

# **Creating communities of risk:**

**Exploring the experiences of youth workers and marginalised young  
people from minority ethnic backgrounds**

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## Abstract

In the contemporary context of economic austerity and youth service cuts, socio-political discourses around 'youth' and 'risk' have gained amplified significance. In particular, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds have been situated centrally within public and political discourses surrounding 'failed multiculturalism', violence, drugs and 'postcode gangs'. These problematic associations contribute to dominant perceptions of disadvantaged, minority groups as simultaneously 'at risk' and 'risky', a process that has a profound impact on the experiences of young people inhabiting racialised urban spaces. This thesis explores the impact of 'risk labelling' on the experiences of a predominantly Somali sample of young people (aged 11 – 19) alongside the youth workers that engaged with them. The data presented within this thesis are based on three years of ethnographic field work, conducted in and around local youth services in two disadvantaged areas of a post-industrial Northern city.

The thesis explores the following research topics in depth: the impacts of 'risk labelling' on processes of collective identification; the ways in which young people conceptualised their behaviours in relation to 'risk labelling'; the perceived significance of local youth provision within the research settings; and, the relationship between the youth workers and young people within the research settings. The research findings provide empirical support for the argument that racialised discourses contribute to the political framing of disadvantaged communities, along the lines of risk and that individually imagined communities are subjectively responsive to these 'risk labelling' processes. Through its exploration of 'risk labelling', this thesis also offers a number of key and relevant policy findings that illustrate the counter-productivity of government youth policy and the contemporary importance of financing local youth provision.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In the contemporary context of economic austerity and youth service cuts, socio-political discourses around 'youth' and 'risk' have gained amplified significance. In particular, young people from working class, ethnic minority backgrounds have been central to discussions of 'failed multiculturalism', violence, drugs and 'postcode gangs' (Alexander, 2000; 2008). The proliferation of a 'risk' focus on 'youth' within political discourse is illustrated by the centrality of the term within contemporary youth policy (France, 2008; Home Office, 2011a; 2011b; DCLG, 2012a). For example, the 2011 Home Office *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* report commits to identifying and managing the areas most 'at risk' from youth violence, with the aim of tackling 'the scourge of gang culture' (Home Office, 2011a). The 2011 Home Office *Prevent Strategy* aims to respond to the perceived national risk posed by Al Qa'ida, preventing *vulnerable* young people from being drawn to terrorism is one of its primary objectives. More recently, the *Working with Troubled Families* initiative has also emphasised the management of 'antisocial behaviour risks', alongside protecting those 'at risk' from child neglect (DCLG 2012a).

The manner in which risk terminology is being increasingly applied to areas and groups within youth policy is questionable. In particular, the construction of young people both 'as risk' and 'at risk' has been criticised for its capacity to drive successful policy and practice interventions (Turnbull and Spence, 2011). The individualised approach by which policy makers define and attempt to manage 'risk' in the context of youth has also been widely criticised for contributing to the marginalisation of already disadvantaged groups (Armstrong, 2006; France 2008; Turnbull and Spence, 2011; Smithson *et al*, 2013).

The implications of ascribing risk labels to disadvantaged people and places are yet to be understood in depth and very little research has illustrated the experiences of young people and youth workers within this contemporary context (Cooper, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Smithson *et al*, 2013). This thesis presents a number of unique contributions to understandings of youth, risk, community and race. The data presented is taken from three years of ethnographic research, conducted in and around local youth services within two disadvantaged areas of a post-industrial Northern city (Forgefield<sup>1</sup>). The research included an ethnically

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<sup>1</sup> All locations have been anonymised; for further details please contact the author.

diverse sample of youth workers and young people. It explored four key research topics.

1. The impacts of risk labelling on processes of identification, including the symbolic construction of 'community'.
2. Young people's conceptualisation of their everyday behaviours in relation to risk labelling.
3. The perceived significance of local youth provision within the research settings.
4. The relationships between youth workers and young people within the research settings.

Addressing these topics, the thesis presents four substantive contributions.

1. By documenting the experiences of a predominantly Somali sample of young people, the thesis builds on a limited body of knowledge that highlights the lived experiences and identity practices of the British Somali population (Harding *et al*, 2007; Hudson *et al*, 2007; Valentine *et al*, 2006; 2009; Valentine and Sporton, 2009). Indeed, Somalis remain a part of the British Muslim population that very little is known about. This thesis presents an argument for the more direct recognition of the Somali community within contemporary understandings of British Muslims (Alexander *et al*, 2013). This is particularly pertinent given the contemporary positioning of Somalis at the intersection of numerous lines of disadvantage.
2. The qualitative nature of this research contributes to the largely quantitative sociological 'risk factor' literature, which fails to consider the 'contexts in which young people experience risk and their own perceptions of risk' (Green *et al*, 2010: 112). The research findings suggest that by relying on a predominantly quantitative field and failing to account for the ways in which individuals conceptualise their everyday experiences, the intervention strategies adopted by local councils and the British Home Office are both theoretically and epistemologically flawed. As such, it is argued that contemporary risk prevention agendas actually contribute to the marginalisation of what are often already disadvantaged communities through risk labelling processes (France, 2008).
3. The exploration of respondents' articulations of community also consolidate contemporary theoretical understandings of community (Cohen, 1985; Andersen, 1999; Bauman, 2000). Despite the highly contextual nature of collective identification, the findings of this research situate the local as the central factor, binding the often contested opinions

of a diverse range of interest groups within the multicultural research settings. These findings point towards the significance of identifying with place in the context of marginalisation. In doing so, the research findings illustrate understandings of community as individually imagined and contested, albeit ordered by established discourses surrounding race, place and social class (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Anderson, 2006).

4. Finally, contemporary understandings of youth work practice are developed within this thesis, through a critical exploration of the youth work relationship. The focus on youth workers and young people within this research presents a unique insight into the challenges of engaging with youth work from the perspective of both practitioners and service users. Significantly, this discussion highlights the implications of contemporary government agendas (Home office 2011a; 2011b; DCLG, 2012a) for the changing nature of youth work practice.

### **The setting**

The research is set in Maple and Meadow. These are two urban areas situated approximately ten minutes walking distance from the commercial centre of Forgefield, a post-industrial Northern city. Forgefield has a rich history of steel production. It also has an ethnically diverse population of which 19.2% are from minority ethnic backgrounds (ONS, 2011). Amongst others, the city is home to White British, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengali, Yemeni, African Caribbean, Jamaican, Chinese and Somali communities. This diversity is, in part, the product of high levels of inward migration, during the mid-20th century, to meet the growing demand for industrial labour. However, the subsequent decline of the steel industry (particularly since the late 1970's) has left Forgefield with levels of long term unemployment that are above the national average (ONS, 2011). This unemployment impacts disproportionately on Forgefield's ethnic minority communities, taking a spatial form 'through severely constrained employment and housing options' (Thomas, 2011:18). As a result, many of Forgefield's most ethnically diverse areas are also the most economically deprived. Inequalities across the city also appear to be increasing. According to the 2010 Indices of Deprivation, Forgefield became more unequal in the period between 2007 and 2010 (DCLG, 2010). During this time, inequalities of education, skills, crime and disorder grew, appearing most acute within Forgefield's ethnically diverse social housing estates.

Figures such as those reported within the 2010 Indices of Deprivation appear to substantiate existing 'common sense' associations between 'race, crime, housing and unemployment' (Hall *et al*, 2013:102 *see also* Lawernce, 1982a). Situated at the centre of these damaging associations is the 'problem of male youth'; a

discourse that sees young urban men as ‘agents of street crime and violence’ (Back, 2007:56). Attempts to explore the recurrent moral panics surrounding inner city youths date back to the 1970’s (Cohen, 1972; Hall *et al*, 1978). It was during this period, through the work of the *Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* that the position of race gained prominence within academic discussions of UK youth (Gilroy *et al*, 1982). Central to this body of work is a focus on the embedding of racialised associations within common sense, alongside the implications of this in terms of institutional racism and increasingly controlling responses to the ‘problem of *black* youth’. For example, Hall *et al* (2013) described the racialised political response to the 1972 ‘mugging crisis’ as the issuing of a ‘law and order society’; characterised by the surveillance of working class neighbourhoods, proactive policing and increasingly punitive sentencing (316). Today, the same populist associations between race, crime, housing and unemployment, directly inform ‘new’ attempts to manage ethnically diverse urban spaces. The Coalition government’s approach is now ‘focused on the management of *risk* through the mapping of crime hot spots and unsafe areas’ (Back, 2007: 56). This contemporary focus justifies the same ‘pre-emptive intervention, surveillance and control in the lives of children and young people’ (Turnbull and Spence, 2011:940 *see also* Armstrong, 2006; France 2008; Home Office 2011a; 2011b; DCLG, 2012b; Smithson *et al*, 2013). Both Maple and Meadow, the areas where this research takes place, are subject to common sense racialised preconceptions and the pre-emptive controlling measures associated with them.

## **Maple**

Maple is a densely populated area with predominantly young (20-24) residents (NHS, 2010; ONS, 2011). It is situated in between two universities. This location makes it a popular place for student tenants, which goes some way towards explaining the overrepresentation of 20–24 year olds living in the area. Many of Maple’s streets are lined with large terraced Victorian town houses. These houses are easily converted into lucrative student accommodation, and many of them have been. However, the area itself is by no means defined by its large student population.

Although Maple’s geographic boundaries are relatively small, its economic and ethnic composition is extremely diverse. The area contains a range of private, owner occupied, rented and council housing. Well over half (74%) of the housing in the neighbourhood consists of flats, maisonettes or apartments within purpose-built housing blocks (ONS, 2011). These living areas, with blocks of flats, are economically deprived. Yet, they border broad leafy streets encompassing almost exclusively owner occupied and affluent housing. Maple is an area of contrasts and travelling through it, one notices relatively defined



boarders between zones of council flats, privately rented terraced housing, and owner occupied housing; with iron gates, pebbled driveways and expensive cars.

On a scale of 1 – 32,482, where 1 is the most deprived living environment, the 2010 Indices of Deprivation ranked the area surrounding the Maple flats 2864 (ONS, 2011). According to the 2011 Census, nearly half (49%) of the households within the Maple area are deprived in one of four dimensions (including employment, education, health and disability or housing). This is compared to 33% of all households in the city (ONS, 2011). The Maple area also scores significantly higher than the city average for residents claiming Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance and Personal Credit (NHS, 2010). However, data from the 2011 Census also illustrates high levels of economic diversity within the area. For example, the output area encompassing predominantly rented student housing (to the North of the flats) was ranked more favourably than the flats (9,612 against 2,864) for living environment deprivation (ONS, 2011). These figures go some way towards evidencing Maple's economic diversity.

Maple has a large ethnic minority population. This is illustrated by the comparatively low percentage of white British residents: 52.1% against the city average of 80.8% (ONS, 2011). Excluding variants of 'White' and 'Pakistani', all of the ethnic categories measured within the Maple area during the 2011 Census exceeded the city averages. 'Black/Black British' and 'Other ethnic/Arab' were the most prominent minority groups, measuring 7% and 5.8% against city averages of 2.1% and 1% (ONS, 2011). Maple is also home to one of the cities most established Somali communities, although accurate data on this group is difficult to acquire. According to the 2011 Census 243 Maple residents cited Somalia as their country of birth. This figure constituted 10.2 % of Forgefield's Somali population (ONS, 2011). However, these figures fail to account for the growing number of individuals that identify themselves as Somali, despite being born elsewhere. This suggests that the actual number of Somali people in Maple is likely to be much larger than the figures suggest. Indeed, one only needs to spend an hour or so observing the Maple area to gain a sense of the underrepresentation of Somali people within the official statistics. The area surrounding the flats has a busy Somali cultural centre and a number of Somali businesses. These establishments act as concrete markers, symbolising the presence of a developed and local Somali community.

## **Meadow**

A main road and an area of large retail units separate Maple from the Meadow area. Maple and Meadow are similar in terms of their economic and ethnic diversity. Meadow encompasses a range of rented, owner occupied and council housing. 56.2% of the housing in Meadow also consists of flats, maisonettes or

apartments within purpose built housing blocks (ONS, 2011). Like Maple the area surrounding the Meadow flats was ranked poorly within the 2010 Indices of Deprivation: 2,962 on a scale of 1 – 32,482 where 1 = the most deprived living environment (ONS, 2011).

Meadow's largest block of council flats is situated in the centre of the neighbourhood. These flats border a road that leads towards the city centre. This road is lined with convenience stores, bars and a variety of independent food outlets which reflect the diversity of the local population. Excluding 'White British' and 'White Gypsy', all of the ethnic categories measured within the Meadow area during the 2011 Census exceeded city averages (ONS, 2011). 'Black/Black British' were the most prominently cited minority ethnic group (6.5% against the city average of 2.1%) although Meadow also houses an established Pakistani population: 6.2% against the city average of 4% (ONS, 2011). During the evening, one can sample everything from Kebabs to Curries, Dim Sum, Sushi, Jacket Potatoes and Fried Chicken on the road that borders the Meadow flats and leads to the city centre.

The opposite side of the Meadow flats, away from the restaurants and bars, sits on a crossroads at the base of a hill. Following the road up this hill and away from the flats takes one in the direction of a more affluent suburban neighbourhood. Progressing up the hill, the houses become larger and more expensive, until eventually the majority are privately owned and occupied by wealthy families. Illustrating this transition, the output area encompassing the top of the hill (with the more affluent housing) ranked 18,599 out of 32,482 for living environment deprivation (where 1 = the most deprived) (ONS, 2011). This was compared to the aforementioned ranking of 2,962 for the output area at the base of the hill encompassing the flats (ONS, 2011). These figures illustrate a marked improvement in living standards at the top of the hill, evidencing the concentration of economic deprivation within Meadow's more ethnically diverse locations.

Maple and Meadow are both locally recognised for the presence of 'Somali gangs'. They are also politically designated as 'high risk' areas and are subject to Home Office visits that aim to develop discourses between youth workers, local residents and policy makers; with the aim of tackling the perceived youth problem. These risk associations are articulated within local discourse, through the regular suggestion that Maple and Meadow are 'risky' places to walk through at night. The Maple area in particular has an association with crime that dates back to the 1970's. During this time the area was locally recognised as a red light district. Since the 1970's Maple's associations with crime have continued, although they have shifted from prostitution to drug dealing and 'Somali gangs'.

Maple and Meadow's ethnic diversity is also likely to have played a key role in their contemporary risk associations. Against the backdrop of economic disadvantage, the diversification of these areas has provided a context for ethnically framed conflicts, particularly concerning the allocation of resources. Within Maple, on-going tensions between the established African Caribbean community and the growing Somali community have contributed to the area's reputation for volatility and violence. As Hall *et al* (2013) have discussed elsewhere, such reputations often manifest themselves in the tightening of populist associations between place, race and crime. Maple and Meadow then, are both locally perceived as 'risky places', but these risk associations have to be understood in the context of broader racialised common sense understandings of class, race and place.

Despite Maple and Meadow's ethnic diversity, the most conspicuous ethnic group within both areas are Somalis. Although it is difficult to accurately calculate the size of immigrant populations, it is thought that to date over 100,000 Somalis live in the UK (DCLG, 2009). Patterns of Somali migration into the UK have existed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when 'Somali seamen came to work in the British Merchant Navy' (Valentine and Sporton, 2009:727). These Somalis settled in large port cities like Cardiff, Liverpool and London. Throughout the last century the British-Somali population has continued to increase at a varied rate with communities being established across the UK. This has largely occurred within Northern industrial cities like Forgefield, where labour was in high demand due to industrial expansion from the 1940's through to the 1970's (DCLG, 2009). The benefits of housing and regular employment also triggered the arrival of Somali families within this period, who joined Seamen already working in industry. Following the outbreak of the Somali civil war in the late 1980's large numbers of Somalis fled their neighbouring countries seeking asylum. A proportion of these asylum seekers, arriving in the UK, moved toward what were already established Somali communities. The latest 'phase of migration began in around 2000 when Somalis who had obtained refugee status and later, citizenship in other European countries, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, began secondary migration to the UK' (Valentine and Sporton, 2009:737). Despite the heterogeneous migration histories and motivations of Somali people, it is the latter phase (associated with the civil war) that feeds the popular discourses which characterise Somali people as a recent and problematic addition to Britain's ethnic minority population (Harris, 2004).

Somali migrants are often depicted as refugees, fleeing a war torn environment lacking a democratically elected government that has fallen under the control of militant fundamentalist Muslim groups. This turbulent context, within which Somali migration is contextualised, bleeds into the concerns of the British public, fuelled by political discourses regarding failed multiculturalism (Phillips, 2004a;

Thomas, 2011) and growing migrant populations in the context of economic crisis (Back, 2012). This is an issue at the forefront of the current Conservative led coalition government that displays a hard line on immigration, blaming 'the previous Labour administration for its chaotic and deeply irresponsible approach' (Soames, 2001). Concerning legal migration for family reasons, Prime Minister David Cameron suggested that 'those who come through this route' should ensure that they can 'speak English, and that they have the resources they need to live here and make a contribution here – not just scrape by, or worse, subsist on benefit' (bbc.co.uk, 2011). The loaded nature of political comments such as Cameron's contribute to public concerns regarding the economic impacts of immigrant populations who fail to integrate 'sufficiently' to participate in the labour market. Such political foci, in conjunction with recent high profile cases regarding the holding of British hostages by Somali pirates (Morris, 2012; Cochrane, 2013) place the Somali migrant population in a conspicuous position, central to established and intersecting debates surrounding race, immigration, acculturation, religion and benefit fraud.

Public anxieties concerning Islamic fundamentalism (Runnymede Trust, 1997; Aldridge, 2007; Geaves, 2010) have also played a central role in the positioning of Somali migrants within a frame of suspicion. Indeed, high profile government reports such as the 2011 Home Office *Prevent Strategy* can be accused of feeding Islamophobic associations of young Muslims (Home Office, 2011b). Speaking ahead of an international conference on Somalia in 2012, Prime Minister David Cameron warned that the 'threat to our national security is growing' and that 'young British minds are being poisoned by radicalism' (Morris, 2012). This public association of British Somalis with militant Muslim groups such as al-Qa'ida and al-Shabaab situates Somalis firmly within a dominant discourse that positions Muslim youths as posing 'risk' (Alexander, 2000). This is a phenomenon that has been awarded some academic attention (Alexander, 2000; 2008; Goodey, 2001) although largely to the exclusion of British Somalis.

The conspicuous nature of the British Somali population is of particular relevance to the racial categorisation of Maple and Meadow as research settings. Maple is often explicitly referred to as 'a Somali area'. The amplified visibility of Somali people, over and above the other groups in Maple is in part reflective of the growing and young local Somali population (NHS, 2010). However, the racial categorisation of the whole area as 'Somali' has to be understood in the context of established public and political anxieties. The general absence of positive public representations of Somali people <sup>2</sup> alongside the positioning of Somali people at the intersection of racial, religious and classed prejudices, contributes to the racialised categorisation of Somali people and the places they inhabit.

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<sup>2</sup> One notable exception is 2012 Olympian Mohamed Mo Farah

Indeed, Maple's inaccurate and racially homogenous identity illustrates the premise that racial categorisation informs thinking about place (Alexander, 2000; Keith, 2002; Back, 2007). Advocating the significance of this perspective, Keith (2002) offers a reflexive and progressive note on the way race has been approached academically within an urban context, suggesting that understanding 'the genealogy of vocabularies of the urban alongside the spatially concrete forms of race formation' provokes an alternative, illuminating perspective on racially categorised urban space (333). Here, Keith refers to the importance of questioning why geographic areas become characterised within general discussion in terms of specific racial groups. 'Put simply, it is sometimes most productive to think about the invoked racial worlds of the urban social that are implicit when people talk of the ghetto and the community, the street and the projects, the problem estate and the regenerated neighbourhood' (Keith, 2002: 333). This thesis addresses the implications of racialised risk labelling processes for the everyday experiences of youth workers and marginalised young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

### **Why Maple?**

The decision to conduct the research within Maple and Meadow was influenced by a number of factors, many of which stemmed back to my own personal experiences of being a resident in Maple for one year during my undergraduate studies. Maple's proximity to both the university campus and the city centre makes it a popular location for privately rented student housing. This is reflected by the high numbers of young (20-24) residents (NHS, 2010). However, despite the efforts of the local community forum, there is very little integration between the shifting student population and the more settled local residents. My interest in Maple's community dynamics began early during my tenancy on a visit to one of the local Somali businesses. This was an independent grocery shop, sandwiched between a Somali cultural centre and a building that offered cheap long distance phone calls. Significantly, on one occasion, as I approached the counter with my purchase, the Somali gentleman at the till greeted me, enquiring as to whether I was a new student resident. This struck me as pleasantry, yet as I paid for my spices he went on to suggest that if I were to experience any trouble in the area, I should avoid contacting the police and instead inform him or his colleagues at the shop, assuring me that they, not the police, dealt with issues within their community. This comment took me by surprise and brought a number of considerations to mind:

1. *The relationship between the student population and the local Somali community.* It seemed that perhaps the assistant's motivation for suggesting I avoided contacting the police, in the event of any trouble, signified some history of (a) students experiencing trouble; (b) students

reporting that trouble to the police; and (c) that reporting resulting in unwelcome attention from the police towards the local residents.

2. *The relationship between the local Somali community and the police.* Presumably, it seemed that the gentleman's preference not to involve the police in issues that occurred within the community reflected a problematic relationship between the police and local community members. This may have been informed by previous experiences with the police.
3. *The apparent self-regulation of the Somali community.* If I were to accept the gentleman's assertion, then the Somali community should be understood as somewhat self-regulating. This implied a hierarchical structure of sorts, within which deviance might have been responded to based on shared, not necessarily dominant, understandings of acceptable behaviour.
4. *The Somali community alongside the other ethnic groups within the Maple area.* (a) If the Somali community was self-regulating, to any degree, what, if any, were the implications of this for the other ethnic communities inhabiting the Maple area? (b) Were there codes of acceptability in terms of who could legitimately challenge the behaviour of others, either within and/or outside this apparently self-regulating social group?

Lastly, spanning all of the above, was the question of whether or not it was right to assume that because this gentleman was a Somali, in a Somali shop, next to a Somali cultural centre, that he was in fact talking about a 'Somali community' at all. Indeed, he could also have been referring to a community of residents, a Muslim community, or a whole range of other communities based on different markers of inclusion. One thing I could be sure of at this stage, was that I didn't know, and this was because, despite being a resident, I was on the periphery of the 'community' he was referring to, whatever that was. Clearly though, the notion of 'community' was of considerable significance here. However, whilst the local student and resident populations were geographically integrated, they were symbolically well separated, so despite my intrigue the remainder of my year within the area was spent living parallel to rather than amongst the local (non-student) population and I learned very little about the lives of my multicultural neighbours. The area itself was calm and nothing affected me in terms of local criminality, so there was no need to contact the man in the shop, or the police for that matter. However, conversations with other 'white' students often reminded me that Maple was a dangerous place, and these allegations were consistently attributed to the 'problematic' Somali community.

It was this mix of familiarity and curiosity that led me back to Maple two years later to carry out my Masters dissertation. At this time (2008), I was interested in studying the impact of western ideals of healthy eating on the traditional diets of second-generation migrants and Maple seemed an ideal location to access interviewees. In order to meet some prospective participants, I obtained a voluntary position at a local homework club. This club took place in a community centre that was situated in the centre of the Maple area. The club was popular amongst local (7-17 year old) Somalis and opened on Monday and Thursday evenings between 5.00pm and 6.45pm. As a Maple centre project, the session was partially funded from the profits made by the centre (alongside a variety of other sources including Comic Relief and the Police). Attendance was voluntary and free of charge. Three paid staff and a large team of volunteers ran the club, most of who (except the paid staff) were from the two neighbouring universities and had some interest in teaching when they finished their degrees. The aim of the club was to provide homework support to young people in the local area, many of whom did not have access to materials like computers or printers and some of whom had restricted academic support at home due to their parent's English language skills. Both sessions were popular and were constantly fully subscribed, with a waiting list that was testament to their success. Although the homework club was an 'open session' (available to all) it was almost exclusively attended by British Somali students. Attendees between the ages of 7 and 11 (school year 4-6) stayed for the entire session engaging in structured learning activities within numeracy and literacy workbooks provided by the club. They did so with the aid of volunteers, often on a one-to-one basis. Students above school year 6 (11+) were free to come and go as they pleased and used the computers or other resources to do their homework. Volunteers, most of whom were students from the local university supported the seniors in a less structured fashion, providing academic guidance as and when it was needed.

Spending a year volunteering in the Homework Club allowed me to develop a more balanced perspective of the Maple community, much of which was in contrast to popular representations. For example, whilst the young people I was working with actively identified with the type of racialised 'hard' masculinity that characterised them as problematic, their seemingly unlikely attendance at the voluntary homework sessions reflected a stringent work ethic, driven by the importance many of the local Somali families placed on academic achievement within the British education system. This was far removed from the popular image of disadvantaged youths' adopting counter school subcultures (Willis, 1977; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). Unfortunately, both this work ethic and the homework club itself were excluded from dominant understandings of the Maple area. Furthermore, although the club was mostly attended by young Somalis, the organisers were white residents and a number of African-Caribbean, West Indian, Pakistani, Bengali and Iranian students also attended. Outside the

Homework Club, the community centre also housed a number of sessions that catered more specifically for the range of ethnic groups living in the Maple area. These observations pointed towards the ethnic heterogeneity of the Maple area despite its homogenous 'Somali' categorisation.

My interests in the categorisation of this area were later compounded in the wake of an incident that occurred approximately 100 yards from the community centre, half way through my Masters dissertation. The incident involved a drive-by-shooting in which three young men were shot, one of whom (understood to have been visiting a relative) tragically died. Importantly, none of the parties involved had any direct connection to Maple, the victims were not Somali and the incident was recognised as the product of a feud between two groups that happened to come to fruition on this particular occasion in the Maple area. However, the story had a considerably high profile within both local and national media and the reporting was quick to signpost Maple as an area of emerging concern regarding 'Somali dominated gang' violence (O'Neill, 2008). A brief analysis of the local discourse surrounding the incident on the online community forums also highlighted the concerns of local forum users regarding Somali youth, 'gangs' and the Maple area more generally. Yet again these were opinions that, based on my experiences of the area, appeared to have very little grounding in anything other than loose associations amplified by racial prejudice. Overall, what the responses illustrated was that the racialisation of the Maple area was clearly linked to its public conceptualisation in terms of 'risk' (Keith, 2002). It was from these observations that the relationship between racialisation and risk labelling became the central focus for this research.

The research documented in the following pages, is taken from a sustained period of voluntary participation within the youth clubs in Maple and later Meadow. During this period (06/2010 – 06/2013) I volunteered in the Maple Homework Club (8-17 years), the Maple Junior Youth Club (8-13 years), the Maple Senior Youth Club (13-19 years) and the Meadow Youth Club (11-19 years). I collected field notes from participant observation, conducted 14 in-depth interviews with youth workers and 2 in-depth focus groups with young people. It is the notes and transcripts generated from this research that provide the foundations for this thesis.

### **Thesis structure**

The next chapter reviews some of the relevant literature supporting the project. The chapter focuses on conceptualising 'community', 'risk', 'youth' and 'race' in order to explore the main theoretical issues that provide a focus for the thesis. In doing so, the discussion critically evaluates the ways in which racialised discourses can contribute to the stigmatisation of areas along the lines of risk,



prompting solidarity through the distinction of symbolic community boundaries (Cohen, 1985). This discussion situates the thesis within a body of conceptual, empirical and theoretical work, identifying relevant weaknesses of the existing field and clarifying the research contributions.

Chapter 3 considers the research methodology, the methods chosen for data collection and the analytical process. This discussion is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the research methodology, detailing why an ethnographic approach was chosen alongside considering the complementarity between interpretive epistemology, symbolic interactionist theory and the ethnographic approach. The second section provides a narrative, sequential analysis of the research process, foregrounding issues related to researcher/participant positionality, power relations, the ethics of professional engagement and inclusion - particularly in terms of researching across lines of difference. This account is interwoven with more critical analyses of qualitative interviewing, focus groups and participant observation. Throughout this discussion research ethics are awarded a significant focus as a complex and integral feature of this research process. In particular, issues around informed consent, deception and privacy are foregrounded. The final section of the chapter considers data analysis. This discussion illustrates how the data collected was organised, coded, themed and eventually divided into the following four data chapters.

Chapter 4 is the first substantive data chapter. This contains some important contextual findings that illustrate the everyday politics of multiculturalism in Maple and Meadow. The chapter draws on in-depth interviews with local residents from Maple to illustrate their general perceptions and experiences of the places they live. These discussions highlight local tensions, politics and divisions between racial and religious groups, particularly in terms of the difficulties facing youth workers providing universal youth provision in a multicultural context. Interestingly within this, despite the local tensions stemming from the diverse range of interest groups within the multicultural research settings, the discussions reflect an overarching notion of 'community' that characterises the experiences of local residents. In this, the chapter illustrates the significance of contested, but nonetheless collectively binding symbolic constructions of community for participants within the research settings.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between youth workers and young people. This discussion reflects the unanimous importance youth workers and young people placed on notions of 'trust' and 'respect' in developing these relationships. However, in doing so, the discussion also highlights the extent to which these relationships reflected dominant expressions of shared local identity that were influenced by social divisions, labelling and marginalisation.

These relationships are approached critically, considering the extent to which the observed dynamics between youth workers and young people are both productive, in terms of providing 'positive' opportunities for disadvantaged young people but counterproductive, in terms of reinforcing the effects and experiences of marginalisation.

Chapter 6 focuses on the youth workers' and young people's experiences of labelling. The chapter is split into three main sections. The first section considers the youth workers' interpretations of local media representations of Maple and Meadow. This highlights significant discrepancies between internal and external perceptions of the areas and the issues seen to be important within them. The second section explores the ways in which contemporary government risk prevention agendas implicate local youth services within risk labelling processes. In particular, the ways in which applying for Home Office funding confirms associations of risk and promotes increased levels of surveillance are outlined. The third section illustrates the young people's experiences of stigma. This highlights participant's interpretations of increased surveillance alongside their recognition of stigma. Overall the chapter illustrates the experiences and frustrations voiced by youth workers and young people in Maple and Meadow concerning labelling processes. In doing so, it highlights respondents understanding of the role popular discourse plays in their own marginalisation.

Chapter 7 develops the analysis presented in chapter six by focusing on the concept of 'risk'. This chapter identifies and critically approaches some of the behaviours associated with 'youth' and 'risk' from the perspectives of the young people in Maple and Meadow. Here the importance of context and peer relations is foregrounded in terms of the ways in which young people understand practices like drug dealing and violent behaviour. Young people's positive experiences of these behaviours and practices are cited as an important factor in their conceptualisation, particularly in terms of status and inclusion. The way in which respondents inhabited expressive forms of 'hard' masculinity in order to acquire social status and secure peer group inclusion through 'risk talk' is considered in depth.

The final chapter of this thesis is split into five sections. The first provides an overview of the opening chapters. The second and most substantive section summarises chapters four to seven, illustrating, clarifying and discussing the key research findings. Here the significance of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2006) is illustrated in relation to the youth workers and young people's experiences of labelling. It is argued that process of labelling around 'race', 'ethnicity', 'class' and 'risk' significantly impact residents collective identification, alongside influencing the organisation and application of youth provision. The third section highlights the significance of these findings and explains how they

contribute to knowledge. It is argued that the thesis significantly contributes to academic understandings of 'youth', 'community' and youth work practice through its in-depth focus on the experiences of youth workers *and* young people within particular social contexts. It is also suggested that few studies have addressed the experiences of young Somalis in relation to issues of labelling, despite the fact that they are undoubtedly one of the most conspicuous ethnic groups within contemporary Britain. This highlights the significance of the research findings for developing understandings of the experiences of young Somali males in contemporary Britain. It also provides recommendations for government policy concerning the damaging implications of risk prevention agendas. The fourth section goes on to critically reflect on the study as a whole before the fifth section outlines recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

This chapter evaluates some of the key literature that focuses on the interrelated themes of 'community' and 'risk' in the context of 'youth' and 'race'. It does this in order to meet the following aims:

- To situate the thesis within a relevant body of existing literature.
- To highlight the contribution this research makes to that field.
- To conceptually outline the key themes that run throughout the thesis, confirming in particular the ways 'community', 'risk' and 'race' intersect.

The following discussion is split into five sections. The first section addresses the literature exploring 'community', one of the central concepts within the thesis. The discussion then moves on to outline the concept of risk in the context of youth, considering the ways in which risk is constructed and implemented within the youth policy spectrum, alongside the more subjective understandings of young people themselves. This leads to a discussion of urban race literature, which points towards the influence of racialised discourses for the stigmatisation of minority groups in marginalised urban spaces. The discussion then addresses the integration of community, risk and race in order to outline the key theoretical assumptions underpinning this thesis. Finally, the chapter concludes with some comments on the study of community, risk and race from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

#### Conceptualising community

'Community' sits at the heart of this research. It is a concept that shapes the experiences of any youth worker or young person inhabiting marginal urban space (Robins and Cohen, 1977; Davies, 2005; Hudson *et al*, 2007; Kintrea *et al*, 2008; Thomas, 2011). Experiences of community constitute a means of identifying or signposting different groups, boundaries, opinions and experiences (Cohen, 1985; Back, 2007; Jenkins, 2008). Yet, significant as it is within the lives of so many, this concept is rarely ever critically approached. Community is a common noun in every day discourse, the meaning of which is generally assumed despite the fact it is used with reference to numerous interconnected, yet nonetheless individually identifiable themes. Alleyne (2002) highlights the importance of critically approaching community through questioning the epistemological consequences of previously unreflexive uses of the term. For Alleyne (2002:608) the often taken for granted nature of

community can present an 'epistemological obstacle for the sociologist' by means of obscuring the complex and layered social processes that mark the development and maintenance of group identities. The danger here, is that community becomes an unsatisfactory solution to understanding social phenomenon in terms of becoming a basic 'explanation rather than something to be explained' (Alleyne, 2002:608). The following discussion critically examines the conceptualisation of 'community'.

Attempts to theoretically conceptualise 'community' can be traced back to the European foundations of the sociological discipline during the period of modernisation and industrialisation. Tönnies seminal *Community and Society* (1963), originally published in German during the late 19th century, is an important starting point when discussing the conceptualisation of community. Within this work, Tönnies proposes a shift, throughout the process of modernisation, from *gemeinschaft* (community) to *gesellschaft* (society/association). The former, (*gemeinschaft*) referring to a traditional, pre industrial society, characterised by intimate relations and social ties, where the latter (*gesellschaft*) refers to a 'society characterised by ego-focused, highly specific and possibly discontinuous relationships in which the individual interacts within different social milieu for different purposes' (Cohen, 1985:22). In simple terms, Tönnies work can be understood as an articulation of the proposed social consequence of the development from villages and towns into cities.

In a similar attempt to account for the social consequences of industrialisation, Durkheim (1972) critically developed Tönnies' ideas within his writings on the *Moral Structure of Industry*. Here, Durkheim proposed a distinction between mechanic solidarity, based on the homogenous experience of individuals (characteristic of pre-industrial society) and organic solidarity, based on the more complex, specialised and interdependent experience of individuals (characteristic of industrial society). Within this framework, unlike Tönnies' more concrete and reminiscent link between 'community' and traditional forms of society, Durkheim points towards the emergence of organic forms of solidarity that replace the communities of the traditional past. Indeed, 'the problem with Tönnies' sociology for Durkheim is that it ignores the very real forms of community that came with modernity' (Delanty, 2010:25). Consistent within both Tönnies' and Durkheim's work is the observation that the development of Western society from a feudal structure, to an industrial modern structure, has led to the specialisation of both individual's labour and social lives and in so drastically changed experiences of 'community' from a unitary shared source to a more individualistic, interpretive one. Society becomes more complex as towns become multicultural cities, and with it so do individual's social experiences relationships and ties – these are observations that are continually reflected in

contemporary society. Consequently, whilst Tönnies and Durkheim are epistemologically dated in terms of their determinist focus - they provide an important basis for contemporary understandings of community.

Other significant, early contributions can be found in the writing of what became known as the Chicago school. This body of work foregrounded the academic consideration of urban community, a theme that has become well established within modern sociology and is central to this research. Pioneering this study is the early empirical work of Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925). Park *et al's* (1967) ideas derived from the empirical data they collected wandering the streets of Chicago. Park *et al* (1967) saw the development of industrial cities, with their specialised labour forces and emergent multiculturalism as a threat to the social order of the traditional village community. Recognising that the city involved a plurality of contexts or 'zones' that were 'clearly distinguishable by population and function' (Cohen, 1985: 26) Park *et al* (1967) suggested that the integration of these spaces within the broader patchwork of the city detracted from their capacity to evoke solid, invested experiences of local community. Instead, individuals within the city adapted, and came to naturally travel through and negotiate this urban ecology in a way that was far more impersonal than the *mechanic solidarity* of the rural past. This modern state of urban fragmentation, as described by writers of the Chicago school, represents an early attempt to sociologically account for the patterns and lived experiences of individuals inhabiting urban spaces:

...with the growth of great cities, with the vast division of labour which has come in with machine industry, and with the movement and change that have come about with the multiplication of the means of transportation and communication, the old forms of social control represented by the family, the neighbourhood, and the local community have been undermined and their influence greatly diminished (Park *et al*; 1967: 106-107).

For Park *et al* (1967), this seismic shift created social disorganisation and impacted rates of delinquency within the city. As referenced above, this progress undermined the capacity of traditional, local community institutions such as the family, close social networks and the church to regulate the behaviours of individuals, particularly young people:

New agencies have been necessary to meet the new conditions. Among these new agencies are the juvenile courts, Juvenile protective associations, parent-teachers associations', Boy Scouts, Young Men's Christian Associations settlements, boys' clubs of various sorts, and I presume playground associations. These agencies have taken over, to

some extent the work which neither the home, the neighbourhood, nor the communal institutions were able to carry on adequately (Park *et al* 1967: 109).

Community then was conceptualised by Park *et al* (1967) as at risk from urbanisation and closely linked with notions of neighbourhood, institution and social control.

However, in their assertions, Park *et al* (1967) failed to sufficiently identify contemporary manifestations of community within the urban environment. It has since been argued, for example, that experiences of local community can be strengthened in response to the racialised mappings associated with the 'zones' cited by Park (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; Back, 2007; France, 2008). For example, on discussing young people's sense of home in disadvantaged London estates, Back (1997) suggests that:

Despite the damage done by the urban geometries of power and exclusion, young people find refuge and ways through the cityscape and in so doing, homes are grown from home (70).

In such, it seems that the developments threatening 'traditional' forms of community actually provide some aggregate for new manifestations of community within contemporary society.

Despite Park's comments on the moral order and impersonal nature of city life, his discussions maintained that cities offered a preferable standard of living. Sympathetic of Park's optimism, from '...Simmel, who Park introduced to American sociology, the notion arose of the city as an open structure where very different kinds of social relations and forms of belonging are possible and where human creativity may be enhanced' (Delanty, 2003:39). Importantly, Simmel emphasised the significance of micro-social processes and small groups in the context of the city, a perspective that was lacking in the earlier, structural focus of Tönnies and Durkheim. Ahead of his time, Simmel's micro focus bears the most resemblance to the more contemporary and widely cited sociological conceptualisations of community, that see community as symbolic and imaginary constructs (Cohen, 1985; Alexander, 1996; Ray and Reed, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Back, 2007). It is toward the ways in which more contemporary scholars have approached the conceptualisation of community (Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006) that the discussion now turns.

When Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities* first appeared in 1983 his account of nationalism provided a foundation for subsequent anthropological and sociological discussions of community. Within his work Anderson illustrates

the function of print capitalism in the development of national consciousness, centred around shared language. Tracing the emergence of the newspaper back to the eighteenth century, Anderson recognises that the widespread dissemination of print played an instrumental role in the development of 'vernacular based nationalisms'. Indeed, for Anderson (2006) 'the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even world events into a specific...world of vernacular readers' (63). For the readers, it was their shared capacity to understand the language of print that generated their *imagined communities*. These communities were 'imagined' because they were not founded or maintained through interaction. Unlike the communities of Tönnies (1963), Durkheim (1972) and Park *et al* (1967), Anderson's *imagined communities* were generated and reproduced amongst individuals who were never likely to converse, or even meet. Reflecting on Anderson's thesis, Amit (2002) has later suggested that this conceptualisation 'marked a shift away from community as an actualised form to an emphasis on community as an idea' (3).

Shortly after the original publication of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* in 1983, his emphasis on community as an idea was developed and popularised by Cohen (1985) within *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. A key theme in the opening chapter of Cohen's (1985) widely cited essay is the relational nature of community - *community in relation to what?* Indeed, the term 'community' evokes at least a loose sense of membership or belonging and with that comes the implication of boundaries, where belonging begins and ends. It is the symbolic, as opposed to spatial construction and reproduction of community boundaries that organises the focus of Cohen's work.

'Community' like identity 'seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference', inclusion and exclusion (Cohen, 1985: 12) *see also* (Jenkins, 2008). The boundaries of communities encapsulate this dichotomy. However, importantly - and bearing some similarity to Anderson's work - Cohen's original thesis argues that these boundaries should not be defined in fixed or tangible terms. 'Community membership depends upon the symbolic construction and signification of a mask of similarity which all can wear' (Jenkins, 2008: 134). The processes, by which experiences of communal membership are constructed, emanate from individually construed levels of shared experience. This implies that individuals within any given 'community' need not experience, imagine or express their position consistently. It also suggests that the markers of similarity shared by community members need not be spatial. 'The similarity of communal membership is thus imagined' (Jenkins, 2008:134). For example, in Becker's *Outsiders* (1963) he describes a community of dance musicians who enjoy many of the same markers of inclusion, who live in different places and are heterogeneous in terms of their experiences and outlooks. This supports Cohen's assertion that:



They (boundaries) might be thought of... as existing in the minds of their beholders. This being so, the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side (Cohen, 1985: 12).

For Cohen (1985) community emanates from individuals and relies on their imbued meanings for its survival (Yerbury, 2011). This makes community more a representation of individual agents interpreting experience than a picture of the homogenous experience Durkheim's Mechanic Solidarity evokes. Cohen's (1985) thesis has gained support from Bauman (2000) in his discussion of community in Liquid Modernity:

In so far as they need to be defined to survive and they need to appeal to their own members to secure that survival by their individual choices and take for that survival individual responsibility – all communities are *postulated*; projects rather than realities, something that comes *after* not *before* the individual choice (Bauman, 2000:169).

Bauman's comments act to stipulate the importance of approaching community in terms of its constituent parts. However, it is also within this assertion: that community is symbolic, individually constructed and in that sense liquid, that Cohen's (1985) original thesis has become subject to criticism.

Reflecting upon his seminal work 17 years on, Cohen (2002a) himself has acknowledged that taking such a strong position on the symbolic construction of community, and insomuch imbuing 'community' with an ephemeral quality, denied the consistency of collective identification. Indeed, there is something in the persistence of patterns in collective identification that suggests the relevance of more 'structural' factors may have been muted within Cohen's original thesis. For example, sociological reflections on 'youth' and 'race' have pointed towards the consistent social and political construction of a racialised, working class 'youth problem' (Hall *et al*, 1978; Lawrence, 1982a; 1982b; Carby, 1982; Alexander, 2000; Back, 2007; Pearson, 2012). Recognising the embedded nature of populist anxieties around race, youth and class highlights the role institutionalised discourses might play in the distinction of particular communities along those lines. Paying exclusive attention to the individually constructed nature of *imagined communities* necessarily eclipses the very real implications of dominant public and political discourses in the organisation and construction of symbolic community boundaries.

A further question arises, assuming that 'community' is individually imagined and therefore necessarily fluid, in terms of how and why local communities are so often represented as being ontologically reliable. A critical reflection on

concrete community markers, such as community buildings, illustrates this point. In her writing on the performance of young Black identities, Alexander (1996) notes that the community centre where she began conducting her fieldwork could be seen as 'an almost archetypal representation of this 'imagined community' (p.33). Community centres exist to facilitate the needs of defined groups. When they are used to hold community forums, debates, youth clubs and so on, they also act as physical spaces where community relations can develop and, more strategically, where the delivery of community based policy interventions can be realised.

Community centres often rely on government funding for their survival. This funding tends to be provided on the basis that recipients deliver targeted policy initiatives – the *Troubled Families Program* provides a good example of a policy initiative that focuses government funding on targeted communities (DCLG, 2012c). In this respect, community centres and the reproduction of communal identification can be inextricably linked to government policy. Indeed, within the context of the current political rhetoric surrounding 'broken Britain' (Travis and Stratton, 2011), 'troubled families' (DCLG, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c) and 'gang and youth violence' (Home Office, 2011a) this distinction of communities, through targeted government services, has increasingly led to 'community' becoming 'the descriptor of a geographically located, collective, deviant poor' (Hancock *et al*, 2012: 351). To this end, Hancock *et al's* (2012) critique outlines the significance of government in the symbolic construction of community boundaries and associations. This is a recognition that Cohen's (1985) *Symbolic Construction of Community* neglects.

A further criticism of both Cohen (1985) and Anderson (2006) is raised by Amit (2002). In their ascension of 'community', towards the symbolic and imagined, Amit (2002) challenges Cohen (1985) and Anderson (2006) for their tendency to neglect the importance of interaction. Focusing in particular on the emotional significance people attribute to 'community', Amit (2002) argues that it is only through the realization of imaginary constructs via interaction that the attributed values can be explained.

People care because they associate the idea of community with people they know, with whom they share experiences... community arises out of an interaction between the imagination of solidarity and its realization through social relations (Amit, 2002:18).

Amit's (2002) critique presents a call for a less conceptual, more empirically centred approach to the study of community, one that attempts to understand community as a phenomenon that is realized in actual social relations. However, in defence of Anderson (2006) and Cohen (1985) it can be argued that in fact,

neither conceptually approached community within an explicitly abstract frame. As Cohen (2002a) argued:

Anderson's suggestion in 1983 that communities should be thought of as imaginary entities, and mine in 1985 that communities should be thought of as symbolic constructs, did not deny the realities of community. They were just attempts to capture what it is that people use the word to signify (170).

Indeed, littered throughout Cohen's (1985) original thesis are empirical examples of the actualization of his concepts through interaction. Furthermore, Anderson's (2006) account of nationalism as an imagined entity does not refute the significance of interaction. Rather, it recognises the development of collective identities that are not *necessarily* bounded by localism. Contemporary empirical research provides support for this proposal. For example, on researching ethnic communities in semi-rural Kent, Ray and Reed (2005) noted that the absence of traditional markers of community (like community centres) did not restrict the development of imagined communities. Instead, the absence of these markers led to more abstract imagined notions of community, unfixed in locality, but based on interaction and persistent ethnic or religious markers of belonging (Ray and Reed, 2005). The implications of these findings act to confirm that any discussion of community, in local terms, should recognise that geographic boundaries are unlikely to constitute an exhaustive explanation of belonging.

Cohen's (1985) original thesis can also be redeemed from his own accusation of having neglected the stability of collective identification. In fact, it is the root of Cohen's argument - that communities are symbolically constructed and are in that sense *not* internally homogenous - that helps us to understand the stability of collective identification.

Collective identities can and do change... they can and do vary from person to person; and yet they can and do *persist* (Jenkins, 2008: 140).

Cohen's (1985) illustration of the role shared symbols play in the lives of otherwise heterogeneous, potentially even conflicting groups, demonstrates the process by which diverse collectivities imagine and reproduce 'masks of similarity' despite division. In this respect, 'it is precisely the consistency of collective identification that' Cohen's original framework helps us to understand (Jenkins, 2008: 140).

Finally, the application of Cohen's (1985) original thesis remains valuable in its potential to inform a transcendence of the structure and agency debate within the distinction of collective identities. Recognising that 'community is symbolically constructed by people in response to, even as a defence against, their categorisation by outsiders' (Jenkins, 2008:141), Cohen's original thesis

identifies a relationship between the 'individually imagined' nature of community and the 'structures' or 'discourses' that contribute to its distinction. For example, targeted government interventions, like the *Troubled Families Program* (DCLG, 2012a; 2012b) have been criticised on the grounds of articulating 'structural problems' around individuals and 'communities' (France, 2008). The political identification of particular groups as problematic generates a symbolic boundary that is likely, in turn, to be reinforced by the responsive actions of those who have been problematically defined. Thus, despite its focus on agency, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* does incorporate the role of power and structure in the distinction of collective identities. It is for these reasons that Cohen (1985) and Anderson's (2006) insights will play such a central role within the following chapters.

### **Risk society and the 'youth problem'**

Like community, the concept of risk is central to the research that informs this thesis and there is some existing theoretical and empirical literature that contributes to understandings of risk in the context of community and youth (Beck, 1992; Lupton, 1999; Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008; Cooper, 2011; Turnbull and Spence, 2011; Smithson *et al*, 2013). Beck (1992) discusses the proliferation of contemporary thinking around 'risk' in his writings on 'risk society'. His suggestions include the idea that an outcome of industrial modernisation is the increase of risks, and risk management. For Beck, a dominant characteristic of modernity is the anticipation and negotiation of risk, 'associated with the erosion of traditional social networks, flexible work patterns, under-employment and a fragility of trust between individuals, experts and political bodies' (Turnbull and Spence, 2011:939). Beck also suggests that 'it is not clear whether it is the risks that have intensified, or our *view* of them' (1992:55), suggesting that the modern preoccupation with risk could equally be attributed to a heightened sensitivity, rather than an increase in actual, objective risk. These comments point towards the socially constructed nature of the term stemming from its interpretive variability. 'Risk therefore is a very loose term in everyday parlance' (Lupton, 1999:9). Nevertheless, it maintains a central position within public, academic and political discourse. Its use is generally one of ascription, attaching symbolic meaning to behaviours and groups. So, the process by which powerless groups or 'communities' are labelled 'at-risk' or 'risky' is of particular significance within the context of this research (Cohen, 1972).

Merryweather (2010) argues that 'contemporary youth are routinely associated with risk' (2). Sociological perspectives typify 'youth' as a socially constructed transitional period in the Western life course linked with social ambiguity (Erikson, 1968; Norman, 1995). The behavioural risks associated with this

period are often related to experimentation with sex, drinking alcohol, smoking, drug use, violence and the use of ICT's (Bunton *et al*, 2004; Winow and Hall, 2006; Merryweather, 2010). This conceptual framework situates Western adolescence as an inherently problematic period and simultaneously defines young people in the West as a group in need of surveillance and intervention (McCahill and Finn, 2010). France (2008) introduces his analysis of risk in the context of youth and youth policy suggesting that:

Historically, adult anxieties see the youth problem as a metaphor, and as evidence for moral and social decline, which has been used to justify greater intervention, regulation and control especially of youthful populations defined 'dangerous' or 'threatening' (1).

So, the management of 'risk' in relation to 'youth' constitutes a key focus within the youth policy spectrum and this is partly because the association between 'youth' and 'risk' is so evocative. The most recent and dominant incarnation of this association concerns government intervention strategies focusing on the prevention of behavioural 'risk factors', 'seen to arise as a result of problems in the community...in schools...in peer relationships...and in the family (France, 2008:3) *see also* (Farrington, 1996; Home Office, 2008; Home Office, 2011a; DCLG 2012a; 2012b). France (2008) goes on to suggest that this preventative discourse appeals to the state because it 'offers an ideological solution to politicians, showing they transcended the 'youth as bad' discourse' (12). That is, alongside shielding politicians from accusations of discrimination on the basis of race. Such an approach allows politicians to appear compassionate, whilst simultaneously placing the responsibility of 'risk' management into the hands of already marginalised groups. The political currency this discourse carries has opened funding avenues for the sociological and criminological exploration of 'risk factors', research that has contributed to the embedding of 'risk prevention' within contemporary youth policy (Turnbull and Spence, 2011).

However, risk factor analysis is problematic in its assumption that objective 'risks' exist as social facts that can be counted and measured. Turnbull and Spence (2011) provide an apt example of this problem within their paper on the proliferation of 'risk' across child and youth policy in England. Illustrating how the political emergence of youth 'at risk' as opposed to youth 'as risk' has provided the justification for preventative intervention in the lives of young people, Turnbull and Spence (2011) have criticised contemporary interventions for their grounding in the indistinct nature of risk as a working concept. The result of this being that:

...risk is applied in an ambiguous manner across the youth policy spectrum, with young people being vulnerable to external risks (including

abuse and accidents), a risk to themselves (from their behaviour or bad decisions) and a risk to society, either now or in the future (through unemployment, criminality and anti-social behaviour) (Turnbull and Spence, 2011:941).

In order to gain an idea of exactly how risk was being used within social policy in England, Turnbull and Spence conducted an empirical study analysing the use of the term across a range of key policy documents (during the New Labour era: 1997-2010). Here, a significant level of ambiguity was found. 'For example, the generalised application of the term 'at-risk young people' was sometimes used without any articulation of any specific risk, hazard or danger' (Turnbull and Spence, 2011:947). This clarifies the vague character of preventative thinking around youth and risk at the political level. In addition, the unelaborated use of 'at-risk young people' reflects deep-seated assumptions about the lived experiences and behaviours of marginalised social groups, presenting issues around the stigmatisation and criminalisation of young people (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005). The processes by which racial and ethnic minority groups can become disproportionately associated with risk will be discussed within the following section.

One of the key problems underpinning contemporary political responses to 'youth' and 'risk' is the absence of knowledge around the ways in which young people actually experience and negotiate risks in their own lives. The ways in which risks are constructed and understood by young people in the context of their surroundings remain under researched (Armstrong, 2004).

Risk factor researchers construct the problem around individuals or the family (as a group of individuals), community is reduced to individual interaction in a localised context and there is little recognition of the complexity of how community life impacts on choice... (France, 2008: 7).

Indeed, the little research that does provide a qualitative analysis of young people's construction/interpretation of risk foregrounds the importance of social factors such as community, peers, situation and processes of identification in young people's risk epistemologies. Mayock's (2005) study of 15-19 year olds drug experiences, highlights a context within which 'responses to risk were hermeneutic, organised around patterns of symbolic and subjective meanings and strongly embedded in young people's social experiences' (393). Here, involvement in drug use created an inroad to social acceptance and shared experience that often outweighed its potential risks. Significantly, within this work discourses around risk were as much about situation and socialisation as they were about the act of substance ingestion. These findings mirror existing literatures regarding peer group dynamics, situationality and alcohol use

(Pedersen and Kolstad, 2000; Engels *et al*, 2006; Bradby, 2007; Becares *et al*, 2009; Valentine and Sporton, 2009; Hurcombe *et al*, 2010). What the studies all highlight is that for many, the potential acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through the exhibition of risk taking behaviours plays a significant role in young people's conceptualisation of their appeal (Winlow and Hall, 2006):

...an important part of young people's risk epistemologies was an interpretation of risk-taking as part of 'living', both in everyday and the spectacular sense. In many respects, young people appeared to actively pick and choose in a seemingly individualistic manner from the (limited) pleasure landscapes available to them. In this context, it seems vital to bear in mind that drug consumption, and even risky use, may be about anything but a preoccupation with balancing benefit and risk; rather it is about such diverse concerns as social expression and 'style', experimentation, group membership, status achievement, or 'escape attempts' (Mayock, 2005: 356).

This suggests that interpretations of behaviours associated with risk are informed by numerous factors, linked to social inclusion, identification and status (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the limitations of small scale qualitative research findings, alongside the generally opposing epistemological focus displayed within the politically dominant risk factor research, limits the application of interpretive analyses within the contemporary political 'risk' discourse (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008). The outcome of this unfortunate epistemological obstruction can be the application of 'risk intervention' without sufficient understanding of how risk is constructed (or not constructed as the case may be).

What should be clear from the above is that the contemporary political risk discourse is theoretically limited and individualistic (Armstrong, 2006). This holds implications for already disadvantaged communities who become labelled 'at risk', contributing to shared experiences of marginalisation and collective identification (France, 2008). The existing literature also fails to adequately account for the relationship between shared experiences of 'risk labelling' and collective identification in terms of community. Finally, whilst some of the literature referenced above cites the relationship between marginalisation and risk labelling, (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008) none of it explicitly considers the significance of race. Indeed, common sense associations between youth, race, housing and crime (Hall *et al*, 2013) are all likely to have significant implications for the targeting of interventions towards 'at risk' young people or 'communities', an area this thesis considers in some depth. It is the literature that does focus on race, youth and place that organises the focus of the next section.

## Race, youth and place

Park *et al's* (1967) discussion of the city's regional tapestry presents an early recognition of the relationship between race and place. As Goldberg and Solomos (2002) have identified, the 'location of race and ethnicity within spatial boundaries, whether it be the colonial state or the metropolitan city, or the urban 'ghetto'... has been a dominant theme in theoretical debates and in empirical studies of urban life' (321). Indeed, in order to conceptually frame this research, discussing the literature on community, youth and risk is short sighted without considering that centrality of race.

Key theoretical contributions to the sociological discussion of race, youth and place can be accredited to the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. Gilroy *et al's* (1982) *The Empire Strikes Back* offers a range of important and critical insights into the marginal positioning of critical race thinking within the academic landscape in the 1970's.

Of particular and continuing relevance is Lawrence's (1982a) essay on the embedding of racist ideology within British common-sense. Offering examples of loaded political commentary, particularly Enoch Powell's (1968) *Rivers of Blood* speech, Lawrence outlines the construction of immigrant communities as 'alien cultures'. Set against the backdrop of economic crisis and public anxiety in the 1970's, these discourses invited common-sense notions of 'normative whiteness' (Puwar, 2004) and 'natural' ethnic and racial incompatibility. Academic explanations of racial inequalities at this time also focused on predominantly cultural factors. For example, in his exploration of West Indian lifestyles Pryce (1979) compares the 'turbulent' nature of West Indian family life to the 'normal' function of the Western nuclear family. Indeed, elsewhere Lawrence (1982b) accuses the paternal and culturalist tendencies of race relations literature for being part of the problem, consolidating dominant interpretations of immigrant communities as posing risk and constituting an 'enemy within'. Lawrence (1982a) theorizes the marginalisation of 'black youth' as a process of 'double naturalization'.

The linkages that are made between 'inadequate family', 'criminal youth' and the 'cultures of deprivation' that are thought to sustain them, form an important element in the common-sense images of black people. In this case however... the images of black families and black youth are the outcome of a kind of *double* naturalization. Blacks are pathologised once via their association with the 'cultures of deprivation' of the decaying 'inner cities' and again as the bearers of specifically *black* cultures (Lawrence, 1982a:56).



Lawrence's 'double naturalization' process goes some way towards explaining the common-sense that is mobilised within populist explanations of racial inequalities, particularly concerning young people. For example, Somali born migrants have been identified as having the lowest levels of education and employment of all immigrants in the UK (CLG, 2009). Between 2007/8 'Black Caribbean pupils were three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their white counterparts' (Weekes-Bernard, 2010:4). In 2011/12 a young 'person from the Black ethnic group was six times more likely to be stopped and searched than a person from the White ethnic group' (Ministry of Justice, 2013:37). However, as Lawrence (1982a) identifies, drawing on the intersection of discourses about economic crisis, 'working class youths', 'social decline' and 'alien cultures' (France, 2008; Back, 2011) to make common-sense out of persistent patterns in racial inequality is limiting. This 'double naturalization eclipses the complex and historically embedded processes that contribute to the racist culture of British institutions, such as the education system (Gillies, 2010) the criminal justice system and the labour market.

Common-sense understandings of 'race' and 'youth', in their assumed 'natural' superiority, can also limit the space for critically reflexive thinking amongst the practitioners of institutions that aim to challenge social exclusion.

The state, the police, the media and race relations experts ascribe to young blacks certain objective qualities, e.g. alienated, vicious little criminals, muggers, disenfranchised unemployed, unmarried mothers, truants, classroom wreckers etc. The youth workers, community workers, counsellors (teachers) and the rest start with these objective qualities as given, and intervene on the basis that through their operations they could render young blacks subjectively different... When this is done in collaboration with control agents themselves, as in police-community liaison schemes, or instances in which professional blacks collaborate with schools in blaming black kids for their 'failure', it is interpreted as progress towards 'good community relations' (Carby, 1982:208).

Recognising the constructed nature of the 'objective' qualities underpinning some practitioners' attempts to address inequality, illustrates the embedded nature of institutional racism. Unfortunately, significant parallels remain between the temporal political commentary informing Carby (1982) and Lawrence's (1982) analyses and the contemporary politics of youth, race and risk. On the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hall *et al's* (1978/2013) seminal *Policing the Crisis*, Jeffersons' afterwords on the criminalisation of marginalised young people are illustrative:

Over the last forty years, all the relevant indices implicating criminalisation and crime have worsened for those on the wrong side of

the tracks... Arguably, the contemporary 'folk devil', commensurate with this worsening scenario, is no longer only black, but has widened to include all disaffected youth: the 'underclass', 'chavs', 'hoodies' and, post 9/11, Asian 'terrorists'. Structural inequalities and worklessness, social exclusion and racism, criminalisation and brutalisation remain toxic symptoms of the present conjecture (Hall *et al*, 2013: 392).

Indeed, the targeting of working class communities within contemporary policies like the DCLG's *Helping Troubled Families* (2012a) illustrates the persistent and widening quality of the 'problem youth' categorisation. Mirroring the culturalist foundations of common-sense racism, the Prime Minister David Cameron's Troubled Families speech reminds us that 'we're talking about behaviour - the behaviour of individuals, the failures of families' (Cameron, 2011). Comments like Cameron's directly reinforce the populist associations between class, crime, housing and race identified in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall *et al*, 1978). This bears profound implications, both at the level of policy making and individual experience. For young Somalis, positioned at the centre of common-sense racism and contemporary Islamophobic anxieties, the 'symptoms of the present conjecture' are severe.

Maple and Meadow are racially diverse research settings sharing complex histories of migration, settlement, resource allocation and local contestation. As Keith suggests (2002):

The conflicts that result from these histories in particular sites in the city may determine struggles for community rights... processes of recognition and resource allocation that potentially reproduce social divisions of race and ethnicity as meaningful ways of understanding the social world (325).

Thus, the everyday politics of multicultural in urban contexts present opportunities for the amplification of common-sense racial associations both within and outside of diverse urban spaces. Hudson *et al's* (2007) research on social cohesion in diverse communities, found that contestation over the allocation of sparse housing resources to newly migrated Somalis, amplified local divisions along racial lines. Underpinning these tensions, were assumptions of entitlement that had developed out of existing resident's own struggles over inclusion and belonging (Back, 1993), debates that reproduce themselves in the daily contestation of changing multicultural communities. Represented in this, is the perceived significance of race in relation to belonging, collective identification and imagined community boundaries (Cohen, 1985).

Indeed, it is through processes of racialised spatial categorisation, such as those identified by Back (1993) and Hudson *et al* (2007) that the common-sense associations between race, youth and place are reinforced. For Back (2007):

Racism is a spatial and territorial form of power. It aims to claim and secure territory, but it also projects associations on to space that in turn invest racial associations and attributes in places (51).

The homogenising associations evoked by racialised discourses can have significant implications for the relatively powerless and diverse residents inhabiting spaces at the intersection of racial, classed and religious prejudices. In his writing on 'The Iconic Ghetto' Anderson (2012) takes logic this one step further. Anderson (2012) suggests that the American ghetto stigma has become so embedded in popular representations of young black men that it 'becomes a point of reference for any and all blacks who appear in predominantly white settings, especially when incidences of crime permeate that bubble' (16). The central argument here is that despite the growing American black middle class, dominant associations between class, race, gender, and 'risk' ascribe all black people with 'risky' ghetto status until they are able to prove otherwise. Although this theory is not directly applicable to the British context, it does provide a useful insight into the way that racialised perceptions of space can permeate processes of identification outside of racialised geographic boundaries. Anderson's (2012) recent work also pinpoints an important gendered dimension in the marginalisation of ethnic minority youth. It is to the intersection of race, youth and gender that the discussion now turns.

### Masculinity

The notion of 'masculinity-in-crisis' has been closely associated with common-sense understandings of race, criminality and working class youth (Alexander, 2000; Hall *et al*, 2013). Indeed, the social construction of young people as 'problematic' or posing risk has strongly gendered connotations. On the subject of inner-city 'youth gangs' Back (2007) points out that much of 'the discussion about public safety has been underpinned by common-sense assumptions about the problem of *male* youth' (56: emphasis added). For example, the 2011 Home Office *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Report* explores the 'impact of gang violence (particularly sexual violence) on girls and young women', without paying significant attention to 'girl gangs' or the role of young women as the perpetrators of antisocial behaviour (Home Office, 2011a). Drawing on common-sense associations of gendered behaviour, these kinds of foci contribute to the alignment of race, youth, masculinity and risk within populist discourse.

Culturalist interpretations of 'fatherless Afro-Caribbean families' provide a foundation for the 'hyper-visibility of black masculinity' and the 'equation of black male identities solely with race' (Alexander, 2000:17). Resting on the assumed inferiority of the single parent family, young black masculinity is constructed as over-compensatory; making up for the absence of male role models. Frosh *et al's* (2002) study of young masculinities in a London school supports this notion. Within *Young Masculinities* it was noted that the 'boys emergent masculinities were heavily marked by ethnicity and race' (Frosh *et al*, 2002: 174). Black boys in particular, were perceived by their peers as having a distinctive, expressive masculinity, embodying the characteristics of coolness, toughness and sexual prowess. This documentation, of the ways in which masculine identities were clearly racialised, signposts the application of common-sense racist associations within lay interpretations of masculine behaviour. It is within the generalisation of such explanations, that the dominant associations between race, gender and 'problematic' behaviours are reproduced.

Moving beyond the playground, Carby (1982b) has also suggested that discussions about youth employment can evoke damaging racial and gendered associations. For Carby:

Black youth are associated with low-paid, low-skilled jobs, jobs that their parents were encouraged to migrate to Britain to do. In common-sense terms, the relation has become 'naturalized'; shit-work is all that the sons and daughters of those who fill those positions now, can, will or want to do (Carby, 1982b:202).

At a practical level, such assumptions have consequences for schooling and the occupational training of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, common-sense understandings of persistent ethnic inequalities are likely to inform the practice of teachers and community workers. Gendered assumptions of immigrant families are also likely to influence gendered educational practice - assuming working class minority ethnic males are 'problematic' and largely neglecting the experience of minority ethnic females, particularly Muslims (Ahmad, 2013).

Over the past decade, dominant constructions of 'black masculinity' have also been joined by what Alexander (2000) has coined 'the new Asian folk devil'. In the summer of 2001, violent disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford saw young people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent clash with white young men and the police (Thomas, 2011). The public framing of these events as 'race riots' has led to the equation of young Muslim men with risk, articulated through the image of the 'Asian gang' (Alexander, 2000). Indeed:

The figure of 'the gang' draws upon common sense ideas of Asian masculinities as collectively dysfunctional and as newly dangerous – most notably in its links of Britain's Muslim communities with religious 'Fundamentalism' (Alexander, 2004: 532)

The intersection of public anxieties associating Muslim men with existing concerns about working class youth, 'but more particularly...long established racialized debates around black masculinities' places young Muslim males at the centre of numerous racial, cultural, religious and gendered prejudices (Alexander, 2004: 535). Alexander goes on to suggest that:

The primary division in the construction of the Asian/Muslim community is that of gender. The 'riots' are clashes between Asian men and white men, or Asian men and the police, and the images are similarly gendered – about crime, violence, testosterone, unemployment, alienation from authority (whether parental or state), etc (Alexander, 2004:535).

These associations have ensured that subsequent discussions about gang or youth violence are underpinned by common-sense assumptions of black and/or Muslim males (Back, 2007). For example, the political commentary on 'community cohesion' and 'the youth problem', articulated by David Cameron (2011), Theresa May and Iain Duncan Smith (Home Office 2011a; Home Office 2011b) in the wake of the 2011 summer riots, evokes the same racial, gendered and religious associations. Recognising this intersection of common sense racial and gendered assumptions within the logic of targeted youth policy, the discussion of marginalised young people throughout the remainder of this thesis refers predominantly to the experience of young, often Muslim males, from minority ethnic backgrounds.

### **Insiders and outsiders: racialised communities of risk**

More often than not, it is the local community or neighbourhood that marks the point where common-sense racism, political risk labelling and the symbolic constructions of community intersect. 'Local community is one of the major expressions of community' (Delanty, 2010: 53), referring to a form of shared experience, based on place that acts as an important vehicle for the formation and reflection of personal identities. Green *et al* (2010) suggest that individuals and groups constantly engage 'in attempts to territorialise spaces and people: including some, excluding others and drawing boundary lines' as a way of gaining control of their local worlds (117).

Back (1993) provides an important contribution to the conceptualisation of local community experience within his early empirical writings on race. Here Back

discusses the ways in which notions of race can be redefined at a local level reflecting the malleable symbolic construction of group identities under the umbrella of community. Here the term 'neighbourhood nationalism' is adopted to describe the process by which certain racial boundaries are recognised as defining separation, while others characterise inclusion:

The notion of 'neighbourhood nationalism' which states 'it is out of order to talk about people's colour' is not an empty gesture but a product of a long struggle over the inclusion of black people within this parochial identity. It is not a benign ideology facilitating cross racial 'harmony' but a product of lived struggles over belonging... (Back, 1993:228).

Back's findings highlight the ways in which dynamic processes of interaction over time can contribute to the formation of identities that shape the symbolic boundaries of 'community'. Furthermore, the selective nature of these identities, reflect the impact of local and national ideologies in shaping these processes. The result is the expression of 'historically specific racisms at a local level' (Back, 1993:231) reflecting 'a belief in the power of local forms of urban belonging' (Delanty, 2010:41).

According to Armstrong (2004), the symbolic construction of localised community boundaries are also perpetuated by the political discourses that situate marginalised young people within a nexus of risk. Indeed, a whole 'paraphernalia of surveillance and intervention' is justified by the government within communities deemed to be problematic, based on the assumption that 'youth crime is an outcome of dysfunctional individuals and communities and that these individuals can be identified' through a 'risk' assessment process (Armstrong, 2004:104). Indeed, many local areas have seen:

...the closer involvement of agencies working in collaboration with one another, ranging from information sharing networks, to operating early intervention initiatives and similar diversionary programs. These include neighbourhood policing teams who engage in informal diversionary activities with young people, parenting support programs such as Sure Start, community wardens used to identify families 'at risk' of crime, as well as outreach youth workers providing youth diversionary provision in many disadvantage communities (Mccarthy, 2011:496).

What the research suggests, is that the process of targeting communities labelled as 'at risk' with intervention programs, contributes to individuals shared experience of marginalisation (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008). Research findings also highlight that the impact of such recognition (often arrived at through targeted individuals regular exposure to agencies of social control) fuels

the construction of symbolic boundaries within the communities deemed 'problematic' (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005; Mccarthy, 2011). In this respect, the categorisation of problematic communities, based on risk assessment criteria, contributes to the amplification of communal experience within those groups. This is a phenomenon that the research documented within this thesis develops.

The adoption of particular styles of dress constitutes a classic example of the ways in which some groups communicate collective identity in response to stigmatisation (Harrison, 1999; Cohen, 2002b). From his ethnographic work with black youths in urban Philadelphia, Anderson (1999) illustrates:

In this scenario, anything associated with conventional white society is seen as square; the hip things are at odds with it. The united sneakers, the pants worn well below the waist, the hat turned backward- all have become a style. These unconventional symbols have been taken over by people who have made them into status symbols, but they are status symbols *to the extent that* they go against what's conventional (Anderson, 1999:112).

Conventional items then (clothing), acquired from the high street, were reworked and encoded with symbols that represent sub cultural identities and affiliations (Cohen, 2002b). In this respect, community became coercive as far as individuals were compelled to conform to certain behavioural codes based on their socially constructed interpretations. By applying these coercive behavioural interpretations, individuals simultaneously identify with a particular ideological group and (dis)identify or segregate themselves from wider society.

A related issue, raised in discussions about working class communities is the ways in which visibly identifying with peers through dress can negatively impact individuals' lived experiences. At the same time as styles develop in response to 'risky' or 'problematic' categorisation, they can simultaneously perpetuate the stigmas that spurred their creation in the first place. See Cohen's (2002b) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (originally published in 1972) for an in depth discussion of sub cultural styles and labelling. Anderson (1999) comments on how 'many ghetto males are caught in a bind because they are espousing their particular ways of dressing and acting simply to be self-respecting among their neighbourhood peers (112). Yet in doing so, they are signing up for further alienation from wider society, confirming the racialised 'risk' status they are responding to. More recently, Green *et al* (2010) suggested that:

In a society where young people are frequently deprived of opportunities for full-time employment and associated status and income, they are

more likely to invest heavily in peer-group relationships, which are developed and consolidated through leisure, or free-time activities. Young people can actively shape their social world through the development of identities enhanced by 'risk reputations'. The acquisition of 'risk reputations' can confer a variety of pressures and statuses upon young people; some reputations are deliberately acquired and others bestowed regardless of individual attempts to avoid their negative associations (113-114).

So, the research suggests that often, responses to negative labelling can affirm notions of shared experience and identification that result in the acceptance of behaviours that confirm their source. A supporting example closer to home, can be found within Back's (2007) discussion of local patriotism and 'gang' labels. Here Back illustrates the ways in which localised stigma and labelling can manifest itself in terms of strong notions of pride and local community:

...as one boy pointed out 'To be from the ghetto now is an honour.' To recode the association as an emblem of pride changes the coordinates of racist mappings, which criminalise both places and people. Inner urban districts are the canvases on which racist fears and stigma are inscribed. What seems to be happening here is the inscriptions are turned back on themselves. Local patriotism is a response and a mirroring back of a negative urban imagery that is in turn recoded as positive (Back, 2007:58).

This example evokes three important considerations for conceptualising community in relation to race and risk. Initially what emerges is the extent to which imagined communities become more than the sum of their parts, to the degree that ideas about community are represented in embodied social action. Notions of community are conceptualised as a 'reason' for *doing*, or *being* a certain way and these ideas cannot be reduced to any singular individual. The structurally informed imagination awards these notions the power to coerce, despite the potential detriment of the actions they subscribe.

While spaces are reclaimed through 'gang talk' it accepts the territorial limits contained within the white racist mapping. Put simply, it is a version of identity that turns the strait jacket inside out, but remains held in it (Back, 2007:58).

Secondly, the extract further illustrates the role of labelling in defining community boundaries. Within this, lies the importance of 'power in authorising particular 'community' formations (and delegitimising others)' (Alexander *et al*, 2007: 798). The link between disadvantaged groups in British society (particularly ethnic and religious minorities) and the problematisation and



categorisation of these communities with 'risk' in popular media and political discourse signposts the significance of power in community formation and the reproduction of inequalities (Cohen, 2002b). In relation to this conflict, what is displayed is the ways in which collective social action can develop and reaffirm notions of community, collective identities and belonging. This reminds us of Bauman's (2000) assertion that communities rely on individuals identifying with them, and taking responsibility for them to exist. The idea of community is formed in this instance through collective interpretation based on place. It is 'not merely an expression of an underlying cultural identity' (Delanty, 2010:53). Additionally, Back's extract emphasises the contradictory outcome that through responding to stigma - recoding the labels - the inhabitants of marginalised communities develop a sense of neighbourhood pride and solidarity, whilst often strengthening the symbolic boundaries separating them from wider society. This point, affirms the significance of imagined boundaries, whilst considering the relevance of spatial segregation - an issue that has particular pertinence within the UK in discussions of race and class (Byrne, 1999).

This section has outlined the conceptualisation of community that takes a central position within the thesis. It has also acknowledged the significance of racialised discourses and risk labelling processes in the contemporary experience of marginalised urban collectivities. Integrating the risk, community and race literature as such has outlined the significance of considering the role racialised discourses play in the political framing of disadvantaged communities with 'risk', alongside the implications of these processes for resident's imagined symbolic community boundaries, particularly young men from minority ethnic backgrounds (Cohen, 1985). Indeed what is clarified in this is that community needs to be understood as emanating from a symbiotic relationship between categorisation and individual interpretation and interaction. It is this model that helps us to understand and theoretically account for the multiplicity of uses 'community' takes on for individuals. The recognition of 'community' as individually imagined, also clarifies the reasons why ideas about inclusion and what counts as 'community' can shift depending on context. Conceptualising community in this way allows for this project's dynamic exploration of the relationship between risk labelling, racialised discourse and experiences of community.

### **Conclusion: Studying racialised communities of risk from a symbolic interactionist perspective**

The discussion above shows the relevance of race, risk, community and the relationship between the three within this project. It has been argued within the existing literature that whilst government risk prevention agendas can open funding avenues for youth services, these opportunities can simultaneously

perpetuate labelling processes and experiences of stigma within the communities awarded funding (France, 2008). The existence of youth provision within disadvantaged communities is therefore intrinsically tied up with the areas negative associations. This has particular implications for the experiences of young boys. It seems both being male and of a minority ethnic background increases the chances of being associated with 'risk', although importantly, what 'risk' actually means at both a political and conversational level is unclear (Lupton, 1990; Pedersen and Kolstad, 2000; Frosh *et al*, 2002; Armstrong, 2004; 2006; Stodolska and Livengood, 2006; Helman, 2007; Johansson, 2008; Turnbull and Spence, 2011). Yet, regardless of the ambiguities surrounding the term, close associations have been drawn between the labelling of 'at-risk young people' and their disproportionately negative attention from the police (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005). Consequently, it seems the contemporary political occupation with 'risk' prevention plays an important role in the marginalisation of communities, and with that, young people's experiences of stigmatisation from institutions of social control.

In terms of young people's actual experiences of 'risk', what the literature highlights is that the behaviours commonly associated with 'youth' and 'risk' are interpreted in terms of the symbolic meanings attached to them, and that the processes by which these meanings are arrived at are influenced by interaction. This observation points towards the relevance of approaching the challenge of understanding individual 'risk epistemologies' from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1986; Merryweather, 2010). Often, within young people's interpretations of behaviour importance is placed on calculations of everyday social gains such as respect and inclusion as opposed to more direct thinking about 'risk' (Winlow and Hall, 2006). Exploring these processes requires an epistemological recognition of the significance of interaction in the interpretive processes of individuals.

Concerning the interpretation of 'risk', the literature also highlights significant variations in the consideration of 'risk' at institutional levels and the lives of individuals. 'Risk' then, is ascribed to particular social phenomena by people with the power to make these ascriptions (See Becker's, 1963 *Morel Entrepreneurs, Rule Creators and Rule Enforcers* for a relevant discussion on symbolic ascriptions of meaning). These ascriptions often bear little resemblance to the way behaviours are actually interpreted by young people (Armstrong, 2004; 2006). Indeed, numerous social factors including the popular media, family, peer relations, spatial context, culture, race, religion and 'community' are all likely to intersect informing young people's perceptions of, and reactions toward certain behaviours. Consequently, the processes underlying the interpretation of 'risks' vary considerably at institutional and individual levels. Yet, the literature cited above fails to sufficiently account for young people's and

youth workers' interpretations of risk within the context of their labelled communities and the wider risk policy discourse.

...a new research agenda is needed that will engage critically with the experiences and perspectives of young people in different contexts, looking at how 'risk' and 'resilience' to risk are constructed and understood by young people themselves (Armstrong, 2004: 113).

This thesis addresses Armstrong's call by means of an ethnographic analysis of the experiences of youth workers and young people within two communities labelled 'risky'. This approach adopts the epistemological stance of the interpretive tradition, alongside the theoretical premises of symbolic interactionism, to direct the research focus at generating an understanding of the experiences of youth workers and young people 'on the ground', in youth clubs and their local communities. In doing so, the thesis contributes to the literature reviewed within this chapter by situating the opinions and experiences of youth workers and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in relation to the social processes that result in their being labelled 'risky'. This will consider the ways in which ascriptions of 'risk labels' impact the experiences of the youth workers and young people who identify with them, alongside exploring the ways in which responses to labelling affect individuals' interpretations of themselves, their behaviours and their communities. These findings will contribute to sociological understandings of individual experiences within disadvantaged communities, alongside critically addressing the current political discourse that aims to manage yet simultaneously perpetuates the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups.

The next chapter provides an in depth discussion of the research methodology, method and process. This will situate the relevance of symbolic interactionist thinking within the chosen ethnographic approach, alongside providing a detailed and reflective account of the research.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methods**

An ethnographic approach was chosen for this research. This was in order to facilitate the collection of in-depth data that addressed the four key research topics. The following discussion explores the methodological logic underpinning this approach and the practical methods derived from it.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an analysis of the research methodology, outlining the reasons why an ethnographic approach was chosen. Here the conformity between symbolic interactionism and interpretive research is considered detailing its relevance to the ethnographic focus. The second substantive section provides a narrative, sequential analysis of the research process, foregrounding issues of researcher/participant positionality, power relations, research ethics and inclusion particularly in terms of researching across lines of difference. Within this the methods adopted for data collection are also critically evaluated, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative interviewing, focus groups and participant observation. The chapter ends with a discussion of the ways in which the research data was organised and analysed.

#### **Methodology**

The epistemological foundation for the research documented within this thesis was inspired by the interpretive, empirical sociological tradition emanating from the Chicago School in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a canon responsible for the development of symbolic interactionist theory, the principles of which guide the methodological approach underpinning this research.

Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical perspective that views everyday life as the product of processes of meaning making by embodied social actors through interaction. For Blumer (1996) this rests on three basic premises: firstly, that humans act towards things based on the meanings they have of them, secondly that these meanings arise from social interaction, and thirdly, that these meanings are personally interpreted and modified by the individual dealing with whatever it is that s/he encounters. 'In this view subjective meanings emerge from experience and change' with it, so the life worlds that individual's negotiate are constantly imbued with meaning through interaction and interpretation (Charmaz, 2005). This is not a structural perspective, rather, one that understands and accounts for the constantly shifting and diverse nature of the

human world (Jenkins, 2002). In order to explore the subjective processes that symbolic interactionist thinking highlights, the researcher needs to understand how people interpret their social experiences in the context of their occurrences seeking 'to reflect accurately the empirical world in which the influence is operating' (Blumer, 1996:192). Social action does not occur in a vacuum, it occurs in a social space *or empirical world* as a response to social phenomenon. Context, is therefore of paramount importance when trying to understand any social phenomenon. Thus, in order to capture and account for the complexities of human behaviours, symbolic interactionist researchers have to develop a detailed picture of the empirical life worlds that their participants inhabit.

It is based on these assumptions that symbolic interactionist thinking makes its connection with empirical sociology and secures its roots in interpretive Weberian epistemology. Weber's occupation with *Verstehen*, understanding the social world in terms of the meaning individuals and groups associate with their actions, is a principle underpinning the Chicago approach and interpretive sociology more generally. Combined with an interactionist theoretical framework, this approach actually dictates an interpretive epistemology suiting an empirically based qualitative method. As Becker (1977) suggests: 'Some problems can be approached in a 'scientific' way while other problems, no matter how interesting or important must either be ignored for the time being...or dealt with in ways that rely on intuition and other non-communicable gifts' (15). The interpretive focus of the research documented here emerges from the shortcomings of 'scientific' research methods in a social context.

Indeed, the study of small-scale social phenomena in qualitative detail requires a closeness between the researcher and participant that contradicts positivist methodology. This empirical proximity allows the researcher to pay significant attention to the nuances and intricacies of behaviour in order to effectively discover the 'markers and the tools that people mobilise in their interactions' (Bazinger and Dodier, 2004:9). Back (2007) makes a methodological call for closeness in his concept of listening. Concerning the significance of accounting for 'context', Back distinguishes *sociological listening* as:

...not simply a matter of transcription, or just emptying people of their expertise and wisdom... It involves an artfulness, precisely because it isn't self-evident but a form of openness to others that needs to be crafted, a listening for the background and half muted (2007:80).

What's important here, is the recognition that utilising a 'democracy of the senses' in sociological investigation, namely paying holistic attention to the intricacies of social situations, not simply the loudest or most obvious voices helps the interpretive researcher to 'notice more and ask different questions of

the world' (Back, 2007:8). It is in developing such a perspective that interpretive sociology maintains its potential to contribute to knowledge and expand social consciousness.

This thesis provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which youth workers and young people interpreted the public and political discourses associating their areas with 'risk'. Its dual focus (youth workers *and* young people) was guided by the intention to avoid the overrepresentation of a 'dominant voice'. Indeed, the voices of both youth workers and young people in the research settings are relatively unheard. The research documented captures both voices and the interplay between them, thus, ensuring against a biased reflection of local youth provision. Efforts were also explicitly paid to reporting the comments and opinions of respondents clearly, in order to maintain their original meaning. This mindfulness was in avoidance of the possible domination of my own voice, as the ethnographer, an issue that is somewhat inevitable, but was managed responsibly through the consideration of participants during analysis and writing up. Drawing on the classical sociology of Mills, the thesis attempts to 'grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (2000:6). In order to investigate these dynamics, particularly behavioural interpretation, methodological and proximal closeness was necessary. Consequently, with reference to the symbolic interactionist tradition, and Back's description of *sociological listening*, an ethnographic approach was adopted.

Ethnography, derived from Greek *ethnos* (people) and *graphia* (to draw or write) literally translates to the study and documentation of people or groups. Whilst its origins are usually traced in social anthropology, sociologists can also lay some claim to heritage in ethnographic research. 'Urban sociology and the study of small communities in cities are almost a century old. The work that originated in, and was inspired by the Chicago school of sociology in the United States can reasonably claim a pedigree of ethnographic research that is unbroken since the 1920s' (Atkinson *et al*, 2001 p.2) *see* (Foote Whyte, 1943; Becker, 1963; Willmott, 1966; Rainwater, 1970; Wiilis, 1977; Robins and Cohen, 1978; Back, 1993; Anderson, 1999; 2012; Alexander, 2000; Winlow and Hall, 2006; Harrison, 2009). Indeed for Blumer (1986) 'the methodological position of symbolic interactionism is that social interaction must be studied in terms of how it is formed' and it is in this occupation that symbolic interactionist sociology forms its relationship with ethnographic research (p. 57).

According to Baszanger and Dodier (2004) ethnographic research is characterised by its grounding in qualitative social science and its empirical focus on the study of human activities within a specific cultural context. May (1997) discusses the aim of this as to achieve an 'empathic understanding of a social scene', demanding researchers to revisit their preconceptions and expose

them to 'new social milieu which demand their engagement' (p.150). May's use of the term 'empathic' is of particular importance here. Empathy alludes to reflexivity, or at least a social interplay between the researcher and the subject. Contemporary ethnography is not a one directional process where researchers look outwards toward groups of clearly defined others. Instead, it 'encounters others in relation to itself, whilst seeing itself as other', recognising that 'every version of an 'other' wherever found, is also the construction of a self' (Clifford, 1986:23). The contemporary ethnographer's position should be a reflexive one that pays attention not only to the observed interaction between participants, but also to his/her own presence and the implications of this. Tyler (1986) supports these ideas under the term 'post-modern ethnography', detailing its commitment to reflexivity, and the awareness of the position of both parties within the ethnographic encounter:

Because post-modern ethnography privileges 'discourse' over 'text', it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasises the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer (Tyler, 1986:126).

Such an approach requires the researcher to immerse him/herself within a setting for some time in order to 'observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group' (Bryman, 2004: 267). This can involve building relationships with participants, spending time participating in social activities, observing interaction and engaging in conversations. Indeed, ethnographic researchers often necessarily breach 'formal research parameters' in order to develop constructive, sometimes intimate working relationships with participants (Alexander, 2000:27). Consequently, this is an approach characterised by empirical closeness and the use of observatory methods, although a strength of the ethnographic approach is the flexibility it grants the researcher to incorporate a verity of qualitative methods throughout the research process (Becker, 1963; Alexander, 1996; 2000; Harrison, 2009).

However, the adoption of this approach does raise questions in terms of validity (Bryman, 2004; May, 2007). Ethnographic research does not lend itself to large sample sizes. The impracticality of researching social groups so intimately seriously limits the scope of ethnographic samples. In addition, researchers exploring specific social or cultural groups are often unable to adopt the random sampling methods that produce representative findings. This is particularly the case in research that explores peer group interactions (no exception in this research). The implication of this is that whilst providing rich and in-depth data, the findings of ethnographic research are rarely representative and consequently lack external validity. However, recognising this, it should be noted that the aim of this research is not to provide large-scale generalisable findings,

but to gain an insight into the specific issues experienced by a particular group. This project entailed over three years of engaged participatory field work during youth sessions and community meetings in Maple and Meadow. Throughout this period a number of research methods were used in different contexts in order to collect data as appropriately as possible. Participant observation, semi structured interviews and focus groups were the primary methods utilised and these will be subject to critical analysis in the second part of the following section.

A second issue raised on adopting an ethnographic approach is reliability. The nature of ethnographic research dictates the contextual specificity of its findings. Thanks to the relative fluidity of the human world, it would be unlikely for example, on repeating a study the following year that a researcher would or could obtain the same data. This is without considering the impact of the researcher repeating the study potentially being a different person with different values and relationships to his/her participants (Fay, 1996). Interpretive in-depth research findings have to be located within the time period that they were collected, the characteristics of the researcher, his/her participants and the relationships they had with each other (Becker, 1977; Bryman, 2004; Huisman, 2008). As Back (2007) succinctly writes:

It is an aspiration to hold the experience of others in your arms whilst recognising that what we touch is always moving, unpredictable, irreducible, and mysteriously opaque (2007:3).

Here, Back implies that the sociologist should aim to reflect the life worlds of his/her participants as truthfully as possible in the given frame, whilst accepting the shifting nature of social life. Importantly however, the contextual specificity of qualitative research findings by no means renders them of limited use. The aim of the ethnographer is to inscribe social discourse, literally to write it down and in so doing 'turn it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account which exists in its inscriptions' to be learned from and reconsulted (Geertz, 1993:19). Information of this nature, 'social snapshots' for want of a better phrase provide a unique insight into the lived experience of specific groups in particular circumstances.

To summarise, this research's basis in symbolic interactionist theory guided its interpretive epistemological approach, which in turn, along with the subject matter, warranted the use of an ethnographic method. In this respect, the theory, epistemology and methodology are very tightly connected. As Silverman (1985) suggests, 'each theoretical perspective represents a particular way of looking at and acting on society' (101). Hence, 'it is evident to say that any researcher grounded in symbolic interactionism will be tentative, empirical and responsive



to meaning' (Rock, 2001:29). Thus, this research is situated amongst a tradition of urban ethnography concerning youth, labelling and deviance (Foote Whyte, 1943; Becker, 1963; Willmott, 1966; Rainwater, 1970; Willis, 1977; Robins and Cohen, 1978; Back, 1993; Anderson, 1999; Alexander, 2000; Anderson, 2003; Winlow and Hall, 2006; Harrison, 2009). However, the study is original in terms of its application of these methods to a contemporary and under researched context.

### **Doing the research**

The act of conducting qualitative research is often described as a 'messy process'. The experience of this project was no exception. An issue concerning many of the text book accounts of research methods is that within them, the hypothetical research process is often presented in a neat linear format. Something along the lines of: sampling- access- application of method- data collection- analysis- dissemination. This is not a sequence that directly reflects my research experience, or does its chaotic complexity any justice. It took for example, over a year of volunteering within Maple and Meadow before a sample was finally identified. Given this, it is more appropriate to discuss my research experience in a chronological, narrative fashion. This section starts at the beginning of the empirical process and provides a reflexive account of the journey throughout. Presenting the research as such highlights the integrative nature of access, sampling, ethnics and the application of method throughout this ethnographic process.

My existing position, of approximately one year (since June 2009) as a voluntary tutor at the Maple homework club constituted an invaluable platform for the empirical work. The Homework Club ran on Monday and Thursday evenings between 5.00pm and 6.45pm. It was a community centre project, supplemented by various private and government resources tasked with providing homework support and extracurricular tuition for local residents. Although spaces for local attendees were prioritised, the club also provided for some students from Meadow, who didn't have a homework facility. Attendees ranged from 7 years of age up to the completion of A levels (18), with a relatively even gendered split. Attendees were also mostly of Somali descent. This demographic stemmed from the established local Somali community, the emphasis they placed on academic success and the difficulties some of the local parents faced providing homework support due to language barriers. The club organisers Lesley and John (a white couple in their late 50's and early 60's at the time of the research) were both local residents and extremely active members of the Maple community. They attended local meetings, knew the forum managers and were familiar with the local youth workers. This involvement made Lesley and John invaluable gatekeepers in the early stages of this research project. Consequently, having an

existing working relationship with them turned out to be a considerable advantage during the following stages of access.

My decision to situate the research across a range of local youth provision was inspired by a curiosity to explore the spectrum of youth service demographics. Indeed, the Homework Club was likely to attract students with a certain diligence, or familial work ethic, that as a sample on its own, could have presented a considerable bias. All of the attendees were in school for example, those who got expelled, had no need for the Homework Club, but often continued to utilise the other, more social, provision available such as the youth clubs. Thus, it became clear early on that in order to gain an insight into the experience of a range of young people, I would need to become involved with the youth clubs. This is something I discussed with Lesley after one of the Homework Club sessions. Lesley suggested contacting Royce, the local youth development manager at the time.

Royce (a tall and confident 36 year old of Jamaican decent) visited the Homework Club at the end of the following week's session. I was introduced to Royce by Lesley, as one of her volunteers who was interested in doing some research within the local area. This was a well-needed push. At that time my unfounded preconception of the youth clubs as dangerous places was causing me some concern, certainly stalling any empirical proactivity. In theory I was keen to challenge these ideas through practical experience, in practice I was nervous.

During my conversation with Royce, which lasted around 20 minutes, I managed to bumble through a rough explanation of the project as an investigation of youth and 'risk', asking all the obvious questions about what 'problems' he thought the area was facing. Royce kindly obliged and told me stories of 'gang warfare', the young people's 'warrior culture', drug dealing, ineffective local councillors and fights with football hooligans. He then passed me his contact details and invited me to arrange a meeting with him if I was still interested in doing some research. This encounter provoked mixed emotions. Initially I was happy to have made a step in the right direction (by talking to Royce about my research) and I was fascinated by his accounts of violence and criminality. However, the meeting certainly did not calm my concerns about entering these spaces as a white middle class researcher. The benefit of hindsight suggests that Royce probably had no intention of doing so, and there is no reason why he should (Rock, 2001). Consequently, from this date (25/3/2010) it took me another two and a half months of procrastination; reading ethnographies, extending my literature review, thinking about methodology and volunteering in the Homework Club before summoning the courage to contact Royce and arrange a meeting to discuss access (15/6/2010).

During this period I invested some considerable time into reading ethnographers accounts of access. I took particular inspiration from the work of Antony Harrison (*Hip Hop Underground*, 2009). Harrison's exploration of underground Hip Hop culture in San Francisco made it necessary for him to gain access to a group of local rappers. A practical step Harrison noted as being particularly useful in terms of getting to know 'the right' people was his acquisition of a job in 'Amoeba' (a local record store). In fact, the position was referenced as 'crucial to creating a context of familiarity' with prospective participants (61). Importantly this imaginative methodological step meant that the individuals Harrison wanted to interact with already identified him as a figure with shared interests:

By working alongside music enthusiasts and directly sharing experiences with them, I was accepted as a person with particular interests, idiosyncrasies and views, and not merely as an inquisitive stranger whose regular presence required explanation. In terms of the 'mutual construction of meaning' (Hutchins 2001:2) and genuine rapport to which contemporary ethnographic research aspires, the benefits of my employment at Amoeba were immeasurable (Harrison, 2009: 62-3).

Harrison's account stimulated a consideration of the ways in which I could go about publically representing some of my interests (before entering the field) that might work against the more obvious boundaries race and background could erect between the service users and myself (Maynard, 1998). However, importantly, as with Harrison, these representations had to reflect *genuine* interests. A key aspect of face work in Goffman's (1969) interaction order is that it requires some agreement or collusion between the performer and the audience in terms of what is being presented. Hence, there would be no advantages in representing an image I could not support. Furthermore, my experiences from the Homework Club reminded me that such instances were informally policed by young people, amongst their peers and youth workers through use of the phrase 'don't beg it', the best definition of which I received was 'don't act like something you're not'. Those who were called out as 'beggin' it' lost both trust and respect amongst the young people. Indeed, as Thornton (1995) quite rightly pointed out 'nothing depletes social capital more than the sight of somebody trying too hard' (12). So, this symbolic association of 'common ground' had to be genuine, or abandoned.

Luckily at that time, a close friend of mine was the manager of a trainer shop that I frequently visited in the city centre. This shop was widely respected as the best place to purchase limited edition trainers or 'creps' as they were referred to amongst the young people in the Homework Club. The shop was visited by anyone locally who was interested in urban fashion and was particularly well regarded amongst the young men and women from Maple and Meadow. Through a mixture of good timing and knowing the right people I was able to fill a vacancy

and secured a part time position on the shop floor as a sales assistant. This was a position that later, like Harrison's, turned out to be of considerable methodological importance. Although, the significance of this was unclear until I had actually accessed the field, and doing so involved (re)establishing contact with Royce.

Royce's office was located at the base of a block of flats in the centre of the Maple estate. As I approached the ground floor the only feature distinguishing an office within was an A4 piece of card reading 'Maple Forum' in one of the grimy windows. I pressed the buzzer and Royce answered, guiding my step over the pool of urine between the main entrance, the base of the stairs and the forum office door. As an icebreaker Royce described the problems they were having with residents 'pissing in the stairwells'. The forum space was a busy converted flat with 3 office rooms and a kitchen area. I sat down in Royce's office and attempted to enthusiastically convey my ideas about reciprocity in the research process, alongside my willingness to give time to volunteering within the youth services during the proposed research period. Royce listened carefully, and his trusting response was to offer me a Wednesday night position at the busiest club in the Meadow area. This club was chosen because the service was relatively new and it catered for a range of young people (both good and 'bad' according to Royce) from Maple and Meadow between 11 and 19 years of age. However, importantly, Royce also warned me that youth workers in both areas were familiar with researchers 'swooping in' to collect data and disappearing without a trace. Consequently his advice was to approach the position as a volunteer at first, to display some commitment to the club and establish some relationships with the session leaders *before* overtly discussing my intentions as a researcher.

This encounter presented a number of methodological considerations worth discussing in some detail. Essentially, Royce had granted my access on the basis that I considered doing a period of covert research, within a club that was outside my initial geographic area of interest. This was not a condition, but at the time it was a strong suggestion and it was one that I chose to abide (despite reservation) to mitigate the risk of being turned away at the door. So, access was confirmed and Royce sent the Meadow club organiser (Flash) an e-mail telling him to expect a new volunteer at the next session, with no reference to my position as a research student.

An obvious initial reflection from this encounter was that the interaction totally contradicted the researcher/participant power dynamics that are so often discussed, somewhat unproblematically in favour of the researcher. Especially in relation to research across lines of ethnic and class difference. Within this interaction Royce was in a dominant position of power and my access was very

much dependant on his terms. The result of this was a period of ethical complication concerning issues of informed consent, privacy and harm.

The British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice notes that 'as far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied' (BSA, 2004). In addition the statement suggests that 'research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish' (BSA, 2004). Whilst I had no intention of physically recording any data during this initial period in the club, my research interests would naturally guide my observations. Consequently this initial period of access and observation would transgress the principles above, because prospective participants would not be given the opportunity to refuse to cooperate based on any understanding of the proposed research. It is also fair to suggest that my introduction to the setting as a volunteer (emitting any information about the project) could be interpreted as a privacy issue. This is because during this initial period, the Meadow team would not know that I was a prospective researcher. With the benefit of hindsight, this is an issue that could have easily been avoided if I had chosen to introduce myself as 'a volunteer who was also interested in doing some research'. However, at such a crucial point of access I was compelled to follow the steps my gatekeeper had signposted and consequently challenged the ethical code. By doing so, I was also arguably at risk of raising a further ethical concern regarding potential harm to myself. At this stage, there appeared to be a risk that revealing my position as a researcher, following a sustained covert period could significantly aggravate the sample population, placing me in harm's way. However, it soon transpired, having entered the field that the settings were appropriately staffed and the chances of any violent occurrence were very slim.

Finally, the encounter also raised an interesting consideration in terms of research fatigue. Royce's suggested approach was based on the need to establish some trust *before* disclosing my intentions as a researcher. This position assumes that within the research settings, researchers are deemed to be untrustworthy. This logic is importantly grounded in the fact that certain groups in Maple and Meadow felt 'over researched'. 'Indeed, such claims are an overt expression from communities that they are tired of participating' in research 'and no longer value the experience or any of the associated outcomes' (Clark, 2008:956). From this perspective, displaying some commitment to the youth clubs by volunteering for a period of time could eventually lead to the projection of my research in a more favourable light. That is, providing the session organisers and young people weren't upset by the lack of clarity from the start, which was a very serious risk.

This scenario speaks for the failure of previous researchers to disseminate findings back to the communities in question, or possibly even to give prospective participants a realistic picture of the potential benefits and outcomes of their involvement. Combined, these considerations all contributed to my desire to challenge the 'hegemonic practices of traditional, hierarchical research' and work towards a mutually beneficial empirical approach based on the feminist values of reciprocity (Huisman, 2008:374). In light of this, whilst I could not make unrealistic claims about the direct benefits of my research to the youth workers and young people in Maple and Meadow, I could offer my time and enthusiasm in a voluntary capacity over a three-year period. At this stage, it is worth noting that in practical terms this was only possible due to the funding this project received from the ESRC quota studentship award. Without this financial help I would have been less able to devote as much time (up to 5 sessions a week) to volunteering and as a consequence, the research approach/engagement would have taken very different shape. To an extent then, it should be recognised that the researcher's capacity for reciprocity is constrained by the limits of time and money.

### **Entering the field**

My first session at the Meadow youth club was challenging. The club itself was in the centre of the Meadow estate; about 30 minutes walk from my house at the time. It was situated in a building next to a gravel car park that was visually obstructed from the road by another large building (also used for youth work at different times). To get to the club, one had to walk through a front car park past the first building, go through a door-sized gap in the wall that opened up into a gravel car park that bordered the club building. This building also backed onto a large park that was known locally as a meeting place. Young people could often be found around this area either in the club buildings, on the steps in the secluded car park, or in the park itself at all hours of the week and weekend, regardless of school time. As a result, the buildings and surrounding car parks were externally recognised, not necessarily as a youth club (that building was secluded), but as a place where 'black youths' played truant. Together, Royce's explanation of the clientele and my own anxieties made entering this area for the first time a nerve-racking experience.

I met Flash (the session coordinator) in the entrance foyer on his way into the building. Flash was a very tall and likeable African Caribbean man in his early 40's. As an ex nightclub bouncer he had a very definite physical presence and the confidence to match. Seeming pleased to have a new volunteer on board Flash quickly introduced me to the other session workers 'Len', 'Liveer' and 'Aki'. Flash delegated a few 'setting up' tasks (getting the table tennis out/taking the covers off of the pool table/switching the computers on) and disappeared. It later

transpired that this was particularly characteristic, due mostly to the fact that Flash often had to negotiate numerous club related tasks at any one time. However, this left me, more or less to my own devices with the task of 'getting to know the young people'. The club quickly filled up and within an hour was thriving with young men, mostly in their mid teens, from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and African Caribbean). Attendees were listening to music, playing computer games, table tennis, pool, play fighting and generally larking about. The atmosphere appeared chaotic and charged with testosterone, although the mood was generally positive.

Despite this, the task of getting to know the group was far more difficult than I had hoped. At this stage my own nerves and perception of difference made it difficult to approach the young people who were, for the most part, ignoring me and getting on with their own games and conversations. My feelings at this stage closely resembled the following account from Alexander's (2000) initial experiences of access within a predominantly Bengali youth club in London:

I could not bring myself to speak to the young men, feeling generally self-conscious and embarrassed, as well as a little intimidated – an anthropological sore thumb... Partly I could see no reason why they would want to talk to me, a total stranger, and partly, I could not think of anything sensible to ask; more than this, the whole environment was new and strange... (31-32).

Consequently, the best part of this session was spent 'floating about', trying to look busy and feeling awkward, during which, my attempts to engage with young people were all responded to with either hostility or total indifference.

In addition, being the only white face in the building presented a new and uncomfortable experience of racial identity, which manifested itself as a symbolic barrier for communication (albeit temporary). Puwar's (2004) theoretical consideration of coexistence, across lines of race and gender within socially enscripted spaces is a useful tool for explaining this phenomenon. Drawing on the racialised history of the British Empire, Puwar (2004) locates the normative state of whiteness within contemporary British society. Her argument asserts the existence of symbolic associations between bodies and spaces, which are 'built, repeated and contested over time' (8). Hence, whilst in theory most social positions and spaces are racially and gender neutral 'it is certain bodies that are tactically designated as being the 'natural' occupants of specific positions' (8). The fact that whiteness exists as an 'unmarked normative position' locates white people within this context in a position of power, free from particular association (58). Indeed, the discussion highlights that:

The ideal representatives of humanity are those who are not marked by their body and those who are, in an embodied sense invisible. This is a privilege which is not...available to those who are considered to be of colour who are considered to be marked and highly visible (58).

This imagery depicts the socially ingrained privilege of whiteness through its normative association, and in so doing, illustrates the foundations of racialised perception and the disadvantages of difference. This suggests that being marked as racially visible, can contribute to the political, historical and conceptual subscription of an individual as seeming 'out of place'.

Whilst Puwar's (2004) analysis focuses on ethnic minorities and women in Britain, my initial experiences bore the same hallmarks in a mirrored, micro context. The Meadow youth club provided an 'open' service. Thus, in the name of community cohesion anybody between the ages of 11 and 19 could come and use the youth club. However, those who attended were almost exclusively from ethnic minority backgrounds and the tiles above the door still said 'African and Caribbean Workshop'. Therefore, despite the aims of the service providers, the 'natural' occupants of this particular club night were black. So, on accessing the club I was conscious of my whiteness and certainly seemed somewhat 'out of place' both racially and culturally. I didn't know the correct handshakes, I was unfamiliar with the slang terminology and I was useless at table tennis – all of which confirmed my racial identity and 'otherness'. Although it later transpired that these experiences were in fact superficial, or at least not of any lasting quality, they were nonetheless significant enough to make communication difficult during the first few sessions and, to an extent, seemed to support some of the methodological criticism concerning researching across lines of race and class (Anderson, 1993).

'The other minds problem' is a debate, based on the philosophical premise of solipsism, which implies that in order to understand a social 'other' one must be as close as possible to the same social type. The methodological implications of this foreground the importance of researcher/participant 'matching' and the researching across difference problematic - erecting barriers for those who wish to conduct research with anybody unlike themselves. Furthermore as Fay observed in 1996:

This solipsistic thesis presently has great currency. In part this derives from the multicultural nature of contemporary social political life in which differences among groups are stressed (indeed, strenuously insisted upon) (12).

17 years on, and the state of 'contemporary' political life seems all too familiar.



However, as Fay goes on to highlight, this is not an argument whose application should damage contemporary sociological research methodology. We do not *have* to 'be one to know one' because 'knowing an experience requires more than simply having it; knowing requires being able to identify, describe and explain' (Fay, 1996:20). From this standpoint, the perspective gained by researching across lines of difference, or outside the symbolic boundaries of 'community' can actually aid the development of understanding, providing researchers with a slightly distanced viewpoint (Bradby, 2007). In fact, whilst my position as a white researcher did contribute to some of the methodological barriers I experienced, my difference from respondents lead to far fewer detrimental implications than the arguments for researcher/participant 'matching' suggest (Anderson, 1993). This will be detailed throughout the following discussion.

### **Participant observation**

Participant observation was one of the three primary research methods adopted within this study. Emerging directly from the 'central consensus of symbolic interactionism' the collection of field notes very much reflected the studies' epistemological approach (Rock, 2001). The adoption of this method was relevant for a number of reasons. Initially, during these early stages of access, collecting field notes enabled the documentation of important contextual information: basic demographics/what the surroundings were like/how the youth club was laid out, all of which were key in terms of understanding the setting within which the research took place and the 'situated character of interaction' (Denzin, 1970). For Silverman (1997) a study 'becomes ethnographic when the fieldworker is careful to connect the facts that s/he observes with the specific features of the backdrop against which these facts occur' (p. 10). It is detailed observations that generate this data. However, due to the ethical issues associated with my covert status, my observations at this stage were restricted to very basic, contextual features (Bryman, 2004). The real benefits of this method could only be unlocked once I had obtained an overt status as a researcher.

Whilst participant observation proves particularly fruitful, in terms of documenting the human world in a 'natural' setting, this alone can prove somewhat limited. This issue is reflected in the fact that often, within ethnographic research, observations are coupled with other forms of data collection such as interviews and document analysis (Alexander, 2000, Winlow and Hall, 2006, Back, 2007). Through participant observation the researcher acquires rich context without specific detail. This is partly due to the practical disadvantages of having to write field notes, which in a covert capacity, can only be done after the observation session. Furthermore, my active participation in the youth club sessions meant that logistically, field notes could only be recorded

after sessions regardless. Throughout the project therefore, notes were recorded directly after sessions in order to maintain the best possible recall given the circumstances (Spradley, 1980). Notes included detailed descriptions of events within their social context including verbal and non-verbal interactions in order to provide sufficiently detailed accounts of the situations observed (Bowling, 1997). However, the field notes alone only reflected my naturally subjective recollections of situations. The sociological significance these observations implied required elaboration through the use of supplementary methods. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the applicable methods for this task, both of which required an overt researcher status.

The following five or six Wednesdays were spent attempting, with some success, to develop a rapport with the session workers and volunteers. At this point it quickly became clear that most of us shared some common ground in terms of musical taste and trainers, so it was here that the benefits of working in the shop really became apparent. Discussing my part-time job with the youth workers and volunteers prompted unanimous interest and often evoked requests for updates on sales, new deliveries of limited edition stock and discounts. Similarly, once word of mouth had spread to the young people, all of a sudden I had previously disinterested session users approaching me to ask about my job. The extent of this fascination was particularly surprising, and at times even seemed to award me a kind of pseudo celebrity status (Harrison, 2009). Certainly the job presented some grounds for dialogue and an instantaneous icebreaker. My nickname actually became the name of the shop. Indeed, wearing the 'right' clothes and shoes was a particularly important aspect in the young men's presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), so being identifiable with one of the most reputable establishments where these 'identity props' could be acquired awarded a certain level of intrigue. Thus, I was no longer just the new white volunteer; I was the new white volunteer who worked in the trainer shop. This was a position that transformed the interactional dynamic between the service users and myself.

A second methodological breakthrough came in the form of a posting at the club reception. Manning the reception meant spending each session in the direct company of another staff member, opening the self-locking door (letting young people into the building) and signing them onto the register. Everybody had to pass through the reception before entering or leaving the youth club (all of the back doors were alarmed safety doors that stayed locked from the inside). The task of keeping a register forced me to interact with all of the session users, in some capacity, and in turn forced their interactions with me. This helped a great deal with developing familiarity and remembering names. Consequently, over the following sessions I met and greeted all the regulars, learned and practiced some handshakes and got to know most of the workers. The post almost wholly

facilitated this advantage. Given that the bulk of attendees arrived within the first hour and a half of the Wednesday night, this also left me and whoever else was on reception with a good two hours to talk. Unsurprisingly here, the workers/volunteers capitalised on the opportunity to clarify my background and involvement in the club. I answered their questions honestly and took the opportunity to casually start mentioning my PhD and the proposed research. This was generally responded to with little more than bemused interest and in some cases a little further discussion about the geographical areas unjust reputation. Still, breaching the subject for the first time was a huge relief and fuelled me with the confidence to clarify my position with Flash and start thinking seriously about data collection.

Fortunately, Flash's response to my apologetic explanation about the proposed research was similarly positive. He told me that he was very pleased with the way I had managed to fit into the Wednesday night and was happy to support the research if he could. So, 'coming out' as a researcher in this instance was fortunately unproblematic, and no doubt aided, as Royce had suggested, by the time (about 8 weeks) spent getting to know people and showing some commitment to the club nights. This unconventional sequence of access and professional engagement reflects the shortcomings of the previously mentioned linear, sequential methodological guides to research practice. In this instance, following the advice provided by my gatekeeper was appropriate. Furthermore, my sustained commitment to the position at the Meadow youth club created openings to two further voluntary positions back in the Maple estate.

The Maple junior and senior youth sessions were both held in the same building as the Homework Club. They were used by a smaller, yet more diverse group of young people. A core group of around 8 young people between the age of 8 and 12 frequented the junior youth club. Here they engaged in planned sessions and enjoyed activities like craft, cooking and sports. The senior group had a core group of more like 15 young people from the local area (who ranged between approximately 13 and 18 years of age), although attendance figures did fluctuate up to as much as 30. This club was less structured and whilst planned sessions did occur, most of the time attendees were free to choose between the available table tennis, indoor badminton, pool, games consoles, or basketball and football if the weather was good enough to play outside. Both the junior and senior clubs were predominantly attended by British Somali boys although African Caribbean, Pakistani, Bengali and White British boys and girls also attended in smaller numbers. Whilst I very much enjoyed volunteering at the Maple junior club, I had more common ground with the senior attendees, a number of which I had already met during the Meadow sessions. This familiarity made fitting into my voluntary role far easier than my experiences at the Meadow club. The advantages of which, combined with their age and consequently wider range of

experiences, meant the senior group is where I volunteered for a longer time period and sampled the Maple participants.

## **Sampling**

The findings of this research project are drawn from extensive field notes, 14 semi structured interviews with paid youth workers/volunteers and two focus groups with young men (aged between 13 and 17), one of which was sampled from the Meadow club, the other from the senior Maple club. The research's dual focus (youth workers *and* young people) raised some sampling considerations, namely; where to sample youth workers and young people, which youth workers to approach, which young people to approach and the grounds on which the chosen individuals were sampled. The following section outlines these considerations and introduces the sample.

Given that the main aim of the project was to explore the lived experiences of youth workers and young people within particular areas, the sampling quota had to be focused on individuals that were affiliated with specific clubs or areas. In order to avoid confusion and to gain an appropriately in-depth illustration of these individuals' experiences in relation to their communities, it was also important to keep the number of areas from which the sample was drawn to a minimum. In this respect, the sample could be in no sense random. There is also no widely accessible sampling frame from which a group of youth workers and young people could be accessed (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, the information obtained from a random sample could not have illustrated the interactional dynamics influencing a particular group's experiences within a community. In this respect the sample had to be taken from a specific group, or groups, within a relevant setting. Consequently, access preceded sampling, and my sample (at least initially) was one of convenience due to the virtue of accessibility.

Having negotiated the initial access via Lesley, John and Royce, and familiarised myself with the youth workers/volunteers in the Meadow club, this pool of acquaintances became the first from which I acquired participants. My plan to focus on the experiences of both youth workers and young people also enabled me to concentrate initially on interviewing youth workers, giving me more time to get to know and subsequently identify groups of young people to approach. This was the logical order given that the young people were comparatively much harder to get to know. By this stage it was becoming very clear that familiarity was going to be one of the key enabling factors during data collection. This was based quite simply on the fact that, before any of the young people in any of the clubs I had volunteered knew me, they ignored me. So, Royce (who was involved in Maple and Meadow from a managerial perspective), Flash (who organised the Meadow club night), Lesley and John (both of whom organised the Maple

Homework Club) were my first interviewees, because they were the four people to whom I had the most access. This initial convenience sample, was followed by a snowballing technique, where information from this small group, alongside my snowballing network of colleagues and acquaintances aided the establishment of contacts with other prospective participants (Bryman, 2004). Importantly, my voluntary positions in Maple and Meadow also shaped the research focus in terms of covering youth provision in the two areas.

It should be noted at this stage, that some methodological issues arose from the above. Neither convenience, nor snowball samples provide representative findings. The nature of both techniques associates the samples with either the researcher, or the other participants. This networked effect promotes criticism in terms of lacking external validity and the ability to generalise (Bryman, 2004). However, in defence of the chosen approach, a consideration of the research topic should be foregrounded. As stated above, the research aims to generate an understanding of the experience of youth workers and young people within particular places. Given this, the participant's association with particular areas and indeed with each other constitutes an integral element of the theoretical approach. The focus here is essentially based on interaction and this requires a sample that interacts with each other. Consequently the chosen sample was by no means representative of anything other than its constituent parts.

Another issue emerges in terms of sampling across two areas. Given that my initial access to youth work was in the Meadow estate and the subsequent opportunities brought me back to Maple, I volunteered within and sampled from both. Arguably, this creates an issue in terms of analysing phenomenon across two contexts. This is particularly the case in that the research does not adopt a comparative approach that focuses in on the differences between the settings. A few significant factors should be highlighted in relation to this. Both Maple and Meadow are areas within the city, characterised by their ethnic diversity, and both include an established British Somali population. It is also important to recognise that the two areas are somewhat allied, and the young people from each often use the youth services in both. Many of the youth workers also work in both Maple and Meadow. Certainly if any major events are hosted in the Maple or Meadow clubs (like a summer barbeque for example) young people from both areas will be in attendance. This is not true for young people from other areas across the city. So Maple and Meadow enjoy a special relationship so far as young people and youth worker affiliations are concerned. This relationship does not eliminate the chance that issues from developing theoretical discussions across the two communities might evolve, but it certainly reduces that possibility. Furthermore, obtaining a convenience sample from both areas allows for the sociological analysis of these affiliations and their significance for the youth workers and young people involved in the research.

To summarise, youth workers and young people were sampled based on convenience and snowball sampling techniques from within Maple and Meadow. Youth workers/volunteers were approached based on their connection with and commitment to the provision in these areas. This was in order to develop an initial overview of the services they provided, followed by a more detailed account of the issues they faced carrying out their work. Specifically, the challenges they felt tasked with and the relationships between the reputations of the areas, the behaviours of young people and their service provision. Young people were sampled later, based on their commitment to the youth sessions in terms of attendance. This generally corresponded to their relationships with me, through sustained contact and familiarity. The sample of young people was chosen in order to represent the voices of this generally muted group. My observations of the young people confirmed that they had strong opinions of their experiences both within and outside their immediate youth provision, and that these opinions were based on a surprisingly advanced socio-political awareness. These observations are supported by contemporary agency perspectives that situate young people as 'participants in the shaping of, social, political, cultural and economic structures (Christensen and James, 2001:4) *see also* (Bluebond-Langer, 1978; James *et al*, 1998; James and James, 2008). However, the young people's opinions were often limited to conversations amongst themselves. When the opportunity to air these ideas arose, during Home Office meetings or general community assemblies, the young people tended to either opt out, or feel too intimidated to discuss their perspectives (Robins and Cohen, 1978). Consequently, including the insightful opinions of the young people I came into contact with became a key sampling focus, alongside constituting one of the studies major contributions.

The following short biographies introduce the core sample, starting with the youth workers/volunteers, followed by the young people who attended the focus groups. It should be recognised at this point that approximately 60 young people frequented the research settings, and that my encounters with all of them informed my field notes in one way or another. Therefore, in some instances the observations presented within the following data chapters do not correspond exactly with the core group detailed below.

### **Youth workers**

**Lesley** was one of two Maple Homework Club coordinators at the time of the research. This was an appointment she had held with her long term partner John for almost a decade (since 2003). Lesley was in her late 50's at the time of the research, she was White British and she had lived in the Maple area since she moved to Forgefield as a student in the early 1970's. Lesley had a quiet, calm demeanour and a genuine concern for the community, which she expressed

through her engagement with a number of local projects. As a result, Lesley was well known locally and respected, particularly amongst the Homework Club attendees and their parents.

**John** was the other half of the Maple Homework Club coordination team. John was White British and he was in his 60's at the time of the research. John shared Lesley's commitment to the local community and actively participated in the coordination of a number of community projects. John was highly regarded amongst the senior (11 +) members of the Maple Homework Club and was able to manage any disciplinary issues effectively as a result. He also had a history of working with computers and offered invaluable technical support to the running of the club. Like Lesley, John was a permanent and integrated part of the Maple community. Being part of the community was something Lesley and John both embraced and considered important.

**Al** was the only paid member of teaching staff at the Maple Homework Club. At 67 Al had 25 years of youth work experience and engaged brilliantly with attendees as a result. Also White British, Al had lived in Forgefield most of his life and knew the city very well. Although Al did not live in the Maple area, his long term commitment to the Homework Club (12 years at the time of the research) meant he was very well integrated. Al's breadth of experience made him an excellent advisor on any Homework Club related issues.

**Royce** managed the youth development for the Maple Forum. He also had a youth development role in the Meadow area. Royce was in his 30's, he was tall, athletic and of Jamaican decent. With 5 years of experience in his post, Royce was extremely knowledgeable on all of the local issues concerning youth; he also took his work very seriously. His duties included engaging with the community on issues to do with young people (8-19), managing policies, insurance projects, service level agreements, funding and delivering local youth projects and services. Royce's position as an employer of youth workers occasionally placed him in awkward situations. He cited one of his key occupational challenges as managing the distinction between people's perceptions of his role and the realities of his ability to acquire funding and offer paid employment opportunities.

**Sally** held a senior position in the Maple Forum. She was a White British woman in her 50's who had volunteered in Maple and Meadow for 12 years before receiving paid work in Maple. Sally's duties included the management of community cohesion led service provision alongside the allocation of funding for local youth services. These responsibilities often placed Sally at the centre of local contestations surrounding resource allocation. As a result, her role often included appeasing various groups and in some instances becoming a scape goat.

'Encouraging people to get on', 'making opportunities for the community as a whole' and working with 'them to develop in whatever way they want to develop' are some of the phrases Sally used to describe her role.

**Flash** coordinated the Meadow youth club at the time of the research. He was in his 40's and he was of African Caribbean descent. Flash was an ex night club bouncer with a colourful past, although he had been involved in youth work for 13 years by 2010. During these 13 years Flash had practiced all over Forgefield, although he worked predominantly within Maple and Meadow. In these areas Flash seemed to have earned a high level of respect amongst all the young people, regardless of whether or not they regularly attended the youth clubs. Indeed, it was difficult to walk around Maple or Meadow (with Flash) without stopping to talk to locals. Flash was a naturally talented youth worker and his ability to engage with young people earned him a 'Worker of the Year' award at the time of the research. Flash was also regularly involved in citywide conflict resolution and managed to diffuse a number of potentially violent confrontations between opposing groups of young people during the research process.

**Yusuf** was one of the senior youth workers at the Meadow club. He was an African Caribbean man in his early 50's and he had a vast knowledge of youth work practice. Yusuf's youth work history dated back to the 1980's where his recollections of delivery centred on the politicisation of black youth. He often compared that history to the current youth work context where the political mobilisation of service users seemed more difficult, if not impossible. Yusuf was able to articulate himself very clearly and often referred to theoretical terms such as 'moral panic', 'rites of passage', 'stigmatisation' and 'labelling' in his discussions of young people's experiences in the Meadow area.

**Abdi** was a Somali youth worker in his early 30's. Abdi's youth work experience dated back 15 years and he practiced all over the city. Abdi also had close connections with the Maple community and was well regarded by all of the youth workers I encountered during the research process. He had a calm demeanour and was confident in his understanding of youth work. Abdi offered insightful opinions on community engagement and participated actively within Maple Home Office meetings, where his comments were received as authoritative.

**Sarah** coordinated the Maple junior youth club. She also worked at the Maple senior youth club on Friday evenings. Sarah was a White British Maple resident and she was in her 40's at the time of the research. Sarah's had a strong presence within both of the youth clubs and was generally respected by staff and service users as an authoritative member of the team.



**Rose** worked part time in Maple's junior club at the time of the research. She was 19 years old and she was White British. Rose had lived and worked in the Maple for around two years, however despite her regular contribution to the junior youth club, Rose struggled to maintain authority and was often disrespected by the male attendees. Rose failed to develop productive relationships with the young people and had left the junior youth club by the end of the research process.

**Kel** worked in the Meadow youth club. He was in his early 20's, he was of Yemini decent and he was raised in the Maple area. Kel's best friend Ozman was Somali and he also had a history of youth work, although Ozman was fired for being allegedly 'corrupt' during latter stages of the research (see chapter 7). Both Kel and Ozman were introduced to youth work by Royce, who had convinced them to do some volunteering at 17 when they both appeared to be at risk of becoming involved in the local drug trade. Since then, Kel had become a skilled youth worker who drew on his past experiences with drugs to support and engage local service users.

**Liveer** was another key member of the Meadow youth club team. Liveer was 18 years old and he had a history of voluntary football coaching in the Meadow area. During the planning of the Meadow youth club, Liveer, Aki and Len (see below) were all voted in as founding staff members by the prospective service users. Liveer was Somali and he had a close relationship with all of the regular attendees, many of whom he claimed to have known 'all his life'. He was a keen boxer and he managed the youth club confidently and efficiently.

**Aki** was also 18 at the time of the research. He had grown up in the Meadow area and he was of Pakistani decent. Aki was an avid football supporter and when he wasn't coaching he made sure there was some football on the television during the youth club sessions. Aki was quick witted and his sense of humour made him popular amongst the youth club attendees.

**Len** was the third democratically elected staff member in the Meadow youth club. He was 18 years old and he was of Somali decent. Like Aki and Liveer, Len had grown up in the Meadow area and he knew the local service users very well. Len was confident and very popular in and around Meadow. Len's approach was informal and this was facilitated by the relationships he shared with the service users. However, Len responded consistently and firmly to any incidences of bullying. If attendees experienced conflicts outside of youth club Len could also always be found offering careful words of advice. Like most of the youth workers involved in this research, Len's sense of responsibility toward the young people spanned far beyond his paid hours as a youth worker.

**Sean** worked in Maple and Meadow at the time of the research. He was 22 and he was of Jamaican and Maltase descent. Sean had spent the majority of his adolescent years in Meadow; he was loud, confident and seemed to inject a level of energy into all of the sessions he worked. Sean was fiercely competitive and could often be found engaging in 'serious' table tennis matches with the older youth club attendees (some of whom played to an intimidating standard). Sean was very difficult not to like and he was unsurprisingly popular amongst both session users and staff. He was committed to youth work, which he did alongside his degree, and he expressed an exemplary level of professionalism and enthusiasm.

### **Young people**

**Ahmed**, Halimo, Killah, Buzz, Shirwaz and Cecló were close friends. They were influential members of the Maple senior club and positioned themselves very at the top of the social hierarchy within it. Ahmed was 15 at the time of the research, he was popular and he came from a locally respected Somali family who had been in the Maple area for two generations. Ahmed had two sisters who regularly attended the Homework Club and an older brother who was also very popular. His older brother Zakaria had recently served a year in prison for low level drug dealing. Ahmed was very fashion conscious; he was also a keen boxer and trained regularly in the local gym. Despite his popularity, Ahmed was not a boisterous character. He was generally calm, confident and respectful in his communication with youth workers. He also performed relatively well at school.

**Halimo's** behaviour was less controlled than Ahmed's. Halimo was 16 at the time of the research and he was dual heritage. Despite the fact his brother was a youth worker, Halimo often behaved erratically. He was very popular within the Maple and Meadow clubs, although he was easily provoked and often instigated fights. Halimo also struggled to concentrate in school and was excluded from at least two different institutions during the three year research period. This rejection affected Halimo's academic confidence. On one occasion when I asked him which school he planned to go next, Halimo replied: 'I'm too hood to go back to school'. Despite his temperament, Halimo was a very likable character and he engaged brilliantly with youth workers when it suited him. Halimo and I had some excellent sessions down at the Maple community gym. He was also a very skilled football player and he was committed to the Meadow youth club's football team.

**Killah** was another key member of the dominant Maple peer group. He was 15 at the time of the research and he was of Somali decent, although he had been born in the UK. Whilst he was less unpredictable than Halimo, Killah was also prone to violent outbursts. Killah regularly found himself in potentially violent

altercations and often boasted with Halimo, Ahmed and Ceclo about his street fighting victories. Like Halimo, Killah struggled with behaviour at school and often found himself excluded or expelled. However, Killah behaved well during youth club sessions and often monitored his little brother Abdi's behaviour who also attended and had a very short temper.

At 14 **Ceclo** was the youngest member of the Maple group. Also of Somali decent, Ceclo came from a large family who were well known within the Maple area, particularly for being wealthy back in Somalia. In-between his younger brother, who was excellent at sports, and his older brother who was serving a jail sentence for drug dealing, Ceclo was neither athletic, nor overtly wayward. Being heavy set, Ceclo was often on the receiving end of taunts about his weight. These taunts clearly affected his self-confidence and Ceclo often responded defensively and violently to teasing. Indeed, Ceclo's size made him a worthy opponent for any of the group, regardless of age and this is something he began to capitalise on within the local community gym. During youth club sessions, Ceclo was often unpredictable and could usually be found at the centre of the fights that would periodically break out. His behaviour improved dramatically when his older brother came out of prison.

**Buzz** was group jester, he was also of Somali decent and he was 15 at the time of the research. Unlike Ceclo, Killah and Halimo, Buzz did not have a violent temperament. He was also less fashionable and clearly economically deprived, although this was not detrimental to his popularity. On the contrary, Buzz' poverty often provided the basis for his reputation. For example, Buzz has a favourite tee-shirt; he wore this tee-shirt regularly until the height of summer, when the group took to wearing vests. In the absence of economic capital, Buzz decided to cut the sleeves off his tee shirt and pretend that it was a new vest. This creative trick fooled nobody and provided the basis for story that was fondly retold over and over again during youth club sessions. Whilst this may appear cruel, in fact Buzz' unapologetic and humorous responses to his own difficult circumstances were well respected by his peers, who were also struggling economically, albeit to different extents.

**Shirwaz** was 17 at the time of the research. He was of dual heritage and spent a lot of his spare time playing football with Halimo and Killah. Shirwaz attended the Maple youth club regularly and always took part in the residential and away days. Unlike Halimo and Killah, Shirwaz generally behaved well. By the end of the research process Shirwaz was actively volunteering during football and youth club sessions.

**Jay** did not attend the Maple youth club regularly but when he did his presence was clearly celebrated. Jay was Halimo's cousin and he occasionally visited

Forgefield from London to stay with Halimo's family. He was younger than Hailmo, in his early teens, and he was similarly energetic and erratic in his behaviour. For example, during the Maple focus group, Jay burst into the room screaming and dancing with his tee shirt pulled over his head.

**Mohammed** was of Somali decent and he was in his late teens at the time of the research. Mohammed regularly attended the youth clubs in both Maple and Meadow, although he was born and raised in the Maple area. Although he struggled academically, Mohammed regularly attended the Maple Homework Club and put a considerable level of effort into his work. Mohammed was popular in both Maple and Meadow and could often be found with Ahmed, Halimo and Killah although he was not tightly associated with that group.

**Abdillahi** was also a regular attendee at the Meadow youth club. He was in his mid-teens at the time of the research and he was of Somali decent. Abdillahi was tall, thin and wore glasses which made him an easy target for bullying. Despite this, Abdillahi was a confident character who was relatively popular within the Meadow youth club. He would participate in the weekly football sessions as well as the youth club, which ran on Wednesday nights. On occasion, Abdillahi and some of his friends from the Meadow area would also attend the Friday youth club in Maple.

**Nas** was also a Meadow regular. At the time of the research Nas was around 16 and he appeared to be one of the most popular Meadow attendees. Nas was of African Caribbean descent and he was a keen footballer; he played very well and this gained him a level of status amongst his peers. For a time, Nas' older sister volunteered at the Meadow youth club. Nas treated her with a great deal of respect and tended to regulate his behaviour more stringently within her presence. When Nas' sister wasn't around he became noticeably more boisterous although he very rarely instigated anything serious. Nas had a good relationship with the local youth workers, particularly Yusuf and Flash who he had known for a long time.

**Faizah** was the only female to participate in any of the focus groups. Faizah was of Somali descent and regularly attended the Meadow youth club with a group of around five other Somali girls, all of whom were in their mid to late teens. Of this group, Faizah was one of the most outgoing and she confidently socialised with male and female staff and attendees. Like most of the girls who attended the youth clubs, Faizah knew how to stick up for herself and she was happy to do it. However, unlike some of the boys, Faizah very rarely engaged in any disruptive behaviour. Faizah and her group of friends generally spent youth club sessions sat around talking on the comfortable chairs at reception, or browsing the internet in the IT suite.

## Interviews

A semi-structured interview method was chosen for data collection amongst the youth workers and volunteers. Using this method enabled me to supplement field notes with more specific insights into the experiences and opinions of this section of the overall sample. 14 interviews took place in total, which lasted from 30 to 90 minutes and were guided by a loose inventory of topics. Interviewees were all given information sheets before the interview and informed consent was obtained from all of the participants, this included consent for the use of an electronic recording device. The very loosely structured nature of this approach allowed participants to expand on points of interest and in so doing reflect their own experiences, concerns and interests. Consequently, open-ended questions were asked in an attempt to provoke narrative responses. This kind of data was well suited to the research's epistemological approach, given that the stories 'people employ to account for events' can be a useful tool for understanding the way behaviours are situated and contextualised within interactions and peer relations (Bryman, 2004:413). Furthermore, adopting a loosely structured informal approach provoked a more conversational dynamic, which will arguably have contributed to the reduction of the power imbalances (often discussed in terms of 'reactive effects') that can characterise qualitative interviews.

Reactive effects refer to the event whereby the inherently unnatural character of an interview encounter alters the behaviour and potentially the responses of interviewees. Gunaratnam (2003) addresses this by highlighting the importance of non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationships between researchers and interviewees, in order to promote informal conversational flow. Such an approach enables qualitative depth, allowing interviewees to discuss topics from their own frames of reference (May, 2001; Gatrill, 2002). Whilst recognising that the character of these interview encounters could never be free from the implications of hierarchical association, it is true that the informal relationships I had developed with participants through volunteering played a role in terms of reducing any awkwardness. Indeed, it has been suggested that what interviewees in any study choose to share with 'researchers reflects conditions in their relationship and the interview situation' (Sherman Heyl, 2001:370).

A technique often cited as a means of improving the social dynamic between researchers and interviewees is interview matching (Anderson, 1993; May, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Wyness, 2006). This method involves matching interviewees with researchers as closely as possible based on lines of difference such as, age, gender, race and ethnicity, theoretically enhancing the researchers ability to empathise with his/her participants (May, 2001; Wyness, 2006). Thus, 'within matching strategies, race and/or ethnicity are approached (and used) as

forms of methodological capital that can be exploited to build rapport, cooperation and trust, and to gain access to the 'authentic' views and experiences of minoritised research participants' (Gunaratnam, 2003:83). This approach implies that research which crosses lines of difference is somewhat inferior to that which does not, an issue that is particularly relevant within this context. My social status; as a mid-twenties, white, middle class postgraduate student certainly seemed somewhat removed from the research focus. However, whilst it is possible that being a local teen from Maple or Meadow would have aided the process of building a rapport, potentially leading to quicker and easier access to data, it is also possible that the information I received during interviews may differ from the information gathered by an ethnically matched researcher. This does not mean that the accounts I received will be any less valid, just that they are likely to be different (Gunaratnam, 2003).

Furthermore, the matching strategy is problematic in its assumption that ethnic and racial differences pose a significant barrier for developing rapport. Spending time participating within the local youth services before data collection enabled me to get to know a number of individuals, highlighting mutual similarities alongside differences (as discussed above). It should also be recognised that rapport is not based solely on mutuality. Difference is not a sufficient indicator of bad relations (Alexander, 1996; 2000). An illustration of this, in research terms, can be found in Andersen's (1993) account of researching across difference:

Within their accounts of previous research projects were clues about the grounds on which they would trust me- despite the clear differences between us. Several talked at length about how my personality made them more trusting, open, and willing to speak with me... Primarily I did not present myself as an expert on their lives. Quite the contrary, I introduce myself as someone who was interested in learning about them particularly because their lives were underreported and undervalued by teachers and scholars (p.48)

Despite the fact that this extract is now somewhat dated, the relevance of the message remains intact. The management of behaviour and general social capability can be just as important in going about the doing of qualitative interviewing as matching characteristics. Indeed if as sociologists we are to ascribe to the essentialist position of the insider epistemologist, assuming that 'you have to be one to know one' (Fay, 1996), then sociology's ability to open pathways of understanding into to 'background and half muted' becomes entirely obsolete (Back, 2007:8).

It is also true that within some research contexts, difference is cited as an advantage. An example of this is cited in Bradby's (2007) study of substance use amongst young Muslims in Glasgow. Bradby recognised that being perceived as

somebody from outside the community lead her participants to assume that she had 'no moral or religious objections to cigarette and alcohol use, possibly promoting discussion of prohibited behaviour' (Bradby, 2007:660). For Bradby (2007) the most important factor in prompting interviewees to discuss their relationship with forbidden substances was the trust she had gained through building informal relationships. This was alongside her position as an outsider, somebody who lacked the connections necessary to feed information back into the network of elders who kept track on younger members of the community. Bearing this in mind, it is quite possible that my empirical focus on youth organisations, and subsequent distance from parents and elders could positively have affected the topics of conversation within which participants were prepared to divulge.

However, a complication arose from this position in that the interviewees to whom I was most acquainted, often wanted to mention issues 'off record'. On occasion personal insights were offered during interviews 'because I was a bredrin' (friend) that were specifically not to be noted down. On such occasions I was compelled to switch off the Dictaphone and reframe from note taking. An interesting consideration here is that whilst these incidents displayed a terrific level of trust between my participants and I, (testament to the relationships we had developed) they also displayed a level of agency in terms of the participants ability to control the way their comments were being recorded. Indeed, interviewees were actively switching between my dual identities as a researcher and a participant or team member in the way that they were directing information. This provides a second, illustrative example that contradicts the assumed power of researchers within the qualitative encounter.

Having considered the impact of positionality and rapport on the interviewing environment, it remains important to recognise the complexity of the information that occurs during the interaction. 'One of the main ingredients of the interview is listening, being 'attentive to what the interviewee is saying or even not saying' (Bryman, 2004:327). This kind of listening recognises the qualitative importance of off-the-cuff comments, visual cues and body language in attempting to understand the subjective stories and experiences of individuals. For Goffman (1969) the 'real attitudes, beliefs and emotions of the individual can be ascertained only indirectly, through his avowals or through what appears to be involuntary expressive behaviour' (p.14). This focus directs the qualitative researcher towards an ethnomethodological standpoint that, whilst recognising the importance of verbal communication, questions the validity of what is said and pays attention to the things 'people do in performing an utterance' (May, 2001:141). Noticing, for example, if an interviewee appeared uncomfortable discussing a specific topic based on their body language, could prove both sociologically and ethically significant. Bearing this in mind, *listening*

was positioned at the forefront of considerations during interviews in order to maximise what could be learnt from the interaction. Consequently, with the participants consent, supplementary notes were taken during interviews and focus groups in order to documenting non-verbal ques.

### **Challenges and acceptance**

Reaching the point where I was underway with the process of interviewing respondents took me just over three months of consecutive Wednesday nights in the Meadow youth club. By this time I was beginning to feel familiar with the setting and seemed to be making some progress in terms of getting to know the local service users, although it was on a fairly superficial level and probably based on my merits as an employee in the trainer shop. My posting as a receptionist had ended and I was given the more flexible role of 'floating' between the IT suite and the adjacent tuck shop. This involved attempting to control the young people's Internet use alongside selling crisps, sweets and drinks to those who had brought enough money with them to the club. The tuck shop was located within a square of waist high worktops with a built in sink. These surfaces acted as seats or leaning posts for the young people that were buying/eating sweets, waiting for computers in the adjacent room, or talking to whoever was staffing the tuck shop.

Significantly, at this time I wore a specific hat to the youth club. This was a hat that I knew was fashionable amongst the young people, although I had not originally purchased it for those reasons. Nevertheless, the benefit of hindsight confirms that this conscious 'manipulation and management' of my appearance, through the decision to wear a particular hat each week, was a definite attempt to construct my identity with a mind to fitting in (Giddens, 1991:142). This illustrated more than anything else the fact that at this point, I didn't fit in. As far as entering the group of service users was concerned, I was in a liminal stage having negotiated my physical presence, yet still working on any symbolic acceptance (Turner, 2008). The hat covered up my ginger hair and its branding and the way I wore it communicated certain stylistic and musical interests. The hat then, was a kind of safety blanket, constituting an identity prop that represented some common ground between the young men using the youth club and myself (Harrison, 2009). The symbolic significance of this is illustrated within the following account.

My presence at the tuck shop attracted the attention of a small group of older services users (around 3 to 4, 16 to 17 year olds). This group were much less forthcoming than the younger members in terms of communicating with new staff members and volunteers. Consequently, despite my having been on the reception for the previous weeks, all I knew of them was their names (Abdi,



Jaber, Nas) and ages (16 to 17). However, working on the tuck shop positioned me within their space (at the back end of the club near the IT room) and naturally after a few hours the group came over to get acquainted. However, shortly after a few minutes small talk, Nas reached over the worktop dividing us and stole my hat. Losing the hat made me feel uncomfortably exposed; it seemed that without this prop the full extent of my outsider status was unveiled. In an attempt to alleviate this discomfort, I chased it. This provoked a somewhat demeaning game of 'piggy in the middle' which I lost, along with some dignity. About 15 minutes later, when the novelty had worn off the group returned the hat to me at the tuck shop. My field notes describe what followed:

*After this the three lads hang around with me at the tuck shop for a while, this is probably just because they want to re-steal my hat but it gave us time to talk. They want to know how fast I can run, how well I can fight, if I punch people in the face during fights and whether I only fought if I had to.*

During my first few weeks at the club it quickly became evident that amongst some of the young people a level of respect was derived from engaging in violent encounters. Here, my position in relation to this was clearly being investigated. Furthermore, by stealing my hat the group consciously removed (and claimed for themselves) one of the only material items that symbolised any commonality. On this level, by taking the hat Abdi, Jaber and Nas challenged my rights of presence alongside affirming their power to do so within that setting. Yet, despite the uncomfortable nature of this encounter, the hat game provoked some informal interaction, so at this stage, perhaps naively, perhaps not, I considered this shift from indifference to casual abuse as more reflective of acceptance than animosity, perhaps even a sort of initiation. The game continued for a few weeks and I encouraged it each time (although I didn't have much choice) by chasing the group around the youth club and eventually managing to (re)acquire the hat. This, more often than not, ended in some conversation about what had just happened, who had tripped over what, or how bad I was at catching – so certainly over time the game seemed to be provoking some opportunities to build relations.

However, after a few weeks of this pattern, a session arose where I was too tired to chase the hat. So I let it go, confident in the knowledge that after a while the group would get bored and return it. They didn't. As the session drew to a close the hat was nowhere to be seen so I decided to inform Flash. He appeared disappointed by the news, assuring me that he would be able to get the hat back and return it to me in the Maple session I was working at the following evening. Nevertheless, he voiced his frustrations on the user's willingness to disrespect staff. This was a comment that was significant in itself, in terms of it being the first time I could remember being consciously referred to as staff or a 'team

member'. Being directly involved in an incident then, seemed to award a new status of inclusion amongst the staff members whilst simultaneously distancing my position from the service users, a somewhat uncomfortable affiliation, given my plans to acquire a sample of voluntary participants from the service users at the Meadow session.

As Flash and I left the building, having packed up and locked the doors, we headed towards the gravel car park outside the club. A small shape caught my eye on the floor in the shadow of Flash's car. This was my hat, discarded, with a hole the size of an apple burned through the lid. The symbolic significance of this cannot be ignored. Not only had the prop I was using to help me visually fit into the group been stolen, it had been destroyed and left for me to find on my way out of the building. A clear message was delivered to me and it was an inhospitable one. Certainly, at this stage I felt like my access to the group was being contested, not by any gatekeepers, but by some of the service users themselves. This was a disappointing development given my optimism that the hat game might have been reflective of initiation or aggregation into the group (Turner, 2008). Flash was furious, immediately planning to ban Nas from the sessions. This raised an internal conflict on my part because, from an ethical perspective I felt uncomfortable being responsible for the barring of any youth club attendees, however, I also didn't want to contradict Flash, and furthermore, I didn't want to diminish my chances of acquiring volunteers for focus groups. Logically at this stage, if a number of the more popular and influential elders were barred from the youth club on my account this would seriously affect my chances of developing a rapport with any of their peers, and ultimately conducting the next phase of my empirical work. Fortunately, we managed to negotiate a stance whereby nobody would be barred, providing that when and if Nas (whom Flash had identified as the main culprit) returned, the three of us would have a formal meeting and he apologised to me for his actions.

As suspected, Nas was absent for a while. He reappeared after three weeks looking somewhat sheepish as I greeted him on reception. To my surprise he immediately apologised, offering no resistance when he was later lead into the office by Flash. Nas listened uncomfortably as Flash expressed his disappointment and suggested that he reimbursed me for the hat he had destroyed. I told him this would not be necessary, pleased that Nas had found the courage to return to the club and take responsibility for his actions. This was far more important than the money he could have given me for a hat that I'd already replaced. Overall my feeling was that Nas's body language reflected a genuine sense of guilt and I found no reason to impose anything more than this. Furthermore, in terms of prospective participants, the risks of coming off too soft far outweighed the potential impact of being too harsh. So the incident was sealed with an apology and during what was left of the session Nas made a

conscious effort to engage me in conversation. In fact, from this point onwards my relationships with many of the young people began to positively develop, and as far as Nas was concerned, a new level of mutual respect appeared to inform our interactions.

The hat game, its results and the subsequent conclusions provoked a major turning point in terms of my engagement with the group, which harboured significant methodological implications. Initially, the nature of the game appeared to support some of the criticism cited above regarding qualitative research that crosses lines of difference (Anderson, 1993; May, 2001; Bryman, 2004; Wyness, 2006). However, what followed illustrates the potential to overcome some of these issues through sustained practical engagement. Indeed within this example, the issues arising from differences proved to be the catalyst that triggered a kind of rite of passage into the group (Van Gennep, 1960). This incident prompted a closeness founded in shared experience. In other words, the development of genuine mutual relationships of respect that turned out to be fundamental in terms of developing the trust that was necessary to access participants and to understand their experiences.

A significant observation here is the importance of time, in terms of the mutual acceptance of each party within the research encounter. Spending a period of months 'settling into' the role of participant observer at the youth clubs enabled me to experience these different symbolic phases of interaction amongst workers/volunteers and service users (from ignorance to acceptance) that ultimately lead to a relationship which could yield far more than any short term research encounter in terms of qualitative understanding. For Tedlock (1991):

... In order to accomplish this form of human understanding, it is necessary to undertake an engaged period of fieldwork. It is this experience that has become the professional ethnographers necessary initiation – variously referred to as a puberty rite, ritual ordeal or *rite de passage* (70)

Indeed, it was only after these developments that I felt comfortable enough with the service users to ask a sample of them to contribute to my focus groups, and the benefits of my understanding were immeasurable in terms of analysing the information they yielded.

### **Focus groups**

Focus groups were the chosen method for data collection amongst the sample of service users. Unlike face-to-face interviews, the focus group arrangement allows the facilitator to pose questions or conversational topics to a small group

simultaneously. Specifically, focus groups are social contexts that aim to characterise the 'forms of communicative social interaction and meaning making found in everyday conversations' (Merryweather, 2010:3). This method was chosen for its potential to generate data illuminating the ways in which young people's discussions of shared experiences could highlight perceptions of their social situations and the services they used. Whilst, like the interview, the interaction within a focus group still takes place within a pre-meditated and an inherently unnatural environment, the presence of others within the focus group encounter holds the potential to dilute the power relations that can contribute to reactive effects. This is an issue that may well have been amplified given my age and ethnic differences should I have interviewed service users on a one-to-one basis. For this reason, focus groups provided a 'safer' environment for young people to interact within, whilst generating a valuable insight into interactional group dynamics:

This is particularly prevalent when groups are constructed according to homogenous criteria of identification which allows elements of peer relations to come to the fore facilitating discussion of common issues and experiences (Merryweather, 2010:3).

The Maple and Meadow focus groups were sampled according to patterns of peer relations. The Maple group comprised 6, 13 to 15 year old boys, 4 of which were of Somali decent and 2 of whom were of mixed heritage. The Meadow group comprised 4, 15 to 17 year olds, one of whom was a girl, all of whom were of Somali descent. These age differences were characteristic of the session's user groups and both groups were close friends. Organising these groups according to those that spent time together (both within and outside the youth clubs) enabled participants to explore specific shared experiences, evoking a relaxed atmosphere that facilitated my observation of the ways in which these individuals collectively made sense of phenomenon and constructed meanings around them (Bryman, 2004). Provoking this kind of interaction, through using peers groups overrode my initial concerns about the potential issues that mixed ethnic, or gender focus groups might produce. It could be argued for example, that community norms regulating the behaviour of Somali girls might restrict the issues they were prepared to discuss within a group situation (Bradby, 2007; Valentine and Sporton, 2009). However, what was important here is that the participants were friends, not what distinguished the individual characters. Furthermore, given that there was only one girl across both groups and that much of the Meadow discussion revolved around youth workers, an issue that is unlikely to trigger any traditional modesty concerns, the mixed nature of these groups was not problematic.

Before the focus groups, participants were given an information sheet to read and informed consent was obtained from all the participants (a discussion of *the ethical implications of obtaining informed consent from participants under 18 will follow*). The conversations were recorded with an electronic Dictaphone that was later used for transcription. This process was significantly aided by my familiarity with the participant's voices. Being able to instinctively put a name to a voice was the only thing that made distinguishing some of the sonic chaos my Dictaphone recorded possible (shouting/interjecting/barking/background noise). However, despite the difficulties these unruly focus groups presented in terms of transcription, the theatrical and dynamic interactional accounts they delivered were of considerable significance. So, in choosing not to control the dynamics within these groups too strictly, I increased my workload in terms of transcription, but simultaneously gained in terms of the quality of the data.

During the groups, initially a brief introduction of the research was provided followed by open questions guided by a loose inventory of topics to cover. My intention within these groups was to encourage participants to have conversations with each other, and to interject myself as little as possible (May, 2001). This approach enabled attention to be paid to both the verbal and non-verbal dynamics observed within the interactions. Non-verbal cues were noted down by hand and referred to later during data analysis.

Concerning these focus groups, a specific ethical issue arose from sampling groups of participants under the age of 18. The British Sociological Association's statement of ethical practice suggests that sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. 'This implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain in appropriate detail, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used' (2002). Generally, informed consent is obtained directly from research participants, providing they are 18 years of age or above. For research participants classified as children (under 18) by the UNCRC, written consent is usually obtained from parents or guardians.

One issue regarding parental/guardian consent within the proposed research emerged in relation to the dissemination of information about the study 'in terms meaningful to participants' (BSA, 2002). Gallagher *et al* (2009) suggest that the product of informed consent 'depends on participants' interpretation of (and memory for) the information they are offered,' this may not represent the same kind of understanding for everyone (p.4). Reflecting this, it can be suggested that children's interpretations of a study may differ to that of their parents. This is likely to be amplified somewhat when parents have difficulties reading and understanding English. For Gallagher *et al* (2002), the ability to give

fully informed consent rests on the following premise: (A) An ability to understand the research project based on the information provided. (B) The ability to think rationally about the implications of participation. (C) The ability to make an independent conscious decision based on the information provided, and (D) the ability to explicitly signal that decision (p.9). In the case of this research, the parent's language barriers, alongside their general absence from the research settings made it difficult to interpret their capacity to give fully informed consent. Notwithstanding the recognition that children are often more interested in doing research than hearing about it (Gallagher *et al*, 2002), the fact remains that discussing the research with, and interpreting the understanding of participants was easier, in this case, than interpreting the competencies of their parents. In this instance, simply obtaining signatures from parents would have reflected an uncomfortable preoccupation with the product of consent, as opposed to the 'process of helping participants to understand the research project' (Gallagher *et al*, 2002 p.7).

Getting to know prospective research participants over time enabled a meaningful process of obtaining informed consent. Through gaining an understanding of my research interests, objectives and myself via regular informal contact, prospective participants were armed with a significant and valid understanding of the research prior to receiving any consent forms or information sheets. This certainly placed prospective participants in a position to be more knowledgeable than their parents. However, a downside to this familiarity was the potential for feelings of obligation. Having come to know me as a youth-worker within their local community, participants might have been more inclined than their parents to agree to participation within the research. This issue was minimised and the agency of participants prioritised, through clearly stating the voluntary nature of participation, both verbally, via consent forms and written information sheets.

Indeed, within this research context, it was crucially important to consider participants' agency (James and James, 2008). Article 12 of the UNCRC Convention on the Rights of the Child suggests:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child... (UNCRC, 2009)

No children below the age of 11 were included within this study. At secondary school age (11+) children are capable of forming and expressing opinions on their own experiences within their local community. However, it is also possible that some parents may have felt uncomfortable allowing their children to discuss

these opinions (Jamal, 1998; Webb, 2002; Cadge and Ecklund, 2007; Pieroni et al, 2007; Gilbert and Khokhar, 2008). This could have resulted in the silencing of children's voices due to the perceived upkeep of parental reputation, something that will not be at stake due to participant confidentiality (*this was explained in full to prospective participants both verbally and in writing*).

The patriarchal structure of traditional Somali culture also implies the likelihood that some parents could have felt disinclined to allow their daughters' participation. This reflects a flaw in British ethical guidelines. The subject of sociological study is heterogeneous in nature. Standardised guidelines of ethical practice fail to account for the multiple nuances and differences within sociological research samples and the impacts these might have on the potential to represent the voices of a broad range of individuals (Dingwell, 2006). Reflecting this, Gallagher *et al* (2009) argue that informed consent must be used reflexively in order to be of value, allowing it the fluidity to be used appropriately within a variety of research contexts (Shea, 2000). In this case, it seemed most appropriate to seek informed consent from participants directly. This significantly improved the chances of obtaining informed consent based on a full understanding of the research aims and objectives.

## **Analysis**

Having conducted my focus groups in Maple and Meadow, completed 14 interviews with youth workers/volunteers and collated just under two year's of field notes I decided to stop formally recording data and begin to focus on analysis. By this point my observations seemed to be repeating themselves, my interviews were beginning to confirm each other and I had conducted focus groups with the peer groups to whom I was most acquainted. The move from data collection to analysis, reflected 'saturation' in part and the exhaustion of avenues in another (May, 2001). Naturally, this prompted the consideration of what I was going to do with all the data.

At this point I had not consciously engaged in any qualitative analysis, although I had transcribed the interview and focus group recordings soon after each of them had been acquired. Throughout the process of (re)experiencing these research encounters, via the act of transcription, I had had chance to think about the data and identify some preliminary themes or concepts. Indeed, the process of writing field notes following sessions was also a reflexive experience prompting some consideration of what patterns seemed to be emerging within the clubs. So in some respect, analysis had been taking place since November 2009 when I began to take notes. This observation reflects the inherently guided nature of ethnographic work, as the act of documenting data prompts a level of reflexive analytical assessment that can arguably sway the direction of a

researchers focus. In fact, the research focus on experiences of risk labelling, had stemmed from my early observations of session organisers discussions, alongside my desires for the research to reflect genuine community concerns and to be meaningful to my participants (Huisman, 2008). In this respect, a conscious amount of early stage analytical reflexivity, guided by my own values for reciprocity and helped focus the data that was ultimately used for analysis. Given this, the approach that I adopted whilst close to grounded theory in terms of foregrounding the data within its conclusions, cannot be described as such. My preliminary observations were already being informed by symbolic interactionist theory (Blumer, 1969), Becker's comments on labelling (Becker, 1963) and Cohen's work on Moral Panics (1972). So naturally my consideration of these will have influenced the cognitive processes by which I came to my conclusions.

In terms of dealing with the data I had collected, given that my initial interviews generated a detailed overview of the services I had been involved with, from the perspectives of the affiliated organisers and volunteers, these transcripts seemed like a logical place to start. The transcripts were reviewed line for line and coded using an 'open coding' technique. Open coding refers to the 'process of breaking down, examining, comparing, contextualising and categorising data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:61). This process generated a set of codes for each transcript that were recorded on a Microsoft word document. The 14 sets of codes (one set per interview) were then compared with a mind to identifying recurring codes and establishing themes. The coded data was analysed conforming (as far as possible) to the themes of analytical induction (Becker, 1998). Although ethnographic research rarely produces data fitting the specific generalisations associated with stringent methods of analytical induction, the key principals could still be followed. This required ensuring that all the information collected was accounted for within the final themes for discussion. Therefore, the prominent themes were those that ran across all of the transcripts.

Focus groups were coded and themed using the same method as the interviews (described above). This enabled the identification of a number of themes which ran across both data sets. These themes (local politics, trust, respect, labelling and risk) are reflected in the following four data chapters. This process ensured that each chapter explored a theme that was unrefuted across the data collected, abiding my desire to keep the thesis relevant and meaningful to participant's reflections and experiences. Field notes were drawn on during writing up to supplement interviews and transcripts with non-verbal contextual information, reflexive notes and dates. Indeed, this data was particularly useful in terms of confirming exactly when specific incidences occurred, how they came about and what my position was with regard to them. Consequently, writing up the data was a reflexive process where themes and events were constantly reconsidered,



theorised and reflected with a mind to staying absolutely true to the data. In this respect analysis both preceded and spanned beyond 'open coding' and the premises of analytical induction. It was a reflexive process that in many respects started with the first observation session and finished with the submission of the thesis.

Mirroring the research process as a whole, this analytical experience doesn't sit neatly within any of the distinct textbook accounts that I have encountered. Instead, the technique I adopted drew on a variety of approaches to fit both the data acquired and my epistemological preferences. The role of theory was influential throughout data collection, analysis, and the development of conclusions. This distinguishes the whole analytical process from grounded theory, or any distinctively deductive approach. Within his thesis, Meyer (2006) cites analysis as the process of bringing theory and data into resonance, 'a relation which neither data nor theory initially predominates' (77). More than anything else, these comments reflect the experiences I have documented, capturing analysis as facilitating the clarification between equally important and somewhat interdependent theory and data.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the methodological considerations underpinning the research and the methods derived from them. Throughout the discussion I have documented my research experience in a reflexive and narrative style. This is the approach I chose because it seemed to be the only way I could accurately reflect the jumbled, sequential nature of the research process – each event leading (sometimes unintentionally) onto the next. In doing so I have attempted to document the somewhat organic fashion within which the research developed. My position within the Meadow club, as an ESRC funded researcher and volunteer (with time on my hands) led to the development of relationships with numerous session organisers, facilitating access to other services leading to a 5 day week of youth work practice. These developments provided the sampling frame, and the process of getting to know the people I was in contact with, dictated who I accessed and in what order. In this respect, my position with regards to the project as an abstraction (the method, process, analysis and participants) was intrinsically linked, although it often seemed that the power was in the hands of the participants. This was not because I chose to relinquish control over the way this project developed; instead, it was because the only way I could feasibly gain access to the positions and people I was interested in was by abiding to certain hierarchies and processes. I had to earn the right to work with the groups I ended up working with and rightly so. Research or not, I was still volunteering in a position where I would potentially be influencing the lives of young people. However, by obtaining access and identifying a sample in this way,

time consuming as it was, I was able to generate a detailed understanding of the areas I was working within and interaction between managers, organisers, workers, volunteers and service users. Ultimately this journey has facilitated a unique insight, from a partial insider, of the communities themselves, the relationships between the workers/volunteers and service users and the opinions and experiences of young people and youth workers in Maple and Meadow. These insights are explored within the following chapters.

The next chapter begins the discussion of findings with an analysis of the respondent's reflections and experiences of 'community'. In doing so, the chapter illustrates the central positioning of the local youth services within residents' communal contestations alongside empirically grounding the conceptual discussion provided in chapter two.

## Chapter 4

### Community, local politics and youth provision

Chapter two provided a conceptual discussion of 'risk' and 'community' in the context of 'youth' and 'race'. Within that, labelling and reactive processes of collective identification were highlighted as significant factors in the manifestation of individually imagined notions of 'community' (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1972; Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Anderson, 1999; Alleyne, 2002). Accounting for the fact that such processes are often documented within marginalised and diverse locations (Back, 1993; 2007; McCarthy, 2011; Thomas, 2011), the work of Cohen (1985), Anderson (2006) and Bauman (2000) was drawn upon (amongst others) to clarify a conceptual approach that recognises 'community' as contested, negotiated and individually imagined. This chapter illustrates the significance of this conceptual focus by detailing the everyday playing out of multiculturalism within the research settings (Maple and Meadow). The following discussion draws on in-depth interviews with youth workers, all of whom except one were Maple residents at the time of the research. Through this, it details the tensions and politics that stemmed from the youth workers' negotiation of the contested cultural ideologies held by the diverse user group, focusing in particular, on the provision of 'universal' (available to all) youth provision.

The chapter is divided into five sections. First, the voices of some of the youth workers/residents of Maple are foregrounded, detailing their opinions of the ethnically and geographically 'divided' nature of the Maple area. The discussion then goes on to focus on one particular narrative, taken from an in-depth interview with Sally, a senior Maple youth forum worker. This documents a brief history of politics between the local Somali community and the Maple youth forum, providing an important contextual foundation for the following. The third section details some of the youth workers' views on the difficulties of providing open access youth provision in a heterogeneous multicultural context. These accounts highlight some of the issues youth workers 'on the ground' faced in attempting to implement 'community cohesion' youth provision (Thomas, 2011). Following that, despite the seeming emergence of a fractious and problematic Maple, section four highlights respondents' overwhelmingly strong identification with the local 'community'. This discussion clarifies the ontological persistence of individually imagined 'communities' despite the issues stemming from occasionally contrasting local, ethnic and cultural ideologies. Finally, section five documents the impact of such strong community ties on the local Muslim youths, particularly in their propensity to occasionally 'escape' the Maple area and spend

some of their leisure time away from 'informal surveillance' (Bradby, 2007) in the Meadow youth club.

### **Maple: a 'divided' community?**

A consistent theme emanating from the youth workers' comments was the extent to which the Maple area was divided along intersecting lines of geography, race and class. The following extract illustrates some of these divisions. It is taken from an interview with Rose, a white local resident, who was 19 years of age at the time of the research.

Rose: Maple is definitely divided and it's like a traffic light system: You've got the bottom and you've got the estate, you've got the tower block, that's like your red light. That's rough, like I wouldn't even walk through there at night, even though I know so many people who live on the estate, I'd never walk through there at night. Then you've got this top end, which is Kipling, Rudyard, Keats (street) and all the way down to Costcutter which I would say is like a yellow zone. Can be a bit rough but on a day-to-day basis it's fine, it's only when really big things happen, like people getting shot across the road from you and things like that. And then you have a green light which is middle class haven up on there which is massive like eight bedroom houses... It's so crazy to have such a diverse area so close to the city centre.

Rose's traffic light analogy is a useful starting point for considering local conceptualisations of the Maple area. An immediately significant component within this is the emphasis Rose placed on geographic lines of division in terms of 'risk'. This spatial conceptualisation supports those illustrated within the findings of Back's (2007) research into symbolic constructions of space amongst residents in two London neighbourhoods. Like Back's respondents, for Rose Maple was 'divided' in terms of 'risky' and safe spaces to negotiate. In considering these individually located symbolic mappings, 'it is necessary to understand the interrelationship between gender, race and social class' (Back, 2007:62).

The 'red light', positioned at the bottom of the estate represents the tower block. This is the housing consisting of the most council funded accommodation and the highest ethnic minority population, particularly Somalis. For Rose this area was equated with the highest 'risk', a place she 'would never walk through' at night despite knowing a number of residents. In this comment, the significance of Rose's locality, gender and race are highlighted. Despite knowing a number of families on the estate, which might well have assigned Rose some level of protection against any perceived 'risks', entering the territory as a white girl at night was still very much something to be avoided. This is an account that

seemingly supports the 'invoked racial worlds' associated with the disadvantaged, diverse urban geography (Keith, 2002).

The yellow zone, that incorporates the community centre where the interview took place, was referred to as a bit rough but fine 'on a day-to-day basis'. This is a more diverse area in terms of race and class encompassing a significant number of privately rented student houses alongside some owner occupied and rented accommodation. With regard to this space Rose highlighted its unpredictable nature, 'like people getting shot across the road from you' although such incidents were infrequent enough not to push the area in to the 'red'.

The 'green light' encapsulates an area that is just within Maple's geographic boundaries, although symbolically the street is very much separated. The street encompasses a range of affluent, private owner occupied housing inhabited by almost exclusively white occupants. From Rose's analysis, a clear pattern emerges; as the cost of housing rises and the occupants get wealthier, the perceived 'risks' associated with the spaces become less problematic. Yet, significantly these mappings were far from straight forward. Rose's analogy tells us that one's locality, contacts, ethnicity and even the time of day might all impact one's interpretation of the 'risks' associated with crossing symbolic geographic boundaries. Additionally, the analogy suggests that the severity of incidences occurring within these boundaries, 'people getting shot', don't necessarily match the assigned 'risk' status. Rose's age, gender and ethnicity are all likely to have played a role in her conceptualisation of these spaces. Indeed, recent empirical research focusing on young people's construction of 'risk' in Bradford and Rochdale suggests that:

Young people were often very clear about which geographical areas they felt safe and unsafe in, with much of these perceptions focused on their own ethnicity in relation to the dominant ethnicity of the particular geographical/housing areas (Thomas, 2011:122).

Consequently, as telling as it may be, Rose's analogy cannot be applied outside of this individualised racial and gendered context. This is a consideration in itself that provides support for the conceptualisation of community as individually imagined (Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006) and negotiated in relation to intersecting factors including identification and 'risk' (Lupton, 1999; Back, 2007). Additionally, what the analogy points towards in more general terms, are perceptions of Maple as a place that is economically, ethnically and geographically 'divided'. This is a key issue that is supported by the following extract from John, a 60 year old white resident and the organiser of the Maple Homework Club:

John: ...the area seems to divide itself up, Upper Beach Side, the other side of the road, the other side of the jewel carriageway, the flats. To some extent the people living in these different areas see themselves as part of Maple but a separate part of Maple.

Indeed, the numerous ways in which individuals identified themselves with the Maple area, particularly in terms of ethnic division constituted a key feature in resident's descriptions of Maple as 'divided'. Below, Royce a local 36 year old of Jamaican descent and a youth development manager (at the time of the research) describes Maple's ethnic composition:

Royce: ...one area has got 42% Somali, that community has been in place for about fifteen years now but within that community there is factions and 3 different tribes. Um, so they make up 42% and then the other communities that have been there much longer being British, Jamaican, Yemini, make up the other 50 odd %. The other communities are a bit more established, ur, some of the communities have been there since the 40's.

This history of migration constitutes one of Maple's most definitive characteristics as an area of multiculturalism. It also represents an important factor underlying the perceived community divisions. Significantly, in the extract above Royce described ethnic 'communities' within a localised setting, pointing towards the significance of ethnic identification over a more inclusive geographically based sense of local 'community' (Ray and Reed, 2005). Sally, a white senior Maple forum worker, illustrated this further as she described her role:

Sally: Community development, and that's about community cohesion, trying to get people to get on really. Encourage people to get on, to make opportunities for the community as a whole for them to get extra resource. To work with them to develop in whatever way they want to develop, but the community is not a homogenous mass that's all in agreement, so there is a lot of negotiations of difference, between the communities within the community, and with individuals within the community.

Expanding on Sally's point Royce explained:

Royce: Um, so what you have is the problem of the newcomers taking over and the perception is that, you know, that they're getting more opportunities, more funding, more services aimed in their direction than other parts of the community, so that kind of leaves you with some conflict, now, we've got kids who are actually battling over space and territory for one reason or another, whether it be just for a space to play, or you know for the kind of bragging rights of 'this is my patch' or you

know, if one of them wants to sell drugs on that area so you know it becomes very complicated to actually sort out a conflict because you've got to know who to talk to, who has an influence and those people are not actually kind of in your face people, they are the people that kind of sit back, and are elders, erm that's just Maple.

Three key considerations can be drawn from Royce and Sally's comments. Initially, in terms of understanding Maple's 'divided' nature, the allocation of 'opportunities, funding and services' are illustrative. Royce refers to the 'newcomers' (recently migrated Somalis in this case) as subject to suspicion from the more established African Caribbean, White British and Jamaican communities in Maple for enjoying a disproportionate share of local resources. Supporting research findings can be drawn from Hudson *et al's* (2007) Joseph Rowntree Foundation report based on research in Moss Side and North Tottenham. This research aimed to explore *Social Cohesion in Diverse Communities* and similarly found that:

... the allocation of housing features prominently in residents' accounts of life in the two areas, and in some instances were a focus for expressions of hostility to newcomers, who were often perceived to be getting more than their 'fair share' of this resource (Hudson *et al*, 2007:34).

The stark similarity of this empirical data, which reflects Royce's comments down to the ethnic composition of the sample (also predominantly Somali), suggests that the issue of tensions surrounding newly migrated populations and the allocation of local resources can be situated within a wider context of 'changes in the housing market, including insufficient supply of social housing and the escalating cost of housing' (Hudson *et al*, 2007:34). However, it should also be noted at this stage, that whilst both Royce and Hudson *et al* (2007) highlight tensions surrounding the allocation of resources to newly migrated Somali people, an investigation into the quality of housing actually allocated to these 'newcomers' reflects a situation that's far from enviable:

For example a Somali man in Manchester described his two-bed roomed flat as 'satisfactory accommodation' (compared to the one bed roomed property he was allocated initially), despite the fact that he lived there with his pregnant wife and four children (Hudson *et al*, 2007: 35).

What these findings display is the wider socio-political context within which localised ethnic disputes should be understood. Indeed, from this perspective the contemporary policy focus on 'community cohesion' can be seen as intrinsically limited by national economic constraints, which in turn create a challenging environment for the negotiation of difference within multicultural communities like Maple (Thomas, 2011).

Deriving from this discussion of housing is the second key consideration within Royce's comments, namely the behaviour of Maple's young people in the context of economically driven, ethnically framed conflict. What is implied within Royce's extract is that within Maple there are separate groups of young people 'battling over space and territory for one reason or another'. The reasons stated ranged from locating a space to play, to defining an area from which to sell drugs. The conflicts engaged in by the young people therefore varied considerably in terms of motive and severity. It should also be noted that not all of these were organised clearly along ethnic lines. Battling over a 'space to play' might well incorporate ethnically diverse peer group's negotiations of ownership of space. This suggests that the disputes involving the local youths cannot be framed uncritically within an ethnic context. Such disputes were also very much an exception rather than a rule of daily life in Maple. However, 'ethnic disputes' between African Caribbean and Somali youths had been seen to occur in the past, and in the event of such incidences the significance of ethnic identification came to the fore. This is illustrated in the following extract, where John discussed some of the local Somali men he was in contact with via his position at the Homework Club:

John: There are individuals in the community that have been a hassle when they've been younger who have, and I'm not talking about academically or whatever now, who've realised that they are responsible members of the community and who will intervene to help if they see a problem arising. One lad I'm thinking of in particular who as a youngster, early teens was a real tear away, and a couple of years ago when there was a potential violent confrontation at the Homework Club, I followed a group of four or five lads outside who were about to, you know, engage in something fairly violent, and the now 20 year old man came out and sorted it out. He was there doing it before I got out there. And without wanting to mention names there is a man who's involved in youth work now who, again by his own admission was a bit of a tear away and got disqualified as a driver, but again is trying to help the next, not quite generation, children 5,6,7 years younger than him to realise themselves that they've got to be responsible members of the community. And having some success with that. With some children, not with others you know. So from the resilience point of view, people within the community who see themselves or are seen as such by others, as people who will try and sort things out. Erm, the second lad by the way, sorry second man, when there was potential for trouble eighteen months or so ago, did express fairly forcefully that if it came down to it, he would defend his community, which he defined as the Somali community. So even though he's working to try and make the whole area resilient there's still this sort of, almost tribal loyalty to one group or another.

Some important distinctions are highlighted within John's account of these two young men. At first what's illustrated is a sense of social responsibility that's



demonstrated in their actions, particularly in challenging violent behaviour and engaging in youth work. The rationale John uses to account for this very positive behaviour is that they have 'realised that they are responsible members of the community'. This comment appears to point towards an inclusive, not an ethnically divided, notion of local 'community' which is reminiscent of Les Back's 'neighbourhood nationalism' (1993), seeing ethnicity and social identity as being constantly re-created within localised contexts. This is illustrated further in John's description of the second man working to 'make the whole area resilient'. Additionally reflected within this are good relations between these young Somali men and John, a 60 year old white youth provider, so ethnic divisions by no means dictated the organisation of interaction on an 'everyday' level in Maple. However, significantly, in the light of an ethnic dispute, John recounted the forceful nature in which one of the young men expressed loyalty to his ethnic 'community'. The implication here is that the symbolic boundaries of community are dynamic, individually imagined and can shift, loose or gain emphasis depending on the social context (Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006). Thus, in Maple the impact of ethnic 'division' in relation to local conceptualisations of 'community' fluctuated in relation to tensions that often stemmed from wider economically framed disputes concerning the allocation of resources such as housing or Home Office funding. What is illustrated within this is the significance of ethnic identification in the interaction between local disputes and wider social issues. In illustrating this complexity, the findings support Alleyne's (2002) criticism of 'unreflexive notions of community' that 'often serve to hide the constructedness of culture, and the culture of community construction' (615). 'Community' in this context should therefore be understood as individually constructed, contested and contextually located.

The third key consideration within Royce's extract concerns the practical challenges facing youth forum staff in attempting to deal with conflict situations in an ethnically diverse or 'divided' multicultural environment. Royce highlights the difficulties both forum and youth provision staff faced locating influential members of each ethnic group:

Royce: ...it becomes very complicated to actually sort out a conflict because you've got to know who to talk to, who has an influence and those people are not actually kind of in your face people, they are the people that kind of sit back, and are elders.

This comment suggests that the forum workers themselves had limited potential to influence local opinions in the event of disputes that amplified the significance of symbolic 'community' boundaries on ethnic lines (Cohen, 1985). Within such situations, the most effective approach was to try and filter messages through particular community elders that 'kind of sit back' and were difficult to locate.

This illustrates the shifting nature of symbolic 'community' boundaries (Cohen, 1985) that are continuously (re)negotiated and (re)interpreted according to context. Such disputes appeared to prompt the polarisation of ethnic groups and the amplification of traditional hierarchical dynamics within them.

### **Religion and 'universal' youth provision**

In conjunction with ethnicity and the allocation of resources, many of the youth workers' accounts of local politics in Maple, particularly those surrounding youth provision, raised the negotiation of ideological religious differences. One important narrative came from an interview with Sally, a senior Maple forum worker. During the first half of our interview, Sally gave a detailed account of some of the events that had occurred in Maple over the past 18 months that had significantly shaped the local youth provision dynamic. She stressed the importance of mapping this history in order to contextualise the nature of the services this research addresses. Her narrative relates primarily to disagreements and misunderstandings between the Maple forum and the local, predominantly Somali and Sunni Muslim population with regard to youth provision. The following section outlines this account, followed by a broader discussion of the role religious and cultural differences played in the contestation of local opinions surrounding youth provision. The account should be read critically as Sally's and therefore not necessarily representative of any other interpretation:

Sally: So about 18 months ago erm, no maybe two years ago, Somali parents led by a couple of Somali so called parental leaders erm... started taking their kids out of youth work, the older ones, and then there was, huge history here. So at the same time there was a lot more youth work in Maple, we used to run 6 sessions a week, every week. There was a youth forum, and there was two senior clubs, there was football, two of them and there was junior club and there was a girls group, every week. We ran, the Maple forum ran 5 or 6 of those nights (as opposed to running 2 of 3 nights at the time of the research).

Spanning from the amount of well-used youth services within the area, the local council decided to help the community develop a youth centre, led by the active youth forum. Thanks to council backing, funding became easier to acquire and enough money was raised by the forum to develop a contemporary youth centre (made of shipping containers) with the help of architecture students from one of the local Universities. A plot was chosen outside a local vicarage, which was on sale at the time. Apparently unbeknown to Sally, various people from the Maple Somali community had decided that this plot was going to be a mosque. This misunderstanding lead to various demonstrations and eventually:

Sally: The Somali community... were sort of railroaded, pushed, encouraged by various leaders to be against the Forum, because 'we were taking their mosque' and then they were anti the youth work that we were doing. So we got resignations that were written out from all of the Somali members of the youth forum and the youth forum collapsed. They made it impossible for it to continue... and we were shunned in the streets, our office was attacked, all of the windows were broken, everything was broken into and smashed up... It was massive. This was about a year ago.

This conflict, led to a further breakdown between two main factions of the Somali community, namely those who were and those who were not sympathetic to the aims of the Maple Forum. Stemming from these tensions and the subsequent antisocial behaviour, a local meeting was called by the police and other agencies in order to talk to parents about issues concerning Somali young people. It seems this meeting constituted a suitable stage for general community frustrations to be aired and the Maple Forum was blamed for the antisocial behaviour through poor youth provision. These events cemented the Somali boycott of the Forum including its youth services and proposed youth centre. Young people from the British Somali community stopped using the youth clubs. Additionally, the extent of the criticism aimed at the forum, and the politically sensitive nature of the disagreement, prompted the council and the other supporting agencies to remove their funding for the youth centre project. This meeting prompted a further, larger 'Maple strategic meeting' at the City Hall with local council members, heads of children and young people, community leaders and forum managers. The discussions within provoked a City Council research project called the Youth Review:

Sally: ...for that they interviewed a huge amount of parents, not just Somali parents but mainly Somali parents, and some young people. Out of that review, now the draft part of that review... and the recommendations, it was quite lightweight to be honest, because it couldn't really say what the real problems were, but it did say that we needed to have increased communication, there needed to be increased parental involvement in youth.

Significantly, this description of the review suggests that the politically volatile nature of the community tensions at the time, led to its failure to clearly spell out the issues surrounding local youth provision. However, the recommendations did prompt the organisation of 'parent meetings' (through the forum) that provoked more direct parental involvement in the Maple youth services. These meetings also aimed to address an additional point raised by the Youth Review, in that:

Sally: ...what young people want out of youth work, and what the parents want out of youth work are just so many miles apart, and within that community (the Somali community), some parents, and not all, the more fundamental and the more strictly Muslim want to have youth work along more Muslim lines. So they want to have separate stuff for girls and boys, not just for girls but separate for boys, they want to have no music. Now music is always, always, always the issue although the young people themselves have their own I pods which they download music into, which were probably brought for them by their parents. To play music in youth club is sort of a bit taboo, and we've always argued against that and our line is that our youth provision is universal. It's for all people and not just Muslim and Somali people, so kids like music and so we'll play music if that's what they want to play, and we play their music from their I pods. But Royce is really careful to make sure that the kind of stuff they listen to is appropriate, age appropriate and is not really sort of, sexist and racist and all those things.

Indeed, the emphasis placed by many Muslim parents on the provision of local youth services that reflected traditionally Muslim values constituted a key area of contestation between some Muslim parents and youth forum workers. In fact, some of the more traditionally Muslim families were openly unsupportive of 'universal' youth provision in general, preferring religiously specific youth services. This reflected a tension between the preferences of some of the more traditional Muslim families and the inclusive 'community cohesion' based youth provision led by the local forum. This is illustrated by Royce in the following:

Royce: ... at the moment I'm dealing with conflicts in the area where the community want an Islamic slant on the youth clubs. I provide a universal service and the money that we use, that we're funded by is universal money so you can't put an Islamic slant on it even if you wanted to, and if you were gonna do that you would have to do it for the whole community. So you gotta just try and keep it as universal as possible. You listen to what the issues are but primarily at the end of the day my primary concern is the young people and getting them off the streets. If that means that I have to put a radio on you nah mean? Because that's, they're my primary concern. So there's different dynamics that will play into how the services are, and it's difficult when there's so many different points of view.

For Sally, the challenges that differing religious and cultural points of view imposed on the local youth service providers was a site in need of focused attention and development:

Sally: The wider perspective is really important. I think the next big discussion to have within the community is one that's been happening on a national and local level really, is issues around multiculturalism and integration. That's the conversation I'd like to have.

Will: Do you feel like that's something that isn't happening?

Sally: The integration, well I think the whole issue about the Somalis wanting separate provision highlights that whole thing doesn't it. And it's quite old hat, and I think hopefully we've moved on, like in the 80's and 90's there used to be funding for and provision for a Somali youth club, a Yemini youth club, an Afro Caribbean youth club, a girl's black youth club, there were all those things separate, and youth workers corresponding to each of those clubs. Since then, slowly we've moved onto universal provision but there are still some people within the community and within the council and the funders that think that's the way forward. In a place like Maple I think that's the way to complete disaster, because the young people, there are issues between different factions of the community, not just young people. So in the past there have been issues between parts of the Somali community and parts of the Afro Caribbean community. In other parts of the city there are issues between Pakistani and Somali. And across the city there are these issues between different factions of communities and here is not different... So, and that's not just with the youth, that's also with the adults, who I believe can fan the flames of that. So integration and working together I think's the way forward. Now that's a slow slow slow slow process, because you got families, within the Somali community who are really fundamental who just want to say 'leave us alone, we don't want anything to do with any of your stuff, we just want to do it for ourselves. We want to get funding for ourselves to do projects for our children'. The problem is with that, and that's happened in the past, but that, having isolated communities within the community, means that the young people are also isolated within it.

A significant point from this extract concerns the impact of ethnically polarised youth provision on the experiences of young people themselves. That is particularly in terms of the formal construction of community boundaries through ethnically segregated youth services. Indeed, it seems much of the debates between parents and forum workers failed to adequately consider the opinions of the young people accessing the services. Significantly, what is reflected here, are generational disparities in the understanding of community amongst some of the local Somali residents (Bradby, 2007; Gilbert & Khokhar, 2008). This was an observation made by Sarah, a white 47 year old youth worker in the Maple junior and senior club at the time of the research:

Sarah: I don't think the kids are bothered, I think it's the parents. The younger kids want to play with other kids, they don't matter who they are what they are, what religion they are, they're their friends.

Concerning these generational differences, the impact of cultural disparities, in terms of the emphasis families placed on education were also raised by a number of youth workers in relation to the local youth provision demographics. During one of our conversations, Royce noted that for some Somali mothers, having

their children achieve academic success at university was often seen as a 'right to boast'. Amidst wider family histories of disruption and migration, academic success amongst the second generation was very much celebrated as a sign of stability and good parenting. Consequently, it seems substantial pressures, to pursue higher education, were placed on Maple's younger generation of Somali residents. This was illustrated in the popularity of the more formal educational youth provision such as the Maple Homework Club. The following comment from Lesley, a white resident in her late 50's, and a Maple Homework Club organiser at the time of the research reflects her concerns regarding the academic pressures young Somalis appeared to face:

Lesley: I sometimes think that it's quite hard for them (young Somali residents) because they're in school all day and there's a very very, particularly in the Somali community, there's a very strong pressure toward educational achievement...the Somali community for one particularly want their children to get involved in educational things.

This focus on academic attainment was further illustrated through the perceived ownership of the Maple Homework Club by the local Somali residents:

Lesley: ...particular groups (youth provision sessions) become identified as being associated with particular ethnic groups. So the Homework Club, even though it isn't a Somali homework club, is seen as a Somali homework club.

For Lesley, the disproportionately high percentage of Somali attendees within the Homework Club contributed to its ethnic identity. This observation was supported by Al, a white homework club worker in his late 60's at the time of the research. During Al's 12 years at the club, he had seen a number of changes and developments, one of which was the rise in Somali attendees that, like Lesley he equates to cultural factors:

Al: Erm I don't know whether it's just seen as Somali. They tend to be very keen on getting the children educated.

This cultural emphasis on the value of educational success goes some way towards explaining local tensions around the nature of 'universal' youth provision. Indeed, in some cases, it appeared that the youth clubs organised by the Maple Forum, which were often informed by the interests of the service users themselves, simply failed to provide an environment that reflected the values of some of the more traditional Somali families:

Sally: Now I've talked to parents who expect their kids to, go to school, go to the library, do their homework and go to bed, or pray, and just do that every single day. They just do not see the value of play, they don't see the

value of youth work. They don't see the value of down time for kids, you know because that's not what they had. They would go from school to the Madras, study the Quran etcetera.

Sally raises a significant point here in terms of the influence cultural interpretations of 'childhood' and particularly 'play' had on some parents understanding of the local youth provision. On discussing the role of 'play' in accounting for childhood culture, James *et al* (1998) referenced the significance of Western cultural interpretations of childhood in terms of understanding 'play' as being 'what children do' (90). Conversely, they argued that similarly focused studies outside of Europe and the US pointed 'to the absence of any well-developed 'children's culture', for in these contexts children's and adults worlds are less socially divided and culturally distinguished' (James *et al*, 1998:90). Therefore, the disassociation between childhood and 'work' can be associated with Western culture and may not be clearly applicable to other cultural interpretations of childhood. To some extent childhoods are socially constructed, 'variable and intentional', and considering them as such goes some way towards explaining the influence traditionally Somali cultural interpretations of 'play' appeared to have on some families opinions of the local youth services (James *et al*, 1998). In this, a certain level of conflict is illustrated between the youth forum's Western and contemporary political focus, on the importance of cohesion, integration and leisure, and the contrasting 'traditional' emphasis placed by some Muslim families on piety and study (James *et al*, 1998; Thomas, 2011). An apt example of what can happen when these contrasting cultural interpretations meet is provided in Lesley's comments below:

Lesley: Like I was saying the Somali community for one, particularly want their children to get involved in educational things and when we started a pre-school, toddler group if you like we particularly knew that and wanted to encourage Somalis, so we called it 'Learning Through Play'. It's now been taken over through Sure Start. But, even after calling it 'Learning Through Play' we only got one family, which was the same people who helped us to set it up in the first place. Oh no, there were two to be fair, there was another, but the other mother who came, I mean, she's got a lot of children and she's older but she really didn't ever get down on the floor and play with her children, she'd just sit and watch other people. She'd stop her little boy if he wacked someone but she really didn't involve herself at all or seem to understand what the point of it was I guess.

This extract suggests that despite the fact Lesley made a conscious effort to attract local Somali families by calling her session '*Learning Through Play*', the point of the 'play' element was difficult for the Somali woman to comprehend, and this cultural barrier resulted in an ethnically skewed service user group. It can also be suggested that these cultural factors had an impact on the other

junior youth club demographics, and certainly the level of suspicion that local forum lead youth provision was awarded by some Somali families.

Overall what can be drawn from Sally's narrative and the following discussion of religious, ethnic and cultural differences within the context of the local youth provision is that numerous factors intersected within the Maple communities that affected the user groups' opinions towards the local youth services. Forum workers were constantly faced with the challenge of attempting to negotiate these occasionally contesting cultural ideologies within the wider context of community politics and tensions (stemming from various sources) that complicated the symbolic lines being drawn in the sand around imagined communities (Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006). Therefore, Maple might be seen as 'divided' or being made up of 'communities within the community' as Sally's earlier extract suggests. However, the ways in which individuals identified with these 'communities' was constantly (re)negotiated according to context, creating a further challenge for local youth providers in terms of the flexibility needed to develop the intra communal relations that facilitated their 'universal' youth provision approach. However, importantly, despite the clearly fractious nature of this heterogeneous collective, it is the very notion of 'community' albeit a contested one that bound the experiences of the groups engaging in the youth provision debates. It is to this phenomenon, that the discussion will now turn.

### **'Community' despite division**

On 'community' in 'Liquid Modernity' Bauman (2000) suggests that we may say:

...the most promising kind of unity is one which is *achieved*, and achieved daily anew, by confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise between values, preferences and chosen ways of life and self-identifications of many and different, but always self-determining, members of the *polis* (178).

This, I will argue is a useful means of understanding the ontological persistence of both 'divided' and 'collective' notions of 'community' amongst the sample of Maple residents. It also eludes towards an understanding of how, or why, despite the clearly challenging and occasionally explosive negotiations of difference at the intersection of ethnic, political, cultural, economic and generational issues, 'community' remained such an important figuration in individual's depicted experiences of Maple. Often in fact, it seemed that the community tensions, that characterise the Maple area as somewhat volatile, were actually compiled into a strong overall sense of belonging through each group's vested interests in their own places within the broader Maple 'community'. Below Sally illustrates this dynamic:



Sally: Maple is a very specific area, it's a very small area, and although there is quite a lot of conflict and problems in the area people are very proud of being from Maple... So it's an easily geographically defined community and people are really proud of living here I think. That's why I really love it here because although it's quite a difficult place to be a community worker in, people do give a shit. There's no apathy and that's what I really love about it, because although people will shout against you, they don't not care what you do, so as a community worker who's trying to do community development, you can actually make a difference. I've called community meetings about various things and had 70, 80 people there. That wouldn't happen in Meadow where I used to work. You'd be lucky if you get 10. So people do care and people do join in, like when we have community festivals and celebrations, loads of people come, 100's of people come, even boring meetings people come to, we have 50 or 60 come to our AGM (Annual General Meeting), you know that's pretty boring (laughs) so that's why I like it here, because people definitely care.

Indeed, identifying as 'being part of the community' was a prevalent theme that emerged from all of the interviews with Maple residents. That is despite the fact that the same interviewees often highlighted the problematic and 'divided' nature of the Maple community dynamics. For example, John, who is quoted earlier suggesting that Maple 'seems to divide itself up' also clearly referred to the importance he placed on his role as a Homework Club organiser in terms of cementing an identity for himself and his partner Lesley within the 'community':

John: As we were saying before in the discussion, it means that we're known in the area and that's really important to us.

Will: Yeah it's nice...

John: It, it is it's great. I mean Alice and Jess (John's & Lesley's children) when they were younger used to have a Maple constant, so if we were walking to town they would add another 10 minutes on, you know because there would always be somebody (to stop and talk to), not necessarily Homework Club related as well. But being part of the community is really important to us, erm doing this sort of job really cements that.

A critical interpretation of John's extract might suggest that the importance he and Lesley placed on working within, and being seen as a part of the Maple 'community' reflected their values as community workers; a characteristic that perhaps underpins the motivation for doing the job. Taken as such, these comments could be interpreted as a likely response for any community worker with such an occupational bias. However, on the contrary, evidence from Royce illustrates the pervasiveness of similar attitudes towards the significance of 'being a part of the community' in the prevalence of local volunteers:

Royce: Yeah, half of my staff is volunteers, you know um, I wouldn't be able to run the service that I provide without the volunteer part of it and it's really important to me. I feel that in this environment of capitalism we very easily forget how to club together and just do things out of community love you nah mean? And what volunteering does, is tries to hold in to the last reminance of the community getting involved... The communal way of clubbing together. And you know, in Britain today you've got a different attitude of well, paper (money), do you know what I mean? Like "I'd rather sit down and do nothing than volunteer in my own time". The volunteering system that we have in place is integral to kind of, instilling community spirit so I think it's important and I love it. I started off as a volunteer.

Will: It's also interesting to me that, if it's community spirit which is needed to evoke volunteers, and you're working in a community where there is an abundance of volunteers, that somewhat contradicts the outsider perception of a community in chaos.

Royce: It's not a community in chaos, I get on average 2 kids a week asking me to volunteer. You know, if I had the capacity to deal with them all I would do. I haven't, I'm up to my eyeballs in volunteers but I get an average of 2 kids a week. Both boys and girls, both adults and young people, so it's not that people don't want to volunteer it's the opportunities that they have to do it. People want to offer time in their own communities and make a difference in their own communities. How that's orchestrated, that's something that the government have got to take on and manage well, not with these piecemeal 5 minute servicing. They've got to embed a system within the British community where if you've got some spare hours or knowledge or whatever that you want to put into the system you can do that for free. Because you know, not everybody's motivated by money and promotions and that kind of stuff. Some people just want to spend time putting a little back you know?

Two significant considerations can be drawn from Royce's comments. Initially, referenced here is the individually imagined, yet nonetheless ontological existence of 'community' (Anderson, 2006). Despite the fact that this 'community' is widely referred to as contested and both geographically and symbolically 'divided' (Cohen, 1985; Back, 1993; Alleyne, 2002) the notion of 'community' is persistent and exists in the minds of the Maple residents. Secondly, this notion can be seen in Durkheimian terms as somewhat 'external to, and coercive of, actors' (Ritzer, 2011:75). It is more than the sum of its parts (Jenkins, 2002) and this is manifested in the notion of 'community spirit'. This is a feeling that stems from individuals' identification with 'community' and provokes their wanting 'to offer time in their own communities and make a difference'. This is social action that, for Royce, perpetuates the instilling of community spirit itself. What this illustrates is that the 'divided' nature of the Maple community does not necessarily take away from the significance of the

concept of 'community' for individual's negotiation of their identities, interactions and surroundings. In fact, these divisions and the 'confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise' (Bauman, 2000:178) they necessarily provoked, in the context of local services, often served to strengthen the significance of the concept. Indeed, Sally's account of the popularity of 'boring' local meetings lies as testament to the sustained engagement of different groups under the premise of developing ways to provide services for a heterogeneous collective within a multicultural 'community'. 'Community' thus emerges as a concept, incorporating and situating the negotiations that simultaneously confirm its resonance. In this respect it is indeed both 'achieved' and 'postulated' thorough individuals identification, interpretation, interaction, negotiation and social action (Bauman, 2000).

### **Escaping Maple**

The discussion so far has considered the reportedly 'divided' nature of the Maple 'communities' and the ways in which these divisions played out within an overarching collective notion of local 'community'. What has been reflected is the emphasis that many local residents placed on notions of 'community' along multiple, contested and contextually specific, symbolically constructed boundaries (Cohen, 1985). Each collective, or community within the community, reflected its own values, many of which were also reflected in the values of other groups, but each group's values were nonetheless unique. From this, a resulting factor emerged in terms of the behavioural constraints these norms and values could impose on individual's behaviours. During our interview, Royce referenced the significance of local surveillance and 'gossip' on the behaviours he was prepared to exhibit as a known youth worker within the Maple area:

Royce: ...because of the nature of the communities there, Christian, Islamic, there's a lot of pride in both communities. You know, so for instance, I would never dream of walking down Beach road, or any road in Maple off my tree, on alcohol or anything like that because I would know, the next day and for a few weeks after that I'd be talked about as walking down the road drunk (laughs), you nah mean? There are not a lot of neighbourhoods where you can say that.

Royce's comments suggest that within the Christian and Islamic communities in Maple, significance was awarded to 'keeping face' and maintaining the identity of the group through presenting ones self according to certain established behavioural codes. This was a particularly relevant issue for the second-generation Somali males who often felt the need to escape the geographic boundaries of the Maple community. Chapter three referenced the 'allied' nature of Maple and Meadow, as far as the youth provision service users were concerned. Due to this relationship young people from each area were more or

less free to utilise the youth provision in Maple or Meadow without any fear of territorial reprisals from local youths. In fact, Meadow was described on occasion, as a place (almost like a safe haven) where young Somali boys from Maple could go to escape the eyes of their extended families. This is illustrated by Shaun, a 22 year old mixed race youth worker in Maple and Meadow at the time of the research:

Shaun: ...with Maple, with the area being majorly full of Somalis and Somali families they've already got that sort of erm, their sort of heritage is sort of, look out for one another, and a lot of older people, they all sort of know each other, they all communicate they all talk. I think the kids over the past few years have noticed this and that's why now you see predominantly, some of the ones that are gang affiliated in Maple have started drifting, over to the Meadow area because they know that not as many people, if God forbid they did get into any trouble, it would be less likely to get back to their peers in Maple.

In this instance, the propensity to leave the area in order to 'safely' exhibit 'deviant' behaviours confirms the significance of maintaining particular identities in the eyes of the 'community'. Logically, in turn this clarifies the significance of the 'communities' themselves in the eyes of individuals. On a supporting note, Valentine and Sporton's (2009) research, which focused on notions of belonging amongst British Somalis in Sheffield, found young men's behaviours were very much influenced by 'hegemonic local narratives about what it means to be a Muslim' (Valentine and Sporton, 2009:746). Within this, young men negotiated their engagement with activities that contradicted more traditional narratives around 'good' Muslim practice by indulging in them outside of the geographic boundaries of their 'community'. A similar example is located in Bradby's (2007) research findings regarding Vish, a Muslim university student who indulged in alcohol at university but abstained in his hometown as a way of keeping up appearances:

Vish, the drinking student, illustrated that surveillance was crucial to young people's behaviour, since he was at liberty to do so as he pleased in Glasgow where he had no family connections, whereas in his small home town in England, his arrival at the bus stop would be reported to his parents before he had reached the front door' (Bradby, 2007:666).

These findings all speak to the importance young people placed on keeping face in relation to the communities they identified within the Maple area. As Shaun implied, the short trip over to Meadow, enabled British Somali teens (from Maple) just enough distance from the 'elders' to get away with exhibiting behaviours that might not comply with traditional perceptions of 'good' Muslim practice. This provides an insight into the ways in which the ethnic, religious and cultural community dynamics within Maple influenced the ways in which young

people chose to behave and negotiate the youth provision they accessed. A key consideration to be drawn from this, is that despite the fact local Somali youths clearly respected their elders, as implied by their geographic behavioural choices, the implementation of youth provision that reflects traditional Muslim values would be more likely to drive young people away, than constitute a space for the successful reproduction of 'traditional' Somali communities.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed interpretations of 'community' in the context of Maple, the primary research setting. By drawing on in depth interviews from a sample of residents who are also active participants in the local youth provision, this chapter has clearly highlighted the local tensions, divisions and politics youth workers faced in attempting to provide 'universal' provision in a heterogeneous, multicultural environment. The discussion has illustrated Maple's 'divided' nature, along intersecting geographic, ethnic, economic, cultural, religious and generational lines. Yet significantly, from this the overarching importance of more inclusive notions of local 'community' is also identified for local residents, despite divisions. In this, the conceptual significance of 'community' as individually imagined, contested and contextual has been foregrounded (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006). Thus, 'community' is employed as a concept that aids individual's interpretation and negotiation of belonging through processes of identification. But these are processes that vary according to situation and context. Given this, 'community' is not explored as a model of localised group identity based necessarily on shared culture or action; rather something that grows out of dynamic ongoing processes of both individual and collective identification (Yerbury, 2011). As referenced above, the data suggests that 'community' 'is *achieved*, and achieved daily anew, by confrontation, debate, negotiation and compromise between values, preferences and chosen ways of life and self-identifications' (Bauman, 2000: 178). Some implications of these achievements have been displayed in the coercive nature of 'community', both in terms of very positive behavioural manifestations, like volunteering, and more manipulative practices, like the presentation of 'deviant' behaviours outside of the geographic boundaries of communities. Still, what all the data points towards is the ontological significance of 'community' amongst the sample. This goes some way towards explaining the importance residents placed on debates surrounding community services, particularly youth provision, given its propensity to challenge established community norms and values.

The next chapter will focus specifically on the ways in which interactional dynamics between youth workers and young people took place within the 'universal' youth provision in Maple and Meadow. This discussion will reflect the

synonymous importance youth workers and young people placed on notions of 'trust' and 'respect' within their relationships. In doing so the analysis will also explore the ways in which these relationships came to reflect both their own unique and wider established notions of 'community'.

## Chapter 5

### Exploring the youth work relationship

The previous chapter illustrated the difficulties local youth workers faced organising 'universal' youth provision in a multicultural environment. This discussion highlighted the contested and symbolically constructed (Cohen, 1985; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006; Bauman, 2012) nature of 'community', by exploring the tensions and politics that emerged between local youth providers and the multicultural residents. This chapter develops that discussion by focusing on the environment that the majority of these tensions were directed towards; the youth clubs themselves. Drawing on empirical data from in-depth interviews and focus groups, the discussion critically explores the relationship between youth workers and young people in the clubs where the majority of the research took place; the Maple senior youth club (13-19 years) and the Meadow club (11-19 years). The data presented in this chapter contributes to contemporary discussions of youth work practice (Crimmens *et al*, 2004; Davies, 2005; Batsleer and Popple, 2010), by exploring the dynamics underpinning the observed youth work relationships, and situating them within the constraints of contemporary youth policy. In so doing, it illustrates the importance of the youth provision in Maple and Meadow, alongside highlighting its propensity to reflect and possibly even consolidate localised experiences of 'community' and marginalisation (Cooper, 2011).

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section outlines the contemporary youth policy framework within which the observed youth work relationships emerge. The second section discusses trust and respect in 'the youth work relationship', this confirms what 'the youth work relationship' is and how it should be understood throughout the following discussion. The third section draws on empirical data to critically explore the significance youth workers placed on being local, in their ability to work productively with young people. The significance of locality is then developed upon through a critical discussion of the importance youth workers placed on informality. Within this, the difficulties youth workers faced maintaining order and discipline within an informal environment is given a particular focus. Locality and informality are then considered as interdependent factors informing local models of the 'right type' of youth worker. That is, the characteristics perceived by the sample as ideal for developing productive working relationships with local service users. The practical significance of this model is then critically addressed and contrasted with a model of the 'wrong type', namely, the characteristics participants identified as hindering youth work relationships. Specifically, this section considers the functionality of 'joined up' approaches to youth provision

by exploring the significance workers and young people placed on separations between local provision and more formal institutions like school and the police.

### **Mapping the UK youth policy context**

Within the UK, the relationship between central government, local authorities and youth work dates back to the 1940's, where youth work was politically supported as a means of helping young people through the disruption of the world wars (Davies, 2010). Historically, the organisation of youth work in the UK has been managed by authorities. However, local authorities tend also to have been directed, to varied extents, by national youth policy, which lays 'out the boundaries within which practice 'on the ground' will – perhaps *must* – operate' (Davies, 2010:7). Since the Coalition government came to power in 2010 a number of influential policy initiatives, focusing on the financing and delivery of services for young people, have significantly challenged the capacities of local authorities and youth work practitioners (Davies, 2013). These challenges provide an important context framing the contemporary experiences of youth workers and young people.

On the 1st of February 2010 the Cabinet Office and the Department for Education published the Coalition government's *Positive for Youth* policy paper (CO & DfE, 2010). This paper brought together all of the government's policies for young people aged 13-19. In particular the policies outlined within *Positive for Youth* 'set out a new partnership approach for giving young people more opportunities and better support... with voluntary and community groups and local businesses drawn in as full partners' (CO & DfE, 2010). This 'new partnership approach' encapsulated one of the core purposes of the *Positive for Youth* document: 'to play down, if not actually write out, the state's direct role in providing or even funding' youth services (Davies, 2013:9).

*Positive for Youth* stressed the responsibility of local authorities, communities and businesses for the organisation and delivery of youth services. In an attempt to articulate some support for this responsabilisation (Liebenberg *et al*, 2013), the document also committed to making volunteering easier and 'funding improved brokerage between businesses and projects for young people' (CO & DfE, 2010). In other words *Positive for Youth* packaged the Coalition government's economic withdrawal within the rhetoric of the 'Big Society'. Indeed, one year after its publication:

The existence of hefty budget reductions at local level was confirmed by local authority heads of youth services. For instance, Harry Fowler, Head of Birmingham Youth Service, said that his service was facing 50% cuts



over the following two to three years: £3 million from a total budget of £5.8 million (House of Commons, 2011:33)

Nationally, Davies (2013) has recognised that by mid-2011 the average budget cut to education-based youth services was 28 per cent, 'with some authorities cutting by 70, 80 and even 100 per cent' (18). OECD figures from the same year reported 20% unemployment rates amongst 15 – 24 year olds in the UK (OECD, 2014) alongside suggesting that on average 15 – 29 year old in the UK face tougher transitions into further education and the labour market than other EU21 countries (OECD, 2013).

At a practical level, the consequences youth service cuts have resulted in the redundancy of experienced youth workers, the increase in unqualified volunteers and in some instance the closure of valued youth work facilities. Reflecting critically on the practicalities of capturing alternative funding from the private sector the Education Select Committee (2011) recognised that smaller youth services found it hard to access these sources. This was particularly the case within the context of private organisations' reluctance 'to provide money to 'top up' statutory funding' (House of Commons, 2011:31). Additionally, the Select Committee's (2011) recognition, that many youth services were unaware of the alternative social and financial opportunities available to them suggested that the government's commitment to 'improve brokerage' between businesses and youth services had failed reach those in need of support.

Despite the economic constraints imposed by the *Positive for Youth* budget cuts, the Coalition government's youth policy has also raised expectations for those involved in the provision of services for young people. Reflecting the trends outlined within the European Commission's (2014) Youth Work Report, UK youth workers are under increasing pressure to emphasise measurable outcomes, partnership working and targeted services in the context of declining 'upfront financing' (Dunne *et al*, 2014). Paradoxically the push for partnership working has also been coupled with increasing competition between youth work initiatives. As Fyfe and Moir (2013) have recognised, youth workers are now finding themselves directly competing for funding whilst being expected to work together. Whilst in principle the integration of local services could produce benefits, particularly in terms of measurement (Fyfe and Moir, 2013), in practice the Coalition government's call for partnership working is problematic.

Notably, the *Positive for Youth* (2010) paper; the cross governmental *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* report (Home Office: 2011a); and the Department for Local Communities *Helping Troubled Families* initiative (DCLG: 2012a) all emphasised the integration of local services in the management of targeted young people deemed, problematically, 'at risk' (Turnbull and Spence, 2011). For

example, on controlling youth violence, the Home Office (2011a) report argues that 'Police intelligence by itself won't be enough', suggesting that local agencies 'will need to share all the information and intelligence they hold' (22). This is a contentious requirement for many youth workers, whose professional relationships can balance precariously on young people's confidence in their discretion (Crimmens *et al*, 2004; Davies and Wood, 2010). The practicalities of this commitment to 'join up' service provision will be critically explored within the following discussion.

The Coalition government's focus on preventative intervention amongst those 'at risk' of becoming involved in 'antisocial behaviour' has also added pressure to youth workers through the introduction of payment-by-results schemes (DCLG, 2012c). The payment-by-results scheme demands increasing evidence of the 'impact' and 'outcomes' of funded youth services (Davies, 2013). However, as the Education Select Committee (2011) have accepted: 'the outcomes of individual youth work relationships can be very difficult to quantify' (83). In some cases, for 'both principled and operational reasons' (Lehal, 2010: 98) this focus on measurable outcomes has led to youth work managers focusing disproportionately on the production of figures whilst 'abandoning critical youth work practice' (Cooper, 2011:14). Indeed, the practical and ideological arguments raised by payment-by-results led practice can evoke significant tensions between youth workers and youth work managers (Foreman, 1987). Siding with the critical opposition, Cooper (2011:1) has gone as far as suggesting that the current preoccupation with government targets 'is closing off opportunities for progressive ways of working with young people and, as a corollary, is stifling the capacity of young people to overcome the structural constraints limiting their life chances'.

As it stands the Coalition government's youth policy expects local authorities to organise, deliver and evidence productive, targeted provision, at the same time as suffering substantive funding cuts. The policy push for multi-agency approaches and measurable outcomes also compromises the delivery of critical youth work, leading at worst, to the reproduction of structural inequalities through young people's engagement with uncritical practice (Cooper, 2011). For those involved in youth work the current economic and political environment imposes constraints and raises contradictions; complicating the delivery of services at the same time as diminishing the rewards of inspired practice at all levels.

### **Trust and respect: the youth work relationship**

Youth work practice is notoriously difficult to define. This is a problem that stems from its proclamation to pay attention to such a broad range of

commitments. 'Social education, preventative intervention, liberation and character building' all sit within the supposed remit of the practice (Jeffs and Smith, 1987:6). Youth work's definitional problems therefore encompass multiple debates about remit, goals, theory and practice, both at the level of policy and practice. "The observer of the youth work scene immediately comes face-to-face with these problems. What is and is not youth work?" (Jeffs and Smith, 1987:7). These are questions that have dominated discussions around youth work practice that, for the most part have been entirely fruitless. The nature of this profession means its boundaries cannot be simplistically explicated, and are likely to always be contested. In discussing youth work practice, it is hereby important to acknowledge and accept these issues, which make any strict working definitions unlikely to be fit for purpose.

The general function of youth work is to develop *voluntary*, informal relationships, with young people that are conducive to the provision of opportunities and support that aid positive social development (Willmott, 1966; Huebner *et al*, 2003; Krueger, 2005; Thomas, 2011). Within this, it is the principle of *voluntary* engagement that constitutes one of the most definitive characteristics of youth work practice (Davies, 2005; Lehal, 2010).

The basis of this position is not simply theoretical or ideological, as has sometimes been asserted – 'conservative' or bloody minded youth workers holding onto a belief that has passed its sell by date. Rather, it is rooted in the historical fact, and it is a fact, that such 'voluntaryism' has from the start shaped the development of the *practice* and especially it's process (Davies, 2005:8).

On considering the relationships between youth workers and young people, one has to recognise that a fundamental characteristic shaping the interactional dynamics is their voluntary nature. Any worker's productivity is dependent on the young people 'opting in' to informal interactions that could be the basis for 'developing real relationships' (Crimmens *et al*, 2004:28). By 'opting in', young people also reserve the right to 'opt out', in doing so leaving the youth workers redundant. So, to some degree young people are always able to exercise a level of power within youth work relationships, albeit a limited one. 'Because this is the starting point, practitioners have no choice but to *negotiate* with young people' and these negotiations are facilitated by the development of voluntary relationships (Davies, 2005:8). The significance of these relationships is reflected in the following comment from Abdi, a 30-year-old Somali youth worker in the Meadow area:

Abdi: For me, the relationship is the foundation of youth work. You remove the relationship, that's the end of what you were gonna do with that young person or what you were gonna do in the area. And, it's a very

difficult thing for a lot of people to comprehend because if you haven't done youth work or you haven't actually observed youth workers, you cannot admire or appreciate how critical having a relationship with that individual is. In enabling them, or empowering them, or kind of, having a positive influence on that person. Because it's almost like: 'You're a stranger, how can I listen to you, how can I listen to anything from you? Who are you to tell me anything?' Or they might find you intimidating. It's that thing of the unknown. 'I don't know that person, who is he? What's he doing here?' So consistency is definitely important as well, because they've got to see you every week to build that relationship and to strengthen it every week. Erm, so for me the relationship is paramount to this line of work.

Abdi's comments confirm the foundational significance of relationships within youth work practice. In order for these relationships to be productive, they need to be founded on a mutual basis of trust and respect. This is a perspective that was widely shared amongst the youth workers and volunteers that engaged in the research. Kel, a 22-year-old male, Yemini youth worker illustrates this in the following:

Kel: ...my base is trust and respect, that's how you build. For me, in my eyes, that's how it is. If you got that young people's trust then you can achieve, you can achieve with the young people and work towards a better future.

Indeed, both trust and respect were regularly cited as integral factors underpinning productive relationships in youth work practice (Alexander, 2000; Crimmons *et al*, 2004). Hence, the 'building of trusting relationships with young people, based on mutual respect' can be seen as a fundamental basis facilitating youth workers' interactions with young people (Davies, 2005:9). The importance of building trusting relationships was also raised during the focus groups with service users. The following comments from Mohammed (15) and Faizah (17), both of whom were of Somali descent and regularly attended the Meadow club are illustrative:

Mohammed: That, erm a respected youth worker, people would listen to. But if he's not really well respected people would just mess about and...

Will: But how would they get to be the respected one? So certain characteristics will make this youth worker somebody that young people respect right?

Faizah: Yeah, I don't know probably their attitude, the way they are and the way they present themselves. Also probably if they respect the youth coming here then I'm sure they will respect them.

These comments confirm the importance of mutual respect from the perspective of the youth workers/volunteers and the young people. In accounting for this, the significance of mutuality can be understood as logically embedded in the voluntary nature of the youth work relationship. Youth workers need to earn their respect, and often, this is a process that occurs over a lengthy period. As Yusuf (an experienced 50-year-old youth worker of Jamaican decent) reflects:

Yusuf: ...with young people you have to gain their trust and confidence you know? Erm, that can take some time, you know, you can be working with a young person for a hell of a long time and not really get to the bottom of what issues are affecting them. But erm, you know it's about showing them respect.

Yusuf's observations were supported by further comments from Mohammed and Faizah:

Mohammed: I don't know like, I just don't know. If it was like, if I just went to a new youth club for instance, and they saw I had a black eye or something I would not tell them. Like it's basically a stranger, I wouldn't tell them what, how I got the black eye an all that.

Will: What about if it was in a local youth club in your area where you've known somebody for a long time?

Mohammed: Then maybe yeah.

Will: So do you think it's different if you've got like a long term relationship with the youth worker?

Faizah: Yeah, I think it is better because then just like, you know.

Alongside earning respect, Mohammed's comments confirm the need for youth workers to earn their trust. His description of a hypothetically unfamiliar youth worker as 'basically a stranger' illustrates the failure of the professional 'youth worker' title itself, to equate a trustworthy status (St Croix, 2010). Instead trust, like respect, had to be earned through processes of interaction, often over a sustained and lengthy period (Crimmens *et al*, 2004; Davies, 2005). However, the resources that youth workers are able to commit to developing longitudinal relationships of trust and respect are becoming increasingly compromised by government budget cuts and the contemporary policy focus on targeted intervention. As more traditional and emancipatory forms of youth work practice are being increasingly constrained (Davies, 2013), it is becoming more and more important to reflect upon the centrality of trusting and respectful relationships within effective youth work practice.

## Locality

During our discussions, youth workers cited a number of factors that aided the development of their relationships with local service users. A key theme was consistency, 'because they've got to see you every week to build that relationship' (Abdi). Support for Abdi's assertion can be drawn from Kruger's (2004) thematic model of youth work practice that references simply being present as one of the most fundamental considerations for youth workers, aiding the development of trusting, respectful relationships. Reflecting this, a characteristic that was often described by youth workers as an occupational asset was their own ties with the local community (Crimmens *et al*, 2004). Workers/volunteers who had grown up in the same areas as the clubs that they staffed always had a pre-existing relationship with some of the local service users. As a result of this dynamic, session organisers often recruited locally because this reduced the need for newly appointed workers/volunteers to concentrate on the initial and lengthy development of rapport. In the extract below, Liveer a Somali youth worker in the Meadow club refers to the advantages of being a practitioner from the local area:

Liveer: It's like, I've grown up with them so basically we know each other very well. If I tell them to stop doing what they're doing, if they're doing anything bad I'm sure they'll listen to me because we've grown up with each other, friends from day one.

These comments illustrate the potential advantages of being local in terms of identifying with and influencing the behaviours of young people. Liveer refers to his locality as an asset, which is significant in itself, because he does so despite the obvious demands being local placed on him outside of working hours. Crimmens *et al* (2004) cite the 'perennial problem' local youth workers faced 'demarcating the personal and professional' (29). Indeed, Liveer and many of the other local workers' sense of responsibility for the service users spanned far beyond the hours they were actually paid to organise youth club sessions. For Liveer, this personal familiarity with the service users, 'friends from day one', facilitated his influence within the club. The significance of this is supported within the following suggestion from Abdillahi, a 17-year-old Somali regular at the Meadow club:

Abdillahi: I think youth workers should come closer to the people that they work with, raise their confidence, get to know them. Maybe meet them outside of the youth club relax with them, chill out so they might be more open to them. Then people might be more likely to say stuff like: 'Oh I've got a problem with this kid or that kid inside the youth club, would you talk to him and tell him?'

Abdillahi's comments clarify the benefits of locality for youth workers. Being 'around' enables workers to engage with young people outside of the more formal confines of the club building. For Abdillahi, getting to know youth workers within a more neutral environment was an important element in the initiation of informal dialogues. Below, Abdi confirms Abdillahi's comments from a practitioner's perspective:

Abdi: ...the most important thing here is dialogue. You're having a consistent dialogue with the young people. You know what's happening, you know what they're doing. Are they in school? In training? Are they in employment, as in working? So you're almost kind of, within that you've got a path that they're going through.

Having a consistent dialogue with the young people increased workers' awareness of their experiences. This not only gave both parties something to talk about, naturally aiding the initiation of conversations, it also allowed workers to recognise issues that the young people might be facing, in doing so, enabling the workers' capacity to advise. Having a locally based awareness of the young people's lives therefore contributed to the workers' potential to engage with them on relevant issues. In the extract below Sean, a dual heritage youth worker, who was 22 at the time of the research, discusses the benefits of locality:

Sean: Erm, I wouldn't say it's crucial but I think it is very beneficial to be from that area, in order to work in that area, because you've already got an understanding of you know, how that area works, and how the people are. It would be very hard for someone to come from outside that area and try to control it if you get what I mean. If someone was to come from the outside and start saying something to the kids, then the kids would just be like (laughs) 'Well, this guy ain't from around here he don't know what he's on about'.

Two key points can be taken from Sean's comments. Initially, he confirms the practical significance of local knowledge from his perspective as a youth worker. Having a personal awareness of the area's community dynamics provided youth workers with the necessary contextual knowledge to frame their discussions with young people. Indeed, the complex and contested nature of the community tensions in Maple (described within the previous chapter) illustrated the significance of such understandings. However, it should also be noted that these understandings are not exclusively limited to residents. It is wholly feasible for example, that youth workers who live elsewhere, but work in an area over a sustained period, could also develop an in-depth understanding of local community dynamics. Hence, in most respects, it is consistency, familiarity and local understanding that enable productive relationships between youth

workers and young people. Whilst these factors are aided by locality, they are not necessarily the product thereof. As Liveer illustrates:

Liveer: It's easier if you're from the area, but it'd be the same if you had the same relationship with them (young people).

Indeed, Flash (the Meadow session organiser) regularly prided himself on being able to work anywhere with anyone.

The second point to be drawn from Sean's comment has a different focus. This is directed towards the significance of a youth worker's locality from the perspective of the young people. The implications to be drawn from the assumption that young people may be less inclined to accept personal advice from 'outsiders' are twofold (Becker, 1963). The first concerns the locally framed nature of the issues that young people in Maple and Meadow were likely to be contending with. A number of research studies have illustrated the prevalence of strong, localised, collective identities amongst disadvantaged and marginalised groups (Robins and Cohen, 1978; Back, 1993; 2007; Alexander, 2000; Kintrea *et al*, 2008; Thomas, 2011). These studies have often focused on the propensity of such strong collective identities to fuel experiences of territoriality. The following observation from Lesley, one of the Maple Homework Club organisers articulates this:

Lesley: I'm not sure it's outside of England but it's all over England, it seems to be that youth have developed this sort of, identification with their postcode.

Will: A sort of territoriality kind of thing?

Lesley: Yes, which shows how incredibly limited some of their experiences are. The Somali girls I see in town quite a lot, maybe they'll sit in the square or wherever and chat or go shopping. But the lads don't tend to do that very much. They really don't seem to go anywhere but stay in Maple, and I don't know, it's just not good. My grandson had been far further than they have at the age of 3. I mean, many of them have been to Somalia so maybe that's not fair, but within the city, they really haven't been very far except where school has taken them.

Whilst these comments should be read critically as Lesley's interpretation, they do go some way towards illustrating the locally framed experiences of some of the Somali boys in Maple. Anderson's (2012) contemporary writings on the racialisation of the American ghetto go some way towards explaining this. For Anderson (2012), dominant associations between disadvantaged urban geography and black criminality have become so iconic that the American 'ghetto' status has become 'the point of reference for any and all blacks who



appear in predominantly white settings' (16). As a result, ethnic minority young people in 'white-majority settings...remain on probation or occupy a provisional status' feeling they have to prove an alternative, 'acceptable' identity in order to no longer be perceived to be 'out of place' (Anderson, 2012:17). On feeling exposed and 'at risk' outside of racialised community boundaries, Bauman (2001) also emphasises the perceived significance of safety in place:

Where the state has failed, perhaps the community, the *local* community, the physically tangible, 'material' community, a community embodied in a *territory* inhabited by its members and no one else... will purvey the 'being safe' feeling which the wider world evidently conspires to destroy? (112-113).

Although both Bauman and Anderson's examples are American, the implications of racialization in a British context could well contribute to the Somali respondents' propensity to stay within the perceived safety of the Maple area. Indeed not all, but most of the issues local young people became involved with during the research could be situated within the symbolic boundaries of their local communities (Cohen, 1985). This is logically related to the amount of time this group would spend in the local area. Thus, the implication within Sean's comments is that for the young people, advice on local issues ought to come from respected elders with local experiences. As a result, local youth workers were often more likely to be trusted than anyone considered to be an 'outsider' (Becker, 1963).

The second implication to draw from Sean's assumption concerns the young people's interpretation of what constituted trustworthy or 'authentic' advice (Scannell, 2001). Often, young people drew on youth workers' direct experiences for guidance. Young people consistently appeared more inclined to take advice from youth workers who had a first hand basis of knowledge around whatever issues were in question, and more often than not, this also demonstrated the advantages of locality. For example, young men tended to approach me for advice about college, personal statements, job applications and occasionally girls. In contrast, local youth workers with a history in the area were more likely to be approached regarding a broader range of issues including sports, local politics, police, fall outs and fights. The following comment from Sean goes some way towards explaining this:

Sean: Yeah I feel, yeah I think personally I can help out a bit because I've come exactly the same path that they have. I've seen it, I've witnessed it. I've seen some pretty horrific thing that I don't wish for any of these kids to ever see. So that's when if ever I see people arguing or fighting, and I know that something's gonna end up happening I always try and just talk to the kids and say listen, It's not worth it.

Sean felt able to provide relevant advice because he often had the benefit of personal experience. Importantly, this advice was also regularly accepted because the young people on the receiving end trusted its authenticity. The notion of authenticity in this instance is of particular importance because of its connection to identity. An authentic experience becomes so, when it can be said to belong to the social actor in question. As such, the experience becomes a symbolic part of the self.

An authentic experience is so because I own it, and thus I can claim it as my own experience and no one else's (Scannell, 2001:406).

Thus, the degree to which an audience accepts the authenticity of an account can symbolically reflect their identification with the actor as trustworthy or 'authentic'. Sean's locality allowed him to verify his experiences. On relaying advice to the young people in the youth club, the chances were that at least some of them would be familiar with the incidents or the characters involved and would therefore be able to place Sean within the narrative. This authenticity, which was supported by Sean's locality, illustrates a key factor aiding the development of trust in the voluntary, informal relationships between youth workers and young people.

Reflected in the above, is a contemporary tension within the changing nature of youth work practice. This tension is manifested within the increasing requirement for formal qualification, implemented by National Occupation Standards, and the decreasing rewards and/or funding available to youth workers at all levels (Batsleer and Popple, 2010). This shift, towards emphasising qualifications over and above the more traditional mobilisation of local understanding, represents a significant challenging to the exclusivity of the skills enjoyed by the local workers like Sean. Cementing this tension, as the changing National Occupational Standards have emphasised higher levels of training, the *Positive for Youth* (2010) austerity measures have removed the resources available for that training. This contradiction reflects a limited understanding of the realities of youth work delivery at the level of government. If the Coalition government expects local and voluntary youth workers to produce the measurable outcomes necessitated by contemporary payment-by-results schemes, they will need to provide the training and rewards that enable consistent and committed youth workers to do so.

### **Negotiating authority informally**

On describing the organisation of club nights, workers often referred to the importance of creating a relaxed, informal atmosphere that young people felt comfortable within. For workers, volunteers and young people the atmosphere

within the clubs 'played a significant role in defining interactions' (Krueger, 2005:27). During our interview Aki, a 17-year-old Pakistani worker at the Meadow club illustrated the importance of creating an informal atmosphere:

Aki: Obviously you've got restrictions as staff, you need to know discipline, between you and the youth, you and a younger person. But you also need to know how to chat to them on a level, because there's no point talking to them in a formal way, because they just want somebody to chat too and have a joke with. They don't come to these sessions to get educated. Well, obviously, they don't come to these sessions like school, they just come to have a laugh and a joke around, play football or come here so you need to know how to communicate with them.

Communicating effectively with young people during club sessions, required maintaining a delicate balance between order and informality. The negotiation of this balance can be seen as a product of the unique power relations between youth workers and young people that stem from their aforementioned voluntary characteristic (Davies, 2005; Lehal, 2010). Indeed, young people did not go to 'these sessions to get educated'. Yet significantly, they also tended not to respect youth workers who failed to maintain any sense of authority. For Faizah, respected youth workers were both approachable *and* authoritative:

Faizah: Yeah, it's good to have a balance like to be able to communicate and be on the same level as the youth and interact with them, for us to be friends with them, but also to have, to be slightly strict and have authority. The two balance out.

Maintaining this balance was one of the key challenges that youth workers faced in practice. This was particularly the case for those who were from the local area and close to the service users in terms of age. Whilst local workers/volunteers had the advantage of being able to engage effectively with young people personally, they were also occasionally called on to challenge behaviours that they were known to engage with outside of the youth clubs. An issue then, stemming from the advantages of locality, (reflected in the staff teams) was that some of the youth workers found it difficult to demarcate their personal and professional identities (Crimmens *et al*, 2004). As Kel describes:

Kel: Yeah it was like that when I was volunteering because, I was 18 at that time and a lot of my friends used to come down, and obviously I had managers and things that used to look over us, and I'm not gonna lie, I used to mess about. Just like them, you know what I mean? I used to run around like a headless chicken and just mess about just like they did, because they're ma boys. But then again you got the managers that are about and they talk to you, and you have the evaluations. Bit by bit you realise like, you know I can make a career out of this, and if I keep going on like this I'm not gonna be nowhere really. I got to take it more serious.

It's about realisation really. You've got to just clock onto the time and do it really, just got to get your head down and do it. It's not, it not easy man. When I was volunteering I wanted to quit because I thought: 'This ain't no fun no more.' I used to come to this youth club and try to work in it but my own boys were coming to this youth club you know? It ain't no fun no more. But then you've got to realize that it's not about fun, you've got to be responsible.

Will: And did you find that like, your mates understood that after a while?

Kel: Yeah but after a while they stopped coming themselves, and I think when they stopped coming to the youth club it made me like work more.

As Kel clearly illustrates, maintaining a balance between informality and professional authority was particularly difficult for local workers and volunteers that had pre-existing friendships with service users. Additionally for Kel, it was the realisation that his voluntary engagement could lead to a career in youth work that marked his transition into responsible practice. This is not a trivial matter, particularly when the austerity measures introduced by *Positive for Youth* (2010) mark such dramatic changes in the youth funding landscape. Indeed, if it is the prospect of steady wages that provokes responsible and professional practice for some, then the dissolution of these prospects, through the economic withdrawal of the national government, is likely to have detrimental implications for the commitment of local volunteers.

In principle, the form within which interactions between staff/volunteers and service users took place during sessions should have reflected the professional lines of conduct that characterise youth work training. However, in practice, local workers/volunteers friendships with service users could, and did, both promote *and* inhibit their ability to effectively challenge behaviours. This was particularly so when workers/volunteers were close to the service users in terms of age.

Kel: What it is, is when I work with the younger people. It's all about the age difference. If the young people are too close to your age then you're gonna struggle really, with authority as well. You can't be an authority really with somebody that's so close to your age. Simply because they can turn around and say: 'Why are you saying this to me? You're more or less the same age as me.' I probably would have said that myself, if a volunteer the same age as me were lookin', well not necessarily lookin' down on me but tryin' to upkeep an authority with me I'd be like: 'Nar it's not happening'.

Kel's comments highlight the significance age played in enabling his advisory role. This observation is linked to the importance young men in Maple and Meadow placed on respectful age based hierarchies. As Liveer illustrates:

Liveer: What they do is follow the footsteps of the elders. Really, like you'll see, the older lot from us lot, from my age, they're like stood on corners doing this, doing that, drug dealing... But what I'm trying to do is get the young people to do something better, instead of standing on corners, so follow my footsteps. So that's what I'm trying to get young people to do.

Implicit in both Kel and Liveer's observations is the ways in which locality and age could function together to enable youth workers' engagement with young people against the backdrop of neighbourhood values that promoted respect for community elders (Alexander, 2000). However, this relationship has to be interpreted as a double-edged sword. This was particularly the case for younger workers/volunteers, as it was the very same familiarity that could restrict their capacity to maintain an authoritative distance within club sessions. As such, local workers'/volunteers' control during sessions, and the respect they derived professionally, could be hindered through the difficulties they faced demarcating their personal and professional identities (Crimmens *et al*, 2004). For example, homophobic mockery was commonplace within both youth clubs. This behaviour was very rarely challenged by any of the younger workers or volunteers who would have risked losing the respect of their peers by questioning this discrimination. This reluctance, prompted a situation where hegemonic gender roles were reproduced during interactions, which simultaneously reinforced discriminative perceptions of alternative gendered or sexual identities. Whilst this example is likely to be framed by the predominantly Muslim background of the club demographics, other research has produced similar findings in predominantly white British areas (Cooper, 2011). What the example illustrates is the difficulties junior workers/volunteers experienced challenging their peers within the youth club environment; an issue that could arguably have been addressed with critical training if the funding were available. However, in the context of sparse economic resources, these limitations, associated with the appointment of young, local workers/volunteers, were outweighed by the practical advantages of locality, which still played a major (and legitimate) role in the rationale underpinning the youth club staffing.

### **The 'right' type**

Emerging from the accounts presented so far, is a model of the 'right type' of youth worker. That is, an individual who understands the area they practice within, who is consistent in their approach, who manages to negotiate the balance between discipline and informality, and is both trusted and respected by local young people (and ideally their parents). This is a model that was widely held by the workers/volunteers who engaged with the research and it is one that was founded in a logical, experience based rationale. Indeed, youth workers, volunteers and local forum workers all mentioned the need to get the 'right type'

of people in to staff the clubs. This was particularly the case when workers/volunteers discussed projects that aimed to deliver on specific targeted funding agendas, like community cohesion or conflict resolution. As Sally (a senior Maple forum worker) illustrates:

Sally: I still think that we need to put more, a bit of education in the wider sense of the word into those sessions. In the new program I'm hoping to do that.

Will: How?

Sally: By having workshops that are interesting and getting the right people in. The trouble is the right people who are effective with the kids are really expensive.

Will: Who are they?

Sally: Erm, people like Ria, er, you don't know Ria. Do you know Jamal? From London? It's a really good conflict resolution organisation and he's, he's really sort of straight and he's got a way with the kids and the work he does with kids is really hard hitting and brilliant. But there's very few people in the city who have got those skills to be able to work effectively with the young people, or at least the young people that we're getting coming. So it was hard to find the right stuff to have an impact. I was hoping that the work that Fahima (junior racism course) did tonight (pause). I asked her to come in and do that to try and look at addressing some of the issues that are around respect and race and 'who am I' and all of those sorts of issues sort of bubbling under the surface, to see if that could have sort of, a small impact. Because, I don't know where those young people are getting that sort of input and support and information. Are they getting it from schools? Are they getting it from their homes? Should we be putting it in? I don't know. But I think that good youth work should be putting that in, and I worry that we do a lot, but that we haven't got the balance right at the moment between play and support and information and that sort of side of youth work. I don't think we have got that right.

Sally's description of the 'right people' illustrates the benefits of hiring 'straight talking, 'hard hitting' workers to deliver educational sessions within the youth clubs. Indeed, there were workers who did manage to engage the local session users in targeted activities, but these individuals were often external, highly trained individuals that, as Sally commented, were 'really expensive'.

As a result of the economic situation framing the clubs hiring capacities, the day-to-day staff teams consisted of predominantly local workers and volunteers. After all, these were the individuals who best fitted the 'right type' for the job. They were often also already respected as community elders which meant they could immediately engage, albeit informally, with service users. However, as

mentioned above, the informal nature of these youth work relationships made it difficult for those workers to challenge some behaviour or implement the more educational or targeted provision suggested by managers.

The educational provision, informed by government priorities and payment by results schemes (DCLG, 2012c), was also something many of the local youth workers chose not to engage with, based on their opinions of what local youth clubs *should* be delivering. Theirs was usually a position that reflected traditional opinion on the subject, suggesting that whatever other worthwhile activities took place in clubs, 'the principle function of the youth service is social' (Willmott, 1966:141). For managers, this reluctance, from local workers, created tensions, as it skewed the balance between the provision of 'play and support and information', ultimately, compromising their capacity to capture funding. More than anything, what these issues highlighted was a contestation concerning service delivery that characterises youth work practice. As Jeffs and Smith (1987) have identified 'it is the conflicting expectations diverse settings and above all else, the absence of consensus regarding the role, function and *raison d'être* of youth work that create tensions and ambiguity in the minds of workers, trainers and policy makers' (8). Youth work practice is a contested field and as such, its delivery is always a product of negotiation. This was particularly evident within the fractious relationships between managers and youth work practitioners who tended to feel 'constrained by management rather than empowered by it' (Foreman, 1987:16).

The observed youth worker/volunteer demographic should also be critically considered in terms of its tendency to amplify and reproduce imagined community boundaries (Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006; Cooper, 2011). For instance, it is worth noting that performances of respect, between local young people and community elders, worked 'both as a marker of distinction from others and of continuity with the wider imagined community' (Alexander, 2000:177). Hence, it can be suggested that staffing clubs around pre-existing frameworks of local respect, advantageous as it was, also limited the capacity of the clubs to broaden the outlook of service users beyond the boundaries of their imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). This implication acts as an example of the contradictory outcomes of the Coalition government's economic withdrawal and responsabilisation of local volunteers in the quest for cheaper and more effective youth provision. The difficulties some of the service users faced respecting external session workers, who they perceived to be 'outsiders', illustrate this point.

On one occasion, during a Meadow club session, a conflict resolution worker arrived unexpectedly to convene a session. She was white, approximately 50 years of age, petite in frame and carried a very quiet demeanour. After around 10

minutes of persuasion the stand in session leader managed to collect an audience of around ten (mostly girls who had just finished their dance class) to participate in the session. Session users generally needed persuading to engage in these classes so this was nothing untoward. However, around fifteen minutes later, far before the end of the session, five of the girls arrived back at the reception where I was working. One of them had faked an 'important' phone call to get out of the class and her peers had gratefully followed. Amongst the giggles and confessions of guilt, the reasons given for leaving the session were that the convenor was 'too boring and too old'. This preceded a consensus from the stand in session leader who said 'ghetto communicates with ghetto', arguing that the convenor was too old and too middle class to effectively engage. To a degree these observations were correct. As the data shows, session leaders sharing more characteristics with session users did generally manage to engage more effectively. However, in this case it was the white female participants that were the first to leave. This suggests that sharing both gender and ethnicity wasn't enough for the participants to award the convenor an hour of attention, or even, the benefit of the doubt. Thus, it is more likely to be characteristics such as attitude, presence and persona, over gender and ethnicity that make the difference between successful or unsuccessful session providers.

What this example illustrates is a complex issue facing youth work organisers. To engage informally with young people, youth workers needed to have developed voluntary and mutually respectful relationships. These relationships were most effectively maintained through consistent engagement and were aided by the workers locality. However, in some instances, these informal relationships limited workers' abilities to deliver more challenging or targeted sessions (Cooper, 2011). To deliver such sessions productively, external workers needed to be called in who could communicate in a particular way. However, in order to challenge the young people's (and some of the youth workers') ideas about who was and was not worth listening to, these workers needed to be highly experienced - people who were few and far between and regularly charged at a rate session organisers could not afford.

The picture that emerges is one of choices within constraints. The clubs in Maple and Meadow were financially constrained in their ability to regularly organise sessions with effective external workers that could challenge and broaden the horizons of the session users. Additionally, the informal dynamics that characterised the relationships between the young people and many of the local workers restricted their abilities to deliver these sessions effectively themselves. This was an issue many of the local youth workers reflected upon, and it was one that some responded to by requesting more training. However, further training, was beyond the financial remit of the club organisers, as Sally illustrates:



Sally: ...we haven't got funding for extra training. Training costs huge amounts of money because the funders, they want outputs, they want numbers of kids. No funders will give you money to train up your workers to that level of expertise that you can actually manage them. Most of our youth workers have a hotch potch of training. No way near as high as I'd like it to be, because they only work a few hours a week, how are we gonna do that?

This point clarifies the financial constraints limiting the productive capacities of the youth work relationships in Maple and Meadow - constraints that are amplified by the service provider's reliance on private business investment. As Sally illustrates, for private investors, the value of funding youth services lies within the measurable outcomes and the subsequent PR press. This leaves little or no room for investment in staff training, a vital activity that warrants far less press attention. As such, whilst drawing on local knowledge and respect was cheap, training local workers to use these relationships effectively, to deliver a varied and productive service, cost more than organisers could raise. Thus, the clubs were highly successful in terms of their ability to engage young people informally (which for the most part was their primary goal), but they were restricted in terms of delivery on more targeted and critical youth provision.

### **The 'wrong type'**

An additional dynamic shaping the youth work relationships in Maple and Meadow arose from the young people themselves. Indeed, as far as the data from interviews with youth workers enabled the construction of a model 'right type', data from the focus groups with young people informed the construction of its counterpart, the 'wrong type'. Namely, the behaviours and characteristics young people felt youth workers should not exhibit. This model sat particularly uncomfortably with the contemporary policy emphasis on integrated youth provision and information sharing (Home Office, 2011a).

For the young respondents, it was important that youth workers displayed little or no association with wider institutions such as school or the police. The extent to which young people influenced this dynamic can again be seen as reflective of the power relations inherent within the youth work relationship. Indeed 'young people have this power (limited and negative though it may often be) because of a role and a status which are *structured into* their relationships with the adult providers' (Davies, 2005:8). Consequently, youth workers/volunteers often had to negotiate the amount they interacted with wider institutions, through fears of the detrimental impact being seen as doing so, could have on their relationships with service users. In some cases, this meant turning down funding offers from multi agency approaches (Crimmens *et al*, 2004). As John (one of the Maple Homework Club organisers) illustrates:

John: That's something that we've had discussions with the schools about because there have been times where the schools that the students have come from wanted, well, have possibly offered money to the Homework Club, but they want information that would allow them to measure the effectiveness of the money.

Will: Hmm ok.

John: And let's see, three years ago that was the first request came in, and the schools said 'Can you let us know which of our pupils are attending the sessions?' and I said 'Well we've not asked the pupils permission so we'll ask them over the next couple of sessions.' And I was really surprised that 100% of them said 'No, we don't want the schools to have our names'. I would have expected 50/50 something like that, but all of them said no, so we haven't done that.

John's example illustrates the significance Homework Club attendees placed on the separation of that service from their local schools. Despite the fact that the Homework Club was a space where young people often worked on homework set by the schools, they were uncomfortable with any formal links being established between the two bodies. This example reflects two points for consideration. Initially, it is clear that the young people using the service *enjoyed* the fact that the Homework Club was not formally associated with school. In such, the club had a different atmosphere and a different set of rules that were much more relaxed and were far more conducive to the young people's voluntary engagement. Formally involving the school could have been perceived as a threat to these rules. Secondly, the dynamics within the Homework Club actively promoted the empowerment of young people and in their refusal to share information with the schools the young people gladly exercised this power. This recognition of young people's agency represents another key factor separating the atmosphere in the Homework Club from that of the local schools. Thus, for young people such multi agency approaches could represent both a symbolic and actual threat to the favourable power relationships that were structured into their youth work relationships (Davies, 2005). Contrary to government priorities, the workers'/volunteers' awareness of these issues directed their negotiations with external parties.

A further example emerges in the workers/volunteers reluctance to be seen communicating with the police. This issue mirrored Crimmens *et al's* (2004) findings where '...respondents feared that too close an association with the criminal justice system might jeopardise their relationships with young people (31). As Kel articulates:

Kel: Because it's with authorities, a lot of youth workers these days, young people say that they're involved in police activities, and the trust goes

down the hill. We try to upkeep that trust and keep it going, we don't want to lose any trust with the young people. It's hard to get and you keep that bond for a long time.

Will: So it's important to sort of keep a clear line between what you do as a youth worker and more formal authorities like the police?

Kel: Yeah yeah you have to keep a line because, then again it's trust. It's all about trust, if the young people see you talking to the police and then they get into trouble... I'll be honest with you, the majority of young people don't like the police anyway, their experiences of like brothers and uncles and cousins that are serving jail sentences, and they can see, it's not fair. But they do realise why they're in jail, but they're still not seeing that family member because of what happened (with the police).

Kel's account raises a number of important issues. A consistent theme running throughout this is trust. For Kel, being accused of sharing information with the police fundamentally limited youth workers' capacities to engage productively with young people. This was an understanding that was widely shared by the workers and volunteers who participated in the research. Trust is hard to earn and as Kel suggests, it's much easier to lose. This observation illustrates the fragility of the youth work relationship, confirming the need for youth workers to carefully negotiate their identities around service users. Kel's comments also go some way towards explaining the fractious nature of relationships between service users and the police. For many of the service users, the local police were associated with the absence of family members who were serving jail sentences for one reason or another. In order to address this issue, on occasion some of the local community police officers would arrive at youth club sessions for five or ten minutes at a time. This was clearly an attempt to develop casual rapport, but predictably these attempts were generally fruitless. Police within the youth club were always perceived as an external group. The following comments from three of the regular attendees in Maple reflect this:

Will: Those police that come into the youth club a couple of weeks ago.

Killah: Yeah we don't like them.

Ceclo: I don't like that guy Gary

Shirwaz: We hate Gary

In fact, by showing up unannounced, local police officers contributed to the existing divisions between themselves and the youth services. Youth workers and volunteers were generally much happier to be warned about such visits in advance. This meant that they could publically inform service users of the expected police presence and in doing so, avoid any allegations of colluding with

the authorities. So, whilst service users generally accepted the fact that serious incidences would have to be dealt with by the police, throughout the course of the research, attempts were usually made to address issues internally (without the police). For the most part, this reflected both negotiations of the youth work relationship and more general 'neighbourhood values' about 'not informing the authorities about low-level crime and deviance' (Crimmens *et al*, 2004:29). On occasion, support was also offered to young people in response to allegations from the police. Where appropriate, this materialised through the provision of reports from youth workers that contradicted police statements made against service users. One such incident occurred when a session leader at the Meadow club received information from the police issuing concerns over a specific individual. This information cited the individual in question as antisocial, uncommunicative with PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers) and youth workers. However, our experiences with the individual in question reflected the contrary. In fact, at the time of the allegations, this particular individual was one of the most consistent, dedicated volunteers on a project that involved the redecoration and development of a music studio. Whilst our experiences could not account for the young man's behaviour outside of the club, he was clearly interacting politely and regularly with youth workers. In this situation it was appropriate to send a contradictory statement to the police in support of the accused.

An issue stemming from the examples cited above lies in their propensity to reinforce lines of separation between young people and the local police. Indeed, the way that youth workers negotiated their interactions with these agencies (necessary as it may have been) did little to dispel any existing tensions. Whilst the youth workers communicated both honestly and realistically with young people about the police, these interactions rarely progressed further than confirming widely held local opinions on the dangers of informing. As Kel explains:

Kel: I understand where these young people are coming from, because as a young person, even though it wasn't this serious it was similar. We got told by our elders like, off the older lot we got told: 'Police, don't talk to them, they'll try and make you speak'. And as a young person, to come to think of it, it's easy because a police officer can easily sit down with a young person because they're trained to do that, and a young person will say everything. What it is, I'm not saying it's a bad or a good thing, but what I'm sayin' is that... That can get that young person into trouble, if someone found out that they'd been talking to the police. And, that's gonna have an effect on like that young person's family as well. You know people don't understand, I don't think the authorities understand, but that's my point of view.

In an environment where informing was strictly taboo and police prejudices along lines of race and class were rife (McAra and McVie, 2005), many of the youth workers felt compelled to warn young people about the dangers of talking to police. This example illustrates a level of ignorance, in the governmental expectation that local, unpaid youth workers would accept and comply with initiatives on integrated services and information sharing (Home Office 2011a). Indeed, for local youth workers, doing so risked not only their youth work relationships, but also their broader local reputation.

Unfortunately the local police also did little, in terms of practice, that contradicted the negative imagery reproduced within the youth services. The following comments from the Maple club regulars are illustrative:

Will: Why is PC Bob safe when the other ones aren't?

Halimo: Because PC Bob gives you a chance to talk to him. The rest all go 'Get on the F'in floor you fuckin dur dur'.

Will: So is this when they're coming to you for a search or just in general?

Halimo: Yeah, when we're just about.

Ahmed: When the police walk towards our direction, I don't wait.

Will: You just chip (leave)?

Ahmed: Yeah

Ahmed and Halimo highlight a complex situation for youth workers to negotiate. Considering the facts that (a) neighbourhood values promoted the resolution of local issues *without* police; (b) the police themselves did very little, in terms of practice, that contradicted their poor reputation; (c) youth workers/volunteers often had particularly negative experiences with, and opinions of the police; and (d) service users respected honesty and authenticity, over anything else in the advice they sought from youth workers/volunteers, workers and volunteers were considerably limited in their abilities to address divisions between the youth services and the local authorities. In fact, despite the workers best intentions, the observed relationships generally perpetuated these divisions. As Cooper (2011) has suggested, this dynamic, framed by the contemporary restraints imposed by *Positive for Youth* (2010) budget cuts, contributes to the already restricted outlooks of service users, through uncritical youth work practice.

## Conclusion

Whilst most practitioners would agree that relationships based on mutual trust and respect, are the foundation of youth work, the data presented in this chapter has critically explored their productive potentials. From this discussion, the picture that emerges is multifaceted. Youth work itself is a contested field, attracting a broad range of practitioners and enthusiasts (Jeffs and Smith, 1987). The youth work practice that this research explores was also centrally situated within the tensions and politics that stemmed from the contemporary austerity measures imposed by national government (CO & DfE, 2010). Unsurprisingly, decisions on the services that the clubs should deliver were consistently subject to debate, both within and outside the staff teams given the scarce resources. A key issue underlying the debates between workers, volunteers and managerial staff, on the delivery of local provision reflected the workers'/volunteers' understanding of the power dynamics underlying the youth work relationships. The service user's rights to disengage significantly impacted workers'/volunteers' opinions on how the youth clubs ought to be managed. More often than not, these opinions were formed around the provision of a social space that was conducive to the development of informal voluntary relationships.

The chapter has displayed the emphasis workers and volunteers placed on locality, in terms of their capacities to develop relationships that enabled informal dialogues with young people. Both locality and informality were shown to have been interdependent factors informing youth workers'/volunteers' capacities to develop relationships with young people: ideas that were manifested in local models of the 'right' and 'wrong' type of workers.

However, the analysis presented in this chapter has also questioned the capacity of the observed youth work relationships, in terms of their ability to expand the outlook of service users, beyond the confines of their symbolic community boundaries (Cohen, 1985; Cooper, 2011). The limitations of both locality and informality have been illustrated in terms of the difficulties some of the workers and volunteers faced challenging the opinions and behaviours of service users. In some cases, the friendships between service users and staff made it very difficult for workers and volunteers to demarcate their personal and professional identities (Crimmens *et al*, 2004). In this respect, the dynamics that clearly facilitated voluntary, informal relationships also restricted the professional capacities of the local workers: a contradiction embedded within the Coalition government's responsabilisation of local volunteers. This was particularly the case in an economic environment where the training needed to negotiate these issues was beyond the financial reach of the managerial staff. The picture that emerges is one of choices within constraints. The clubs did their best to provide a regular service that was inviting enough for young people to voluntarily engage

with. In fact, even the continued existence of the clubs lie as testament to the efforts of the staff involved in this research. However, if the 'social education' that happens within these clubs is to effectively broaden the outlooks and aspirations of the local service users, more training is needed to support the local workers that struggle to balance the highly complex role that youth workers are rarely given credit for.

The next chapter addresses one of the key stressors fuelling the local debates surrounding youth provision. By focusing on the nature of contemporary funding agendas, this chapter will explore the contemporary political occupation with 'risk prevention', illustrating the implication of local youth services within political 'risk labelling' processes.

## Chapter 6

### Creating communities of risk

The extent to which racialised risk discourses characterised dominant local understandings of Maple and Meadow constituted a prominent issue within the opening chapters of this thesis. Throughout the data collection process, youth workers and young people consistently shared their frustrations concerning the perceived associations between Maple, Meadow and risk. In particular, both places were known for the presence of Somali 'gangs'. They were also politically recognised as 'high risk' areas and subject to Home Office visits that aimed to develop discourses between youth workers, local residents and policy makers, in order to tackle this perceived problem. However, these visits were often referred to as counterproductive, in that they contributed to the political and racialised framing of Maple and Meadow along the lines of risk. Youth workers also voiced their concerns regarding the detrimental impacts risk labelling processes could have on the behaviour of local young people. In response to these concerns, this chapter covers three key topics, risk labelling, its relevance to youth provision and its influence on the behaviours of the young people involved in this research.

The chapter is divided into three substantive sections. The first section provides some examples of risk labelling. Here the youth workers' reflections on local media representations of Maple and Meadow are drawn upon in order to illustrate the nature of risk labelling. Following that, the chapter provides an illustration of the contemporary political context situating Maple and Meadow within a racialised risk discourse. This section illustrates the political risk prevention agenda, the policy response and the ways in which the local youth services were implicated within it. Finally, the chapter considers the impacts of these risk prevention agendas 'on the ground', particularly in terms of surveillance. Here the voices of the young people illustrate the ways in which contemporary risk prevention agendas contributed to their recognition of being positioned within a labelling process that drew on the intersection of race, religion, class and place, under the heading of risk.

#### **Risky areas: media representations of Maple and Meadow**

'Gang culture', 'gang warfare', 'postcode gangs', 'hail of bullets', 'postcode wars', 'gang war', 'gangland execution', 'drugs 'turf war'' and 'gangland turf war' were all phrases used by local and national newspapers to describe the *state of things*, following the murder of a 22 year old African Caribbean man in Maple, and later, a 24 year old Somali man in Meadow - incidences that were seemingly unconnected and over two years apart (Armstrong, 2009; Daily Mirror, 2009;



Lewis, 2009; The Times, 2009; Townsend, 2009; Mulchrone, 2010; Forgefield Press, 2011a; 2011b). Importantly, these events occurred within the same timeframe as already widespread national media reporting concerning 'postcode gangs', disproportionately representing violent black on black crime within a context of wider social concerns regarding 'failed multiculturalism'. Youth, specifically ethnic minority and Muslim youth, were at the height of social and political sensitisation during the time of this research, communicated through the image of the 'gang' (Alexander, 2000).

During interviews residents consistently referred to their areas as stigmatised, particularly in terms of 'Somali gangs', an image that was concurrent with the dominant media focus on British Muslim youths (Alexander, 2000). Issues to do with violence and drugs were most often discussed in relation to this observation. As Royce, a senior Maple forum worker at the time of the research illustrated:

Royce: Urm, I think the journalists are lazy. They take snapshots of the worst incidences and blow them out of proportion. The stats don't stack up to their perceptions. So for instance in the past five years there's been probably 2 murders, ok there's a lot of assaults but that comes with every council estate. That comes with any area that has poverty ingrained in it. Erm, I think when you look at it, it doesn't have as many issues as other areas like drinking alcohol and stuff like that. They're down to a minimum and that's really surprising to say that it's an inner city kind of area... Erm, the media come in off the back of certain research papers from people that are really angry. The first negative article I saw of Maple, it was from a reporter who, in the past, had been a heroin addict. He'd obviously been knowledgeable of the drug dealers on Maple and not had a good experience of them. So once he cleaned himself up, got himself back into a position where, of power i.e. as a journalist, he actually wrote a really damning article about the situation whilst kind of washing away his own part in the mix of it. If he wasn't hooked on heroin and had to see the people, would he have had them experiences in Maple? That's my question. I'm not saying that Maple is really a nice place, you know, there are certain parts of Maple that you wouldn't really wanna walk down at night without knowing somebody, but at the same time, that's not the whole of Maple, it's only a small pocket of it. If you know where the pockets are like any other area you stay away from it you know? The bad lads have got to hang around somewhere, you nah mean? But they're not everywhere, you know where to circumvent and stuff, so for me the media perception is not a truthful one, it stereotypes the rest of the community that get on with normal everyday life in a peaceful manner, and in a respectful way.

Royce's comments introduce three relevant themes. Initially, his tone is one of frustration. Here the local media are blamed for disproportionately reporting

negative issues within the Maple area, particularly those concerning violence and drugs. This is an opinion that was unanimously shared across the sample of youth workers and young people involved in this research. Secondly, Royce alludes to the issue of power. Through recounting his tale of the heroin addict turned 'moral entrepreneur' Royce articulates the hierarchical power dynamic between the Maple residents and institutions like the local Media (Becker, 1963). This is an observation that is supported by classic writing on the social construction of deviance and deviancy amplification (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1972). Indeed, on discussing the conditions by which reactions to deviance can influence rule creation and wider control cultures, Cohen (1972) explicitly recognised the significance of power, or access to 'powerful institutions such as the mass media' (91). Local residents were widely frustrated by their inability to challenge what they viewed to be the dominant and disproportionately negative, racialised imagery presented by the media. In response to this, what Royce is careful to articulate within his comments is the reality of the situation in Maple. Here the notion of 'community' is adopted to illustrate a shared experience that contrasts the 'snapshots' reflected by the local press. In doing so, Royce draws on a depiction of mundane, 'normal everyday' life to contrast the negative risk representations, suggesting that the majority of residents are both peaceful and respectful in the way that they choose to go about their daily business. This failure, on behalf of the local media, to present a balanced account of life in Maple and Meadow was raised on a number of occasions by local youth workers, including Kel, a Yemeni worker from the Maple area:

Kel: I think, personally I think it's disgusting man, the way they (the media) do it. Because they make it out to be what it's not. It's like, I could tell you from personal experience, I've lived in that area, Maple all my life, it's just not that area. From a personal experience that's not what it is. It's not what the media write down. In relation to the trip where I went to Belfast<sup>3</sup>, it's what you read in the paper ain't true. We went and spoke to them people and they told us what it was really like. And it's nothing like what the media says it is. So I think... The media, they have to do it in a way don't they, to generate that...

Will: They need to sell papers.

Kel: Yeah to sell papers and to make people think: 'Oh right that's a bad area, I'm not going to go to that area because of this, that and that.' But their missing out the positive points, they're bringing up all the negative points, but where's the positive points? There's no positive points. So all the other people that have no experience of that area just find out about

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<sup>3</sup> At this point, Kel is referring to a conflict awareness trip organised by the Maple Youth Forum that involved a number of local youth workers and volunteers travelling to Northern Ireland to share experiences with youth workers from Belfast.

the negative points like the shootings and the gang violence, but they don't know about the strong community, the people. You know what I mean? They don't know, it's just media, they like to make a lot of things up.

Like Royce, Kel draws on the notion of 'community' to articulate an image that contrasts with the negative representation reflected in the local media. Illustrated in these responses, is the ways in which imagined notions of community (Anderson, 1999) were incorporated by residents as a defensive response to negative risk profiling. From this, it can be reasonably suggested that the negative representation of Maple and Meadow in the local press facilitated the strengthening of individuals' imagined symbolic community boundaries (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006). This example also illustrates the contextual nature of respondents' interpretations of community. Hence, in responding to risk profiling, this harmonious notion of community was often articulated, whilst contrastingly, within community meetings the highly contested nature of local debates meant any sense of harmony very quickly dissipated.

Additionally, although many of the youth workers regularly articulated 'imagined' and idealised notions of community in response to negative representations, others also drew on empirical examples of positive community programs, which the media consistently failed to deem newsworthy. As Sean, a mixed race youth worker who practiced in Maple and Meadow illustrates:

Sean: Like for example, say the feud with Meadow and Maple and the media, that has been something that's been on-going for like the past 20 odd years. And that will always be tarnished in the media as 'these two areas have been bad'. But yet projects like ourselves and other projects that's good and that's part of the community never really get praised. It's always in the background and it's always the knife crime and the deaths that are always at the forefront of Maple and Meadow's reputation, and I just think that the media could help if it tried to shed light on some goodness of what actually happens.

Will: Erm, so in terms of what's underreported, what sorts of things do you see happening within the community that have a positive impact on the behaviours of young people?

Sean: Erm, positive things. Well like football sessions for example, I think football sessions are a prime example of straying kids away from their day-to-day or hourly activities when they're out on the street. We've got kids that come down to the football session. Boom. As soon as they're in the session that's it. They ain't thinking about nothing else. For that couple of hours they're focused on football, they're having a laugh, they're

getting on with people that perhaps they wouldn't really be getting on with out of the session.

Sean's comments are reflective of a unanimously held frustration, amongst the youth workers, concerning the lack of recognition received for service delivery. As Sean highlights, the youth services available in Maple and Meadow provided a well utilised opportunity for young people to enjoy themselves, avoid the risks of the street and interact with others who they might not otherwise have met. Indeed, the facilitation of such an environment reflected the practical operationalization of the 'community cohesion' agendas that youth work practitioners are increasingly encouraged to carry out (Thomas, 2011). It is no wonder then, that this disproportionately negative media coverage frustrated those who were working tirelessly towards reducing the risk of grievances between ethnic groups within and around the local areas. A further example of the frustrations youth workers held concerning the absence of positive media coverage was raised by Sally, a white youth worker from the Maple area:

Sally: I think there's a lot of community spirit in this area but I think there's a lot of people who are willing to do things, and to do things that are underreported. I mean, the prime example is the Homework Club. It's got to be one of the most thriving homework clubs there is but nobody knows about it.

The Maple Homework Club constitutes a significant case in point. As previously mentioned, this was a service that was consistently oversubscribed. The club delivered one-on-one homework support, the use of free computers and printing facilities, yet only local knowledge of this service seemed to exist. That is, despite the fact that the user group utilising the service seriously undermined any of the racialised stigmas inscribed on the area concerning the perceived risk of Somali 'gangs'. What is represented in this, is the propensity of the media to contribute to the areas risk reputations through selective reporting. This was an opinion voiced by Yusuf, a senior youth worker in the Meadow area:

Yusuf: Ok well, you see the thing with the media now, when you're dealing with the media one thing you have to understand is that the media, they're after sensation. You know, erm the ordinary mundane stuff never makes it in the media, you know what makes it in the media is when something terrible happens. Sadly you know when things do happen, then this is what is highlighted in the media, so people who live outside the area might get a different perception of what the reality is in a certain area. The majority of young people that I see out there in the area are good, law abiding, good young people. You know, who want to get on. Most of them are doing well in school, you know they are educated, they're looking for jobs, they're doing what you would expect young people to do. But in every area there's always a minority you know, that

will be involved in certain activities that might tarnish the reputation of an area. Unfortunately this is what the media focuses on, and that really has a bad repercussion on the way people might view an area, young people in that area then become stigmatised. Because you live in that area then obviously you must be involved in drugs, you must be involved in gangs, you become you know stigmatised, and then people start to profile you... I think erm, you know if you're portrayed in the media as being an area where, young people in that area are just, involved in criminal activities for example, then what you find is that some young people will play into that, you know, especially those who are, you know, at risk and are involved in that kind of activity. But the point that I'm making is that the vast majority of the people in those areas are not involved in those sorts of things but they become stigmatised along with everyone else.

Yusuf's sophisticated articulation of the role the media played in labelling along the lines of risk illustrates the extent to which this risk labelling constituted a frame encompassing existing racialised discourses surrounding religion, class, and place. This facilitated a situation whereby discussions of incidents like mugging could 'be racialised in a moment through the selective representation of the street, the mosque' and the local urban context (Keith, 2002:330). What this suggests is that the risk status inscribed onto these areas came to represent a much broader intersection of the existing racialised stigmas associated with these already marginalised groups and spaces.

### **The local impacts of 'risk labelling'**

A key concern amongst the senior youth workers in this research was the extent to which labelling processes bled into the organisation of youth club funding. For example, Royce considered the unsustainable nature of reactionary funding. That is, the local government funding offered to the Maple community forum in response to incidents like the shootings that gained high profile media attention:

Royce: Um, the services that are given to them are not sustainable. So what you'll find is the government, local politicians will put in piecemeal to try and solve problems that need to be thought out and developed, then delivered, to solve the problem. Instead you'll get £20,000 thrown at the police, £20,000 thrown at the community, that will last for five minutes and then we go back to square one.

One of the key issues facing youth workers at an organisational level was the sporadic nature of available funding. As Royce highlighted, the 'knee jerk' funding reactions offered by the local government in response to high profile incidences consistently failed to 'solve' problems. For Royce, these 'piecemeal' government responses were far more reflective of an attempt to 'keep face' in

the light of national risk prevention agendas, than to develop longitudinal strategies that involved working with local service providers.

Indeed, the contemporary prominence of risk prevention agendas (Home Office, 2011a; DCLG, 2012a) within the government framing of youth provision had significant implications for the organisation of these local youth services. This is a relationship that gained amplified political significance after the summer of 2011, which saw rioting in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham (Briggs, 2012). Following these riots, in December 2011, the Prime Minister David Cameron unveiled a £448 million plan to turn 'around the lives of 120,000 problem families' (Wintour, 2011). The aim of this proposal was to provide cash incentives for local councils that could 'prove' (quantifiably) that their interventions had secured preventative change around issues such as 'gangs', youth violence and truancy. This proposal also marked the beginning of the Home Office commitment to identify and manage the areas most 'at risk' of gang and youth violence, to tackle the 'scourge of gang culture' (Home Office, 2011a). These responses reflected the political rhetoric adopted by the Coalition government, that placed responsibility for the riots at the feet of already marginalised, disadvantaged and depoliticised groups, who lacked a 'universal political narrative' that could make 'causal and contextual sense of their own shared suffering' (Treadwell *et al*, 2012:3).

Significantly, within a context of severe austerity based cuts, these government commitments did provide some opportunities for local youth service funding. However, it is the case, that this funding was intrinsically linked to the continued stigmatisation of areas along the lines of 'risk' (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008; Turnbull and Spence, 2011, Smithson *et al*, 2013). This is because successfully acquiring funding meant service organisers had to adopt language that 'played into' the notion of their areas as 'risky'. This created a situation that implicated the youth services within risk labelling processes, because their funding bids necessarily amplified the extent of the area's 'problems' in order to remain competitive. Successfully acquiring funding, therefore, contributed to the political recognition of areas as in need of 'risk intervention', due to the 'problem' of local youths. As Cooper (2011) suggests, such government priorities, 'increasingly target young people deemed at risk of social exclusion as a result of their alleged risky behaviour' (14). Critically, it is the adoption of this:

... 'risk talk' that enables the control agencies to apportion and attribute 'blame' upon the research communities 'at risk' or on the periphery of gang problems and hence necessitate criminal justice intervention (Smithson *et al*, 2013:125).

So, to some extent the contemporary risk prevention agenda can be seen as a funding trap contributing to the stigmatisation of communities and providing justification 'for pre-emptive surveillance and control in the lives of children and young people' (Turnbull and Spence, 2011:940). As suggested by Turnbull and Spence (2011), this government's pre-occupation with 'risk' can be seen as leading to the framing of already marginalised young people as 'permanent suspects'. Indeed, for most of the young people involved in this research, their 'risk status' framed the ways in which their ethnic and religious identities positioned them within existing public and political discourses situating working class, Muslim youths as inherently 'deviant' and 'problematic' (Alexander, 2000). The perceived effects of this 'risk' labelling on local surveillance were articulated by three of the Somali respondents during the Meadow focus group. In the extract below Faizah, Mohammed and Abdillahi consider the actions of the local police during the time of the 2011 summer riots:

Faizah: Yeah they did go around in police vans taking pictures of people.

Will: In the city?

All: Yeah

Will: Did they do that yeah?

Abdillahi: Yeah they came to our area

Mohammed: They were looking at the main areas that would probably start a riot, like I saw lots of police officers in Meadow and Maple.

Faizah: And Ashby (A neighbouring area).

Abdillahi: We played football and they were taking pictures. There was some undercover there too. The undercover were on the building, the flats taking pictures.

Will: What of you lot?

Abdillahi: Us playing football yeah.

Mohammed: So they know that if we started something they'd have our ID and all that so they could catch us if we kicked anything off.

Mohammed, Abdillahi and Faizah's comments illustrate the extent to which the measures of the police reflected their own framing as 'permanent suspects' (McAara and MacVie, 2005; Turnbull and Spence, 2011). Despite the fact there were no riots in the city where the research took place, this police surveillance reflected the assumed necessity of preventative measures. Again, what is

significant is the way in which this risk prevention agenda justified the surveillance of a group who were already stigmatised along the lines of race, religion, class and place. Significantly, the football match Adbillahi referred to was also part of a youth club session. This suggests that these respondents felt they were being targeting despite their engagement with the youth services. This was a situation that seriously frustrated local youth workers and had a significantly detrimental impact on the already fractious relationships between youth workers and the police.

Indeed, the young people's frustrations surrounding the disproportionately high levels of police presence in Maple and Meadow emerged as a key theme from the focus group analysis. In the extract below, Hamlio, Ahmed and Killah articulate their feelings on the matter:

Halimo: Yeah the police are always around... They, the police think this area is so bad yeah, they've even made a little police box.

Killa: Yeah

Halimo: Near costcutter

Will: And what's that for people to write reports down on?

Halimo: For people to write like, and like for police. For the police just to have an excuse yeah, to be in the area, because they say 'Ah we've got a little post box thing and we check the mails and that'. But it's a lie.

Halimo's reflections on the police box are particularly illustrative. Initially, his comments reflect an awareness of the extent to which the area was broadly assumed to be risky or 'bad'. This is followed by his assumption that over and above offering a space to report crime, the police box provided local officers with an excuse to 'be in the area' as a means of surveillance. Whether or not Halimo's reflections hold any empirical weight, they certainly represent a sense of dissatisfaction with the *perceived* impact of the dominant associations between Maple and 'risk' on levels of local surveillance and policing. This is a feeling that was unanimously shared across the sample and was acted out by respondents in their avoidance of the police:

Ahmed: When the police walk towards our direction, I don't wait.

Will: You just chip (leave)?

Ahmed: Yeah

Will: Why?



Halimo: Because we know yeah, we will get either stopped or stopped and searched.

Ahmed: They try to take out names. For example if something happened in the area, and we're standing around, then we'll get caught for it. They're gonna want out names.

Will: So they just expect that you'll be involved in stuff like that?

Ahmed: So I chip (leave).

Ahmed and Halimo's interpretation of any police contact as negative reflects a recognition of their 'suspect' status, which was informed by the association of their areas with risk. This recognition is concurrent with existing criminological research that considers the ways in which local police exercise their discretion in targeting labelled, 'suspect' individuals (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005). Mcara and Mcvie's (2005) analysis of survey data from Scotland, suggested that the police disproportionately directed their attention towards working class youths. Furthermore, they suggested that once individuals had come under the purview of the police, they became a part of a permanent suspect population. This process appeared to 'suck young people into a spiral of amplified contact *regardless* of whether they continue(d) to be involved in serious levels of offending' (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005:9). Significant correlations were also observed between rates of contact and later offending. This suggested that disproportionate engagement with the police at an early age was associated with criminality later in life.

However, on discussing police practice, it is also important not to neglect the role of young people's agency within their disproportionately regular police contact. Indeed, Ahmed and Halimo's response to the prospect of police contact clearly reflected their willingness to consciously behave in a way that perpetuated their suspect status. This behaviour should be understood as both reflective of a genuine desire to *avoid* police contact, and conversely, a means of *sustaining* police contact for the purpose of entertainment. That is, despite this entertainment directly contributing to both the young peoples' suspect status and the areas risk status in the eyes of the local authorities (Back, 2007). Significantly, it was also the case that disproportionate levels of police surveillance, challenged the young people's ability to present more congenial identities to family members. As Mohammed illustrates:

Mohammed: The police just judge you for what area you're from. For instance like if (pause) Meadow doesn't have like a good reputation does it. I mean lots of crime and all that lot happen, so they'll just look down at you. You know, like they start searching young kids for..

Abdillahi: For no reason

Mohammed: For no reason, when instead of that they could actually go and prevent something that's major happening.

(...)

Mohammed: And so when your aunties walk past they think you're not a good child are you, because you're getting searched for no reason, and you know you don't have anything on you. If for instance your mum, your auntie, your grandma, uncle comes and walks past they will think, he's not a good kid.

Mohammed's comments point towards the layering of surveillance that young people were subject to in Maple and Meadow. For the Muslim respondents in particular, police surveillance was coupled with informal networks of familial surveillance. The significance of these networks reflected the importance that these respondents placed on maintaining a positive identity in the eyes of their community elders (Bradby, 2007). Thus, for them, their religious identification amplified the significance of police targeting in terms of the challenges it posed to their 'keeping face' within the local Muslim community. Additionally, the regularity with which the young people involved in this research came into contact with the police, fuelled the suspicions of local Muslim parents concerning the role of the youth services. Ultimately, what emerged from this dynamic was a state of mutual suspicion between local families, youth workers, young people and the police. What this highlights overall, is the damaging impact of risk labelling and contemporary risk prevention agendas in the context of already contested, multicultural communities.

### **Responding to risk labelling**

A particular concern for the youth workers involved in this research emerged around the damaging implications of these risk labelling processes for the behaviours of young people. Indeed, it was regularly inferred that the disproportionately negative media representations of Maple and Meadow could influence the behaviours of young people through the facilitation of personal 'risk reputations' (Green *et al*, 2010). As Sean suggests:

Sean: I think once, once the kids know that their areas are portrayed as ghettoized areas the kids automatically feel like they've got that reputation, straight away. This means that they can use that to their advantage, they can be like 'yeah we're from Meadow, we're from Maple'. It automatically makes them 'ghetto' or bad. So immediately we've got the reputation of being from a bad area, what can we do with it? We'll form a gang, we'll be violent, we'll go out, we'll beat people up. But if that area wasn't already tarnished with a bad representation I don't think the kids would be as pro ghetto as they are.

Will: Hmm, so it's almost like there into it?

Sean: Yeah, it's sort of, it's like... I don't know because when I was younger and I was growing up in this area, back then it was tarnished as a ghetto area, and we had elders in the area at the time that was like our age obviously, now. They was the hard men and the ghetto kids of the area, and we were just little youth, 13, 14 and even then we thought 'Rah we live in Meadow, it's a ghetto area, why don't we just start acting ghetto'. I think getting over that is, is hard when you're surrounded by friends that are all wanting to do the same thing and be part of that same clan, and that's why it took me forever to get away from it (laughs). But you've got to be strong minded to be able to do it.

The following remarks from Kel's interview support Sean's comments:

Kel: Yeah of course. You can see it, if a newspaper said this area is known for gang violence, these young people are gonna straight away think 'Yeah we've got reputation' straight away. 'Our area's been mentioned in the papers for gang violence' so that means that's it, 'we are what we are, and this is what we are and this is what we wanna do'. Straight away. Media don't realise yeah, how easily they can change people's points of view. You know I don't think it's fair, and it's never gonna change.

Both Sean and Kel's comments display a clear sense of the extent to which local media representations could influence the way young people identified as being problematic or 'risky'. The nature of these comments also appears to suggest that young people responded directly to negative representation through the internalisation of these 'risk labels'. However, significantly when the young people discussed these issues themselves, a much more complex process of expression and identification immersed. The following comments are taken from the Maple focus group:

Will: So first of all, tell me about the area that you live in.

Halimo: Maple.. it's a bad boy area!

Will: What do you mean?

Halimo: (Adopts a comedic voice) It's very scary.

Will: Be real though, because it's not that scary is it?

Killa: Nah it's because if you're a part of us, then, you get me.. (shouts in a gruff voice) yeeeeaaaahhh (everybody laughs).

Halimo: Some people feel intimidated innit.

In their description of Maple, Halimo and Killah adopt the use of comedic voices and sarcasm to play on the negative, racialised stereotypes inscribed upon it. Interestingly this use of sarcasm characterised a substantial amount of the conversations within this focus group, reflecting a real discontinuity between the ways in which these young people identified with each other and assumed others identified with them. This suggests that although the young people were aware of their stigmatised positioning, this was not something they considered to be a valid reflection. Continuing directly from the above Halimo elaborates:

Halimo: (Theatrical voice) And when they hear Maple in the news they get very angry because..

Killah: Because they pay tax for these youth clubs where we're just throwing away the opportunity instead of taking it with two hands (everybody laughs).

A number of points deserve analytical attention in relation to this extract. Initially Halimo's use of the term 'they' bears particular significance. Here, without referring directly to a specific group, Halimo highlights a clear sense of identification with his own peers, through the disassociation of 'outsiders' referred to as 'them'. 'They' are 'outsiders', probably people who aren't from Maple, and as Killah elaborates 'they pay tax' (Becker, 1963). These comments evoke the image of a clear distinction between the life worlds of the young people in Maple and the wider urban population. Killah's elaboration of Halimo's statement is also meaningful. This sarcastic description of the ways in which he and his peers throw away the opportunities provided to them by the youth services reflect his interpretation of their perception by 'outsiders'. The reality of the situation was that all of the young people involved in this focus group were active members of the club who, for the most part, engaged with all of the opportunities available to them. This response not only displays a tension between internal and external identification, in terms of Halimo and Killah's perception of their labelled positioning, it also displays an informed connection between processes of labelling and wider structural issues concerning economics and politics. Indeed, a basic understanding of both politics and economics is required in order to recognise that tax payers might be angry about their money contributing to government funded youth projects that allegedly fail to bear fruit. Consequently, Halimo and Killah's comments reflect a complex and sophisticated understanding within which they recognise the process of being stereotyped, display solidarity through sarcastically confirming the labels and respond, by generalising 'outsiders' as misinformed and overtly judgmental. The following extract illustrates this response:

Killah: It's very frustrating when people stereotype about situations like this.

Ahmed: And they get scared when we walk in big groups.

Halimo: They're intimidated.

Killa: It's just like, because we're a big family (shouts some Arabic words, everybody laughs)

Will: So if you are in a big group do you find people are odd with you?

Halimo: (Calming everybody down) Yo yo yo yo real talk real talk, yeah people always try walking the other way because they think oh we're trouble makers

Killa: They think we're gonna rob them

Halimo: Yeah innit

Shirwaz: But we're not trouble makers

Will: Does that bother you?

Ahmed: What?

Halimo: Yeah it kinda does bother me because, how come... You can't judge a book by its cover. You have to judge everybody when you know them.

Will: So how close are these perceptions to your ideas of what goes on?

Buzz: Gangs?

Shirwaz: Just because we're in groups doesn't mean we're looking for fights.

Killa's theatrical use of Arabic is of particular importance here. Initially, these words represent the genuine significance of shared Muslim identity for the predominantly Somali sample contributing to this focus group. Yet, conversely this use of Arabic also reflects a deep sarcasm that aims to challenge the homogenising, racialised narratives 'which define what it means to be British and Muslim' (Valentine and Sporton, 2009:736). What is reflected in this is a critical awareness, on behalf of the participants, of their central positioning within a labelling process that draws on the common sense intersection of class, race, religion, gender and place (Hall *et al*, 2013), through the broader association with risk. This is pertinently illustrated in the respondents' latter comments which point towards the symbolic transformation of groups into Muslim 'gangs' (Alexander, 2000).

Thus, concerning the youth workers' comments (referenced above), for these young people it was certainly not the case that their behaviours reflected an unconscious internalisation of the labels inscribed on their areas. Instead, what the data highlights is an interpretation of those labels, which bred an emotive sense of frustration that was managed through the playful articulation of stereotypes. Unfortunately however, despite the inaccuracies of the social and political discourses that contributed to the stigmatisation these young people faced, there was a clear sense amongst them that this was a situation that was unlikely to change. This continuity of experience is supported by the aforementioned marrying of these racialised risk discourses with local youth service funding and intensified levels of surveillance.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the issue of 'risk labelling' in Maple and Meadow. The discussion has illustrated the framing of localised experiences within a broader socio-political context. A key recognition, has been the extent to which the political response to the contemporary risk discourse has created a scenario that simultaneously implicated the local youth services and framed the inscription of existing stigmas concerning race, religion, class and place (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008; Turnbull and Spence, 2011; Hall *et al*, 2013; Smithson *et al*, 2013). Of particular concern here, is the consistency of these research findings with existing studies that point towards the damaging nature of contemporary 'risk prevention' agendas (Armstrong 2004; France, 2008; Smithson *et al*, 2013). Clearly, for the young people in this research, the youth provision accessed was significant in terms of providing a space to spend time, socialise and do homework. Yet, the contemporary political framing of these services with preventative initiatives contributed to the young people's recognition of stigma along the lines of 'risk'. Their perceptions of disproportionately high levels of local surveillance and policing only compounded this recognition. Ultimately, what this suggests is that the youth services served a clear purpose, but the functionality of that purpose was challenged by the funding agendas service organisers were reliant upon. In order for these spaces to continue effectively providing an environment that is conducive to the management of risk and the development of links between the local community and other groups, a move away from negatively loaded 'risk prevention' agendas will be necessary. This will require an increased recognition, at policy level, of the damaging implications of risk prevention agendas and the effects that they can have on the everyday lives of disadvantaged minority youths.

The following chapter will critically develop this discussion, by expanding on the ways in which everyday 'risk' was interpreted and negotiated by the youth workers and young people working in the areas these 'risk labels' were inscribed

upon. In doing so, it will address one of the key criticisms surrounding the contemporary governmental pre occupation with 'risk management'; its failure to consider the subjective nature of young people's interpretations of risk.

## Chapter 7

### Exploring risk epistemologies

The discussion in the previous chapter introduced the concept of 'risk labelling'. This highlighted some of the problematic associations between political conceptualisations of risk and disadvantaged youth in contemporary Britain (Bunton *et al*, 2004; Winow and Hall, 2006; France, 2008; Merryweather, 2010; Turnbull and Spence, 2011). Excluding one or two examples (Armstrong, 2004; Mayock, 2005), much of the existing research that focuses on political risk discourse in the context of youth fails to consider young people's subjective risk epistemologies. Namely, the way in which young people interpret and experience risk in their own lives. This chapter draws on empirical data to document the ways in which everyday risks were interpreted, experienced and avoided by the youth workers and young people in Maple and Meadow. In doing so, it considers the ways in which respondents viewed risks in their own lives, in order 'to build an understanding of the social interactions and cultural meanings relevant' to their experiences (Armstrong, 2006:273). Overall, the discussion provides an integrated analysis of the complex and nuanced factors influencing young people's interpretation of 'risk behaviours', alongside the opinions of the youth workers engaging with them.

The chapter is divided into three substantive sections. The first section explores the local issue of drug dealing, something that was raised independently by all of the respondents. This is split into three parts. Initially, the youth workers' comments on the allures of drug dealing for local young people are considered. Drawing on the comments of the young people themselves, the discussion then goes on to address their opinions of drug dealing particularly in terms of the acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In order to theoretically situate these respondents' comments, this discussion draws from Bourdieu's (1986) *The Forms of Capital*, which positions 'social capital' as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources' linked to group membership (246). As such, social capital is approached as a form of capital that is achieved through the establishment and reproduction of social relationships. Following that, an analysis of the value young people placed on the acquisition of consumer goods is provided. This situates the acquisition of 'economic capital' (Bourdieu, 1986), through drug dealing, within the daily pressures young people faced achieving levels of social capital and 'respect', via the consumption of particular goods (Goffman, 1959; Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; Argyle, 1988; Harrison, 2009; Treadwell *et al*, 2013). The second section of this chapter goes on to discuss the issue of territoriality. Drawing on the arguments put forward in chapter four, this section highlights the relevance of imagined community boundaries (Cohen, 1985; Anderson,



2006) in young peoples' every day conceptualisation of risk. Section three develops the analyses outlined above by considering the role of the local youth services in providing a space for young people to avoid the risks associated with drug dealing and territorial behaviour (Kintrea *et al*, 2008). Overall this builds on the previous chapter, by considering the respondents' subjective interpretation, management and symbolic construction of 'risk' (Armstrong, 2006). In doing so the data presented critically engages with the socio-political discourses that paint a homogenous picture of marginalised communities along the lines of 'risk'.

### **Drug dealing and designer clothes**

The industrial decline in the late 1980's had a profound and lasting effect on the lived experiences of individuals in contemporary Britain (Winlow and Hall, 2006). This development not only saw a shift in available employment opportunities, but also a conceptual change in the way that individuals understand the labour market. For those entering the labour market in contemporary society, the appeal of 'life-long employment inside a company... whose life-span stretched' well beyond theirs has now long been replaced by an overbearing sense of fluidity and uncertainty (Bauman, 2000:146). Particularly for young people, jobs are likely to be transitory, providing one is fortunate and flexible enough to actually secure a position, 'long-term security is not on offer' (Batsleer, 2010:159). 'Those who are... not flexible and not mobile, retain an affinity with local places and therefore bear disproportionately the costs in terms of the riskiness and precariousness of living in this new world' (Batsleer, 2010:158). Unsurprisingly, this precariousness is amplified considerably amongst disadvantaged communities in post-industrial cities, where opportunities are sparse (Thomas, 2011). As low levels of education limit the opportunities of many to menial, low paid work, for some the prospect of such work is less desirable than the acquisition of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) via alternative means. Consequently, high levels of unemployment, economic insecurity and the limited 'horizons and opportunities available for socially excluded young people' have contributed to cultures whereby economic capital is sometimes gained via opportunistic means (Thomas, 2011:118). 'In the absence of long-term security, 'instant gratification' looks enticingly like a reasonable strategy' (Bauman, 2000:162). Indeed, during our interview, Yusuf (a senior worker in the Meadow club) highlighted the illegitimate acquisition of economic capital as a causal factor in the adoption of problematic risk behaviours for young people:

Yusuf: What are the pull factors? Well easy money, you know? Erm, that's one, erm, company, you know, that's another, bad company not the right company. Erm, poor education which I've said, that is something that leaves them vulnerable, leaves them exposed. Erm you know and I guess a

young person not being educated, not having a job, not having any training, you know not any prospects at all.

As Yusuf highlights, the limited prospects arising from poor academic achievement and unemployment had a considerable impact on the aspirations and general outlook of local young people (Smithson *et al*, 2013). This is illustrated in the following extract from Halimo and Killa, who both took part in the Maple focus group:

Halimo: Young generations, when they grow up they don't have nothing to do. There's no jobs and there's like, nothing for us to do when we're older so they just think, why are they moving up the tax and everything so, decrease the tax and everything.

Will: When you say growing up having nothing to do, do you mean not having jobs?

Halimo: No jobs, no nothing.

Killa: It's like, see Labour, they dashed out so much benefits that everyone was cool yeah, until Lib Dems and Conservatives come and then bang! Cuts cuts cuts cuts cuts.

These comments highlight the pessimism shared by the young people engaged in this research. Halimo clearly voices his understanding of the limited opportunities available to him and his peers within the contemporary economic and political climate. Killa goes on to develop Halimo's comments, comparing contemporary austerity measures to the more generous benefit system enjoyed under the previous Labour government. Together, they articulate a political consciousness that informs the bleak outlook of their adult futures. Previous research has suggested that such stark realisations of social exclusion might well inform the social construction of risk for young people, alongside the types of risks young people are willing to take (Armstrong, 2004). Indeed, if legitimate employment is not considered a possible option, then alternatives could become all the more viable. As Yusuf went on to suggest:

Yusuf: You know and then somebody comes along and says: 'Well, you man, you can make £50 a night' you know. 'Sell this or sell that'. You know it can seem very tempting for a young person, you know, so those are the kind of pulls that pull them in.

Drug dealing or 'shotting' was a key concern for all the youth workers involved in this research. This was tied to the workers' awareness of the plethora of avenues available to those who chose to engage with the drug market. As Royce illustrated:

Royce: Yeah there's khat, there's cannabis, there's crack cocaine, there's heroin, um it's the nature of the inner city population of this town. This town is overrun, well these areas are overrun by heroin users... but way less than some of the Caucasian areas that I've worked in.

The fact that Royce carefully depicts Maple as less problematic than some of the Caucasian areas he had worked in is significant. This defensive response highlights Royce's frustrations with the negative racialised profiling that the area was often subjected to, particularly due to the perceived problem of Somali 'gangs'. Accounting for this, Royce rightly described Maple's drug problems as comparable to other disadvantaged inner city populations, regardless of race. However, in doing so he also compounded the salience of the local drugs issue. There was an active, lucrative market for young people to engage with should they choose to do so. What many of the youth workers observed in relation to this, was that service users often had close contacts via friends or family who were actively involved with illicit drugs, either via dealing or consumption, and this increased the chances of their engagement. Indeed for some, drugs were simply parts of family life. As Rose (a part time Maple youth worker at the time of the research) noted:

Rose: Growing up with your brothers being drug dealers... there's a couple of families that grow up with it being a family business. That's obviously a negative impact.

In fact, it was regularly suggested that those who were often exposed to illicit drug use were at the highest risk of becoming involved in drug dealing. This illustrates the extent to which regular exposure can impact on the equation of such behaviours with risk for young people, or at least the extent to which they might interpret and respond to risk. 'Risk' and 'danger' are indeed central features in the everyday lives of young people' (Green *et al*, 2010:110) and the integration of these features into individuals habitual routines surely normalises their conceptualisations of them. As Armstrong (2006) noted, for children growing up in areas with high levels of crime, 'risk management is part of daily life and therefore for the most part unconscious and unremarkable' (273). This is an issue that was raised by Flash, a senior Meadow club organiser at the time of the research:

Flash: There's no work, alright, and some of these kids, when I say there's no work, there's work out there but there's a lot of people unemployed. Erm, some of these kids, well some of these young people come from you know, all different environments. Some of the environments that they come from you know, there might be drug use. Just, you know, blatant drug use and if there's drugs there's usually drugs to follow. You know, some of these kids that we see, you know, when they come into the club we see them as they are, but when they go home it's a totally different

thing. Some people you know, if that's what they're used to seeing then it's nothing, you know because that's all they know.

Flash clearly articulates the extent to which regular exposure to illicit drugs could impact on young people's conceptualisations of them. These comments also gain support from classic sociological writings on the subject. Within Becker's (1963) seminal work, the argument is made that when conventional conceptions of 'deviant' behaviours become regarded as 'the uninformed views of outsiders' and are subsequently replaced with 'inside' views, acquired through experience', individuals feel more free to progress their deviant careers (Becker, 1963:78). This position confirms the traditional symbolic interactionist emphasis on the role of interaction in developing and maintaining individual interpretations of 'things' (Blumer, 1986). Thereby, the knowledge that the young people in Maple and Meadow naturally acquired through their interactions in the home and around the local area informed their interpretations of the risks of the drug market. These risks are illustrated in the following comments from Lesley, a Maple resident and Homework Club organiser:

Lesley: Drugs, I mean drugs yes, I know there are Somali youth on the flats who deal drugs and that's, and I know that there have been a lot of problems with African Caribbean kids and drugs in the past. Erm, and I know people who have lost their children. Not recently, the people I knew because their children were the same age as my kids, one lad was stabbed to death who we were quite close to, and it's tuff, it's horrible. He was a Somali kid.

Will: Yeah

Lesley: But yeah, some of the African Caribbean children I know and some of the white kids who were close to the African Caribbean children and got into... Another really close friend of mine, one of her sons has been on crack and stuff and had, he's been in prison and all sorts of things, and it can be hard to escape from a peer group and that's a problem.

Will: Absolutely yeah

Lesley's comments represent an adult's perspective of the risks of involvement in the local drug trade. Notably however, despite the nature of her recollections, she also recognises that the issues only affected a small proportion of the local residents:

Lesley: I think it's, I think there's a problem... But the amount of children and young people that actually get into severe violence is very small. It's just so horrible and that's why it becomes a focus.

These comments are useful in terms of understanding why, assuming that engaging in the drug market is calculated, a minority of young people still embarked on drug dealing as a means of earning money. Indeed, whilst the potential and grossly violent consequences of drug dealing were widely recognised within local discourse, the reality was that those who fell victim to serious, drug related violence were few and far between. The young people growing up in Maple and Meadow were privileged to a far more realistic and in-depth understanding of the likelihood of being physically injured or imprisoned through their involvement in drug dealing, at whatever level. Therefore, the knowledge young people were able to acquire about drugs, through their exposure and interactions with those they knew, impacted their assessments of the risks of selling drugs as a means of making money - the raw material necessary for acquiring both economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These observations are supported by contemporary sociological literature that considers young people's understandings of risk (Green *et al*, 2010). Gillien *et al* (2004) suggest that 'adolescents show a complex and subtle framing of risk-taking involving several thematic strands. These thematic strands include the perceived personal and social consequences of risk-taking (both positive and negative)' (p.52). This suggests that young people embark on a rational process of 'weighing up' certain behaviours against a broad landscape of pros and cons, before making informed decisions about whether or not to actually engage. Thus, in the context of some behaviour, the associated risks could be outweighed by the desirable benefits of making money and establishing social relationships.

For the young people in Maple and Meadow, the acquisition of economic capital was crucially important in terms of displaying status and social capital. A key means of communicating this status was via the medium of clothing or 'swagger' (Argyle, 1988; Bauman, 2000; Harrison, 2009; Miller, 2012). 'Status', was hereby intimately connected to displaying one's ability to consume. Indeed, for disadvantaged young people in contemporary Britain:

Consumerism's promise to elevate the subject above the everyday social world and compel others to look on in envy at the symbolic success of the self is rendered all the more attractive as its vivid, transformative ideal stands out against the grey background of marginalisation (Treadwell *et al*, 2013:9).

This is a phenomenon that has been widely recognised in previous sociological works. Elijah Anderson's (2000) ethnographic research with young people on decency and violence in inner city Philadelphia suggested that:

Physical appearance, including clothes, jewellery, and grooming, also plays an important part in how a person is viewed; to be respected, it is vital to have the right look (Anderson, 2000:73).

Anderson (2000) goes on to describe how having the wrong 'look' could easily result in the rejection of young people from certain cliques or peer groups. Similarly, for the young people involved in this research, their look, or 'swagger', was integrally linked to social acceptance. It was also the case that this acceptance was reflective of the significance of a particular stylised 'black' masculinity that was shared by the predominantly Somali respondents. Indeed, as Alexander's (1996) work on black masculinities suggests, community boundaries are 'both maintained and made more flexible through the use of symbolic boundary markers, such as dress' (p.56). The propensity for young Somalis to adopt this kind of stylised 'black masculinity' has also been noted within the work of Frosh *et al* (2002). Consequently, the importance that the young people 'attributed to the symbolism carried by consumer objects' (Treadwell *et al*, 2013:11) played a significant role in their interpretations of engaging in 'risky' behaviours that paid. Some confirmation for these observations emerged during the Maple focus group when the conversation turned to the reasons some of the local young people became involved in drug dealing:

Killa: Reputation.

Halimo: Yeah because people want rep.

Ahmed: Easy money, no not like dat. Selling drugs, easy money.

Will: That's the main thing do you think?

Ahmed: Yeah, it's just a paper chase. Everyone wants money.

Killa: You get me?

These comments articulate the dominant desire to successfully participate in the consumer economy in order to earn respect, as experienced by many of the young people involved in this research. Similarly, for Treadwell *et al's* (2013) 'interviewees, discarded and left to rot on marginalised housing estates, unable legitimately to acquire the lifestyle and symbolism validated by consumer culture yet subject to the ceaseless' advertising, all values reflected the 'power of money' (8). In a society where the ability to consume symbolically reflects one's ability to live a 'successful' life, it is perhaps no wonder that these young people stressed the importance of acquiring economic capital. The fact that these young people were also simultaneously disadvantaged along lines of race and social class significantly contributed to the barriers they faced acquiring these socially prescribed goals through legitimate means. So, in the perceived absence of opportunity, crime can constitute both 'a material and symbolic gain... revealing

how young people subvert their 'lot' in an attempt to find meaning from the otherwise mundane' (Armstrong, 2006:275).

Engaging in the risk of selling drugs allowed individuals to gain reputations facilitating the acquisition of both social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Green *et al* (2010) have gone as far as suggesting that some young people 'actively shape their social world through the development of identities enhanced by 'risk reputations' (113). From this perspective, behaviours like drug dealing can be seen as contributing directly to young people's processes of identification (Jenkins, 2008), through the formation of hyper masculine 'risk reputations' (Green *et al*, 2010). Indeed, reputations inscribe individuals with a level of status, allowing them to become well know, 'and, because they are well known, they are worthy of being known' (Bourdieu, 1986:52). Furthermore, as Anderson (2000) points out, being well turned out, having the 'right' clothes and shoes becomes synonymous with displaying popularity, wealth and social capital. This is something Jay, one of the regular attendees visiting cousins, commented on during the Maple focus group:

Killa: What's your gang called again?

Jay: My gang? Diamonds for life.

Halimo: Why did you call them that?

Jay: Because everyone thought like, diamonds, they show you're rich an' that. Like some of us wear Diadora shoes with diamonds around them.

Jay's rationale clearly illustrates the significance of displaying expensive belongings amongst his peers. Despite the fact that Jay and his cousins almost certainly realised that they were likely to 'always fall short of the spending power required to live the lifestyle that they are constantly told they want and feel they must have', the need to represent themselves as successfully engaging in the consumer economy was none the less intense (Treadwell *et al*, 2013:15). For marginalised individuals who emphasise the value of consumption, but are cut off from the opportunity to legitimately consume, this can only breed resentment and frustration. As Bauman (2011) argued:

The objects of desire, whose absence is most violently resented, are nowadays many and varied – and their numbers, as well as the temptation to have them grow by the day. And so grows the wrath, humiliation, spite and grudge aroused by *not* having them (n.p.).

These comments represent a line of thinking that came to the sociological fore in the wake of the 2011 summer riots (Treadwell *et al*, 2013). Substantiating this,

the prominence young people placed on the acquisition of expensive consumer items was further emphasised during our discussions on the riots:

Will: Do you think that if you were involved in that sort of thing (the riots) you'd actually be achieving anything?

Shirwaz: Free clothes, free shoes, free I pod, free CD's, free everything. But if you get caught, you've fucked it.

Will: Right so it's about getting stuff. Is it about getting stuff more than it's about showing the government a message?

Halimo: Yeah

Ahmed: Yeah, I'd rob Size (trainer shop), I'd rob everything. I'd be looting the Rolex shop.

Interestingly, within this extract Shirwaz displays a clear recognition of the legal risks of involvement; 'if you get caught you've fucked it'. However, again this risk is rationally balanced against the potential material gains of rioting. Significantly though, rioting was something most of the young people talked about whilst none of the young people actually engaged in any. During the time of the 2011 summer riots, the youth clubs were well attended. The atmosphere within these clubs was one of boisterous excitement. Service users were all particularly keen to express their support for the rioters across the country and verbally fantasized about what they would be looting if they were involved. More than anything, what this talk reflected was the significance of articulating risk, in terms of acquiring social status through expressions of masculinity. Importantly though, what this suggests is that the young people did not necessarily have to engage in risk behaviours in order to develop their social standing along the lines of masculinity and risk. In some circumstances risk talk was enough. However, despite this lack of active involvement, the comments still consolidate the need to 'incorporate more completely a critical analysis of consumer culture' in understandings of youth and 'risk' behaviour (Treadwell *et al*, 2013:15). Incorporating an analysis, as such, harbours the potential to add a dimension to contemporary discourses on marginalisation, youth and risk, which could extend far beyond framing the riots.

A particularly important social factor reflected in the examples cited above, concerns the role that verbalising identification, or engagement with risk, could play as a means of acquiring, or consolidating social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Green *et al*, 2010). Indeed, a key consideration arising from the observed relationship between 'risk', consumer culture and social acceptance, emerged concerning the experiences of particularly vulnerable, marginalised young people. Observations from the field suggest that the immediacy of the social



capital (Bourdieu, 1986) promised by those involved in the drug market, often particularly appealed to alienated young people who lacked the support of an established peer group. The following example illustrates this point.

Within the youth clubs, regular service users often referred to newly migrated attendees as 'freshies'. This signified their status as 'fresh off the boat'. The term was most often used in a derogatory context to ridicule individuals that were unfamiliar with local trends or interactional norms. Generally 'freshies' were conspicuous by their clothing, etiquette and most importantly their grasp of the English language. The following field note describes one incident where three recently migrated Somali men arrived at the Meadow youth club to use the internet:

*Three 'freshies' (Somali lads) in the computer room. They signed in with Shel on reception as 15 years old although they were obviously a lot older (late teens early twenties). Keesha (African Caribbean) and Abdi (Somali) both started mocking them, staring closely at their Facebook pages, imitating rural African accents. I have to tell them to calm down.*

This incident illustrates the process by which many of the local service users took advantage of opportunities to interact with new migrants in order to define their own superior cultural competence (Valentine and Sporton, 2009). Importantly, the scenario also highlights the difficulties newly migrated young people could face breaking into what were often very clearly defined peer-group relationships (Green *et al*, 2010). 'Logically inclusion entails exclusion, if only by default' (Jenkins, 2008:102). Indeed, for some newly migrated Somalis, the desire to fit in, alongside the obstacles erected by jovial bullying made them particularly vulnerable to the allures of the drug market. As Yusuf suggests:

Yusuf: There's issues out there around bullying, you know there's lots of young people out there who are bullying. Some young people might even carry weapons for protection, you know and erm, this thing about belonging to a gang, sometimes they do this for their own protection because of what's happening with other gangs out there. So you know there's a lot of different pulls, and it can be very difficult for a young person to stay on the straight and narrow because there's peer pressure to get involved in this, to get involved in that and if you're not educated and if you haven't been brought up in a secure environment then peer pressure is something that can just take you in any direction, you know? So they're the kind of pulls that are out there and the things that make young people vulnerable.

Consolidating Yusuf's comments, the following example (adapted from field notes) illustrates the story of one newly migrated Somali boy's experience of inclusion in the Meadow youth club:

*Jama (a recently migrated Somali teen) arrived at the Meadow youth club approximately 6 months into the data collection process. His English was so poor that he was only able to communicate with the other attendees in Somali. Like most, he was subject to the usual teasing associated with being unfamiliar with British culture. However, after a few months he seemed to have been awarded some rights to associate with a group of older Somali regulars (although he was still subject to teasing). Many of this group were known by the youth workers for their involvement in the local drug market. Jama's confidence quickly grew and his position amongst the group seemed to be confirmed on one occasion when he was physically protected by one of his peers in retaliation to a verbal assault from one of the Pakistani regulars. Whilst Jama's language skills made it difficult to understand the true nature of his relationship with this group, it soon became known, to the disappointment of the youth workers, that he was involved in carrying drugs for the older group and most probably also selling them.*

For Jama, his relationship with this group secured him a sense of belonging. This acceptance awarded Jama social capital, and as such, protection from the risks of social exclusion and bullying associated with being new to the area. However, a product of this inclusion was the necessary acceptance and practice of behaviours that in this case, contradicted both British cultural norms and Muslim ideas of acceptable conduct. In order to be accepted, Jama had to contribute to the group's illicit economic activities. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1986) suggests it is 'the profits which accrue from membership in a group (that) are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible' (51). This supports Armstrong's (2004) notion that young people's management of social exclusion might well 'impact on the types of risk they are willing to take' (110). In Jama's case, the symbolic rewards of belonging apparently outweighed the risks of involvement in the local drug market. This data clearly suggests that the process of 'weighing up' the risks associated with engaging in risk behaviours is closely linked to the relationship between consumption, identity and social capital within the lives of disadvantaged young people (Bourdieu, 1986; Green *et al*, 2010). In doing so, these findings highlight the limitations of contemporary 'risk factor' discourses that fail to recognise the nuances of individual risk epistemologies, and instead, largely account for youth offending 'based on the superficial data provided by statistical correlations between risks and offending' (Armstrong, 2004:109).

However, with reference to Jama's story, it should also be recognised that not all of the young people observed engaging in the local drug market were particularly vulnerable or indeed poorly educated. For some, the financial and symbolic promises of selling drugs clearly outweighed their other academic judgments. As Royce notes:

Royce: There's a few kids out there trying to make money from it, but they're disillusioned about life you know, if they have another way of

going. I know a lot of them, quite a few of them are university trained. They've got degrees and stuff like that and they're on the streets.

The implication born from Royce's observation is that whilst the opportunity to access higher education was clearly utilised by some of the local Somalis, this academic engagement was not always enough to deter young people from choosing to engage in the local drug market. Without refuting the importance of education, what this confirms is the idea that the young people's interpretation of risks, were often rationally based on contextual understandings of the personal and social consequences of engagement (Armstrong, 2004; Green *et al*, 2010). Importantly, it should also be recognised that just because these individuals were studying at university did not necessarily mean that they felt legitimate employment opportunities would be available to them. On the contrary, for the young Somali males engaged in this research, their recognition of the highly competitive and limited nature of the contemporary labour market prompted a rational level of scepticism concerning future prospects, despite their academic qualifications. Hence, whilst the importance of education was clearly understood (and the popularity of the local Homework Club lay as testament to that) the young people drew on a broad range of factors beyond this when they were contextualising their behaviours and aspirations. As Yusuf argued:

Yusuf: So education does have an impact on the way that young people perceive themselves and their community. You know, erm, so there are environmental issues, there are educational issues, there are economical issues that impact negatively on young people. Job opportunities, training opportunities, these are all things that can influence the way that young people see themselves and their environment, and view their own life prospects.

These comments confirm the intersection of multiple social and organisational factors in contributing to the limited outlooks and horizons of some of the young people who engaged in this research. Indeed, rather than simply attributing these young people's problematic behaviours to 'gangs' (as the dominant local discourse consistently did), it was clear that the youth workers 'had a more nuanced understanding of the local problems, which were linked to the acute socio-economic and cultural problems within the community' (Smithson *et al*, 2013:122).

### **Claiming space: the issue of territoriality**

As the previous chapters have revealed, numerous sociological accounts have contributed to discourses associating the limited horizons experienced by individuals inhabiting marginalised social spaces with a strong sense of local

identification (Robins and Cohen, 1978; Back, 1993; 2007; Alexander, 2000; Thomas, 2011) or a kind of 'super place attachment' (Kintrea *et al*, 2008). 'Such attitudes are not just representative of a strong positive identification with neighbourhood' (Thomas, 2011:118), but can also reflect a negative lack of identification with other neighbourhoods. This process necessarily strengthens symbolic community boundaries (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Anderson, 1999; Alleyne, 2002) and amplifies imagined distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Becker, 1963). Data from the focus groups constructed an interesting picture of the ways that young people experienced these imagined territorial boundaries in terms of their reflexive interpretations of risk. Indeed, whilst territorial behaviour was something that the young people depicted below identified as being involved with, the fact that their area was labelled as 'risky' was something they discussed with regret:

Will: Alright. Is there anything that you think people should know about, I guess this area, or the youth work?

Shirwaz: Don't be intimidated to come into the area.

Will: Why not?

Ahmed: Gangs

Will: Don't be intimidated of gangs?

Ahmed: Yeah

Will: Why?

Ahmed: Like if you don't start on the gangs then obviously they won't start on you. And if you're from Ashby (a neighbouring area) don't come to Maple.

Will: Why not?

Ahmed: Because they're warring. If you're a Simpson (A family from Ashby) you don't come to Maple or you get bullets in your head.

Three significant themes can be drawn from these comments. Initially, it is clear that neither Ahmed nor Shirwaz were comfortable in the knowledge that people who were not involved in territorial conflicts might be too intimidated to enter the Maple area. This response displays their recognition of the extent to which the Maple area was locally perceived as 'risky', based on its negative associations with 'gangs'. These comments also reflect the respondents' awareness and relative powerlessness against the contemporary public discourse surrounding 'gangs', which equates disadvantaged multicultural spaces with ethnic minority

males, criminality and violence (Alexander, 2000; 2008; Smithson *et al*, 2013). Neither Ahmed nor Shirwaz drew any pride, in this instance, in the knowledge that their area was so closely associated with risk.

Secondly, and significantly these comments provide no evidence to support any of the racialised public discourse surrounding 'self segregation'. In fact, Ahmed and Shirwaz appeared to actively regret the implication of the area's racialised association, particularly in terms of the amplification of symbolic boundaries for 'outsiders' (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006). On the contrary, Ahmed and Shirwaz appeared to want to encourage people not to be afraid of 'gangs' and to come into the area, providing they were not involved in any specific territorial conflicts. These observations support the assertion that for many British Muslims, the residential clustering that is often equated with a reluctance to integrate, is actually far more reflective of structural disadvantage and inequalities in the housing market than it is of any desire to live 'separate lives' (Philips, 2004b).

However, despite the failure of these comments to support any of the limited public depictions of British Muslims as proudly, deviant or self segregating, the fact that Ahmed and Shirwaz still clearly voiced their involvement in territorial conflict cannot not be neglected. Kintrea *et al* (2008) identified a number of motivational factors for young people's territorial engagement. These included group solidarity, respect, leisure and the negotiation of a sense of spatial ownership. Significantly, this was alongside reflecting a 'strong interrelationship between territoriality and disadvantage' (Kintrea *et al*, 2008:2). Indeed, where disadvantaged 'inner urban districts are the canvas on which racist fears and stigma are inscribed' local patriotism can be seen as reflecting 'a mirroring back of a negative urban imagery that is in turn recoded as positive' (Back, 2007:58). In Back's (2007) research, his respondents discussed gangs as a means of verbalising solidarity and positioning themselves against 'the ways in which the places they lived were racially stigmatised' (Back, 2007:58). Similarly, for the young people involved in this research, their territorial behaviours reflected an attempt to symbolically control the spaces they inhabited (Green *et al*, 2010), and the motivation for this should be understood in relation to their powerlessness to control the negative profiling affecting the areas in which they lived. Reflecting Back's (2007) findings, this vying for control often manifested itself in a strong sense of local identification, gang talk, expressive masculinity and territorial symbolism. As Kel (A Maple resident and Meadow youth club worker) illustrates:

Kel: ...we had gang warfare like: 'This is our street' and 'We operate from this street'.

Although the language Kel adopts to describe his experiences of growing up in Maple evokes some very serious imagery, the amusement young people gained from engaging in, or just discussing behaviours of this kind is also of importance. For the young people participating in this research, territorial behaviour was often the source of much excitement. This is an observation shared by Kintrea *et al* (2008) who suggested that territoriality could be seen as a kind of leisure activity or a source of 'recreational violence'. Indeed, the ways in which tales of minor clashes between individuals from Maple and Ashby (a neighbouring area) were embellished and dramatised within the young people's recollections with peers certainly reinforced this assertion. These theatrical recollections also provided support for the suggestion that young people actively shape their social capital through the development of masculine 'identities enhanced by 'risk reputations' (Bourdieu, 1986; Green *et al*, 2010:113). However, as Green *et al* (2010) point out, the acquisition of 'risk reputations' and the kind of respect derived from them can confer a number of pressures. For example, the characteristic and 'particular style of resilient 'hard' masculinity' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005:83) is commonly derived (amongst other symbolic markers) from the reputation for being violent (Frosh *et al*, 2002; Kubrin, 2005). This kind of reputation can be maintained through engagement in violent behaviours, thus reproducing the individual's status and rights to demand respect. The obvious consequence here is a symbolic incentive for individuals to engage in the risks of violent territorial activity.

A key concern surrounding the young people's frankly playful engagement with relatively minor territorial clashes concerned their propensity to spiral into more serious incidences. For Kintrea *et al* (2008) 'the risk of harm, or even death, appeared to be much higher for those actively involved in territorial gangs compared to non-participants, as they were involved in fighting more frequently or were likely to be victims of revenge attacks' (3). Following this, whilst serious incidences of violence were uncommon, during the three-year fieldwork period for this research, there were two murders (one in Maple and one in Meadow), both of which were connected to disputes with groups of individuals from different areas. These incidents had significant impacts on the young people's, and their parents' perceptions of risk within the local areas. As Lesley's comments illustrate:

Lesley: I mean even the parents after the... After the murder on Leaf street, talking to the mother of one of the children who comes to Homework Club who's not Somali was saying: 'How can I protect my kids? I think they should have weapons now'. I was just appalled at her, and I was arguing quite strongly against that, and she said 'In the end my kids come first'. But that's not how to protect your kids.

Lesley's recollection articulates the extent to which the incident in Maple heightened resident's fear of the risks of territorial violence. The reaction of the mother referenced above also depicts a clear absence of trust in the abilities of the local police to manage this risk. In fact, her consideration - to allow her own child to carry a weapon - reflects a highly individualised response to the management of risk that is characteristic of the level of distrust and discontent that many of the marginalised individuals harboured for the governmental agencies that consistently failed to represent their interests (Treadwell *et al* 2013). This observation also provides support for Beck's (1992) writings on contemporary risk society, which account for the individualisation of risk management in modernity. Logically, this sense of individualisation is one that is rationally amplified amongst members of communities who feel their interests are ignored by the powers of government.

What the data cited illustrates, is the complex and highly situated nature of residents' interpretations of risk in relation to territoriality and 'gang' talk. Lesley's comments in particular, evoke a real sense of dissatisfaction with the local governmental agencies that contributed to some residents' acutely individualistic interpretations of risk. In doing so, her comments support Alexander's (2008) recognition of the importance of looking beyond the 'gang' as an explanation for risk behaviour and instead considering the ways in which risk, 'youth violence or conflict can be mapped onto a broader social, economic, political and cultural context' (1). Indeed, contrasting the sensationalist, racially situated discourses within the local media surrounding 'gangs', the voices of the young people in this research reflected a far more intricate conceptualisation of territorial identification. Whilst their comments confirmed the presence of some conflict, they also acutely failed to provide any evidence of any wider disassociation concerning 'neutral' outsider parties. Furthermore, although the presence of 'gangs' was verbally acknowledged 'it was generally agreed that the risk from gang violence was low', with the referenced notable exceptions (Back, 2007:59). The risks associated with territorial behaviours were also actively incorporated into young people's construction of masculine 'risk reputations' (Green *et al*, 2010). These processes reflected their attempts to 'articulate a material and symbolic gain in the absence of opportunity...to find meaning from the otherwise mundane' (Armstrong, 2006:275). As Robinson and Cohen (1978) identified:

Killing boredom means making something happen out of nothing. An action that produces a consequence becomes an event; an event is whatever is remarkable, recountable to your mates' (Robins and Cohen, 1978:85).

For the young people engaged in this research, their interpretation of risk behaviours, were contextually situated within the frame of desirable opportunities available to them. Logically then, the socioeconomic factors that limited the opportunities available to these young people framed their propensity to create excitement out of engaging in risky behaviours, or at least talking about them. What this confirms, is the suggestion that young people's interpretations of risk are tightly situated within their geographic, economic and socio-political contexts (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; Green *et al*, 2010).

### **Providing opportunities: the role of local youth provision**

Within this environment of limited opportunity and security, one of the key roles played by the local youth services was providing legitimate opportunities through volunteering and employment. Indeed, the opportunity to engage in positive activities that occupied individuals outside of the lure of the streets was something that many of the young people in Maple and Meadow chose to utilise. As Royce illustrated in chapter four:

Royce: I get on average 2 kids a week asking me to volunteer. You know, if I had the capacity to deal with them all I would do. I haven't, I'm up to my eyeballs in volunteers.

What the voluntary positions in the youth services provided, amongst other things, was a space for local residents to disengage from the risks of street lifestyle without necessarily losing social capital or respect. As Liveer's experience illustrates:

Liveer: If your friends are doing bad stuff then you're definitely doing it with them. And if your friends are doing volunteering and stuff, then definitely. Like for example after the drugs operation<sup>4</sup> I got five or six close friends coming up to me and asking if they could volunteer at the football session. And I said 'Yeah course you can'. And they're all sticking with it now... their brothers, about two or three of their brothers got locked up for that thing, and they thought 'Why are we putting our family through this'?

The local youth services were organised around a culture that invited young people with limited qualifications to positively apply themselves. Importantly, they also provided some prospect of future employment, although this was quickly diminishing within the context of *Positive for Youth* (CO & DfE, 2010)

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<sup>4</sup> This was a large-scale drugs operation (popularly referred to by the respondents as 'Operation Lock Every Fucker Up'), where a number of local young people were arrested for drug dealing – some of whom were given sentences that were regarded as disproportionate to the severity of the offence.



austerity. Indeed for some, this appeared to be the only opportunity available to them other than selling drugs. The following adaptation from my field notes illustrates this:

*I head outside for a chat with Mubarak (a youth worker) and Leo (a volunteer). Leo asks me if I smoke crack. He then tells me that he used to be a 'badman' and spent a few years selling crack, but now he's on the straight and narrow after having had a baby boy (Leo seems to be around 20). We discuss volunteering for a bit and I tell him about my research.*

A few months after this discussion, Leo was fired for disrespecting a youth club staff member. Shortly afterwards he was arrested and served a short prison sentence for selling cannabis. A similar story occurred with Ozman, a member of staff at the Meadow youth club. Shortly after the drugs operation referred to by Liveer, Ozman was fired from the youth club for being pictured by undercover police with active drug dealers. Although he was never actually pictured doing anything incriminating, this association was enough for the local police to pressure the youth club managers into firing him for being 'a corrupted youth worker'. Sadly, I later learned that after a few months of failed attempts to get a job, Ozman had been imprisoned for selling crack cocaine.

What these examples illustrate is that for some of the young people in Maple and Meadow, apart from youth work - which offered some training - those who had not excelled academically often seriously considered the costs and benefits of the drug trade. Given the perceived absence of opportunities for any gratifying employment, this was also a fairly rational process. The opportunities provided by the youth services thus clearly played an integrally supportive role in the lives of the young people in Maple and Meadow. These services were also consciously appreciated, as the following discussion on the role of the Meadow club highlights:

Faizah: Fun, entertaining, gives us something to do.

Abdillahi: It keeps us off the streets.

Mohammed: Instead of like, standing on the streets and all that, it occupies our time an all that, so we have something to do basically... Like, actually you know like youth clubs, they help the community because they try to bring all the kids yeah, and for them to come here and do something instead of being on the streets and doing stuff bad. So youth clubs are like helping the community and all that.

Mohammed and Abdillahi's comments articulate the importance of their local youth provision against the backdrop of the limited public resources available to young people in Maple and Meadow. First and foremost, the clubs provided

‘something to do’ – a location to simply spend time in company. For the young people this in itself was clearly significant, particularly in terms of its role as a distraction. The following comments from the Maple focus group are illustrative:

Halimo: We just come to stay out of trouble.

Will: And it’s fun right? Something to do.

Halimo: Yeah, something to do, and sometimes to stay out of trouble.

Will: So if the youth club wasn’t on do you think you’d be getting in more trouble then?

Shirwaz: Yep

Combined, what the young people’s comments suggest, is that despite ongoing professional discussions on the general functions and purposes of youth work (Willmott, 1966; Huebner *et al*, 2003; Davies, 2005; Krueger, 2005) for the young people involved in this research, the local youth services were primarily viewed as a place to simply spend time and stay out of trouble. What this reflects is a conscious desire on behalf of the young men to avoid or minimise risk. This contradiction, between the respondents’ performance and avoidance of risk, was clearly illustrated through the popularity of the local Homework Club. This club ran twice a week, was voluntarily attended and was consistently oversubscribed. Many of the boisterous young Somali men who attended the youth clubs could also be found at the Homework Club. In fact, the almost exclusively Somali user group within this Homework Club reflected a solid emphasis on academic attainment that wholly contradicted the aforementioned discourses placing working class Muslim youths within a nexus of ‘crisis’ and ‘risk’. What this suggests is that the young people adopted a ‘rational’ calculation of risk that was highly contextual’ (Green *et al*, 2010:115). Put simply, although the expression and performance of ‘risk’ played an important part in the way that these young people presented themselves, the youth services provided a well-utilised opportunity to manage risk, ‘stay out of trouble’ and do homework.

These findings contribute to the neglected criminological field that Armstrong (2006) criticises for favouring determinist analyses of risk, instead of considering the experiences of young people and the ways in which these experiences are produced by their interactions. Indeed, if the contemporary political occupation with risk management is to continue to target groups of marginalised young people, then a more comprehensive body of knowledge surrounding young people’s subtle and contextual interpretations of risk taking, as a part their daily lives, will be needed.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored interpretations of risk from the perspective of the youth workers and young people involved in this research. Drawing from the comments of the youth workers, the discussion has illustrated drug dealing and territoriality as two of the most prominently identified 'risk behaviours' for the young people in Maple and Meadow. This is perhaps unsurprising given the body of research that equates such behaviours with economically disadvantaged, ethnically diverse and marginalised communities (Robins and Cohen, 1978; Back, 1993; 2007; Alexander, 2000; Thomas, 2011). However, the comments of these youth workers have contributed to sociological understandings of these relationships, by highlighting the complexity of the intersecting factors influencing young people's engagement with these behaviours (Smithson *et al*, 2013). Access to education, occupational training and leisure facilities were all cited as factors that could influence young people's outlooks, aspirations and in turn their propensity to involve themselves in risk behaviours. The comments in the previous chapter have also highlighted the counter productivity of the risk prevention agendas aimed at addressing these issues.

The comments of the young people themselves have added detail to this picture. The analysis presented in this chapter has highlighted the rational and contextually framed nature of young people's risk epistemologies. Providing support for some contemporary writing on the subject (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; Green *et al*, 2010), this data has illustrated the young people's interpretations of risk as part of their daily lives and their presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), through the development of identities founded on and maintained by 'risk reputations' (Green *et al*, 2010). An interesting product of this relationship is the recognition that some young people actively chose to engage in risk behaviours, despite their nuanced understandings of the associated dangers of involvement. Conversely, it was also the case that many of the respondents actively avoided risk through their engagement with the local youth services. For these young people, it was still possible to maintain social status through the articulation of expressive masculinity and risk talk within these controlled settings. Here, it has been argued that these marginalised young people's desire to achieve a sense belonging amongst their peers, has contributed to their willing to express themselves in particular ways that allow them to acquire social capital, occasionally through their association with risk (Bourdieu, 1986). The fact that this status was also so often displayed via the ability to acquire economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and to successfully engage in the consumer economy has compounded the need to incorporate a more sophisticated analysis of consumerism into contemporary sociological understandings of risk. Indeed, whilst the discussion in this chapter has drawn on some of the emergent literature surrounding the 2011 summer riots (Bauman, 2011; Treadwell *et al*

2013), it has also been suggested that the incorporation of contemporary consumer culture into this analysis clearly needs to be extended to the wider discourses surrounding youth, race, marginalisation and risk.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions

Before moving onto this concluding chapter, it is worth reiterating that youth services are highly varied institutions. Levels of staff training, available funding, venues and user group demographics are all temporally and geographically heterogeneous. Additionally, as chapters two and four have illustrated, the ways in which individuals inhabiting marginalised neighbourhoods experience their 'communities' is also highly subjective. In the light of these acknowledgments, it should be noted that it was never the intention of this research to present a representative model of experience in the context of youth provision. Instead, the focus of this project was to represent the lived experiences of a particular sample within the specific research settings, and I believe that the thesis has been successful in this task. However, that is not to say that the conclusions in this chapter are of no use to wider understandings of labelling processes and discussions of professional practice within the field of youth work. It is likely that at least some of the key research findings illustrated below are broadly applicable to the experiences of other young people and youth work professionals. Indeed, contemporary austerity measures and targeted government funding initiatives are shaping youth services similarly across the country (CO & DfE, 2010; Lehal, 2010; Home Office, 2011a; Smithson *et al*, 2013). Thus, whilst these conclusions are naturally bound to the data generated within this research, the same can also be seen as contributing to broader understandings of the contemporary issues affecting the experiences of those directly involved with the youth services in the UK.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first provides an overview of the three opening chapters of the thesis. Here, the research background, rationale and key topics are reconsidered. This is followed by a summary of the literature review in chapter two. Particularly here, the work of key community theorists (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006) are considered in relation to some of the leading risk society (Beck, 1992; Lupton, 1999; Armstrong, 2006; 2006; Green *et al*, 2010) and race theorists (Carby, 1982; Lawrence, 1982a; Back, 1993; 2007; Anderson, 1999; Keith; 2002). This focus summarises the adaptation of an integrated theoretical approach within the thesis, to frame the ways in which racialised risk labels are inscribed onto disadvantaged communities within the context of the contemporary British 'risk society' (Beck, 1992). The discussion then moves on to consider the methodological considerations underpinning the ethnographic data collection process.

The second and most substantive section of this conclusion provides a summary of each of the four data chapters. Within this, the key research findings are considered in terms of the ways in which they have addressed the main research topics. These findings are then developed by outlining their contribution to three key areas of knowledge; youth, particularly Muslim youth, contemporary understandings of community, and youth work practice. Having outlined and discussed the research contributions, the research limitations are then considered. In particular, the absence of a female voice and the limited sample size are noted. The final section goes on to outline recommendations for future research, alongside adding some additional conclusive remarks.

### **Revisiting the rationale**

This research was born out of a personal and broad sociological interest in the Maple community. My own brief experiences of living in Maple and being on the fringes of the Maple community were the catalyst for this. The focus of this research was developed later, through my sustained engagement with the local youth services, particularly the Homework Club in Maple, and later the youth clubs in Maple and Meadow. It was only through spending a prolonged period of time working with the young people in these areas, that the real inconsistencies between the way they were depicted (within popular discourse) and the way they negotiated their everyday lives became evident. It was here that the apparent interconnection between risk profiling, racial profiling and the symbolic construction of community (Cohen, 1985) occurred to me as something worth researching, sparking the following research topics:

1. The impacts of risk labelling on processes of identification, including the symbolic construction of 'community'.
2. Young people's conceptualisation of their everyday behaviours in relation to risk labelling.
3. The perceived significance of local youth provision within the research settings.
4. The relationships between youth workers and young people within the research settings.

Building on these interests, the literature reviewed in the second chapter outlined some of the key theoretical, conceptual and empirical work surrounding the central concepts in this research; community, risk and race. The work of Becker (1963), Cohen (1985), Bauman, (2000) and Anderson (2006) in particular, laid a suitable foundation for the conceptualisation of community as individually imagined, contested and coercive, a theoretical understanding that proved fundamentally important on reflection. The risk society literature also provided an important theoretical foundation for the research (Beck, 1992;

Lupton, 1999). This work not only highlighted the significance of risk as a concept for understanding the organisation of contemporary society, it also went some way towards highlighting the connection between government risk prevention agendas and the political targeting of disadvantaged communities along the lines of risk (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; Green *et al*, 2010; Home Office 2011a; DCLG, 2012a; DCLG, 2012b). This chapter also highlighted the significance of race within the intersection of community and risk. The work of Lawrence (1982a), Les Back (1993; 2007), Michael Keith (2002) and Hall *et al* (2013) contributed to an understanding of the ways in which processes of common sense racialisation factor in the inscription of risk labels onto disadvantaged communities.

Chapter two concluded by arguing that a framework combining the insights highlighted within the community, risk and race literatures would provide an important theoretical grounding for the thesis. Indeed, whilst all of the literature reviewed in the chapter presented significant contributions in themselves, it was the intersection of these concepts that was of theoretical relevance. As a result, these conclusive points set up the theoretical assumptions underpinning this research. Namely, that racialised discourses contribute to the political framing of disadvantaged communities along the lines of risk, and that individually imagined communities are subjectively responsive to risk labelling processes.

The third chapter considered the research methodology. It also provided a critical, reflexive narrative of the research process. Here the adoption of an ethnographic approach was considered in both theoretical and practical terms. The influence of classic, urban, empirical sociology and the associated symbolic interactionist theoretical approach were also cited as key factors informing the research's epistemological grounding (Park *et al*, 1967; Becker, 1977; Blumer, 1986). Within this, it was noted that the research methodology was very closely informed by the practical research context. Indeed, the time scale and level of personal interaction needed to gain enough trust to effectively start doing the research deemed anything other than an ethnographic approach unworkable.

The issue of researcher positionality was also considered in some depth within the methods chapter (Fay, 1996; Alexander, 2000). From the point of access this narrative explored the extent to which the research experience was coloured by a necessarily respectful awareness of the hierarchies operating within the youth clubs. This discussion considered the extent to which juggling the role of an active volunteer and a researcher temporally expanded the research process, a scenario that was only possible thanks to my ESRC funding and the inherent flexibility of the qualitative approach (Bryman, 2004).

Overall, this chapter highlighted both the benefits and challenges of ethnographic research. Indeed, what has been clear, despite the temporally extended access period was the value of conducting research that did occasionally breach the 'formal research parameters' in order to develop productive and lasting working relationships with participants (Alexander, 2000:27). In a professional context where sociologists are being increasingly urged to engage with publics through the dissemination of their work, it is also important to recognise the impact of developing working relationships during research, through the closeness of responsible ethnographic practice.

### **Key findings**

This section now turns to the four substantive data chapters in order to articulate the primary research findings. Within what follows, particular attention is paid to the ways in which these chapters have addressed the four research topics referenced above.

Chapter four provided some important contextual information through the exploration of 'community' as a lived concept amongst the youth workers and young people involved in this research. Drawing predominantly on the comments of youth work organisers in Maple, this discussion illustrated the difficulties facing those implementing 'universal', 'open access' youth provision within what were already highly contested and politically complex multicultural environments. This chapter addressed the third research topic in particular (the perceived significance of local youth provision within the research settings) alongside presenting a necessary empirical grounding for the conceptualisation of community as individually imagined, negotiated and contested (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006).

A significant observation within the fourth chapter centred on the extent to which residents described Maple as divided. Respondents drew upon articulations of culture, race, class, ethnicity, religion and generation in order to outline the perceived divisions within the Maple community. Interpretations of risk, and the management of the youth services, emerged as the two key contexts framing these articulations of local division. Paying initial attention to the notion of risk, Maple's economic geography provided the most pertinent example. Respondents reflected upon the economic diversity of the areas encompassed within Maple's geographic boundaries, ranging from affluent owner occupied accommodation through to overcrowded and underserviced social housing blocks. These economic distinctions also bore racial associations as the more affluent streets were generally perceived to be 'white', whereas the poorer social housing blocks were seen as 'black' areas. For all of the respondents, regardless of ethnicity, it was the more deprived 'black' areas that were associated with the



highest level 'risk'. These findings are consistent with the work of Michael Keith (2002) and Les Back (2007) who have both highlighted the intersection of race and place in individual's perceptions of 'risk'. What they clarify is the continuing centrality of racialised discourse within individual negotiations of risk and place.

The organisation of the youth services provided the second and most pertinent context for the articulation of local divisions. It was also within this contestation that the perceived significance of local youth provision within the research settings was identified. Culture, religion and generation occurred most prominently as explanations for the difficulties facing those organising the youth services. One narrative in particular documented the historical tensions between the Maple community forum and the local Somali community over a plot of land, eventually leading to a predominantly Somali boycott of the Maple youth forum. Tensions between the more traditional factions of the local Muslim community and the youth workers were also often raised, concerning the organisation of youth provision. Respondents commented on the emphasis local Somali families placed on academic success, and the almost exclusively Somali demographic of the Homework Club stood as testament to this. It was also the case that many of the local Somali parents were suspicious of any youth provision that didn't have an educational or religious focus. These services were often deemed 'pointless', an interpretation that was discussed in relation to James *et al's* (1998) insights on culturally varied perceptions of childhood. Ultimately what these findings have highlighted is the complicated intersection of cultural and religious ideals within the organisation of 'universal' youth provision. Indeed, cultural and religious variations in the user group's perceptions of 'acceptable' services were consistently raised within community meetings, and the pertinence of these tensions pointed directly towards the central significance of Maple's local youth provision.

Despite the tensions stemming from Maple's intersecting social divisions, the ontological persistence of community also constituted a key research finding within this chapter. Significantly, it was also the case that what individuals referred to as 'community' varied according to context. As chapter six later illustrated, residents often articulated depictions of the Maple community as culturally harmonious in response to negative representations, yet local tensions could evoke far more exclusive ethnic or religious articulations of community from the same individuals. It is from within these variations that the conceptual significance of 'community' as individually imagined, contested and contextual has been illustrated (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006). The ontological persistence of this term, despite its shifting and reactionary nature also points towards its significance as a means of collective identification for the local residents (Jenkins, 2008a). Indeed, community constituted the primary reference point for the residents' contestation and

celebration of the complex realities of everyday multiculturalism. Significantly, understanding community as such undermines some of the utopianism inspired by politicised community cohesion rhetoric, by recognising that it is in fact the natural contestation and negotiation of interest groups (ethnic, religious or otherwise) that facilitates the achievement and maintenance of local communities (Bauman, 2000; Back, 2009).

Having provided a clear analysis of the Maple community and the debates surrounding the local youth provision in chapter four, chapter five went on to explore the relationships between youth workers and young people within the local youth services. This discussion primarily addressed the fourth research interest, the relationships between youth workers and young people. Drawing on the understandings of youth workers and young people, this chapter presented an analysis of the youth work relationship, critically considering the factors contributing to youth work policy and practice.

The first half of chapter five reflected on the comments of the youth workers and young people. This empirical data facilitated the construction of a model 'right type' of youth worker. This was an abstraction consisting of the qualities respondents perceived to be ideal components for youth work professionals. Importantly, this 'right type' should not be considered as an 'ideal type' in the Weberian sense. The construction of an ideal type would have required more rigorous and historical foundations (Ritzer, 2011). Instead, the characteristics encompassed within this 'right type' reflected the qualities outlined by the sample; although this does not mean other youth work professionals will not share them. Within this, four key themes were identified, trust, respect, locality and informality.

Trust and respect were clearly articulated as the foundations of productive youth work relationships. It was argued that the voluntary nature characterising the observed youth work relationships necessitated a mutual level of trust and respect (Davies, 2005). The young people accessing the services included in this analysis did so by choice and in so much maintained a level of power over the youth workers, emphasising the workers need to be respected. Ultimately, without this basis of trust and respect the service users ceased to use the services, diminishing any possibility of productive youth work practice.

Locality constituted the third significant feature of the model, reflecting the importance respondents placed on the benefits of residing locally for effective engagement. Here it was suggested that familiarity with the locality enabled a level of authenticity that facilitated respect. Local youth workers for example, could reflect on events with hindsight that service users knew had occurred locally. However, it was also noted that locality held drawbacks in terms of

practice. The chapter found local residents who practiced as youth workers' sense of responsibility extended well beyond their working hours. It was also suggested that these individuals faced difficulties demarcating their personal and professional identities, which could ultimately lead to disciplinary issues within their professional roles (Crimmens *et al*, 2004). Consequently, it was argued that the benefits attached to locality could also be achieved through consistent practice over a prolonged period, whilst simultaneously negating some of the associated complications. Indeed, my own engagement with the service users unsettled the validity of any claims for the significance of locality.

Finally, the 'right type' model outlined the negotiation of discipline and informality as a key feature. The young people's reflections highlighted the importance of youth workers' ability to maintain an informal and relaxed atmosphere within the club settings, whilst managing disciplinary issues enough to maintain a level of control and respect.

The latter half of chapter five critically reflected upon this model. Two key findings emerged from this. The first of these considered the limitations this staffing model placed on the ability of the youth services to expand the horizons of the service users, beyond the confines of their already established imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). Indeed, despite the fact that for the most part the local team managed the youth services well, the relative homogeneity of the staff teams restricted their ability to promote respect for 'outsiders' (Becker, 1963). This was an issue that was confirmed in the difficulties some external youth workers faced maintaining order within their sessions at the clubs in Maple and Meadow. Significantly, it was noted that this was an issue local youth workers were aware of and were keen to address. However, the absence of youth service funding made the acquisition of appropriately trained and varied staff teams almost impossible. If the youth services are to successfully meet the objectives of community cohesion agendas, in terms of promoting cohesive relations across lines of race, ethnicity, religion, class and place, there will need to be a recognition, at policy level, of the need to provide funding quantities that facilitate the acquisition of varied staff teams.

The second key finding illustrated local workers' requests for extra training, alongside the inability of the organisational bodies to provide it. Again, in this instance, shortages in youth club funding restricted the developmental capacities of the staff teams. In such, the analysis in this chapter outlined a scenario of choices within constraints, concerning local youth club staffing, which bore implications for the potential of the services. In an economic and political context where local youth services are expected to manage and deliver complex policy initiatives like community cohesion and risk prevention, it will be of increasing significance to promote the need for additional training in order to facilitate the

professional development of the youth workers expected to achieve these goals (Thomas, 2011).

Shifting its focus from the youth work relationship to the agendas financing the services, chapter six explored the notion of risk labelling. This chapter addressed the first of the four primary research topics, the impacts of risk labelling on processes of identification, including the symbolic construction of 'community'. These findings detailed the racialised profiling of Maple and Meadow, considering the role contemporary government risk prevention agendas have played in implicating the youth services within risk labelling processes.

The first half of this chapter reflected the unanimous concerns youth workers expressed regarding the disproportionately negative and racialised media representations of Maple and Meadow. The central argument within this was that the media's association with Maple, Meadow and risk, represented the framing of existing and long established stigmas around race, religion, gender, class and place. Indeed, the fact that popular representations often bore specific reference to the local Somali community highlighted their racial and religious context. These findings illustrated the impact labelling processes had on the way that young people identified with each other, and expected 'outsiders' to identify with them. Overall, this discussion presented a call for a more critical perspective of political risk discourses that recognise their propensity to represent existing and damaging stigmas.

The second part of this chapter explored the role of the contemporary, Home Office risk prevention agenda, within wider risk labelling processes. This focused on the 2011 Home Office commitment to tackle youth crime and gang culture, an initiative drawing upon evidence based risk factor analysis to identify and target the area's most 'at risk' of 'antisocial behaviour'. The central finding highlighted within this discussion, was the extent to which the funding opportunities this initiative provided have implicated the local youth services within a labelling process that confirms the stigmatisation of the areas along the lines of risk. Here, it was argued that applying for this funding necessarily required the adoption of a discourse that played into the association of areas as in need of preventative intervention, because of the perceived local 'youth problem'. As such, the successful acquisition of funding contributed to the political recognition of areas as needing risk prevention and this recognition promoted increased levels of surveillance and policing (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008; Turnbull and Spence, 2011; Smithson *et al*, 2013).

This chapter also reflected upon the young people's interpretations of police presence in their areas. The evidence presented suggested that policing was something local young people were acutely aware of, and often interpreted as

supporting evidence for their central positioning within a labelling process that drew on the intersection of race, religion, class and place, albeit communicated under the guise of 'risk prevention'. This suggests that despite the government's best intentions, the reality is that their preventative agendas have contributed to a situation that is increasing young people's recognition of stigma, and consequently, their sense of animosity towards the local government and police. As such, risk prevention agendas are actually contributing to the cementing of distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' within the imagined communities of the disadvantaged (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1985; Anderson, 2006). This chapter concluded by suggesting that in order for the youth services to continue to work towards providing an environment that promotes positive relations between service users and the wider urban community, including the police, there needs to be a recognition, at policy level, of the damaging implications of contemporary risk prevention agendas and their associations with labelling processes.

The final substantive data chapter developed the discussion of risk labelling through an empirically grounded analysis of the ways in which everyday risks were actually experienced, negotiated and understood, by the youth workers and young people in Maple and Meadow (Armstrong, 2004). Up until this point, the thesis had only dealt with the concept of 'risk' in the context of wider labelling processes. This chapter presented some of the most significant research findings through its acknowledgment of the participants' lived experiences, addressing the second and third key research topics in particular; the young people's conceptualisation of their everyday behaviours in relation to risk, and the perceived significance of local youth provision within the research settings.

The reflections presented in this chapter outlined drug dealing and territoriality as the two most prominent risk behaviours raised by the youth workers and young people involved in this research. This was consistent with other research findings that focus on the lived experiences of disadvantaged youths inhabiting ethnically diverse locations in contemporary Britain (Back; 2007; Kintrea *et al*, 2008; Thomas, 2011). Respondents pointed towards the absence of legitimate leisure facilities, educational and employment opportunities, alongside the influence of elders in their reflections on the lures of these behaviours. Further analysis of the focus group transcripts highlighted the significance of social inclusion and status in the young people's propensity to rationally consider the risks of engaging in drug dealing or 'recreational violence' (Kintrea *et al*, 2008). In particular, the centrality of engaging within the consumer economy was situated within the young people's perceived acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This finding placed these young people's conceptualisations of risk behaviours firmly within their strive for social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through the achievement of 'localised distinction', gained in part, through the 'acquisition of brand names' (Harding, 2012:197). Within this discussion, some

critically significant literary support came from the analysis of deviance and consumption that have emerged within the academic response to the looting seen in the 2011 summer riots (Bauman, 2011; Briggs, 2012; Winlow and Hall, 2012; Treadwell *et al* 2013). The applicability of that literature to this research context justifies a call for the wider exploration of the relationship between marginalisation, consumer culture and the behaviours of economically disadvantaged young people.

The significance of 'reputation' was also central to the discussion of social capital presented in chapter seven (Bourdieu, 1986). The work of Green *et al* (2010) provided a useful grounding for the respondents' reflections on the acquisition of status, founded on reputations facilitated by the articulation of risk. Interestingly here, whilst existing research findings tend to point towards individuals' active involvement in behaviours, like violence, as facilitating this respect (Green *et al*, 2010; Harding, 2012), these research findings illustrated the adaptation of expressive masculinity and 'risk talk' as a viable means of gaining social status on their own. Significantly, what these findings highlighted was the possibility of obtaining status and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through the articulation of masculinity and 'risk talk', without actually engaging in illicit behaviours. Indeed, the findings presented in this chapter illustrated the fact that many of these young people developed their social positioning through 'risk talk' from within the safety of the youth clubs. What this illustrated was a conscious level of risk avoidance amongst respondents, despite their identification and expression of hyper 'black' masculinity and 'risk talk' (Alexander, 1996; Frosh *et al*, 2002). The significance of this finding is twofold, initially confirming the rational and contextual nature of young people's risk epistemologies, and secondly, challenging the contemporary discourses that uncritically associate young, working class, racialised masculinities with risk behaviours. Compounded in all of this, was the significance of the local youth provision in terms of providing a safe space for the expression of masculinity and the acquisition of status and respect through legitimate means.

This section has outlined the key research findings illustrated within the four substantive data chapters. It has also highlighted the extent to which these findings have addressed the project's key research topics, clarifying the ways in which racialised, risk labelling processes have contributed to the respondents' distinction of symbolic community boundaries, alongside amplifying the significance of the local youth provision, despite its implication within some of these labelling processes. Having described the findings as such, this discussion will now outline the ways in which these findings contribute to existing understandings of youth, race, community and youth work practice.

## Contributions

One of the key contributions this thesis provides concerns contemporary understandings of British Somalis. Through its documentation of this predominantly Somali sample of young people, this thesis has contributed to a limited body of knowledge highlighting the experiences and identity practices of the young male British Somali population (Harding *et al*, 2007; Hudson *et al*, 2007; Valentine *et al*, 2006; 2009; Valentine and Sporton, 2009). It is also the case that within contemporary Britain, the British Somali population is of acute sociological importance. The positioning of Somali migrants within the intersection of gendered and racialised discourses around British Muslims, piracy, black masculinity and social class, underpins the significance of developing wider sociological understandings of one of Britain's most marginalised ethnic groups. Indeed, two of the key research findings outlined this significance through their critical engagement with the dominant discourses that present British Somalis as distinctive and problematic. Both the stringent work ethic promoted by the local Somali families (facilitated by the Maple Homework Club) and the propensity for the young Somali respondents to actively avoid risk by engaging with the local youth services challenged these associations, whilst underpinning the significance of local youth provision.

Importantly, the consistency of this data, with other research findings that focus on the lived experiences of young, working class people from *Muslim and non-Muslim* backgrounds also presents a major contribution (Alexander, 2000; Frosh *et al*, 2002; Back, 2007; Green *et al*, 2010). This congruence has enabled the findings of this research to critically engage with the contemporary discourse that paints a homogenous picture of male working class Muslim youths as posing threat (Alexander, 2000), whilst pointing towards broader continuities of experience around race, class and gender. Perhaps most significantly of all, is that the broad applicability of the experiences this research documents, allows the findings to unsettle the dominant discourses reflecting British Muslim youths as 'separate' from the wider non-Muslim population. More research that points towards experiences shared by working class boys within multicultural Britain could significantly enhance sociological understandings of youth, ethnicity and class.

This thesis' commentary on the community politics surrounding local youth provision has also presented a contribution to the sociological discussion of 'community' in multicultural Britain. Through the application of contemporary community theory (Cohen, 1985; Bauman, 2000; Alleyne, 2002; Anderson, 2006) this thesis has demonstrated the significance of 'imagined communities' within an empirical context. In doing so, the research has consolidated the relevance of

theoretical understandings of community as individually imagined and contested.

Exploring the articulation of community within individuals' reactionary depictions of Maple and Meadow, in response to 'risk labelling', has also provided a clear example of the importance of 'community' as a notion of solidarity amongst ethnically diverse marginalised groups. That is, despite the highly contextual nature of localised collective identification. These findings situated the local within the heart of these respondents' imagined communities. This is outlined in the fact that many of the Somali respondents in Maple and Meadow had grievances with other Somalis from different areas of the city. Therefore, without neglecting the importance of understanding that communities are not confined to the local, this work serves as a reminder, that for many, the neighbourhood does constitute the most prominent platform for the symbolic construction of community and belonging (Cohen, 1985; Back, 1993).

Additionally, this research has presented some key and relevant policy findings for contemporary youth work practice. The research's dual focus (youth workers *and* young people) has highlighted the increasing complexity of youth work in disadvantaged, multicultural communities from both perspectives of the youth work relationship. The data presented in chapter five outlined the numerous intersecting factors facing contemporary youth work professionals. These included appeasing different contestations over 'acceptable services', managing the expectations of the police, maintaining relationships of trust and respect with service users, creating an inviting yet controlled environment and increasingly delivering relatively complex policy agendas like 'community cohesion' and 'risk prevention'. In the light of these increasing pressures, this research has made explicit, the need for extra funding, to train and manage the youth workers who are able to successfully engage with hard to reach young people, and to do so in a way that promotes an understanding of wider government agendas (Thomas, 2011).

Finally, this research contributes to contemporary understandings of youth work practice through its critical reflections on the implications of government risk prevention agendas. The consistency of these findings, with other research which points towards similar relationships, has provided additional support (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008; Turnbull and Spence, 2011, Smithson *et al*, 2013). In particular, the ways in which contemporary funding opportunities have implicated the local youth services within processes of risk labelling and increased levels of surveillance and policing is a finding that needs to be acknowledged at policy level. Perhaps most significant, is the impact these processes had on the respondent's awareness of their central positioning within



a labelling process that drew on the intersection of race, religion class and place. Whilst realistically, this project may be too small in scale to impact wider policy agendas alone, highlighting the counterproductivity of contemporary preventative policy initiatives is still of critical importance.

### **Research limitations**

This section reflects upon the research limitations. Indeed, despite the advantages of ethnographic practice there are a number of inherent limitations with such an approach. An example that bears relevance to this research is located in the size of the sample and the issue of external validity (Bryman, 2004). Despite the in-depth nature of the findings, this thesis can only claim to reflect the opinions and experiences of the 14 interviewed youth workers, the 11 young people that contributed to the focus groups, and the approximately 60 local young people that engaged with the youth clubs and the Homework Club during the three year data collection period. As the beginning of this chapter stated, youth services are highly varied institutions and the experiences of the individuals involved in this research may or may not concur with those from other areas of the country, or even the city. Indeed, on sharing experiences with some youth workers from Dewsbury at a youth work seminar in December (2012), I was struck by both the consistencies and the differences reflected. Whilst my findings on the implications of contemporary risk prevention policy agendas were widely shared, the level of training these youth workers enjoyed was wildly different, boasting undergraduate qualifications or beyond. Hence, although I am wholly confident that the findings presented in this thesis depict the experiences of the sample accurately, these findings are not necessarily representative beyond that. A key implication of this shortfall is likely to be the limited capacity of this work to speak directly to policy, as it is generally more wide bearing research findings that hold weight within this field. However, some optimism can still be drawn from the wealth of supporting qualitative evidence from other areas of the country (Armstrong, 2004; 2006; France, 2008; Green *et al*, 2010; Turnbull and Spence, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Smithson *et al*, 2013).

This research is also open to criticism because of its disproportionate focus on young men and masculinities. As the discussion in chapter two illustrated, the gendered nature of common-sense racism has positioned black and (post 9/11) Muslim men under the political spotlight (Carby, 1982; Lawrence, 1982b; Alexander, 2000; 2002; Frosh *et al*, 2002; Hall *et al*, 2013). This disproportionality renders the everyday experiences of young black, particularly Muslim females more or less absent within both political and academic discussions of 'youth' (Ahmad, 2013). Unfortunately this thesis is no exception to that rule. The experiences of the young women attending the youth clubs and the Homework Club have been left mostly unrecognised within this work.

Importantly though, it should be noted that the absence of a female Somali voice was not due to the girls being in any way culturally restricted in their expression. Conversely, those who attended the sessions were often just as boisterous as the young men, there just happened to be far less of them. As a result of this disparity, and the rapport that I had managed to develop with a group of predominantly Somali boys from Maple, the research focused on them. Whilst there is some existing work that explores the experiences of British Somali girls (Valentine and Sporton, 2009) this population remains distinctively under researched.

Finally, it is important to recognise that this research could have been improved if it had taken the role of the local council and wider funding bodies more deeply into account. Obtaining some more in-depth information about the multiple funding bodies contributing to these youth services could have provided data that pointed towards possible alternatives to problematic targeted government funding.

### **Recommendations for further research**

As is the case with much sociological research, the findings of this work present a number of unanswered questions that will benefit from further exploration. One of the key challenges facing researchers and policy makers in support of youth work is the heterogeneous nature of the youth services. Indeed, one of the key limitations stated above, cites the difficulties of presenting any broadly representative work that outlines the successes and challenges of youth workers experiences of practice. This presents an issue whereby youth workers 'on the ground' can feel their professional capacities are not clearly reflected in the application of the policies affecting them and the nature of training provided. Whilst there is some existing research exploring contemporary youth work practice (Batsleer and Davies, 2010; Thomas, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Smithson *et al*, 2013), this work could be more organised. Producing a report that collated the existing available research alongside contributing some new empirical work from across the country could present highly important and representative reflections. This work would develop a wider understanding of the strengths and limitations of youth work practice, the implications of contemporary austerity measures, and most of all, what can realistically be expected from youth work delivery (Jeffs and Smith, 1987).

One of the contemporary challenges facing youth workers, is the challenge of positively influencing the behaviours of young people who feel pressured to achieve levels of symbolic status in the perceived absence of legitimate opportunity. A key finding cited within this analysis has been the significance of respect; acquired through a number of mediums including expressive

masculinity, risk talk and consumption. Throughout the previous discussion, it has been noted that the academic analysis of the 2011 summer riots has presented some highly relevant material situating the demands of the consumer economy centrally within the lived experiences of working class young people in contemporary Britain (Bauman, 2011; Briggs, 2012; Winlow and Hall, 2012; Treadwell *et al* 2013). This research has also reflected on the relationship between expressive masculinity, style, consumption and young people's calculation of risk behaviours. However, a wider more in depth body of research is necessary in order to build on these research findings and explore the relationships between consumption, gender and risk outside of the riots, within the mundane, everyday lives of marginalised young men and women. Developing more nuanced understandings of the centrality of consumption within the acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) amongst the disadvantaged, could provide crucial information for the development of contemporary youth work practice, particularly that which is interested in risk behaviours and consumerism.

Through its exploration of risk, this research has also challenged some of the existing work equating racialised masculinities with deviance. The findings of this study have shown that in some instances, expressive masculinity can in itself present a means of status acquisition *and risk avoidance*. In future it will be important to conduct further research that develops this understanding. Doing so could help to unsettle the dominant discourses associating racialised expressions of masculinity with risk and threat (Alexander, 2000), alongside opening doors for funding traditionally masculine pursuits in youth work (like boxing or weight lifting) which are currently difficult to finance due to their negative associations.

Finally, given the limited body of research that focuses on the lived experiences of British Somali youths, it is also clear that more research is needed to develop our knowledge of this population. Although there are no reliable figures reflecting the academic and occupational successes of this group, the observations presented in this research have suggested that despite a stringent work ethic, the amount of young people that actually managed to gain full time, legitimate employment after school was disproportionately low. More research will be vital in order to provide an empirical understanding of the lived experiences of British Somali boys and girls, particularly in terms of their transition into adulthood and their ascension into the labour market.

### **Conclusive remarks**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the key research findings, contributions, limitations and recommendations. I would like to

conclude by briefly pointing towards some continuity between the research findings presented above and some of the British ethnographic work that was published in the late 1970's. Robins and Cohen's (1978) *Knuckle Sandwich* presented an ethnographic documentation of the rise and fall of a youth lead Disco in North London. This research highlighted some of the major challenges facing British, working class boys and girls inhabiting disadvantaged estates, illustrating issues of territoriality and the fractious relationships between young people and the police. Later, in 1979, Pryce's *Endless Pressure* presented the findings of a 4-year ethnographic study (1969-1974). This research depicted the life-styles of a West-Indian, mostly Jamaican community in Bristol. Pryce's work concluded with the suggestion that the intersection of 'class and colour' were significantly impacting the life chances of Bristol's West-Indian population. The findings of these two studies, and many like them, are uncomfortably close to the findings presented within this thesis.

Just like the narrative in Cohen's (1978) *Knuckle Sandwich*, this research has highlighted the fundamental importance of local youth provision, alongside the challenges of providing effective services within a context of 'growing unemployment, racism, and educational disadvantage' (174). Reflecting Pryce's conclusive points, this research has also explored the implications of labelling processes that draw on the intersection of class and race, albeit under the more contemporary guise of 'risk'. As such, the findings presented in this thesis are original, but they address experiences of disadvantage that are very much established. Unfortunately, they are unlikely to break any moulds. The 'problem of working class youth' is longstanding, and the 'moral panics' and labelling processes that contribute to their marginalisation are equally so (Cohen, 1972; Pearson, 2012). However, this should not be misread as defeatist sentiment. This is because ultimately, it is the history of ethnographic depictions that provide accurate insights into what are often hidden and misunderstood communities like Maple and Meadow. Indeed, 'the enduring contribution of community studies is its attention to situated descriptions of social life in process' (Back, 2009:204). These insights capture experience in time, contributing to understandings that situate local matters within border national, political and even global contexts. They raise cultural awareness, and this holds philanthropic, sociological and political significance.

As I write these conclusions, the Meadow youth club has been relocated, and the Maple Homework Club, and senior youth club are facing imminent closure due to government funding cuts. If nothing else, I hope that the findings documented above have illustrated the value of these services, and others like them, alongside the need to recognise the implications of closing their doors.

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## Appendix 1

### Youth worker information sheet



#### **Risk and Resilience: How are day-to-day lifestyle risk factors seen by young people in Maple/Meadow?**

What's your story?

I would like you to invite you to take part in a research project. Before you make your decision it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to carefully read the following information. Feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like any more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you would like to take part. Thank you for reading.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This project aims to gain an insight into the everyday leisure activities of young people in Broomhall/Sharrow, the youth services available, and the role these services play in protecting young people from 'risk'. Through doing this project I hope to present an accurate picture of the areas mentioned, representing the opinions of young people and youth workers.

The research is being undertaken as part of a PhD and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

#### **What will happen if I take part?**

The research will take place over a one-year period (August 2010 – September 2011). If you are happy to participate you will be invited to take part in a one-to-one discussion. The discussions will be informal and should take no longer than one hour. They will take place wherever you feel most comfortable. I would like to record the discussions, however I can take written notes if you would prefer not to be recorded. I will also make notes based on my observations during the time of research.

Any information recorded either digitally or in note form will be treated as strictly confidential, kept in a secure locked environment and destroyed after the research has been written.

#### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

There may not be any direct benefits from taking part in this research. However you will have the chance voice your opinions of everyday life as you experience it. The results of this will hopefully contribute to an accurate/insider representation of Broomhall/Sharrow, bridging the gap between preconceived understandings and your own experiences.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and also be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide that you would like to take part, you are still free to change your mind and withdraw at any time.

### **What will happen to the results of the project?**

The results of the project will be written up as a PhD thesis in approximately one year. They may be presented at conferences or seminars and published in books or articles. You can request a copy of the thesis if you wish. Nothing you say or do as part of this research can be traced back to you from the written work. All the information you give will remain completely anonymous.

### **What if I want to make a complaint?**

If you wish to make a complaint within any stage of the research please feel free to contact my supervisors:

Kate Reed: [K.Reed@Sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:K.Reed@Sheffield.ac.uk)

Joanne Britton [N.J.Britton@Sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:N.J.Britton@Sheffield.ac.uk)

### **Contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns or decide to withdraw from this project please come and speak to me at the Broomhall Community Centre, or contact me:

William Mason, PhD student, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU.

Email: [sop09wjm@shef.ac.uk](mailto:sop09wjm@shef.ac.uk)

## Appendix 2

### Young person information sheet



#### **Risk and Resilience: How are day-to-day lifestyle risk factors seen by young people in Maple/Meadow?**

What's your story?

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Before you make your decision it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to carefully read the following information. Feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like any more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you would like to take part. Thank you for reading.

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This project aims to gain an insight into the everyday leisure activities of British-Somali youths in Sheffield. What do you do in your spare time? What do you do to relax and have fun? Do you have any concerns about the things which happen in your area? Through doing this project I hope to present an accurate picture of the day-to-day lifestyle practices of people within your community.

The research is being undertaken as part of a PhD and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

#### **What will happen if I take part?**

The research will take place over a one-year period (August 2010 – September 2011). If you are happy to participate you will be invited to take part in a one to one discussion, and possibly a group discussion with friends. The discussions will be informal and should take no longer than one hour. They will take place wherever you feel most comfortable. I would like to record the discussions, however I can take written notes if you would prefer not to be recorded. I will also make notes based on my observations during the time of research. Any information recorded either digitally or in note form will be treated as strictly confidential, kept in a secure locked environment and destroyed after the research has been written.

#### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

There may not be any direct benefits from taking part in this research. However you will have the chance voice your opinions of everyday life as you experience it. The results of this will hopefully contribute to an accurate/insider representation of lifestyle as a British-Somali youth in Sheffield, bridging the gap between preconceived understandings and your own experiences.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and also be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide that you would like to take part, you are still free to change your mind and withdraw at any time.

### **What will happen to the results of the project?**

The results of the project will be written up as a PhD thesis in approximately two years time. They may be presented at conferences or seminars and published in books or articles. You can request a copy of the thesis if you wish. Nothing you say or do as part of this research can be traced back to you from the written work. All the information you give will remain completely anonymous.

### **What if I want to make a complaint?**

If you wish to make a complaint within any stage of the research please feel free to contact my supervisors:

Kate Reed: [K.Reed@Sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:K.Reed@Sheffield.ac.uk)  
Joanne Britton [N.J.Britton@Sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:N.J.Britton@Sheffield.ac.uk)

### **Contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns or decide to withdraw from this project please come and speak to me at the Broomhall Community Centre, or contact me:

William Mason, PhD student, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU.  
Email: [sop09wjm@shef.ac.uk](mailto:sop09wjm@shef.ac.uk)



## Appendix 3

### Consent form



## Consent Form

### **Risk and Resilience: How are day-to-day lifestyle risk factors seen by young people in Maple/Meadow?**

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any point for any or no reason.

All the information you give will remain completely anonymous.

Please read the statements below **carefully** and tick the box next to each statement that you **agree** with.

1. I agree that I have read and that I understand the information sheet provided for the risk and resilience project.
2. I have had chance to ask questions about the project.
3. I understand that it is up to me whether or not I take part and that I can stop at any time without needing to say why.

Please sign below if you have ticked all the boxes above and are happy to participate in the study.

Name of participant

Signature

Date

-----

-----

-----

Name of researcher

Signature

Date

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## Appendix 4

### Ethics approval



Department  
Of Sociological  
Studies.

William Mason  
Department of Sociological Studies

**Department Ethics Co-ordinator**  
Dr Jo Britton  
The University of Sheffield  
Department of Sociological Studies  
Elmfield, Northumberland Road  
Sheffield, S10 2TU  
**Telephone:** +44 (0) 114 222 6431  
**Fax:** +44 (0) 114 276 8125  
**Email:** n.j.britton@sheffield.ac.uk

4 May 2010

Dear William

**PROJECT TITLE:** 'Acculturation, Symbolism, Burgers and Beer: To what extents do British-Somali youths exhibit risky, Western eating and drinking behaviours?'

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 4 May 2010 the above-named project was unconditionally **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following document that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form (*dated 31 March 2010*)
- Participant information sheet (*dated 31 March 2010*)
- Participant consent form (*dated 31 March 2010*)

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved document please inform me since written approval will be required. Please also inform me should you decide to terminate the project prematurely.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Britton'.

**Dr Jo Britton**  
Department Ethics Co-ordinator



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