individuals take on different identities dependent on the situation, with particular facets of identity becoming salient given the context in which they occur. Place forms a major component of this context, and, as such, its development as a social construct is examined. Place takes a singularly human scale when examined in relation to the neighbourhood, and a number of debates around neighbourhood are also examined looking particularly at exclusion and anti

social behaviour, which feed into cultural expectations of specific neighbourhoods and therefore also into the context in which intergroup encounters occur.

Nevertheless, place is not the only context impacting on these encounters, rather, residents encounter fire services as just one of a range of public services and the FRS, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, are also a part of a policy context over which they themselves have little control. Place and neighbourhood were discussed in this chapter as contributing to residents' identities, and also impacting on the nature and quality of intergroup encounters. However, the FRS have a number of quite specific organisational factors which also impact upon them, and it is this that forms the basis of the next chapter.

# Chapter Three: Fire Service Literatures

Although a number of studies have been conducted in various fields relating to the fire service in recent years and there exist whole fields which relate in some way to the fire service, including perhaps, Fire Sciences, Emergency Management and Disaster Management, the field remains under researched in psychology, especially compared with other emergency services (Brunsden, 2009). Nevertheless, in recent years, an increasing number of researchers have chosen subjects related to the fire service, and fire services themselves have supported them through the sponsoring of projects such as this, and by allowing access to their staff and premises to researchers. Further, an amount of police research also has relevance to the fire service, so in some instances, this is also called upon.

As discussed above, much fire service research pertains to emergency and disaster management, and in this respect, also has parallels with research on the police. As such, the first section of this chapter looks at similarities between the two organisations, considering the extent to which police research can stand as a proxy for fire service research. There is also a strong tradition in research which looks at the identity of fire fighters, particularly identities of gender and sexuality, both within the fire service, but also with regard to how fire fighters are perceived by ‘civilians’. This comprises the next part of this section of the literature review. The following section contains literature from Organisational Studies about sensemaking, the result of a ‘seminal’ work by Weick (1993), which used the fire service as an exemplum, and which has spawned many subsequent studies, a number of which inevitably focussed on the fire service. Further, the fire service is not just an object of academic interest, but also a tangible entity within the policy community. Its place within policy debates is discussed in the final part of this chapter. Needless to say, there are a number of linkages between these parts, especially through policy documents relating to equality and diversity (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services 1999) and in the changing role of the FRS within local government.

## *Introducing fire fighter identity*

Much research that has been conducted on the FRS in recent years which has taken identity as a theme, particularly on the related identities of gender and

sexuality, and many of these studies look at how identities within the fire service are produced and reproduced both internally and externally. However, despite the fire and rescue services having a prominent symbolic role in society, little work has been conducted on how they are viewed from the outside, with the notable exception of Cooper (1995). Although these previous studies do not explicitly take social identity approaches, seeing how fire service identities are produced and assimilated gives us insight into how fire fighters' social identity works within the intergroup context, and also provides clues as to how they are likely to be perceived by outgroups. Weick's (1993) work is introduced in this section also as it looks at how fire fighters work as a group, and what happened, in a particular situation, when that group dynamic failed to cohere. This is particularly relevant if considered as an intergroup encounter, where the outgroup is not a social group, but fire itself, presenting a dynamic situation not unlike those described by Drury et al (1999) in their ESIM. Indeed, Canetti (1984) explicitly uses fire as a metaphor for the crowd, taking this analogy one step further.

Fire service identity in general is closely bound up with ideas of masculinity (Yarnal,C.M. 2004), with the act of fire fighting akin to that most masculine of endeavours – war - in that it is an act in defence of ones community. Indeed, not only does naming fire fighting thus conjure images of war against the enemy of fire (Bachelard 1964, Goudsblom 1994), but the modern British fire service is a child of war, formulated into Brigades during and after the Second World War and having strong traditional links with the Navy (Baigent, D. 2001). Although fire and rescue services (FRS) are relatively under researched bodies (Brunsden 2007), a number of recent studies have reviewed fire service culture (Baigent 2001, Bain 2002, Home Office 1999), or at least cultural aspects of the service (Myers 2005, Childs, Morris et al. 2004, Tracy, Scott 2006, Weick 1993, Ward, Winstanley 2006, Yarnal, Dowler et al. 2004, Landgren 2005, Hall, Hockey et al. 2007). Whilst culture is clearly not the same as identity, reviewing these studies can provide an insight into views of identity within the fire service, as can their comparison with the police, a far more studied entity within society.

## *Fire service/police similarities*

Although research around the fire and rescue service is a growing field, its scope remains limited, especially in comparison with research around police forces and the role of police in society. As uniformed and emergency services, there are a great deal of similarities between the police and FRS, including their military links and rank structure. In this section I will discuss some of these similarities in order to present literature concerned with the police where it is not possible to draw on literature concerned with the FRS. Like the police, the FRS have, in recent years, been called upon to move away from reactive, response oriented work and to take on a more preventive and proactive role, and this is covered at the end of this chapter.

Research around policing is a well established field, with a number of significant publications (Stott, Reicher 1998, Reiner 1992), dedicated journals (*Policing and Society, Police Review*) and specific research centres. In contrast, research around the fire service tends to be limited to either fire behaviour (Quintiere 1998) and emergency management, or identity and equality issues within the service (Baigent 2001, Ward, Winstanley 2006, Yarnal, Dowler et al. 2004), although there is also a growing field of psychology studying the fire service (Brunsden, Hill 2009a). At a policy level, this is also the case, with a considerable department within the Home Office dedicated to policing research, compared to a small unit in Communities and Local Government with a fire service remit. Even emergency service blogs are weighted heavily towards the police, with many police officers writing their own or collaborative blogs (PC Bloggs 2011, The Thinking Policeman 2011) but none, as far as I know, from fire fighters or even fire control staff. This presents a problem for the fire service researcher, as that research which does exist is not necessarily relevant to the study in hand. Further, this process is self perpetuating, where researchers build on existing research, rather than branching out into new fields, ensuring that fire service research remains within rather narrow confines.

Superficially, there are a number of similarities between fire and police services: they are uniformed, emergency services; they are popular stereotypes, and easily

picked up roles for children (and fantasies for adults). They both have a civic protection and contingency role, as do the army, and are part of the partnership structure of local government, discussed below. However, for certain sections of society, the police represent a threat to ‘survival strategies’ (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008) invoked by residents in deprived areas, and contribute to a negative stereotype of ‘authority figures’ which are not well regarded. Further, policing practices in problematic neighbourhoods can reinforce this image (Lersch, Bazley et al. 2008), resulting in a vicious circle of resentment and poor policing (Skogan 2006). Even where residents are law abiding, they might resent the police, either for failing to control crime, for perceived injustices elsewhere in the system or for not taking their particular concerns into consideration (Sunshine, Tyler 2003a, Sunshine, Tyler 2003b). These issues tend not to be seen to concern the fire service (Bradford, Jackson et al. 2008), who are imagined to have a far healthier public image. However, this is not universally the case, and fire fighters face a number of difficulties in conducting their work, including attack (Labour Research Department 2005, Labour Research Department 2008a) and obstruction. Media representations are not always favourable either, with fires services at loggerheads with local media over equalities, community fire safety and deployment (Salkeld 2007, Bristol Evening Post 2009). I suggest that there are four areas of similarities between police and FRS, based on cultural and functional factors and internal and external perspectives. I have called these: operational issues, structural issues, organisational culture and symbolic function.These are discussed in turn below.

Operational issues refers to similarities in what fire and police services do in the day to day course of their work, examining operational and procedural issues as they are played out by personnel within each service. As members of the core emergency services, police and fire both have duties to prevent, protect and respond, although to an extent, with regard to different ‘enemies’. This very superficial similarity, however, reveals a lot more similarities, for example about the role of emergency services in our country, and the expectations that we have of them. Broadly, we expect our emergency services to be non partisan, and to respond where and when they are required, whether police or fire service (or indeed, ambulance). Recent experiences, for example, in Northern Ireland, where both police and fire services had sectarian affiliations (and are still paying the consequences of them), demonstrate that the neutrality of the emergency services cannot always be taken for granted. This also presents the fire service with a

similarity to the military who also have a public protection role, although (in our society) with less public contact. Further, the ongoing reliance on the military for assistance in natural disasters and to provide strike cover demonstrates that there are similarities above and beyond those with the police, and that the links with the military are far from being a thing of the past.

Structural issues refers to similarities in what fire and police services do in relation to other authorities and public services, and in relation to the public, and again, there are a number of similarities. The role of both the fire service and the police in community safety partnerships, and in taking a preventive role in terms of community (fire) safety demonstrates similarities in actual work and in role. This is reiterated by the position in local government that the services take, as peripheral to the main business of local government, but still responsible for a number of core measures. There is a further similarity in how the services have responded to the shift towards prevention, which has often been seen as not real police work (Waddington 1999) or proper fire fighting (Baigent 2001), and which I will discuss further below. There is also a tension for these services in the public response to increased preventive working, whereby the public seem to think that preventive work comes at the expense of response work, when in reality it is more likely to complement it (Murphy, Hinds et al. 2008). Police and fire services also share democratic accountability through police and fire authorities, separate democratic bodies comprising elected representatives from the geographic region that they serve. This is in marked contrast to, for example, the armed forces, who have no democratic or local remit, and the other emergency services, such as the ambulance service or coast guard, who are not democratically accountable.

A further role, which has been growing for both police and fire services following the 9/11 attacks in New York, but more particularly the 7/7 attacks in London, pertains to counter terrorism and civil contingency. Again, this links both services to the military, who are also involved in this function, although it also has the potential to alienate certain parts of the population who may feel that they are unduly targeted by this type of work. Embracing a more social approach to terrorism prevention may have pay offs for the fire service as much as for police and other agencies (Shaftoe, Turksen et al. 2007), in what is indisputably a growth area. This also demonstrates a cultural difference between Britain and the US, where in the wake of 9/11, fire

fighters have been lionized, and elevated above and beyond the status of folk heroes; whereas in the UK, the emergency services have seen their reputation very much tarnished by the inquiry into the 7/7 London bombings (Topping 2010).

Organisational culture relates to similarities in police and fire service 'culture', examining how police and fire fighters view themselves, their function and their organisation, especially where this departs from official 'versions' of the culture. Both the fire service and the police have quasi-military structures, with rank systems and uniforms not dissimilar to those employed in the military, and whilst the police are, perhaps, closer in operational function to the military, the links are also strong within the fire service, which developed out of the navy at the end of the second world war. Further, a number of recruits to the fire service have traditionally come from the armed forces, and this remains the case today. 'Officially', both the fire and police services have strong internal cultures of public service, duty and respectability. However, research, intuition and the popular imagination suggest that unofficially, this is not always the case. Writing about 'canteen culture' in the police has been a popular genre for both academics (Reiner 1992, Waddington 1999) and journalists (for example the undercover exposé of racism in Manchester police recruits), and particularly for television writers, with police series from The Sweeney to Luther focussing very much on officers not entirely doing things 'by the book'. Over the years, the canteen culture has been seen as problematic in a number of different ways, perhaps culminating in the accusations of 'institutional racism' following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, or for the fire service, in some of the documents looking at their record on equalities (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services 1999). However, there are also positives to some of the informal culture produced and reproduced within these organisations. Strong group ethos and affinity is no doubt of particular importance in life threatening situations (Hill, Brunsden 2009, Regehr 2009), and the very specific humours which develop are in some way response and defence mechanisms for the stressful work of dealing with danger and with normalising their work (Waddington 1999, Brewer 1991). As such, there seem to be a number of similarities in the culture of police and fire services, in their development either from the military or along military lines, in the formal culture, in the informal 'canteen culture' and both positive and negative associations with that. As discussed above, there is also much of the military in the culture and language of the FRS. For example, the watch system mirrors that of the navy, one set of shifts is referred to as a 'tour', and non fire fighters are called 'civilians', clearly

demarcating fire fighters from external groups and, as shall be discussed in the first study, demonstrating social identity at play.

Finally, the idea of symbolic function looks at how the public view fire fighters and police officers and the roles they think they play. Popular conceptions of both police and fire fighters abound, with no shortage of material aimed at younger children, especially boys, including, for instance police and fire fighter dressing up outfits. This not only shows these job roles in a 'heroic' fashion (other outfits would include knight, astronaut, superhero, fairy, princess and nurse) but also in a strongly gender stereotypical fashion. And although this thesis is not overtly concerned with issues of gender, it is scarcely possible to mention fire fighters without, at some stage, mentioning gender. This feeds directly into the gendered and sexualised representations available to more adult audiences (Cooper 1995), that both hyper-masculinises male fire fighters whilst also undermining the contribution of female fire fighters. And whilst macho prowess might once have been the sole virtue required for fighting fires or criminals, the shift to prevention in both of these services requires a new skill set, whilst challenging what it means to be a fire fighter or a police officer, both within the services and amongst the general public, which will be discussed in more detail in both the Literature Review and the studies.

There is then a tension between these representations, which are presented as authority and aspirational figures to children, but fetishised for adults, while on both counts reinforcing the masculinity of the role (Hall, Hockey et al. 2007) and their link to an exemplification of social norms (Sunshine, Tyler 2003a). As such, fire fighters and police officers play a strong role in the public imagination, demonstrated through the numerous television programmes (Fireman Sam, London's Burning, The Bill etc) devoted to covering them, to the range of children's (and adult) toys. Further, fire and police services both protect us from a number of base fears, both instinctive and manipulated. The fear of fire no doubt predates society (Bachelard 1964, Goudsblom 1994), and whilst crime is an essentially social phenomenon (Rock 2002), fear of crime has been manicured by the press and commercial interests to its current fever pitch. Our reliance on both police and fire services to counter these fears is a strong similarity between the services. Further, both organisations have, with comparable amounts of hostility from the public, sought to transfer responsibility for these areas back to the public through their crime

prevention and community fire safety schemes (MacLeavy 2009). The resistance with which these have both been met points to both further comparisons, but also the strength of feeling we have about the role of these two services in our communities. This will be picked up particularly in the chapter on the Focus Group study.

Police research is not, however, a straight forward proxy for FRS research, and there are a number of important differences. A key difference is with regard to enforcement: clearly the police and the fire service both have a prevent, protect, respond function, but for the police this is also accompanied by an enforcement component. However, this is to an extent becoming blurred, with fire fighters being granted the same powers as Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), and potentially becoming part of the extended police family. This differs widely across service areas, with some forces and services maintaining a very strong 'separation of powers' but in other areas, police and fire work closely together in enforcement operations, for instance using 'trojan' fire engines to covertly deploy police officers (Case 2008). Fire fighting appliances are also often deployed in crowd control situations and the continuing debate over co-responding (where fire fighters deliver first aid), which is akin to the French system of fire fighters being the first response demonstrates that it is not only police tasks that can be taken on by fire fighters.

A further difference is with the relative 'popularity' of police and fire fighters. Whilst the majority of law abiding citizens respect the role of the police, many will sympathise with those who fall foul of structural and procedural injustices, such as through stop and search, and may be cynical of the police's power to affect change or to deal with their priorities (Bradford, Jackson et al. 2008). Some may even have had negative experiences of the police themselves (Drury, Reicher 2000). Further, people also seem capable of understanding that in the 'war on crime' there are as likely to be police casualties as 'criminal' ones. However, when hostility to the fire service is discussed, this is frequently met with incredulity (although, as I shall discuss in the findings, this is sometimes also followed by at least latent hostility). Whilst this goes someway to demonstrating the high standing of the service in certain sections of society, it also undermines the difficulties that fire fighters face in a number of neighbourhoods (Labour Research Department 2008a), and can result in assistance, for example by the police, not being given. That fire fighters do come

under attack, and in certain areas with depressing familiarity, suggests that in this respect they are not actually so dissimilar from the police. Further, they are, to an extent, powerless to respond under attack other than to call on the police for help, potentially undermining an identity based on strength and manliness.

In this section, I have considered research around the police as a proxy for research on the fire and rescue service, of which there is considerably less, both exposing gaps in literature relating to fire and rescue services, and proposing one potential way to fill those gaps. This also starts to set the context for relations between FRS and the public, by positioning the FRS within the public sector and allied in a number of ways, both actual and perceptual, to the police. In the next section, I will turn to an area of research on the fire service which is much more developed – fire fighter identity.

## *Fire fighter identity*

Any applicant to the fire service will have been immersed in FRS stereotypes from a young age, and so people do not become fire fighters unknowingly (particularly as many follow fathers or brothers in the service). Further, becoming a fire fighter is not easy, with around twenty five applicants for every position (Avon Fire and Rescue Service 2008). This has the effect of immediately setting the successful applicants apart from other non-fire fighters and of categorising the successful applicants as 'fire fighters'. As shown in the SCT literature, this categorisation is necessary and sufficient for the new fire fighters to develop a social identity as fire fighters, providing the basis for potential intergroup conflict with non fire fighters – especially given their demarcation as 'civilians'. In this section, I will discuss this group identity and the implications that it has for this research project.

Once recruited, the training process begins, which has the effect of destabilising previous social identities as the recruit becomes socialised into fire service work, a process described at length by Myers (2005) and Scott and Myers (2005). Myers describes the process of assimilation, as 'rookie' fire fighters demonstrate trustworthiness and knowledge of insider norms to gain acceptance into their chosen culture. Although this is an American study, the fire service studied has a

similar degree of competition for jobs as do British FRS. Myers describes the recruitment process as one which does not just eliminate those who are physically unable to perform the role, but also plays a part in the start of their socialisation process: as with British fire services, recruits *really* want to become fire fighters, and as such, come to the service immersed in the norms described by Cooper (1995) and others. Scott and Myers' associated article from the same study looks in greater depth at a specific aspect of the socialisation process: the management of emotion. They found that fire fighters tended to internalise personal emotions in order to continue to be seen as 'trustworthy' and to get on with the job in hand. A notable exception to this was in the case of fire fighter fatality, which were met with overt grief, as also described by Sargent (2002). Despite seeming to be direct contradictions to the 'manliness' implied in fire fighting, these type of exceptions are explained in a number of ways: as reminders of the everyday dangers that fire fighters face (Scott, Myers 2005); as indicative of the subversion of masculinity within the firehouse (Yarnal, Dowler et al. 2004); or, as a reinforcement of the extent of the tragedy of losing a fire fighter (Sargent 2002).

These studies discuss the formation of fire service identities, and the socialisation processes that underpin them. A further set of work discusses how those identities manifest themselves within the fire service, and start to consider the implications for operational function. Baigent (2001) writes at length about fire service culture, conducting an ethnography accompanied by the insights he personally gained in 30 years of fire service employment. Although his research is primarily concerned with masculinity, it necessarily encompasses a considerable range of other aspects of fire service identity. He particularly looks at how new recruits are trained to adopt fire service identity, and how recruits are told that '*they should listen to the advice of experienced fire fighters and it is their duty to fit in*' (page 39), further perpetuating fire service culture, a process also described by Myers (2005). The gendered focus allows Baigent to reveal certain factors of fire service culture in ways that correlate with the Home Office findings (1999, 2000), suggesting that there is widespread suspicion of paperwork (Childs, Morris et al. 2004), and of those (including senior officers) who undertake this role. Fire service masculinity is constructed in contrast to those who are not fire fighters, which includes those who might once have been, but whose role now incorporates the emasculating tasks of 'pen pushing' and 'fire prevention' (page 92), for it is the *fighting of fire* that constitutes the core of fire

service identity: '*by being reactive to fire, fire fighters create their public profile*' (page 100).

This issue is taken up again by Childs et al (2004), and by Hill and Brunsden (2009) in relation to fire fighter fatalities and Brunsden and Hill (2009) in relation to striking and has significant implications for the changing role of fire fighters, as described in the policy section, below. In the first paper, the authors discuss the role reversal that occurs when fire fighters themselves are injured, referring to a specific incident in which there were also a fire fighter fatality. Using interview and grounded theory methods, the researchers discuss the role confusion that occurs in response to the incident, mirroring Wieck's (1993) consideration of the collapse of sensemaking (see below). As such '*the macho identification and occupational rescue role is seen as being in conflict with any notion of victimhood*' (page 79). In the second paper (Brunsden, Hill 2009b), a single fire fighter is used as a case study to discuss the impact of the 2004 strike. The question of identity was found to permeate his talk of the strike, with the fire fighter feeling that any reference to fire fighters was personal to him, and to a 'universal fire fighter' (page 104). Again, his experiences within the strike, which is anathema to the usual 'helping' ethos of the service, cause him to adjust his world view (page 107) in relation to his peers, the service, and, most fundamentally, himself.

## *Sensemaking and the collapse of fire fighter identity*

Identity is formed in a number of ways (Turner, Reynolds 2004), and as such it is plausible for fire service identity to be formed in relation to 'civilians' as non-fire fighters, but also in 'competition' with fire itself as an 'enemy' to be 'defeated'. Indeed, the language of fire fighting reflects this, for instance where buildings are said to be 'lost' when fire takes over. Fire can also be considered to be dynamic in that it is constantly changing, and, as proposed in the Elaborated Social Identity Model (Drury, et al, 1999), responds to the actions of those around it (Quintiere 1998). This is reinforced through sensemaking, an idea which comes from organisational studies. It is the process through which people create the situations in which they find themselves, how they act in those situations, and how they rationalise them to themselves and to others both during and after the event (Allard-Poesi 2005). Allard-Poesi (2005) distinctly links it to social identity,

suggesting that through sensemaking we decide which ‘self’ to invoke in any given situation. She suggests that this is a dynamic process, where actions and sense are defined in relation to the actions of others in the situation. When these actions are not comparable to personal understandings of the situation, sensemaking recurs, and the situation is redefined, again relating to the ESIM described by Reicher.

Weick’s study of the Mann Gulch incident builds and theorises on work conducted in the 1970s by Norman Maclean. He reconstructed events from 1949 where ‘smoke jumpers’ were parachuted in to tackle a wild fire in Montana (Maclean 1992). Much of the men’s equipment was lost on impact, and the fire quickly got the better of them. Despite the foreman’s protestations that they should light ‘escape fires’, this seemed counterintuitive (even though it was part of their training) to the rapidly unravelling crew, and many of them succumbed, having lost equipment and sight of their leader, to the fire. The only men who survived were those who clung on to their identity as fire fighters, building escape fires or finding their own escape routes. A number of further sensemaking studies have focussed on the fire service (Weick 1993, Landgren 2005, Putnam 1995), perhaps in response to Weick’s seminal work on ‘smoke jumpers’ in Mann Gulch (1993), but perhaps also in response to these dynamic factors outlined above. If fire is conceptualised as a group in relation to whose actions fire fighters are sensemaking, there is the possibility to study a dynamic encounter. Further, because it is clearly not a social entity, there is no need to study its actions, only those of the fire fighters. As such, there are only one group of subjects, making the experience of researching fire fighters potentially less problematic than researching, for example, crowds and the police (Drury, Reicher 2000) or groups coming together through organisational merger (Haslam 2000).

Fire fighters are who they are when they are actively engaged in fire fighting, and when that fight is successful. As Weick demonstrates in the Mann Gulch episode, it is less straightforward when the fight is lost. That identity is called into question when not fire fighting has serious considerations for non emergency responses, such as home fire safety visits and other preventive work. In this section, I have looked at how fire fighter identity is constructed and manifested. Although the majority of the studies discussed do not take an explicitly social identity approach, what they tell us about fire fighter identity has direct bearing on intergroup relations. If, as suggested, fire fighters prize masculinity and have an identity forged through

conflict with fire, this surely has a bearing on how they relate to the public, especially when they meet with them as groups, and, as will be discussed in the next section, in preventive work.

## *The fire service in local government*

In the previous section, I looked at identity issues and how fire fighter identity is produced and reproduced. In this section, I look more at the context for the fire service in terms of modern local government. There are certainly identity issues at play here also, from the policy impact of reports such as the HMFSI's 1999 report into equality and diversity, to ongoing wrangles over the role of the fire service as they become a more proactive service, engaged with communities and conducting preventive working, as suggested in the Bain review (2003) and enshrined in the Emergency Services Act, 2004. Despite the range of policy documents relating to the modernisation process, and the central role of the fire service within modern local government, there remains a dearth of academic discourse in this field. This will be discussed at some length in this part of the thesis, and a more extended version of this section has been accepted by *Local Government Studies* for publication (August 2011).

The changing role of the FRS over time has shifted the requirements of what fire fighters are expected to do within the organisation, without necessarily addressing the expectations either of fire fighters or of wider society. The increase in preventive working and fewer actual fires have resulted in fire fighters not being just fire fighters, and fire and rescue services not being just that, but linked also to ASB, to education and to regeneration initiatives. This has a considerable impact on how fire fighters perceive themselves and how the public perceive them, resulting in disjuncture between how they see themselves and what they are required to do. No doubt this has ramifications for their group identities and for their self presentation in intergroup situations. As such, the policy context for this research project remains compelling.

This part of the literature review will set the context for the research in national and in local terms. It will allude to changing trends in the nature of public services which

are increasingly emphasising a more preventive approach. It will cover the general strategic framework in which FRS operate, and the way in which that has changed in recent years, including what challenges this has posed for FRS. This includes a summary of the modernising local government agenda and the shift to partnership working, including partnerships with the police for example through community safety, as well as examples of the type of community fire safety interventions undertaken by the fire service.

The context for FRS modernisation is set within local government modernisation. The Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2000 put the principle tenets of new Labour's local government modernisation agenda firmly on the statute books. These tenets included three key areas which shaped local government and to an extent, fire service, policy in the intervening decade (Stewart 2003). Firstly, a shift to community leadership, whereby local authorities work more closely with their partners (including FRS) and with local communities. This is particularly evidenced through the development of the power to promote well being. Secondly, a focus on democratic renewal, in which a new 'relationship' was to be fostered between authorities and residents/voters. This is particularly evidenced through the implementation of new structures for local government, with an emphasis on scrutiny and accountability. And, thirdly, with the development of performance improvement through strategic regulation. This started with the transfer from compulsory competitive tendering to best value, and the expansion of best value from single service inspections to the all encompassing 'Corporate Governance' inspection.

Downe and Martin (2006) suggest that LGMA followed four distinct developmental phases, incorporating each of these tenets. They assert that the first phase was best value, the second, the duty to promote well being, the third the introduction of comprehensive performance assessment following the crisis in best value and fourthly the shift to community leadership encapsulated in local strategic partnerships, and formalised through Local Area Agreements (LAAs) (Downe, Martin 2006). The shift to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) perhaps signified a fifth or final stage of this project, although the change in government in 2010 and the ensuing 'Age of Austerity' will no doubt further impact on the process.

A key component of the LGMA was to ensure that all local government partners modernised alongside local authorities themselves (Downe, Martin 2006). In this section, I look at the changing role of FRS as they have moved from traditional fire brigades to modern fire and rescue services, taking on new roles and changing their culture. As with mainstream local government, this has not happened overnight, rather it has been the result of negotiation, resistance and piecemeal change at both local and strategic levels. These changes are examined in this section with regard to FRS, and in the next section with regard to local government. A key part of modernisation was to move away from the militaristic style 'brigade', originating in the navy and recruiting disproportionately from the armed services (Baigent 2001), towards a more outward focused 'service'. The old brigade structure had come to be seen as anachronistic (Bain 2002), culturally immobile and unrepresentative of the communities that they served. It was hoped that modernisation would address this, creating modern working arrangements, engagement with local communities and a more preventive focus, and although not every FRS across the country rebranded from 'brigade' to 'service', the general shift in terminology is emblematic of New Labour's modernisation process (Ewen 2004).

The most recent process of fire service modernisation can be seen to have started in 1995, when the Audit Commission published a report questioning value for money in FRS (Audit Commission 1995). This report acknowledged the excellent work done by FRS in saving lives from fire, but acknowledged that there were several significant shortcomings in the service, including limiting and inflexible conditions of service, static risk categorisation and lack of attention to fire prevention. For example, local fire authorities were funded according to the number of house fires they had attended in the previous year, a funding mechanism which clearly penalised brigades conducting effective fire prevention work. Subsequent reports made similar findings, dealing particularly with the modernisation process (Cap Gemini Ernst and Young 2002) and with recruitment / retention and diversity issues (Home Office 2000, Home Office 1999) but with little associated change (Bain 2002).

Finally, in 2002, the Bain Report was published – indisputably the key document in the modernisation of the fire service. It acknowledged the 'high value which the public places in the fire service' (page 9) whilst stressing the need for the service to improve and modernise in order to provide a better public service. The Review called for a new policy context for the FRS for the UK, with high level support in government filtering down to strong managerial support at individual service level (Bain 2002). Alongside this, it was proposed that a more proactive approach would be introduced, with emphasis put on community fire safety and fire prevention approaches. This should be delivered through a revitalised service that deployed resources (both personnel and equipment) according to need, rather than according to the post war arrangements. The Review suggests that this should be accompanied by regionalisation, a move that was at the time unpopular. This change remains unimplemented to date, demonstrating perhaps an ongoing resistance to more input from central government, and is reminiscent of previous resistance to regionalisation (Ewen 2004).

The modern service would have a more diverse staff structure, with operational staff particularly drawn from the local community and including more women, in the hope that this would both provide a more 'modern' workforce and challenge the prevailing culture (Baigent 2001) The introduction of new HR systems and dedicated HR managers from outside the service was to support this. Personnel would move from 'rank to role' with a new pay structure based around the revised personal development system (IPDS). For the first time, managers could be drawn from outside the service (a move which is still neither universally accepted or popular), and the relationship between retained and whole time fire fighters revisited. This included the potential for whole time fire fighters to undertake retained roles under the dual duty system. The review acknowledged that much of this change would take careful implementation, but reminded readers that the overall aim of the recommendations was to 'save lives' (page vi).

Perhaps understandably, the review was not received well in all quarters, and late in 2002, the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) called the first national strike for a generation. Although the strike was ostensibly about pay and conditions, rather than overtly regarding the Bain Review, the proposed changes to conditions proposed by the Review were not met favourably by the FBU, who saw the Review as a 'distraction'

(FBU 2002), preferring instead the results from the research they had commissioned themselves (Cap Gemini Ernst and Young 2002, Fire Brigades' Union 2002). Further, a number of the existing conditions of service, and the alternatives proposed by the FBU, were perceived in the Review as being hostile to modernisation. Bain (2002) suggests that management structures were seen in some quarters as providing an 'alibi' for managers seeking to avoid change, and that Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI), and the Fire Service College, reinforced that culture rather than challenged it. As such, the duties of HMFSI were handed over to the Audit Commission in 2004, and to the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, located with the Department for Communities and Local Government. The change to the Coalition government in 2010, however, has seen the dismantling of the Audit Commission and so potentially a new stage of modernisation (or conversely, a halt in modernisation) has been reached.

Diversity was seen as key to FRS modernisation and a number of further studies looked specifically at diversity in the fire service (Baigent 2001, Home Office 1999), challenging the 'fire service culture' with its emphasis on 'fitting in' and 'not tolerating diversity' (Bain, 2002, page 75). *Equality and Fairness* (1999) was the first of a series of thematic reviews conducted by HMFSI. This report was critical of much of the FRS, particularly with regard to the management of equality and diversity, and links to much of the FRS literature discussed above. It found discrimination and bullying prevalent almost universally with a strong culture within the service which perpetuated this. This was found to be the case across all organisations with responsibilities to the FRS. A fundamental aspect of this was seen to be the watch culture, which was perceived as being more like a 'family than a team' (page 20). This culture was challenged in the first three National Frameworks (Communities and Local Government 2004), with the proposal to be more of a team than a family. However, in a potential reflection of the prevailing strength of watch culture, this challenge was dropped from the 2008 National Framework (Communities and Local Government 2008).

At this time, fewer than 2% of all operational personnel were either female or from minority ethnic backgrounds and *Equality and Fairness* found that many female and/or BME staff had been subject to harassment. Further, where harassment was challenged, management of the process was inadequate. Graduate recruits also

numbered around 2%, again, far below community averages. This potentially reflects the poor view of ‘clean’ work (office work, management or community fire safety) in the fire service (Childs, Morris et al. 2004), but also the view that the public have of the fire service as not being a suitable career for graduates. Whilst ambitious targets were set for the recruitment of female and BME fire fighters, these are unlikely to be met (Communities and Local Government 2004). Indeed, the target for the recruitment of female fire fighters has been significantly scaled down in the intervening years (Communities and Local Government 2008) suggesting perhaps a more deep seated need for cultural change within the fire service, but also, as with graduate recruitment, amongst the general public from whom fire fighters are recruited. For example, where FRS have attempted to introduce specific recruitment initiatives, these have been met with hostility from the general public. Further, *Equality and Fairness* also discussed the prevalence of homophobia in FRS, concluding – shockingly - that FRS were not really ready to begin to tackle this issue. Despite some high profile positive actions by a small number of FRS, this situation prevails (Ward, Winstanley 2006).

Modernisation is about more than diversity, however, and much of the scope of the Bain Report – with the notable exception of regionalisation – was incorporated into the 2003 white paper, and the following 2004 Fire and Rescue Services Act (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004). The Act served to put a number of prevention and rescue activities which many FRS already undertook (attending road traffic accidents, dealing with flooding and other natural disasters, responding to terrorist incidents) on a statutory footing, so that they could be held accountable for these services, but also adequately resourced to deal with them. Similarly, community fire safety work was also made statutory, in the hope that this shift to preventive working would encapsulate all that was modern about the fire service – partnership working, community outreach, proactivity and diversity. However, there is still some reluctance to engage in community fire safety at much of the grass roots level (Audit Commission 2004b) as well as reticence from the public who believe that prevention comes at the expense of response capability.

Alongside the White Paper and the Act, other changes in local government ensured that the role of FRS became more centrally positioned in relation to mainstream local government: the Police Reform Act, 2002, made FRS statutory partners in

CDRPs, and the Anti Social Behaviour Act, 2003, reinforced this position by legislating against a number of fire related behaviours (including setting off fire works in a public place and making hoax calls). Finally, the 2004 Act also gave FRS the right to call themselves 'Fire and Rescue Services', reiterating the expansion of their role to prevention and rescue, and, it was hoped moving them away from the militaristic, closed watch culture, imagined in the word 'brigade'. Interestingly, however, a number of FRS, most notably London, still refer to themselves as 'brigades'.

## *Modern Local Government*

The processes that FRS had undertaken in the name of modernisation closely followed the trajectory set by central government for local government, with the intention of granting a number of freedoms from bureaucratic scrutiny for local government. The mainstream of Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) was driven by the twin tenets of inspection and improvement which were intended to steer this process. Although it was hoped that the relationship between central and local government would be relaxed through LGMA, in reality, central government still has considerable power over local (Laffin, 2008), through the measures of inspection and the ongoing process of change. This reflects the position that local government has come to occupy in relation to local public sector partners (FRS, police forces, primary care trusts, probation services etc).

## *Crime prevention and community (fire) safety*

The LGMA was not the only policy shift occurring in the late 1990s and early 2000s, however. Another major raft of legislation concerned crime and, particularly, disorder. To an extent, these directives formed a part of the LGMA, introducing partnership working where links had been tenuous in the past, and providing crime prevention and youth disorder as a policy objective that all of local government would need to tackle. However, crime prevention is not only an example of joined up government, it is also an example of how FRS have engaged with LGMA, and potentially, not benefited from doing so. In this section, I will look at the development of community safety and crime prevention, which is used as an example of how FRS have engaged at a local level.

The shift to partnership working in community safety followed a growing acknowledgement that the police, with their inevitable enforcement focus, were insufficiently resourced and experienced to deliver crime prevention. Organisations such as Crime Concern and Nacro lobbied for better coordination, and worked at a grass roots level to promote joint working. The 1998 Act formalised much of this work, putting CDRPs on a statutory footing, and making local authorities and police partners in crime prevention. Further, Section 17 of the Act made local authorities take the crime and disorder implications of any of their decisions into consideration. Youth Offending Teams were instituted, comprised of officers from a range of different agencies responsible for coordinating responses to young people's offending. Most sensationally, ASBOs (Anti Social Behaviour Orders) were introduced – placing low level criminality at the heart of government policy (von Hirsch, Simister 2006), where it has remained ever since. The rhetoric of disorder took over many social policy debates (Crawford, 1999), and as more organisations joined CDRPs, so their agendas became increasingly crime prevention oriented. An associated concern with disorder developed amongst the general public, fuelled in no small part by the tabloid media, but exacerbated by the involvement of ever more agencies. As different and diverse agencies became involved in tackling ASB, they could be seen, to some extent as responsible for its perceived proliferation – or at least for failing to 'solve' it. Including FRS in CDRPs and in crime prevention work also implicates them in the growth of ASB and, again, in failing to resolve local problems with associated implications for local people.

Much of this concern about disorder emerged from concern on the right about a burgeoning moral underclass, characterised by illegitimacy, unemployment and crime (Murray, Lister et al. 1996) and on the left about growing social exclusion (Levitas, 2006), resulting in neighbourhood based interventions such as Neighbourhood Renewal (see previous chapter also). The moral tone of these debates gave rise to the suggestion that communities were, through their own internal decrepitude, responsible for crime which occurred within them. Attendant problems of failing schools, health inequality and inadequate housing were no longer questions of social, but criminal, justice. Generic social policy issues were no longer worth resolving of their own accord, but rather because they gave rise to crime and criminal tendencies. This is what Crawford (1999) comes to call the

‘criminalisation of social policy’, which, as I will discuss below, has certain implications for the FRS.

The move to partnership working, including community safety partnerships, was (and remains) challenging to many, both in local government and in the police. Culturally, there are great differences in many aspects of these organisations and getting representatives to share information and allow each other to participate equally has been problematic (Sullivan, Downe et al. 2006, Sullivan, Sweeting et al. 2005). At a more strategic level, the work of encouraging inward facing organisations to cooperate and develop a more external outlook (Stewart 2003) has been challenging, not least for fire and rescue services, many of whom are concerned about their perceived contribution to partnerships due to low financial input and stretched commitments to a number of LSPs (Audit Commission 2008).

In 2002, the Police Reform Act developed and extended the work begun by the Crime and Disorder Act, extending statutory authority status to Fire and Rescue Authorities, and Primary Care Trusts. Other partnerships also came into prominence in the interim, including Children and Young People’s Partnerships, delivering the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda. Growing partnership commitments have challenged FRS across the country, particularly in areas where a single FRS covers multiple local authorities.

Expanding the role of partnership, and the number of agencies integral to those partnerships, has been an important part of the modernisation agenda. More recently, local strategic partnerships (LSPs) have come to prominence, despite their non statutory status, and have now subsumed other partnerships (including Children and Young People’s Partnerships and CDRPs). There has been an associated shift at this level from agencies within partnerships being service providers to partnerships themselves taking a commissioning approach. Further, where the police, for example, were equal partners in CDRPs, the local authority remains responsible for the LSP – rendering them no longer partnerships of equals. This is an issue particularly for the other partners, such as FRS, and parallels the centre / local relationships (Gillanders 2007) that the LGMA was supposed to

replace. Further, the principal mechanism for LSP operation has been through the Local Area Agreement, piloted in a small number of authorities in 2005, and then implemented across the board. LAAs brought together local authority agencies to simplify funding, allowing them to pool resources and allocate funds as appropriate. This was in recognition of the diverse nature of local authority areas, and the different ways in which they conducted their business. Key to selling the process to local government were the concepts of flexibility and accountability (Communities and Local Government 2007), but these did not materialise in practice (Laffin 2008).

Prior to their formal inclusion in CDRPs in 2002, FRS were already involved with initiatives such as community fire safety, which traditionally involved school visits alongside targeting adults with smoke alarms, chip pan amnesties and electric blanket testing, most of which were piecemeal and local interventions, well intended but lacking strategic focus (as discussed elsewhere), but which date back to their inclusion in Constabularies in the interwar years (Ewen 2004). In more recent years, they have become increasingly concerned with youth interventions (Arson Control Forum 2004, Arson Control Forum 2006), which themselves started to take a more crime prevention approach. Further, the ASB Act, 2003, had made crimes of various fire related activities, including the public use of fireworks and making hoax calls. Following from Crawford's (1999) assertions of the 'criminalisation of social policy', this has led, to an extent, to a 'criminalisation of the fire service', as their core business has increasingly been influenced by rhetoric around disorder and directed by available funding. In 2008, funding from central government for Home Fire Safety Visits, the flagship of community fire safety, came to an end, and although most FRS will continue to provide the service, it is possible that progressively more resources will be aimed at preventing fire setting behaviour in young people. This is especially the case given the requirements within CAA for partnership approaches to issues such as ASB, which have been embraced by far more authorities than those relating to generic fire safety (Improvement and Development Agency, 2008). This suggests that FRS have to some extent also been subsumed by the shift to crime prevention and community safety, potentially at the expense of generic fire prevention and community fire prevention.

This shift is not necessarily negative: the concentration on community safety, and the involvement of FRS in CDRPs has positioned them well for further partnership

work, such as through the rapidly developing LSPs. However, FRS are a late inclusion to many partnerships with their statutory incorporation a full five years after police forces and local councils. Although in some areas they have assimilated well (for example with FRS staff chairing CDRPs), FRS have had to work hard to adopt more cooperative ways of working in partnerships where dynamics and relationships may have become well established prior to FRS involvement. This area is somewhat under-researched, with the majority of LGMA literature focussing on community / authority relations (Sullivan, Downe et al. 2006) or central / local relations (Gillanders 2007, Laffin 2008), rather than considering relations between the local authority and their other public sector partners. However, that in itself is perhaps evidence of the lack of status experienced by partners in the process of LGMA, as reflected by the Audit Commission (2008).

Further, there may also be particular cultural styles within FRS that make this involvement particularly difficult: the 'closed culture' (Home Office 2000, Bain 2002) of the fire service is likely to be just as impermeable from the outside as from within, and at a strategic as at an operational level. However, little of the FRS modernisation agenda has been concerned with outward relations as debates about inwardness have mostly concerned the watch culture (Audit Commission 2004a), which describes the replication of homogenous, male working class cultures throughout the service, with an emphasis on 'fitting in' (Baigent, 2001), as described in the above sections on identity. Similarly, debates about the potential for local authorities to develop these styles of working have focussed more on centre – local relations than on those between local government and its partners (Sullivan, Downe et al. 2006, Gillanders 2007, Laffin 2008), an issue complicated for FRS by their inclusion, prior to local government reorganisation, as part of County Councils.

As such, modernisation as a process has had a considerable impact on the fire service, and many FRS have worked hard, in most instances, and despite some difficulties to adapt to this. However, progress has not been entirely unproblematic, nor is the process complete, and as some FRS are still reluctant to engage fully (Audit Commission 2008), there is still some work to go.

I would suggest that fire services across the country have worked hard over a decade of LGMA to become included in modern local government through modernisation, inspection and improvement. However, and in a reflection of ongoing centre / local relations, modern local government has not reciprocated by including FRS on equal terms in partnerships. As such, the incentive for further involvement and engagement by FRS seems somewhat to be lacking, especially at a time when some in the fire service are still questioning the need for modernisation, the speed of its progress and the nature of its implementation (Labour Research Department 2008). The changing role of the FRS at both strategic and operational level has a considerable impact on what fire fighters do in their day to day jobs and how they are perceived by the public, issues which are picked up in much greater detail in the chapters which cover each of the studies. In this section, I have examined the process of fire service modernisation, against the backdrop of the general LGMA, looking specifically at FRS involvement in community safety partnerships as a case study. This demonstrates the extent to which FRS identity flexes and changes according to context, including policy context. For fire fighters recruited to deal with fire and emergencies, preventive working challenges what they joined the service to do and, correspondingly, how they perceive themselves. This conception is then carried over into work in the community, which has a more or less direct bearing on how they relate to residents and therefore impacts on the nature of the intergroup encounter.

## *Summary*

In this and the previous chapter, I have addressed a range of literatures that form the background to this research project, looking at identity, place and the FRS. Whilst the previous chapter looked at theoretical issues around the idea of identity and place, this chapter focussed more on the nature of fire fighters' identities, especially looking at how this might impact on intergroup relations. It also outlined the policy context in which the FRS work, demonstrating that they are just one of a range of public services delivering work in deprived neighbourhoods, and that this impacts on their perceptions of themselves, but also potentially on how they are perceived by residents in these areas. By considering work relating to FRS in this way it is possible to see a number of gaps in the literature. Firstly, work pertaining to the FRS is in and of itself rather scant, and although this can in part be addressed by looking at work on the police, this is only a partial substitute. Secondly, that work

which does look at the FRS does not look at them in relation to the communities in which they work, nor, to any great extent, in relation to the wider policy community. This are both issues that this research project seeks in part to address.

# Chapter Four: Methodology

## *Introduction*

As discussed in the literature review, the modern British fire service developed at the end of the second world war, and, at that time, had strong links to the navy. It continued to be a popular career choice for men leaving the armed forces, and to an extent, still is. Other recruits are drawn from airport and RAF fire services, and some have come through the retained system. Still more recruits have family links to the fire service, with fathers or brothers who are themselves fire fighters. As such, and as with many large organisations, the fire service has a distinct ethos, based partly in their role as public servants, partly in the popular stereotype of fire fighting, and partly in the internal dynamic of a predominantly male organisation, rooted in the military and with an ongoing preoccupation with physical prowess. Fire fighters and members of the public alike are likely to say that being a fire fighter means something in particular, and that it provides an identity and set of assumptions both for the fire fighter and those who come into contact with them (Cooper 1995), whether that is a negative or a positive encounter. These factors make the fire service and their interaction with the community an interesting relationship to research, whilst also having certain implications for how that relationship is researched.

As stated above, the overall aim of this research is to understand better the relationship between AFRS and the neighbourhoods in which they work, particularly looking at the roots of hostility and resistance between AFRS and residents in various neighbourhoods, using social identity approaches to understand the relationship and asking to what extent existing mechanisms are effective. In this chapter I will present the methods I have used to research this issue, drawing on the literature review. I will be particularly looking at how social identity approaches can help us to understand these relationships, and how AFRS and residents frame these encounters. Further, fire service work has changed over the last decade, with an inevitable impact on identity. This suggests a temporal aspect to identity, which is mirrored further by the spatial context of encounters; that is to say, identity is contingent not just on time but on place. AFRS experience different communities in

different ways, just as residents in those neighbourhoods will have different experiences of the fire service at different times.

In this research programme, I have chosen to use qualitative methods, the arguments for which are well rehearsed below and elsewhere (Drury, Stott 2001, Hammersley 1992, Ritchie, Lewis 2003). Further, I will be predominantly using ethnographic methods, the reasons for which are explained in relation to each particular study. Such methods have been used extensively with fire services (Myers 2005, Tracy, Scott 2006, Ward, Winstanley 2006, Hall, Hockey et al. 2007) and with police (Campbell 2003, Hobbs, May 1993, Rowe 2007) and as such remain congruent to previous literatures as well as to this study.

## *Locating the research*

As discussed in the introduction, AFRS are both sponsoring this research and providing some of the research locations. Avon have eleven full time crewed fire stations, mostly around Bristol and in Bath and Weston (Avon Fire and Rescue Service 2010). In addition, there are twelve further part time and retained fire fighter stations, and further facilities within Head Quarters, Control and the Joint Training Centre.

Of the eleven whole time stations, I have had contact with two in particular: Upperfield and Norton, with the majority of time spent at Norton station. Also the name of a local area and council ward, Norton station actually covers a wide swathe of south Bristol, extending into the countryside of North Somerset. Of most interest to this research, however, is the number of council estates and deprived communities that are covered by the station, particularly Wootton, Clearwell and Shiregreen. Inevitably, it is Shiregreen that comes up in conversation both with the fire service and with Bristolians about deprivation and multiple, complex problems. Disturbed by riots in the early 1990s (Campbell 1993), and by supermarket led regeneration in the 2000s, Shiregreen was once the beacon of hope for council housing in the south west. Built in the wake of the second world war, Shiregreen provided new homes, with the glamour of gardens, heating and indoor lavatories, to thousands of Bristolians. As with many similar areas, however, housing stock,

reputation and facilities declined over time, with Shiregreen becoming a by word for outer city sink estate deprivation by the 1990s. In terms of social trajectory, it could be any one of a number of peripheral estates: Wythenshawe in Manchester, Speke in Liverpool, and the issues facing such areas are well rehearsed (Hanley 2007).

However, Shiregreen is on the up (Dundry Pioneers 2002, Broda 2008). The notorious High Street, strongly linked to the 1990s riots, was demolished in 2006 and a new flagship superstore built in its place. Neighbourhood Renewal funding has been and gone from the area, and it is currently a neighbourhood management pathfinder. Whilst this is neither the time or the place to enter into discussions of supermarket led regeneration, or of the regeneration process as a whole, there is particular reason for mentioning it. Part of the physical regeneration of the area has included the development of a new community building, which includes community meeting rooms, the new Shiregreen library and, most importantly, a dedicated AFRS community safety centre. Whilst some of the fire stations include community safety centres, which are open access to the community, this is Avon's first detached one, which is actually located within a target community and not in a fire station, marking a step change for the fire service in their relations with the community.

The other two areas of particular focus are Upperfield and Hilton. These have similar, multiple problems of access, decay and deprivation (Bristol Partnership 2007). Upperfield is the larger of the two, with two distinct estates forming the neighbourhood. Again, both the neighbourhoods were viewed with great hope when residents started to move there in the wake of the second world war, but the areas have been quick to deteriorate. Upperfield has its own, designated fire station, which is staffed full time. Hilton, despite sharing a number of demographic features with the other two neighbourhoods is much less problematic to the fire service than Upperfield or Shiregreen. It is also a more diverse area and, despite being less problematic, is to an extent, more 'deprived', lacking, as it does shopping facilities and having recently lost its secondary school. Hilton does not have a designated fire station, but is served by two nearby full time stations.

## *Research questions*

As discussed in the Literature Review, this research project draws particularly on social identity approaches. This is reflected in the methods used, which will help me to consider the interaction and relationship between groups, in this instance the fire service and local residents, including examining how hostility arises, how social identity approaches can help us to understand this and to what extent the fire service's current interventions are effective at dealing with hostility and resistance to fire safety messages. Again, this is discussed in more detail in relation to each of the separate studies. Although the fire service and local residents are not entirely comparable as groups – for a number of reasons – the research looks at the relationship and interactions between them. In this research project, I have used three linked but discrete studies, which could also be described as 'phases' of research, emphasising their interconnectedness but also a temporal and thematic distinction between them. In the first study, the focus is on the fire service, the nature of their identity and how they view themselves and local people. In the second study, the focus is much more on residents, considering how they view their own communities, and how they form their identities in relation to being a part of this community (or by being distinct from others) as well as their experiences of the fire service. The third and final study looks at what happens when the two groups come together, and uses observation methods to explore this dynamic relationship.

## *Qualitative research*

Arguments for and against qualitative research are well rehearsed throughout academic literatures (Ritchie, Lewis 2003, Denzin, Lincoln 2000, Bryman 1984, Brewer 2000), not least in those stemming from social psychology (Parker 2005, Breakwell 2006) and human geography (Pain 2004, Ward 2007), which have roots in the more 'scientific' disciplines. Further, research in social policy areas is also, frequently, expected to take a quantitative approach with a cultural reliance on 'evidence' which tends to privilege hard facts and figures. Whilst perceived wisdom in some quarters suggests that 'proper' research has a quantitative dimension, and this is perhaps the case within the fire service. Alternately, Bryman (1984) asserts that qualitative research is characterised by the obligation to perceive the social world from the perspective of those engaged in it, with an emphasis on close involvement so that these behaviours can be seen and understood in context (Bryman 1984) – although, of course, such contexts can be altered or manipulated

by the researcher (Blaikie 2000, Bryman 1984). As explained above and elsewhere, this research project seeks to come to an *understanding* of a group of phenomena, as opposed to enumerating them. The fire service presents an interesting social milieu in which to conduct research, and as this research is implicitly concerned with the understandings of the fire service, and the way in which they are perceived by residents, it is appropriate to use qualitative methods. Further benefits of such an approach include its perceived fluidity and flexibility (Bryman 1984) and its varying methods which facilitate an 'insider' view (Hammersley 1992, Hammersley, Atkinson 2007). Furthermore, many of the researchers who have worked in comparable fields – for instance with the fire service (Myers 2005, Childs, Morris et al. 2004, Ward, Winstanley 2006, Yarnal, Dowler et al. 2004), with crowds (Stott, Hutchison et al. 2001, Reicher 1984), or in neighbourhoods (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008, Gosling 2008) have also used qualitative approaches. As such, the choice of such methods is as much pragmatic as it is philosophical (Bryman 1984).

Qualitative research necessarily includes a range of different methods, which can include documentary methods, interviews, group methods and observations, the latter being most associated with ethnography. Needless to say,

> *Ethnography is not a particular method of data collection, but a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given field or setting, and an approach which involves close association with and often participation in this setting*
>
> Brewer, 2000, page 59.

Ethnography, then, grounds this research study, allowing me the flexibility to use various methods (interviews, focus groups, participant observation) as appropriate at different times. The ways I have utilised these different facets of ethnography is examined in more detail within the sections on each study (below).

## *Reflexivity*

As with much ethnography, much of this thesis is written in the first person. In part, this is a reflection of the qualitative nature of the research, as it is not intended to speak of universalities and objective truths, as quantitative research, reported in the authoritative third person can tend towards. It also positions me well and truly within the research, as the primary researcher and author. Much of the research taken from an ethnographic perspective is contingent upon me as an individual; on my self presentation and presence (Harrington 2003) and is contingent on me as female (Campbell 2003) and a non-fire fighter (Baigent 2001), when working with the fire service, and as middle class and not local when working with residents. These discussions around positionality and reflexivity are integral to any research project, and mine is no exception. As will be discussed below, in relation especially to focus groups, positionality (Sidaway 2000) is unavoidable as I make disclosures about myself in order to provide context for the group discussion.

Although considered a 'slippery concept' (Webster 2008), reflexivity is ubiquitous in ethnographic research (page 65). It tends to refer to the focus of the researcher on themselves as part of the research project. In its most derided sense, it is synonymous with navel gazing and an unhealthy level of introspection (Lynch 2000), in which the researcher becomes the focus of the research itself (Denzin 2000) at the expense of the original subject. For Lynch (2000), this is corrected through the use of 'ethnomethodology' and Van Maanen (1988) explicitly uses reflexivity to link introspection to confession (as discussed below in relation to writing) through the 'fieldwork confessional' (page 73). This has particular relevance to this research project, where the confessional tale is seen as constructing a particular type of reflexive ethnographic self. Webster (2008) concludes that:

> *Reflexivity is not a 'sense of honour' to be defended, but a 'principle of practice' to be deployed – not a moral principle based on virtue or an essentialised principle based on unavoidability, but a principle of practice based on the historically contingent nature of knowledge production*
>
> (Page 75)

Reflexivity is used in this research project in this spirit, whereby it is a tool and a type of conduct, rather than an end in and of itself.

## *Writing as research method*

Although ethnography is, quite literally, 'writing about people', the writing stage is often ignored in the literature, or presented as a technical exercise after the bulk of the work has been done. However, in recent years, a number of researcher-writers have come to place additional emphasis on writing as a research method in and of itself. To an extent, this stems from the post modernist 'crisis of representation' and the ensuing literary turn of social science (Woods 2005) which emphasised the relativist nature of social research, and which links the writing process to reflexivity through the production of the text and the presence of the researcher within it.

As discussed above, Van Maanen (1988) suggests three different types of writing for ethnography: realist tales, confessional tales (where the writer is seen as an instrument of the research) and impressionist tales, a more post modern take on social science writing which gives voice to some of the research participants using a variety of literary styles. In the realist typology, writing is presented as a finished product, not something for either the reader or the writer particularly to engage in or with (Van Maanen 1988). This might be particularly characterised with earlier anthropological or sociological texts, which lack the reflexivity more usual in modern qualitative research.

Richardson (2004) looks at the subversion of the writing process undertaken in using it as a method of analysis. She reflects that when we are taught to write, we are taught not to write until we know what we want to say. By taking Van Maanen's style of 'confessional tale', she now writes '*in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it*'. Colyar (2009) develops this argument further, viewing writing not just as method, but also as learning in and of itself. For her, the self reflexivity of the process is its strength, '*because the writing process generates a text, one we can use to better understand our rhetorical selves, writing seems an obvious means of pursuing self reflexivity and therefore more trustworthy research findings*' (page 432). As such, we come not just to know about our work but about ourselves.

Typical of this ‘moment’ of ethnography (Coffey 1999) Colyar’s work is not presented as a standard academic text, rather in a less formal, contrived ‘work in progress style’ (Colyar 2009). This clearly reflects Van Maanen’s third type, as does ground breaking work such as that presented by Paget which takes interview transcripts, and relays it as performance (Paget 1990).

The writing process has been integral to this research project, and has remained consistent throughout the three studies, with the additional use of vignettes – an explicitly reflexive practice (Richardson, 2000) – in the third study. Fieldnotes, observations and interview transcripts formed the majority of data in each study. This was then collated into qualitative analysis software. Although conducted ostensibly through thematic analysis (Braun, 2006), writing was an integral part of the analytical process, especially in Study Three, where I have used vignettes to describe observations of the community. The use of vignettes encourages a greater level of engagement with the data for the reader, asking them to relive the experience through the eyes of the researcher (Denzin 2000). This has the effect of enhancing the contextual depth of the material (Miles, Huberman 1999), ‘bringing life to research and research to life’ (Humphreys 2005). As with Humphreys, my vignettes are derived from fieldnotes taken contemporaneously, and comprise a combination of reporting of events with a degree of introspection.

## *Analytic strategy*

Drury and Stott (2001) advocate the development of a ‘consensual’ (page 365) account of events, which relates to methods of triangulation proposed by Denzin (2000). This suggests that an account can be recorded between participants which is based on agreement between parties. Although this does not attempt to present an absolute truth, and remains necessarily constructed, it does serve to present ‘the reality as understood by the various parties’. However, such an approach presents a problem for the lone researcher, as there is no one with whom to compare interpretations of events, and so the development of a consensual account is problematic. Nevertheless, individual accounts can still maintain a degree of validity (Flick 2008) with themes and accounts ‘crystallising’ (Richardson 2003) around certain factors, although it remains to be said than any interpretation and reconstruction of events is mine alone.

As with Drury and Stott (2001), these data were gathered ‘opportunistically, rather than systematically’ (page 366) and, as such, are not intended for quantitative analysis. They are indicative of my interpretations of comments made to me, or within my hearing, by a small number of people, who, although potentially typical of AFRS fire fighters in particular and personnel in general, do not claim to speak for the entire organisation. Likewise, whilst residents might speak as a resident of a particular neighbourhood, they are unlikely to have claimed to be speaking on behalf of it.

Having recorded and annotated fieldnotes and collated them, the analysis itself was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative method which seeks, identifies and analyses patterns within data (Braun, Clarke 2006). Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as a ‘flexible and useful’ means of analysing data, which is capable of producing ‘rich and detailed, yet complex’ interpretations of the data (page 78). It enables the researcher to take an active part in the exploration of the data, rather than relying on ‘emergent’ themes or the commitment to generating theory inherent in grounded theory approaches (page 81). As it is not my intention to produce further theories with my research, rather to expand on existing ones, this is a useful distinction.

The aims of this research programme are to understand better the relationship between AFRS and the neighbourhoods in which they work, by looking at the nature of the relationship, examining the roots of hostility and resistance and asking whether current engagement mechanisms are effective. As such, the data are approached with these questions in mind. In each study, the analysis was conducted by coding into initial themes, based on recurrent or particularly prominent ideas, then reviewing and recoding iteratively as further themes emerged, a process which bears similarities to other types of qualitative analysis, as described by Brunsden and Hill (2009). As such, the coding schedule did not reach completion until the coding process itself was close to completion. Further analysis was conducted as the themes were written up (Richardson 2003), and as such, the writing has been as much of the process of inquiry as its reporting. As with any research, it has been necessary to strike a balance between a rich account of the

full data set (Braun, Clarke 2006) and a nuanced account of particular themes (page 83). This is especially evident in the focus group study, where I have attempted to provide a rich overview of the majority of themes, whilst also providing a more detailed analysis of some.

## *Study One: Ethnography with Avon Fire and Rescue Service*

As described above, the overall research project will comprise a number of qualitative methods. However, for this particular study, an ethnographic approach was taken, combined with semi structured interviews. The focus of the work was to look at whether the fire service have a particular social and group identity, and to examine how this is manifested in relation to other groups, particularly groups of residents in certain neighbourhoods in Bristol. Ethnography is both a methodology and an approach to research (Hammersley 1992, Brewer 2000), which essentially relies on participant observation – although it can include a wide range of other methods (Stott, Reicher 1998). Spending time with participants, seeing how they behave in groups and understanding how they operationalise their identity was essential for this study, and for this reason, ethnography was used.

Academic work is not conducted in a vacuum, and so it is pertinent to this study that comparable work with fire fighters, but also with police officers and in crowd situations, has been conducted from an ethnographic perspective and utilising methods of participant observation, often alongside or to contextualise semi structured interviews. In her studies on 'white collar work' (2004) within the fire service, Childs (2004) uses semi structured interviews alongside focus groups in a way that is clearly commensurate with ethnographic approaches: the research team aims to 'produce useful knowledge, drawn from the lived experiences [of fire fighters]' (page 410), and includes data not just from interviews and focus groups, but also from the field diaries of the researchers. Hall et al (2007) also combine semi structured interviews with participant observation in their study of occupational masculinities in fire fighters, estate agents and hair dressers in a northern town, and Ward (2006) extends such an approach further, using stories collected during narrative interviews as the focus for subsequent focus groups. Brunsden and Hill (2009) also use interview techniques in their studies of fire fighters as victims (Hill, Brunsden 2009) and on strike (Brunsden, Hill 2009b). Yarnal (2004) spent

significant periods of time in volunteer fire stations collecting data for her study on masculinities and public and private spaces, and Tracy and Scott (2006), Scott and Myers (2005) and Myers (2005) also use participant observation and semi structured interviews in their linked studies comparing fire fighters with prison officers (Tracy, Scott 2006), looking at the socialisation of emotion (Scott, Myers 2005) and assimilation into a fire department (Myers 2005). Baigent (2001) uses 'auto ethnography' in his research and Campbell (2003) and Rowe (2007) are certainly not unique in using ethnographic approaches with police officers as participants. Waddington's 1999 literature review of police subcultures and Cooper's 1995 cultural analysis of fire fighting confirm that these areas abound with examples of qualitative research. It is also the case that much of this research specifically concerns the masculinity of fire fighters in varying guises, and although this is not the focus of this research project, it is interesting to note that there is such a wealth of research on fire fighter identities in the first instance.

Over the space of a year, I spent time in a number of fire service locations. This included Headquarters, Control and two fire stations. A number of other contacts were made, including meetings at different fire stations, community events and visits to other services. A number of shifts were undertaken with one particular watch at Norton station, at different times of the week, and including night shifts. Owing to the flexible nature of ethnography, it was also possible to gather ethnographic data whilst ostensibly undertaking other business, for example going to meetings at fire service properties, or encountering personnel going about their business elsewhere, including at my children's school. It must be noted that aspects this research project did not progress as anticipated and a degree of opportunism was required which made forward planning difficult. An iterative approach was taken meaning that opportunities were followed where they arose, and one set of findings informed the development of the next stage of research (Cialdini 1980). As such, there is not necessarily a clear distinction between research method and preliminary findings, and the below accounts of the process describe, in relation to the data, what I actually did, rather than a theoretical description of what one could do.

## Negotiating Access

Despite being funded by the fire service, access to fire fighters was not straight forward, a problem described by any number of ethnographers. Traditional anthropology put the researcher in a position of power, whereby they descended upon a remote group of people who often had little control over the researcher's presence or their participation, much less the eventual representation of themselves. The modern ethnographer is in a more equal position with their participants (Harrington 2003), and the siting of research within private spaces (offices, organisations, family groups) ensures that access becomes negotiated with rather than imposed upon the participants. As such, as Hammersley comments, it remains within the power of the researched to exclude the researcher (Hammersley 1995), and this certainly reflected my experience as I shall describe below.

In the first instance, I sought to familiarise myself with AFRS through working at HQ, which is also a functional fire station. This was relatively easily achieved: I had already had meetings with my key contact at the fire service, who had a nominal responsibility for overseeing my research, and with some of his colleagues in the Performance Information Unit. This seemed like a natural 'home' for me, with white collar workers (none of whom had ever been or expressed any interest in being fire fighters), a number of female staff and desk work which reflected the importance of research. I had also hoped that by being in HQ, I could observe the work at hand, participate in 'canteen culture' (Waddington 1999), learn about the culture and operating practices of the service, and, importantly, meet people who could help me find further sites for research. Although this did, to some extent, occur, working at HQ was not the smooth and seamless entry into AFRS that I had hoped for: the office I worked in was entirely devoid of chat, with a number of disparate individuals sparsely placed around the room. I am confident that I did not prevent a level of conversation through my presence, rather that the office was populated with quiet people intent on the job in hand. Secondly, a clear demarcation between operational and support staff (Childs, Morris et al. 2004) meant that it was very difficult to pass between different groups (an interesting observation in its own right), with the effect that once I was perceived as 'support staff' it was difficult to overcome this labelling. Similarly, the operational fire fighters meal breaks occurred at different times to 'conventional' office breaks, proving a practical difficulty in mixing with operational staff. Nevertheless, this was not an entirely fruitless use of time: I did indeed come

to understand a great deal about the service, and to meet with a number of key players, albeit mostly in support and managerial roles, and was forced to develop different strategies for further contacts.

My second attempt at access reflects the process that Harrington (2003) describes. She describes a process of 'getting in, access and rapport' (page 599), whereby 'getting in' is the first stage, akin to my experience at HQ where I had achieved contact with fire service personnel, but had yet to access information in any great detail. For Harrington, access is not access to people, rather access to the knowledge through which they interpret the world. The final stage, rapport, pertains more to the quality of the relationship, rather than its existence. As Harrington reminds us, access is a process of negotiation, and must be repeated, as I found, time and again throughout the fieldwork experience. Baigent (2001) also uses the term 'getting in', although in this case this reflects the process through which the researcher becomes an accepted member of a fire fighting team by demonstrating trustworthiness and a commitment to the job in hand. This idea is also picked up by Myers (2005), and seems as relevant to the rookie fire fighter as it does to the researcher.

In attempting to secure access to a 'watch' on a station, I then tried to go through the Station Manager (a fairly senior position, awarded to fire fighters who have risen through the ranks), which I was assured was the appropriate process. Again, this was not straightforward. I had (naively) assumed that it would be a simple case of phoning him up, putting my case, and being given some times. However, I was shuttled to and fro between answer phones and emails until I was fortuitously introduced to him face to face at HQ. This process was not aided by his insistence on calling me Katie, however many times I introduced myself as Kate, which I found initially irritating and eventually reductive and undermining, wondering the whole time whether he would have belittled a male researcher in this way. In the end, he gave me the name of a Watch Manager, and told me to go and meet with his watch 'because they've got a woman on'. I am not sure whether this was a deliberate misunderstanding of my research project or an attempt to help me fit in with the watch (although in the end, I never actually met 'the woman' as she was always stationed elsewhere when I worked with the watch). Nevertheless, it represented an entry point to a station, and enabled me to start making further contacts. By this

stage, I had also met with two representatives from the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) who were very interested in my research, which coincided with the publication of a significant report commissioned by the FBU nationally (Labour Research Department 2008a, Labour Research Department 2008b) into assaults against fire fighters. I was aware that the FBU had the potential to 'sabotage' my work if they felt I was 'snooping' on behalf of management (Hall, Hockey et al. 2007, May 2001), and felt that it was important to have their representatives on side, in addition to possibly gaining entry to stations through them. However, whilst the representatives were solicitous, interested in my research, and free to give me information, they were also not straightforwardly helpful in gaining me access to stations. They very kindly offered to 'look after me', and although I jokingly said that I did not think I posed much of a risk to their staff, the fact that they thought I might need chaperoning on station speaks volumes for gender relations within the fire service, and relates closely to Campbell's (2003) experience of being told that the custody suite was 'not a place for ladies' (page 291).

## Visiting stations

Once I had the name of the Watch Manager, things progressed rather better. I arranged to visit the station whilst the watch were on duty, and to 'ride along' (Myers 2005) for the day. Although this was not the all-encompassing ethnographic access I had hoped for, it was a start, and I (correctly) identified it as a foot in the door. My first day on station was, inevitably, a nerve wracking experience for me, and a potentially confusing one for the fire fighters. I took great care over my self presentation (Harrington 2003), both in physical terms (dressing appropriately) and in how I introduced myself and my research. There is a fine line to be taken between seeming over professional (and potentially either cold or management) and too familiar, which would also undermine my capabilities. Campbell describes a similar process in her study of police decision making, whereby she is reluctant to call herself a student, instead mentioning relevant experience with police forces (Campbell 2003). Similarly, I introduced myself as a researcher, rather than a student, hoping that this would position me as an 'employee' who, like them, would be subject to the vagaries of management, and played up the relevant experience I had had with fire services in the past and with previous work I had done on assaults against bus drivers and NHS staff. In social identity terms, whilst I was clearly distinct from fire fighters as a group, I wanted to position myself in such a way that

they would be sympathetic to my goals, and feel a degree of commonality with me. As Harrington (2003) says:

> *Ethnographers gain access to information to the extent that they are categorised as sharing a valued social identity with participants, or as enhancing that identity through their research*
>
> (page 609)

In this research project, I hope I achieved both, not least by reinforcing the integrity of fire service identity firstly as distinct from my own, and secondly as something worth researching, and therefore valuable in its own right.

Three linked techniques were used to gather data from participants (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008): direct observation of duties, which I recorded via field notes; conversations and interactions which occurred whilst I was engaged in participant observation, again recorded in field notes, often during the observations, or after; and, longer semi structured interviews. A number of interviews were recorded, although a couple of participants were reluctant to be recorded and so only notes were made. No conversations were audio-recorded, and no covert recording was conducted – although at times it was very tempting. My notebook became as familiar as me on the station, with lots of jokes being directed at it, rather than me (Hobbs, May 1993). This became a useful tool for eliciting responses from people, and conversely, the symbolic act of closing my notebook and putting my pen down ensured that participants also felt able to speak freely. Interviews were conducted during the quiet, early evening period on concurrent night shifts. They were conducted in an office at the fire station, which presented some unique challenges, not least participants being called to incidents mid-interview, and, in some cases, taking me with them. The initial fieldwork provided an excellent grounding for the subsequent interviews (Cialdini 1980): it ensured that I was aware of operational issues and cultural aspects of the work so that issues did not have to be explained to me in minutiae; it helped me hone my questions so that they would be answerable by participants but relevant to me; finally, and most importantly, it allowed me build up trust and rapport with the participants, many of whom spoke

very openly to me. A significant aspect of this, and potentially what ‘closed the deal’ for me, was an understanding of the ‘hearty if not healthy’ approach to food that the fire service takes, which ensured I never arrived empty handed at a fire station, (and never left empty stomached).

I spent a number of day shifts with this watch, who, once they had found out a bit about me, were very accommodating. I tried my hardest to join in with whatever activities they were doing, including getting very wet training with hoses, and allowing myself to be a ‘casualty’ when they were undertaking training scenarios. Rowe (2005) describes the kudos associated with being given a nickname within the police force he studied, and I felt similarly accepted when conducting a hose training exercise. I was directing a high pressure hose at the fire tower in the station yard, when the fire fighter at the pump end of the hose turned the pressure right up (a popular trick to the new recruit, and not done with vindictiveness), which made me sit down in a puddle. Whether this was done as a test to see how I took it, or as a sign of acceptance in its own right, it felt like a rite of passage, and I was certainly accepted by most of the watch afterwards, and all the more so after I later when I came on night shifts. Although I did not stay the full fourteen hours every time, the fact that I did at all came with a lot of respect. As one of the fire fighters said, ‘no one’s ever done that before’!

## Interviewing fire fighters

Spending time observing the watch, joining in with their activities and having informal conversations with fire fighters was fascinating, but not the sole end of this phase of the research. I utilised contacts from HQ to secure visits to other stations, to Control (where the 999 calls are dealt with and the crews dispatched to incidents), to the Training Centre, to a Community Safety Centre and to other fire services. A full list of fieldwork contacts is attached at Appendix 1. I used the insights gained from the observations and discussions with the watch and at HQ to compile a set of questions for the crew and the manager to discuss their experiences of working in different neighbourhoods and with different people. This is a common technique in ethnographic research (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008, Gosling 2008, Ward, Winstanley 2006) and has a number of benefits which are well rehearsed elsewhere (Cialdini 1980, Robson 2002). By the time I came to conduct

the interviews, I was well enough known and accepted for the majority of the watch to come forward, although there were a couple of notable exceptions, and one fire fighter who agreed to be interviewed, but not to be recorded.

In the interviews, I introduced myself and restated the purpose of my research, allowing the fire fighter to ask anything he (conforming to stereotype, all the fire fighters I interviewed were male, although I did meet female fire fighters in other settings) wanted before we started. Although the interviews were conducted in work time, I was worried that the crew would not want to take time away from whatever other duties were allocated to talk to me, as it might be seen as 'unproductive' work. Myers (2005) describes in great detail the process through which the 'rookie' fire fighter is required to be busy at all times, to a greater extent than the established fire fighter, and it was amongst my concerns that my work was too close to 'white collar' work (Childs, Morris et al. 2004) to seem an attractive proposition. I also had concerns about the extent to which consent was given for the interviews. Like other uniformed services, there is a strong 'command and control' culture within the fire service, and junior staff are very much at the behest of their seniors, whether senior in position or senior in years service (Myers 2005). Rowe (2005) describes a process of being 'allocated' to police officers, which seems antithetical to principles of informed consent (although, ironically, it is the unethical behaviour of the police, and not the researcher, that he is studying), and I was concerned that fire fighters were being sent to me in the same way. I compensated for this by reiterating the potential for participants to opt out at any stage, and the fact that not all of the watch attended, and that one did not want to go 'on the record', confirmed to me that the level of consent amongst participants was adequate.

The interview schedule was kept deliberately flexible, so that I could introduce themes and allow the participant to warm to them and speak at length, rather than go through a series of 'yes/no' type scenarios. Inevitably, some participants were more vocal than others, and interviews ranged in time from really only a few minutes to over an hour. Although we were using an office room and had some measure of privacy, station life was very much continuing around us, and interviews were interrupted for emergency calls, including one which I attended as well. Although this meant that I might have paid slightly more attention to ambient noise than I usually would, this was quite natural for the fire fighters, and it was interesting to see

this mindfulness to the potential for a call out at any time, and the swift change of focus, at play. Questions covered a range of topics around the nature of the work, their role within the fire service, their residential experience, the experience of working in different neighbourhoods and any experience of assaults that they might have had. A copy of the interview schedule is included at Appendix 2. As is the nature of qualitative research, I was able to adapt questions as the interviews progressed, both to make them more appropriate to the participant and to shift the focus between areas as successive areas of questioning reached ‘saturation’.

Although I worked at and observed a number of different stations by this point, I only conducted interviews in one, with the watch with whom I was best known. Whilst, perhaps in an ideal world, conducting interviews elsewhere would have been desirable, the familiarisation process was too time consuming to replicate elsewhere from the perspective of my own workload, and potentially risked alienating AFRS personnel if I was seen to be too demanding. I did, however, have the opportunity to interview two fire fighters working on those occasions who were not from that watch or station: one was from the same watch but a different station, who had transferred over for the tour to ‘my’ watch (Campbell 2003); the other was from a different watch at the same station who had swapped tours with another fire fighter. Although I had met neither of these men before, the coherence of fire service identity, which means that one fire fighter is trained to be able to fit in with fire fighters across the service (Myers 2005) and the strength of the watch system (Baigent 2001, Hill, Brunsden 2009, Regehr 2009), which means that new (or in this case, visiting) members of the watch trust those that the watch trusts, enabled these men to speak freely with me, and to be able to participate in the discussions giving a much valued ‘outsider’ opinion.

In addition to these ‘formal’ episodes of ethnography, I have seldom been ‘off duty’ since I started this research project. Any meeting with fire service personnel has been an opportunity for further, informal ethnography, and I can no longer see fire service personnel without wondering who they are and what they are doing. My children are particularly enthusiastic spies for me, and always point out fire engines (although this started before my research did – an indicator of the high standing of fire fighters at least in the minds of my little boys), and any number of friends and acquaintances have been keen to relay their latest anecdote about the fire service

to me. Some notable occasions have included trips to Fire Service College (FSC) for the annual research event, which have enabled me to mix with senior FRS personnel, and to observe, albeit from a distance, large numbers of recruits and regular fire fighters undertaking training. With contacts made at one of these events, I also shadowed some ASB 'advocates' in Merseyside for a day and have met with two different fire fighters from the South Wales FRS, one of whom was working on a secondment to CFOA (the Chief Fire Officers Association). On another occasion, I took a group of children on a fire station visit and, entirely serendipitously, helped some fire fighters, along with my children, to fill the pond at their school in the school holidays.

I am particularly grateful to the staff who took time to talk to me, and the whole watches who incorporated me into their routines, letting me sit in the back of the fire engine and tolerating my earnest questions and objections to watching women's beach volleyball at the end of a particularly long night shift, an experience reminiscent of Baigent's 'boob test' (Baigent 2001). To an extent, my researching of the fire service feeds into popular conceptions of fire fighters. My sons, think it's fantastic that 'mummy's a fireman', and friends and colleagues are always keen to know if I get to go in a fire engine (yes) and with the lights on (oh yes). What they tend not to ask about is much that is hidden in fire service work, but which actually comprises the majority of operational fire fighters' time – home fire safety visits, drilling and maintaining equipment. These aspects of work tend not to contribute to the stereotype nor to the identity, factors which are discussed again in the Focus Group study chapter, yet they comprise the bulk of the role. In my representations of fire fighter work, I have taken care to guard against perpetuating the popular myth of fire fighting, without playing down the fact that it can be exciting. Stringent safeguards are, however, in place, not least the very exacting entry requirements for the service which ensure, however much I talk up the work of the fire service, I am very unlikely to 'go native' (Armstrong, G and Harris, R 1991, Dunning, Murphy et al. 1991).

When my period of fieldwork was complete, I input the data, including field notes and interview transcriptions to NVIVO and conducted a process of thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke 2006) with a number of themes emerging from the data as the

analysis progressed, as discussed above, and as with the other studies. The findings from this study are presented in the next chapter.

In this study, I looked specifically at AFRS. However, this only represents one side of the relationship. The next section describes research I undertook in Bristol neighbourhoods.

## *Study Two: Focus Groups in Neighbourhoods*

This section describes the detailed methodology used in the second study, in which I conducted focus groups in a number of different neighbourhoods. It describes the choice of focus groups as a method, the population that the sample is drawn from and the identification and recruitment of that sample. It then goes on to look at the administration of the focus groups, including choices of venues, the size of the groups and their composition. This section also considers the way in which the focus group schedule has been developed to build on group dynamics, including how it has been piloted, and ethical issues involved in using focus groups.

The aim of this study was to look at how people see themselves as residents of particular neighbourhoods, and how they view fire fighters coming into their neighbourhood. This will help to examine ideas of group norms and social practices in these neighbourhoods, and how these extend to the FRS. As discussed above, within qualitative research lies a number of different methods, including interviews, observation and documentary techniques. Although it is reasonable, and not uncommon (Drury, Reicher 2000) to use a number of techniques to gather data within one study, these techniques all share an ability to access underlying meanings and interpretations, rather than attempting to account for the scope or scale of a phenomenon. In this study, it was decided to use focus groups as the best way to access the type and level of information that would complement data gathered in the first study.

In the first study, participant observation (PO) was used, as discussed above. I had hoped to be able to employ similar methods for this study, but in a community

setting, and to this end, conducted a scoping study in Shiregreen in 2008. I had intended with this study to replicate the first study with AFRS but in a community setting, finding groups of residents with whom I could become familiar, prior to interviewing. The scoping study was intended to find groups with which to work and, as such, I spent several days chatting to people in the supermarket (too busy), library (too quiet), bus stop (too many buses) and community safety centre (too few people). However, all this revealed was that residents tend not to think or speak of the fire service in any great detail in their day to day lives, only really calling on them in an emergency, so despite a number of days spent doing this, findings about the fire service were very sporadic. For this reason, in this study, PO was rejected as too broad an overarching strategy. However, as with Gosling (2008), it has been used as a supplementary method to inform and contextualise the findings of the focus groups, as well as to gain insight into social norms, to find populations with which to hold focus groups and to identify facilities within the community.

As was found in the first study with fire fighters, SSIs enable the researcher to generate indepth data with participants, although they also have a number of drawbacks. Most relevantly for this study, they create a social dynamic particularly between the researcher and the participant, as opposed to between participants. For this study, it is important that local social norms are maintained, and it is considered that the social dynamic within a focus group would be more appropriate.

Having discounted SSIs and PO for anything other than contextualising the research, I chose focus groups as the primary method for data collection for this study. Focus groups developed in the 1940s and 1950s, mirroring the growth of advertising, as they were originally developed for market research purposes (Barbour 2007). The singular advantage for focus groups for this research project is that they allow participants to interact both with the moderator of the group (the researcher) and each other. For the sake of this research project, it was hoped that this interaction would enable them to maintain their social identity as residents in a salient way (Stott, Adang et al. 2007), and not attempt comparison with the moderator. This will help to ensure that the data generated is relevant to the study as socially produced local knowledge. Further advantages and disadvantages of running focus groups will be discussed in the following sections on recruiting and administrating focus groups.

## Identifying and recruiting the sample

As discussed above and elsewhere, the fire service had identified Upperfield and Shiregreen as particular areas of interest for this study. I wished to augment this with a third neighbourhood which had some apparent commonalities (in terms of demographics and physical environment) with these neighbourhoods, whilst not presenting a problem for the fire service. A neighbourhood which fitted these criteria was Hilton, which had the added advantages of accessible facilities for conducting the groups, helpful local staff to assist in arranging them, and was a neighbourhood with which I had some familiarity. Further, two of my pilot groups were conducted with residents mostly from Abbeyville, an inner city neighbourhood (where I live), with its own problems and reputation. As with Gosling (2008) a number of different strategies for recruitment have been employed. These have included recruiting through existing groups (for example a young people's Entry to Employment scheme; an older people's lunch club) and through the fire service themselves. It is worth noting that not every group I contacted was interested in attending, for instance a gentle exercise class decided against participating when it was revealed that no actual fire fighters would be present.

Opinion is divided on the ideal size for a focus group, with some researchers preferring smaller groups (Poso, Honkatukia et al. 2008), whilst older texts cite a far larger number of up to twelve (Barbour 2007). For this study, my ideal number of participants was between five and eight – giving enough participants for a lively discussion, but not so many that the discussions would get out of hand. However, as with other researchers, such as Peek and Fothergill (2009), this research was governed to an extent by expediency and opportunism. They cite three different methods of recruitment: researcher driven, key informant driven and spontaneous (page 35). As discussed above, this project took a line involving the two former of these strategies. However, in a number of instances, individuals who happened to be in the building at the time expressed an interest in participating, and so were not excluded. The flexibility to be spontaneous (or perhaps opportunistic) seemed more important than limiting group numbers, so in some instances, numbers exceeded what was seen as 'ideal' (Peek, Fothergill 2009) . Groups did not, however, tend to exceed Krueger's maxim that the group must be small enough for everyone to have

the opportunity to contribute, but also large enough to demonstrate a diversity of opinions (Krueger, Casey 2008).

Another key consideration with group composition is the recruitment of a heterogeneous or homogenous group (Robson 2002). But again, opinion here is divided, including along what lines groups are homogeneous or heterogeneous. For this research, it was important that groups maintained an element of social identity from their home neighbourhoods, and so every attempt was made to recruit samples from the same local area, which in some ways, would suggest a homogenous group. However, the minute levels of abstraction at which people define their residential environment meant that in practice this was not realised. That said, the groups still retained more of a similarity of neighbourhood experience to one another than to myself as the moderator. Peek and Fothergill (2009) refer to this as segmentation, and comment that it can occur in a number of different ways. In their research, they found segmentation along unconventional lines when researching working mothers' use of childcare. Although the participants were mostly women, and all working parents, they had very different issues of guilt and feelings associated with childcare depending on whether they worked full time or part time. In this study, segmentation occurred in at least two ways. Firstly in the recruitment of the groups, so that one group are guaranteed to have had a HFSV, whereas the second will have a more varied experience with the fire service. Secondly, segmentation occurred within the other groups, who were recruited from pre existing groups which will share certain demographic characteristics (such as unemployed teenagers in one group, older women from an afternoon club). However, homogeneity in one respect does not imply homogeneity in any other, and my experience with these groups was that a great degree of dynamism and discussion was maintained, even with preacquainted or overtly homogenous groups.

A second issue with the composition of the groups is with regard to whether or not they know each other prior to the study. Again, different commentators take a different stance on this issue, with some maintaining that pre-acquainted groups produce rich and interesting data (Kitzinger 1994, Bloor 2001), whilst others suggest that this presents issues of confidentiality (Brannen, Pattman 2005) and difficulty in interpreting the results (Krueger, Casey 2008). In reality, it is hard to guard against

the pre-acquainted group, with individuals recruited within the same neighbourhood likely to share acquaintances if they are not themselves acquainted. However, pre-acquainted groups are not in and of themselves homogenous groups, being potentially of different ages, genders or other demographic characteristic, and as shall be discussed, homogeneity is no guarantor of agreement!

As MacDougall and Fudge (2001) explain, recruiting the sample for qualitative work is not the same as for quantitative studies: there is no need to make the sample representative of the population as a whole, and participants should be chosen who are likely to provide 'rich' data. They propose a three stage process of *prepare, contact, follow up* (MacDougall, Fudge 2001) through which participants can be recruited. In the first stage, they suggest researching community groups and local networks, to gather not just different groups of potential participants, but different ways to recruit them (as well as accruing interesting contextual data of a more ethnographic nature). This is, to an extent, what I have done through using community groups and fire service data. In the second stage, contact, it is suggested that researchers recruit community 'champions' or local workers to advocate on behalf of the research project. Again, I have successfully done this in both Shiregreen and Hilton, developing rapport with local workers who in turn have recruited some very data-rich participants. In their third stage, follow up, they suggest feeding back to participants and to community champions. As such, I will ensure that I take the time at the end of the study to report back not only to the community workers who have helped me arrange the groups, but also to the fire service. As an important part of this research is to help the fire service make more effective contact with communities, and to understand these relationships better, this final phase is not likely to be ignored.

One set of focus group participants were recruited through these pre-existing groups. A second set were recruited through AFRS HFSV data. Letters were sent to residents in certain postcodes who had had HFSVs in the previous three months. They invited them to attend discussions at the same locations as the other groups, giving some description of the research and stating that expenses would be paid. A copy of a letter is included at Appendix 3. The next week, a follow up telephone call was made to each recipient of a letter, where numbers were available, reminding them of the invitation and asking if attendance was likely, giving potential

participants an opportunity to ask any questions, and me to be able to prepare for the right number of attendees.

## Developing the schedule

If the purpose of a focus group is to allow participants to talk with one another to produce data for the researcher, then the group must be moderated in such a way that 'rich' data can be produced (Puchta, Potter 2004). There are a number of ways to do this, with researchers using visual techniques (Kitzinger 1994), prompts or definitions of the subject matter (Poso, Honkatukia et al. 2008). In this study, the topic guide was developed to start with very open questions about neighbourhoods, then some open questions about the fire service, before channelling the discussion into a more narrow focus about local perceptions of the fire service and experience of hostility to them. A full version of the schedule, including visual aids, is given in Appendix 4.

This was then piloted three times, on UWE students and school gate acquaintances, before arriving at the final version. Each pilot allowed me to test different aspects of the schedule, for example, UWE students were well placed to discuss whether questions were 'leading', and to consider the flow of questions and their sequencing, whereas my school gate acquaintances presented a more naturalistic experience, and in this instance gave some suggestions about the wording of the questions and the style in which I addressed them as participants. These groups were much closer to a 'community' sample, and presented an opportunity for me to see how the questions worked with this different demographic. The significant changes made to the schedule as a result of the pilots included changing the information given at the start about confidentiality (which sounded, initially, like I was a police officer reading them their rights) and a change to the wording of one of the stimulus materials. A third change came from listening again to the recordings, at which I realised how hard it was to keep track of who was saying what. For this reason, in subsequent groups, I tried hard to address people by name both when they started speaking and when they had finished (Barbour 2007).

## Group dynamics

As discussed above, one of the principle reasons for using focus groups for this study was to utilise the shared identity of the group to promote participants' responses as residents of the same neighbourhood and not along other identity lines. Farnsworth and Boon (2010) discuss the group dynamics they witnessed in their focus groups researching poverty. They found that the dynamics of the constrained circumstances of their participants continued throughout the research encounter, and although my research was not explicitly concerned with poverty, there is still relevance of this experience to those living in these hard pressed areas. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, the group experience has an effect on members whether or not they are pre-acquainted (Tajfel, 1986). The focus group is not a 'neutral tableau' (Farnsworth, Boon 2010) and the production of talk within its confines constitutes and sustains both knowledge and social identity (page 609). As such, being a part of the focus group 'mobilises latent identifications and common experiences shared by group members' (page 610). Similarly, being the focus of the research promotes social identity as residents both as distinct from me the researcher as a resident of a different neighbourhood, and as the members of a group which is worth researching in its own right (Harrington 2003). This encourages individual participants to see themselves as a part of a wider collective group with a life outside the experience of being researched, even if that was not there previously (Clark 2010), helping to promote and preserve identity as residents of a specific neighbourhood, and encouraging identification with that identity as positive and distinct.

## Running the focus groups

As with Peek and Fothergill (2009), focus groups were carried out consistently, although the difference in setting and in participants made each one unique. Each participant was welcomed to the room, and when the whole group was present, introductions were made, both about the research and the researchers. Some groups seemed initially shyer (especially those with younger participants) and more time was spent on this stage before the formalities began. Ground rules were proposed (Peek, 2009) which asked participants to speak one at a time and to respect what other people were saying. In turn, I proposed that I would keep data confidential, and asked group members to respect that with one another. As several of the groups were pre-acquainted and would have an ongoing relationship (Poso,

Honkatukia et al. 2008, Green, Hart 1999, Green, Hart 1999) this was considered to be a particularly important part of the introduction.

An ‘easy’ warm up question opened proceedings, and also gave the opportunity for a voice test for the recording (Barbour 2007). The first question asked participants to give their name and say where abouts they lived (specifically not where exactly), and how long they had lived there for. Having gone round the table to ask this question, I then allowed proceedings to open up a bit more, by asking what people liked and disliked about their neighbourhoods. For this section, I had a list of prompts covering various neighbourhood issues such as cleanliness, safety and proximity to amenities. However, in most groups I did not have to use this as people were quick to list most of the attributes in positive or negative ways.

Questions about the physical attributes of neighbourhoods then gave way to questions about the social nature of neighbourhoods, about who lives where and what that says about people. Participants often made their own way to these issues once they had run out of physical attributes, and potentially once they had warmed to me, the environment and the theme. Following this section, I then showed a picture of a fire engine, asking what that made them think about (Kitzinger, Barbour 1999a). The reason for this was to introduce a more neutral topic than showing fire fighters engaged in any particular activity, and to see if they spoke first about emergencies or about other types of fire fighter work. Most groups spoke at this point about emergencies, and general perceptions of the fire service, both in Bristol, nationally and in fiction. The second set of photographs showed fire fighters engaged in community activities, to enable participants to start relating fire service issues to their own community and to their personal experience. This was then narrowed even further by showing photographs of HFSVs, and asking specific questions about this.

The final set of questions started to ask about experiences of people behaving negatively towards fire fighters, reporting that fire fighters sometimes find it difficult to get their message across, and asking why participants thought that might be. Again, this was phrased in as neutral way as possible, to avoid ‘accusing’ anyone of

negative perceptions towards the fire service, and although this is not an explicitly 'action research' oriented research project (Pain 2003), questions were asked about what the fire service could do to improve the situation in the hope that some constructive suggestions might be able to be forwarded to the service. The final prompt was a press release from the fire service, detailing an attack on a crew on Bonfire Night 2007. This was specifically chosen as it did not occur in any of the study neighbourhoods, and I did not want people to discuss who had done what or why, rather what sort of person would do such a thing, again, attempting to be neutral and to discuss the themes in general, rather than specific, terms. However, this caused particular excitement in groups of young people, with an amount of accusations being levelled between some of the young men – mostly, I felt, through bravado.

At the end of each group, I would round up some of the key areas of discussion, and ask if people had anything further to contribute. In some instances, some of the most revealing comments were made at this point, once the 'formal' group had ended, again perhaps showing how different 'repertoires of knowledge' come into play in different contexts (Green, Hart 1999). I would then distribute a 'debrief' sheet (attached at Appendix 5). This outlined my contact details, and also some information about the fire service and how to report crimes or anti social behaviour. As mentioned above, some participants were paid nominal expenses for their attendance, and this was distributed alongside the debrief sheets.

Groups ranged from almost silent, and very hard to elucidate any responses from, to rowdy and disruptive, and I found there was a fine line to tread between allowing groups to develop in their own way (and being potentially disruptive) or being a more invasive moderator but managing to elucidate 'better' data from participants, albeit in a less natural way (Farnsworth, Boon 2010). As with Michell (1999) and Green and Hart (1999), I was aware that dynamics outside the room could permeate the atmosphere inside the room, and that the focus groups could become a further opportunity for the bullying of lower status members, particularly in the groups with younger participants. However, there is a tension here, in that a more 'chaotic' interaction within the group, where the researcher feels that they might be in danger of losing control (Wilkinson 1998), might actually result in a more

‘naturalistic’ encounter than in a more closely regimented setting (Green, Hart 1999). As such:

> *Obtaining naturalistic data from children involves balancing the need to allow such confrontation in their accounts and not collude with what could become bullying. We can only hope we achieved a humane balance by acknowledging the contributions of all children and by moving along the discussion if it became uncomfortable for some participants* (page 32)

Sentiments which I can only echo.

The above discussion of the particular dynamics of conducting focus groups with young people is just one of the ethical dilemmas which can occur in focus group research. However, the ethical issues are not unsurpassable, and with due consideration and conscientious forward planning, should not prevent focus groups being conducted both ethically and productively (Barbour 2007). In addition to power within the group, and issues of confidentiality between pre-acquainted members, as discussed above, the positionality (Sidaway 2000) of the researcher can also have significant bearing on the outcome and process of the group. In these groups, I thought carefully about my self presentation, dressing appropriately (down for groups of teenagers, conservatively for groups of older women) in order to fit in with both the setting and the potential expectations of me as a researcher. I also chose my assistants carefully, using a younger male second moderator in the groups with younger participants, and a second female moderator in the more predominantly female groups.

Following the groups, I transcribed all the recordings and notes preliminary to the analysis, as with the previous study. The findings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six on the focus group study.

## *Study 3: Observations in the community*

This study builds on the two previous studies, which used ethnographic and focus group approaches, as discussed above, as well as a scoping study conducted over the summer of 2008 in one particular community, using participant observation.

Although I have used ethnographic techniques in previous studies, this study is more closely rooted in observation, both of the place as well of the people, and of the interactions that occur within it.

The first study in this research project, as described above, focused predominantly on the fire service and, using participant observation, looked at how fire fighters view themselves and their work as well as how they see residents in different communities, particularly drawing on social identity approaches to examine that as a dynamic relationship. Following a pilot study, participant observation was not seen as an effective method for the second study, and so a number of focus groups were convened and conducted with diverse residents in the selected Bristol neighbourhoods, with the purpose, as discussed above, of looking at how they saw themselves and their relationship with the fire service. The third study comes, in a way, full cycle (Cialdini 1980), to look at the interaction between fire fighters and residents in a number of different settings. This took two particular phases. In the first phase, I utilised traditional participant observation, where I engaged, as much as possible with the tasks at hand and formed, in many cases, relationships with the participants. Gold (1958) describes four types of observation work, ranging from complete participant through participant as observer and observer as participant to complete observer. In the first study, the method was mostly participant as observer; in the second study, where I used focus groups, the ethnographic role was less well defined, although Gold does liken ‘one visit interviews’ (page 221) to the observer as participant. In the third study, particularly the first phase, which I shall discuss below, the method was far closer to complete observer than had been the case during either of the other studies.

Not only does this study link together the three different studies which have comprised this research project, but also, to an extent, links some of the literatures from which the methods have been drawn. In this section, I shall start by reviewing some of the different methods of observation utilised by researchers in areas such as urban studies and criminology, as well as more familiar ones which utilise social identity approaches in social psychology. Following this, I shall set the scene for some of the observations I conducted by revisiting the types of community facing work which the fire service undertake (discussed in more detail in the Research Context). I shall then discuss the actual methods which I utilised.

A number of researchers have used observation techniques in studies of place attachment and incivilities, both of which, as described in the Literature Review, have relevance to this research project. Brown's (2002, 2004) research focussed on environmental assessments to link perceived incivilities with weak place attachments, although these studies do little to address the lived experience of life in one of these neighbourhoods. Similarly, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) combine physical and social measures by covertly videoing from a slowly moving car – a method which is not without ethical concerns. Both of these approaches attempt a degree of quantitative objectivity and neglect the experience of being in the neighbourhood (Sheller, Urry, 2006) or the potential for street life to be a positive dimension to city living (Jacobs, 1961).

Work on riots (Reicher 1984), football crowds (Stott, Hutchison et al. 2001, Stott, Reicher 1998) and protests (Drury, Stott 2001, Drury, Reicher et al. 2003) has been conducted using social identity approaches for a number of years and has utilised a number of methods, which are included in more detail in the methodology for Study One (above). Drury and Reicher (2000) describe the process of collecting data at a road protest in 1994, for which they used participant observation. In this instance, they are known to the protesters, which was necessary for gaining access to the protest. The potentially conflictual nature of the demonstration rendered more formal techniques impractical, and so they relied on the collection of contemporaneous data (page 583) by a researcher (Drury, Reicher 2000). In this research, Drury and Reicher form part of the protest crowd and are able to interact with the participants to collect a number of different types of data, including witness statements, semi structured interviews and contemporaneous recordings. Although this level of data collection is desirable, it is not always possible in a research environment, especially where the crowd is not 'organised' to such an extent. In a further study, Stott et al (2007) use participant observation with football crowds in Portugal (for Euro 2004). They describe a two-fold process of conducting semi structured observations (as opposed to the very structured, quantitative ones described above) alongside data collected from fans who were opportunistically interviewed during the course of the tournament. Further data were collected through web based questionnaires available before and after the tournament (page 80). My research methods for this study, as discussed below, follow in this tradition.

## Community interventions

In line with other public services, the fire service's remit has shifted in recent years to take a more proactive and preventive focus. However, there is lack of consensus as to how best to deliver preventive work, with interventions seeming ad hoc as a result. Different communities have different risk factors to address, and although the service has developed its messages so that they apply to specific communities, there is still a lack of strategic overview in the delivery of interventions.

As discussed above, the fire service hold a range of intervention strategies, meeting with residents in a number of different settings. These tend to come to a head in the summer months, where they are asked to attend a number of community events and festivals. Although these are not the only community engagements they undertake, these are, from a pragmatic perspective, well suited to observations. The public nature of these events make gaining access relatively easy, and, particularly if they are doing displays (barbeque safety, chip pan demonstrations etc), observing is a 'natural' activity to be undertaking.

For a number of years, fire services have tailored messages to particular sectors of the community (for example smokers), but in recent years, this has become more sophisticated. As with risks for other social problems (for example, ill health or crime), risk is concentrated in certain, poorer, geographical areas (Smith, Lepine et al. 2007), and amongst poorer sections of the public. Further, there are two separate risk factors at play: causing a fire and being a victim of a fire. However, unlike crime risk, these factors are likely to play out within the household with family members both causing the fire and being the victim of it. There are strong socio-demographic links to risk of fire (Smith, Wright et al. 2007), and again, these are closely correlated to measures of poverty. Although the fire service are unable to act to prevent poverty, they can help to protect against some of its symptoms, and, as such, conduct a range of community interventions, including attending events and conducting Home Fire Safety Visits, which are their 'flagship' intervention aimed at reducing death and damage through accidental house fires.

This study took a two-pronged approach to examining the relationship between fire fighters and residents in a number of neighbourhoods. The first phase was to observe a number of community events where the fire service were present in the community and interacting with residents. The second was to shadow fire fighters from the watch with which I had previously worked as they conducted HFSVs. Although Avon conduct a number of different interventions in the community, as described above, these are the primary mechanisms for engaging with residents on an individual / household basis and in a community setting. I was interested in continuing to view the relationship in dynamic, interactive terms, congruent with social identity approaches, and these two different types of intervention seemed most valid in these terms. To add different experiences to this phase, I also revisited fieldnotes from Study One and reconstructed events from that, providing a rich and detailed range of data.

## First Phase

Although Avon have an events team, based at HQ, who organise and promote some of the 'flagship' events, others are organised and carried out solely on station, with no recourse to central planning. This meant that it was hard to find a comprehensive list of events from which to select. I was able to access the list held by HQ, but this only contained information on larger events (for example the Harbour Festival) where AFRS provide not only an appliance but also display stands and support staff to provide information and hand out leaflets, ensuring a continuous presence even if the appliance is called to an emergency. I was able to find out about further events by my presence at different fire stations, and in one instance, was given information about a likely appearance by the participants at a focus group – demonstrating the importance of a flexible and opportunistic approach to ethnography (Drury, Stott 2001, Harrington 2003).

The events I attended included:

- The Upperfield Festival: a large community event at which the fire service have a guaranteed presence to publicise HFSVs and to deliver community fire safety messages, as well as raising their profile as

‘friends’ of the community. There was no display team at this event, only the appliance and fire fighters from the local station.

- The Hampton Road Festival: a smaller community event in an ethnically diverse part of Bristol, at which support staff ran a display focussed on barbeque safety and fire safety when cooking. Although an appliance was promised at this event, none appeared for the duration of my visit.
- The Mound Festival: a community event arranged in a regeneration area. Although I seemed to be in the right place at the right time for this event, it did not appear to be taking place. I asked a number of local residents if they were aware of it, and none appeared to be. The events department assured me the next week that it had gone ahead, so clearly local knowledge failed me!
- Shiregreen ‘fun day’. This was sponsored by the large supermarket in the area as a celebration of its anniversary, and I attended with my children hoping (possibly optimistically) to add their perspective to my observations. This is the neighbourhood that hosts the fire service’s community safety centre, and there was a full turn out of display team, with chip pan fire demonstration, appliance, regular crew and a group of recruits.

At these events, and drawing on Stott (2007), I was particularly interested to note:

- The physical setting of the interactions
- The participants
    - Are they AFRS / residents (plus other demographics)
    - How many people are there
    - What they are doing
    - What they look like
- The chronology of events as they unfold
- Any material artefacts that are present, distributed or generated during the encounter
- Behaviours and interactions between people and groups
- Any verbal exchanges that are overheard or participated in.

(adapted from Angrosino, 2008).

Utilising these methods enabled me to work towards answering my research aim, to better understand relationships between the fire service and different neighbourhoods, as well as addressing issues around the root of hostility and resistance, the extent to which social identity approaches can be used to help us understand these relationships, and whether the current engagement mechanisms are effective in this study. However, these events are only really relevant at a macro level. To view smaller group interactions, it was necessary to go into people's homes to observe HFSVs, as described below.

## Second phase

The purpose of this phase of the study was to build on the data gathered over the summer months by observing fire service attendance at community events by observing the interaction between fire fighters and residents, through the mechanisms of home fire safety visits (HFSVs).

In this study, I followed a crew as they 'warm called' a neighbourhood in Norton. This procedure involved distributing leaflets around a neighbourhood, giving details of the HFSV, and leaving a card for residents to put in their window to signal if they do or do not want a visit. This marks a departure from the standard method of disseminating information about HFSVs at events (for example community visits, school visits) and allowing residents to call up and book their own. In the past, visits have been targeted, predominantly through focussed marketing, at particular risk groups, such as the elderly or disabled people. This newer approach recognises that risk factors are often concentrated in specific geographical areas (Smith, Lepine et al. 2007), and that by targeting a whole residential community, they are likely to be able to access a number of people who exhibit different risk factors. However, this approach also enables the fire service to access people who would perhaps be traditionally reluctant to invite fire fighters into their homes, but might feel more able to when they are moving door to door. I had hoped that this would enable me to observe the fire service meeting with a wider range of people than just those that have thought ahead to invite them, and that, therefore, they might be met with a wider range of behaviours (although, as will be described in the study chapter, this was not the case)

The crew were mostly people with whom I had worked on previous occasions, and, as such, there was an existing degree of rapport which facilitated the process. Much of the process was similar to that described in the methodology for Study One, however, time and circumstances had changed somewhat and so there were a number of differences in the way in which I conducted the study. In the first study, I rode alongside the crew in the fire engine, observing the chat that went on in that environment and potentially being whisked away to further incidents and away from community work. By the time I undertook this study, I was in the early phases of pregnancy and felt that riding along would not be appropriate, although I was reluctant to ask what the exact procedures would be for the pregnant fire fighter, for fear of further distinguishing myself from the male crew (Childs, Morris et al. 2004). As such, although I reported to the station for duty as before, I made my own way behind the fire engine to get to the sites. Arriving separately, and in 'civilian' clothes also helped to distinguish me from the fire fighters in the minds of the residents with whom we met. It was interesting to observe that, although the speed limit was never exactly broken, it was very hard to keep up with the appliance as it drove through the city: traffic lights were passed on orange, other vehicles gave way for the engine to pull out and the 30mph limit was certainly tested.

As with previous contacts with the fire service, I carried briefing sheets on the research (included as Appendx 7) and discussed the work in terms of me being a 'researcher' rather than a student (Campbell 2003). I introduced myself to residents as a researcher, looking at HFSVs, and asked if they are happy for me to observe. If they said no, I would have left, but in the event none did. Again, I had a hand out ready to provide to residents if they asked about the research, but again, none did. My aide memoire for observations is included as Appendix 8. More detail is given about the visits in Chapter Eight.

## *Summary*

In this chapter, I have discussed the background to the methodologies for three studies, covering ethnographic work with AFRS, focus groups in three neighbourhoods and two phases of observations. The following three chapters present analysis of the data generated in each of these studies, looking at the

relationship between fire fighters and residents, how hostility and resistance arise between them, how social identity approaches can explain these relationships and the extent to which current engagement mechanisms are effective.

# Chapter Five: Ethnographic Work With AFRS

In this chapter, I will present the analysis of the data I gathered from AFRS during contact time with them. It starts with a brief description of my data gathering and analytic strategies, which are covered more fully by the literature review and methodology chapters. It then re-states the research questions and links them to the questions that I asked fire fighters in interview and which I considered in my fieldwork contact with fire fighters. These are then linked to the themes which emerged during the analysis, which are presented as a narrative by way of introduction. In the analysis section, each theme is introduced in turn, with a short, descriptive preamble and then a quote which serves as an exemplum from the data. In some cases, more than one quote is provided, often demonstrating competing or subordinate claims within a single theme. Finally, a discussion section looks at the themes in greater detail and in relation to the research aims.

## *Within AFRS*

Within the fire service, as with any uniformed service, functions a strict hierarchy. Although the one I describe is what I observed in Avon, I am assured that it is comparable across the country, perhaps even beyond – no doubt adding to the commonality felt between fire fighters from across different services and even different countries and distinguishing them from non-fire fighters (‘civilians’). Within each fire station (or ‘on station’ as fire fighters would say), each fire engine (appliance) is staffed by a ‘crew’ of three or four, with a ‘crew manager’, which is the first promotion step up from fire fighter. Some stations only have one crew per watch, but the stations I worked on tended to have two crews. As with the navy, there are four watches (red, white, green and blue) who alternate ‘tours’, a shift pattern typified by two day shifts, followed by two night shifts and then four rest days. Watch Manager is the next promotion from crew manager, although this is still an active fire fighting role. Subsequent promotions, to Station Manager and beyond, become senior management and are more involved with strategic work, and less with what happens on the ground. The distinctions between these roles are examined more closely in the second Literature Review chapter. When I started this research project, much of the language and culture of the fire service were foreign to me, although, inevitably, it was not hard to pick up. Every attempt has been made to present the information in this thesis in neutral tones, but, especially when discussing aspects from the fire service perspective, this might not always be the

case. It should also be said that residents in the three neighbourhoods in which I worked had their own ways of referring to the world, both by speaking in strong Bristol accents, with which I am familiar, and also by discussing local landmarks in their own particular ways. This too took an amount of time to become familiar with, and is discussed in greater depth in the focus group chapter.

## *Data gathering and analysis*

Over a number of months in 2008, data were gathered during an ethnographic study of fire fighters and other fire service personnel in the Bristol area. As discussed in the Introduction, AFRS have over 20 fire stations in the four local authorities that they serve, with six in the Bristol local authority area: one in the city centre, which is also the head quarters where support staff are stationed; one in the port area; and, four in residential areas. The majority of my time was spent in one of these neighbourhood stations, Norton (Station C), with other time spent at HQ, Control (where emergency calls come through to), a community safety centre located in a neighbourhood and one other station, Station B. In addition, I encountered fire service personnel in my own community and at meetings and conferences outside of the Avon area, including staff from Stations A and D. A summary of the contacts I have had with AFRS personnel is included as Appendix 1. Ethnographic data were supplemented with written material both from the media and from the fire service.

Once collated and transcribed, the data were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke 2006). Initial coding was reviewed and recoded as further themes were derived, with further analysis continuing throughout the writing stage. The resultant themes are introduced and discussed below.

## *Research questions*

In looking at the relationship between fire fighters and residents, it is necessary to consider how fire fighters view themselves, how they view the communities they work in, and how they view themselves as distinct from these communities. As

described below, this is partly managed through a distinct ethos separating fire fighters from ‘civilians’, but also through fire fighters viewing certain neighbourhoods in particular ways, by describing them as ‘busy’, or ‘rubbish fire’ neighbourhoods, and by distinguishing them from the neighbourhoods that they themselves live in and were brought up in, even in some cases where they are neighbouring areas.

I approached this study with my research aims in mind, and had particular sub themes which I wished to examine in this respect. As such, whilst I spent time with AFRS personnel, I was paying particular attention to the following issues, which were also reflected in the semi structured interviews I conducted with crew members.

1. The relationships between fire fighters and residents
    a. How do fire fighters see different communities
    b. How they think residents see them
    c. Whether there are differences between where they live and where other people live
2. The roots of perceived hostility and resistance
    a. The way in which fire fighters think residents see them
    b. How they see residents
3. Using social identity approaches
    a. How fire fighters form groups and exhibit group identity when entering into community situations
4. Whether engagement mechanisms are effective
    a. How fire fighters talk about working in the community
    b. Whether they think this works.

By looking at how fire fighters see their role and the communities in which and with which they work, it is possible to start to examine the relationships between these two groups, to explore where and how hostilities arise and to what extent mechanisms for engaging with communities are effective.

## *Analysis*

The analysis is presented as a series of themes (Stott, Hutchison et al. 2001). Within each section, the theme is introduced and a specific piece of data is given which I feel characterises the themes discussed. This is followed by a short discussion of the theme. A fuller discussion is presented later in the chapter.

Fire fighters have strong group identity, which is distinct from that of non-fire fighters, and which is perpetuated through society, formed in the training school and reinforced in everyday practices on station and throughout the fire service. The majority of fire fighters are professional and keen for the fire service to be seen in a positive light, however, for many, the joy of their role comes from fire fighting, rather than from community engagement, which is seen to an extent as a necessary evil (although the vast majority of fire fighters are too 'on message' to say as much). Further, in operational terms, most fire fighters identify strongly with the fire service, and are keen to perpetuate its good name, and not to bring it 'into disrepute'. This suggests that there is a strong link between the good standing of the fire service and the self esteem of individual fire fighters, as consistent with social identity approaches.

Fire fighters are distinct from the communities that they serve: their identity and military bearing distinguishes them from their 'civilian' counterparts and serves real operational purpose when they are attending incidents. However, the shift to preventive working has not been altogether straightforward: many fire fighters resent having to spend an increasing amount of time in the community, and as numbers of incidents go down, due to successes in preventive working, more time is inevitably spent in this way. For many fire fighters, this is not 'what they joined to do' and there is a feeling that they were somehow misled into a role that is not all action. Preventive working challenges their identity as fire fighters, and may, to an extent, cause them to resent the very communities they are supposed to be helping, as they come to 'blame' residents for their own poor fire safety habits (Arson Control Forum 2004, MacLeavy 2009), and to an extent, their own deprivation which puts them in receipt of community fire safety interventions.

Fire fighters recognise that they are not viewed unequivocally in communities, with a degree of suspicion coming from certain residents for a number of reasons, including their status as authority figures, their links to the police and, anecdotally, their resemblance to Eastern European police enforcers. In other instances, where they are viewed ostensibly positively, this is also not straightforward, with some (female) residents being somewhat over enthusiastic, and reinforcing negative views amongst male residents where female residents are provocative or saucy towards male fire fighters, making local men feel inferior, especially in instances where fire fighters are fetishised as symbols of overt masculinity in areas where men have few legitimate outlets for their manliness – especially not through work . However, fire fighters feel that they are deserving of respect because they are there to serve the community at all times. Further, they are also not always respectful of the community, describing neighbourhoods in derogatory terms and being less than enthusiastic about certain forms of engagement.

The themes which emerged through the analysis of the study link to the research questions in a number of ways, and are *italicised*: *fire fighters have a distinct group identity* which is expressed in relation to 'civilians'. As such, there is a *social contract between fire fighters and the public.* Further, they feel *they ought to be held in high regard*, and are generally – although not incontrovertibly. They feel they are particularly deserving of respect because they are 'there' for residents at any time of night or day, and in this way, they are happy to attend incidents, even seemingly trivial ones, and to provide help in a range of emergencies. Further, *this is what they joined the service to do*, and is implicit in their identities as fire fighters. However, the majority of the contact that fire fighters have with residents is through preventive work, and there is a tension between the *busy stations* where fire fighters like to work, and which serve *busy areas*, and the increased need for engagement in these areas. However, episodes of outright hostility, both reinforce the need for engagement work, and feed into the ideas of masculinity and conflict which are inherent in the identity of fire fighting. Further, there is also a *normative distinction between busy areas and the communities in which fire fighters live*. This brings the relationship full circle, back to the idea of the social contract with communities, but to an *opposing contract of resentment*, whereby communities resent fire fighters (for their masculinity, for 'spoiling their fun'), but fire fighters also resent the communities for causing them to have to do engagement work.

## Fire fighters have a strong group identity distinct from the public

Fire fighting is necessarily a physical occupation, which prizes physical prowess at the expense of less macho pursuits, such as office work and intellectual endeavour, and, like other emergency and uniformed services, this identity positions fire fighters as distinct from non fire fighters, or 'civilians'. Although numerous other research projects (as discussed in Chapter Three) deal with fire fighter identity in different ways, I am particularly interested in it as distinct from civilians, and relating to fire, and it is these aspects which are covered here. Even though more women are coming into the service, it remains a predominantly (white) male profession, and is also struggling to confront its heterosexism. This culture of fire fighting is perpetuated both through society (by stereotypes) and through the fire service, notably through the watch system, and presents a homogenous face to the outside world.

> *When I say me I speak for all thousand of us*
>
> Fire fighter, Shiregreen Community Safety Centre

Further, this external homogeneity is also replicated within the service, with management seeking to perpetuate the given image of a stereotypical fire fighter. As such, one participant I spoke with described how his initial training requirements were assessed as

> *Get a hair cut and start eating meat*
>
> Fire fighter, Station D

And although he had risen through the ranks (itself somewhat 'deviant') he was still described as a 'hippy' by his crew. It must be said, his hair was probably two inches long. This suggests that although the FRS seem monolithic and homogenous from

outside, there are variations within the service. Indeed, fire fighter identity is made such through the training school and is reinforced in daily practices within the watch and on the fire station. I perceived particular distinctions also between urban and rural stations, between crews and managers and between fire fighters and their support staff, demonstrating the distinction between active fire work and less highly regarded roles. The crew from one visiting rural station were known as '*the village people'*, importuning both their sexuality and their ability to work in an urban environment, and demonstrating the preference and higher status of work in tougher, urban 'busy areas' (which will be discussed further below).

This strong group identity also has operational functions, and despite accusations of impenetrability, it is encouraged both in the training school and on the station ground, as recounted by a fire fighter at Station K, describing whether fire fighters should tackle fires at home:

> *I can't do that without you lot. I can only deal with it with equipment and backup and the knowledge that if something happens to me, someone will help, because we're a team*
>
> Fire fighter, Station K

Fire fighters are therefore positioned as apart from civilians, and the stronger their group cohesion, the more pronounced this becomes. As will be discussed below, there are a number of implications for work in the community from this.

## Social contract between fire fighters and the public

Although few fire fighters would describe themselves as heroes, or anything even approaching that, they do feel that they are deserving of respect from society, less because of the implicit danger in their role, rather the fact that they are always available. This often takes the form of a type of 'social contract' between fire fighters and residents, in which they see themselves as deserving of respect because they

are always and unconditionally available, and it was respect in the community that was particularly raised to me as an issue:

> *As a kid I was always brought up to respect the authorities. I don't think I ever spoke to a fireman, up to, I don't know, to my teens I expect. I had no need to talk to a fireman. It's the same as a policeman, always looked up to them.* ***Never, you know… always held them in good respect, because if you need them, they'll be there.***
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

Fire fighters see themselves as professionals, and have high regard both for the profession, and for the service. Such professionalism also forms a part of this social contract, by offering what fire fighters perceive to be a high standard of service to all members of the public. Clearly, the FRS has a public service provision role and ethos and it seems reasonable to expect some sort of social kudos from this. As one fire fighter says, they're:

> *A community service type of figure, and they're certainly not one of the roles that has over time attracted negative stereotypes, for instance like parking wardens or accountants or bank managers*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

These roles, by implication, serve little public function, and are, accordingly granted little status. However, as I shall discuss below, having a community service function does not equate to working with the community, for example in preventive or safety work, roles which are seen in the same emasculated way as, for example, the bank manager, and which, by being less prized by both public and fire fighter, threaten both identity and status, thereby undermining the pre-established social contract.

## They ought to be held in high regard

Although a lot of fire fighters acknowledge that they are not universally liked, they still expected to be held in high regard by the majority of the public, and this is strongly linked to the idea of the social contract.

> *We're still on a pedestal. Most people think 'you're mad, but fair play to you'*
>
> Fire fighter, Station K

However, many also spoke about less straightforward reactions from the public, including lewd remarks and misconceptions about the role.

> *I would say it mostly ranges from sort of raised eyebrows expressions to enthusiasm and occasional, you know, over enthusiasm. Which is all very flattering, but it still surprises me.*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

Such over enthusiasm often takes the tone of provocative or lewd comments from women (even quite elderly ones) which suggest a form of public ownership of the fire fighter: they belong to the public to comment on and play with at will. This is discussed in greater depth in the chapters relating to the other two studies. Further, they are also quite 'safe' in their professional reputation, and so flirting and propositioning can be conducted safe in the knowledge that it is unlikely to be reciprocated or the offer taken up, other than through a little gentle banter. However, as I shall discuss in the other studies, this positions them apart from other men, and also potentially in conflict with them.

The high regard with which fire fighters expect to be seen also mirrors the high regard with which they hold the service. Fire fighters are proud to be fire fighters, and to be members of the service, and many spoke out against bringing the service into disrepute (which is, itself, a disciplinary matter). For instance, when discussing attacks, one fire fighter said:

*You wouldn't [turn hoses on assailants] because it would bring the service into disrepute*

Fire fighter, Station D

He managed to subjugate his personal feelings of frustration and disempowerment in a given situation, where there was an option for immediate release of those feelings (namely turning the hose onto the assailants) for the greater good of the fire service to which he belongs. The self esteem then of individual fire fighters is intrinsically linked with the good standing of the service as a whole and as such it is a collective project to uphold it. Work of which they are less proud, notably community safety work, has the potential to chip away at this image, and therefore at their own self and collective identities. Many fire fighters spoke at length of their expectations of fire fighting work, and this is discussed in the next section.

## What fire fighters joined to do

As discussed above and elsewhere, fire fighting has a strong macho reputation, and tends to recruit accordingly. Although much of the role is community facing, this is not dwelt upon in recruitment, and is only touched upon in training. Many fire fighters enjoy working with residents, and some are very good at it – although they are often teased about it, suggesting that the skills associated with community fire safety are not prized, as I never witnessed teasing about, for example, enjoying weight training. However, for many community fire safety is something of a burden, and even for those that enjoy it, it is not 'what they joined to do'. This is given as short hand for what fire fighters say about the job and about their perceptions of the role, as discussed above.

> *It's a busy station. It's a good station, we've got good things, good kit… I know E and F* [other stations] *and I've gone detached there, and it's nice because you know the area, but I think, because of the area, it's a little quiet station, whereas here there's always something different. It's what I joined to do, isn't it?*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

The disdain this fire fighter feels for quieter stations is reiterated in his description of them as 'little', and again, he makes the link 'because of the area', (which will be discussed in the next three sections) to those stations which are less busy, less interesting and less able to provide the experiences which reinforce his fire fighter identity.

Fire fighters are also the subject of stereotypes, and feel that many outside the service think that all they do is:

> *We just sit in our fire station waiting for the bells to go down, squirt some water, think 'that was fun' and go home*
>
> Fire fighter, Station K

However, there is a tension in that this is exactly what they *would* like to be doing, alongside training, drilling and maintaining their equipment – almost anything other than community safety work. This is reiterated by a trainee claiming

> *I can't wait to get stuck into a half decent housefire*
>
> Fire fighter, Station K

Which suggests he would not feel as if he were a proper fire fighter until he had had that opportunity to demonstrate his difference from other civilians, but also to prove his mastery over fire.

Another fire fighter commented to me

> *You don't want someone else turning up and doing all the good jobs*
>
> Fire fighter, Station B

I cannot help but think the same would not be said for a HFSV, and this demonstrates both the pride and enjoyment that fire fighters have in their work and also the hierarchy of tasks, where 'good jobs' are those fighting fires. There is also the implication that, although politically, fire fighters no longer worry about community safety work 'doing them out of a job', there is still a degree of resentment at preventive work for decreasing the opportunities for hot fire work.

For fire fighters, what 'they joined to do' was fight fires, and this is most likely to happen at 'busy' stations.

## Busy stations

How fire fighters talk about busy stations exemplifies the way in which they talk about the role of fire fighting and how they see themselves as fire fighters. Busy stations are ones that have a high proportion of call outs to lower category and deliberate fires, so for example although Station A attends the most fires, it would be counted as less busy than Stations C or B which attend the highest volume of deliberate fires.

> *Out of preference I would have come to this station anyway… It's a busy station. It's got a number of pumps and specialist appliances* [whereas Station G] *is quieter. I mean you still get some jobs, and they support us on our station, but they've got the decon section…*

*You know, hazardous chemicals and stuff, which is alright, but it's not necessarily the most exciting stuff.*

Fire fighter, Station C

For this fire fighter, the appliances and other aspects of equipment (described at Station D as '*proper manly stuff*') provide a supporting role to him as a fire fighter. They assist in the demarcation, like the uniform, between him and other civilians and ensure involvement at the 'right sort' of incident.

One area of talk which was noticeable by its absence in these conversations was about big fires and serious incidents, particularly ones in which there were (fire fighter or civilian) fatalities. In training, fatalities are touched on in relation to the rationale behind HFSVs, and a video is shown of a senior male fire fighter attempting (and failing) to resuscitate a young girl, about which is commented

*You get tired of this, and you get sad of this*

Fire fighter, Station K

Fire fighter fatalities were responded to with memorials, with minute's silences, but not with discussion. In these instances, the fire 'won' (Weick 1993), and where fire fighter identity is forged in relation to taking fire on, and winning, this clearly has implications for the group. Indeed, in a particular instance, on my first day at HQ, a minute's silence was held for four fire fighters who at that stage were still missing, presumed dead, in what was to become the second largest loss of fire fighter life since the second world war. This instance particularly demonstrated the way in which the service as a whole can put aside distinctions of watch and role and come together at a different level of abstraction. No distinction was made at this time between operational and support staff, and support staff were clearly affected by the gravitas of the occasion. The mood surrounding the occasion was sombre and I did not detect any resentment of the presence of support staff by operational staff. There was a strong sense of the fittingness of marking fallen colleagues, members

of the fire service family. A particularly moving aspect of the memorial was provided by neighbouring builders, who not only stopped their work out of courtesy, but who also came to the edge of their scaffolding and (no doubt in terrible contravention of health and safety legislation) removed their hard hats in respect. Male working class solidarity is so frequently explained in derogatory terms (Nayak 2006), that this level of identification was most touching. Further, it again demonstrates, perhaps, the high regard with which members of the public view the fire service. In an interesting aside, research in the Lancet (Roberts 2002), examining mortality rates of various professions found that scaffolders and general construction workers have far higher workplace mortality than fire fighters. The fact that builders join with the fire fighters to commemorate their fatalities, when no one publicly commemorates theirs is a sad reminder of the human cost of publicly celebrating some careers, and not others. This is particularly the case when it is considered how many more builders – and therefore deaths – there are than fire fighters.

A sad irony in this case is that the men who died were from small, rural stations, and not all of them were whole time fire fighters. Although they did not in their daily work have the prestige of 'proper manly stuff' or association with a 'busy station', the memorial for their deaths provided the opportunity for the rest of the service, both in Warwickshire and beyond, to consolidate around the identity of fire fighting and the fire service.

## Busy areas

It stands to reason that, having described 'busy stations', the neighbourhoods served by those stations are 'busy areas'. However, each station covers more than one neighbourhood, and within any one station's area, there will be a number of areas, some less busy than others. For example, when entering Shiregreen with a crew from Norton station, I was told we were now coming into '*bandit country'.* These areas gain reputations both within the fire service and consistent with local stereotypes about them. Indeed, recruits, who may not all be familiar with Bristol, are 'taught' these stereotypes in the training school. Further, there is a tension in the fact that, whilst these areas provide the

majority of the sort of fires that fire fighters enjoy attending, they also require the most intervention work, which they relish less.

> *I'm happy on the watch. I thoroughly enjoy what we do here. It is, shall we say, a slightly busier operation to some of the other stations, which may not be for some people, but the experience I've had here, that I've built up, it's a very rewarding station*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

Residents of busy areas are also spoken about in distinct ways, although many of the problems in these areas – over crowding, poor waste management, substandard housing stock – are the result of structural factors and poverty, not just deviance by the residents. Fire fighters invoked a lot of stereotypes, talking about '*the outreach people*' or '*those communities from all walks of life*', as if they were reluctant to name problematic behaviour or areas in polite terms. However, as will be discussed below, these stereotypes can have useful operational functions. For instance, when attending a very minor car fire in an affluent neighbourhood close to Upperfield fire station, I was told it was unusual to attend a car fire where the driver was also the owner of the vehicle.

This has the impact of setting up a complex relationship between fire fighters and the neighbourhoods in which they do the most work, as they have to do more prevention work there, which is not relished, but at the same time, they are still more likely to have to attend fires there, which reinforces presuppositions about both the residents of the neighbourhood, and themselves as fire fighters. Further, it is in these neighbourhoods that they are most likely to be attacked, and whilst this can be traumatic to those involved, and obviously detracts from their work and challenges their identity as 'good guys', it also reinforces their identity as different from the residents of that area, and as macho men involved in conflict.

## Normative distinction between busy areas and the communities in which fire fighters live

Having described the 'busy' areas, many fire fighters then drew both spatial and temporal distinctions between where they live or grew up and the areas in which they experience problems, a process which serves to distance them from such problematic neighbourhoods, reinforcing the distinction between residents and fire fighters, but also providing relevant local context through socially constructed stereotypes.

> *I don't have a lot of involvement in the council areas here because* ***obviously*** *I don't live there. I only see and talk to people in the community when I'm on the shift now, but living in [another part of the area], again, I live in a slightly different area… so I live 4 or 5 miles away from any of the council areas*
>
> Fire fighter, Station H (my emphasis)

This links closely to how residents saw involvement in incidents, as is discussed in the next chapter, whereby emergencies are seen as things which happen to other people, people who are, in some way, different to them.

In temporal terms, this was also often accompanied with distinguishing how they were brought up from how people are nowadays:

> *So my parents brought me up to respect them. It's how it should be, but it doesn't continue on.*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

Further, it is interesting to note how, although fire fighting is a traditional working class pursuit, modern fire fighting actually serves to position fire fighters away from the traditional working class, both through their conceptualisation as authority

figures, which may be distasteful in ‘hard pressed’ areas (Nayak 2006), and through the relatively high starting salary, and accrued benefits (as well as the potential to undertake further paid employment owing to the number of ‘off’ and ‘rest’ days). This distinction between where fire fighters live and where they work makes a number of further points relating to this, reinforcing the idea that fire fighters are not just distinct from, but also better than residents of ‘*your typical rubbish fire areas*’. This also relates to ideas of exclusion and the underclass, whereby certain people are seen to be responsible for their own exclusion through moral degeneracy, and are then, perhaps, not worthy of interventions designed to assist or protect them and their communities.

## Opposing contract of resentment

In addition to the positive reciprocity of the idea of the social contract, which I discussed above, there is also a negative cycle of resentment which can be viewed as an oppositional social contract. Resentment between fire fighters and residents seems to flow two ways, with fire fighters ready to admit that in some instances they can be seen to ‘spoil the fun’ of residents who may be enjoying themselves at the expense of the community, for example by setting fire to rubbish or (stolen) cars. Further, these cases are not confined to young people, but can also develop when the fire service arrive at a private function, such as a bonfire or barbeque, that has got out of control, especially where people have been drinking.

> *The only bad reception you get is people who’ve lit bonfires and such, and you have put the fire out as a control measure. And you’re affecting their fun as such. That’s when you get the poor reception*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

These situations can also be compounded by existing neighbourhood tensions, where it is the neighbours who have called the fire service, sometimes out of good intention, but also sometimes as part of an existing or perceived enmity, and there seems to be a particularly territorial aspect to the idea of groups of (inevitably) men arriving to douse another man’s fire. Alongside the resultant loss of face for the

house holder and the associated spectacle of the fire fighters and appliances, resentment by residents in these situations, whilst not an excuse for recourse to violence, does not seem an unreasonable response.

Fire fighters develop quite a complicated typology of attacks, including those described above, typically involving male householders, and other 'random' attacks, involving groups of youths.

> *You're taking their fun away when you put a rubbish fire out. I think they resent you taking away their fun.*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

And whilst fire fighters acknowledge that there are far more serious attacks, including entrapments and ambushes, they also acknowledge that, in Avon at least, these are rare. Further, resentment is not confined to attacks when they arrive 'uninvited' but can also be seen in, for example, HFSVs and at community events, as discussed elsewhere.

> *Occasionally if you're at a fete or a local fair, you might get someone who is questioning, shall we say, and certainly I've heard of equipment being stolen*
>
> Fire fighter, Station C

'Questioning' seems to be regarded as tantamount to sin, and indeed, it does constitute something of a threat to perceived fire fighter identity, which is based on a strong command and rank structure and a culture of following orders, as in the military or the police (Bain 2002). However there is also a degree of resentment between fire fighters and the community, whereby residents are resented by fire fighters for requiring interventions in the way of community engagement. This is demonstrated by the way in which fire fighters discuss these neighbourhoods in derogatory terms, and often feel that they are not using their time wisely in

delivering community fire safety messages. More than once, I was told with some disdain '*you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink*'. This is discussed in greater detail below.

## *Discussion*

As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a substantial body of literature which relates to fire service identity and to the way in which this is formed and presented. Whilst my findings broadly concur with much of this literature, they also, drawing on social identity approaches, see fire service identity in relation to that of other groups. This is particularly the case with residents in the communities that attract the most fire service attention. Fire fighters are positioned as distinct from 'civilians' by their training, their uniform and the demarcation of them as separate. However, there is a further dissociation from residents in hard pressed neighbourhoods, who are seen as more likely to experience emergencies (and therefore 'different' to other residents) and to require intervention work. Whilst this can have an operational benefit, by means of providing local intelligence, it also has the less beneficial impact of forging a normative distinction between fire fighter and resident, reinforced by and accentuated within the neighbourhoods inhabited by each group. As these groups are separated and divided, divisions become further entrenched and, particularly given the normative dimension, increasingly intractable.

Although the name of the occupation that was once termed 'fireman' has been changed in recent years to 'fire fighter', as an attempt to gender neutralise the profession as part of the modernisation process, the term fire fighter is still far from neutral in itself, and the way that fire fighters speak of themselves and of their profession reflects this, and further reinforces the difference between them and residents. Many fire fighters that I spoke with still referred to themselves as 'firemen' (and also to the FRS as a 'brigade'). This was not unique to older / more senior fire fighters, but prevalent even amongst probationers and staff who had been part of the service only in the post-Bain years. Whilst this might not seem superficially problematic (after all, there is an argument for people calling themselves the name they prefer), it reflects a deeper failure to address such gender stereotyping, and potentially echoes a more pernicious feeling that fire fighting *is* a particular sort of man's work, despite the protestations of management, reinforcing the stereotype of

physical work, and further undermining that of more public facing safety work. It must be added that I had been assigned to watches that *had women on them*, as if such an exotic creature as a woman might upset the watch's fragile equilibrium if they were not used to such a being.

Further, the problems of being called a fire *man* are only changed to different problems by being called a fire *fighter.* Fighting fires is only a small proportion of the modern FRS's workload, as discussed elsewhere, with far greater emphasis increasingly put on prevention, community fire safety and other such interventions. However, recruits join to become fire *fighters*: to fight fires (Weick 1993), and although this is not solely the fault of the job name (recruitment advertising and popular stereotype having their own part to play), it does suggest quite strongly that the role is predominantly associated with fighting fire, and not with community work and outreach. This sets up fire fighters to feel aggrieved at work that is not fire fighting (Childs, Morris et al. 2004), as discussed below, community safety work is 'not what they joined to do'. Moreover, there are other consequences to the naming of this work fire fighting, and that is that it posits it as a conflictual activity.

As Weick (1993) discusses, fire is a dynamic opponent, and misjudging it can, quite literally, be fatal, as he demonstrates in the discussion of events in Mann Gulch. Fire behaviour clearly responds to outside intervention (Quintiere 1998) and although it is somewhat far fetched to view fire in social terms (Canetti, Stewart 1984), it is reasonable, to some extent, to attend to relational elements between fire and fire fighter in intergroup terms. As with the ESIM described by Drury et al (1999), the fire service will view a fire in a particular way. As with the police in the football and protest examples (discussed more fully in the literature review), they are in a position to act in relation to the fire, which will respond in a dynamic, if not deliberate, fashion[2]. To an extent then, fire fighters go into fires with conflict on their mind, and metaphors of war abound. They are keen to 'beat' the fire and refer to past incidents as 'won' or 'lost' (the latter particularly where there are 'fallen' colleagues) (Cooper 1995). As such, the identity of operational fire fighters has

[2] Clearly, fire does not think about what it is going to do next, and to an extent, this metaphor is a little strained. However, whilst fire behaviour can be unpredictable, it is often, in retrospect, explainable in relation to external factors, and for this reason also resembles a crowd.

much to do with conflict, although, according to popular stereotype, that conflict is against fire. It was particularly noticeable, towards the end of my time on shifts with fire fighters that one thing they did not speak about was serious fires or incidents or fatalities. There are a number of potential explanations for this: perhaps they were protecting my sensibilities, or perhaps these topics are *verboten* in front of strangers. However, my feeling is, that in these instances, fire was seen to have 'won' and that this had an impact on their identity as fire fighters, as the ones who usually emerge victorious. In instances where fire wins, they are not just fire fighters, but also mere mortals.

However, as discussed at some length above and elsewhere, much of the role of the fire fighter is no longer concerned with fighting fires, but with responding in the community. I have already touched on how fire fighters might resent residents for requiring community interventions, but by looking at the relationship in terms of how fire fighters see their roles, it could well be that they approach the community, like fire, in a conflictual fashion, as if residents themselves were something to be beaten. If this is the case, following from the ESIM, it is no wonder that the response is sometimes hostile. This has a number of interesting ramifications for assaults on fire fighters. Fire fighters discuss assaults, in many instances, as badges of honour, and seem to relish the telling of these 'war stories'. Some indeed seem to quite enjoy the thought of some riposte with locals, perhaps because it reinforces the masculinity of a profession increasingly driven by performance targets and prevention. However, there are implications for ongoing community relations in this realisation, and its linkage to wider issues of an identity which is associated with conflict.

Further, hostility to fire fighters takes many guises. Whilst fire fighters were keenest to discuss outright assaults or verbal abuse, the experiences I had whilst shadowing them were that they were not universally welcome into people's homes. In one instance, (described in the Preface) this took the form of the partner of the householder refusing to turn the television off when the fire fighters were delivering part of the HFSV (indeed, he actually turned it up), and at no point acknowledging their presence. The crew I was with expressed very little surprise at this behaviour on the ground, but when discussed at the station, felt that most people welcomed them into their homes. To an extent, they seemed surprised that I was suggesting

this might not be the case, indicating a lack of engagement with the public's actual perceptions of them.

This type of experience was also repeated in interactions with staff, some quite senior, at Head Quarters. Although the nature and scale of attacks are known and documented through a process called 'Fires of Special Interest' (FOSIs), other anti social or hostile behaviour directed at fire fighters is not recorded. FOSIs cover, amongst other things, fires where there are fatalities, issues of particular interest to the public, very large fires and exceptional (both over and under) performance by the service. Of particular interest in this research project is Type C – attacks on fire fighters and civil disturbances. A number of acts can constitute a Type C FOSI, including thrown objects and verbal or physical abuse. However, verbal abuse tends not to be reported, and thrown objects only are when they make contact, especially with appliances. Although only a small number of attacks are recorded a year, the perception is that these happen in isolation from the community as a whole, and that they are an aberration, rather than the extreme manifestation of patterns of behaviour which run through society and which become expressed in relation to the fire service and not in isolation. The inability (or refusal) of support staff to acknowledge the difficulties in working relationships between fire fighters and residents simultaneously reinforces and undermines the fire fighters position. In the first instance, fire fighters continue to be seen as distinct from the community, which is itself viewed as somewhat pathological. In the second instance, the reluctance to engage with the relationship neglects the nuance of the work that operational fire fighters engage in, and the negotiated role that they play in the community.

Many previous researchers have also found fire fighter identity problematic (Baigent 2001, Ward, Winstanley 2006, Yarnal, Dowler et al. 2004), in terms of minority stereotyping (Ward, Winstanley 2006) and inflexibility (Myers 2005, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services 1999). Further research, looking at the relationship between residents and fire fighters has found a pathological relationship, whereby innocent fire fighters are attacked (Labour Research Department 2005, Brunsden 2007, Labour Research Department 2008a), and make allowances for their attackers' behaviour. This study argues that the relationship between fire fighters and the communities in which they were work is dynamic, evolving and reciprocal, and in this way is a useful subject for social identity approaches. Further, the ESIM

(Drury, Reicher 1999) has looked at short term, localised events, but also contributes to this study in two ways: firstly through better understanding the relationship that fire fighters have with fire, and in turn how this affects their social identity, and secondly, with communities, akin to the standard ESIM work, but occurring over longer timescales. This community factor is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter on Study Two.

Despite popular preconceptions of fire fighting, and the type of stereotyping found in children's dressing up outfits or raunchy calendars, most fire fighters have a balanced view of how they are viewed by residents, and similarly, seem to view residents in a balanced way. However, their identity remains riven with masculinity, and although this is not necessarily associated with conflict, the proximity to other young, male groups makes this a plausible outcome, particularly when mutual resentment is also added to the equation (Tajfel, Turner 2003 (1979), Stott, Reicher 1998). The idea of the social contract also goes someway to explain this resentment: fire fighters are happy to provide services to those genuinely in need, but there is an element of responsibility, as in any contract, on both sides. As such, a number of residents 'breach' the social contract by making unrealistic demands (getting the spider out of the bath), having unrealistic expectations of the service (that they should recover someone's coat from the bus) or 'questioning' (as discussed above) operational decisions. This is also concerned with residents who are overtly hostile to the fire service, or who seem to take no regard for protecting themselves.

Further, as discussed in the literature review, stereotypes are socially constructed and can have a useful social function. As such, stereotypes in some instances do not just represent negative sentiments about residents (for example, X sort of people live there – discussed in greater detail in the next chapter), but can also serve an operational purpose. For instance, if a crew know that they are more likely to be attacked attending a car fire in Shiregreen in the after school hours, they might send two appliances, rather than the usual one. This allows the fire to be dealt with, thus protecting Shiregreen property, whilst also protecting fire service property. In this instance, a stereotype serves an operational purpose as intelligence. The

problem comes when the cultural and social transmission of information in this way comes to negatively impact upon the provision of service delivery in certain neighbourhoods, in other words, when stereotypes are acted on to become prejudice or discrimination.

That fire fighters also make a distinction between the *type* of neighbourhoods that they live in and how they were brought up then adds a normative dimension to their differentiation from residents which could potentially exacerbate this relationship. When looking at perceptions of hostility, this becomes particularly evident, in as much as fire fighters view a negative response to them as problematic and indicative of moral failings within that community. Stott and Drury (2001) discuss intergroup dynamics in terms of the ESIM, and in this instance this also appears to be happening, albeit over a longer time frame: as hostility to the fire service grows, fire fighters are required to undertake more engagement work in those communities, causing fire fighters to resent those residents more.

This gives the unfortunate impression that all engagement work is counter productive, however, this is not entirely the case. Fire fighters undertake much engagement work with good grace *despite* their reservations about it, and understand the point of schools visits and HFSVs, even if they are less pleased with the actual delivery of these interventions. Further, activities such as schools rugby programmes are actively engaged with by a number of fire fighters, in some part at least because they allow for a continuation of masculine fire fighter identity alongside the achievement of operational objectives. People outside of the fire service are quick to discuss the risks which fire fighters take in their daily work, however, this is not something that operational fire fighters often discuss. What does preoccupy them is their *availability* to the public, and this suggests a disjuncture between what fire fighters know about fire fighting and what the public expect of them. Further, many of the fires that fire fighters attend are not likely to pose great risk to them (although, of course, there is always a possibility), but, although they do not view themselves in a heroic light, they do not seem quick to disabuse the public from their misconceptions.

## *Summary*

With regard to my research aim, to come to a better understanding of the relationship between residents and fire fighters, in this study I have observed the fire service and seen how they relate to the community. Although the following study then takes a community perspective, from the fire service's perspective, there is a recognition of a degree of reciprocity in the relationship, whereby they are held in high regard for providing a universal service, but also resented for interfering with other people's communities. Many fire fighters feel that they provide a unique service to the public, however, as will be discussed in the next chapter, many residents see them as one of a number of public service providers intent on telling them how to live their lives. This tension underlies much of the relationship, and leads to an understanding of the roots of hostility and resistance. Although fire fighters themselves tend not to be overtly hostile in neighbourhood settings, there is a degree of resentment at times towards the community, in particular for requiring community safety interventions, which are not popular ways for them to spend their time. Further, residents of some neighbourhoods are not referred to in the most complimentary of ways, and a degree of stereotyping runs through fire fighters' portrayals of the different neighbourhoods in which they work. By positioning themselves as distinct from residents, there is a clear path, in social identity terms, to the potential for intergroup conflict, and the dynamics of this relationship are ongoing and shifting and experiences and encounters change or reinforce perceptions. Using social identity approaches emphasises the potential for social conflict, and provides ways of understanding this relationship as having its own momentum with conflict between groups of fire fighters and residents reinforcing their own group identities, especially where one identity is very positively valued by its group members. Further, there is a lot at stake for fire fighters in the maintenance of this group identity which is upheld both in distinction to residents and to fire and which also comes through the wider reputation of the fire service. For fire fighters, it is fire fighting work which enables them to most express this identity, and other, lower status work, such as community fire safety, has the potential to diminish both their status and their identity, suggesting that, whilst the delivery of current engagement mechanisms might be successful in the community, they can be less so for those fire fighters who deliver them.

In this chapter, I have discussed a number of themes relating to the data I have gathered through ethnographic work with AFRS. I have attempted to relate this both to my research questions, and to the wider literature, although I will also address this in greater depth below. I have found that there is, as discussed variously, a strong social identity associated with the fire service, but that in contrast to a number of studies, that this has a number of positive operational aspects, and that despite seeming monolithic from the outside and homogenous from the inside, there are a number of differences between fire fighters. Fire fighters form a social contract with the communities that they serve, under which they offer certain conditions of service, and what they perceive to be high levels of professionalism. However, fire fighters feel negatively towards communities where this is frequently breached, such as through assaults or failing to consider community fire safety messages. This presents an ongoing and dynamic intergroup situation between residents and the fire service, which has evolved over a number of years, which is perpetuated through stereotypes within the fire service, and which is explored more from a community angle in the next chapter, in which I present the data from a number of residents' focus groups. This fits well with social identity approaches and the ESIM described in the literature review, but, unlike Stott and Drury's examples, this dynamic develops over time, not in day long events.

# Chapter Six: Focus Group Study

In this chapter, I will present the analysis of the data I gathered using focus groups in a number of communities in Bristol. As with the previous chapter, it starts with a brief description of my data gathering and analytic strategies, which are covered more fully by the literature review and methodology chapters. It then restates the research questions and links them to the questions that I asked the participants, and which I considered in my fieldwork contact in these areas. These are then linked to the themes which emerged during the analysis, which are presented in this introduction.

In the analysis section, as with the previous chapter, each theme is introduced in turn, with a short, descriptive preamble, and then a quote which serves as an exemplum from the data. In some cases, more than one quote is given, often in order to demonstrate competing or discordant claims within the theme. The data are then summarised, prior to a section which discusses the themes in more detail.

## *Data gathering strategy*

In total, eleven focus groups were conducted: three of these were pilots, conducted firstly with research colleagues from across Bristol, and then with local mums and school gate acquaintances in the Abbeyville part of the city. Focus groups were conducted with a range of different groups in Shiregreen, Upperfield and Hilton, some preexisting (such as a local history group) or with small numbers of a preexisting group (such as the Hilton Afternoon Club), and others formed for the express purpose of the study. This latter group were recruited through fire service records of recipients of HFSVs in the past three months, as described in the methodology chapter, and although some of the participants were known to each other, they had not met previously as a group.

## *Analytic strategy*

Having collated and transcribed data collected in the focus groups, Nvivo software was used to code and group themes. This process was conducted in a comparable manner to that described in the previous chapter, whereby coding structures were

developed as the coding progressed so that the final structure was not reached until coding was completed. The process started with a thorough reading of the data. I then coded it, and then grouped the coded data into themes. This was followed with another reading through of the thematic data, and then coding was conducted within the themes. A first draft was written, which contained commentary on all the themes and coded data. This was then revised into a more discriminating account, which more selectively addressed the research questions, providing a 'rich' account of some of the neighbourhood issues (Braun, Clarke 2006) and a more nuanced description of issues more specifically relating to fire fighters. These themes will be discussed further below. As before, names of participants and names of neighbourhoods are anonymised. As groups were conducted with people who had specifically had a HFSV, these are labelled as such (although some participants in other groups had also had them). Groups are labelled by neighbourhood, and the HFSV groups are also named. Although the way in which questions were phrased differed from the pilot groups to the main body of the study, the format remained the same. As such, I have chosen to include this data. However, because of the potential ease of identifying some participants in these groups, I have ungrouped the data. Therefore, rather than labelling pilot groups 1-3, I have grouped them into a single 'Pilot Group'. Also, in Shiregreen and Upperfield, I met with two separate non HFSV groups. Again, I have termed these together as just 'Shiregreen' or 'Upperfield' rather than numbering them.

Some observations that were immediately apparent to me included a degree of shock and scepticism about fire fighters being treated badly in the community, coupled with outright hostility and suspicion (even in more 'respectable' seeming groups) towards the police and a number of complaints about overuse of sirens and the speed of fire service appliances. Alongside this, residents also spoke in different ways about their neighbourhoods, either being adamant that it was a wonderful place to live, and then outlining many less wonderful aspects, or that it was awful, but with a number of positive aspects. Many residents also spoke at their frustration of dealing with other agencies and public services and of incidents that they themselves had been involved in. Further, although the majority of residents felt that it was unacceptable to judge people because of the neighbourhood in which they lived, they freely admitted to world views in which these stereotypes formed a strong part – including of where they themselves lived. Needless to say, in many instances, although these stereotypes were cogent and coherent in their minds, they

themselves did not fit in with them, forming exceptions rather than examples of the rule.

## *Research Questions*

The aims of this research programme, as stated above and elsewhere, are to understand better the relationship between AFRS and the neighbourhoods in which they work, by looking at the nature of the relationship, examining the roots of hostility and resistance and asking whether current engagement mechanisms are effective, using social identity approaches. As such, the data are approached with these questions in mind, and how the data address these questions will be dealt with more fully in the discussion section.

In this study, these questions were addressed in the following ways:

1. The relationships between fire fighters and residents
    a. What expectations do residents have of the fire service?
    b. How do residents view fire fighters?
    c. Is this particular to their neighbourhood?
2. The roots of perceived hostility
    a. How are fire fighters linked to other public services?
    b. Why do people tolerate attacks?
    c. What other manifestations of hostility are there?
3. Using social identity approaches
    a. Are there particular aspects of neighbourhood culture that facilitate hostility?
    b. How are these perpetuated in the neighbourhood?
    c. How do people make judgements about different neighbourhoods?
4. Whether engagement mechanisms are effective
    a. How do residents speak about their contact with the fire service
    b. How have they responded to HFSVs?
    c. Is this what the fire service should be doing?

## *Themes*

In this section, I will outline the overriding themes that I drew from the data. As with the previous chapter, the analysis will be presented in the form of a description of the theme and then a quote from a participant that demonstrates the manner in which the themes were discussed. The themes will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion section at the end of this chapter. The focus groups discussed a number of issues related to neighbourhood experience and exposure to the fire service (fuller details of which are given in Appendix 4 which outlines the schedule used for the groups). Inevitably, therefore, some of the themes reflect some of the questions that were asked, although, of course, the thematic structure is somewhat divergent from the schedule itself. The broad themes that I will look at in this section cover:

- How residents relate to their neighbourhoods
- How people judge residents of other neighbourhoods
- Neighbourhood change over time
- Involvement in and experience of emergencies
- The presence of fire fighters
- How fire fighters are associated with a wider health and safety agenda
- The job of fire fighting.

Within each of these larger themes emerge a number of smaller themes, which are introduced at the beginning of each successive section. Inevitably, some of these overlap, but that in itself is indicative of the way in which these issues become compounded in the minds of residents and the responses of the fire service. To an extent, the chapter reflects the format of the groups, whereby the discussion started in general terms about their neighbourhood, and then drilled down into particulars about where they lived. This was followed by general conversation about the fire service, focussing in then on personal experiences of the fire service and then negative experiences or reported experiences. However, this is only a loose framework, and the themes that have arisen, for example, are not the same as the questions that were asked.

## *Neighbourhoods*

In this section, I will discuss the way in which residents spoke of their neighbourhood and of their experiences of living where they live. This will include themes about how people spoke of the positive and negative aspects of where they lived; how people disagree on what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘bad’ neighbouring; how residents discussed the microgeographies of their environments and the way in which participants discussed the culture of their neighbourhoods, and how this is relevant to the fire service, especially considering norms in the neighbourhood that might tolerate or encourage hostility to public services.

Many of the participants involved in this study are current council tenants, or, if home owners, had bought council houses of which they were longstanding residents. As such, not many of them had experienced a great deal of agency about where they lived, and a number of responses to the neighbourhood reflected a degree of acceptance and resignation, but an absence of choice. This potentially means that residents expressed their views about their neighbourhood in different ways to residents who had chosen to live where they lived (for example, most of the Pilot Group participants had had more choice in where to live), but that they also felt that, even if they did move, it would likely be to a comparable or similar neighbourhood. Although tenureship and opinions on moving out of the neighbourhood were not issues covered, or even much raised, in the course of the various discussions, many of the responses should be viewed as responses of people without much choice in where they live.

> *You gotta live where you lives. You’ve not got a lot of choice*
>
> Bobby, Shiregreen

Further, it should also be noted that constraints, both economic and cultural, also acted on those who had bought houses outside of the council system. All my participants were constrained by finances and a number who had moved recently to Bristol were living in neighbourhoods that they had heard of, or which were proximate to places of work and many discussed living elsewhere if they were able

to. Needless to say, residential choice is not a matter to be discussed here, and so it must be accepted that people have a number of reasons for living where and how they do, not all of which are within their control.

## Positive and negative views of the neighbourhood

Participants in the focus groups were quick to tell me about what they liked and disliked in their neighbourhoods. The first question I asked in the discussion was a direction for participants to go around the table stating their name and where they lived, and for how long. To an extent, this functioned as a voice test and icebreaker, and worked so that I could recognise voices and names (hopefully) on the recording, as discussed in the methodology. In reality, this also set people to talking about where *exactly* they lived, which I will discuss below, and often led people straight into talking about what they liked and disliked about the area. Indeed, where people said they lived also reflected aspirations and popular conceptions about neighbourhoods, as discussed below. In many instances, there was not consensus about what people liked in an area, reflecting different lifestages and different interests. For example, where older people enjoyed seclusion from city living and the proximity of the rural environment, younger people thought areas were boring and lacking in opportunities for them. In a number of instances, lack of consensus was expressed not just by an individual, but by an individual in a single breath:

> *Of course, they've been very good to me, but they have the worst rows. I mean I've warned them, but it goes on until 2 or 3 in the morning*
>
> Liz, Upperfield

This demonstrates a number of problems and benefits of urban living: close proximity to neighbours, who may help at difficult times, or cause dismay by their proximity. Indeed, neighbours further away might or might not help, but certainly the extent of their arguing would remain unknown. It also suggests that Liz, whilst clearly finding her neighbours difficult, does not wish to speak ill of them. This theme is repeated again and again throughout the data, of people experiencing quite profound problems in their neighbourhoods, but either making light of it, or

juxtaposing it with more positive aspects. Perhaps where people have little agency over where they live, it is too depressing to dwell on the negative – although it must be sorely tempting.

Further, groups were not united either within or between themselves on what constituted positive or negative aspects of neighbourhood, and indeed, I would not presume to tell people what was a good or bad aspect of their neighbourhood (although that did not stop them telling me the negative aspects of my neighbourhood). However, what was interesting in this respect was what was tolerated within different neighbourhoods, either as normal, or as aberrant but insolvable. A number of issues – litter, maintenance, car speed / parking – were raised as problematic but things you just got on with. Other issues caused more problems – young people, crime and fear or crime – with participants being less relaxed about some of these aspects and discussing the interactions that they had had, in many instances entirely fruitlessly, with other services nominally responsible for such provision. However, much of this was accepted with a sense of resignation, especially amongst older participants.

## Sense of making do

A number of residents discussed their neighbourhoods in terms of having come to tolerate it over time. Although many expressed a great pleasure in their early years in the neighbourhood – which in many instances was the early years of the neighbourhood itself – this had faded over time. It is not clear, however, to what extent this reflects a general dissatisfaction allied to becoming older, an increased intolerance of problems or actual neighbourhood decline – most likely a combination of these factors. However, many participants had invested most of their life in one neighbourhood and felt that moving away was no longer an option.

> *I like Hilton. I've lived up here too long not to.*
>
> Brenda, Hilton

Brenda exemplifies this, saying she has lived in Hilton too long to not like it. This reveals a degree of 'mind over matter' – she has both forced herself to accept it, but also made friends and got to know the neighbourhood.

> *So I'm fairly happy with where I live you know. Except for all the problems.*
>
> Ivy, Hilton

Likewise, Ivy is both happy with where she lives despite being intolerant of the problems. This sense of making do was typical for a number of older residents.

## Interaction with other services

There is a degree of inevitability to the fact that residents in 'hard pressed' neighbourhoods will have greater contact with public services than residents in more affluent areas, and whilst this study primarily concerns the fire service, the treatment of residents by other agencies and the opinion in which residents hold these agencies have clear resonances. For council tenants, one of the most obvious links to public service provision was through the council housing department, but even for people who owned their own homes, their dealings with their neighbours, where they were council tenants, were often mediated in this way. Parents of younger children had contact either with health visitors or with social workers, and in some instances older people also had contact with social services. Community facilities are often provided by the council, including the community centres in which we met, and which hosted parents' groups or older people's social groups. Community transport also features in this way. Two other particular services that people discussed were the police and waste disposal.

> *We've got problems at the back of our house. The kids sit at the back, they throw stones. They're our neighbours, they should behave like neighbours. We've got a wooded wildlife area at the back. It was meant to be garages,*

*but they were never built. And they dump rubbish there, and cars and that. And we went to the council about it, and the wardens and everything…*

Paul, Shiregreen HFSV Group.

This demonstrates a range of the problems that residents felt within their neighbourhood: lack of opportunities and inappropriate supervision of young people; perceived lack of 'neighbourliness'; failure to follow through on promises by developers / housing providers; failure to provide adequately for waste disposal, and, crucially, failure amongst a range of agencies to respond to problems. As such it is no wonder that for many residents, dealing with public services is trying and ultimately unrewarding, and over time becomes seen as a waste of time, or leads to hostility towards these services.

This has dual implications for the fire service. Firstly, it is possible that residents will assume the fire service 'guilty by association' with the other services, and not refer problems to them. In this way, the fire service become 'just another public service' and not a trusted provider, for instance:

*My only observation is maybe the fire service could use its position with the council…*

Sid, Hilton HFSV Group

As such, it is likely that the fire service would struggle even more to get fire service messages across in hard pressed communities. Secondly, the alternative is for the fire service to become seen as the first public service of choice:

*You can't talk to a fire fighter normally because he's working, but you do get a better response from them than from the police*

Paul, Shiregreen HFSV Group

Whilst there could be advantages in this for the fire service, in that they would, for a while be seen as a particularly trusted and reliable provider, this is likely, eventually, to set them up to fail. As discussed in the previous chapter, fire fighters are not unequivocally keen on attending to community matters, and additional requests and expectations from the community could quickly be seen as a burden and a nuisance. This would likely impact on the service that the fire fighters provided, and in residents being let down by yet another public service. As such, the fire service has a fine line to tread to maximise the potential of being seen as a trusted provider, without becoming the first service of choice for a range of provision beyond their remit, which would result in a swift decline from such exulted status. This will be discussed in Chapter Eight with regard to implications for the fire service.

## Microgeographies

Participants in the focus groups talked about their neighbourhoods in a range of different ways. Although I was expecting residents to give their neighbourhood (or essentially ward / council boundary) name – such as Shiregreen or Hilton – people tended often to drill down and be more minutely specific, specifying, for example, 'old estate' where this was seen as a relevant or particular parts or ends of estates. In Shiregreen, this was particularly apparent. Shiregreen is popularly regarded as one of the 'worst' estates in Bristol, but for people who live there, it is not Shiregreen itself that is the problem, but the Poulton Avenue area. Further, residents of Poulton Avenue were particularly concerned about one end of the road, which itself can only be a couple of hundred yards long.

These microgeographies also particularly affected who people mixed with and where people went and when. The idea of mixing with people from different neighbourhoods will be considered in greater detail in the section on making judgements about different neighbourhoods. However, the idea of travelling is closely linked to this. Much has been written elsewhere about the insularity of council estates (Hanley 2007), and these three neighbourhoods are no exception to this. This is particularly commented on, for example in Upperfield, where participants said they had to take two buses to get to a decent park for their

children, or in Hilton, which is on a steep hill, which is hard for older residents (or those with mobility problems, or even pushchairs) to navigate.

In Shiregreen one resident was clearly not going to let ideas of insularity stand between him and a social life:

> *You can get the bus into town. I'm fortunate, because I've got a car, so I can go a bit further than that. I can go to Harford, Larchton.*
>
> Robin, Shiregreen

It remains to be said that these outer villages must lie within three miles of Shiregreen. This demonstrates the extent to which estate life can become all encompassing – these villages are essentially walking distance away, but the emotional distance of leaving the estate is far greater than that. As such, for residents of these relatively socially isolated areas, what counts on the estate counts for more than it might to a resident of a more mobile area (Forrest, Kearns 2001).

For the fire service, such insularity presents a number of problems. Firstly, there is potential, in such inward focused communities, for any outsiders, whether public service or not, to be regarded as untrustworthy or not credible. Secondly, community and local knowledge – of which there is much in such areas, which have long memories of institutional prejudice or wrong doing (Bradford, Jackson et al. 2008) – militate against new knowledges being brought in from elsewhere. Thirdly, cultures which have developed in these circumstances, which suggest that outside agencies are 'enemies' (or at least alien), are hard to penetrate and for outside agencies to perpetuate new knowledge, even – perhaps especially – where that new knowledge might be helpful to residents. Outsiders are immediately categorised as interfering, and this in no small part extends to the fire service.

However, participants were not just passive recipients of neighbourhood delineation, and many knew and understood the implications of different names, choosing to 'play along' with certain elements as and when it suited them.

> *I'm on the edge, so it depends who I talk to. So if I want some help with something, or something to do with Upperfield, I'll put Upperfield, but if not I'll put Brynwood* (more affluent part of Bristol)
>
> Jeanette, Upperfield

This participant understands that different names carry different resonances, and whilst many would just dismiss their labelling, she is able to turn this to her advantage. Although she lives in an area without a great deal of agency, and can exercise little control over this, she is able to exert control through her own use of these labels and their systemic implications.

## *How participants judge residents in other neighbourhoods*

To an extent, council tenants (and young people still living with parents) have little agency over where they live, and there was a feeling that, because of this, it was unfair and unreasonable to judge people on where they live. That said, in every focus group I conducted, participants were swift to make judgements about what different neighbourhoods said about their residents. Again, this tended not to be straightforward, with disagreements within and between participants common, and a number of stereotypes, including about my own neighbourhood, offered. Participants were also aware of the way in which others judged them for their place of residence, and discussed this accordingly, alongside issues of self esteem that that arose.

Many of the participants felt that they ought not to make judgements on where people lived. For some, this was potentially because they did not want others to judge them on where they lived – especially for residents in hard pressed areas. For others, there was considerable awareness that even for people who can choose

where they live, socioeconomic circumstances may limit, to an extent, the choices they are able to make. Further, and as with any number of other discussion points, what one person saw as a positive neighbourhood attribute would be dismissed out of hand by others as a negative attribute of the same neighbourhood.

> *Interviewer: When people tell you where they're from, does that make you think in a particular way about them?*
>
> *Laura: I'm afraid it does. That's awful*
>
> Laura, Pilot Group

It was reassuring within the focus group dynamic that despite so many people thinking they ought not to express judgements about others' neighbourhoods, they then went on to do so. Firstly, it ensured a degree of lively debate about different neighbourhood characteristics, but secondly, and more importantly, it suggested to me that, although people had a sophisticated understanding and awareness of prevailing social mores, and the unfashionableness of stereotyping, they were willing to enter into these discussions quite willingly. I felt that this boded well for asking them to talk, later in the group, about attitudes towards the fire service, both as emblematic of what people in their neighbourhood (or indeed, other neighbourhoods) might think, and also in the knowledge that, although one ought not to speak badly of a public service, they were clearly prepared to do so.

## Making judgements about their own neighbourhood

Whilst participants were quick to label residents from other neighbourhoods as coming, typically, from sub-groups of the underclass ('scabby', 'junky', 'single parents' were all terms used), they also applied the same type of judgements to their own neighbourhoods – although generally not to themselves. However, this was not in every case straightforward, with a degree of discussion both about the minutiae of where which sort of people lived, but also a degree of protectiveness and defence of one's own neighbourhood.

*And I see your study is Shiregreen and Hilton and Upperfield. Which overall, most people who don't live in those estates would say 'that's all the rough areas'.*

Steve, Hilton HFSV

In this quote, Steve is attempting to explore the way in which I chose my study neighbourhoods. Indeed, the three neighbourhoods I chose are generally considered to be 'rough', although in different ways, and certainly, Hilton would be seen as the least rough. Further, they are not the only neighbourhoods in Bristol that could be seen this way, rather they typify some white working class peripheral neighbourhoods, and not the more diverse, inner city urban areas that are potentially more renowned outside Bristol. With a degree of inverse snobbery, some people are proud to live in an area with a reputation, or accepting of the good aspects, as discussed above, which make up for less favourable aspects of their residential experience.

For other residents, the constant belittling of the neighbourhood, and its division into more or less amenable microgeographies was a matter of concern and distaste:

*It doesn't count as anything. I don't say old and new estate. It's all just one estate, for some it gives it away. They wouldn't say they live on the old estate, so I just says I live in Upperfield.*

Liz, Upperfield

Liz is well aware of the divisions in her neighbourhood, which is divided into 'old' and 'new' estate (reflecting one build pre WW2 and one built immediately after). To those in Upperfield, the 'old' estate is popularly portrayed as 'rough' and the 'new' estate as 'posh'. To many outside Upperfield, the whole area is one best avoided. She does not want to buy into and perpetuate the distinctions that make one part of her area seem better than the other part, preferring to speak positively of the whole area. Similarly, a participant in a different focus group took umbrage at people

discussing the negative aspects of their estate, asking participants to remember 'happy Shiregreen' instead. This will be discussed in greater detail in the self esteem section, below. Similar distinctions were also made about my neighbourhood, with the assumption:

> *You're a student, you don't have any choice*
>
> Al, Hilton

This demonstrates a number of points. There is an assumption here that I would not choose to live, perhaps as he had not chosen to live, in the neighbourhood in which I do live. This is actually untrue, and suggests an interesting point, that it is acceptable to live somewhere like Abbeyville, or by extension, any of the other neighbourhoods in the study, if you do not choose to. However, choosing to live there is somehow suspicious. It also reinforces the earlier point about challenging the power relations in the group so that, in this group at least, I became positioned as a 'poor student' rather than an 'all powerful' moderator. In other groups, this was also picked up outside the formal discussion, when I came to reimburse people. A number of participants said, in the nicest possible way, that I needed the money more than they did. When I insisted it came from university budgets, and that they'd 'earned' it, they would reluctantly take it from me, saying that they would give it to charity[3]. Where people have not chosen to live where they live, they make assumptions that other people also lack choice or control, and as such, judge people in the way that they see themselves and judge their own lives.

## Self esteem

In social identity terms, group membership contributes to positive self esteem (Hogg, Abrams 1990), and, as discussed in the previous chapter, this is clearly the case for the fire service. However, in many of the focus groups, participants

[3] As an aside, in every case where a couple came to the group together, the man would hand his envelope of cash / debrief notes straight to his wife / partner.

discussed what residents of other neighbourhoods assumed about them. For example:

> *They think I'm a druggy*
>
> Leanne, Shiregreen

In this instance, the young woman says that, when people hear she lives in Shiregreen, they assume she is a drug addict. Other residents in this and other groups used similar derogatory words, such as '*scabby'* and '*junky'*. Many of the participants appeared to put quite brave faces on these types of remarks, almost revelling in the negative connotations, and appearing to brazen them out. This appears to a be a rational 'survival strategy' for living in such a neighbourhood (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008). However, amongst older residents, whilst the knowledge of the stereotype remained the same, there was more of a sense of resignation and sadness, particularly amongst those who were parents themselves, and did not want their children to grow up affected by both the problems and the reputations.

> *Sometimes you get people who are really nice and polite, and they'll talk to anyone, but other times you get something different*
>
> Sarah, Shiregreen

In this quote, Sarah suggests that for someone to talk to her, once she's said she lives in Shiregreen, they have to be 'nice and polite'. This suggests that she thinks there is something wrong with living in Shiregreen, and by association, something wrong with her. Such associations perhaps make it increasingly less likely that people from these areas either leave, in case they are judged for where they are from, or if they do go off the estate, that they do not mix with people from other areas, perhaps feeling that they are not good enough to. As such, estate culture becomes increasingly ingrained, not just in response to the outside world, but in defence and defiance of it (Hanley 2007).

## *Change over time*

The majority of participants did not see their neighbourhood as a static entity over time, rather reflecting on change in a number of ways. Some were particularly concerned with changes in their neighbourhood, others with change in themselves in relation to both their neighbourhood and to the fire service over the period of their life course. A particular cause for concern amongst older residents in particular was decline in (perceived) standards over time, and despite considerable investment in a number of the neighbourhoods that participants lived in, the majority of them discussed neighbourhood change in terms of decline, even if this was coupled with material improvements.

For many of the older focus group participants, the early days of the estates really were exciting times, with people recounting the novelty of electricity, freezers, spaciousness and indoor plumbing, having moved from inner city slums that were bombed during or cleared after the second world war. Perhaps it is inevitable that as the novelty of these amenities wore off over the intervening fifty years that residents would come to find the estates less alluring?

> *Well, I wouldn't say I like it. It's declined in the last 10 to 15 years. It was very nice when we first moved here, but it's got rough now*
>
> Ivy, Hilton

Further, and in relation to life stage changes which will be discussed below, many residents felt that the last decade or so had seen a particular decline. It must be said that the average age for the group which Ivy attended was probably seventy five.

## Life stage

I was pleased that a full spectrum of ages was represented within the focus groups, from young people who had just recently left school, through young parents, some middle aged people and a number of older people. This enabled me to look at how

people's concerns about their neighbourhoods, and about the fire service, differed depending on life stage.

> *I think I'll be more concerned as my daughter grows up*
>
> Laura, Pilot Group

New parents, such as 'Laura', acknowledged that aspects of the neighbourhood that they ignored or found, at worst, an irritation, might come to weigh more heavily on them as their children got older. However, for parents of babies, the fire service was not of particular interest, despite their being considered a vulnerable group, in fire service terms.

Parents of young children (as opposed to babies) universally commented on pointing out fire engines to children:

> *(on being shown a picture of a fire service appliance)*
>
> *Look Shona there's a nee-nah*
>
> Jeanette, Upperfield

This sort of activity, alongside ubiquitous toys and games targeted at this age group (although predominantly at boys), was spoken about by many parents, with young children being particularly interested in appliances such as fire engines, diggers and trains. This sort of interest is reinforced through programmes such as *Fireman Sam*, which perpetuate a heroic image of fire fighters and add to their popularity with young children (Cooper 1995). I can attest to the fact that a walk with young children is inordinately enlivened by the site of a fire engine, and so it is no wonder that the fire service attempt to capitalise on this good will by taking fire safety messages into schools to target children from a young age. However, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, these responses are not universal.

As children reach adolescence, the fire service and other public services start to lose their allure. Respect for adults diminishes and authority is widely challenged (Smith 2002) Although not every teenager will resort to standing on street corners abusing or assaulting fire fighters, it is fairly safe to assume that they will not hold these professionals in the same thrall as when young children. The same can likely be said for their interaction with many public services, and indeed, for those services' view of young people as they go from children to be engaged with to teenagers to be managed (Drury, Dennison 2000).

However, even for those who do stray from the straight and narrow, this is often a temporary aberration, which becomes tempered by familial responsibility, as Linda explains about a 'rough' group in Upperfield:

> *But they're growing up a bit now, they're moving on, like Craig and that, their gang used to be really bad, but they're growing up a bit now, getting girlfriends and that. Growing out of all the violence.*
>
> Linda, Upperfield

This reflects how, as parents and householders, many residents assume a mantle of responsibility that a few years earlier they would have eschewed – although it is likely that a number of fire fighters would disagree with this! However, again, this is not entirely uncomplicated: although a number of residents agreed that becoming a householder enforced a degree of responsibility on them, for many *taking* responsibility seemed a step too far. There was an expectation that the fire service, or other agencies, such as health visitors, were obliged to provide for their safety, including fire alarms, fire guards and stair safety gates, the latter two of which can be obtained on referral from social services or health visitors. When these were not forthcoming, this caused a degree of resentment:

> *Ellie: They shouldn't be advertising if they can't do them…*

*Jeanette: … I know equipment costs money, but it's people's lives at the end of the day*

Ellie and Jeanette, Upperfield

This suggests a sense of entitlement that a number of participants seemed to hold, feeling that they were entitled to goods (such as stairgates) or services (such as HFSVs) with a minimum of input from themselves, and that where this was not forthcoming, this was a source of resentment.

As residents age further, they enter a period during which few agencies are likely to be interested in them. They may continue to have contact with, for example, housing officers if they are a council tenant, but in the main part, the middle aged have less to do with public services than other age groups might.

Bill: *but when you got children, that's another worry isn't it*

*Robin: well, my youngest is 56, so it's not so much for me*

Bill and Robin, Shiregreen HFSV Group

However, as they pass retirement age, once again, residents appear to public services as requiring interventions and as a vulnerable group. This is also likely compounded by an increase in time available to the newly retired who, finding that services are again offered to them, also have the time to avail themselves of such services. This is reflected by a number of participants who describe their experiences both as older people, and of other older people who they are, perhaps, caring for. Unfortunately, this increased exposure to services can also result in an increase in dissatisfaction with those services, for example when smoke alarms are not fitted *immediately*, or if fire fighters are called away mid installation. However, there is also the possibility that those who attended my focus groups felt they had particular issues with certain services, including the fire service, that they wanted to air through the focus groups.

## Decline in respect

One of the areas which many participants spoke at length about was a decline in standards in their neighbourhood, particularly in relation to respect as due from the young to the older and the public to their public services. However, at no point was it suggested that this respect might be reciprocal. Further, and as with many of the comments about crime and degradation in their neighbourhoods, many residents saw a decline in respect as originating in other parts of the country (or even of the city) and coming into their neighbourhoods as contagion from outside:

> *But how long before it creeps down this way? I mean if it's in other parts of the country, how long. People are moving all the time, you get people coming into Bristol to live, who may be from those areas, and they bring that with them. That's the frightening part. You get this shift in people moving around, you don't know what sort of developments are going to start up that come in from other areas*
>
> Ivy, Hilton

This particular quote relates to antipathy to the fire service, and reflects a number of these concerns: of people coming from outside of the neighbourhood to live there, of bringing their problems with them. It suggests that problems do not originate within communities, but *creep* in from outside. Clearly this is frightening to Ivy. She does not want people coming from other places to live in her neighbourhood. She particularly does not want to admit that the neighbourhood in which she lives, which has formed a part of her identity for the majority of her adult life, is capable of spawning these problems itself.

In another group, the decline in respect is linked to the ascendance of 'rights', reflecting the lack of intergenerational respect. Paul does not think young people are deserving of 'rights', and that, in turn, young people, and their parents, do not respect other people. This is associated with a decline in moral standards, exemplified by single motherhood and a concomitant lack of discipline.

> *Nobody is allowed to correct anybody any more. And they know their rights, right from two or three years old. No one can tell them off, no one can threaten them. They've got no father… and the government turn around and say anyone can have children, and they got no respect.*
>
> Paul, Upperfield

However, this statement was not accepted by other group members unequivocally, with two participants, both of whom knew Paul well, springing to the defence of single mothers and their children – somewhat surprisingly to me. This reflects that even in outwardly homogenous groups, certainly groups who meet regularly and out of common interest, there is not a moral consensus, and that even where people express a consensus amongst 'us' versus 'them' in their neighbourhoods, this is not complete, universal or unchallenged. As such, looking for a prevailing identity in neighbourhood terms is not as clear cut as it might be with the fire service.

## *Involvement in and experience of emergencies*

Although many of the focus group participants were keen to tell me about times they had accidentally set chip pans on fire or activated smoke alarms with burnt toast, none of them had been involved in a serious incident, or certainly none which they wished to talk about. Although participants knew that I had come to talk to them about the fire service, a number of other topics were covered first until I introduced the idea of the fire service with a photograph of a fire engine. I had thought that this would be quite a neutral way to introduce the topic, but, as I shall discuss in further detail later in this chapter, residents had a great deal to say about fire engines in general, and their sirens in particular. In this section, I will look at how people talked about their own perceptions of emergencies, both of the fire service attending emergencies, and from their own experience, their expectations of the fire service beyond emergencies and their thoughts about who experiences emergencies. As with the types of people who live in different neighbourhoods, it transpired that a number of participants held some quite fixed views on who was likely to experience an emergency, or to need the fire service.

## The association between fire fighters and emergencies

For many participants, the fire service was synonymous with emergency fire fighting, and any other function that they took played a distinctly secondary role. This was exemplified by a community centre worker I spoke with when setting up these groups. She said that she had not seen the fire service for ages, and had never personally had anything to do with them. When I pressed her on the local festival, which the fire service attend, she said that 'obviously' she'd seen them there. When pressed further, she also transpired to have had a HFSV and to have taken children's groups to the fire station. However, as none of these involved an emergency, they did not 'count'.

This lack of recognition has quite considerable consequences for the fire service. As time goes on and modernisation progresses, as described in Chapter Three, the amount of 'hot fire' work that they undertake diminishes. Further, as I discussed in the previous chapter, as this diminishes, so too does their image of themselves as fire fighters. If the other work that they undertake, sometimes, to an extent, under duress (and certainly not for the love of it) does not take its place in the public imagination, they are left in something of a limbo, where the construction of their job does not match the actuality, and this is not recognised as valid.

## Expectations about involvement in emergencies

Many of the participants felt that there was little point in asking the fire service for information because it would not apply to them. People seemed to have quite fixed ideas about the 'sort' of person who would likely be involved in a fire, and that sort of person tended to be someone else.

> *I don't think I'd go and ask them a question, because I don't think it would happen to me*
>
> Laura, Pilot Group

This followed on from lack of interest in other aspects of the fire service's work: if people did not know what was available to them, they are unlikely to see things that are relevant. Further, in the same way that people 'know' the fire service put out

fires, they 'know' that if they are in an emergency, they will come and help them. To an extent, this level of blind trust in the fire service stands against them: residents consider themselves to know what the fire service are there for, how to reach them and what they will do. This is so ingrained in us that challenging the presupposition by asking what else the fire service could do, what role they play in our communities, goes unstated. Again, as the fire service put out fewer fires and increasingly lose this role, their identity within the community is threatened.

As with judgements about who would live where, participants also made judgements about who would be involved in a fire, and this was intrinsically associated with where people lived:

> *Where I live you don't see many* [fire engines] *there isn't a station and obviously there aren't many fires.*
>
> Amy, Pilot group

Amy lives in an affluent village outside of Bristol, and reflects this by saying that 'obviously' there are few fires. Fire, and other emergencies, are, in this way reflected not just as something that happen to other people, but to *different* people in different places. This suggests that there are types of people who are susceptible to fire (Communities and Local Government 2008), and that this might have a level of blame apportioned to it. Residents in less affluent areas similarly commented on the amount of fires that they saw, and different sorts of fire, particularly car fires, were intrinsically linked to certain areas.

## *The presence of fire fighters*

Although not all participants had had direct experience with the fire service, where they had, fire fighters (or the image of fire fighters) had left quite an impression on them. As such, the presence of fire fighters is felt strongly in the community, although it does not always manifest itself positively. Following on from the previous section, a number of residents spoke about the absence of fire fighters in their community, both as an absolute and in relation to other countries or communities in which they had lived. Other residents also spoke about the presence of fire fighting appliances in their communities, and this presented a number of examples of residents who would have thought they were broadly positive about the fire service actually expressing quite negative sentiments. In this section, I will also examine

some of the stereotypes of fire fighters as ‘sexy’ and heroic, looking at the comments that (mostly female) participants had made about their physicality. In the last part of this section, I will look at more male perceptions of the fire service as authority figures.

## Speed and sirens

One area that came up repeatedly was the issue of fire engines. Although most participants were happy to see appliances in their neighbourhoods and understood their need for a speedy response in emergencies, they did not speak so favourably of the need for actual speed or sirens, and these were presented as somewhat intrusive to residents attempting to go about their daily business, and disturbing to the relative peace of night time. Almost every time fire engines were spoken of in transit, they were described as ‘racing’ or ‘zooming’, rather than just driving, and many residents described hearing sirens, particularly at night, although admitted that they were unable to tell if they were fire or another emergency service.

> *Because I live on the main road I see them nearly everyday racing up, either going left or right*
>
> Barbara, Shiregreen HFSV Group

Here Barbara describes how fire engines use the main road. Whilst it is almost certain they do not always ‘race’, this is not Barbara’s perception, and even though she was broadly sympathetic to the fire service, in this instance she is less flattering. This also reflects a neighbourhood rumour I had repeated to me a number of times, that fire fighters from the nearby stations use the estates to practise driving at speed. Whilst this is not true, fire fighters need to be sensitive to these type of perceptions in order not to further alienate generally sympathetic residents.

> *I can’t think when I last saw one. I mean you hear them. You hear lots of sirens*
>
> Victoria, Pilot Group

Victoria reflects this idea, but with sirens, repeating the idea of the intrusion, that even though sirens are intended for warning traffic that they are approaching, this intrusion extends into people’s homes, repeatedly.

*I hate it when you're driving along and a fire engine comes up behind you, flashing the lights and you like crash. You don't know what to do. You let go of the steering wheel 'here, you have it'. I hate it.*

Leanne, Shiregreen

In this third quote, Leanne describes the stress she feels when seeing a fire engine whilst driving. Although a relatively young driver, this level of panic and anxiety about an encroaching emergency vehicle is not uncommon, and by saying 'here, you have it', she is clearly indicating that she feels a high level of intrusion from the fire service, who are interfering with how she is driving and her ability to drive unencumbered.

## The size and physicality of fire fighters

Another area which came up repeatedly in the focus groups was with regard to the physicality of fire fighters. As discussed elsewhere, there is a prevailing stereotype of the 'sexy fireman', reinforced through any number of cultural media. This was no less the case in the focus groups, with a number of (mostly female) participants making some quite saucy comments about fire fighters. Further, as I shall discuss, this was not confined to younger women, although it did take a slightly different tone amongst older women, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Men too were not immune from the physicality of fire fighters, commenting on their size and physical prowess.

In the focus group discussions, one of the first things people tended to say about fire fighters was that they were good looking, and this even played a part in recruiting participants. Even though participants were aware that I was female and a student, some of them seemed to come along in the hope of seeing a fireman, or even that the *frisson* of talking about them might prove excitement enough. One group I tried to recruit from refused point blank to attend when they found out that there would be no fire fighters present and at another community centre, a postman expressed great disappointment that the 'men in uniform' adage did not apply to him.

*Amy: They're fit*

*Georgie: I mean they're like real life superman and things*

Georgie and Amy, Pilot Group

These quotes from one of the pilot groups are characteristic of the type of comments that came when the idea of the fire service was introduced. Again, none of the participants considered the role of non operational fire fighters, seeing rather the stereotypical image of a young, physically fit, male fire fighter. To an extent, this served as a second ice breaker in the groups: participants had warmed up to speaking about their neighbourhoods, but the change of subject away from the neighbourhood that they knew to the fire service, of which they were likely to be less well informed, was a moment of potential tension. In many of the groups, the participants took this into their own hands by discussing a 'safe' topic, such as the physicality of fire fighters.

> *I saw the Australian looking, bronzed, blond hunk walk in to my neighbours, and I thought 'I've made a mistake here' and I said to my husband 'I've just seen the fire fighter, let's get him in here'. But it was too late. They went to my neighbours. I think I should just stop talking now.*
>
> Lousie, Pilot Group

This quote from Louise extends a number of these themes, although, unusually, it is made in response to an actual fire fighter she has seen, and not her stereotype of one. By commenting on his physical appearance to her husband, she is demonstrating that fire fighters' physicality is very much in the public domain, to be commented on and appraised safely from afar, however, by repeating this conversation in the focus group, she feels that something of a transgression has occurred, and that she should 'just stop talking'. As such, there is a tension here between what is regarded as a 'safe' topic for discussion, and with going a little too far in one's appreciation of it.

> *Sam: Lovely firemen*
> *Annie: Sexy firemen*
> *Al: They don't do much for me… but you never know, they've got firewomen too now, haven't they*
>
> Sam, Annie and Al, Hilton HFSV Group

The Hilton group extend these themes again. Sam and Annie, both mothers of young children and in their twenties or thirties talk about 'lovely' and 'sexy' fire*men* as the topic is introduced. Again, this is greeted with laughter, particularly when Al, a

gentleman of advanced years, says ‘they don’t do much for me’. However, as the laughter died down, he turns his attention to female fire fighters as a potential object of attraction. This is not met with laughter, and the conversation was not pursued. Female fire fighters are a relatively recent addition to the fire service, and have not yet carved out (or had carved out for them) a comparable niche to the ‘sexy fireman’. Further, although female fire fighters do appear in a number of sexualised formats, this tends to be at the more explicit end of the spectrum, for example pornography or strippers, rather than slightly *outré* calendars and children’s dressing up costumes. As such, female fire fighters just do not hold the same position in the public’s imagination. This can be seen to signify a lack of acceptance into the ‘man’s world’ of fire fighting, both by the public, who have fixed views, as discussed elsewhere, of what it means to be a fire fighter, and within the fire service, many of whom are still trying to preserve a culture of machismo implicit in the fighting of fire.

Whilst younger women were happy to describe fire fighters as ‘sexy’, older women had a slightly different way of approaching the subject, which can only really be described as old-fashioned sauciness:

> *I was told to take my keys upstairs and wave out of the bedroom window… that’s if there’s a fire, not just for anyone, to invite the firemen in (laughter)*
>
> Dorothy, Hilton HFSV Group

Dorothy laughs at the idea of waving her keys out of the window, and of the chance of ‘inviting the firemen in’, although, as with Louise she is clear that this line of talk is reserved for the fire fighters, ‘not just for anyone’. Further, she was fairly clear that the fire fighters need not actually be attending a fire in her own home, and that that was what she would do if she saw them passing. Other older women made lots of references to being rescued in their nighties, to great general hilarity. This reinforces the idea of fire fighters being a ‘safe’ avenue for women to express their sexuality towards. Their prowess is very much in the public domain and this allows women who perhaps would not normally speak this way, to openly discuss fire fighters as public property. This reinforces the image and stereotype of fire fighters, and also of older women’s sexuality, at a time when they are, apparently, trying to move away from this image. This also presents a challenge to men in their communities who may not exhibit – or feel that they have many legitimate avenues to exhibit – much in the way of manly prowess (Campbell 1993).

## Fire fighters as authority figures

Whilst a number of female participants were keen to discuss fire fighters in terms of their physicality, male participants, particularly younger ones, often spoke of fire fighters in terms of authority. A bridging factor in this was descriptions of fire fighters' size, with a number of male participants referring to 'big lads' or the actual height of a particular staff member they had encountered. Fire fighters I have had contact with are not universally massive, but rather more normal – if fit and strong. That male participants regarded them as large is a reflection of their imposing physical presence, made possible, in part with their association with authority.

> *I suppose they represent authority. If you want to attack something, and they're the only ones there. But if there's a choice between the fireman and the policeman I'd probably go for the policeman*
>
> Peter, Pilot Group

Peter uses their authoritarian status as an opportunity to explore why people might attack or abuse a fire fighter. Although seemingly law abiding, he can see why people might want to attack a police officer, and extends this to the fire service, however, it would seem that this level of hostility is not extended to the fire service per se, rather it is just directed at them as representative of authority in an area where there are few other indicators of such. Further, there is an assumption that authority figures are viewed negatively:

> *Teenagers, they just don't like any kind of authority.*
>
> Alan, Upperfield Group

For Alan, this explains why groups might be hostile to fire fighters: fire fighters represent authority, and teenagers have an antipathy to authority, therefore teenagers, especially those in groups, are hostile to fire fighters, again, not necessarily because they are fire fighters, but rather in relation to their authority status.

## *Association with health and safety*

In this section, I will explore another range of minor grievances directed towards the fire service, mostly by people who, as with speed and sirens, would have thought they were broadly sympathetic towards the fire service. A number of participants referred to ‘health and safety’ almost as short hand for the type of mean spirited health and safety concerns associated with preventing children from playing conkers, rather than the more reasonable gains in health and safety in relation to, say, industrial accidents. This is largely intended to cover where residents and participants feel that they have been legitimately engaged in some activity which the fire service subsequently declare *verboten*. In this sense, participants felt that the fire service over reacted and interfered with what they were rightfully doing. This also extends to the attitude of the fire service towards hostile groups, and in this instance is linked to political correctness. A further strand in this theme relates to participants feeling that the fire service go too far in the advice that they give and that people have a right to be in control of the safety of their own home.

### Interfering fire fighters

Many participants felt that the fire service had more or less legitimate claims to tackle fires, and many participants were particularly concerned that fire fighters could come and put out a bonfire on private land.

> *Ed: What? They put out bonfires?*
> *Moderator: They can do*
> *Ed: and they’d just come and do it? They wouldn’t ask?*
>
> Ed, Pilot Group

Ed in particular was horrified at the prospect, even when it was explained that in such an (imaginary) scenario, the bonfire might be causing aggravation to neighbours. For many participants, the ‘right’ to have a bonfire on private land harked back to a more innocent time, where having a bonfire was seen as emblematic of an idyllic country childhood. In this respect, the fire service is seen to be clearly interfering. Although in practice, the fire service would likely engage the householder in dialogue whilst deciding what to do about a bonfire, Ed is concerned that ‘they’d just come and do it’, interfere with his activity, and by imputation, insult his manhood (Bachelard 1964). In this instance, there are a number of quite

primordial claims to masculinity involving the right to fire, its control and its ownership. Female participants, it should be noted, tended not to worry too much about fire fighters putting out their fires.

> *It's all a bit health and safety, and people don't like safety*
>
> Bryan, Pilot Group

Bryan sums up this sentiment, explaining why people might be agitated by the fire service involving themselves in their lives. This highlights a core tension for the fire service 'people don't like safety'. Although no one wants to have an accident, or see their family have one, they also don't like to be told what to do on the grounds of safety, where fire fighters can potentially be seen to be interfering.

This distrust of health and safety extends to the actions of the fire service themselves, who are seen as being somewhat beholden to 'health and safety' in their operation, and – worse – caught up with political correctness.

> *And why they would attack them. I mean that disgusts me, when they go to a place, and I can't understand, or you can't say because of all this PC racket, why one of the pumps couldn't just turn on them and wash them down the street.*
>
> Morris, Upperfield

Like Morris, a number of participants thought that health and safety had gone too far when it extended to stopping the fire service turning their hoses on people attacking them. Although this would compromise them in a number of ways, and make future community relations particularly difficult, this was seen, to an extent, as emasculating the fire service. The PC reference reiterates some of the underlying racism that emerged in this group, and in others, reinforcing the idea of the impermeability of communities, and the closedness of a number of these neighbourhoods to (perceived) outsiders and newcomers.

## Easy targets

Another group who expressed concerns about the fire service were those who had come into contact with them through, for example, through HFSVs.

*So I had three fire fighters in my house, early one evening in their aertex shirts. They fitted new smoke alarms in my house, they made sure they were working properly, then they gave me a mini lecture on fire safety. And by the time they left, I was absolutely shitting myself because I thought everything was about to burst into flames. Now I have to sleep with my phone in my bed in case I need to phone them during the night.*

Claire, Pilot Group

Claire felt that the level of message she received from the fire service was disproportionate. As a conscientious parent and non smoker, she felt that her home was not all that unsafe, and that the fire fighters had gone somewhat over the top in the strength of their message, and that this level of scaremongering might be more appropriate for a higher risk audience, an issue which is discussed at greater length in the next chapter. Further, this was seen as something of a waste of resources, as if the fire service were preferring to deal with precautious householders, rather than reaching out to more vulnerable client groups. This was seen as having the potential to alienate more responsible householders, who might feel that there is no point getting in contact with the fire service if they would only criticise them. Further, and as with other issues mentioned above, this is also a highly intrusive approach, so that even the responsible, proactive householder is left feeling dissatisfied.

## Doing their job

A number of participants also had quite fixed ideas about what the fire service should be doing with their time, and this tended to be responding to emergencies. Participants in some instances were concerned that local stations were stopping being crewed twenty-four hourly, rather moving to shift patterns which reflect need, and allowing for the fact that other, neighbouring stations would provide cover if need be. Although this had not actually occurred, there was a degree of outrage that it could even be a possibility. However, this was countered by the old stereotype of fire fighters hanging around the fire station playing pool for the majority of their day.

*Their job is to do fires and that, and all this is extra stuff. To me, they're doing it on top of their job. And they shouldn't have to do that.*

Nigel, Upperfield HFSV Group

For Nigel, the fire fighters' job is to deal with fires and emergencies, and that anything else they do is an optional extra. This is a very literal view of the fire service, where, even at one of the busier stations in Bristol, it is not unusual to have a whole shift with no emergencies (and not unheard of to have a whole tour without one).

If fire fighters are solely employed to fight fires, and fires do not occur with such great regularity, this then feeds further into the old stereotype of the fire fighter.

> *If they were out at a fete or something, they'd have to get away from there to get back to their real job… they always had a bad image of smoking cigarettes and playing snooker all day, which I'm sure isn't all that true.*
>
> Sid, Hilton HFSV Group

As Sid says, there is an image of the fire station akin to a working men's club, rather than a place of work (Myers 2005, Yarnal, Dowler et al. 2004), although for this participant, the 'real job' is still the fire fighting (Childs, Morris et al. 2004), rather than any community engagement work. He is willing to give the fire fighters the benefit of the doubt that the stereotype is not *all* true, but clearly, at some level, he feels there is truth in it.

## *Discussion*

In this section, I will discuss these findings further, particularly reflecting upon how they answer the research questions. The overarching aim of this programme of research, as stated above and elsewhere, is to examine the relationship between the fire service and the communities in which they work, focussing particularly on the roots of perceived hostility, how social identity approaches can be used to consider these problems and whether existing engagement mechanisms are effective. I will address each of these issues in turn, considering them in the light of the themes outlined above. However, it must be remembered that the questions and themes are linked, and, as such, one theme could come within the remit of numerous different questions.

The context in which these focus groups occurred is of particular relevance for the relationship between fire fighters and residents. Residents in many poorer neighbourhoods, such as those discussed here, typically have little control over a number of aspects of their lives, including where they live, and the services which that area is equipped with. Further, these areas are likely to be subject to a range of stereotypes, many of which are negative, and which are transferred to residents. Residents of more deprived neighbourhoods, especially where they are council tenants, or a 'vulnerable group' (parents of young children, members of BME communities, elderly etc) were already subjected to a number of interventions, some more welcome than others, from a range of different agencies. In this light, the fire service, especially where they are intervening increasingly in the community, risk becoming labelled as just another agency intent on doing things at or to residents rather than with them or on their behalf. This leads to a degree of hostility towards all external agencies, coupled with a suspicion of outsiders in general. Where external agencies are seen as outsiders, this is compounded.

Further, and as with previous research on policing (Bradford, Jackson et al. 2008), the fire service face increasing criticism even from law abiding residents as they find they cannot cater to all the whims of the community. For instance, where some residents are likely to complain that fire fighters drive too fast, other residents worry that they are not getting to emergencies in time. Further, the more work they do in the community, the more likely they are to be seen as interfering and labelled alongside agencies such as the police, who are treated with historical enmity. This paradox is at the heart of how the fire service need to learn to engage with communities, and will be discussed in greater detail in the concluding chapter.

Other factors which influence the relationship between the fire service include the physicality of fire fighters themselves. As such, they are viewed as 'heroes' and 'sexy firemen' by female residents, which, understandably, puts a number of male residents somewhat on the defensive. Further, this is inextricably linked to stereotypical views of what fire fighting is about, and as such, to emergency response rather than to community intervention. The view that residents hold of fire fighters is also linked to how they view themselves within their community, and this is greatly dependent both on how they see their community (and how they judge others) but also at what stage of their life they are at. Neighbourhoods and the fire service are not static entities, and residents engage with them in different ways at different times, including in differing day to day circumstances.

Whilst much of this discussion of the relationship between residents and the fire service starts to address the roots of hostility, for example through the culture of communities which is suspicious of outsiders, there are a number of more specific attributes which exacerbate the situation. As discussed above, residents are often suspicious of outsiders, including outside agencies, and as such, the fire service are immediately also the objects of suspicion. This cycle deteriorates as fire fighters become more involved in community work and are seen as adjuncts of other, interfering, services. This is particularly likely to be the case where residents are either unaware of their community roles, or think that they should not be engaged in this way.

As discussed above, the sexualised view of fire fighters by a number of female participants in the focus groups sets the scene for male residents, already alienated in a number of ways (Campbell 1993, Nayak 2006), to be far from welcoming to fire fighters. This is perpetuated by the view of many participants that fire fighters are representative of authority, whether in symbolic function or physical role, for example putting out bonfires. This sense of intrusion does not just extend to those on the fringes of society, but to many residents aggrieved by constant sirens and the like. Problems such as these are seen as endemic in these neighbourhoods, even, perhaps particularly, by those who otherwise are happy there.

This idea of competing images of neighbourhood feeds particularly into the use of social identity approaches in this area. There was a degree of contention (as would be expected) over what constitutes a good neighbourhood, and what makes good neighbours. Whilst it was deemed acceptable that this was hammered out by residents, it was a different matter when ‘outsiders’ attempted to impose their own views. This was as true for me as for representatives of other agencies, including the fire service, although it did not prevent participants from passing judgement on my own neighbourhood. Elements from social identity approaches were apparent in any number of discussions within the focus groups. For example, participants spoke animatedly about minute distinctions and differentiations in locality, resulting in a complicated and interlocking series of microgeographies, both of their neighbourhoods and others. This was not accepted passively, with delineation of neighbourhood being played with in quite a sophisticated manner, dependent on the circumstances and need. As such, neighbourhood linked implicitly to self esteem and self representation, but again, neither passively, nor straightforwardly. There

was also a strong level of judgement about the ‘sort of people’ who experience emergencies, and how they are different to other householders.

In terms of the engagement mechanisms the fire service already use, these were viewed in a variety of ways, suggesting at best, patchy effectiveness. Many participants only associated the fire service with emergency responses, and further, some felt that they ought not to be doing anything else. A lack of visibility in the community was cited as a particular problem, but again, this is not straightforward, as the more contact people have with any service, the more opportunities they have for disgruntlement.

In this chapter, I have presented the analysis of data collected through my focus group study in a number of communities in Bristol. This builds on the work presented in the previous chapter where I examined how fire fighters create and maintain their identity and how they distinguish themselves from the communities they serve. In the following chapter, I will present data from the final study, during which I looked at the interaction between fire fighters and residents in a community and a household context.

# Chapter Seven: Observing Interactions

## *Introduction*

As discussed previously, Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS) have a wide ranging remit, summarised in their ‘mission’ of prevention, protection and response. Over recent years, there has been a shift in emphasis so that the majority of their work is now concerned with prevention and protection, however the public has an expectation that their sole purpose is concerned with ‘response’, creating a tension for them in the delivery of their services. Previously, I have looked at the way the fire service view working in the community, in Chapter Five, and how residents view members of the fire service that they encounter within their own communities in Chapter Six. In this, the third study chapter, and building on social identity approaches (Turner, Reynolds 2004), I look at what happens when the two groups come together. This study represents the logical extension and conclusion of the work conducted in the first two studies by viewing the relationship between fire fighters and residents itself, in a range of community settings. As discussed above, the fire service meets with residents in a number of settings, both public and private, most notably through home fire safety visits (HFSVs) and attendance at community events.

In this chapter, I will start by revisiting some of the community safety interventions that AFRS conduct, In this chapter, I have chosen to present a more narrative description of events, with the use of vignettes (Denzin 2000, Miles, Huberman 1999), which allow for a greater engagement with the events themselves. Vignettes necessarily produce an abstracted account (Erikson 1986) and for this reason, multiple vignettes are presented, with an accompanying commentary. In addition to the vignette in the Preface, I will present three vignettes from different community interventions: one from a HFSV following an emergency attendance; one from a community event; and, one from a series of HFSVs. This is followed by corresponding analysis of the vignettes before a concluding section of this chapter.

I used this study to build on data collated in the two previous studies and the methodology for this study is discussed in some detail in Chapter Four. In the first study, I spent time in fire service locations observing fire fighters and other fire

service personnel acting within their group and interacting with the public. In the second study, I used focus groups to examine how residents viewed their neighbourhoods, and the ways in which this informed their identities, before moving on to question participants about their perceptions of and relationships with the fire service. Although both of these studies produced invaluable data about both fire fighters and residents in different Bristol neighbourhoods, they could only partially answer questions about the relationship between these two groups. In this third and final study, I wanted to test some of the findings that had arisen previously, and examine, in greater detail, the relationship, working from some of the presuppositions of social identity approaches (Tajfel, Turner 2003 (1979), Abrams, Hogg 1999), as discussed in more detail in the first of the literature review chapters. This was achieved by both observing new interactions, and by revisiting my fieldnotes from earlier work to reconstruct experiences.

As with many public services, the fire service have moved from a response to a preventive role over recent years (Matheson, Manning, Williams, 2011) with an increasing emphasis on community and social interventions to prevent fire. In part, this has been in line with, for example, health promotion or crime prevention type initiatives, but has also been encouraged by a change in the funding mechanisms for fire services, who are no longer paid according to the number of house fires attended (a regime which clearly disincentivised preventive working). At a household level, the primary method of engagement is the home fire safety visit (HFSV), where fire fighters come to the house, fit (or test) smoke alarms and go through a range of safety literature with the householder. However, the fire service do not limit their interventions to those in the home. Raising the profile of the service, and disseminating fire safety messages to the general public is also a key concern, and is achieved in a number of (more or less successful) ways. Attendance at community events, from a Halloween party at a community centre to staffing a stand at big regional events such as the Harbour Festival, allows fire fighters to be seen by and to speak with a wide cross section of the public.

## *Delivering targeted interventions*

For a number of years, fire services have tailored messages to particular sectors of the community (for example smokers), but in recent years, this has become more

sophisticated. As with risks for other social problems (for example, ill health or crime), risk is concentrated in certain, poorer, geographical areas (Smith, Lepine et al. 2007), and amongst poorer sections of the public. Further, there are two separate risk factors at play: causing a fire (either deliberately or accidentally) and being a victim of a fire. There are strong socio-demographic links to risk of fire (Smith, Wright et al. 2007), and again, these are closely correlated to measures of poverty. Smith et al find that those most likely to be victims of fire include those experiencing deprivation, single people/single parents, those experiencing mental or physical impairment, those using smoking materials carelessly and heavy drinkers. It is not unreasonable to suppose that these last four groups are also concentrated within people experiencing deprivation, and so, as other research demonstrates, there is a close correlation between poverty and the risk of fire (Arson Control Forum 2004). There are a number of reasons for this which are both social (for example smoking and drinking) and structural (poorer housing stock, overcrowding) resulting in a pressing case for the delivery of strong fire safety messages in poorer communities. Further, geodemographic tools, such as those used by the police, can assist the fire service in delivering the right messages in the right areas (Williamson, Ashby et al. 2006), ensuring that poverty may be addressed as a risk factor in fire prevention.

Recent government research (Communities and Local Government 2008, Mackenzie, Bannister et al. 2010) has extended these arguments, suggesting that perception of risk also has an impact on risk behaviours. This suggests that there are groups, such as ‘conscientious’ smokers, who are ignoring fire safety messages, and who could be encouraged to do more. Fire safety messages and interventions are therefore targeted specifically at some groups more than others, depending on both the level of risk and the perceived level of permeability of those social groups to safety messages. At some levels, there may be a degree of resistance within the fire service to focussing resources on groups that are seen as less permeable, to an extent due to issues of finite resourcing but also to supposed ‘deservingness’ of client groups, for instance heavy drinkers or drug users, who tend not to be viewed with great sympathy by fire fighters (Murray, Lister et al. 1996).

Considerable work has been conducted in a number of fields relating to concentrations of poverty in particular geographic areas, and the way in which this

self perpetuates (Sibley 1999, Young 1999, Levitas 2006), and many agencies now target work accordingly (Williamson, Ashby et al. 2006, Wallace 2001). However, the fire service have been slow to come to this type of analysis, instead focussing on their target groups, especially members of BME communities, single parents, the elderly and the disabled. Using a more geographical approach could potentially focus their resources where other agencies are, achieving economies of scale and fitting in with neighbourhood based approaches gaining currency in social policy debates (Smith, Lepine et al. 2007). However, there are ongoing tensions in delivering interventions in these areas, both in relation to the fire service, and from a generalised 'intervention fatigue' common to a lot of hard pressed neighbourhoods.

Further risk factors relate to fire related ASB. This includes behaviours such as fire setting, hoax calls and anti social use of fireworks. This behaviour is typically concentrated amongst young people and is responded to somewhat differently to other fire safety messages, with more youth engagement type work which attempts to establish relationships and rapport with young people, whilst also disseminating fire safety messages related to these behaviours.

In this section, I have looked briefly at risks for fires which the fire service hope to address through their interventions. These risk factors are likely to apply across the UK, and indeed beyond, although the exact pattern of risk concentration will differ according to local factors. In the next section, I will look at some of the interventions to address these risk factors put in place by AFRS across the Avon area.

## *Community fire safety interventions*

In this section, I will summarise some of the contacts with the public that AFRS have, information gathered during research for the previous studies. A full list of these is at Appendix 6. Although these are broadly motivated by community fire safety concerns, some other more general activities are also covered as these still present an opportunity for generic brand advancement and for community safety messages to be reinforced, as well as perhaps having a public reassurance function. These interventions are unique to Avon, although most fire services will conduct similar interventions, such as HFSVs and schools work. However, most fire

services tend to develop local messages, sometimes even at a station level. Further, whilst there is some strategic direction in terms of flagship interventions, a number of fire fighters also pursue local or personal interests in the development of interventions. As such, there is no comprehensive ‘catalogue’ of local interventions, and delivery changes as personnel move around, needs change or resources are withdrawn. The following descriptions aim to give a general feel for the type of interventions performed in Avon (but particularly urban Bristol) during the period in which I undertook the fieldwork, but are unlikely to capture community fire safety work in its entirety, and are possibly somewhat outdated by the time of writing – especially owing to the change of government and associated public sector cuts.

There are a number of ways of categorising fire service community fire safety interventions. As with generic community safety work, these could be categorised as targeted or universal (Crawford 2007). Universal work applies to every one, and includes, for example information about fire safety included in council newsletters which are sent to every house within the local authority area. Targeted work is applied to certain groups who are deemed to be at higher risk (for example children, the elderly and smokers) than the general population. In these instances, messages are tailored to be appropriate to that risk community and directly address the identified risk. Materials are also provided in a number of community languages, and a wide range of universal materials are also provided at fire stations and community fire safety centres for the public to select from.

Targeted work further divides into two categories, covering behavioural or demographic factors. The former would include smokers, people who use candles or incense and heavy drinkers/drug users, whilst the latter would include the elderly, single people/parents, families with young children and people with disabilities. There is every possibility that an individual or household could fall into any number of these categories, and some interventions, including the HFSV, are designed so that they can be tailored to the household’s requirements. However, it is perhaps easier to change an individual’s behaviour than their demographic status, and so messages targeted at this latter group are more about risk awareness and mitigation than overall societal change.

Interventions can be framed in terms of an escalation process, starting from work which does not have an explicit engagement focus, ranging through different levels of intervention to some quite intensive work with challenging young people, and often relating to specific social policy initiatives: brand advancement; pre-engagement; cleaner, safer, greener (CSG); community fire safety; and, ASB prevention. Again, a specific intervention may fall into a number of categories, or a fire crew might take advantage of a situation to engage in a number of activities at once. In the following section, I will elaborate on these five categories, explaining the category heading and giving a generic example. Further, a number of these activities are controversial in their own right, and for a number of reasons – for example AFRS's branded hot air balloon (Bristol Evening Post 2009). The full list is contained in Appendix 6.

Brand advancement work covers work which AFRS undertake to promote their brand and corporate image. Whilst this work might not have an overtly engagement focus, it ensures that their brand is seen frequently and is associated with positive messages. This ensures positive associations and recognition for people when they meet the service in other contexts. Charity car washes held at stations are an example of brand advancement work.

Pre-engagement work actively raises awareness of AFRS work and fire safety messages, but in a very arms length way. It aims to get fire safety messages into the public domain, but without being too strident about it. People can take or leave these types of messages, but, as with brand advancement work, they are intended to contribute to the overall good standing of the service. This type of work might include the fire service's hot air balloon or attending regional events.

Cleaner safer greener work emerged under the 'liveability' agenda in local government, following the granting of local authorities' duty to ensure well being (Downe, Martin 2006). It is premised on the idea of linking local environmental issues (for instance waste disposal and street cleansing), low level community safety and wider environmental work such as parks and green spaces to improve neighbourhoods for residents. Fire service work fits in with a number of these

issues. For example, fly tipped waste is a frequent target for fire setters and unsecured cars that are taken for joy riding are often then set alight – a powerful symbol of urban degradation. AFRS have been involved in CSG work through, for example, their vehicle arson campaigns.

Community fire safety is the largest of these categories, and incorporates a range of service wide activities with a significant resource attachment. These interventions still cover different groups and different degrees of engagement, but are single-mindedly community fire safety focussed and explicit in their aims. This work includes home fire safety visits (HFSVs) which are discussed in more detail at the end of this section.

Anti social behaviour (ASB) interventions are motivated by the increasing awareness in the fire service that the young people who are problematic to other agencies are likely to be problematic to them too, and, inevitably, the fire servcie are particularly interested in fire related ASBs, including hoax calls, fire setting, vehicle arson and firework misuse. Further, fire fighters can also be the victims of ASB, with verbal abuse and assaults on appliances and personnel common occurrences. Engaging with young people thus serves a number of purposes. Early interventions with younger children may help prevent later involvement in fire related ASB. Engagement work with older children might limit their involvement in fire setting, thus reducing the number of call outs fire fighters attend. Relationship building, such as through schools visits, aims to reduce attacks on staff, as well as promoting good fire safety behaviour. At the ‘harder’ end, interventions are also made with young people already engaged in fire setting behaviour at a range of levels including through the Youth Development Centre.

## Home fire safety visits

Home fire safety visits (HFSVs) are one of the principle mechanisms the fire service has for engaging with the community. Working from a preventive premise, popularised in health and community safety since the nineties, HFSVs enable the fire service to go into people’s homes, fit smoke alarms and deliver general fire safety messages.

Funding was provided for HFSVs from central government until 2008, but has since been mainstreamed into FRS core spending. Despite this, the vast majority of FRS will continue to provide them as they are seen as being an effective community intervention and are credited with the reductions in fire deaths over recent years. As with much in the fire service, there is no standard way of delivering HFSVs, with different services taking different approaches. Some services take a non-intervention approach, with applicants filling in a form online or over the telephone and then receiving a smoke alarm through the post. Other fire services work in partnership with other local providers to perform a complete 'safety check' encompassing slips, trips and falls and other home hazards tailored accordingly to young families, older people or other at risk groups.

The approach taken by AFRS falls somewhere between these two extremes. Applicants can fill in a form online or over the phone, or with personnel at events. These are collated centrally and then handed back to the applicant's local station. A crew is then allocated the applicant and will arrange with them when to visit. Different stations take different approaches to this. Some stations bring an off duty crew in for overtime one Saturday a month, and get them to do as many as possible in one day. Other crews try to incorporate them into regular work time, although this means that they have to come as an entire crew (four or five people) in operational uniform, and in a fire appliance, and if an emergency comes in, they have to leave the scene swiftly to respond, an issue which is discussed in more detail in the Chapter Six.

In completing the initial questions on application, a risk rating is generated, determining the risk status of the applicant. This should suggest that higher priority is given to higher risk households, but in reality, this is unlikely to be the case except in very specific circumstances (such as with disability), and although Avon have conducted many thousands of HFSVs to date, there is a considerable backlog of applications with some people waiting a number of months between requesting and receiving a HFSV. In 2008/9, the target for HFSVs was 16,666, with over 18,000 eventually completed (AFRS 2010).

The format of the HFSV is broadly the same despite station differences as there is a standard check list. This contains a range of fire safety information at the start and a check list at the end which the crew complete whilst undertaking the visit. This highlights various risk areas and includes sections for specific advice to be given. Applicants are left with this after the visit. HFSVs are 'advertised' to an extent as being 'something for nothing' with many applicants just expecting a crew to turn up , fit a smoke alarm and leave again. However, the pro forma asks a number of quite personal questions, and does require a degree of commitment from the applicant, which, as demonstrated in the preface, is not always forthcoming.

The HFSV covers the following areas:

- Candles and incense
- Smoking
- Using a chip pan
- Plug sockets
- Electric blankets
- Open fires
- Bedtime routine (this includes closing doors, making sure appliances are off, candles out etc)

Smoke alarms are then checked where they exist or fitted where they do not, fire plans discussed and the applicant informed about what to do if trapped by fire. HFSVs are of particular importance to this research project as they are one of the primary mechanisms through which AFRS engage with the public. Further, and as discussed in the Methodology and Study 2, the HFSV process allowed me to recruit participants who had had guaranteed contact with the fire service.

## *Vignettes*

In this section, I will present the vignettes I am using to illustrate a range of fire service engagement with the public. This is based on my fieldnotes, started at the event in question, and written up later. The cases represent a series of different

engagement types, and were observed over the course of my fieldwork both with the fire service and in the communities that they serve. They are presented in chronological order in order to maintain some degree of autobiographical linearity (Coffey 1999) and to prevent premature analysis of the themes by grouping them differently. The four vignettes I have chosen relate to a scheduled HFSV in Shiregreen (2008) (presented as the Preface); an opportunistic HFSV following an emergency call to Wootton (2008); the Upperfield Community Festival, (Summer 2009); and, conducting HFSVs in Warwick Lane (October 2009). There is more information about writing vignettes in the methodology chapter.

Analysis of the vignettes is presented in the following section.

### Emergency call in Wootton

*It's Halloween, and I'm interviewing fire fighters at the station. It's early in the night shift, before you would usually expect incidents to be happening, but that's what happens at Halloween. The bells go down and the crew spring into action, asking if I want to come along. Of course I do! It's cold, but dry, and there are a lot of people out on the streets, mostly young children in fancy dress going trick or treating accompanied by adults.*

*We pull up in Wootton, at a council house divided into two flats. The council have boarded up the windows of the downstairs flat to only near the top, leaving a gap too small to crawl through, but big enough to smash the window. Needless to say, this is exactly what has happened, and a firework has been thrown in.*

*The road is wide, with semi detached houses arranged in fours, with front gardens and sheds or garages in between. Even in the dark, the effect is quite spacious, but the planning is very clearly 1930s council estate type. This is my first visit to Wootton, but its reputation precedes it and I am interested to see if it lives up to the bad press it gets. The flat*

*we have been called to is the ground floor of one of the semis. There are bags of rubbish in the grass outside and the other windows are smashed above their screens too. I think how short sighted it is of the council to board it up like this, how contemptuous it is. The windows are practically guaranteed to get smashed, rain will get in, perhaps leaves and other detritus. What kind of a state will it be in for whoever is rented it next? Why isn't it inhabited now?*

*The resident from the flat above has called the fire service. She is waiting outside, smoking, and is clearly agitated. From her appearance and general demeanour, it does not seem unreasonable to assume she is a drug user, and fairly chaotic. The fire work has not gone off, although there is some smoke from where it has burnt itself out, and the fire fighters use a small ladder to look through the gap over the board to see if there is any fire to attend to. They talk about how hard it will be to get in if they need to, and again, I think about the extraordinary lack of regard by whoever boarded the windows up like this.*

*There is quite a lot of action going on on the street, with lots of foot traffic passing by, mostly for trick or treating, but a few people who have come out to see what's going on. Mostly they stand in little groups on the other side of the road. Mostly they are women. It's too dark to see how old they are or really what they look like, but most give the impression of having just left the house for a moment: lots are smoking, few are wearing jackets (although it's cold), some have mugs. Occasionally one will shout over to see what's going on. The resident reports that some (expletive) has thrown a fire work in downstairs. No one seems all that surprised by this, no one really condemns it, no one has seen anything, no one asks the fire service what's going on, although they look on, impassively, at the spectacle. A group of lads passes by. They are quite loud, and I am anxious about whether there will be a confrontation, but they pass by without comment. No one else seems to even notice them.*

*While the crew deal with the firework, I ask the resident if she likes living in Wootton. She says she doesn't, and would rather live in Upperfield. I am surprised by this, as it is a fairly comparable area, with an equally poor reputation. I ask why Upperfield, and she says so she can visit her brother's grave more often. It seems like a terribly sad reason to want to move.*

*When the crew are satisfied that there is no risk to the property or to the upstairs flat, they ask the resident if she has a smoke alarm. She doesn't know, doesn't really know what they mean, but is keen to have one, so they collect their HFSV kit together, and go in. I am invited in too, and although some of the crew stay outside to put the other kit away, I go through the door. The front door for the upstairs flat is at the side of the property, presumably where the back door would be for a whole house. It leads straight onto steep stairs, going up to the first floor. There are clothes strewn across the floor and wedged into the corners. Some of them look like they've been there for quite a long time. Immediately at the top of the stairs, with the door open, is the bathroom. There is no seat on the lavatory, and there are clothes on the floor here too. Half way up the stairs is a large piece of excrement. There is no sign of a dog. I am third in, and don't even get to the top of the stairs. The front fire fighter sees a smoke detector, and tests it. It works fine and we turn round to leave. One of the fire fighters treads in the excrement. He is not best pleased and hoses his boot off outside from the appliance. He confirms that it is not dog. We do not attempt to give fire safety information, but I think that one of the crew has suggested the resident contact the police if she has any more trouble. I am not convinced that she is likely to do this.*

*I wonder how one would begin to give fire safety advice in this situation, whether or not you should try, what level you should try at, what behaviour to tackle first. Crews don't often get access to this type of property, to so chaotic a resident (nor I presume do many services), but drug and alcohol users are key target audiences for fire safety messages. In this situation, the fire service were called to an incident,*

*not to deliver a HFSV, and they did succeed in dealing with that. At least her smoke alarm works, I think as we drive back to the station, but I wonder how else we could have helped her.*

## Upperfield community festival

*Upperfield's community festival takes place every summer, on a Saturday in July. It is a longstanding event, that takes place in the centre of the community with participants from a number of local organisations, including the schools, youth club and local churches. There are a number of stalls both advertising local services and allowing residents to have table top sales. There is a healthy eating display but the only food available is a burger van. The police, smoking cessation services and recycling branch of the city council all have a presence, giving out information and promotional material, such as pens to adults and Frisbees to the kids.*

*The festival takes place on the green which is nominally (or at least historically) the centre of the neighbourhood. On a normal day, the green is effectively a roundabout – despite being square – with roads on all four sides. On the westerly and easterly sides of the green are a number of churches, church buildings and an old people's home. To the north lie a number of terraced streets, with the sides of the buildings 'facing' onto the green. The church windows are covered with metal grills, and there are no windows on the ends of the terraces. The south side of the green is more open, with a shopping area opening out onto the southerly road. The buildings to the left and right (both discount supermarkets) also present blank brickwork to the green. The central section of the southern side is car parking for the shops. In addition to the supermarkets, there are two charity shops, a newsagents, a chain bakery, laundrette, greasy spoon, a large betting shop and a car spares shop. Two empty shops have been taken over by local charities. Other shops have their shutters down. It is hard to tell if this is because they are shut for the day (perhaps they are takeaways) or because they are shut for good.*

*The green has a path running north – south across the middle, but a number of informal paths mark out well used local shortcuts with muddy strips. There is a seating area in the south west corner, but it is a modern, wooden design which I have never previously seen anyone sitting on. On other occasions when I have been in Upperfield, I have walked across or around the green. It tends to be empty, except for residents crossing it on their way to or from the shops. Young people hanging around tend to be closer to the shops, where there are bollards to lean against and the kerb to sit on. There are often burnt patches of grass, and a lot of litter, which suggests more use than perhaps I am accustomed to seeing. Because there are lots of people here today, it is hard to see whether there are still burnt patches. There is some litter. There will certainly be more by the end of the day.*

*There is a reasonable turnout, with a number of families out together. However, most of the families have younger children. Teenagers are thin on the ground on the green, although there are plenty still by the shops. Although it is not very warm, and actually intermittently drizzly, lots of the lads have their shirts off and tucked into the back of their trousers. Lots of them are holding mountain bikes, invariably balanced on their back wheels with the front wheel pointing up. Every once in a while, a smaller group will hop on their bikes and go off somewhere. After a few minutes, they come back, drop their bikes and go back to their hanging about. The crowd is almost entirely white, and nearly everyone seems to be smoking. The smoking cessation service people have their work cut out for them.*

*There are two highlights to the festival: the parade and the youth club dance display. At this point, I have probably been at the festival for about an hour, with no sign of the fire service arriving. I have already walked around looking at all the stalls, and stocked up on free pens from the police. It must be said, most of the stall holders, especially from the*

*statutory agencies, look like they would rather be elsewhere. None are working particularly hard to tout their wares.*

*An announcement comes over the tannoy: 'if you come under the tree, you can get a free fruit kebab from someone trying to make Upperfield eat healthily'. They don't sound too convinced, and there is a noticeable lack of stampede.*

*Eventually the fire service arrive. They drive around the green a couple of times, looking for the best place to park up. By now, much of the grass is covered with groups – some families, some young people – sitting around and drinking cider. There are some pretty serious looking dogs. They park up almost opposite where I am sitting watching. Lots of people have moved out of their way for this. A few people have started to gather to look at them. They start moving again, making more people stand up out of their way. It looks like they're choosing a space that will be easier to drive away from in event of an emergency (although this does not appear to be being communicated), but the people who moved out of their way look annoyed, and the people who went to look have mostly dispersed. There is muttering.*

*Once the truck has come to a stop, four of the crew get out, with the driver staying in position. The back doors of the truck are opened, but the front ones remain shut. Two fire fighters stand at the front of the appliance, two at the rear, with the lockers open. Each of the pairs are chatting to each other. A small group of parents and children have gathered. I'm still keeping my distance – partly because I have a good vantage point, partly to avoid drawing attention to myself. Some of the kids are clambering in through one back door, and out through the other. A couple walk past me with their daughter. She looks about 6. Her mum says 'have you ever seen a fire engine?' She says no. Her mum says 'you wanna go and look'. She shakes her head. They wander off.*

*The small group around the engine is almost entirely mums and young kids, which is not that representative of the general make up of the crowd, many more of whom are male and/or teenage. By this time, the residents are chatting at the front of the engine, the crew are all together at the back. A group of teenagers walk through them, and they part to let them through. It is an aggressive gesture by the kids, and although the fire fighters do not rise to it, they do not attempt to ameliorate the situation or to engage with the boys in any way.*

*The dancing is announced by tannoy, and those members of the crowd who mean to amble over to the northwest corner. There are to be two performances – by a younger and an older group. The kids are probably under ten in the former, and over ten in the latter. They dance to a rap track. What they lack in coordination and timing, they make up for in the enthusiasm with which they perform their borderline sexually explicit moves. The audience whoops along merrily, and the finale, in which they all die in simulated gun fire is greeted as a triumph. For an area with notoriously high crime and teenage pregnancy, it seems particularly inappropriate. I feel very uncomfortable watching, although other spectators are videoing or photographing – often on high spec mobile phones. I feel very much of an outsider at this point, and worry that I will be run out of the neighbourhood for being a paediatrician, although clearly it is a public display and it would be presumptuous and somewhat patronising to assume that everyone at the festival know each other, and would recognise me as an outsider.*

*The announcement of the dancing draws the entire crowd away from the fire fighters. They remain, leaning against the engine, chatting. They are facing away from the crowd that is watching the dancing. There are still lots of groups of drinkers nearby, not interested in the dancing (or the fire engine), but each group studiously ignores the other.*

*By the time the dancing has finished, the fire engine has gone. If it went to an emergency, it went very quietly. The official attractions of the festival are now mainly over. The stalls are packing up and the information services leaving. The drinkers look well set for a long evening on the green. I take this as my cue to leave.*

## 'Warm calling' in Warwick Lane

*I report to station early in the shift, joining the crew for breakfast (most important) and briefing, and then following in my car to the site where we were conducting HFSVs. On previous occasions, I have gone in the appliance with the crew, but health and safety considerations relating to early pregnancy require me to adopt a different approach for this study.*

*The crew already know what they are meant to be doing, as they have done other tower blocks on previous tours and have already leafleted the tower block, in the Warwick Lane part of the city. The Watch Manager (WM) reflects this change of approach, saying that essentially they now use the smoke alarm as a 'way in', with the fire safety information being of more use. However, many of the crew feel that many residents are uninterested in the information, being keen rather to get something for nothing. One fire fighter reports knocking on a door in Shiregreen and offering a HFSV, which is declined. He follows up with the information that it will include a free smoke alarm. The resident replies 'oh, if it's free, I'll take half a dozen'. More than once, I am told that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink, and the fire fighters are quick to get into discussions of 'perilous' situations encountered on HFSVs. Mostly this relates to large dogs and over bleached or squalid houses, but one reports a large python. It would seem that even with HFSVs there is room for a little joking one-upmanship.*

*The tower block the crew are working in is immaculate, if slightly fusty. It is almost entirely inhabited by elderly council tenants, in a mix of one*

*and two bed flats. There is a live in caretaker on the ground floor, who seems on good terms with the tenants, and knows a lot about them. There are three fire fighters, plus myself, doing visits, with two more out in the truck (in case of a shout, one needs to stay to mind the radio. The other, it would seem, stays to mind the one minding the radio). The WM brings a walkie talkie so that they can be contacted from the truck). They start on the top floor (10) and work down. Spirits are quite high and the crew are a little bit boisterous. It's such a quiet block that this is very noticeable. They get to the seventh floor before seeing a single card, and no more all the way down. The crew are very excited about this, anticipating an early lunch, and there is a sense that they have 'got out of' doing something onerous. However, on the way back out to the truck, a group of women are coming back from an escorted minibus trip to the shops. They immediately harangue (in good terms) the fire fighters, and ask them to come back in. If the fire fighters were a little giddy before, this is nothing compared to the reaction of the women. There is borderline hysteria at the prospect of the three fire fighters coming up to their flats, and a number of rather saucy comments are made. When the husband of one of the women comments on my presence, he receives a sharp knock on the leg from his wife's walking stick. The fire fighters take it all in good humour, but I am surprised (and actually slightly shocked) by the behaviour of the women, all of whom are of senior years, which borders on the lewd.*

*The fire fighters give very abridged versions of the fire safety advice, depending on the perceived understanding of the resident. As such, the most vulnerable residents receive the least advice, with the main message being 'if there's a fire in your flat, get out into the corridor. If there's a fire in the block, stay in your flat'. The WM thinks that for some people, the more information you give, the less likely it is to be retained. In every case, smoke alarms are fitted (or checked where they are already there) and a fire safety leaflet left in a prominent place. Many joke that the smoke alarms, fitted with ten year batteries, will outlive them. Mostly the WM gives the chat, while I loiter. The other two fire fighters fit the alarms, which have sticky pads and are just stuck to the ceiling. They are tall enough to manage that without steps, as the*

*ceilings in the block are not high, and this is frequently commented on. The flats all have long central corridors, and mostly the crew and I just stand in line in the corridor. Four of us in there does feel like over egging it a bit, and this is commented on a couple of times. This makes me feel bad, as I feel my presence is what tips the balance, although I am clearly the smallest (and perhaps the least conspicuous – particularly to the female residents, who still only have eyes for the chaps.)*

*Mostly people receive the fire fighters positively, but this is not universally the case. They are asked for ID a couple of times, and the fire engine has to be pointed to, as no one has remembered theirs (although they are all in uniform – but these are well trained older people). One man answers the door gruffly, and complains that we have interrupted the football. A couple seem to resent the intrusion, and several try to get away from the fire safety talk. Although the block is very pleasant, the fire fighters are not greeted with universal warmth, nor do they respond with outright politeness, and a number of residents take the opportunity to harangue them for a perceived shortfall in other services.*

## *Summary of vignettes*

At both events and HFSVs, the presence of a fire engine is imposing, and can be inconvenient, as demonstrated in the vignettes. In a residential setting, it is likely to arouse a lot of interest amongst neighbours, who may in turn feel either left out of the visit, or anxious that official attention is being directed at their street. The presence of fire fighters in public can also prove quite a draw for women's affections, and this is likely to be felt to be to the detriment of local men. Further, in areas of high male unemployment, conspicuously employed men, who work in a high status, high profile profession, without any apparent demographic distinction from locals, can easily become a target of resentment.

In short, there are a number of ways in which interaction between residents and fire fighters, in a range of situations, might not be conducive to an improved relationship – despite the best intentions of the fire fighters doing the job, and the fire service as

a whole. In HFSVs, the resident may have waited for some months to be allocated a time – although this is, of course, not the attending crew's fault. This irritation is likely to be exacerbated if the crew are late or have to leave abruptly for an emergency – whatever the resident's thoughts about what fire fighters ought to be doing. Further, there is an expectation that a HFSV will give them something for a minimal input, whereas the HFSV format actually requires some consideration and commitment from the householder.

## *Analysis and Discussion*

The focus of this section is to look at the ways in which fire service engagement with the public contributes to the overall relationship between the two groups, particularly focussing on the research questions that I have addressed above and elsewhere. As such, I will consider how such engagement impacts on the relationship, why hostility might arise in these settings, how they bear relevance to social identity approaches and whether these current mechanisms are effective. This will lead naturally to some of the implications for the fire service from this research, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

It is easy in any analysis to dwell solely on the more negative aspects of the relationship between fire fighters and residents, and to find fault in the way in which fire fighters engage with the public. Indeed, this is exactly what the next section will comprise. However, I feel it must first be said that many fire fighters engage with the public with goodwill, if not outright enthusiasm, and, broadly, acknowledge the purpose of their community interventions. Further, like other researchers (Rowe 2007), I went out expecting to be privy to some extreme behaviours, when behaviours, both amongst fire fighters and residents were actually far more nuanced. A smaller number of fire fighters actively engage with the public, seeking out opportunities for fire safety work although, as discussed elsewhere, this often takes the shape of more 'manly' interventions, such as the schools rugby programmes. This section is not intended in any way to be disrespectful to fire fighters, or to patronise or pathologise residents, rather to comment on the relationship as a whole, and how small interventions can have disproportionate consequences. It is hoped that by understanding the relationship in this way, it can

be improved so that more effective fire safety messages can be promulgated through different communities, and, ultimately, that lives will be saved.

The themes that emerge from these vignettes are not dissimilar from those that arose in the course of the previous studies. As such, I will particularly consider the way in which the fire service are not immune from their context, and this includes both the neighbourhood context and their presence as one of a panoply of services that residents are likely to have had prior experience of. Fire fighters also maintain an imposing physical presence, and this has implications for how they are viewed in the community, both as people, and in their appliances. This also links to their physicality and the stereotypical ways in which they are viewed, particularly by women. Even given the possibility that fire fighters might live in the community in which they are working, when they are there as fire fighters, they are perceived as outsiders, and this can represent an intrusion. This is particularly likely when they are coming into people's homes, and again, this links to both to the context of them as service providers, and also to their physical presence. There is also an element of expectation management, through which members of the public have a potentially elevated expectation of what the fire service can provide (and what input is required from them), coupled with their (mis)conceptions about what they should be able to provide. I will cover each of these aspects in turn, below, with reference to the specific vignettes.

## Context

As discussed elsewhere, the fire service are just one of a number of public services working with residents in Bristol's neighbourhoods, but especially in poorer neighbourhoods (Gosling 2008). As such, the context of services and neighbourhoods are inextricably linked – especially in neighbourhoods where residency is determined by council housing policy (Hanley 2007). Further, the council also sets, to an extent, the milieu of a neighbourhood, for example by determining street furniture, designating parks and maintaining responsibility for waste disposal, housing repairs, regeneration policy and other service provision. Residents often experience public services negatively, as discussed in the previous study, feeling that housing services, health visitors or social services are interfering

in their private lives, or that service provision is inadequate (Mathers, Parry et al. 2008). As such, the fire service are not just a benevolent force that attend emergencies, they are emblematic of a wider system that provides poorly in these neighbourhoods, and which interferes in the lives of residents to a disproportionate extent.

This is evident in each of the different vignettes. In Shiregreen, the resident seems uninterested in the input of the fire service, tolerating the intrusion perhaps just as she would tolerate a comparable visit from housing or social services. Her partner is clearly unimpressed and resentful of the intrusion, and continues his fire-hazardous behaviour under the gaze of the fire fighters. Their intervention is of no interest to him. Further, although clean and tidy, their house is very much the victim of council housing policy. The kitchen is very basic, and at the point of disrepair, and the bare concrete floors seem wholly unsuited to a family with young children, as well as imparting an unjustified air of squalor. In other council houses, floors are laminated, which is a practical as well as stylish solution to this situation. This house desperately needs work doing on it, and to an extent, it seems justified that the resident has no interest in the fire fighters when other public services seem to have little interest in her and her property.

This situation is repeated, even more dramatically, in Wootton, where the contempt for standards and safety is evident in the screening off of the downstairs flat. By leaving a small gap at the top of the screens, there is plenty of room for the windows to be broken and debris thrown inside. Even without the malice of debris, it is possible that birds could get in, and that litter and leaves would blow in, as well as rain. Not only does this mean that there is plenty of fuel in the event of a fire, as is seen in the vignette, it also means that there is plenty of mouldering matter to contaminate the flat for future residents. Further, these are standard council properties, and one would expect that standard council screens would be available.

The Upperfield situation seems slightly different, as the fire service are just one of a number of services present at a community event, and the interaction is with a crowd, and in public (Hogg, Abrams et al. 2004, Reicher 2001). However, the

presence of other services is insightful: in addition to the fire service and the police, who are regular fixtures at any number of these community type events in the belief that exposure to them will encourage trust (Allport 1954, Hewstone, Brown 1986), whereas the presence of healthy eating professionals and smoking cessation services, at what is meant to be a fun event, implies a degree of pathology amongst the residents that they, the professionals, are there to sort out. In this light, the presence of the fire service and police can also be seen as interfering, and in implying a degree of problem behaviour in the residents. What is particularly interesting here is the degree of resistance amongst the residents to these types of messages – people wilfully smoking as they stroll past the smoking cessation gazebo, or the scepticism of the tannoy announcer over the healthy eating campaign. Presumably the announcer is someone with some standing in the community, and this exemplifies an almost formalised resistance to the intrusion of well meaning outsiders and the imposition of external norms.

In Warwick Lane, there are fewer of the immediate problems evident in Shiregreen or Wootton: the block is clean and tidy, and seems well managed with a number of homely touches (such as doormats outside the lifts) that would quickly disappear in many communal areas. However, a number of residents still make comments to the fire fighters about issues that they want to see resolved, to do with parking, health care, waste disposal. It is hard to know if these are just part of a litany of complaints that are repeated to anyone who will listen, or if they are made to the fire service as representatives of a different agency with a reputation for ‘getting things done’. Either way, it is unlikely that residents would make these complaints if their concerns were being heard and responded to elsewhere. The high maintenance of the block, compared with council properties elsewhere, is striking. Although the demographic of the block is skewed towards elderly couples, they are all council tenants, and seem to receive a high standard of maintenance, at least in communal areas. This seems indicative of inequality in service provision – the famed ‘postcode lottery’, and is perhaps suggestive of a sense of deserving and undeserving poor (Murray, Lister et al. 1996), again, showing the contempt of the council for other, less capable or organised residents.

## Physical presence

As discussed above, the physical presence of fire fighters in a community is often quite pronounced: fire engines are unmistakable, and the fire fighters themselves stand apart from civilians both in uniform and stature. The presence of groups of young men in communities is frequently seen as a problem, both by residents and by policy makers, but when that group is uniformed fire fighters, the onus is shifted somewhat. This visibility is heightened by the reaction of some women who may be lewd towards or about them, and by some men who by virtue of the women's reaction, or through their own considerations, may view them as outsiders, intruders or authority figures, as was evident in the focus groups as well.

Although not all fire fighters conform to the stereotype of the 'big, strapping lad', they tend to behave as if they do. This was particularly evident in the Warwick Lane block of flats, presented in the fourth vignette. Whilst the fire fighters I shadowed were generally charming and garrulous when with residents, their presence in the block was quite overwhelming, both objectively, in that they were quite loud and boisterous, and subjectively, in that this was in marked contrast to the chintzy ornaments and knick-knacks that were displayed throughout the blocks. They were clearly unaware of this impact, which must have been evident even behind closed doors, as they careered up and down stairs, inevitably two at a time, shouting to colleagues above and below. Although this is not bad behaviour as such, it is not considerate behaviour, and could easily have had the result of upsetting some residents. However, it again demonstrates the special way that residents view fire fighters: I am sure that if it was a group of 'civilian' young men hammering up and down the stairs, there would have been complaints and accusations of anti social behaviour. Further, it demonstrates the extent to which many fire fighters are oblivious to their public image. Although many in the first study spoke about their reluctance to bring the service into disrepute, they seem unaware of the impact of their behaviour on the public, particularly important since, like the police, negative feelings might have a much greater impact than positive responses (Skogan 2006).

The lewd behaviour of the women in Warwick Lane exacerbated, to an extent, this 'giddy' behaviour on behalf of the fire fighters by sanctioning their youthful masculinity and setting a context for high spirits. As with other, less excitable

groups, it was primarily the women in this group who were interested in talking to the fire fighters, with the men looking a little out of place in the proceedings, and not engaging with the fire fighters – perhaps because they had nothing to ask, or perhaps because they were somewhat overshadowed by the behaviour of the women and their focus on the fire fighters. The fire fighters in their turn did little to discourage the women, and joined in happily with the banter. Only when one male resident turned to address me, asking if I came free with the fire alarm (remarkably restrained compared to the women) did the focus turn away from the fire fighters. One lady, presumably his wife, rapped him sharply on the leg with her walking stick and the subject was quickly dropped, much to the approval of the other women. Assuming that in this context I was viewed as a fire fighter, it is interesting to note how female to male attention is endemic, whilst the reverse is verboten. This pattern, of women showing interest and men showing disdain, is repeated throughout my research: in one encounter with private sector staff volunteering at a primary school, the women all chatted to the fire fighters and climbed in the engine, whilst the men looked on, arms folded; in Upperfield, the groups watching the fire fighters were primarily women and young children, with the only recognition from young men being to push through the group of fire fighters. This was repeated on almost every occasion on which I saw the fire service in public. In areas such as Shiregreen and Upperfield, with high unemployment and particularly low male aspiration, the presence of uniformed, salaried fire fighters is an inevitable distraction for young women, and a target for the disaffection of young men, giving socio-political context to the potential for conflict inherent in the group dynamic (Stott, Reicher 1998).

A further facet of the physical presence of fire fighters is their appliances: fire engines are big and red and shiny for good reason – they are important working machines and need to be easily recognised for traffic to move out of the way. However, in non-emergency situations, they often look cumbersome and unwieldy, although fire fighters tend not to view them in this way. When I have ridden in an appliance, I have been a passive passenger. Trying to follow in my car was a different matter – fire engines are granted a degree of leeway on the roads, for instance using bus lanes, accelerating towards orange lights and being let out at junctions, even without sirens on, that the civilian driver is just not afforded. Fortunately, from my perspective, by virtue of being large and red, even at a distance, they are relatively easy to keep track of, although this also means they are

very visible to those who may seek to have cause for complaint. At the Upperfield festival, the fire engine has to pass through a mostly seated crowd, which is does, in effect, twice. Although no one explicitly complains, this is inconsiderate of the crew, and does not bring the proceedings to a good start. Similarly, the presence of the fire engine in general for HFSVs tends to bring a number of people onto the street to observe the spectacle, and initiates a certain amount of curtain twitching. Unlike the police, who are able to send plain clothes officers and unmarked cars, there is nothing subtle about the presence of a fire engine, especially for those who would not wish to broadcast their concern about fire. In areas where they might not be met entirely positively, this could be potentially off putting for people thinking about engaging, and upsetting to those who would wish their concerns to be treated a little more confidentially.

## Intrusion

As discussed above, the idea of intrusion links both to the physical presence of fire fighters, and to their context as one amongst many service providers. The intrusion that they represent can come in a number of ways, as intrusion into the community, into the home, or into the lives of the residents. These are apparent in the vignettes in various different ways, again, which link to the themes of physical presence and to the context of other service providers.

At the Upperfield Festival, the fire fighters' late arrival and repositioning of their truck got them off to a bad start in their presence at the festival. Indeed, there is a degree of irony here: the majority of the public seem to think that really the sole job of the fire service is to attend emergencies, and that going to events or doing HFSVs is a bit extra, as discussed in both of the previous studies, and an example of where the public and fire fighters tend to agree. However, if they are due to attend an event, and are delayed in doing so because of an emergency, they are then the subjects of resentment. Events, like the Upperfield Festival often feel very close-knit – perhaps more so for outsiders than to residents – and the presence of outside groups is particularly keenly felt.

This intrusion is also felt in the home, not least because of the large number of fire fighters who tend to conduct HFSVs, and because of their imposing presence, as discussed above. It is a matter of some regret to me that I probably tipped the balance by being on hand at a number of visits, such as Warwick Road and Shiregreen, but I think that even without me the presence of three or four fire fighters would be cause for comment. However, the intrusion in the home is not just the result of the physical presence of the fire fighters. Indeed, the lines of questioning that are conducted about bedtime routines, smoking and food preparation are really quite intimate, and are not necessarily what the resident was expecting from the experience. Further, many people find it hard to dissociate fault being found with their behaviour from fault being found with them as an individual, and this adds to the level of intrusion felt during HFSVs.

## *Summary*

In this chapter, I have considered two of the primary types of intervention that the fire service engage in, through the use of vignettes. As seen, the fire service often go out of their way to try to engage with people, with greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm, and greater or lesser degrees of success. Understanding this relationship will help them to relate better to the most vulnerable communities that they serve, and this will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter.

# Chapter Eight: Discussion and Implications

In this chapter, I will draw together the findings presented in the previous three studies, looking at their links and wider implications. This forms the final chapter of the thesis. In the first section, I will present a general discussion of the work conducted so far, looking at the findings in the round and making wider comparisons between the linked studies. In the second section, and particularly linking to the literatures presented at the start of the thesis, I will look at how the original research aim, to examine the relationship between the fire service and residents in three Bristol neighbourhoods, and the research questions, have been answered. To an extent, these three sections link to the individual research questions, where the first question, looking at the roots of hostility and resistance, relates to the findings; the second question, considering social identity approaches, relates the findings back to the literature; and the third question, considering the extent to which current engagement mechanisms are effective, links the findings to the fire service and to the practical application of this work. As such, the subsequent section will consider the implications for the fire service from this programme of research. In the final, concluding, section, I will reflect on the experience of undertaking this research project, and suggest further research which could build on it in the future.

## *Introduction*

In the first study, I introduced themes particularly related to the fire service. These considered fire fighter identity, formed in relation to fire and to traditional ideas of fire fighting. I discussed the idea of a social contract that fire fighters enter into, whereby they are available to the public at any time of night or day, but through which they expect to be treated with respect, and for the fire service to be held in high regard. Although fire fighters explicitly spoke of the need to undertake community fire safety work, it was hot fire work that was of particular interest to them, and which they joined the service to undertake. This type of work was available to them at busy stations, which represented the ideal work environment for many of my participants, whilst also presenting a tension, in that busy stations served busy neighbourhoods, which were held in rather lower regard. A number of fire fighters expressed an amount of contempt for residents of busy areas, associating them with high numbers of hoax calls and deliberate fires, which, although presenting them with opportunities for hot fire work, were not seen as deserving recipients of their

attentions. Further, fire fighters drew distinctions between these 'types' of neighbourhood, and the types of neighbourhood in which they lived.

In the second study, I went to three of these 'busy' neighbourhoods and conducted focus groups with residents there, looking at how they perceived their own neighbourhoods and others; how others perceived their neighbourhood and their experiences with the fire service. Although many residents spoke highly of the fire service, and the vast majority were overtly law abiding, there were many concerns about the way in which fire fighters behaved in their communities and in their homes, and participants did not speak entirely positively about the fire service. The majority of focus group participants lived in social or ex-social housing, and expressed wide ranging experiences of living there, with positive and negative experiences emerging of the same neighbourhoods. Participants were very particular about exactly where they lived, discussing their neighbourhoods with great precision both relating to where they lived and went, and how they presented this to outsiders dependent on context. Although participants did not think residents should be judged on their neighbourhood, they were quick to do so both about other neighbourhoods, and about where I live. They had complex expectations of different 'types' of people, both in relation to other neighbourhoods, and in relation to experiencing emergencies, which they explicitly associated with the fire service. Although a number of participants had encountered fire service personnel in non emergency situations, this was disregarded in a number of instances as not a 'proper' encounter, suggesting that participants, like fire fighters, have very fixed views on what fire fighters do in their work, and what they should be doing. The presence of fire fighters in communities was not seen as a universally positive experience, with a number of residents disconcerted by the presence and speed of fire engines, the lack of visibility of fire fighters and their associations with a wider discourse of health and safety. There was also a strongly gendered response, with many female participants holding a sexualised view of fire fighters, which was denied to male participants, who in turn held fire fighters as authority figures.

In the third study, the neighbourhood context was discussed in greater detail. In this study, I observed the interaction between fire fighters and residents in a number of different situations. The neighbourhood context is set, particularly in these types of neighbourhood, by interaction with public services, of which the fire service is just

one. Typically, these public services view residents as problematic and something to be tackled or dealt with, for example through crime prevention, public health or waste management. This is typified by a lack of respect towards these services, expressed particularly by public services and policy discourses about the public, but which also run in the opposite direction, where residents feel that public services are not respectful towards them. The physical presence of fire fighters in the community is part of this, where there is little subtlety or discretion in the fire service's approach, and interventions are conducted very publicly, whether this is welcome or not. Further, a number of these interventions are characterised as somewhat intrusive, whether into the community as a whole or into people's houses and lives at a more micro level. This seems to be the case whether deliberately, for example through home fire safety visits, or through the perceived intrusion of the noise of sirens and the presence of vehicles on the roads.

## *Bringing together the analyses*

There are, then, a number of superordinate themes that can be seen to run through these three studies, and which link fire fighters and the public in ways which might, perhaps, surprise them. As with the other analyses, the discussion sections of each study were collated and read for recurrent and prominent themes. The first of these themes is about suspicion and resentment, whereby both residents and fire fighters view members of other groups with distrust, and which clearly have implications for how fire fighters respond in a community context. The second theme is about traditional roles, and this encapsulates both perceived traditional roles of fire fighters, and the ways in which this is played out in response to gender issues. As such, men and women seem to respond differently to fire fighters and to have different expectations of encounters with them. The third superordinate theme is about entitlement. A number of fire fighters have quite fixed views, particularly relating to notions of the deserving and undeserving poor, about who and where their services should be directed towards. This is coupled by a 'rights' based discourse from residents who believe that they have an entitlement to call on the fire service wherever and whenever they fancy, and which leads to problems relating to expectation management and role confusion. These will each be discussed in further detail below. A summary of themes within their superordinate groups is given in Appendix 9.

## Suspicion of non group members

Social identity approaches make very clear (Abrams, Hogg 1999) the preference of individuals for members of their own groups, and this is very much the case with both fire fighters and residents. For fire fighters, this is ingrained even from the training school, with initial division into nominal watches, which are maintained and posed against one another in competitive training events, so that even trainee fire fighters make distinctions between members of different watches. This also extends to referring to non-fire fighters as 'civilians' and posits fire fighters as distinct and apart from their civilian counterparts in a work context. For more established fire fighters, there is an ongoing distinction, which assumes normative dimensions along two lines, firstly about residents in different neighbourhoods and secondly which makes a differentiation of where they themselves live. As such, certain neighbourhoods are referred to as 'bandit country' or described as 'lost', labels which reinforce distinctiveness and situate the fire service as both superior (Haslam 2000) whether legitimately or not, and impermeable. Whilst these might serve some organisational functions, as well as describing how fire fighters navigate the city, it also does little to break down barriers between groups. Fire fighters also made strong distinctions about the type of neighbourhoods in which they lived, claiming that 'obviously' they did not live in the type of neighbourhood in which most fires occurred, and, by implication, that there was a type of person distinct from them who did.

Forming judgements about people in particular neighbourhoods was not confined to fire fighters, however, and was equally prevalent amongst residents. Whereas fire fighters seemed suspicious of non-fire fighters in general and residents of certain neighbourhoods in particular, resident participants formed negative judgements about those from outside their neighbourhood, whether they were residents of other neighbourhoods, about which they exhibited similar stereotypes to the fire fighters, or in other cases, members of public services attempting to work in their neighbourhood. This potentially inhibits the ability of residents to form relations and develop encounters beyond their neighbourhoods and estates, limiting social mobility and outside experience. It also makes neighbourhoods increasingly impermeable to outside agencies seeking to promote healthier lives or communities within the neighbourhood, the fire service included.

Although it is not inevitable for group distinctiveness to promote bias and social conflict, social identity approaches show the ways in which it can happen. This is clearly the case for the two groups of fire fighters and residents, and occurs, as shown through the data in earlier chapters, in a number of ways. Distinctiveness between groups can easily become suspicion of different groups, with a degree of distrust over the motivations for contact between them. For instance, whilst the fire service are keen to attend fires in any neighbourhood, there may be a degree of resentment of those who are seen as requiring a number of community safety interventions, and it is, inevitably, in these predetermined neighbourhoods that the majority of these are focussed. Further, there are distinctions made between those who are more or less deserving of such interventions, linking to debates about the underclass (Murray, Lister et al. 1996).

For residents, the relationship between fire fighters and their neighbourhoods is equally tense. There seems to be a prevailing sense of intrusion, whereby fire fighters (and other agencies) are seen as outsiders intruding in 'their' neighbourhood, whether or not participants seemed overtly law abiding. For those hovering around the wrong side of law abiding, the fire service is very clearly an intruder (although such participants were few and far between), with concerns about their ability to put out bonfires and interrupt barbeques, even if these were causing distress to other residents. For law abiding residents, the sense of intrusion was perhaps more subtle, whether through sirens, fire engines or direct encounters. Fire engines were visible symbols of outside intervention, and widely perceived as 'racing' or 'training' on local roads, even if this was not the case. Sirens (which were not differentiated from police or ambulance ones) were seen to intrude into the home on a daily basis, and were a source of some considerable resentment for a number of participants. The experience of the home fire safety visit was also, in some cases, endured as something of an ordeal, where disproportionate numbers of fire fighters were seen to be involved, questions were overly intrusive, and information given rather dramatic. This was especially felt to be the case amongst a number of participants who considered themselves respectable and responsible, and who, again, drew a distinction between themselves and those who were less so, and might, therefore, be better suited to this type of intervention from the fire service.

## Traditional roles

Fire fighters spoke at length about how they joined the service to fight fires, and although many conducted other, especially community fire safety, work with a degree of skill and enthusiasm, this was not where their passion lay. Further, their identity as fire fighters was challenged by this change in role, with a number of participants seeming unhappy or uncomfortable about the direction in which it took them and the fire service as a whole. This sentiment was echoed by a number of residents, who similarly seemed uncomfortable about the extension of the fire service's role into community fire safety work, although they were more satisfied about the extended 'rescue' function, seeing the role of the fire service including both hot fire work, but also the cliché of rescuing cats from trees. Any deviations from this were potentially confusing to residents, who tended to have fixed and traditional ideas about fire fighting and fire fighters.

Although this research project has not taken an explicitly gendered focus to the fire service, it is hard to ignore this avenue of analysis, both in response to work that has gone before (Childs, Morris et al. 2004, Cooper 1995, Hall, Hockey et al. 2007), but also in relation to perceptions in the community. The fire service remains overwhelmingly male, both in composition and in image, and fire fighting continues to be viewed as 'men's work', by many in the fire service (albeit surreptitiously) and those in the community. How fire fighters were responded to depended, in many instances, on the gender of the participant, with women pursuing a sexualised line of discussion around fire fighters, and men maintaining a preoccupation with physical size and authority status. For both of these groups, these preconceptions produce barriers to encounters and to the dissemination of community fire safety messages.

There are very real concerns here about the potential for social conflict, especially when, in demographic terms, groups of fire fighters and young men might actually be quite similar. For young men in many hard pressed neighbourhoods, there are scant avenues for legitimate manliness, and those that are illegitimate may be directly challenged by the fire service. Even where there is scope for legitimate displays of masculinity, the presence of the fire service is likely to detract from it, as

much by their novelty as their portrayal of ‘immaculate manhood’ (Cooper 1995). This creates another tension in the pursuit of community fire safety, where this is not seen as man’s work, it undermines the status of the fire service both for fire fighters, and, perhaps, for female observers, whilst exacerbating the relationship between male observers, who, as discussed above, resent the intrusion, and the fire service.

## Entitlement and resentment

Whilst suspicion of external groups can easily turn into resentment, as discussed above, another source of resentment, more typified by familiarity, is through a sense of entitlement. For many participants, this was closely allied to what they perceived as being their ‘*rights’*, although, invariably, these were not rights for which they were required to take responsibility. For the fire service, the sense of entitlement pervaded many of their dealings with the public and was a similar cause of concern to them.

Many fire fighters hold the fire service in very high standing, and are keen to act to preserve its reputation and integrity. They pride themselves on their ability to provide a service, potentially saving lives twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. However, the provision of an emergency service is provided alongside a sense that they felt entitled not to be asked for more, so as not to have to provide vehicles for fetes, conduct schools work or carry out home fire safety visits.

As discussed above, many resident participants felt that it was the role of the fire service to provide an emergency service, and that anything else was either an aberration or a bonus, rather than just part of the job. However, once offered additional services, such as home fire safety visits, residents seemed to feel entitled to them immediately and unconditionally, with resentment occurring if this was not the case. Many residents seemed to feel entitled to things that they did not think the fire service should provide, demonstrating a very complex and dependent relationship with their public service providers, and one which is very hard to satisfy, with more contact providing more opportunity for grievance. Further, there was potential for far greater resentment for residents if they were engaged in a community safety activity (which they did not think the service should provide) and

the fire fighters were called away to an emergency (which is what they thought the service should be doing). As with much of the police engagement work, there is a fine line for the fire service to tread between having a high public profile, but also incurring the regular wrath of the public, whereas a lower public profile, and less awareness raising work, might, perversely, have the effect of an least not diminishing their standing in the community. This will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

## *Answering the research questions*

In the previous section, I considered some of the superordinate themes that I have observed within the data presented in this research project. As stated above, and elsewhere, the aim of this research project was to examine the relationships between Avon Fire and Rescue Service and residents in three Bristol neighbourhoods, asking the following questions:

- What are the roots of hostility and resistance between fire fighters and residents?
- How do social identity approaches explain this?
- To what extent are current engagement mechanisms effective?

In this section, I shall take each question in turn, and examine the ways in which it is answered through this research project.

### What are the roots of hostility and resistance between fire fighters and residents?

Residents in areas with higher than average social housing, such as the three neighbourhoods that this research project has focussed on, have more experience of public services than residents elsewhere. In addition to their homes potentially being owned by the council or housing associations, residents also may come into contact with social services, health and education. Even if not social housing tenants, the neighbourhood is more likely to have more maintenance conducted through social provision, a higher police presence and potentially more issues with waste management. Further, demographics suggest that a range of problematic behaviours (such as smoking, low educational attainment, high levels of worklessness, teenage pregnancy and poor diet) are likely to be concentrated in

these areas. This is responded to by a wide range of public services which view local residents as problematic in and of themselves, and which intervene accordingly, and so, the fire service are not the only public service active in Bristol neighbourhoods, and cannot be divorced from this context. As such, residents in these neighbourhoods engage with them as one of many public services who are not seen universally positively, and starts to suggest the roots of hostility and resistance between the fire service and residents.

However, the fire service do not tend to see themselves as one of a range of agencies providing services in a neighbourhood, viewing themselves instead as the sole provider of an important and unique service. This immediately presents a tension between their expectations of the public's response to them, and the way in which the public perceive the same encounter. This is exacerbated by the likelihood of the encounter being a community safety one, viewed negatively by the fire service, and with suspicion by the public, as well as being, essentially, not dissimilar to a lot of other work which is conducted in the community, and which pathologises residents whilst instructing them how to behave. As such, this suggests the first of a number of roots of hostility and resistance to the fire service, where there is a disjuncture between how the fire service see themselves and how residents see them.

Secondly, and as will be discussed in the next section, a number of group processes exacerbate relations between fire fighters and residents. Social identity approaches suggest that individuals maintain a preference for their own group members at the expense of members of other groups, and will work to maximise difference and to enhance self esteem. The neighbourhoods in which this research project was conducted are typically those that are negatively viewed, both by public services (indeed, that is why two of them were chosen) and by residents of other areas. Residents of these areas have a more complex response, with an awareness that they are judged accordingly, but also with a degree of defensiveness about what is, after all, their home. For many residents, the reputation of the neighbourhood contributes negatively to their self esteem, and the comparison with an outgroup which holds itself in high regard can exacerbate this. This suggests a second root to hostility and resistance.

Thirdly, the behaviour of fire fighters and the fire service is not always exemplary in neighbourhoods, and this will be addressed in the implications section, below. Whilst emergencies are attended regardless of the neighbourhood, and priority is not placed on one over another in response terms, fire fighters are not always mindful of residents, or of how residents perceive them. Groups of fire fighters can be intimidating, and fire engines are large, loud and unsubtle, and although this is tolerated in emergency settings, for some residents there is a sense that their use is somewhat indiscrete and indiscriminate in non-emergency encounters.

Finally, the behaviour of residents themselves can also be far from exemplary. Where residents resist interventions, or cause problems for the fire service, the fire service may have stereotypes confirmed. In future interactions, these will be reinstated, and again, perpetuated. This causes a vicious circle of action and recrimination, often involving some of the most vulnerable in society. This is added to by historical enmities such as involvement (or not) in riots or public disorder; feelings that other neighbourhoods (rightly or wrongly) are prioritised or preferred or perceived linkages between the fire service and other agencies such as the police. Indeed, in other cities, the fire service actively works with the police, allowing them to use fire engines to 'ambush' groups attacking fire engines or committing arson. As such, the roots of hostility and resistance develop in a context of neighbourhood deprivation, fuelled by group processes and exacerbated by behaviours on each side. Although there are many implications for the fire service from this, it is to these group processes that I shall now turn.

## How do social identity approaches explain this?

As discussed in the literature review, social identity approaches explain how individuals behave in group situations, and help to explain how groups themselves behave. They are based on the assumption that individuals are members of certain social groups, that these groups have meaning to them, and that they contribute to their self image (Tajfel, 1978). Experiments such as the minimal group paradigm suggested that group membership was a necessary and sufficient condition for favouritism towards the ingroup and against the outgroup, with clear implications for this research project. This helps us to understand that the relationship between fire

fighters and residents is mediated through group processes, with the potential for conflict whatever the history of hostility or resistance there might be. Further, social identity, like place identity (Proshansky, 1983) links into self concept, and provides the impetus for comparison with other groups. However, social identity approaches do not just attempt to explain how individuals relate to groups, but also help to account for the relationships between groups and society (Reicher, 2004), especially depending on the context, in this case often provided by the neighbourhood milieu, in which they occur.

Social identity is predicated by self categorisation (Turner, 1982), the process through which group membership is assumed. For fire fighters, this process begins as soon as recruitment is successful, with an immediate distinction made between those who have successfully become fire fighters, and those who are left as civilians. This is emphasised in training and continued through work in the fire station, where much work serves to reinforce the distinction in a positive dimension between fire fighters and residents. In neighbourhoods, this happens at greater or lesser levels of abstraction (Haslam, 2000), dependent upon the micro-geographies that residents observe and perpetuate within their environment. Affiliation, experienced through these processes of categorisation, leads to comparison and feelings of similarity to the ingroup and distinctiveness from the outgroup, whether this is the fire service and residents or residents of different neighbourhoods in comparison with each other. Seen through the prism of social identity approaches, it is hard then for fire fighters to identify with residents, and vice versa, as their professional identity is premised on the distinction from those that they work with. Where the work is fire fighting, this distinction is maintained, however, where fire fighters are engaged in community or preventive work, this can erode the distinction between themselves and residents (or at least other service providers), thereby eroding their ingroup distinctiveness and social identity. Understanding these group processes starts to explain, through social identity approaches, how fire fighters and residents come to relate to one another through identification with their own group and comparison with other groups.

Such comparison can lead to stereotyping, whereby individual group members are seen as polarised prototypes (Hogg, Abrams et al, 2004), such as the archetypal ‘hoodie’ or the sexualised fire fighter, and these are viewed as distinct from more

similar members of the ingroup. Further, the development of polarised prototypes also reinforces ingroup homogeneity. By viewing fire fighters and residents in this way, it is apparent that as one group draws a distinction from the other, that distinction is reinforced, and this can develop its own momentum, especially where the acceptance and promotion of such stereotypes, both within the fire service and amongst residents is an important signifier of group membership. As such, work which serves to reinforce neighbourhood distinctiveness can be seen to be somewhat counterproductive if the overall goal is to encourage permeability within communities.

Using social identity approaches allows stereotyping to be seen as a social act, and not one which is rooted in individual pathology. However, that is not to say that its consequences are unproblematic. For example, the typical stereotype of the 'sexy fireman' undermines the role of the fire fighter, whilst also inextricably linking it to physical work and not to more feminised community interventions. There are further problems with the stereotype of the sort of person likely to be involved in an emergency, where residents make a distinction between themselves and these other groups. Understanding this in social identity terms means that the fire service can then attempt to address these issues in comparable ways. Although not inevitable, stereotyping can also lead to bias between groups, especially in conditions where inequality is perceived in the status of groups, and social mobility is not an option – for instance in terms of fire service recruitment. Bias is also the requisite precondition for social conflict, although the degree to which this occurs is dependent upon context, as seen in some of the crowd studies (Reicher, 1984; Stott, Reicher, 1998; Drury et al 2003). For the fire service, it is key to understanding just what those conditions might be.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest three preconditions essential for group comparison leading to bias and conflict. The first of these is that ingroup identity is sufficiently internalised to allow for comparison. This is clearly the case for fire service personnel, and although maybe less so for residents, within the neighbourhood context, it would seem that this identity does become salient. Secondly, the context must be conducive to comparison, and again, the neighbourhood does appear to provide this context, with fire fighters and residents making a number of assumptions and comparisons with residents of different

neighbourhoods. Thirdly, there must be an available outgroup 'who meet conditions of similarity, proximity and situational salience' (page 60). As discussed above, residents tend not to discuss the fire service when they are not present or prompted, and typically, resentment comes up in relation to community safety rather than observed emergency work. This suggests that emergency work breaks this rule of similarity, although community safety work posits the fire fighter outside of their traditional role, and therefore as a more similar, more comparable figure. Proximity is accounted for by their presence in the community, which, similarly provides the context for situational salience. Further, similarities can also be noted in group settings as fire fighters are typically working class young (ish) men, and these are also the groups that they may experience in conflict situations. With regards to social conflict, social identity approaches present and explain a number of different factors then that are relevant to the relationship between the fire service and residents. Data from the studies demonstrates the internalisation of identity for fire fighters, and (although perhaps to a lesser extent) for residents. This is contextually contingent and linked back to society so that fire fighters make an association between  resident and neighbourhood, and residents have perhaps different expectations of fire fighters dependent upon where they are encountered, and what they are doing. For instance, an emergency in their own neighbourhood would be tolerated, but community safety work would be seen as an intrusion. However, on 'neutral territory', for example in the city centre, community safety work might be viewed more positively – although it may well still be seen to detract from the core role and identity of the fire service. An exception would certainly, however, be made, where the resident is in charge of the fire, and here issues are raised over the right to the management of fire in the community – an issue as old as society itself (Goudsblom 1994). For fire fighters then, there is the potential for any situation to result in social conflict, however, group processes do not happen in isolation from the wider social context; nor do they predetermine conflict.

One of the advantages of social identity approaches is that they situate conflict beyond the realm of the purely psychological, observing also socio-economic and historical factors (Hogg, Abrams et al, 2004), which can include (perceived) rational and realist competition for resources. In the case of the fire service and residents, this has something of a primitive nature to it, where the competition can be over the right to control fire in a community (Bachelard, 1964; Goudsblom, 1994) or to receive the sexual attentions of female residents, again, building on the gendered

distinction between male and female residents in their relationship with the fire service. Social identity approaches are particularly useful in this regard, linking the fire service back to their context as neighbourhood service providers, and reminding us that residents do not view them as isolated from this context, just as fire fighters do not view residents as distinct from the neighbourhoods in which they live. Further, the changing context in which the fire service operate, whereby they are increasingly taking on a preventive role, also impacts on this relationship. Social identity approaches then both explain the relationship between the fire service and residents but also can help to provide suggestions for how to improve them. This will be considered in greater detail in the section looking at implications for the fire service for this research. Suffice to say, it may be easier for the fire service to look in on themselves and attempt to change their identity as a group in certain situations, than to attempt the same process either on groups of residents, or on the neighbourhood context in which they operate.

There is also another side to social identity approaches, whereby smaller groups are considered. In the literature review chapters, I covered a range of literature dealing with social categories and large groups, including crowds and riots. However, the actuality of the research demonstrated that fire fighters are more likely to experience small groups of residents in both neutral and hostile encounters, rather than larger crowds (although of course the recent riots remind us that this will not always be the case), and that even at crowd 'events' such as the Upperfield Festival, residents interact with the fire service within smaller groups.

Nevertheless, it is possible to demonstrate group identity when only a small number of group members are present (Hogg et al. 2004). On the one hand, this could be an example of smaller groups in proximity, for example 'Number One Crew, Green Watch' or 'the Smith Family', or, those present could be representative of a larger category, so that an individual fire fighter could still identify as a fire fighter, even with no other FRS staff present. Similarly, the family members could identify as, for example, Upperfield residents whether in an Upperfield crowd, or away from it. Although it is tempting to dwell on broad social categories, and exciting and dramatic crowd events, the reality of much of AFRS's work deals with the mundane and quotidian interaction between small groups of residents and small groups of fire

fighters. However, social identity approaches are equally able to deal with events at the latter level, and are not solely dependent on the former.

For example, there is a wealth of research using social identity approaches that covers, for example, organisational change (Haslam, 2004), small groups (Hogg et al. 2004) and sensemaking (Allard-Poesi, 2005), invoking the everyday and the mundane of group behaviour, rather than the unusual scenarios of crowd behaviour. Further, there is much within social identity approaches that points to the positive aspects of group behaviour, including links to social status and self esteem and the wider link between the group and society along a number of valued dimensions, including, at a large scale, ethnicity, nationality or gender and, at a smaller scale, occupational allegiances, neighbourhood identities and even sporting allegiances.

However, these types of identification can also lead to levels of resentment through, amongst other mechanisms, perceived iniquities in social status and the unlikeliness of social mobility. This is likely to take different forms, depending on the relative status of groups (Haslam, 2004) so for example higher status groups may employ latent or covert discrimination, or employ strategies to legitimise their higher status, whilst lower status groups use methods of social creativity to cope with the disparity. Haslam describes these methods as including comparing groups along a different dimension, changing the perceived attributes of the ingroup and finding different outgroups with which to compare (page 27). In this way, social identity approaches consider a range of different responses to social situations.

This is continued within contact approaches, where resentment and hostility between groups may have been expressed but not directly experienced. Although not unproblematic in and of themselves (Dixon and Durrheim, 2005), contact approaches have suggested a number of ways in which social identity approaches can be linked to coping with the dispersal of resentment in everyday situations, for example through decategorisation or recategorisation (Hewstone, 1996). In the former, individuals are encouraged to decategorise themselves from their group identities, viewing themselves and members of other groups as individuals. In the latter, members of different groups are encouraged to view themselves as equal

members of a larger, superordinate group which incorporates facets of the smaller groups. However, these processes are both difficult to achieve in the laboratory (Pettigrew, 1998) and hard to manage beyond it (Dixon and Durrheim, 2005).

However, social identity approaches are not without their critics, and do have some limitations, as befit an approach with such a wide ranging scope. Historically, one of the particular critiques of social identity theory was its lack of attention to the process through which social identity was assumed by the individual. This was addressed by developments in self categorisation (Turner, Oakes 1989). A further area of critique asks why individuals choose to associate with identities that contribute to negative self esteem (Brown 2000a), and there are some wider ranging commentaries that question the very scope of social identity approaches, arguing that they have become over extended and lost focus and falsifiability (Hogg, Williams 2000) as a result. Whilst these, and other, critiques are valid, they also serve to invigorate debate around social identity approaches, and ensure that they are of ongoing relevance in the study of intergroup relations. In this research project, they have enabled me to view the relationship between fire fighters and residents in neutral terms, seeing hostility and resistance as a natural, if not inevitable, adjunct to group relations. In the next section, I will look at ways in which the fire service have attempted to overcome this group dynamic and promote more positive relations with residents.

## *Are engagement mechanisms effective?*

In the previous two sections, I have considered the first two research questions posed by this thesis: what are the roots of hostility and resistance between fire fighters and residents, and how are these explained by social identity approaches. In this section, I will start to look at the practical application of this research project, continued more fully in the next section, by asking the final research question: to what extent are current engagement mechanisms effective? As discussed above, and listed in Appendix 6, AFRS conduct a wide range of interventions in the community. These are based on a number of different theoretical positions, including a number discussed previously in the Literature Review, but which tend not to be overtly acknowledged by the fire service or the fire fighters delivering the interventions. However, understanding the theoretical basis of the work is a useful

tool in understanding the way in which this package of measures is delivered, whether they are effective in themselves and congruent as a whole.

A key set of interventions conducted by AFRS appear to be premised on contact theory, which suggests that groups are in conflict with one another because group members stereotype and are prejudiced against members of other groups (Allport 1954). It is thought that by putting groups in a positive situation where cooperation is required for a superordinate goal to be reached, personal relationships can be formed, stereotypes and prejudice rejected and conflict reduced. Although few in the fire service are likely to cite contact hypothesis if asked, there is a clear link between the theory and the practice: community fire safety centres have been established in communities that are perceived as problematic in the hope that establishing a presence will lead to improved relationships and an increased level of trust, hopefully leading to fewer fires. Some of the informal schools schemes seem to work in a similar way: fire fighters go to some of Bristol's 'tougher' schools with professional rugby players to coach rugby. The groups play alongside each other, without the fire fighters giving any overt fire safety messages, and only disclosing their profession if asked. In this way, it is hoped that relationships can be established with some of the boys, who will then advocate for fire fighters in potentially volatile situations. By developing a reputation for being 'sound', fire fighters hope that fire safety messages and in schools interventions will be better received.

However, contact has been shown not to be universally successful (Dixon, Durrheim et al. 2005, Dixon, Durrheim 2004), and tends to be dependent on precise situations (Pettigrew 1998), (Reicher 2004). Of particular relevance to this research project are further critiques which suggest that contact theory fails to address the roots of conflict (Dixon, Durrheim et al. 2005), or may allow for it to reemerge. This may well impact on the effectiveness of contact based interventions, especially where they are based on the underlying assumptions of the contact hypothesis, and these approaches are perhaps particularly likely to be met with resistance, with the additional potential that they will exacerbate existing problems. Further, the data collected through the various studies demonstrates that fire fighters are not universally welcome in communities, and that on occasion, their presence, although envisaged as breaking down barriers and improving contact, can actually have the

opposite effective. This was seen to be the case especially in the vignettes presented in Study 3, and, pertinent also to police work (Skogan 2006) it may be the case that contact with the fire service in the community actually has a negative impact on perceptions of the service.

Other interventions, such as those dealing with ‘cleaner, safer, greener’ issues seem to be based on ideas stemming from broken windows theories (Wilson, Kelling 1982, Taylor 1999). As with the contact hypothesis, there are clear links between AFRS activity and broken windows theory. Although interventions which remove or report waste or abandoned vehicles have an overt fire prevention focus, by removing the fuel for a fire, they also fit in with a wider social agenda, very much espoused by community safety partnerships and regeneration practitioners, whereby environmental interventions, designed to make areas cleaner, safer, and greener, also have a knock on societal effect. AFRS are closely linked in with these activities, for example through local ‘days of action’ and are instrumental in their organisation, not just their execution, and their involvement in this area demonstrates their attempts to link in with other service providers. However, as discussed in the literature review, broken windows theory can have the effect of blaming residents for the consequences of their own poverty and it should be acknowledged that physical incivilities have a number of roots, not all of which can be addressed through short term clean up campaigns.

Further, data collected, for example through the focus groups, suggested that residents were somewhat confused by AFRS conducting work which did not seem to be fire related, and potentially thinking less of them for doing so. This type of ‘mission creep’ has the dual effect of potentially alienating residents who do not understand why AFRS are not doing their core work, as well as opening the way for criticism when, for instance, waste is not collected. The more different areas the fire service are involved in, as discussed above, the greater the possibility of criticism.

Much of AFRS business is concerned with areas which are typified by social exclusion, with residents of neighbourhood renewal areas twice as likely to die or be injured in a fire as residents of more affluent areas (Arson Control Forum 2004).

Needless to say, these are also areas that are covered by a number of area based initiatives aimed to address these related issues in whole or in part. Although probably not familiar with the different discourses of social exclusion (Levitas, 1998), fire fighters on the ground are acutely aware of its effects, of over crowded housing, furniture dating from before regulatory improvement, and a concentration of demographic risk factors, such as single parent families, elderly and disabled people. However, it is the moral underclass discourse which is perhaps most pervasive amongst operational fire fighters, who see, on a daily basis, the effects of smoking, chip pans and heavy alcohol / drug use. This is exacerbated by fire related ASB and attacks on crews to a point where certain neighbourhoods become stigmatised. Although this does not impact on operational response in emergency situations, it may impact on the ability of crews to engage with residents in these neighbourhoods, and an increased difficulty in relaying fire safety messages.

Further, the different ways in which exclusion is used (Levitas 2005), can, like broken windows theory, come to blame the excluded for their own exclusion (Murray, Lister et al. 1996). Processes of exclusion are mirrored in patterns of fire risk (Communities and Local Government 2008) and at times it seems as if fire fighters are complicit in these types of moral underclass discourse. Further, as discussed at length above, the fire service are just one of a panoply of public agencies providing services to residents in hard pressed areas. Where these are seen as unduly intrusive, residents may be more likely to close ranks against them, seeing them as just another interfering public service, and not as the unique service provider the fire service see themselves as being. Further, although allaying some of the more relevant effects of social exclusion may fall within the purview of the fire service, clearly effecting wider social change may be somewhat beyond their remit. However, one method for both understanding and attempting to combat social exclusion is social capital, and much of the engagement work which AFRS performs could be seen to be in this way. Unfortunately, and as discussed in Chapter Two, there are a range of critiques of social capital, including its ability to limit diversity (Crawford 2006), especially where groups are not themselves open to it (Baigent 2001, Bain 2002). Furthermore, where the local norms of a neighbourhood tolerate or condone anti social behaviour, celebrating neighbourhood distinctiveness might send rather mixed messages.

A number of AFRS interventions very clearly attempt to tackle ASB itself, with a heavy emphasis on that ASB caused predominantly by young people, such as vehicle arson and hoax calls. Although some of AFRS's ASB interventions are popular with some fire fighters, and in communities, they could be seen as problematic in two main ways. Firstly, behaviours such as vehicle arson, making hoax calls, misuse of fireworks and attacking fire crews are all illegal, and are covered by various different areas of legislation. Conflating them with behaviours which are lower impact, less dangerous and not criminal both devalues the danger of some of these behaviours – vehicle arson, for example, could be fatal – and exaggerates the impact of lesser behaviours, such as the visibility of young people in public. Secondly, and in a related point, by seeking to tackle this range of ASB, AFRS are at risk of buying into discourses which stigmatise certain communities and groups (Prior 2009), with the possible result that their actions prove counter productive, as communities close ranks against fire service personnel who are seen as antagonistic to their needs or their culture.

Viewed in the whole, it seems that the fire service has an enormous remit in addition to its 'bread and butter' fire and rescue work, and this is no doubt as overwhelming for fire service personnel as it has been for me. The range of different initiatives is confusing both for AFRS personnel and for the resident who is the consumer of these services. Broadly, this can be seen as stemming from a lack of direction at a strategic level. If this was to be addressed, alongside a clearer theoretical input, initiatives on the ground would become both more consistent, better managed and complementary to one another's aims. AFRS have a lot of resources at their disposal, and a degree of goodwill in many communities. The messages they espouse and the interventions they perform can be literally lifesaving. It would be a shame if a lack of congruence in the delivery of these messages was to prove counterproductive to their execution. As such, although a lot of good work is conducted through current engagement mechanisms, they are not as effective as they could be. The implications for this are discussed in the next section.

## *Implications for AFRS*

In the previous section, I discussed the extent to which existing engagement mechanisms were effective, finding that a lot of good work is done by the fire service, but that it lacks a theoretical underpinning or a strategic focus, and that this might, ultimately, prove to be counterproductive. In this section, I will consider the implications of this for the fire service, returning the focus of the work back to practical considerations in acknowledgement of the real life location of the research and its pragmatic origins. Although the relationship between research and policy is not straightforward (Pain 2006), it is important that a dialogue is maintained between the two, and that research is not confined to the academy but allowed to permeate and influence its supporting institutions. However, these implications will be presented in a manner which is congruent to this thesis, rather than as recommendations for the fire service, although, as will be discussed below, this is something that could be addressed by further dissemination work. The four areas of implications that I will discuss include recruitment issues, acknowledgement of the problem at an organisational level, dealing with the problem at an operational level and, finally, the capriciousness of the public.

As discussed at length above, the image of the fire service is very much one of fire fighting (Childs, Morris et al. 2004, Cooper 1995), and this is perpetuated both in recruitment and in the training school. Community safety work takes little precedence in training, with maybe half a day (out of three months) devoted to it, and, in my experience, being somewhat undermined by other staff at the centre. Many recruits and existing fire fighters expressed a sentiment to me that community safety work was not ‘what they joined to do’ although it actually comprises a significant proportion of their work time. As such, this creates a disjuncture between job expectation and job role, with the possibility of resentment accumulating both for the community safety work itself and for the community which requires it. Further, there is little publicity of community safety work, which means that residents remain unaware of this area of fire service work. Although this type of cultural change has already begun, for instance through the restructuring of the fire service in the 2000s (Bain, 2002), it is far from complete, and issues such as recruitment and publicity are currently undermining other organisational attempts at change.

At an organisational level, and despite the sponsorship of this research project, there remains a lack of acknowledgement of a problem in the relationship between the fire service and the community. Although there is recognition of the problem of assaults, there is incomprehension about the lower level resistance and hostility, with several senior managers I encountered, both within Avon and beyond, expressing doubts in my claims. There appears to be a degree of complacency within the service that they perform a valued task (granted), that they perform it well, and that the community are in agreement with this. However, in operational terms, there is a potential problem that to disabuse fire fighters of their high standing may make them question the value of their emergency work. Inevitably, these are issues of some sensitivity. Further, and although the danger of assaults is real and present, for a number of fire fighters, they are not taken very seriously. War stories abound, and for a number of participants, hostility from residents was taken in good humour as a bit of manly cut and thrust. This is undermining both to fire fighters who do take it seriously, and also to organisational attempts to catalogue and gauge the problem.

Thirdly, at an operational level, there is a need for greater sensitivity by the fire service to residents in Bristol neighbourhoods. Fire fighters are very visible in communities, and this has a two fold effect. Firstly, they draw attention to themselves in a number of different ways. Whilst this has clear purpose when responding to emergencies, the same features mean that in non-emergency situations they are just as visible. Further, the practice of working as a whole crew means that there can be five fire fighters in a situation that would only require one or two, and that in numbers, noise levels can also escalate. This potentially leads to residents being more able to see fire fighters behaving in ways of which they disapprove (such as chatting together by a fire engine, rather than engaging with local people), and drawing correlations about the whole service from this (Skogan, 2006). Secondly, the same factors also draw attention to residents, such as when a fire engine arrives at a property to conduct a home fire safety visit. In a number of neighbourhoods, residents have a natural reticence about engaging with public agencies (Mathers, 2008) and such a high profile visitation may direct more attention to the resident than they would have willingly experienced. Although some of these issues are, perhaps, unlikely to be changed, they are aspects of community work that the fire service could be more sensitive towards.

The final implication very much picks up on Skogan's work (2006), which suggests that the public weight a negative encounter, in this case with the police, much more heavily than a positive one. Even in communities that are ostensibly law abiding and pro public services, there will be residents who are resistant to the fire service, possibly *because* they are law abiding, and who may feel that their concerns are not prioritised over those of harder to reach residents. The public have a tendency to be fickle and capricious, and, whilst it is a truism, the fire service are not going to be able to please all of them all of the time. However, if they come to acknowledge that, and to act with greater sensitivity to it, they may at least please some of the people, some of the time.

## Reflecting on the process: looking back and looking forward

I started this research project in 2007, fresh from a career in consultancy, with two children and a Labour government. As I draw near to concluding, consultancy seems a long time ago, I have three children and the coalition government and banking crisis have changed, perhaps forever, the fabric of public service provision and higher education. When reflecting on the process of research, it is often customary to think of what one would have done differently if asked to conduct the research again, perhaps negating the fact that conducting the research project is as much of a learning process as its outcomes. It is almost impossible for me to say what I would have done differently – so much remains beyond one's control – and indeed, if, knowing what I know now, I would have started in the first place. One of the most pragmatic problems to have overcome has been with the change of personnel at AFRS, so that the initiator of the project retired before I started. Although a replacement contact was found for me, this research project was not officially part of his remit, and although he found time to discuss the project with me, and to make certain introductions, he too left the service. I had managed to find staff on the ground to help me, but the extended period of leave I took over my husband's severe illness then rather interrupted that relationship. A second period of leave for maternity did not help.

More detail is given in the methodology chapter on the ways in which I managed to navigate AFRS hierarchies and systems, however, this was only one aspect of the

management of this project. Working on any project which is both inter-institutional and interdisciplinary is always likely to have some complexities, and there is no one way of negotiating such relationships. For example, contact with Bristol University proved to be little more than a formality, and once initial meetings had been held, none more were expected of me. Perhaps, given the chance to do things again, I would have worked harder on this relationship, but it was easy to get engrossed in the day to day minutiae of the project, and to an extent, this was to the detriment of external relations.

A further relationship to be managed was that with the different departments that my supervisors came from. Although funded under the Psychology stream from GWR, I have been based, along with one supervisor, for the duration of this research project in what started as the Faculty of the Built Environment, and which is now called the Faculty of Environment and Technology, whilst my other supervisor is in Psychology. Without a formal training in psychology, coming to an understanding of psychologists' ways of doing things was an important, and ongoing, learning experience. Undertaking courses from a third faculty further demonstrated the differences between certain academic fields, as well as causing something close to a diplomatic incident, and I felt thankful on a number of occasions that using social identity approaches gave me insight as much to these relationships as to those between  fire fighters and residents.

Of course, this research project was far more than a simple exercise in project management, and from the outset I had inherited a broad research brief, developed to secure the funding that enabled the project prior to my involvement. As I adapted to the strictures of the brief, I struggled, as no doubt many have before me, with the conflicting requirements to both fulfil the stipulations and to make the research my own. The most obvious change to the original requirements was the move away from quantitative work, although this is not an approach I would dismiss for further projects. There was, perhaps, also a stronger emphasis on place at the outset, and although spatial aspects, most typically neighbourhood, still feature in the research, I have focussed less on this than I might have done. However, and as discussed below, this could form an area for further research.

As I found my feet with the research project, and perhaps strove for individuality and my own take on things, there is every possibility I tried to move away from the original requirements, particularly as my research gained its own momentum. However, in the latter stages of the project, particularly following the disruptions that external life imposed, I found myself coming back to the brief time and again. Although I cannot truthfully say I stuck to the letter of it, I do feel that I have completed this project in the spirit of the original outline, although it is a shame that so few of the original stakeholders have been able to see it through to completion with me.

Nevertheless, the past four years have been an interesting time, and to an extent only really mark the beginning of this research enterprise. It has always been important for me for this research project to have a life beyond the academy, something which I have pursued through presentations at the fire service Research Event each year, and now, increasingly through journal publications. I have co-authored one paper which is due for publication (in *Local Government Studies*) in August 2011, and am currently preparing papers for submission to *Urban Studies* and *Crime Prevention and Community Safety.* These will address issues arising in the focus group study and around fire related anti social behaviour, respectively.

In addition to the dissemination work discussed above, there is also the scope to develop the work begun in this research project through further research. As with the studies undertaken in this research project, this could focus on the fire service, residents or the interaction between the two. Several potential research projects are outlined below, each requiring more or less new research and building to an extent on the work already conducted.

Building on work looking at the interaction between residents and fire fighters could help to test the ideas developed in this research project. Although focus groups and observations both discussed the interaction, the studies did not allow for change over time. A further study could take a longitudinal approach, interviewing residents before an interaction with the fire service, observing the interaction, and then interviewing them again. Alternatively, interviews could be conducted immediately

following the interaction, and then at a later date, allowing for some months to pass. This would enable the impact of the interaction to be assessed, and for AFRS to judge more effectively if their current mechanisms for engagement are effective. It could also be possible to interview fire service personnel involved in the encounters on their perceptions of the experience. This would allow for a greater understanding of how they perceived the different encounters, and to what extent this mirrored the public's perceptions of them.

Working with residents of the same neighbourhoods could also produce some interesting data. None of the residents I met with had directly experienced emergencies, and although it would need to be handled with great sensitivity, it would be interesting to look at how residents who have had emergency experiences viewed the fire service. Rather than meet with people who have themselves been in a fire, interviewing neighbours who had closely witnessed but not personally experienced a house fire could be insightful, with fewer of the associated ethical issues. Further, a number of fire services conduct follow up work with people affected by house fires. If this is the case for AFRS, it could be possible either to observe this work, or to use transcripts as data for secondary analysis.

One of the themes that came out of the neighbourhood work concerned the way in which residents use microgeographies to navigate their neighbourhoods. This work could be progressed, comparing perhaps more and less affluent neighbourhoods, or ones that are typified in different ways (for example inner city or peripheral). This could feed into both social and environmental psychology debates around identity and context. As an adjunct to this work, it could also be possible to look at how residents' navigations of the neighbourhood differed from those of service providers and the implications of these different understandings of place.

A second theme that might bear up to further scrutiny is concerned with the change in relationship with the fire service, or with public services in general, according to lifestage. This could also be extended to look at differences according to lifecourse, for example with residents who lived in the city through the Second World War having different experiences of fire (as a weapon of war) and fire fighters (as

volunteers, and in many cases female) than is currently the case. This could also link well with discussions of crime and anti social behaviour and the way in which these link to lifestage, building on the journal paper outlined above considering a typology of fire related ASB.

A final area in which further research could be conducted would return to the fire service, using them to source data, this time in a more quantitatively driven way. Building on the ways in which residents navigate their neighbourhoods, fire service data about the location of fires would be collated and mapped. This could, potentially, be accompanied by other data including hoax calls or home fire safety visits. A further layer of research could add other geo-demographic information including around household make up and other factors which the fire service see as contributing to risk. Using new mapping technologies, this would allow for a textured and informative representation of fire service data which could then be used as the basis for more qualitative work with both fire fighters and residents.

This section has outlined some further avenues for research which could be pursued following from this research project. When I started the research in 2007, the FRS was an under researched area. Although that situation is being addressed, there remains scope for a great deal more research, building on this research project, and linking to existing research areas, such as with social and place identity, neighbourhoods, and criminality and lifestage. In years to come, perhaps, fire service research will take its rightful place alongside research on the police and other emergency services.

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# Appendix 1: Field work contact with AFRS personnel

Head quarters

Observations

- Information unit
- Fire prevention office
- Canteen

Interviews / meetings

- Community safety manager
- Union representatives
- Partnerships manager
- Performance and information manager
- Bristol group manager
- Fire fighter seconded to the CSP with remit for ASB

Control

- Manager (interview)
- Staff (interview and observations)

Stations

- Arson control forum (meeting)
- Watch manager at Upperfield (interview)
- Crew at Upperfield (observations)

Norton

- Watch manager (interview)
- Crew (interviews, observations, including night shift)

Merseyside

- ASB advocates (observations)
- Crime prevention manager (interview)

Shiregreen community safety centre

- Observations in centre
- Events: opening ceremony, ‘fun day’, electric blanket amnesty
- Meetings with other local service providers
- Risk control manager (then also chair of the CSP) – meeting
- Councillors from the fire authority (meeting)
- Observations and conversations with a number of passing fire fighters
- Operation Phoenix (fire prevention and rugby, inc in YOI)

Other

Conferences: Research Events at Fire Service College, Bristol ASB conferences (AFRS conspicuous by their absence)

A station visit for a children’s birthday party

A visit to the school (in the holidays) to fill up the pond

Meetings with South Wales FRS risk manager (on a CFOA secondment) and a station manager

Days spent at the JTC with recruits

Discussions with friends and acquaintances who have had HFSVs

# Appendix 2: Outline for Fire Fighter Interviews

Introduction: I will start the interview by introducing myself, outlining the research and giving participants details of the research project, including my contact details. I will explain that they are free to leave the interview or to withdraw their data at any time, and give them a consent form to this effect.

Job role:

How long have you been a fire fighter? At this station? Which other stations?

Experience of hostility:

- How are you usually perceived? Have you experienced hostility in your role?
- In what respect? (For instance doing HFSV, public displays, school talks, driving around)
- Can you think of a particular instance? What happened? What did you / your colleagues do? Do you think you could have behaved differently? How might that have changed the outcome?
- Do you experience hostility particularly in certain areas? Do these areas have anything (physical / social) in common?

Your local community:

- Did you grow up round here?
- Do you ever work in the community in which you grew up? Is that different to working in other areas? How is it different?

Thanks for your involvement. Any other points? Reiterate confidentiality. Remind about withdrawal and contact details.

# Appendix 3: Letter to HFSV participant

Dear XXX

I am a student at UWE doing research in Upperfield, Shiregreen and Hilton. I would like to invite you to a small group discussion, to be held at the xx Centre, Shiregreen, on the 13th July 2009, at 11am. We will be talking about what you like and dislike about living in your neighbourhood, what you think people in your neighbourhood are like, and whether you have had any contact with the fire service (although it doesn't matter if you haven't).

You will be paid £10 to thank you for coming to the group, and refreshments (tea/coffee and biscuits) will be provided. The discussion should take one hour.

If you come to the group, I will not tell other people that you came to the discussion, and I will not tell people who said what in our conversations. Because this work is being supported by AFRS, the overall results of all these discussions will be passed back to the fire service to help them improve the services that they provide, but they will not know who said what.

If you would like any more information, please call me on 0117 3283667 or email kate2.matheson@uwe.ac.uk

I will be making follow up calls in the next couple of weeks, to ask if you would like to take part in this research. Alternatively, you can get in touch by phoning or emailing me. I hope that this research will help to make your neighbourhood a safer place, and it is important that local people are involved.

Many thanks

Kate

# Appendix 4: Script for Focus Groups

Hello everyone, and thank you for coming.

My name's Kate. I'm a researcher at UWE, up in Frenchay, and I'm doing some research about relationships between the fire service and different neighbourhoods. This is my colleague (Billy/Anja). They are here to help me with the equipment, and things, but won't actually be taking part.

I'm hoping this will take a bit less than an hour. Before we get started, can I just make a couple of points.

Firstly, I'd like to reassure you all that I will treat everything you say in confidence. This means that, although I might quote from what you say to me, it will be written in such a way that no one will know who said what. Even though I am recording this, no one except me will listen to the recording.

I'll leave you all my contact details, and if you have any further thoughts, or questions or concerns about your involvement, please do get in touch.

Also, I'd like to ask you to respect each others confidentiality, and not talk about what people have said in here once you leave.

While we're talking, it would be good if you can try and talk one at a time, and not interrupt each other. I'll try to make sure everyone gets a turn to talk. And do please be respectful of what other people are saying.

Is that okay? Are there any questions?

Okay, that's enough of the formalities.

**Section one**

The first thing I'd like you to do is just to go round saying your name, whereabouts you live (just the neighbourhood, not your actual address) and how long you've lived there.

So, I'll go first. As you know, my name's Kate, I live in St Pauls, and I've lived there for 7 years.

**Section two**

Great, ok. Now it would be useful to talk about whether you like living in your neighbourhood.

(Would anyone like to start)

And do you think it's getting better? Or worse?

And what particular aspects do you like or dislike:

Is it clean?

Do you feel safe?

What are your neighbours like? (would you ask them for a favour, would they ask you?)

Are there good facilities / things to do?

Do you get involved with things in the neighbourhood? (churches, parks groups, clubs, voluntary work)

Are there other things you like / dislike

When you tell people you're from your neighbourhood, what do they think?

And what do you think if people tell you they're from your neighbourhood? What about if they're from a different neighbourhood?

Do you think people in your neighbourhood are different to people from other neighbourhoods – like 'we all keep ourselves to ourselves…'

Do you think where you live tells people anything about you in general

(what do people think about you when you say you're from wherever)

**Section three**

That's great thanks. Okay, now I'd like to ask some slightly different questions

Show picture

An easy one to start with, here’s a fire engine.

What does this make you think about?

When did you last see the fire service

What were they doing?

Is this the sort of thing they usually do in your neighbourhood?

Have you seen them doing anything else in your neighbourhood?

(Do you see them doing useful things in your neighbourhood?)

(my little boys love seeing fire engines, would you point out fire engines to your children / other children)

So here are some pictures of fire fighters doing some other sorts of things, like mountain bike patrols, a schools visit and a display in the supermarket.

Have you seen any fire fighters doing any of this sort of thing?

What did you think about that?

Do you like seeing them in your neighbourhood?

Do things like this make you change your ideas about the fire service?

Did you know they did things like this?

Do you think they should be doing this?

Okay, moving on, Have you or your family had a home fire safety visit? (show pictures of HFSV) (that's when some fire fighters come to your home, go through some safety information and check or install smoke alarms)

Show picture of the booklet

Was it useful?

was it how you thought it would be

have you done things differently as a result

(like stop smoking, fit a smoke alarm)

Do you think HFSVs could be done differently? Or better?

If you or your family haven't had a home fire safety visit, and would like one, I can give you details at the end.

So, you've all talked a bit about your personal experiences with the fire service, now I'd like you to think a bit more broadly.

The fire service say that sometimes it's hard for them to get their messages across

(for example, people don't come and ask them questions at fetes, or are rude to them)

Why do you think this might be? Do you think this is a problem in (wherever)

What do you think they could do to make this better? (for example, get out more / less, different uniforms, different messages)

Crews attacked by firework

**Monday 05 November 2007**
**23.03 Hill Avenue, Totterdown, Bristol**

Crews were called to a bonfire in the middle of Victoria Park and on arrival they noticed youths playing with rockets in the park. As they attempted to tackle the fire two youths lit a rocket and fired it horizontally at crews. It landed around 20 feet away.
Fortunately no one was hurt, but Avon Fire & Rescue Service is disappointed with this kind of behaviour. Not only were the youths putting their own safety at risk, but they were also endangering the safety of firefighters, who were there to protect the community.
Fireworks can be extremely dangerous and can also cause horrific injuries if used irresponsibly.

Show press release, read out.

So this is a press release about an attack on fire fighters in Bedminster a couple of years ago.

Do you ever hear about attacks on fire fighters?

What sort of people do you think do this?

Why do you think people do this?

What do you think the fire service should do?

How do you think people feel about the fire service? How do you feel about the fire service?

Section four

Ok, that’s great.

Thanks so much for your contributions, and for helping me with my research.

Before we finish, I’d just like to go round once again, and see if anyone would like to make any further comments, about their neighbourhood, or about the fire service.

Great, thanks for all your help. Before you go, I'd just like to remind you once again about respecting each others confidentiality, as I will respect yours. Also, please take one of these leaflets, which includes some details about how you can get more information about the things we've been talking about.

# Appendix 5: Debrief sheet for neighbourhood focus groups

***Neighbourhood research project***

Thank you very much for your involvement in today's discussion. I hope you found it interesting.

Please remember that I will not use your name in my report, and will not write about what you said in a way that means people will know that you said it. Please also treat the information other people have given you in confidence, and do not talk about it.

On this sheet, there is some information that you might find useful if you would like to find out some more about the work the fire service does, or if you have any worries resulting from our discussions.

For further information:

About the fire service: 0117 926 2061 (main switchboard)

www.avonfire.gov.uk

About community fire safety: www.avonfire.gov.uk/Avon/Your+safety

About home fire safety visits:
www.avonfire.gov.uk/Avon/Your+safety/Home+Fire+Safety+Visits.htm

Or phone the switchboard, 0017 926 2061.

To report a crime anonymously (Crimestoppers): 0800 555 111

www.crimestoppers-uk.org

To talk to the police (Avon and Somerset) 0845 456 7000

www.avonandsomerset.police.uk

If you would like to discuss my research some more, or have any concerns about your involvement in it, please contact me: Kate2.matheson@uwe.ac.uk 0117 3283667

## In an emergency, always call 999

# Appendix 6: AFRS community interventions

Brand advancement

- Annual charity fun run
- Gambia partnership
- Charity car washes
- Sponsoring the LGA conference

Pre engagement

- Nursery school visits
- Fire service hot air balloon
- Fire safety messages on branded vehicles
- Some outreach work (for example ‘Operation Phoenix’ which is a rugby programme at a young offenders’ institute)
- Event attendance (for example taking an appliance to a local fete or community activity)
- Information in council / local newsletters

Cleaner safer greener

- Car clear scheme
- Annual arson campaign
- Environmental action days (which involve a number of local services)
- Mountain bike patrols and improved reporting of fly tipped rubbish

Community fire safety

- Chip pan trailer demonstrations at events / chip pan amnesties
- Fire safety in the home talks
- Schools interventions (Sparx, FiresKills, RoadsKills)
- Electric blanket testing
- HFSVs (which I will discuss in greater detail below)
- Advocates (who work within a specific community, for example with deaf people, raising fire awareness and giving community fire safety advice)
- Community fire safety centres

Fire Related Anti Social Behaviour

- Schools interventions (Sparx, FiresKills, RoadsKills)
- Hoax calls
- Mischief week joint operations
- Impact roadshow (delivered with the police to deter young people from joyriding)
- Youth fire cadets
- Youth development centre
- Individual psychological interventions

# Appendix 7: Research Participants Briefing

### *Neighbourhood research project*

### *Introduction*

My name is Kate Matheson.  I am a student, funded by Avon Fire and Rescue Service and Great Western Research (GWR), based at UWE.

### *My research*

My research is looking at how people behave in groups, how groups behave in relation to one another and whether there are particular factors in different neighbourhoods that affect these group behaviours. I am interviewing groups of people in different neighbourhoods to ask them about their experiences of living where they live, and to talk about what they think about the fire service.

Names will not be attached to anything that you say, and only the other people at the group will know who was there. If I use comments in my reports, they will be put in a way which means people won't know who said them.

### *More information*

If you would like more information about this research, or if you would like to take part please get in touch with me by email: Kate2.matheson@uwe.ac.uk

or telephone: 0117 3283667.

# Appendix 8: Aide memoire for use with HFSVs

At the briefing, I will look at:

How and why they choose the areas

What are they expecting from the day (are they looking forward to it…)

How they feel about warm calling as a method

Process

What are the response rates like?

How many leaflets are dropped?

How many displayed?

How many visits conducted?

What do they do if a leaflet isn't displayed?

In the house

How are they received by the resident

How do they introduce themselves / explain the process

What kind of response do they receive? Are residents 'keen'?

How do residents take to being questioned?

Are people happy to share all the required information?

Do residents discuss their neighbours? Do residents talk as 'residents' or as individuals?

Do the fire fighters follow a common format? How closely? Do they go 'off script'

How is the advice offered (in a way that 'tells' the resident what to do, or which presents information and allows them to make an informed decision for themselves)

Do they address additional risk factors / offer help or guidance on other issues?

What information are residents left with? Do they seem satisfied with the encounter?

Afterwards

How do fire fighters think the days went?

Did they think it was a good use of time?

Did they enjoy doing them?

Did they think the residents benefitted from them?

What was a ‘typical’ visit?

Did they go as expected?

# Appendix 9: Subordinate themes within superordinate groups

| Study | Theme |
|---|---|
| Suspicion of non group members | |
| 1 | Busy areas |
| 1 | Distinctions from where they work and live |
| 1 | Contract of resentment |
| 2 | Neighbourhoods |
| 2 | Positive and negative views |
| 2 | Making do |
| 2 | Interaction with other services |
| 2 | Microgeographies |
| 2 | How participants judge residents |
| 2 | Judging their own neighbourhood |
| 2 | Self esteem |
| 3 | Context |
| Traditional roles | |
| 1 | Fire fighter identity |
| 1 | What fire fighters joined to do |
| 1 | Busy stations |
| 2 | Involvement in and experience of emergencies |
| 2 | The association between fire fighters and emergencies |
| 2 | Speed and sirens |
| 2 | Fire fighter physicality |
| 2 | Fire fighters as authority figures |
| 2 | Doing their job |
| 2 | Association with health and safety |
| 3 | Physical presence |
| Entitlement and resentment | |
| 1 | Social contract |
| 1 | They ought to be held in high regard |
| 2 | Life stage |
| 2 | Decline in respect |
| 2 | The presence of fire fighters |
| 2 | Interfering |
| 2 | Change over time |
| 2 | Easy targets |
| 3 | Intrusion |