

# **Storying Challenges in Communities**

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*This is a declaration to certify that the following thesis is my own work. Any ideas and quotes from external sources have been clearly identified. This thesis has not been submitted for any other award or qualification.*

P. Keane

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# **1. Abstract**

The methodology of the thesis guided the research focus. It endeavoured to use a community psychology approach, collaboratively working with Mothers Against Violence (MAV) - a volunteer group based in Moss Side, Manchester. The research question evolved through attendance at MAV meetings, where members expressed concern with how they felt their community was being perceived. Members believed that negative stereotypes had impacted on investment, employment, public services, and opportunities for young people.

Five members of MAV were interviewed using semi-structured re-authoring questions from narrative practice. Interviews were evaluated using narrative and thematic analysis techniques. As well as highlighting concerns about perceptions, MAV relayed their community's attributes including the diverse activities, facilities, volunteers and community groups locally available. They also gave richer descriptions of problematic issues with helpful guidance towards future change.

This thesis is introduced with a review of government agendas over the last two administrations, particularly in relation to communities and young people. The discussion considers misrepresentations and dominant narratives circulated about communities facing challenges. These are analysed alongside structural issues such as inequality. The discussion also raises questions about the effectiveness of current government agendas in promoting genuine community consultation.

As a developing educational psychologist it is important to be aware of dominant discourses, and how these could impact on judgements being made about the people we work with. Being sensitive to how children, families and communities feel they are storied might encourage more authentic engagement. It is also likely to result in more relevant, collaboratively designed goals and strategies.

## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1. Visible Authorship**

In every piece of research there is subliminal bias. The researcher is in a position of power over the written word. They have ultimate control over what questions will be asked, who will participate, and how responses will be collated and analysed:

*'At a fundamental level, it needs to be recognised straight away that no research is ever free from the influences of those who conducted it.'*

(Denscombe 2007, p300)

Some academics feel that is not bias that is dangerous, but the portrayal of traditional '*empiricist research*' as objective due to the '*distant and opaque*' nature of the investigator (Gergen, 1999, p98). This implies that the researcher is the ultimate expert, with a '*God's Eye View*' of reality (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997, p41). Such claims can result in work with '*a lack of responsibility*' for the ethical implications of results and findings (Billington, 2006, p39).

The author's own '*personal, social and cultural contexts*' will impact on how they '*interpret the world*' (Etherington, 2004, p19). When authors fail to acknowledge their own '*subjective experiences and sensitivities*', the reader has no access to the '*meaning*' or '*context*' in which the work has been produced (Billington, 2006, p55). A lack of '*visible authorship*' prevents the reader from holistically analysing arguments (Coffey, 2003, p.324). As authors we need to position ourselves within our work, in order to ensure that our '*values and beliefs*' are '*transparent*' (Etherington, 2004, p27). This requires a level of '*reflexivity*'. Researchers often have an emotional response to the research process, and choose areas of research that reflect issues within their own lives. We need '*self awareness*' to acknowledge and communicate this relationship to the reader (Etherington, 2004, p31).

I currently work as an Assistant Educational Psychologist. My interest areas include identity and accessing the voice of the child. Both of these interest areas relate to my own life story and development of self. In Western cultures there has been a *'boundary between childhood and adulthood'* which has restricted our perceptions of a child's ability to conceptualise their world (Wyness, 2000, p1). Legislation has only recently begun to appreciate the understandings of children, and their right to partake in decision making (Davie, 1996; Farrell, 2005). Children are beginning to be acknowledged as social actors *'active in shaping their own identities'* (Wyness, 2000, p26). They form their identities within social, cultural and economic contexts.

I was born in 1976, which resulted in the majority of my childhood occurring during the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. This had huge implications on my awareness of deprivation, and the way in which sections of the population might be described by dominant agencies. As a family we were late in securing a colour television, which meant that visual media was as grey as headlines about mass unemployment, poverty, strikes, racism and anti- Irish sentiments. Songs on the radio reflected themes of injustice, inequality and prejudice (Simmonds, 2007). Walking and playing in North Manchester neighbourhoods enabled me to see differences in access to housing, amenities and luxury items. There were also clear discrepancies between educational provisions. The primary school I attended had a caring culture, but with low expectations for pupil attainment. As I progressed through the education system I became more aware of the perceptions of teachers, and how these could negatively influence interactions with children from particular catchment areas.

Fortunately, my parents were both committed to the value of education. My father was born during the 1950s in Salford, Greater Manchester. After attending a secondary modern he secured further qualifications, and became part of the 42% of his age group who attained upwardly mobile occupations in relation to their own parents (Barry, 2005, p39). My Irish mother came to England as a child in the 1960's. She has a more emotive response to education, having spent much of her childhood assisting my grandmother who was unable to read or write. For my mother, success in education is about securing acceptance and respect from the world. My parents have supported my right to an education. This has enabled me to

follow a very different life trajectory than many of my early childhood peers. I feel that alongside the rights I have benefitted from, I need to be aware of the responsibilities I now have. On completion of this doctorate I will be in a relatively unique position, of being able to enter and access quite different worlds.

Since the nineteenth century, knowledge has been a highly regarded '*commodity*' which could be '*bought*' (Billington, 2006, p41). Psychologists and educators have worked with structures of control to assess, define, separate and divide individuals. Their expert knowledge has subjugated the experiences and understandings of communities. This has resulted in a lack of acknowledgment of locally based voices and wisdom. Some psychologists argue that education is never a '*neutral*' endeavour. It can be used for '*domestication*' and '*conditioning*', but has the potential to be the '*key*' to '*freedom*' (Freire, 1972, p9). When we engage in research our work should be '*morally defensible*' (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997, p13). Researchers have the skills and capacity to investigate complex life stories which contextualise individuals within their social, cultural, political and economic situations. They have the ability to deconstruct dominant storylines about individuals, groups and neighbourhoods, and consider who is benefitting from these headlines (Billington, 2006). If they choose to psychologists are able to '*listen*', '*reframe problems*' and make the '*invisible visible*' (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p27).

I decided to complete my thesis research in the Moss Side/ Hulme area of Manchester, in the North West of England. Before beginning this doctorate in educational psychology, I had worked in the area as a teacher for over four years. Teaching across the primary and secondary school phases allowed me to meet children of all ages, families, local link professionals and support organisations. My experiences in Moss Side remain the most enjoyable and rewarding years of my career so far. This was due to the welcoming nature of families, and the high energy levels, warmth, humour and intelligence of the students I taught. Through my thesis research I wanted to be in a position to help record more complex stories about the locality. I felt that these might provide more holistic descriptions of issues affecting the community. I believed that context, including issues of inequality and prejudice, were often absent from negative media accounts of the area (see Appendix 1).



## **2.2. Historical Context of Moss Side**

Moss Side is located approximately one mile south of the city centre of Manchester with its two main housing areas set at either side of Princess Parkway, a six lane highway bringing commuters into the city (Fraser, 1996, p52). The area borders Hulme, which is adjacent to the city centre with its northern boundary being the River Medlock (Makepeace, 1995). Hulme is set between Upper Brook Street on the east and Manchester ship canal on the west (Moobela, 2005, p11). Locally, the two areas are often '*cited interchangeably*' (Fraser, 1996, p53). However, it is the name of Moss Side which researchers feel has become nationally and internationally known:

*'Indeed it is rare for anyone living in any part of Britain (and many people in parts of Europe and the US too) not to have heard of Moss Side. Moss Side has developed a (racialized) iconic status as the epitome of 'Dangerous Britain'. Comparisons are drawn between Moss Side and the mythologized black ghettos of the United States (the Bronx in New York or South Central Los Angeles) with seldom any sense of irony, despite the phenomenal difference in land area and extent of racial segregation...'*

(Fraser, 1996, p55)

In understanding more about perceptions of the area held by some, it is important to consider the historical development of Moss Side and Hulme. The ward of Hulme was incorporated into the original borough of Manchester, established in 1838. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, warehouses and mills were built along the Bridgewater Canal, either within or on the boundaries of the area. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century small workshops developed, with Britain's first Rolls Royce car being built in Hulme in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The area consisted mainly of residential properties with '*row upon row of terraced housing, much of it poorly constructed, without adequate sanitary facilities and running water and the streets lacking proper drainage*' (Makepeace, 1995, p44). The neighbouring Moss Side became a ward of the borough of Manchester in 1904, with better developed residential properties built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As *'the first industrial city'* (Peck and Ward, 2002, p1) Manchester attracted migration from across the United Kingdom, with settlers residing in the city's neighbouring wards inclusive of Hulme and Moss Side. More middle class residents, accommodated in the better housing of Moss Side, began moving into the suburbs during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their homes were split by developers into smaller dwellings, providing working classes with cheaper rents (Fraser, 1996). During the post war years and economic boom of the 1950s, various government initiatives encouraged migration from abroad, due to labour shortages in building, engineering, manufacturing, transport and the National Health Service. Many black and Irish migrants found themselves unwelcome tenants across Manchester, with more hospitable attitudes in Moss Side and Hulme. They similarly experienced prejudice when attempting to socialise or gain access to nightlife leisure activities within Manchester's city centre. This resulted in the creation of a leisure infrastructure within Moss Side and Hulme, inclusive of cafes, clubs, and unofficial private houses locally known as *'shebeens or blues'* (Haslam, 1999, p225). The configuration of housing and leisure development reflected national patterns of segregation through *'the informal but widespread colour bar'* (Gilroy, 1987, p160).

During the 1960s Manchester local authority began clearing what was considered *'slum'* housing across Hulme, inclusive of key local amenities (Moobela, 2005, p13). In their place, planners felt that residents would be able to replicate street level interaction within *'four huge crescent blocks'* which were *'five storey deck access blocks a quarter of a mile long, and together having a capacity of 1000 homes'* (Moobela, 2005, p14). The second stage of development included the Alexander Park housing estate. Shops were demolished, and the estate was divided from remnants of the older community through the widening of Princess Parkway (Haslam, 1999). Structural faults within the new buildings led to heating, ventilation and waste disposal difficulties incurring additional costs and poor living conditions for residents. The unsuitability of housing was further illustrated by the accidental death of a child who fell from the deck access housing in 1974. Many residents had limited choices in terms of alternative accommodation, and the deck access buildings were difficult to police (Moobela, 2005).

The impact of poor planning was compounded in the late 1970s and early 1980s by high rates of unemployment, particularly affecting young, black men (Fraser, 1996). In addition, Venner documented young peoples' perceptions of *'harassment'* by police officers, inclusive of unconfirmed allegations of *'capricious use of 'stop and search' powers, illegal detentions and racial abuse of young people'* (Venner, 1981, p375). Keith discusses these issues, arguing that by 1981 Moss Side had already developed a particular reputation locally, which would become fixed nationally following disturbances which occurred across the country, in the summer of 1981 (Keith, 1993). Venner states that within Moss Side, *'people of all colours and ages took part for many different reasons'* (1981, p377), with a belief that the negative image the area contributed to difficulties:

*'...when riots occurred in Brixton, followed by Southall and Liverpool, people believed that if it happened in Manchester it would happen first in Moss Side. This turned out to be a self- fulfilling prophecy.'*

(Venner, 1981, p376)

The Scarman Report similarly cited national structural issues of inequality and racism when contextualising the riots of the 1980s. He commented on *'high unemployment'* and *'tensions between the police and at least some sections of the community'*, when reflecting on conditions in Moss Side (Scarman, 1982, p33). Some partnership working over the following years, between residents and the local authority, led to improvements in the planning of housing and amenities. These were funded through the Moss Side Urban Initiative and Hulme City Challenge, as part of Manchester's rebirth as a *'global'* city (Peck and Ward, 2002, p18). Manchester's regeneration followed the Baltimore (USA) *'bricks and mortar'* model of rebranding the urban core, with a belief that investment and a developing service industry would benefit residents across the city. Attempting to *'market'* Manchester on the basis of *'distinctive and individuating features'*, has resulted in a city which reflects national and international *'recycling of very similar regeneration landscapes'*. These include *'waterfront developments, heritage and theme parks, concert halls, shopping centres'* and *'prestigious office complexes'*.

(Quilley, 1999, p186).

Unfortunately the quality and availability of occupations created through the Baltimore model can create *'gentrified areas for high income, white collar workers'*, spatially separated from the *'poor and dependent'* (Seo, 2002, p120). Division is further created when discrimination operates in employment practices:

*'Nationally as well as locally, it is known that the predominant characteristics of work in the retail sector and all branches of the leisure industry are those of low skill, low wage, part-time or casual employment. These overwhelmingly outnumber skilled or managerial jobs. Many agree that those who live in the stigmatised inner city do not have access to this work (postcode discrimination) and those who are categorised as black, irrespective of skill or qualifications, find barriers.'*

(Peck and Ward, 2002, p232)

Dave Haslam described the development of a trade in illegal substances throughout Manchester's inner cities in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Within Moss Side he felt that this evolving industry was further supported by a separate nightlife infrastructure, and high rates of unemployment. The production and selling of illegal substances across Manchester resulted in an increased use of firearms, related murders, *'and bystanders'* who *'seemed increasingly at risk'* (Haslam, 1999, p239). South described the tragic shooting of Benji Stanley in 1992, a 14 year old boy who had been the victim of mistaken identity. Further violent incidents, together with newspaper reports and views expressed by politicians, consolidated the negative reputation of the area:

*'Moss Side in Manchester is notable as a location that has come to bear the burden of representation as a dangerous place where drugs, race, guns and violence are said to coexist in an unstable mix.'*

(South, 1999, p56)

### **2.3. Initial Thesis Idea**

There have been a number of deaths through gun and knife crime across Manchester, over the last three decades. In September 2006 Jessie James was killed. He was a positive, energised 15 year old boy, who I had previously taught within a support unit in Moss Side. My clearest memories of Jessie are from when he was in Year 7, as a smiling, laughing member of the class. His funeral was an emotional experience. I remember images of his friends carrying his coffin, and contributing to his memorial mass through prayer, poetry and song.

In the summer of 2008 I met with professionals I had previously worked with in Moss Side, including a Senior Educational Psychologist and Youth Worker at the Powerhouse (youth centre). We discussed the tragedy of Jessie's death, and expressed sadness that his peers had experienced a traumatic bereavement at such a young age. We were inspired by the resilience they were displaying in the face of this adversity. We considered whether a related research project would be helpful to the community, and professionals working with children. We also wondered whether this research might encourage more empathy and understanding from those external to the community.

I spent a great deal of time reading around adolescent development, peer bereavement processes, traumatic bereavement and resilience. During this time I was also receiving supervision at Newcastle University. Reading, supervision and reflection made me aware that the project could potentially distress the young people I was aiming to support. I decided that questioning young people about such sensitive issues would have huge ethical implications (Farrell, 2005). The young people I was proposing to work with were in the process of working through key transition periods in their lives, having only recently left school.

## **2.4. Working Collaboratively with MAV**

I investigated alternative possibilities for researching bereavement, in more ethically acceptable ways. Whilst working in Moss Side I taught a group of students who followed the ASDAN syllabus (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network). Part of this course involved exploring voluntary agencies. A number of students completed a project on 'Mother's Against Violence' (MAV), a local community group which offered support to those bereaved through violence.

Mothers Against Violence (MAV) was founded in Manchester in 1999 by Patsy McKie, as a response to four gun incidents in a week and three fatalities. One of the young people killed was her son Dorrie. Patsy McKie attended support meetings which enabled mothers to share how they had been affected by crime and bereavement. The group's discussions led to shared understandings, goals and agreed actions. They evolved into an inclusive organisation which aims to raise awareness of the impacts of gun crime, and address related issues. In 2001 MAV met with Tony Blair to highlight their concerns, and discuss possible strategies for a better future. In 2004 they were granted a voluntary service award in recognition of their work. They then assisted the development of linked organisations based in London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds and Huddersfield. Most recently they have helped establish Fathers Against Violence (FAV), which was formed by James Gregory following the murder of his son Guiseppe in 2009. Mothers and Fathers Against Violence largely consists of volunteers who provide a range of resources across the community. These include discussions, presentations, campaigning, mentoring, counselling, and support with training, education and employment needs (<http://mavuk.org/02.08.2011>).

I initially contacted MAV via email in October 2008. I outlined my prior connections to the neighbourhood, and requested some support with a project about bereavement. I was aware that MAV were open to discussing their bereavement experiences, in their aim to promote awareness of the impacts of gun crime. The then Chairperson of the group, Angela Lawrence, telephoned me to discuss the project further and we met on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2008. She was warm and welcoming, showing me around

the small building that the group were based in at that time. I was open about my prior experiences in Moss Side, and my current thinking around research possibilities. I shared examples of the articles I was reading and interested in. From the beginning of the meeting I explained that my ideas were only an initial starting point. I was respectful and eager to access the knowledge of MAV, and allow their ideas to guide the research.

Angela Lawrence was kind and supportive. She acknowledged the work I had put into reading around resilience and bereavement issues, prior to our meeting. She was pleased that I was flexible about how the project might develop, as she recognised that I was not aware of more difficult aspects of MAV's work. She felt that considering positive psychological processes involved in bereavement was an interesting idea (Tennen and Affleck, 2005). However the people she was supporting had experienced complex and traumatic loss, which did not easily fit into models of bereavement (Kubler Ross and Kessler, 2005) or resilience (Coutu, 2003). Angela gave the example of a mother she had worked with that morning, whose son had been killed five years before. The mother was still in the process of eliciting details about the crime from the police. She did not feel that she could begin the grief process without basic information about her son's murder, such as the time of his death. Angela provided me with an opportunity to speak to the whole MAV group during their monthly meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> October. She felt it was important for the group as a whole to decide whether or not this was research that would be of interest to them.

During October I completed as much reading as possible around bereavement in sudden and traumatic circumstances. People bereaved through murder can experience disbelief and denial for extended periods (Murray Parkes, 1998). They are likely to feel intense anger towards perpetrators, which can exhaust emotional resources (Raphael, 1984). Bereavement processes can be further complicated by legal proceedings and media attention. Additional distress may be caused by negative portrayals of the deceased (Staudacher, 1998). The experience of complex grief can induce symptoms usually associated with post traumatic stress syndrome such as nightmares, flashbacks, survivor guilt, detachment and depression (Fitzgerald, 2000).

I spent several hours at the MAV offices on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> October. I spoke to members about their experiences before and after the formal meeting. At the meeting I presented some ideas about bereavement, and provided copies of academic articles. My aim was to be transparent, in line with ethical expectations of researchers investigating sensitive issues (Banyard and Flanagan, 2005). I was also honest about how much I needed to learn. I was eager to gain advice from the group, and new knowledge from potential participants. I explained that this would shape and develop the research.

I felt that the group were more trusting of me as a researcher due to my prior connections to the area. There were some familiar faces among the members, including counsellors who I had met through joint work with past students. Another member commented on my Irish name and colouring. She also felt that it was positive that I did not have a “*silver spoon*” in my mouth. She’d been dismayed by the negative attitudes of some students she was studying with, who refused to come into the area. I feel that my Irish heritage, Manchester accent and previous teaching experiences in the area all provided opportunities for increased rapport with MAV. It was possible for ‘*matching*’ in conversations (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p65) and there were opportunities for shared ‘*humour*’ (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p143). Building rapport is a key element in ensuring open communication with potential participants (Rapley, 2007). It is also important to have an understanding of the culture and norms of the environment we are working in (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and McCormack Steinmetz, 1991). There is a sense of matriarchy within the MAV group, which I am familiar with from my experiences of Irish culture. When people have similarities in life experiences, they are more likely to understand each others constructs (Moon, 2007). This can help the researcher to establish ‘*credibility*’ based on their ‘*understanding of the research*’ (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p143).

Despite similarities, it was apparent that there were also differences between my own understandings and those of MAV members. Academic books can not describe the emotions of a person who has lost a close friend or family member through murder. MAV members relayed traumatic experiences, such as negative treatment they’d received from the police, immediately after a relative had died. I was also



unaware that ambulance staff are unable to respond to a gun crime incident, until an armed response unit is on the scene. Members of MAV described trying to help a loved one who was dying, whilst ambulance staff were in view.

MAV members were willing to discuss their bereavement experiences, and were generous with their time. They responded to questions I asked and issues I raised. However, bereavement was a much smaller theme within the overall priorities being discussed by the group. The services they were providing to the community were much wider than bereavement support. The group were raising awareness of the impacts of gun crime through their liaisons with schools, businesses, local authorities, national government representatives and the media. They were completing preventative work with people serving sentences in prison. They were also involved in a number of projects with young people including performing arts, sports, education, employment, social and life skills. They voiced how their work was more difficult due to negative perceptions held about their community, and their young people. During this first meeting the group decided not to engage with a large donation offered, in exchange for participation with a television programme. The group had serious concerns about how their community would be portrayed by the presenter, who is a well-known chat show host. This helped clarify how predominant this theme was, in MAV's thinking and decision making.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> November Angela Lawrence confirmed that MAV would be willing to work collaboratively with me on a research project. Over the next six months I regularly communicated with her, reviewing how the initial MAV meeting had impacted upon my ideas. I had also attended an event MAV organised at Manchester Cathedral, called 'Getta Life, Don't Take a Life'. The evening was advertised as being about 'Real Life, Real Soul and Real Gospel'. It was one of the many activities being completed by MAV to help raise awareness of gun crime, whilst also celebrating the talents of their area's young people. I discussed my experiences with prior professional contacts from the locality. In addition, I completed a self funded narrative level one course in the Autumn of 2008. This helped to improve my listening skills, and focus on the knowledge, values and intentions of the people I worked with. As part of the narrative course I received supervision. I also accessed supportive advice through my placement at Telford and Wrekin's educational

psychology service. The most transformative reflections were initiated through questions posed by Professor Liz Todd at Newcastle University. She asked me to review my interactions with MAV, and consider the priorities that they were voicing. She also used narrative techniques to elicit some of my constructs around identity, equality and justice. Positive feedback during supervision helped me to appreciate that this reflection was part of the research process.

Qualitative researchers do not rush towards rigid questions. They work with people in natural settings, and '*attend to the experience as a whole*' rather than focusing on '*separate variables*' (Ely et al, 1991, p4). They allow '*new ideas*' to develop through '*intuition, vision, and personal experience*', utilising '*emotional intelligence*' to create '*meaning*' (Ely et al, 1991, p107). Jennifer Moon explains that we each come to a situation with our own '*frame of reference*' or set of constructs (2007, p23). This directs our motivations, attention, and the information we assimilate. Learners notice external stimulus, and make meaning of these in relation to their internal constructs. Reflective learners complete '*cognitive housekeeping*' (2007, p27), adapting internal constructs in relation to their experiences. This allows the learner to find new meanings through the interaction of internal and external knowledge. The process permits growth, and transformative development of new realizations.

## **2.5. The Evolved Research Question**

The research project I originally posed to MAV changed considerably, in the six months after we first met. It initially evolved from a resiliency themed bereavement question, to a more open exploration of the complex processes involved in traumatic bereavement. The research question was adapted further, when it became clear that MAV had already extensively considered bereavement in the origins and formations of their group. When people are providing their '*time, thought and assistance*', it is important that they consider research '*valuable and relevant*'. This allows a sense of '*reciprocity*', where the researcher is contributing rather than just extracting information (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p63). It is important to me that I balance giving, with the opportunities I secure. This is part of my core construct about how a socially

just society should operate. People should have equal access to rights. With those rights comes an expectation of giving back to society as a whole, in the form of responsibilities.

A thesis exploring perceptions about their community was much more useful to MAV than a bereavement project. This related to how they felt their young people were perceived, and the feasibility of engaging the wider community with the process of positive change. The new thesis topic also reflected MAVs own transformation process. They had already evolved from a small bereavement support group. They were now re-branding their image to better communicate the range of services MAV offered. They were developing a new logo, flyers, posters and a website. They had moved to new offices which provided more space and resources for local people. They were also registering as an official charity. The overarching research question became:

***How do Mothers Against Violence feel that their community is being storied, and what is their response?***

With additional support questions, including:

1. What ideas do people have about your community?
2. What are the effects of what people think about your community?
3. What would you say about the community?
4. What ideas about your community are helpful?
5. What is it that you want people to know about your community?

As part of the doctorate process I have also needed to ask myself reflective questions, exploring how the research process has impacted on my own thinking and development.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1. Community Psychology**

The way in which my research question evolved is representative of community psychology processes. Community psychologists believe that an '*assessment phase*' is required for worthwhile research to be conducted (Orford, 2008, p323). This allows the researcher to work with participants, to better understand what type of research might be useful to their community.

Community psychology emerged during the 1960's, as people began to feel dissatisfied with the focus on the '*individualism*' within Western societies. This was creating '*alienation, loneliness and fragmentation of the human experience*' (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p173). Many participants involved with psychological experiments had been relatively young and middle class. Their life experiences were unlikely to be reflective of wider socio-economic, cultural and political circumstances (Orford, 2008, p8). Community psychologists also questioned the usefulness of controlled experiments, which did not consider social contexts (Zax and Spector, 1974). They feared that the individual was becoming '*decontextualised*' in psychology. Community psychologists began working '*in schools, churches, neighbourhood and grassroots associations, mutual help organisations, and workplaces*' (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p166). They attempted to understand the perspectives of the people they worked with, and the situations in which they lived. This included an appreciation for the impacts of income distribution, social class and inequalities. By placing the individual firmly '*in a social and cultural context*' community psychologists were beginning to fuse psychological theory with sociological and political reflections (Bender, 1976, p128).

The shift in the focus of community psychologists, also required a shift in their thinking about knowledge. Community psychologists were not investigating abstract situations within formal, experimental settings. They were moving away from

academic criticisms which described psychologists as *'maintenance men'*, supporting systems of control (Loxley in Gillham, 1978, p100). Psychologists needed to acquire a better understanding of social environments. Investigating new areas meant they were no longer able to claim *'greater knowledge and truth'* (Billington, 2000, p36). They needed an *'appreciation of the competence and expertise possessed'* by *'members of groups or communities'* (Orford, 2008, pxiv).

Community psychologists began re-defining traditional roles between the researcher and participants. There was acknowledgement that the researcher needed to share power and control as part of an *'egalitarian partnership'* (Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, and Davis 2002, p4). Participatory research processes required researchers to genuinely collaborate with participants. They needed to be *'far more engaged and open to negotiation and change than is the case with more traditional, controlled forms of knowledge acquisition'* (Orford, 2008, p86). This involved relinquishing plans for *'extractive'* research designed to meet the needs of the researcher (Holland and Blackburn, 1998, p179). Instead, co-created knowledge was favoured, which is more likely to be helpful to future community projects and policies:

*'They have the most accurate and direct knowledge about the problems they are facing and the extent to which different issues matter in their lives. They have valuable insights about the causes of the problems they are experiencing and the roles they can play in addressing those problems. They know what they want solutions to look like and have ideas that can help to design interventions that meet those objectives.'*

(Lasker and Guidry, 2009, p209)

Community based research projects are more likely to be beneficial if the researcher and participants work together, towards common goals (Aron and Corne, 1995). Projects are favoured which *'involve collaborative, multilateral co-research and co-action'* (Orford, 2008, pxiii). It is argued that we are more likely to hear the voices of participants, by *'immersing ourselves'* in the communities we work with (Orford, 2008, p181). It can take extensive time to develop trusting relationships required in order to gain access to the views of participants, groups or communities. Therefore it

is acknowledged that trust and acceptance can be aided by prior links to an area (Cotterill and Letherby, 1994). This can help the researcher to build rapport, and understand local culture and contexts (Ely, Anzul, Freidman, Garner and McCormack Steinmetz, 1991, p4). Communities can then provide us with new understandings of evolved research questions:

*'It is not probable, and perhaps not even possible, for us to achieve an adequate understanding of the most profound problems that burden the majority of the population today if we do not place ourselves, hermeneutically, at their historical context point.'*

(Aron and Corne, 1994, p46)

When psychologists work alongside participants and community groups, they are acknowledging the importance of self- determination and participation. It is essential that community groups have ownership over the research processes they are involved with. The five core values of community psychology are considered to be *'health, caring and compassion, self- determination and participation, human diversity and social justice'* (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p167). It is argued that these values can be divided into those which are *'ameliorative'* in nature and those which are *'transformative'* (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p171). Ameliorative projects utilise the first four values of self determination, health, diversity and caring and compassion. These projects attempt to address the impacts of inequality and injustice within communities. Unfortunately ameliorative projects often fail to tackle the core issue of social justice (Orford, 2008). This results in psychological research which addresses *'symptoms'* rather than *'causes'*:

*'For as long as we address only the consequences of an uneven allocation of resources, without looking at the problem's root cause, we confront only the surface of the issues.'*

(Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p170).

### **3.2. Social Justice**

Social justice became a necessary concept during the industrial revolution. Capitalism and modern machinery had created new employment dynamics. Theories on social justice developed as a means of ensuring some balance of distribution, as new opportunities for financial benefits arose. Discussions led to the organisation of trade unions, and gradual improvements in employee rights. After the Second World War, an ethos of equality was prevalent in Britain. Political parties felt that trade unions helped ensure fair distribution of resources in the workplace, and taxes remained progressively high for higher earners. The war effort had encouraged a sense of social responsibility, resulting in the creation of the '*welfare state*'. It was felt that appropriate support agencies were required for those living below a socially acceptable level. There was also an expectation that universally accessible health and education amenities would be developed, which would permit every child an equal opportunity to achieve in life. Post war sentiments remained largely in place across Labour and Conservative governments until 1979, when Margaret Thatcher came to power. The highest tax rate was reduced to 40%, and has remained at this level since then (Barry, 2005). Tighter restrictions were introduced on public spending, and nationalised industries were re-privatised (Bryson and Fisher, 2011).

Lower tax levels impact on the financial resources available to fulfil social justice aims. This results in children accessing very different levels of health and education support at a young age, which in turn affects their access to equal opportunities in life. Social class is the strongest known predictor of illness and health issues (Orford, 2008). Socio-economic positioning also impacts on attainment at school. Children who receive free school meals consistently attain at a lower standard than peers (Dixon and Paxton, 2005). Lack of success in school can have further bearing on future life choices. Many young men who are involved in street crime have underachieved in school. Three quarters of people incarcerated in prisons, have previously been excluded from school. Patterns of racial inequalities mirror those in the United States. Afro- Caribbean pupils are four times as likely to be excluded. They also experience harsher reactions at every stage of the legal process, from arrests to charges and sentencing (Barry, 2005).

The standard of locally based services generally correlates to the average household income of an area. For example, high achieving schools create a house price premium within the local catchment area. This results in a *'post-code lottery'* for families unable to afford accommodation in those areas (Barry, 2005, p293).

*'Residential segregation'* can further hinder life chances when *'stigma'* is assigned to *'neighbourhoods and those who live in those neighbourhoods'* (Young, 2008, p86).

People experience social injustice when their *'social positioning means that the operation of diverse institutions and practices conspires to limit their opportunities to achieve well being'* (Young, 2008, p79). When people have *'unequal opportunities for self development and access to resources'* they can be *'more vulnerable to harm than others'* (Young, 2008, p80).

In Britain the gap between rich and poor has continued to widen since 1979, reversing post war trends towards greater equality (Pierson, 2010). A *'just distribution of earnings'* ought to enable anyone working normal hours in a full time job to make at least 60% of the national median average income (Barry, 2005, p18). Welfare support services should further aid families experiencing unemployment. People need access to the *'social minimum'* required for a *'secure and dignified life'*. This includes adequate accommodation, clothing and sustenance (Barry, 2005, p5).

In the twenty first century poverty remains high in Britain. In 2003/4, 21% of the population were living in households earning below 60% of the median average income (Dixon and Paxton, 2005, p27). A 2008 report by the London Child Poverty Commission stated that almost a third of children in the United Kingdom were still living below the official poverty line (Zulueta, 2009, p71). The extreme geographical imbalances in poverty illustrate structural, rather than individual, causes of deprivation and unemployment. There remains a lack of employment opportunities in areas such as the North West, North East and the Midlands. Many people within these areas relied upon the manufacturing occupations which were decimated during the 1980s recession (Barry, 2005). Employment opportunities are further curtailed when whole neighbourhoods are affected by joblessness. There are less informal links to new prospects through *'word of mouth'*, *'adverts in windows'* and *'networking'*. Employers have also been known to *'exercise postcode discrimination, choosing not to hire from certain areas'* (Barry, 2005, p312).



Wilkinson and Pickett describe the way in which levels of inequality negatively impact on *'the psychological well-being of all of us'* (2010, p5). Once people are able to meet their basic needs, income begins to have emotional rather than physical impacts. People judge themselves in relation to others, and place themselves on a *'social ladder'* (2010, p40). They hope for *'creditably in society without shame and stigma of apparent poverty'* (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p25). This can create a breakdown in trust and social cohesion, as people feel pressured to *'fend for themselves and get what they can'* (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p56). Feelings of shame and humiliation have also been cited as antecedents to violence and offending:

*'...one of the most common causes of violence, and one which plays a large part in explaining why violence is more common in unequal societies, is that it is often triggered by loss of face and humiliation when people feel looked down on and disrespected.'*

(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p40)

It is believed that these ideas are fully comprehended by governments. When administrations have required cohesion and collaboration, this has been accompanied by a greater push for equality:

*'...both wartimes were characterized by full employment and narrower income differences – the result of deliberate government policies to promote co-operation with the war effort.'*

(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p85)

Wilkinson and Pickett describe how *'crude differences in wealth gradually become overlaid by differences in clothing, aesthetic taste, education, sense of self and all other markers of class identity'* (2010, p28). The resulting *'divisive class prejudices'* can prevent people from connecting with those outside their immediate locality. This inhibits communication, social exchange, and empathy for challenges in certain communities:

*'Inequality, not surprisingly, is a powerful social divider, perhaps because we all tend to use differences in living standards as markers of status differences. We tend to choose our friends from among our near equals and have less to do with those much richer or much poorer. And when we have less to do with other kinds of people, it's harder for us to trust them. Our position in the social hierarchy affects who we see as part of the in-group and who as out-group – us and them – so affecting our ability to identify with and empathize with other people.'*

(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p51)

Division between sections of society becomes alarming, if experiences of disadvantage are no longer understood by the wider community. Social justice theorists emphasise the need to consider how people are represented. They argue that the *'politics of poverty'* now needs to be reframed as *'a politics of recognition as well as redistribution'* (Lister, 2008, p114). There is currently a *'misrepresentation'* and *'othering'* of people affected by disadvantage (Lister, 2008, p113). This results in *'blame'* being assigned to communities, rather than empathy and understanding being exchanged (Lister, 2008, p112). It is also possible that people experiencing difficulties will internalise *'intrapersonal explanations'* for structural socio-economic issues (Orford, 2008, p38). Emerging beliefs reflect government rhetoric which focuses on the *'responsibilities'* of *'the most vulnerable in society'*, including *'the unemployed, single parents, the sick and disabled'* (Barry, 2005, p146).

Wilkinson and Pickett state that *'politicians have the opportunity to do genuine good'* (2010, p238), providing that they do not ignore *'the glaringly obvious fact that these problems have common roots in inequality and relative deprivation'* (2010, p15). Social justice theorists argue that we each benefit from the opportunities available within our society. It is our responsibility to contribute something back, in relation to the advantages participation in society has supplied:

*'Those who have benefited most from the existing system of rights – the rich and the powerful – are those who bear the heaviest responsibilities, because the way in which they use their advantages has such a large impact on the lives of everyone else. Thus, political office should not be abused by turning it into a means of personal enrichment, nor should the political power of the wealthy be deployed to further unjust public policies, slanted towards their interests.'*

(Barry, 2005, p144)

### **3.3. Government Agendas**

I began this thesis during New Labour's administration. The Party's initial rhetoric appeared to promote understanding and inclusion. In his election victory speech Tony Blair assured us, "*A new dawn has broken...*" New Labour would, "*...build a nation united, with common purpose, shared values, with no one shut out, no one excluded...*"

([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bldWwrgS\\_E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bldWwrgS_E) 02.08.2011)

As the Head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit from 1997 to 2001, David Milliband argued that communities required mainstream services which could be accessed by all without '*stigma*'. This was described as an '*investment*' for the future, with a focus on preventing longer term societal difficulties by offering universal support (cited in Clarke, 2009, p61). Sure Start Centres could be interpreted as an example of universal services. They were based on American 'Head Start' programmes which aimed to provide children from '*deprived*' backgrounds with access to early learning educational opportunities (Byrne, 2006, p157). Sure Start Centres were often based in '*disadvantaged*' areas, but were accessible to all residents within a locality. They provided childcare, education and health services, together with training and advice for parents (Department for Education and Skills, 2002, p2).

New Labour's language of inclusion seemed to take a different direction with the dissemination of 'The Respect Agenda'. It used an authoritative tone, locating blame within individuals. Those in crisis were separated from the 'decent' majority:

*'Anti-social behaviour by both adults and young people creates havoc for the communities around them. Where that happens we will not allow it to go unchallenged and unchecked. We will take tough action so that the majority of law-abiding, decent people no longer have to tolerate the behaviour of the few individuals and families that think they do not have to show respect to others.'*

(The Respect Task Force, Home Office, 2006, p1)

New Labour's approach has been described as '*neo-liberalism*' (Byrne, 2006, p111). This is a new take on the theories of John Locke, a seventeenth century philosopher. He disagreed with ideas regarding innate characteristics leading to divine and inherited rights. Instead he argued that we are blank canvases, capable of learning from our environments (Lowe, 1995). Arguments intended to be libertarian, became central in New Labour's language of individual responsibility and choice:

*'We need to take responsibility for ourselves, our children and our families, support those who want to do the same – and challenge those who will not.'*

(The Respect Task Force, Home Office, 2006, p1)

Causes of challenges in communities were firmly assigned to individuals, families and localities. These were cited as '*poor parenting skills*', '*schools where poor behaviour is not challenged enough*', and '*drug and alcohol misuse*' (Home Office, 2006, p5). Within this blame discourse, there was a continual enforcement threat:

*'Everyone can change – if people who need help will not take it, we will make them.'*

(The Respect Task Force, Home Office, 2006, p1)

New Labour had departed from left traditions associated with trade union membership and concepts about financial oppression (Byrne, 2006). Instead, language was being used to divide individuals, their families, and *'deprived areas'* (Home Office, 2006, p5). These practices helped attribute financial difficulties to individuals and groups, rather than structural issues such as inequality and poverty (Rabinow, 1984). The use of labels such as *'problem families'* (Home Office, 2006, p3) has helped to deny families a voice, by disengaging them from consultation processes (Mowlam and Creegan, 2009). Divisive language can be further exploited by governing structures, as a persuasive tool used to increase their powers of enforcement and control:

*'We face new challenges and as problems and nuisance evolve so too must our responses. We need to maintain the momentum we have built up to tackle anti-social behaviour by using the tiered, incremental approach to enforcement alongside support and diversion, and go further by strengthening and introducing new powers.'*

(The Respect Task Force, Home Office, 2006, p1)

Family intervention projects could be considered to be an example of state control. They aimed to address parental *'deficits'* (Nixon and Parr, p41, 2009), and were described by parents as *'non-negotiable'* support more akin to a *'programme of surveillance'* (Nixon and Parr, p47, 2009). Parents were aware and resistant to themes of *'blame'* (Nixon and Parr, p49, 2009) which did not recognise the complexity of issues families faced, inclusive of *'deprivation'*, *'ill health'* and *'school exclusion'* (Nixon and Parr, p44, 2009).

Themes of control were also apparent in New Labour's 1997 White Paper on youth offending, entitled *'No More Excuses: A new approach to tackling youth crime in England and Wales'* (Home Office, 1997). Legislation permitted changes from a system which included cautioning, to one which allowed courts to issue more serious sanctions such as final warnings and criminal charges. New Labour argued that they were attempting to deter young people from becoming *'career criminals'* (Home Office, 1997a, para 47, cited in Goldson, 2009, p91). Young people were expected to

participate with linked intervention programmes, and non-compliance used as evidence in discussion of any further offences:

*'The Crime and Disorder Bill will abolish cautioning and replace it with a statutory police reprimand and Final Warning scheme. Within a clear statutory framework the police will decide whether to Reprimand a young offender, give a Final Warning or bring criminal charges. When a Final Warning is given, this will usually be followed by a community intervention programme...to address the causes of offending and so reduce the risk of further crime.'*

(Home Office, 1997, paras 5.10 – 5.12, cited in Goldson, 2009, p91)

Goldson voiced concern that new legislation provided opportunities for governing structures to 'up-tariff' a young person's offence 'allowing the courts to impose more intensive (punitive) forms of intervention' (2009, p92). He felt there was 'normality' in adolescents breaking legal codes of conduct. Young people become 'offenders' not by their experimentation, but by the judiciary processes they become subjects of (2009, p94). He raised concerns about the impacts of early intervention:

*'In essence, the core proposition maintains that the application of stigmatising labels; followed by negative social reactions, is a routine consequence of (early) intervention...such processes produce 'outsiders' and this invariably invokes further and more intensive forms of targeted intervention. It follows that cycles of intervention 'create' (or at least consolidate and confirm) offender 'selves'.'*

(Goldson, 2009, p95).

There was concern that young people were not always involved in criminal activity, before being enrolled on targeted intervention programs. Selection could be made because a young person met criteria associated with risk of future offending. Goldson argued that defining someone as a 'near criminal' or possible 'future

*criminal*' violated international human rights, legal processes, and a belief in the innocence of those who have not committed crime (2009, p96). Allen supported his arguments citing the Riyadh Guidelines of the United Nations:

*'...the Riyadh Guidelines state that 'labelling a young person as deviant, delinquent or pre- delinquent often contributes to the development of a consistent pattern of undesirable behaviour' (UN, 1990, para 5f), and therefore suggest that formal agencies of social control should only be utilised as a last resort.'*

(Allen, 2009, p106).

Pierson believed that New Labour initially experienced policy support, because they appealed to both the politically left and right. For the left early intervention and prevention suggested, *'a greater push toward equality with a focus on tackling deprivation'*. More right wing voters were engaged by themes of responsibility, and *'a strong national regime'* (2010, p8). During their last administration, *'the working class were increasingly frustrated by the limited impact that New Labour had had on improving their conditions'* (Heppell, 2011, p33). Other long term supporters had become uneasy with *'punitive elements'* of New Labour's policies (Heppell, 2011, p28).

In May 2010 Labour lost the general election. A coalition government came to power, comprised of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The new administration's main vehicle for change was communicated through 'The Big Society'. This is an agenda which encourages participation from communities in tackling local challenges. It builds upon New Labour's 2006 White Paper entitled 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (Henderson and Vercseg, 2010, p148). This White Paper was linked to a number of funded initiatives, including the 'Building Bridges' programme which encouraged partnership between private, state and voluntary sectors (Edwards, 2010, p11). David Cameron presented his understanding of the Big Society to the Cabinet Office in May 2010:

*“Today is the start of a deep and serious reform agenda to take power away from the politicians and give it to the people. That’s because we know instinctively that the state is often too inhuman, monolithic and clumsy to tackle our deepest social problems. We know the best ideas come from the ground up, not the top down. We know that when you give people and communities more power to come together and work together to make life better – great things happen.”*

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/big-society-heart-public-sector-reform -  
16/11/2010](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/big-society-heart-public-sector-reform-16/11/2010)

Elements of Cameron’s rhetoric have been maintained within the ‘Giving’ Green Paper, which describes the Big Society as, *‘about creating a country in which people are in more control, supported to pursue their collective and individual goals, and are less reliant upon the state.’* It explains the aims of the Big Society as *‘empowering communities’* and *‘opening up public services’* so a range of organisations can *‘compete’* to offer provision (HM Government, 2010, p4). It also outlines the government’s understanding of ‘Giving’:

*‘...people giving what they have, be it their time, their money, or their assets, knowledge and skills, to support good causes and help make life better for all.’*

(HM Government, 2010, p4)

The Big Society has received support from outside the coalition. Academics recognise that the voluntary sector often have credibility not shared by paid employees, due to their personal links and commitments to causes (Henderson and Vercseg, 2010, p23). In addition community groups provide opportunities for people to gain experience of *‘decision making’* and can even *‘strengthen their skills as future political leaders’* (Edwards, 2010, p15). Glasman celebrates a *‘redistribution of power’* (2010, p62), explaining the Big Society as consisting of four elements:



*'The first is a stress on civic responsibility, volunteering and an active sense of community. The second is support for social entrepreneurs, people whose work it is to strengthen society... The third is the strong stress on the mutualism of public services... The fourth element is a radical localism in terms of civic government...'*

(Glasman, 2010, p61)

The Coalition claims that *'the best ideas come from the grassroots'* (HM Government, 2010, p28), may support Glasman's assertion that the Big Society has done much *'to rehabilitate socialist language to a central role in mainstream politics'* (2010, p63). However a critical reading of the 'Giving' Green Paper also raises issues about the allocation of social responsibilities:

*'The main lesson is to acknowledge the limits of government. Social action is not something that government can, or should, compel people to do; it has to be built from the bottom up, on the back of free decisions by individuals to give to causes around them.'*

(HM Government, 2010, p5)

The Coalition cites ways in which the public can accept their assigned commitments, including the possibility of making *'giving one per cent of income a social norm'*. They further emphasize that *'others would say that the level should be far higher, as much as ten per cent'* (HM Government, 2010, p15). The coalition similarly offer operational ways in which communities can contribute to public services:

*'Hospitals, schools, prisons, courts, libraries, police services, and cadet forces have long made use of volunteers, and we think more public bodies should develop ways for people to give time to their services... This is not about providing public services on the cheap. There are significant benefits for those who give their time – in terms of building skills, making new friends and connections, and even for their health.'*

(HM Government, 2010, p9)

These types of ideas have resulted in a questioning of the ethos behind the Big Society agenda, particularly in relation to global financial difficulties:

*'Politics over the next few years is about managing the process of taking things away from people – either cutting their services, raising their taxes or both... There will be valiant attempts to portray constraints as part of a positive, daring agenda. For the Tories, that means nurturing the "big society" to fill the gap that opens when the state is rolled back.'*

(Behr, 2010, p14)

It has been argued by BBC political commentators that these views are shared by *'the overwhelming majority of the electorate'*, who believe the Big Society is *'a convenient pretext to justify the biggest peacetime cuts in public sector jobs and services in living memory.'*

([http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/patrickburns/2010/11/the\\_big\\_society\\_or\\_the\\_big\\_exc.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/patrickburns/2010/11/the_big_society_or_the_big_exc.html) - 16/11/2010)

Those who feel positive about some concepts within the Big Society nevertheless recognise *'serious weakness'* (Glasman, 2010, p62) in its lack of focus on inequality:

*'Put simply, it's hard to engage in public life if you have to work two jobs because you are not paid enough to live. The Big Society provides no account of the decentralisation of wealth to complement its agenda for devolution of power.'*

(Glasman, 2010, p62)

### **3.4. Evaluating Government Rhetoric**

Finlayson states that *'the biggest mistake of both Blairism and Cameronism'* has been *'a focus on the behaviour of individuals as if they were unaffected by the wider cultural economy around them'* (Finlayson, 2010, p30). Connor continues to explore divisive practices, believing that the two administrations simply differ on the mode of intervention. New Labour focused on state control, whilst the coalition advises that responsibility for solutions remains with labelled communities:

*'...what is particularly notable is the positioning of a 'Big Society' as the solution to the problem of a 'Broken Britain'. On the one hand, the saintly narrative of Big Society highlights the spirit, resilience and potential redeeming qualities of a civil society. In contrast Broken Britain highlights the broken, depraved and threatening nature of a number of Britain's communities. These account of 'saints' and 'sinners', may appear very different, but what they share is the assumption that the supposed breakdown of society is to be found in a combination of the alleged enduring pathology of the poor, in part created and sustained, by well intentioned, but misplaced interventions of the state.'*

(Connor, 2010, p1)

My initial research proposal, exploring bereavement and resilience processes, may have inadvertently played into a *'saints'* mythology. Connor believes that both *'saints'* and *'sinners'* definitions separate others. These divisive practices provide opportunities to locate responsibilities within a community rather than considering *'the possibility that it is the very fabrication of society where the locus of responsibility lies'* (Connor, 2010, p4). Connor documents the role of the media in propagating these myths through *'selective and particular collation and presentation of material'* (Connor, 2010, p4). Finlayson further comments on the marginalising language used by politicians:

*'If our society is broken then it is at the top, not the bottom, that the damage is concentrated. Furthermore, the minority at the top has sought to dominate social and economic life to its own advantage and to make public goods into sources of more private wealth for itself.'*

(Finlayson, 2010, p32).

Pitt argues that people's behaviour cannot be *'separated out from the circumstances in which they live'* (Pitt, 2009, p23). He provides the example of young people and offending behaviour, explaining the links between structural issues and crime. These include socio-economic status, unemployment, poverty, discrimination and poor housing (Pitt, 2009). Lack of access to education and resources cause additional complications (Pierson, 2010). Successful preventative work across Europe has included the use of social and educational policy to improve health and welfare (Soloman and Blythe, 2009). The United Nations explicitly links the holistic well-being of young people to lower levels of imprisonment:

*'Comparing data from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) against the prison population shows that countries that rank highly on child well-being tend to have lower rates of imprisonment than those who fare badly.'*

(Allen, 2009, p105)

Goldson questions dividing practices, in light of the commonalities shared by those labelled and *'wider inequalities in structural power'*:

*'Why are some 'categories' of children and young people (the poor and structurally disadvantaged) more likely than others to be 'labelled'?...What is the significance of social class, 'race', ethnicity and/or gender in comprehending differential patterns of labelling and negative social reaction?'*

(2009, p95)

Pierson raises concerns that stigma further complicates problems of structural inequality. Negative labelling has the potential to exacerbate *'self-esteem, mental health problems, violence and the acute consequences of exclusion'* (2010, p36). Residents may find judgements from outside the community stressful, further limiting social interaction and cohesion (Pitt, 2009). Negative discourses can be propagated by schools, leisure services, estate agents and the media, all contributing to an area's *'abandonment'* (Carley, Campbell, Kearns, Wood and Young, 2000, p6). Impacts include less people engaging with 'Right to Buy' initiatives, house prices falling, and properties becoming empty and derelict. This can in turn affect the willingness of external services to invest in the area. When access to financial and retail services are limited people can be vulnerable to higher living costs. This may be through higher prices in smaller shops, mail order catalogues, *'predatory lending practices and outright intimidation from loan sharks'* (Pierson, p139, 2010). Fewer businesses may also limit employment opportunities, particularly if local people feel discriminated against outside their area:

*'...a whole estate or neighbourhood can suffer exclusion. Derelict or overcrowded housing, abandoned public spaces, the disappearance of local shops, poor services, postcode stigma, lack of trust between neighbours all combine to exclude the residents living there.'*

(Pierson, p7, 2010)

Pierson outlines three key discourses around social exclusion. A *'redistributionist'* discourse focuses on financial inequalities arguing that poverty will only be eradicated *'through redistribution of wealth across society as a whole, through taxation, benefits and services'* (2010, p10). This discourse reflects a social justice ethos. It is critical when blame for structural inequality is ascribed to individuals, groups or communities. A *'social integrationist'* discourse recognises some impacts of economics. It maintains that equality can be gained through employment which provides improved access to social, education and economic opportunities. The *'moral underclass'* discourse is prominent in media communications, and political propaganda. It alleges that difficulties in society are due to *'lapses in attitudes and morality'* (Pierson, 2010, p10). Discourse which stigmatises vulnerable groups is part

of an *'implicit moral underclass discourse of social exclusion'* (Clarke, 2009, p62). Pierson feels that New Labour introduced the term social exclusion to British politics due to its *'overly vague'* nature, which distracts attention away from economic inequalities (2010, p5). Similarly *'excluded'* is used as a noun rather than a verb. It describes people, groups and communities *'with no sense of their being an agent'* (2009, p56).

Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party in 1994. After previous Labour election defeats, Blair and his *'modernisers'* felt that the party required *'rebranding'* (Bryon and Fisher, 2011, p5). This resulted in *'New Labour'* which sought to separate itself from old party traditions:

*'They argued that society was now more individualistic and middle class as a consequence of Thatcherism, and that Labour had to break down the perception that the party was associated with holding people back or with levelling down... Central to the modernisers' analysis was a need to respond to the fact that the working class was declining as a percentage of the electorate, whilst the middle classes were expanding...'*

(Heppell, 2011, p19)

New Labour sought to win over the middle classes through research, focus groups and *'electoral calculations'* of what was *'politically feasible, rather than what was ideologically desirable'* (Heppell, 2011, p21). New Labour presented more palatable versions of social justice concepts to the middle classes. These avoided challenging issues, such as fair distribution of society's benefits:

*'New Labour failed to adopt an educational role towards the electorate and shape public opinion towards the importance of social justice and the merits of redistribution.'*

(Heppell, 2011, p28).

Instead, New Labour combined economic growth policies with social responsibility concepts that would be accepted by wider society. They distanced themselves from old Labour administrations through a focus on financial freedom. They criticised Conservative governments for their lack of attention to socially challenging issues. New Labour and their '*mediatisation*' of politics illustrated an '*increasingly central role for language and discourse*' (Bryon and Fisher, 2011, p5).

The Conservatives have taken lessons from New Labour's administrations. With skilful use of language and discourse the coalition government can maintain the individualistic nature of traditional conservative values. The facade of the Big Society ensures they no longer hold '*electorally alienating positions*' (Heppell, 2011, p33). The Big Society provides the basis for discourse which demonstrates '*compassion*' for Britain's '*social fabric*' (Heppell, 2011, p22).

It can be difficult to decode the '*ideologically slanted meanings*' relayed through reframed political policies and the media. Considered analysis is essential in understanding the power of dominant rhetoric:

*'The fact that politicians and media commentators will continue to produce ideologically slanted meanings leads to the conclusion that the need to educate citizens to be critical readers and independent thinkers is pressing if they are to be truly 'empowered' members of a society where social justice means something real.'*

(Jeffries, 2011, p53).

There is a '*dialectical relationship between the power of discourse and the material conditions of people's lives*' (Bryson and Fisher, 2011, p1). The way people are described by dominant agencies impacts on how they are treated in society. Negative discourses permeating society permit an acceptance of gross social injustice. Poverty indicators illustrate that large sections of society live without the basic '*social minimum*' of adequate housing, food and clothing. The variation of education provisions across socio-economic areas prevents '*equality of opportunity*'. Inequity obstructs '*equal citizenship*' and possibilities of '*civil, political and social*

*rights*'. This in turn hinders personal choice and '*fair distribution*' (Pearce and Paxton, 2005, p5). 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is very far from a socially just society. Careful communication from those in power has masked inequality as the root cause of society's ills.

Analysing the research question from a social justice perspective has been challenging. It required consideration of over-arching structural themes which affect the way in which society is governed. There was a necessity for extensive reading, and thinking time for reflection and assimilation of knowledge. This was followed by much deliberation of what information to include in the thesis, and how to present this in an accessible way. Community psychology projects which focus on social justice, often lack manageability. They are also less likely to provide immediately visible '*pay offs*' (Orford, 2008, p16). This has resulted in community psychologists usually involving themselves in more containable and localised projects. These aim to improve conditions within systems, as opposed to tackling causation through questioning structural inequalities (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997).

Fear of tackling structural concepts could have led me to make '*unproductive divisions between macro and micro theories*'. This would have resulted in a lost opportunity to link MAVs experiences to '*the political*' (Bryson and Fisher, 2011, p1). I would not have been addressing '*the causes of the causes*' (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p178). MAV talked about how their area had been described in the media. They also relayed negative interactions they had encountered with local and national government officials. If I wanted to work in a genuinely collaborative way, I needed to attend to the structural issues they had relayed. I hope that investigating these issues will allow me to contribute something useful, to the insightful discussions prevalent during MAV meetings.



## **4. Methodology**

The literature review evaluated government rhetoric during New Labour's administration, and the early stages of the Coalition. New Labour used negative terminology about communities, to justify state interventions in public lives. The Coalition use concepts such as the Big Society, to defend public sector cuts whilst assigning social responsibilities to the wider community. It is argued that language can create new meanings, if used regularly in day to day interaction (Gergen, 1999). We need to take a critical approach to media and political discourse, considering possible motivations for descriptions of individuals, groups and communities. Holding opinions that differ from dominant agencies, illustrates that concepts of 'truth' can be personal and diverse. This chapter is introduced with an overview of what we believe exists in the world, and our understanding of perceptions in relation to this reality (Willig, 2001).

### **4.1. Methodological Views**

*'Ontology is the study of being and existence in the world. It is the attempt to discover the fundamental categories of what exists in the world.*

*Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge and how we come to know the world of things.'*

(Burr, 2003, p92)

Epistemologically I feel that people perceive the world in different ways. Perceptions are likely to relate to people's prior life experiences and understandings. This will act as a *'frame of reference'* for new information provided by the environment. People's attention will be drawn to different stimuli, this will then be remembered and assimilated in unique and individual ways (Moon, 2007, p23). People also interact

with their friends, family and colleagues, sharing thoughts and belief systems through language. New meanings will be created in those interactions, further influencing perceptions of the external world (Gergen, 1999). The literature review raises questions about the influence of media and politics in the development of our understanding of social issues. As powerful agencies their discourses permeate almost every aspect of our lives. On a daily basis most people will listen to the radio, pick up a paper, look at a website or watch some television. Academics voice concern about *'issues of power'* that impact on *'which accounts dominate and which are less often heard'* (Drewery and Winslade, in Monk, Winslade, Crocket and Epston, 1997, p35). Carla Willig similarly cites power relations as a factor in how our views develop. She argues that cultivated discourses can be perpetuated over time:

*'Dominant discourses privilege those versions of social reality which legitimate existing power relations and social structures. Some discourses are so entrenched that it is difficult to see how we may challenge them.'*

(Willig, 2001, p107)

Whilst discourses are likely to be affected by structures of control, this thesis does not accord with a view that these are inflexible. The processes of power and control can change over time. This is because power is practised by ordinary people within each interaction and conversation. It operates through interpersonal exchanges of beliefs and values:

*'...it is important to trace a subtle but important shift in the twentieth century theories of structural power. At the turn of the century it was easy enough to account for structural power simply in terms of differences in material control, for example, armies, weapons, property or money. Over time, however, analysts turned their attention from such material differences to the shared reasoning that renders these material differences reasonable and right. In effect institutional control rests on sets of beliefs – shared ideas, values and sentiments often called ideology.'*

(Gergen, 1999, p204)

Gergen highlights the importance of understanding how meanings are created. However I also feel there is a need to recognise the real issues affecting people's lives. MAV members discussed bereavement, unemployment, discrimination and lack of resources. These concerns are indicative of disparities in health and social opportunities across Britain (Graham, 2007). As a community psychologist it is important to collaboratively work with participants, *'taking seriously'* what they tell us *'about their circumstances'* (Orford, 2008, p49). I am therefore most comfortable with the idea of ontological *'realism'*. This approach acknowledges both the reality of the objects we touch and see, and the structures and processes of society that affect us (Groff, 2004, p11). My realist perspective is evidenced within the literature review, through judgments on levels of poverty and inequality in Britain (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). The combination of a realist acknowledgment of reality, together with a *'critical'* awareness of differing perceptions about this reality, provides a *'critical realist'* methodological paradigm. It merges *'a modified naturalism'* with *'the necessity of interpretive understanding of meaning in social life'* (Sayer, 2000, p3).

Critical realism might be considered to fall along a continuum, between realist and relativist perspectives. An extreme realist outlook might view each person's perceptions as direct accounts of the external world. This standpoint is evident in positivist research which aims to uncover and report objective truths. An extreme relativist approach regards every aspect of reality, as being negotiated and constructed between people. Even circumstances such as death are bound within the language that people have constructed. Discourse has resulted in collaboratively developed meanings within particular places, times and cultures (Willig, 2001). Relativist theorists feel that we learn and grow, when we continually question the realities we are presented with. This supports us in developing new perspectives, rather than becoming entrenched in old ideas. Gergen argues that acknowledging a range of possible realities *'leads to practices that invite interchange and mutual understanding'* (cited in Burr, 2003, p94). Thoughtful debate maintains an appreciation of the need to revisit questions of ethics and morality, from alternative angles (Willig, 2001).

I currently struggle with the idea of relativism in relation to morality, which is one of the reasons I have taken a critical realist perspective within this research. Groff asks how we can challenge beliefs if all are 'equally valid' (Groff, 2004, p1). Burr similarly states that relativism '*appears to undermine our attempts to morally ground our action, our choices and politics*' (Burr, 2003, p81). I feel that I need to take a '*firm position*' in order to '*challenge*' current '*economic conditions*'. Critical realism provides a better forum for my developing thoughts, as there is a clear emphasis on issues of equality, class and ethnicity (Sayer, 2000). This fits with a community psychology ideals of promoting social justice, by being clear about circumstances leading to inequality (Orford, 2008, p48). Critical realism also relates better to my current role as an Assistant Educational Psychologist. My support recommendations are developed from perspectives surrounding an issue, but they need to be based upon real resources, staffing and facilities.

Critical realists are keen to emphasise that they do not '*claim privileged knowledge*' of '*the real*' (Sayer, 2001, p11). I feel that there may be situations where a relativist perspective might be more useful to me in the future. It is important to recognise the advantages and disadvantages of each perspective, as an evolving researcher:

*'Both critical realists and relativists have criticised the implications of each other's arguments. Critical realists have accused relativists of being unable to take up a moral or political position in relation to anything at all. It is argued that if everything is discursively constructed, then we have no grounds for adjudicating between different views. As a result, all views are equally valid and 'anything goes'. Relativists, in turn, have pointed out that realists' commitment to 'bottom line' arguments means that certain truth claims are ruled out of bounds and cannot be challenged. A principled questioning of all truth claims is, therefore, not possible within a realist framework. It is this, however, relativists argue, which is required to promote a genuine spirit of enquiry.'*

(Willig, 2001, p124)

## **4.2. A Critical Approach**

When we begin to question structures of control, we take a '*critical turn*' in psychology (Richardson and Fowers, 1997, p271). This approach draws on the work of Habermas, who encourages '*critical activity*' in the '*reflective sciences*' (Habermas, 1968, p53). Habermas believes that transformation is possible as people began to reflect upon laws and '*frozen relations*' affecting their lives (Habermas, 1968, p310). This enables an awareness of a person's positioning in relation to modes of control:

*'For the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a movement of emancipation.'*

(Habermas, 1968, p198)

A focus on power is a key element in the work of critical psychologists. By analysing forces operating in society, issues of social injustice become more visible (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005). The psychologist moves away from '*rationalising the status quo*' towards work which questions structures governing '*justice and human welfare*' (Richardson and Fowers, 1997, p271).

Critical psychologists have often drawn on the work of Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and social scientist. Foucault analysed various episodes in history, giving consideration to social arrangements operating at the time. He argued that power was not an '*attribute*' held by a few, but an '*exercise*' or process in which we all engage (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p50). Through a process of '*problematization*' people could begin to question '*what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live*' (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1997, pxxxvi). This form of challenge is available to all. It is part of a continuing pattern of social relations where power is formed, challenged, and restructured over time (Rabinow, 1984).

Foucault expresses the continual possibility of change, as individuals and groups refuse the identities they are assigned through dividing practices. He is supportive of resistance to '*totalizing discourses*' which can provide misleading, absolute

descriptions of events, groups or people (Richardson and Fowers, 1997, p279). He does not take a value stance on issues of morality. Instead Foucault holds the position of questioner and analyst. He believes progress is found in continual questioning of realities presented, with deliberation of possible alternative truths. He fears unequivocal loyalty to one perspective might endanger rigid dogmatism (Rabinow, 1984). These views would be most likely to be interpreted as relativist within the spectrum of approaches which believe that perceptions are socially constructed.

Of particular relevance to this thesis, is Foucault's analysis of the '*art of government*' which he felt arose from the mid- 17<sup>th</sup> century in France (Rabinow, 1984, p15). He felt that as well as forming forces to challenge threats from outside the country, governments began to develop '*policy*' to increase the powers of the state from within (Rabinow, 1997, p69). This form of '*governmentality*' resulted in enhanced involvement of the state on issues such as health, family, education, employment and religion (Rabinow, 1997, p88). Power and control were practised through '*normalization*' where individuals could be measured against particular sets of norms, established through dialogue and discourse. This process involved professionals such as psychologists, categorising and diagnosing the population (Billington, 2006). Those who did not accord with expected norms could be separated from the mainstream through '*dividing practices*' (Rabinow, 1984, p8). Examples of physical division included the isolation of those suffering from leprosy in the middle ages, or '*the confinement of the poor, the insane, and the vagabonds*' during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Rabinow, 1984, p8). Foucault communicated modes of power and control as involving those objectified, through a process of '*subjectification*' (Rabinow, 1984, p11). As people interact with negative perceptions in their social world, they can develop destructive self identities based on these harmful discourses.

Foucault analysed a range of epochs in time, believing that there are a variety of versions of 'truth', in relation to any historical period. The reality we come to know is consolidated through hearing particular stories repeatedly. These may be versions of reality circulated by those in structurally powerful positions. Power is practised and can be challenged. Part of this challenge may involve tracing and recording alternative storylines (Rabinow, 1984).

Bob Holman is an academic who is a long term resident of a large housing estate on the outskirts of Glasgow. He referenced the work of Charles Murray, highlighting the negative discourses generated by writers who have sporadically observed working class communities:

*'He asserted that the bored men turned to crime and drugs while the feckless women neglected their children, who became the next generation of criminal layabouts. Poverty, unemployment, the decline in sexual behaviour was thus largely attributed to the personal inadequacies of the underclass, to their immorality, their rejection of the work ethic, their abandonment of the traditional family, and their lack of abilities.'*

(Holman, 1998, p8)

Bob Holman is also critical of the media which he feels *'has a top- down approach to the coverage of items of social deprivation'* (Holman, 1998, p13). He explains *'serious consequences'* of *'misrepresentations'*, such as negative perceptions of communities (1998, p10). He feels that his community has not been represented holistically, with academics and journalists failing to document positive stories:

*'...articles are too often by the wrong writers. They are by outsiders not by residents. They are by journalists – and sometimes by academics – who make brief forays into Easterhouse. During these visits they concentrate on a negative aspect- they spotlight a death related to drug abuse but do not mention the many local teenagers who shun drugs; they give details of violent crime but do not mention the many law abiding citizens; they portray loan sharks but not the locally run credit unions. Journalists do not want balance.'*

(Holman, 1998, p12).

Social justice theorists are beginning to emphasise that *'recognition'* is as vital as *'redistribution'* in challenging inequality (Lister, 2008, p105). Dominant discourses on

poverty repeatedly blame victims of deprivation. This protects the status quo, by re-focusing attention away from unequal rights, access to opportunities and fair distribution of the society's benefits:

*'...dominant cultural narratives, are often of the victim blaming variety and help members of dominant groups to rationalize their role in contributing to and perpetuating the oppression of disadvantaged people.'*

(Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p24)

When people are negatively portrayed they can experience disrespect, humiliation and *'devalued statuses'* (Lister, 2008, p105). This *'oppression'* can be *'psychologically damaging'* (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p24). Listening to the stories that communities tell, is the first step in negating the damage caused by dominant narratives:

*'It helps individuals and collectives to reclaim their history, to understand and appreciate their strengths, resilience and resistance...so that dominant cultural narratives that have been imposed on them can be challenged and alternative stories can be promoted.'*

(Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p25)

Positive aspects of working class communities have been explored since the 1950's. Elizabeth Bott gave examples of social support and *'connectedness'* within urban environments (2001, p113). Young and Wilmott witnessed *'solidarity'* and *'attachment'* during their research in Bethnal Green (1962, p84). Holman's (1998) *'Faith in the Poor'* promotes positive, alternative storylines about a working class community on the outskirts of Glasgow. He recognises the inequality and adversities people face. He documents the resilient generosity of neighbours who contribute to their community through informal support, church events, cooperatives and volunteer groups. In his investigations of modern urban areas Pierson asserts that neighbourhoods still *'matter to their residents'* (2010, p134). He refers to the *'social fabric'* and *'social capital'* evidenced in communities in numerous ways (2010, p21).



He provides examples of support systems resulting in the positive well-being of elderly residents. He describes help neighbours give each other during illness, financial difficulties, and with childcare. He also conveys the continuing traditions of communities, including celebrations of *'rites of passage'* (2010, p18). These storylines, if respected and understood, might be useful as *'an approach that concentrates not so much on risks, deficits and so called criminogenic needs'* (Allen, 2009, p113).

When people share their stories with external professionals they allow alternative narratives to be documented. The process also provides opportunities for people to connect with each other's understandings. When experiences are shared individuals may realise that their encounters with injustice are not *'isolated'* but part of a *'pervasive pattern'* (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p178). This encourages *'solidarity with others'* promoting *'awareness and understanding the unjust psychological and socio-political circumstances oppressing them'* (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p27).

Martin-Baro and Freire were South American community psychologists who highlighted the importance of working collaboratively to record community voices and identities. Freire stressed the importance of understanding our own positioning in the world. Becoming aware of our context within structural controls, results in *'conscientization'* (Freire, 1972, p 51). This in turn provides the knowledge for *'problematization'* or questioning of the current status quo (Freire, 1972, p 9). Martin-Baro used his role as an academic psychologist to advocate for equality alongside people from Salvador. His work explored historical narratives which failed to acknowledge structural and social factors affecting people's lives (Aron and Corne, 1994, p5). Gergen states that groups who regain ownership of their personal identities have historically and internationally been *'a means of sparking group consciousness and political activism'* (1999, p44). He also encourages us to consider ways in which we can affect change *'locally'* through our general interactions, and *'the day to day activities in which we are engaged'* (1999, p209).

Professionals working within communities are able to provide opportunities for individuals, groups and communities to re-author themselves (Saleeby, 1992). When

we understand the history of structural power and control, it aids us to look more closely those around us. It encourages us to question whether these people fit the descriptions that have been communicated to us through media and government discourses. As a minimum listening might encourage mutual understanding. At best, it has the potential to reveal transformative solutions, through the authentic knowledge that people within labelled communities hold:

*'Getting people to tell 'their' story acts as a way of bringing elements of their life to awareness – yours, theirs and others. One of the elements of a story that you are looking for is local knowledge... As you become more familiar with the range of stories and their local knowledge the problems that people feel strongly about will emerge.'*

(Pierson, p39, 2010)

### **4.3. Narrative Practice**

Using a community psychology ethos required *'the development of a mutually beneficial and trusting relationship'* with members of MAV (Harper, Lardon, Rappaport, Bangi, Contreras, Pedraza, 2004, p213). MAV members needed to trust me in order to share their experiences and thoughts on potentially sensitive issues. In turn, I needed to endeavour to present their words *'in their proper contexts, including the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that exist in any social setting'* (Harper et al, 2004, p214).

Qualitative methods can be helpful in gaining a holistic view of a participant's world. These methods are not designed according to pre-set, quantifiable categories. They are open and flexible, allowing participants to provide their personal insights and meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This is respectful towards the expertise of participants, as opposed to over-emphasising the value of the academic researcher (Willig, 2001). It is also compatible with genuine enquiry, and the discovery of new knowledge:

*'...the strong invitation is for the emergence of new forms of language, ways of interpreting the world, patterns of representation. Invited are generative discourses, that is, ways of talking and writing (and otherwise representing) that simultaneously challenge existing traditions of understanding, and offer new possibilities for action.'*

(Gergen, 1999, p49).

Historically people have relayed and recorded their views through stories. We are born into a world of fairy tales, myths and legends which teach us about moral codes and expectations (Zipes, 1999). Within this *'storytelling society'* we form our own stories to explain and organise the events in our lives (Denzin, in Benwell and Stokes, 2006, p130). Through the accounts we tell about ourselves, we begin to construct our identities and make sense of our experiences. The meanings people give to life's events are constructions which help them navigate through their world.

The navigation metaphor has been used by Michael White in describing narrative *'maps'* of personal experience. The map is not the actual territory, but the individual's perception and process of ordering the territory (2007, p3). This process allows us to actively work on resolving issues by trying to form them into a coherent whole. Creating narratives is believed to be a *'universal human activity'* (Reissman, 1993, p3). When we share our stories research has indicated that we feel more connected to our social world (Niederhoffer and Pennebaker, 2005).

Narrative practice can be used to investigate *'the complexities of real life'* intrinsic to small scale, qualitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p400). I was initially introduced to narrative practice through my doctorate course at Newcastle University. I then completed a self-funded narrative level one qualification to find out more about the approach, and further practise my interviewing skills. It is important for the researcher to feel competent when using a research method (Ely et al, 1991). Additional training aided my listening skills, helping me to hear the stories MAV members shared:

*'Participants have a story to tell. They will tell it to those who are willing to listen... Indeed, one might argue that the very point of citizen participation is to tell one's story – to make one's views known, efforts felt, values actualised and passions realised. We have a lot to learn from listening to the stories people tell.'*

(Harper, Lardon, Rappaport, Bangi, Contreras, Pedraza, 2004, p199)

Michael White's (2007) map metaphor is helpful in linking narrative practice, to previously mentioned epistemological and ontological beliefs. The map represents a person's epistemological perceptions, as opposed to the actual ontological reality of the world. These maps can be influenced not just by the individual story teller, but by the *'master narratives'* circulating within society (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p139). When powerful structures propagate negative storylines this can lead to individuals, groups or communities feeling separated from their own narratives and identity:

*'Community narratives are the shared stories told by community members about themselves. Dominant cultural narratives about people with few material resources tend to be negative and often these negative narratives are accepted into the personal stories (and identities) of the people who are their target.'*

(Harper et al, 2004, p200)

Fortunately, in the same way that power is a continual process being practised, negative storylines are able to be operated on. Views of reality are constructed, and can similarly be re-constructed (Burr, 2008). This permits alternative stories and identities to develop. The new constructions can then become platforms for change (Monk et al, 1997).

Over time, narrative practice has developed sets of questions, used for a range of purposes. Re-authoring questions aim to support people in reclaiming their preferred stories and identities, when they have previously been misrepresented (White, 2007). Questions support the storyteller to relay more complex and holistic

descriptions of their life stories; the environments they've lived in, and decisions they've made (Eron and Lund, 1997). Answers may provide insights to how dominant narratives have evolved, how they operate, and who they serve. The story teller is able to choose how to position themselves in response to dominant narratives promoting 'human agency' (Reissman, 1993, p5).

Narrative practice and re-authoring techniques can be completed in a range of ways. It may have been possible to use ethnographic strategies, such as ordering field notes into stories with a beginning, middle and end. This would have emphasised my perceptions, as the researcher. Data collection requiring greater levels of interpretation from the researcher might be more suited to relativist methodologies. These place more emphasis on the way in which reality is constructed, at both the ontological and epistemological levels (Willig, 2001). I felt it was important for views of MAV members to be as prominent as possible in the research. This reflects community psychology ideas on collaboration, and social justice concepts of recognition. I felt that data needed to be generated by participants for it to be meaningful. This places more emphasis on the importance of their epistemological knowledge, as a reflection of the ontological reality they see.

*'Naturally occurring data relies on the researcher's interpretation of what is observed or read. While the meaning that the research holds for a participant is embedded in their enactment of it, it is the researcher not the participant who draws out that meaning and makes it explicit. Generated data collection methods, on the other hand, give participants a direct and explicit opportunity to convey their own meanings and interpretations through the explanations they provide, whether spontaneously or in answer to the researcher's probing. The generated data may be further interpreted by the researcher, but the participant's own interpretation is seen as critically important, at least in broadly realist research paradigms.'*

(Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p57)

There were a range of options for accessing generated data. As a former teacher within support units, I had an interest in art activities. At the early stages of my thesis I had contemplated working with young adults. Visual research methods were discussed with my thesis supervisor, and core instructional texts accessed. Strategies might have included asking participants to draw and label their area. I could have also requested anonymous photographs, which participants felt were representative of the essence of their neighbourhood (Banks, 2007; Prosser, 1998). As a collaborative project, these ideas were discussed with Mothers Against Violence. MAV Members felt that question and answer formats would be most comfortable. This is likely to have been related to the familiarity of interviews, particularly for members who regularly presented talks and answered questions at community events. For the wider population, *'much of our learning is orally based'* (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p14).

The research was related to MAV's developing identity, and how they felt their area was perceived. In many ways, it may have been helpful to complete the research interviews as a group exercise. This process would have allowed participants to hear each other's opinions and develop their own related perspectives. Focus groups are often used in *'attitudinal research'* (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p58). However, the members of MAV already had a wide range of set meetings and commitments. It would have been difficult for all members to agree on an additional focus group time which accommodated everyone's employment and family obligations. Instead, conveniently timed individual interviews were arranged as *'in-depth interviews are more accessible to potential participants than group discussions'* (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p59). Individual interviews provided time and space to seek clarification on certain issues. Participants may also have felt more comfortable with individually sharing stories about their personal journey towards MAV. For some, this involved experiences of traumatic bereavement. In a group situation, participants might have been less likely to give full details, as the rest of the MAV group may already have known their story. During interviews I felt that *'humility'* was beneficial in recognising the expertise of participants (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p143). I also believe that aspects of being from Manchester and a former teacher in the area, allowed *'rapport'* (Rapley, 2004, p16).

Completing the narrative level one qualification helped me recognise that interviewing was '*a craft*', to be continually improved upon (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p17). To support myself whilst developing interview skills, I decided to use a semi-structured interview format and topic guide. A prompt sheet helped me to remember relevant questions. This improved my confidence, allowing me the flexibility to follow participants answers and attend to the issues that were important to them (Ritchie and Lewis, 2006, p112).

Interview prompts could have included several sets of guides, with the first guide being developed from themes present within initial MAV meetings. The first participant's answers could then have been analysed and collated to choose new branches of investigation, and this process repeated for each successive interview. This approach would have required more of a reliance on my own directive processes as a researcher. Interviews would have been increasingly '*grounded*' in my interpretations, and my developing theoretical knowledge (Willig, 2001, p34). I wasn't comfortable with holding this level of direction at such an early stage of data gathering, as I again felt too much emphasis would be placed on my understandings, as opposed to the views of participants. Instead, the core topic guide was developed from a generic set of narrative practice re-authoring questions. These were refined through supportive supervision at Newcastle University, peer support at Telford and Wrekin's Educational Psychology Service, and attendance at a narrative level one forum/ supervision session.

Final drafts of the proposed re-authoring questions were presented at MAV group meetings, in order to ensure that participants were comfortable with the prompts. I felt that this transparency was important as some participants had become MAV members after personal bereavements. This meant that there was the potential of questions eliciting sensitive and emotive responses. I wanted to ensure that MAV members were at ease with the prompts, or familiar enough with questions to be able to opt out of ones they were less comfortable with. I felt that participants would feel more empowered and in control if they had advanced sighting of the topic guide. Meeting with MAV also provided the opportunity for questions to be adjusted, if the group felt prompts were inappropriate. This was coherent with my aim to complete the research in an open and collaborative manner.

#### **4.4. Practicalities**

This research used a case study design. Case studies focus on '*novel*' situations (Robson, 1993, p149), investigating '*natural occurrence within definable boundaries*' (Bromley, 1986, p8). This requires being '*open*' towards genuine enquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p400), with questions emerging throughout the experience (Reissman, 1993). These studies are not concerned with producing general truths or '*objective statements of an experience*' (Lyons and Coyle, 2007, p37). Findings are specific to the situation that has been researched in detail. However, some researchers feel that when we genuinely connect with individual people, groups and contexts, we find ourselves closer to issues that affect wider society. By '*delving into the particular*', we may get '*closer to the universal*' (Lyons and Coyle, 2007, p59).

Five participants agreed to take part in the interviews, one man and four women. The participants were representative of Mothers Against Violence, as well as providing diversity in terms of gender and their personal journeys towards joining the organisation. This is described as a '*purposeful sampling*' (Willig, 2001, p58). Participants provided a varied and reflective impression of the Mothers Against Violence group:

*'Units are chosen because they typify a circumstance or hold a characteristic that is expected or known to have salience to the subject matter under study... A second requirement is to ensure that the sample is as diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population.'*

(Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p83)

The individual participants discussed their understanding of discourses circulated about their community, and their experiences of living and working in the area. The intention was to '*understand people within their community settings*' (Orford, 2008, p68) and support MAV in documenting issues of concern to their particular situation. Using qualitative, narrative interviews allowed exploration of the '*human subjective*



*experience*' (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997, p32), rather than *'reductionism'* of participants, their contexts and stories (Gillham, 1977, p99). Multiple in-depth individual interviews provided a detailed and holistic understanding of MAV's context:

*'In essence we see the primary defining features of a case study as being multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context... Those multiple perspectives may come from multiple data collection methods, but they may also derive from multiple accounts – collected using a single method from people with different perspectives on what is being observed... The integration of different perspectives on the context or interaction means that case study designs can build up a very detailed in depth understanding. They are used when no single perspective can provide a full account or explanation of the research issue, and where understanding needs to be holistic, comprehensive and contextualised.'*

(Ritchie and Lewis, p52)

The interviews occurred in the summer of 2009. Participants were given a written copy of a consent form and questions prior to interviews, which I talked through with them during MAV meetings. The consent form included my contact details, which allowed participants to ask any further questions they had about the research. I reminded participants that they could choose not to answer particular questions, or withdraw from the research at any time. This was particularly important due to the *'socially sensitive'* issues that were inherent within the project (Lee, cited in Banyard and Flanagan, 2005, p78). Sharing the topic guide with Mothers Against Violence prior to interviews allowed participants to be emotionally prepared for the interview, and was one of many examples of open communication. This followed ethical guidelines of transparency, which I endeavoured to adhere to throughout the research process (Cone and Foster, 2006). Only one participant was interviewed per day, and interviews were set at least a week apart. This was a pre-caution in case any of the participants required additional supportive conversations after the interview. It also allowed me to reflect on each interview, and seek supervision and advice if required.

I explained that when interviews eventually did occur, they would be tape recorded to support me in accurately recording participants' verbal responses, as opposed to my perceptions of their responses. I personally transcribed the interviews, in order to ensure confidentiality. Digital recordings, interviews and transcriptions have been stored on an appropriately password protected computer (Banyard and Flanagan, 2005). There has been transparency about what has been recorded, analysed and shared. Original interviews and transcripts will be stored for the time required for this qualification, in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act (Banyard and Flanagan, 2005). At the end of the research, Mothers Against Violence would like a copy of the final thesis for their office.

Throughout the research process I have been clear about my trainee status (British Psychological Society, 2004). I have reflected on my own learning requirements, completing additional training when necessary (British Psychological Society, 2005). During my learning journey I have aimed to promote dignity and respect, as advised by the British Educational Research Association (2000). I have also attempted to pursue objectives outlined by the American Psychological Society:

*'Social science research should serve scientific and human interests...increasing knowledge of human behaviour and of people's understanding of themselves and others...utilizing this knowledge for the promotion of human welfare.'*

(cited in Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p.62)

## Interview Prompt Questions

### Establishing Perceived Prevailing Storyline:

What ideas do people have about your community? What do they say? What understandings do they have of mothers here? Of the young people?

### Perceived Effects of Prevailing Storyline:

What are the effects of what people think about your community? What have been the effects in the past?

### Evaluation of Prevailing Storyline:

Is this ok with you? Why/ Why not?

### MAVs Perspective:

What would you say about the community? What would you like people to know? Can you give me examples of this? Who else would know this about your community? What do you know about your community that other people don't know?

### Intentional Questions:

What were your intentions behind joining MAV? What do you hope to achieve? How does this fit with how you see things/ what you believe in? What should people know about MAV? What would you like people to know?

### Prevailing/ MAVs Perspective on Gun Crime (optional Qs):

What do people say about communities that lose young people to gun crime? What are the effects of this? Is this Ok? Why/ Why not? What effects does it have on a community when someone is killed? What would you like people to know about this? Can you give examples of what they should know? Who else knows about these things?

### Identity:

What ideas about your community are helpful? Which ones are not? How can you hold onto the ideas that are helpful? How can others in the community hold onto these ideas?

### Next Steps:

Having had this conversation, what is it that you want people to know about your community? Who would it be important to let know about this? How might we do this? What other sorts of conversations would be helpful? What would you like to happen now? What are the potential next steps? Who would you want to know about this?

## Informed Consent

Title of project: Storying Challenges in Communities

Researcher: Philomena Keane  
[p.h.a.keane@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:p.h.a.keane@newcastle.ac.uk)  
07704 524768

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. This research is part of my studies towards a Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at Newcastle University.

Purpose of the study:

- To listen to, and record the voices of, members of Mothers Against Violence as they give accounts of their community.
- To use the voice of Mothers Against Violence to offer more authentic community themes, than those which may be held in popular media and understandings.
- To hope that subjective accounts will promote transformative understandings of this community and their identity.
- To provide a permanent written record of the research which will be collaboratively produced, and shared with Mothers Against Violence.

1. I have been informed of the purpose of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to any questions I have asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation, by advising the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to the personal data provided, that data will be stored securely, and used only for research purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree to take part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I agree to digital recording of the interview and give my permission for the recording to be used for transcription, analysis, and as part of the researcher's studies at Newcastle University.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Information received as part of this procedure will be treated in confidence. The data obtained through interviews will be analysed and themes will be fed back to those taking part. Any quotes used from the interviews [used to illustrate themes] will remain anonymous.

Name of research participant (print) Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher (print) Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Original to researcher

Copy for research participant

## Timeline of Thesis Development

Time Period	Activity
2000 - 2004	Worked as a teacher in primary and secondary schools in Moss Side.
Sept 2006	Reconnected with past colleagues after attending the funeral of Jessie James.
May 2008	1. Asked for support from past colleagues regarding a project about peer bereavement. 2. Received advice from staff at the Powerhouse, and a Senior Educational Psychologist.
October 2008	1. Contacted Mothers Against Violence to ask for support with their views about bereavement, in sudden and traumatic circumstances. 2. Met with Angela Lawrence, the then Chairperson of Mothers Against Violence, to discuss possible research ideas. 3. Presented research ideas to the wider Mothers Against Violence group. Shared copies of academic articles and links to government policies.
November 2008	Attended 'Getta Life, Don't Take a Life'. This was an event that MAV helped to arrange at Manchester Cathedral. The event aimed to raise awareness of gun crime and celebrate the talents of local young people.
October to December 2008	1. Completed a self funded narrative level one course with the Institute of Narrative Therapy. 2. Liaised with Angela Lawrence (MAV Chairperson) via email and telephone, regarding evolving research ideas.
January 2009	1. Attended MAV meeting to discuss how my ideas had evolved as a result of prior MAV meetings/ events. 2. Helped produce some volunteering posters.
February 2009	1. Completed supervision with the Institute of Narrative Therapy. 2. Presented thesis progress to Newcastle University tutors and peers. 3. Liaised with Angela Lawrence via email and telephone, regarding evolving research ideas.
March 2009	1. Met with Angela Lawrence to discuss thesis research question, and interview prompt questions. 2. Met with MAV group to discuss evolved thesis research question. 3. Shared and discussed consent form, and provided contact details for further questions. 4. Shared and discussed interview prompt questions.
Summer 2009	Completed interviews with willing participants from Mothers Against Violence.
2008 - 2009	Supervision and peer support, from staff at Telford and Wrekin Educational Psychology Service.
Autumn 2009	1. Liaised with Patsy McKie (MAV founder) regarding funding bids MAV were applying for. 2. Presented progress on thesis to tutors and peers at Newcastle University.
Spring 2010	1. Shared emerging research themes with Patsy McKie. 2. Provided copies of the global themes, thematic maps, and related quotes for MAV members. I had offered to present these at a MAV meeting, but members were pressured for time. 3. Appeared as a guest on Patsy McKie's Sunday morning radio show, at PEACE FM. We discussed the research we were collaboratively completing, and the themes that had emerged. Other MAV members were informed about the show, to enable them to listen to emerging themes in the most time efficient way possible for them. 4. Shared one participant's individually transcribed interview with her. This was provided to help the participant prepare for an interview with North Manchester Radio.
Summer 2010	1. Attended a qualitative writing course organised by Newcastle and Durham University, entitled 'Writing Across Boundaries'. This helped me with ideas for presentation of a less traditional thesis. 2. Attended 'North East Grad School'. This was a four day course which helped me to consider ways in which academic research could be used in practical ways. 3. Attended an anti- gun and knife crime event in London. 4. Provided some email and telephone support to MAV, to aid them in publicising their 'Million Mothers March' event. 5. Shared some support resources I had gathered during the educational psychology doctorate/ attendance at events.
2011	1. Provided updates of thesis progress via email, and offered some ideas around funding. 2. Attended the 'Million Mothers March' event in Manchester, aimed at raising awareness of the impacts of gun crime.
2012	Have continued to offer updates on thesis progress via email. Will be providing MAV with a bound copy of the thesis. I hope to be able to offer more concrete support, once thesis/ doctorate qualification completed.
2008 - 2012	Supervision and support from Professor Liz Todd at Newcastle University.

#### **4.5. Reliability and Validity**

My prior connections to the locality are likely to have assisted the rapport building required for partnership working. However, I also need to recognise my separateness from participants. Whilst I have some knowledge of the area, I do not live there. I have not experienced the daily challenges some participants referred to, or suffered the traumatic bereavement of losing a close friend or relative. I have attempted to collaboratively develop new knowledge with participants, but I am aware that I can never fully understand or document their personal perceptions. There will always be '*an interpretative or hermeneutic element*' to the research (Sayer, 2000, p17).

Attempts are made '*to create meaning and understandings of the topics under investigation*' through '*the relationship between the storyteller and the listener*' (Etherington, 2004, p21). However the researcher will ultimately make final decisions about the research topic, the format of the questions to be asked, and the way in which transcribed answers are analysed and presented. Ceglowski (2002) emphasises the importance of being aware of our own positioning within the research process. Ely et al (1991) outline the usefulness of utilising supervision to explore how personal perceptions may influence research development. Discussing my subjective views in supervision helped re-define the research focus, and develop research questions and methods which promoted genuine enquiry, and a hope for new understandings.

Collecting the views of members of MAV has been a humbling experience, which I feel privileged to have been able to complete. In attempting to relay authentically their views to a wider audience, it was important to be mindful of the way in which I presented their words. In traditional methodologies, this might have related to issues of reliability and validity:

*'Reliability is the requirement that the research findings are repeatable, and therefore not simply a product of fleeting, localised events and validity is the requirement that the scientist's description of the world matches what is really there, independent of our ideas or talk about it. But social constructionist research is not about identifying objective facts... The concepts of reliability and validity, as they are normally understood, are therefore inappropriate for judging the quality of social constructionist work.'*

(Burr, 2003, p158)

The epistemological standpoint of this research leads to questioning of perspectives about truth and reality (Webster and Mertova, 2007). This research investigates some of the structural dominant discourses prevalent in society, which contrast to alternative storylines understood by MAV members. In this way it acknowledges a range of possible views that exist, and the *'unique situations'* differing individuals form their ideas from (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p90). Qualitative researchers therefore recognise the difficulty in attempting to repeat results across different sets of people and contexts. Narrative practice is particularly unlikely to lend itself to replication:

*'Narrative inquiry and storytelling research...seeks to elaborate and investigate individual interpretations and worldviews of complex and human-centred events. It is more concerned with individual truths than identifying generalisable and repeatable events.'*

(Webster and Mertova, 2007, p89)

Narrative practitioners recognise that *'the past is a selective reconstruction'* linked to *'current identities'* participants *'wish to claim'* (Riessman, 1993, p64). Therefore narrative research does not *'claim to correspond exactly to what has actually occurred'* (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p90). However it should reflect the positioned, evolving 'truth' participants wish to convey:

*'Whilst each one of these accounts will be unique in the way every interaction is, it would be both presumptuous and unrealistic to assume that a practitioner will invent a whole new story just for the sake of a particular researcher who happened to interview him or her. The narratives are well rehearsed and crafted in legitimate logic.'*

(Czarniawska, 2004, p49)

Narrative practice has the potential to deliver valid data, as it allows the participants to relay qualitative information about their personal experiences in full context, together with the meanings they attributed to these experiences. Interviews are normally collected respectfully, within the participant's natural environment, increasing ecological validity. In this research interviews were also taped and transcribed (Banyard and Flanagan, 2005). The emphasis was on producing *'trustworthy records'* (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p90), further supported by transparently communicating methodology processes (Riessman, 1993). Webster and Mertova argue that valid research creates a *'resonating'* experience:

*'The story sounds true because either it reminds the reader about something that has happened to him/her or it opens a new window to the reader. Sometimes this may generate new understandings... whereby, upon reading a story, they gain a new understanding of an experience.'*

(Webster and Mertova, 2007, 1999)

This identification and resonance is more likely to occur if *'theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants' accounts'* (Riessman, 1993, p65). Qualitative researchers argue that validity relates to how authentically participants have been represented (Ely et al, 1999). Any claims made in relation to the research question should be clearly linked to the information supplied by participants. It is advisable for participants to be provided with the opportunity to read interviews to ensure a *'member check'* of validity (Reissman, 1993, p66). It is ethically important for participants to have the opportunity to *'speak back'* (Lyons and Coyle, 2007, p156), highlighting any concerns (Rapley, 2006). Member checks can also provide



useful information for the organisations we work with, in consolidating their group identity and ideas:

*'It is desirable, as a general rule, to take work back to the individuals and groups who participated in the study... It is important that we find out what participants think of our work, and their responses can often be a source of theoretical insight. Returning our interpretations to their home communities is also politically important.'*

(Riessman, p66,1993)

I discussed emerging themes with available members of MAV, sharing copies of thematic maps and linked anonymised quotes. Due to the time pressures on members, copies were provided for them to view at their convenience. I then discussed some of the emerging themes and quotes with the group's founder on her PEACE FM radio programme, providing descriptions of themes and anonymised quotes. MAV members could listen to the radio show and provide feedback. All participants were offered copies of their original transcripts. However, only one participant felt that her individual interview would be helpful. This was slightly separate from the analysis of themes, but linked to MAV's aims. She was preparing to be interviewed for a North Manchester radio programme with the group's founder, to further communicate the purpose of MAV. Research has value when it can be used to support community groups as they develop their emerging identities:

*'Because the particular setting in which the research and/ or action is carried out is considered to be crucial, community psychology is not generally looking to establish laws that can transcend the particularities of contexts. Rather, it aims to achieve empowerment goals with a particular group in a particular setting; whilst also hoping to accumulate knowledge from experience in a variety of settings.'*

(Orford, 2008, pxiv)

Small numbers of participants, and the specific local context, would prevent the results being used to make predictive statements (Willig, 2006). However small scale qualitative research projects, can help cultivate concepts which might increase our understanding of similar situations:

*'It is our view that qualitative research studies can contribute to social theories where they have something to tell us about the underlying social processes and structures that form part of the context of, and the explanation for, individual behaviours or beliefs. The particular value of qualitative research lies in its ability to explore issues in depth and from the perspectives of different participants, with concepts, meanings and explanations developed inductively from the data.'*

(Ritchie and Lewis, 2005, p267)

Webster and Mertova similarly identify the particular benefits of narrative practice within qualitative methods:

*'In our view...narrative inquiry provide(s) such richness of detail and accessibility that a reader should be able to make applications in another setting.'*

(2007, p101)

## **5. Narratives from Mothers Against Violence**

### **5.1. Collecting Narratives**

Practising as a community psychologist involves '*researchers placing themselves side by side with participants*' (Orford, 2008, p72). This generally requires '*longer term engagement with communities*' (Orford, 2008, p81). Ideally I would have liked to have been based in Manchester throughout the research. This would have allowed me more time to collaborate with Mothers Against Violence, in order to understand their perspectives. Unfortunately over the last five years I have been based in various locations distant from Manchester, including Newcastle, the Midlands, London and Cumbria. This research is part of a wider educational psychology doctorate which requires placement experiences and related assignments. I was grateful for my previous connections to Moss Side and Hulme. These helped me to feel more assimilated into the area when I did return. They also helped with motivation and determination levels, when the doctorate course was challenging.

Interviews with MAV members were initially scheduled to be at least a week apart, for ethical reasons. This ensured that time was available if participants wanted to discuss any feelings evoked by the research questions. The time allowance was sensible, as I had not fully comprehended how busy MAV participants were. Interviews took place between a number of other roles they held, including caring for families, relatives, and rushing to and from full time jobs. The level of their responsibilities made me even more aware of their generosity, in allocating time to take part in interviews. Sometimes I needed to wait locally for participants to arrive and/ or complete other tasks. On a number of occasions I bumped into past colleagues and pupils in the nearby ASDA store. We were able to share memories, and I was excited to hear how well some students were doing in terms of college courses and career aims. I was also reminded of past students when meeting staff at the Powerhouse. The youth and community centre is based adjacent to Broadfield Park, where Jessie James was murdered in 2006.

I met three of the five participants in their offices on Old Birley Street. I had interviewed the first participant in the older offices, which were based nearby in a local authority/ community centre building. Moving to the new offices on Old Birley Street was part of the process of rebranding Mothers Against Violence. The offices provided a light, airy space for children and young people to enjoy. It was also an ideal environment for the life long learning, employment and ICT services that MAV were offering. The new offices were part of a cooperative 'Work for Change' space initially funded by Hulme's City Challenge Project. The block of buildings also includes art studios, a theatre, and a stylish cafe (<http://change.coop/-14/05/12>). The offices are opposite Hulme's Community Garden Centre. As well as being a lovely place to visit prior to interviews, this garden centre provides a range of projects and activities for children and families ([http://www.hulmegardencentre.org.uk/index.php\\_-14/05/12](http://www.hulmegardencentre.org.uk/index.php_-14/05/12)). I also briefly visited a number of other local organisations, when I helped to deliver leaflets for the 2010 'Million Mothers March'. These included a probation office, a youth centre, an alternative education setting, and the Kath Locke Centre. Kath Locke was a local community worker, with a particular focus on women's rights ([http://www.thebiglifegroup.com/big-life-centres/58/kath\\_locke\\_centre-14/05/12](http://www.thebiglifegroup.com/big-life-centres/58/kath_locke_centre-14/05/12)). The health centre provides a range of support services. It is reflective of the many locally based people and organisations, supporting their community.

I met the fourth participant at her house, as this was the most convenient location for her, due to work and family commitments. There were a number of photographs in the participant's home of her son, who had been murdered. She was also caring for her grandson that day and expressed how "*cruel*" it was that her grandson no longer had a father: "*My grandson's seven, he asks about his father constantly... It's cruel that he hasn't got a Dad... And it breaks my heart.*"

After each interview I stopped in my car, or in a local cafe. I wanted to note down some initial feelings and responses to the interviews, before going on to meet friends and family in Manchester. Some of my initial reactions illustrate the incredible opportunity I have had in interviewing these participants. Apart from supporting me to complete a qualification, participants provided illuminating views which have helped me learn and grow as a person:

*"I was totally blown away..."*

*"What an amazing interview..."*

*"I was particularly touched..."*

*"The story this lady told was incredible. Her narrative and her meaning making and strength through this are inspiring; her focus on 'voice'. The ideas she was coming out with could be dropped into Foucauldian writing so easily, as she seemed to almost innately see her life this way.*

*POWER, CONTROL, STRENGTH, VOICE, CHANGE, HISTORY."*

(My notes from research diary, Summer 2009)

Each participant's individual journey towards MAV was distinctive and educational. Their personal stories would be enlightening to any reader. However, for this project the group wanted to contribute their ideas in a collaborative way. They wanted the themes to reflect the priorities of the organisation at a particular time. One of the participants stated his hopes for the research: *"For it to be a good reflection really...that we can say this is a reflection...of someone that viewed us. This is what they saw."*

## **5.2. Member Checking**

After a summer of completing interviews with MAV members, I moved from the Midlands to London, as part of my educational psychology qualification. My third year placement was much more challenging than working at Telford and Wrekin, and I had less opportunity to visit MAV. The group were also in the process of transition, with various key changes in staffing and lead volunteers. This meant that MAV had a number of issues to discuss at each meeting, and taking time from these vital decision making processes would not have been appropriate. Instead, I initially shared and discussed themes via email, calls, and a visit to the MAV offices to see

Patsy McKie. Other members were invited, but they had a range of commitments. I ensured that I brought plenty of copies of emerging themes and anonymised quotes to the offices, so that MAV members would be able to read them at convenient times. On the day I visited, Patsy was delayed as she had needed to support a community liaisons group, following a gun incident. This is illustrative of some of the immediate and urgent situations volunteers assist with, which puts research demands into perspective.

Patsy McKie provided further help with the research process by inviting me to be a guest on her Sunday morning radio show. We were able to review the research and some of the key themes MAV members had shared. This included discussing stereotypes attributed to young people in the area, and how these impacted on opportunities. We also considered the numerous positive aspects of the community, and the locally based facilities. I shared key quotes which related to MAV's hopes for investment in the area, and the better future for their young people. The radio show provided an opportunity for other MAV members to listen to verbal evaluations of the themes, as part of their normal weekly routine.

The radio show took place at the studios of PEACE FM 90.1. This is a not for profit radio station based locally. It provides an opportunity for the community to discuss issues of concern and celebrate local culture, music, poetry and events. It also provides work experience based placements for young people who wish to learn about broadcasting and media ([http://www.peacefm.co.uk/?page\\_id=2-14/05/12](http://www.peacefm.co.uk/?page_id=2-14/05/12)). The radio station evolved from 'Peace Week'. This event occurs over a week each spring, and includes a carnival and artistic performances. It aims to help people celebrate their locality, and continues the process of building relationships and mutual respect (<http://www.peaceweek.co.uk/-14/05/12>).

### **5.3. Analysis of the Interviews**

The analysis of the interviews was a time consuming process, taking several months. Much reading was required in order to decide how to analyse the interviews,

and several stages of analysis were needed to ensure that the voices of the participants were clearly prioritised. This was reflective of the nature of qualitative research. In providing authentic evidence, it is important to consider how interviews will be most effectively approached and organised:

*'...it is important to emphasise that qualitative analysis is a very time consuming process, whatever approach is used. Indeed, it is likely that the time and resources required to analyse a unit of data will far exceed those needed to generate the data in the first place. Resources are never unlimited and it is therefore important that the activities in which analysts are engaged are moving them towards an understanding and interpretation of evidence.'*

(Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p211)

My interest was in researching the ideas that Mother Against Violence wanted to be projected, about the way in which they were perceived and how they viewed their situation. I therefore wanted to prioritise the meaning of the words they choose to use, rather than underlying messages which might be communicated by intonations, pauses, and expressions. Conversational and discourse analysis would argue that these aspects of language can be indicative of cognitive structures, and therefore have a range of rigorous (and time consuming) processes for eliciting their meanings (Willig, 2001). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) similarly aims to interpret the participant's individual experience, from the perspective of the researcher (Willig, 2001). I was less comfortable with these forms of analyses as I felt it they further emphasised the researcher's control of the analysis process, rather than highlighting meanings generated by participants. I decided that thematic analysis would be most appropriate for this thesis, as it supports rich descriptions of areas '*under-researched*' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p83). It is a tool that is associated with a range of epistemologies. It can be used to reveal explicit responses to real world issues, as well as illustrating differing interpretations of these issues. It therefore compliments critical realist approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The process of analysis began with transcribing each interview (see Appendix 2 for an example extract). I completed this task personally, in accordance with agreements made with the MAV volunteers. This was in case information was provided which members might feel less comfortable with post interview. It also ensured that participants or sensitive references remained anonymous. Transcribing allowed me to become thoroughly familiar with the words of the participants, through reading and re-reading for accuracy (Crossley, 2000, p67). This was particularly helpful when providing feedback to MAV.

I then began reading interviews for possible themes. As advised by Braun and Clarke (2006) initial analysis included jottings, coding in margins and collecting together extracts relating to proposed themes. Through supervision conversations, I began to wonder if my eagerness to complete the analysis process had led to pre-supposing themes from my own perspective. I was concerned that this would result in too much personal interpretation, when my aim was to present MAVs views in a way that would be as close as possible to their intentions, and therefore a “*good reflection*” of their organisation:

*‘...part of the power of qualitative research comes from its ability to explain the range of diversity of phenomena that occur. Therefore, a report or presentation which focuses only on the dominant message may well be misleading because it will provide only a partial map of the evidence.’*

(Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p290)

I reconsidered the transcriptions, and produced notations using the actual words of participants. I also decided an additional stage was required in the analysis process. I used narrative analysis systems developed by Crossley (2000) to ensure that I was thoroughly attending to each participant’s words, rather than my own interpretations. I worked through each interview, extracting examples of tone, imagery and themes. Tone referred to the underlying emotive and directive elements of narrative, for example whether participants were positive about future possibilities. Imagery referred to metaphors and descriptive language, such as anger at adjective “*feral*”



being used about young people from the area. Exploring the first two elements of Crossley's narrative analysis helped direct me towards the themes (see Appendix 3 for an example extract). By the end of this process I was very familiar with the words participants had shared. This allowed me to produce thematic grids, for each individual participant (see Appendix 4 for an example extract). I stayed as close as possible to participants' intentions, by using their words when producing these individual interview grids.

I used the five individual grids to link ideas that occurred across interviews. These were arranged into organising sub-themes. Each organising theme was titled with the transcribed words from participants. Linked ideas also used the words of participants. The organising themes were then ordered into three global themes. The analysis process was supported during supervision sessions, with Professor Liz Todd. This helped provide another perspective, and discussions on how I could stay close to words and intentions of MAV participants. The three global themes developed were 'Looking In', 'From Within' and 'The Future'. The actual phrases of "*looking in*" and "*from within*" were taken from the transcript of one of the interviewees. They explore the two key elements of the research question:

***How do Mothers Against Violence feel that their community is being storied, and what is their response?***

The narrative tone of the interviews was predominantly optimistic, with numerous references to future work planned, and hoped for positive change. This resulted in the third global theme of 'The Future'. The analysis involved a '*bottom up*' process of analysing the smaller pieces of evidence, to reach the super-ordinate themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p83). However, the nature of the collaboratively developed research question which referred to perceptions, in some ways directed participants to explore aspects of 'looking in' and 'from within'.

The final presentation of themes most resembles Attride-Stirling's model (2001), where information is coordinated around organising sub- themes, and then grouped into at least one global theme. On the pages that follow, each of the three global themes will be presented using a '*thematic network*' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p387).

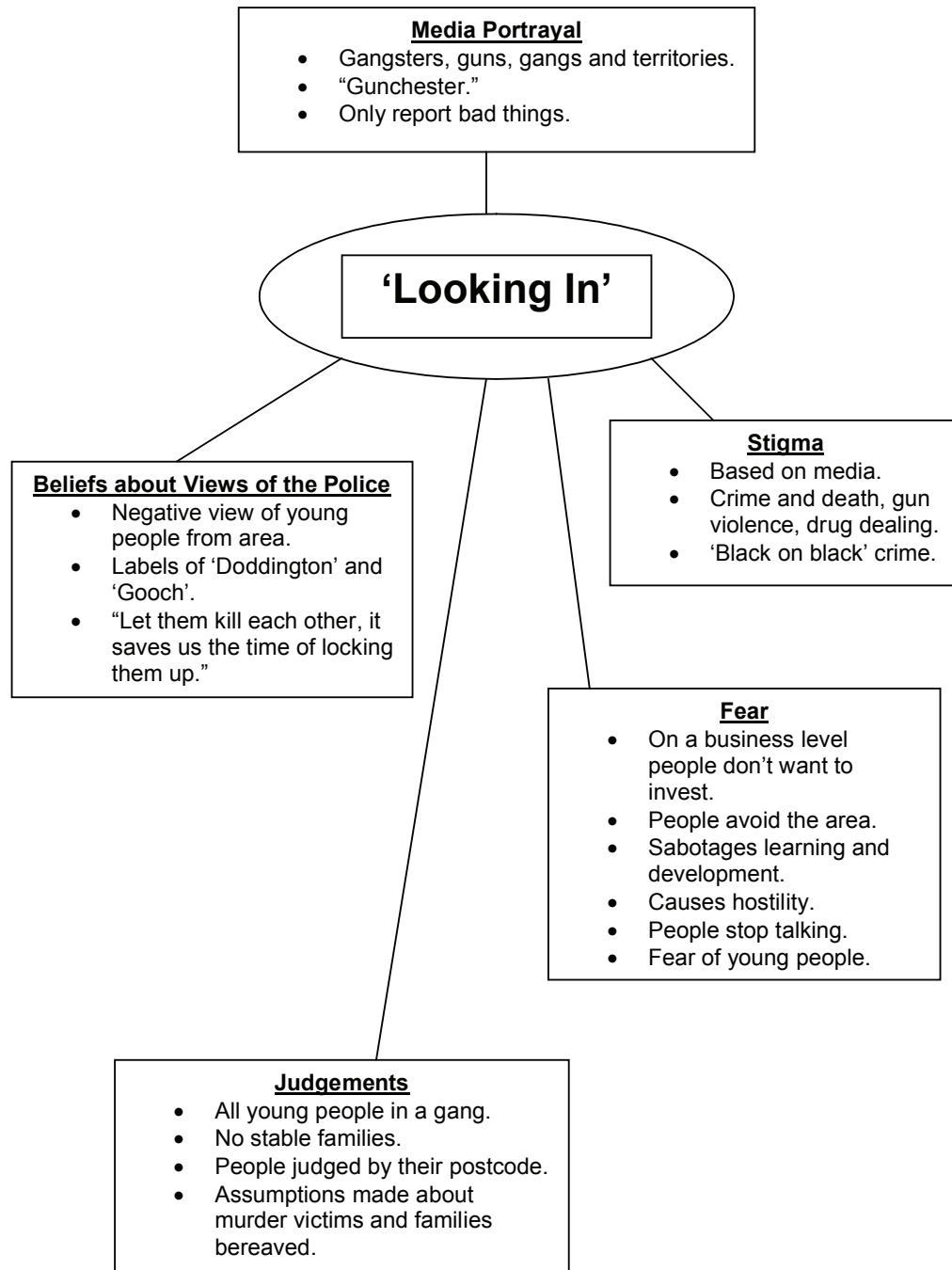
These are visual representations of the more detailed quotes which follow each network. In answering the research question chronologically, I will begin with 'looking in'. This will be followed by how people experience things 'from within' and then what they hope for in 'the future'.

The interview quotes are presented with limited commentary. They will be explored further through the discussion. Within this section I would like them to be read for their own value and meaning. I have provided quotes within the context of detailed replies, to enable the reader to have more holistic access to the words of participants. I do not feel I can re-interpret their words with more clarity and depth, than they bring themselves. They tell their own story. This is my experimental answer to questions raised by Lyons and Coyle (2007), regarding how much our academic status interferes with the way in which we truly listen to the narratives of those we interview. It also affirms prior statements regarding the authority of grass roots knowledge, described here by Crossley:

*'...we should not rely too much on the kinds of knowledge produced by professional groups within society such as medics, and increasingly, therapists and psychiatrists. From this perspective, our own, lay knowledge, although of course not divorced from dominant narrative structures of power and control, should be acknowledged as having an equal and sometimes superior status to professional knowledge with regard to issues such as experience of self and identity.'*

(Crossley, 2000, p63)

## 5.4. 'Looking In'



This thematic map overviews issues raised by participants about how they felt their community was being perceived, by people who did not live or work locally. These themes are reflective of some of the conversations heard at wider MAV meetings, prior to the interviews.

One of the most difficult forces MAV felt they were working against, was the negative media portrayal of their area. They repeatedly referred to an overwhelmingly one sided media perspective, interested in stereotypical storylines. A number of members used the word '*stigma*' to voice the impact and effects of media headlines. These included a lack of movement in and out of the area, halting natural exchange, learning and development. There were economic repercussions due to businesses being reluctant to make local investments. '*Stigma*' could also lead to a lack of equity for local people seeking work and education outside the immediate community. Lack of opportunity and access to resources extended to beliefs about poor public services, including hostile treatment of young people by the police force. Restricted opportunities were felt to be particularly prevalent for local people who more closely resembled media stereotypes, such as young, black men.

### Media Portrayal

Participants seemed weary with the longevity of negative media press about their area. Stereotypical reports were not a recent occurrence, but had been a difficult issue over the longer term:

*"...if you look at the history of the press of Moss Side it has always tended to be very negative. You know, titles like 'Gunchester' erm, 'Gangland' and all that kind of thing...you've got erm, the 'feral youths' headline. You've got the 'gangsters' headlines. You've got 'it's all about guns and gangs and territories'."*

Participants felt there was a lack of objectivity to be found in media reports, with multiplicity of voices and perspectives unheard:

*“...unfortunately the headlines don’t reflect the good things that go on, as with all news, it only tells you bad news of things that go on. Erm, so I think people have got a very clear cut view that it’s a bad place to live, it’s a bad place to bring up your children, it’s a dangerous place to be. And, people are desperately trying to get out of Moss Side, Hulme and surrounding areas because of that perception that people have got from the outside, which is mainly driven by the media, I think. Erm, the fact that, as I say, it is only ever negative headlines. You never hear about anything good...”*

They also voiced their beliefs about the motivations of journalists, who avoided positive headlines:

*“If you look for those people who are actually doing good and put them up there, then the community will start getting, feeling good about themselves, you know. And I really believe those are the things that the media should be looking at. But, you know, they seem to get a bit more pay for doing the other... Something needs to be done about that.”*

### Stigma

Participants stated how they felt media headlines affected the wider populations’ perspectives about the area:

*“...there is a stigma around the area...people you come across do have this image of it being quite a rough area, where there is a lot of crime and death, really, erm, where there is gun violence.”*

They particularly highlighted the focus of media headlines on “black on black” crime:

*“I guess externally, erm, we have become, erm, famously known for gun violence. Erm, in particular, what has been deemed as ‘black on black’ crime. Er, where young gang members will shoot to kill other members, in order to gain patch ground, erm, where it concerns drug dealing. So, yeah, I think the view would be different from those people looking in, and from those people that live within, yeah.”*

Participants were aware that this skewed perspective often resulted in a lack of understanding of the wide range of people nationally affected by gun crime:

*“I think the stigma, is still, in this country, that gun crime is related to the black community. Erm, because really, the number of deaths are normally black kids, erm youth... It is funny that a lot of the families that are left are very, very multi-cultural. There are a lot of white mothers, of what we would deem as black children.”*

In this way they were verbally challenging dominant media narratives, which focused on gun crime as a ‘black’ issue:

*“So, the white community are suffering, alongside the black community, there isn’t that great a difference in the colour of who it’s affecting, in the wider picture. Because the faces that we see, are perceived to be black, it’s almost as though there aren’t white people that are suffering. But many mothers are, many fathers are, many families are...”*

## Fear

The literature review explored the impact of perceiving people, groups or individuals as separate or different. This can lead to distancing, resulting in a loss of understanding and empathy. Difference coupled with negative stereotyping can also

create “fear”. This was a word repeatedly used by participants in relation to how they felt people were viewing their community both “looking in” and “from within”:

*“I think if there is something that I would remove as a block, it would be a fear that people have about these sorts of communities.”*

Participants felt that fear created avoidance of the area, further distancing those “looking in”:

*“Often there are people who would avoid going through this area, or stopping in this area. Erm, or would be very disappointed or even frightened to hear that their children were in this area. Erm, because of the image perhaps, regarding gun violence. So, that would affect how they would see it and how they would perceive it. I guess they would feel it as an area to keep away from, because danger could occur to them.”*

They felt that the fear was of the area itself, but extended to fearful perceptions of individuals within the community:

*“...people who live outside...they have this idea, which is a false idea, which is not a true idea, that all the people down there are wicked and terrible and bad... “And, we don’t go there, and if we go down there we hang on to our purses, we hang onto our bags, and we can’t walk through this area, and we can’t walk through that area.” Fear, then it becomes fearful. And fear is the number one em, distress in people’s lives.”*

Much of MAV’s work is focused on encouraging and supporting young people, therefore they were very concerned about how negative storylines evoked “fear” of their youth:

*“Then some people become afraid of young people. We should never be afraid of young people. If you’re afraid of young people, what does that lead them into? It leads them into fear, and they will then start operating out of fear. They’ll think that nobody cares about them, nobody likes them. They think nobody thinks well of them. Well if nobody thinks well of you, why would you want to think well of yourself? Why would you want to do things nice for other people?”*

Participants were conscious that without interaction with the wider community, people “*looking in*” would not benefit from the culture, diversity, learning and willingness of people within the area to contribute. This prevented growth through mutual exchange and participation:

*“I believe everyone should be free to go wherever they want to. So, if they want to come down to Moss Side, because there is something down here that they’ve never seen before, or they’ve never had before...say the African Caribbean or the Asian groups put on something cultural...it sabotaged, sorry sabotages learning... For the person, but also the one who is giving, but the one who is receiving as well.”*

*“...you’ll find that events such as erm, the carnival for example, you don’t find people from outside areas coming into Moss Side, to see what it is all about.”*

Within the community participants were concerned that dominant negative storylines were also beginning to impact on the understandings of local people:

*“For the people within the community, they start looking at each other and wondering, “Is this the person...” you know what I mean, “...that I should be afraid of.” And then they start not being themselves... Elderly people start feeling they can’t go out...people’s homes become their prisons, and that can’t be good for anyone.”*



As well as a lack of exchange and communication, participants voiced the economic impacts of stigma and fear:

*“If you are looking at a business level people might not want to invest in the community...so it’s, it has an impact on employment, it has an impact on investment.”*

### Judgements

Participants discussed the prolific use of the word “gang” in the media, and the way in which this was regularly attached to any group of young people:

*“I think what they think is, that every group of young people in Moss Side belongs to a gang. They don’t see that it could be a group of young people going to a dance group. Or it could be a group of young people going to a youth club together...you never hear about a good group of kids who go out. And there are a lot of good kids in this area, a lot of good kids.”*

They were also annoyed about the attribution of blame to parents and communities in the aftermath of the tragic loss of young lives:

*“...they make judgments like...when Jessie James was shot and killed, all the judgements people were saying was, “What was a young child doing out at that time of night?” And you are thinking, well for me, you’re not in tune with what happens for young people. And twelve o’clock, one o’clock is not late, really, ok... And he was out with his friends. And he had been given permission by his mother to go and to be out. You see, those comments, they are very, very damaging.”*

*“The same thing when Giuseppe Henry was murdered, “What was he doing out at that time of night?” ...It was twelve o’clock, he was sixteen years of age. There are many sixteen years of age in erm middle suburbia who are left on their own while their parents have flown to wherever they have gone. Or, having parties and bringing hundreds of young people into the house...”*

They voiced that these biased storylines prevented empathy, understanding or joint action towards solutions:

*“I think they probably think, “Let them get on with killing each other.” And I think they always presume its gang and drug related, and I know it’s not. That is the perception of it... And I think while people have that perception, no-one’s gonna get any help. We need to be pulling together, trying to stop it.”*

Participants challenged media stereotypes of families bereaved through sudden, violent deaths, through their own positionings:

*“Don’t judge that family, don’t judge that person. I, when I lost my son I was working and doing a degree. Working full time and doing a degree. You know, I earned thirty grand a year... I brought my lads up with morals and respect... You know just ‘cos I lost my son, that don’t make me a scumbag or a thug, it doesn’t... He went to work. I’ve always worked. His Dad always worked. You know, just don’t be judging people ‘cos you don’t know what goes on, you don’t know why things happen.”*

Members of MAV reiterated that negative views of families extended beyond the traumatically bereaved, to include the wider community:

*“You don’t hear about any stable families, even though there are a lot of stable families in Moss Side. You don’t hear about fathers being good mentors, and good erm people to aspire to for the kids. Again, you just hear about the negatives. You know, ‘single parent bringing up five kids to four different fathers, who are all going to go on and carry on the cycle, of guns and gangs and violence’.”*

There was a frustration about the lack of understanding those “looking in” had about how it felt to be in receipt of these continual negative perceptions:

*“...swap the postcode with Wilmslow. See how the people in Wilmslow like it when people look at them funny ‘cos they come from M15. And then they might get a better idea of how it feels to get looked and immediately judged based on where you live rather than who you are as a person and what you’re about.”*

Participants felt that negative perceptions resulted in a lack of equity in employment searches. This was beginning to splinter the community as some residents felt that in order to attain, they would need to physically separate themselves from the locality:

*‘I think, it’s kind of a post code lottery again, it’s the fact that if they have got an M15 or M16 postcode...if that’s on someone’s CV, there is that immediate “Oh, they live in Moss Side, they must be an ex-criminal, or an ex-gang member”. There is never any perception that there could be good people coming from Moss Side. It’s always a negative... So, people tend to move out of the area in order...even just to change postcodes. So they can progress a little bit more on the career ladder, or not be judged just by their address.’*

### Beliefs about Views of the Police

Some members of MAV voiced that negative “*looking in*” stereotypes might be shared by those in public service, such as the police:

*“...you get the people who comment say, and pass judgement on these places that they have never been to, by saying, “Build a wall around it, let them all kill each other.” I do think that again, it’s, “Oh, it’s only people from Moss Side,” and I do think that the police have that opinion of, “Let them kill each other. It saves us the trouble of locking them up.”*”

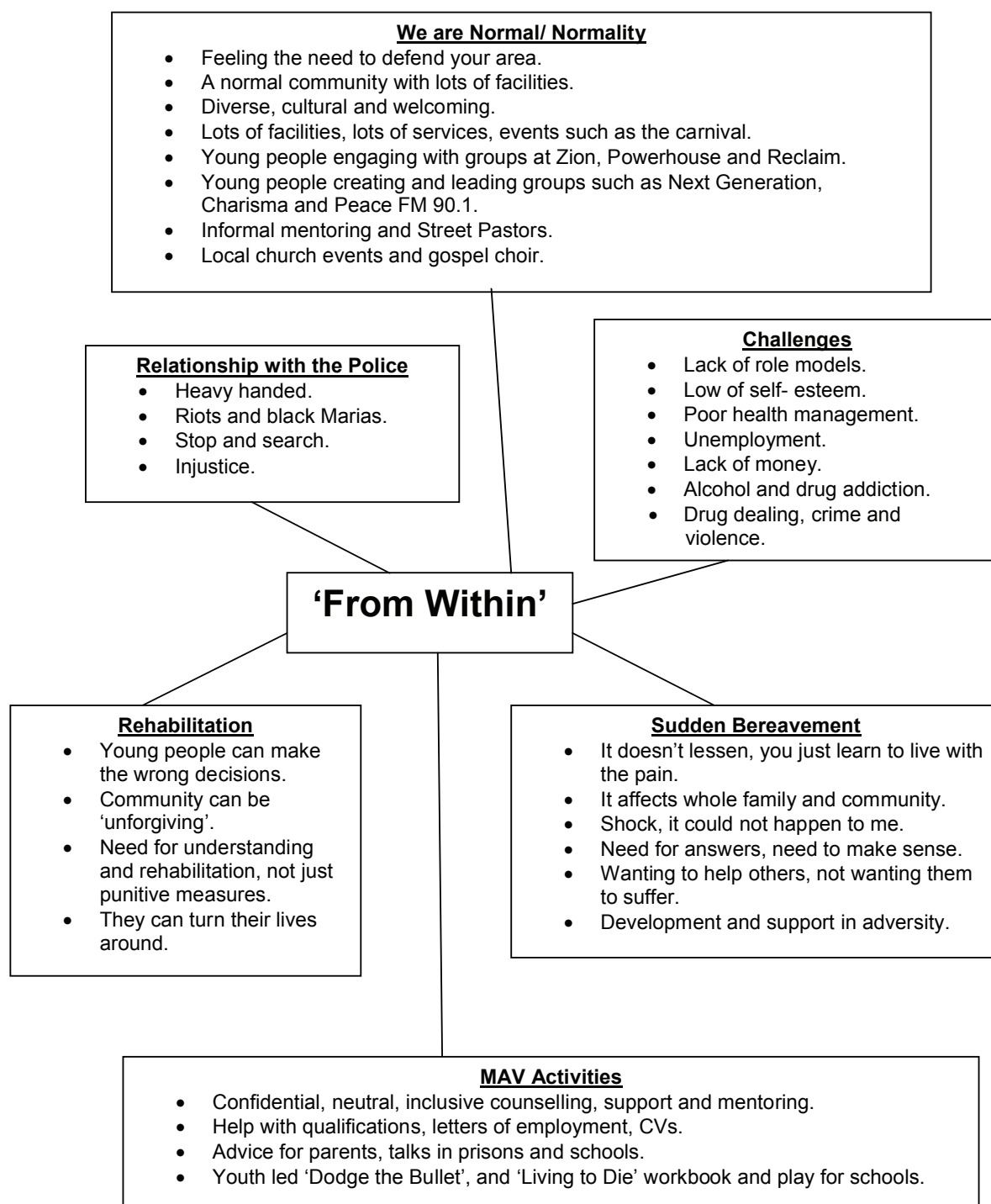
Members also raised specific concerns about police perceptions of the young people MAV were attempting to engage:

*“I think the police have got a very negative view about young people in the area.”*

Members in the process of researching the language associated with ‘Gunchester’, highlighted how some labels had evolved via structural services:

*“Erm, and I actually know that a lot of the...actual labels that are given to...for example ‘Doddington’ and ‘Gooch’ were actually named by the police... The police gave them those labels, which have then carried on and people, young people who want to aspire, or want to be a part of something, have attached themselves to that label as well.”*

## **5.5. 'From Within'**



Participants were keen to emphasise the 'normality' of their locality. Their experiences of living and working within the area were generally positive, with supportive local activities and facilities available. They discussed efforts by individuals and groups to ensure that a cohesive community ethos continued through projects such as carnivals, local radio stations and church events. The group did acknowledge the challenges present within the area, inclusive of crime and violence. However, their descriptions of these challenges provided more holistic explanations than those relayed in dominant discourses. Participants discussed the negative effects of unemployment, inequality, restricted success stories and role models. Particularly striking was their willingness to share accounts of the emotional impacts of crime and traumatic bereavement.

Through MAV participants were attempting to work towards resolving challenges affecting their community, particularly in relation to young people. Their work highlights the contribution of the voluntary sector in supporting positive choices. Experiences described by participants also raise questions about how structural services relate to local communities.

### We are Normal/ Normality

Part of the reason that the participants had engaged with this project was their desire to voice a different perspective about Moss Side. The stigmas and stereotypes raised within the previous section had led MAV members to feel the need to defend their area:

*"It's frustrating and it's hard...Before you have even made a statement about what you are planning to do in your community, you almost have to defend the fact that it is coming from Moss Side. Before, because the people have got that stereotypical, stereotypical view."*

This defence was followed by richer descriptions of a full life within the area:

*“I guess there is a sense of wanting to defend the area because you have grown up here. And personally I have had a good experience of living in the area, on a whole, you know... I got a lot of erm community, activities and fulfilment. I came from an area where, you know, there was always lots to do. Erm, I was always involved with something. I guess I was involved in my local church and also my local school, and things like that... So, I think it was an area where you were well invested in. And thoroughly enjoyed being part of it really... I was involved quite a lot in Sunday school with church, which would mean summer holidays from school, and things like that... And I sang on the gospel choir for many, many years.”*

The positive descriptions of activities and facilities were further punctuated by the ‘normality’ of the area:

*“I guess people living in the area, erm, would see it as a normal community: A community where there are lots of services; erm, a community that, erm, engage quite well; erm, a community that is quite...quite open to diversity, I would say. That’s probably people that are within the community, that live within the community. I think if I was to ask every person, or the average person on the street, that would be their response: that it ticks all the boxes...”*

*“I really think it’s a wonderful community. It’s a community with all kinds of cultures, all kinds of people, people you can talk to...”*

Local residents are engaging with, and initiating community support networks which challenge negative media stereotypes:

*“So you have a whole group of young people going out, young people going to school, taking their grades, being nice, doing things that are important. And, giving to their community...”*

*“Then you’ve got the older ones who are working with young people, you know, helping them, supporting them, being there for them. And, you don’t hear stories about that.”*

The positive belief that MAV members had in their locality’s youth reinforced their motivation to help these young people reach their potential:

*“And there is a lot of informal stuff goes on, that hasn’t got a name or an office. You’ve got people who are out there on the street, who are talking to young people. You’ve got informal mentoring going on. And it, I think for me that that needs to be recognised and valued a lot more.”*

Cultural diversity provides a basis for a number of centres, projects and groups supporting young people:

*“...we have a number of groups within our area that’s working with young people. And they try to do different things for young people. They try to help them...we have got a Powerhouse in Moss Side, and I know lots of young people access it. We have got a Zion in Hulme... they have cultural things, they have dance. They have drama. You know, they put on all kinds of things that children would say that they want, because they are asking children what they want and they are putting them on...the other day we had a young man here, you know. Erm a choreographer for dance here... And so, there are lots of young people that actually do things. Powerhouse as I say, you know, we have a young man who works with us here. He puts on all kinds of training, weights, and all that kind of things.”*

MAV participants remarked that many of the supportive activities being completed within the area, were not highlighted by the local or national media:



*“I think things that have come out of Moss Side that are positive are things like the ‘Reclaim Project’...headed by Ruth from Urbis...she worked with young people to get a manifesto for young people of what they want in their community. And she was able to team thirty young men with mentors. So that was a positive thing. Erm, the ‘Dodge the Bullet’ campaign was a positive initiative that came out of Moss Side and Hulme. Again, young people being consulted and being led erm, fully participating in the ethos behind what the campaign means. Erm, ‘Street Pastors’ come out of Moss Side. It’s, it’s a group of people who patrol their streets once a month, giving pastoral care... So, there’s lots of things that happen in Moss Side that often doesn’t always get the highlight.”*

This stereotypical image of Moss Side had led some young people to take more control of the services available to them:

*“‘Next Generation’ was set up by two young girls who were sat in their bedroom, and they were pissed off with the way things were. And fed up of the stereotypes. So they literally set up their own company, erm, and set up their own youth club...and they run, erm they do the security, you know for, the working on the doors... I think they were doing some mechanics training for young people. And that, for me, is what it’s all about. You’ve got young people, setting up services, for young people, in a positive way... ‘Charisma’ do ‘Peace Week’...They do a Peace March, they link up with Longsight and they do events in youth clubs. They run ‘Peace FM’, stuff like that. So that, again, but you don’t hear of these groups.”*

Participants felt that one of the key strengths on the area was the level of diversity and culture, which had evolved over several generations since the Second World War:

*“My Dad first came over from Ireland and he lived in Moss Side. And he said it is the best place he has ever lived. Because, there used to be signs on the door saying ‘no Irish, no blacks,’ and the two communities you know, the Irish and the black community were very close... And for me it’s that erm, that openness and willingness to take anybody in... So, it’s the fact that their arms are open wide, and they want people to come in, and they’re very welcoming... So, I think that openness is something to be celebrated... It doesn’t matter your ethnicity, your age, your background, or anything. It is a very welcoming place.”*

Participants emphasised the potential for learning and exchange intrinsic within a multi-cultural community:

*“I really believe that the community first is a multi-cultural one... And that from it you can get all kinds of different cultures, and all kinds of ideas...”*

They also voiced the life and laughter present as the diverse community comes together for particular events:

*“I’ve always said, “Come to the carnival with us,” and when the people have got there they have loved it. ‘Cos, it is, that is the heart of Moss Side, that’s the true Moss Side, the people, they play hard as well as they work hard.”*

### Challenges

Participants also recognised that Mothers Against Violence had been formed as a reaction to challenges facing their community:

*“Ah, I think the fact that we are here, identifies that there is a problem, and we’ve identified that. Erm, because there is a problem with gang violence and young people killing each other. Erm, so gun violence and knife crime – even though knife crime has not been a big issue in our community, in Moss Side and Hulme, no bigger than in any other area – gun violence has been over the years. And, it has taken quite a number of lives. So, the nature of what we are about has come out of a lot of pain and a lot of suffering.”*

One participant relayed her personal view of how gun crime had infiltrated the area during her own youth:

*“...drugs were coming in, the emergence of the different gangs...The violence, it became a common, common occurrence. That you’d go out, and it would kick off, and shots would be fired, and we’d lived through all of this... And then, you somehow, it became normalised. For me personally...somewhere in my psychie, it became something that we had, expectations, this is what it’s gonna be. And not realising that erm, we could be part of the change of process... And I think for me, back in 1999 when we had that...three young men...shot and killed. Two were from Moss Side and Hulme, one wasn’t... And I just think the impact, was just getting ridiculous. We’d had years of this. And I’m saying absolute years.”*

Another participant highlighted the financial aspects of drugs infiltrating the area, touching on structural issues such as unemployment:

*“For years, people were saying it was drugs. But I believe it was much more than that. I believe the drugs is only what they were erm involved in, and erm, to actually to get themselves some money... And that’s where the gun came. People started robbing them, taking away their money, whatever it is. They found they had to have something to protect, something to protect themselves...”*

Structural issues were part of the “*tremendous pressure*” families experienced, despite the “*tremendous work*” of community groups:

*“I think the pressures, and when I mean that, I look at unemployment; I look at the households in which the, the person is placed - whether it’s a single parent household; erm, I’m looking a people under pressure through drug addiction, alcohol addiction; lack of money; erm, lack of support; mental health.”*

Availability of alcohol and drugs for those feeling pressure, was compared to a lack of access to supportive resources:

*“You know, you go to any inner city community and there’s more alcohol shops than anything else... more alcohol shops than community resources...”*

Participants highlighted the range of issues which needed to be addressed within their community, especially in relation to how residents perceived themselves:

*“...there are symptoms in our community that, and cases, and issues in our community that still need addressing around poor health management, self- esteem, confidence.”*

They were particularly concerned about how young people in the community viewed themselves, and the messages they were receiving from those “*looking in*”:

*“I think it’s, it’s about what you’re told you can be. Erm, young black men are usually told that they’re either gonna be a rapper or a footballer. And if they are not one of those then they are going to be a drug dealer.”*

For MAV, part of their role was in providing positive role models and highlighting positive people and actions within the community:

*“One of the things that we have highlighted, in working with young people is that the issues why they turn to gun violence, are usually because of lack of role models. Lack of positive figures, in their lives, that they can emulate to. So, I think that if we can engage with young people, and support them younger, I think that that will have an influence, in the long term communities that we’re building.”*

### Sudden Bereavement

In the same way that participants openly discussed challenges within their community, they were also willing to talk about personal, painful journeys towards MAV membership:

*“Well for me, I didn’t join MAV. It became about. I actually went to a meeting that I was told was going to take place, because some mothers wanted to look at the issues... Young men were being shot at the time, most of the time they were being shot and killed... My son was you know, one of those young men...”*

Their vivid accounts of sudden bereavement might encourage a degree of understanding unlikely to evolve from dominant media and government narratives:

*“I can’t tell you how I get up in a morning and carry on living, ‘cos I don’t know. How you do it is, your heart still beats, and your body still breathes, although you don’t want it to. You’ve got no choice in that matter, it still does. And you just carry on. There’s days I’ve felt like I’ve dragged myself up and put myself on a frame and pushed myself round.”*

*"I think you just learn to live with the pain, and you learn to deal with the pain."*

As well as their personal bereavement, participants explained how the death of a loved one had affected other family members:

*"It's affected everybody."*

*"...my Mum and Dad have never recovered from it. They won't ever. They've aged dramatically. My Dad's been ill since."*

Participants also considered wider effects on the community as a whole:

*"It does affect the whole community...on the day of his funeral I walked out of my house and it was like, there were just thousands of people... It shattered the community. It wasn't nice. And not only do I have to go through that and my family, but his friends. I watch his friends still grieve now, and that so upsets me that, I had to watch them through that pain."*

Part of the experience of loss in these circumstances, also involved shock at such sudden and violent deaths:

*"It affects the whole family, which in turn affects the whole community. You know this community round here was stunned when it happened... It just, it affects everybody. People that you don't believe it would affect."*

Shock and disbelief were a large part of individual narratives describing personal loss:

*“Losing my brother was a shock. It wasn’t something that I had expected, or anticipated, or even thought about, or contemplated. I grew up in this area and even though I was very, very aware of gun violence - it was going on around me – there was still a sense of...that it could not happen to me, or it would not affect my family. And so when it did it was a complete and utter shock. I guess because erm my brother was not known by the police, he didn’t have a criminal record, he was just at a basketball match. He was due to come home, we just...never ever saw him again...and the thought of someone pointing a gun at him and taking his life...”*

After the initial shock, participants voiced a need to attempt to make some meaning of their loss:

*‘...when I went to the first meeting I went there to see if I could find some answers... My son was pivotal in my actual going, ‘cos I don’t think I would have gone if he hadn’t have been killed. I wouldn’t be asking those questions... I was in pain. I was trying to make some sense of what was happening in our community. Not just what was happening to me, but what was happening to our community.’*

For many part of this meaning making process involved an exploration, and either questioning or greater commitment to religious beliefs:

*“I did question every religion at the time.”*

*“...it was trying to make some sense of the world, of what was happening... I was trying to get myself at peace. To find peace in me, to think my son was at rest somewhere.”*

Participants also voiced a belief in personal and educational growth as part of the bereavement process:

*“Because, one of the things that I’ve realised is that out of our pain, and our disabilities, we then have people that will come along and support us. We then have empathy. We then have compassion. These are where these qualities are born, in that we then have patience, and kind of a humility.”*

This personal growth was coupled with a wish to help others, and promote change:

*“That was the, the initial need to for wanting change I think within the community. I think a sense of not wanting other people to suffer.”*

*“I wanted to be able to be that voice, or to be that ear rather, to be able to hear those voices, that were very much like my own, when I, when they, went through that difficult period. So, my role was really to be a counsellor, a support, a mentor. And I looked at becoming qualified as a mentor and counsellor. Which, I completed about a year and a half ago...”*

### MAV Activities

One participant gave their perspective, on the contributions of MAV members who had lost a loved one:

*“I was just in complete awe of women who could lose their children and then turn that into something positive, by setting up MAV.”*

Members discussed some of the core activities they complete, in an aim to work against violence and gun crime:



*“...we go into prisons and speak to young men about how important the father is to a child, and we do parenting classes. We have recently been into a woman’s prison.”*

Members of MAV were also in the process of encouraging young people to take more control over projects that challenged crime and violence:

*“...we did ‘Dodge the Bullet’ which was a project made for and by a group of young people, who own it. They own the copyright to that DVD. So, if they want to go out and sell it, they actually own...and I think, for me I like the empowering side of it.”*

*“...they were affected by Jessie James’ death. And they felt compelled to do something erm, and they were studying drama so they developed this play – it was called ‘Living to Die’... We went and watched it and we were moved, erm myself and Patsy. And I just thought, this has to be seen, you know. So erm, we organised for it to be seen and aired at the Zion Community Resource Centre. Erm, and it was well attended, and we aired it for the first time. And again, it moved people then. And I just think you just keep going, so the next thing was to turn it into a DVD. Erm, to share the experience we turned that into a DVD along with an educational resource booklet, which is now in all the schools in Trafford.”*

Despite their powerful projects aimed at working against gun crime, Mothers Against Violence wanted their role within the local community to be much wider:

*“...we have to be ensuring that we’re reaching who we can reach, to the best of our ability, and, not to become blinkered. And thinking that everything has got to be with guns and gangs, and nothing else, you know. It filters off into so many different aspects...”*

*“...parents need to know that they can come to us for help. For help with whatever the child’s doing, help with their grief.”*

*“...we’re gonna do an open day...we’re gonna have a core group of volunteers who are going to help us with the parenting programme... We’ve got an erm, an on- board counselling service.”*

*“...we do trips... And we do get rival gangs sat in the same room together.”*

Help offered by MAV volunteers included supporting young people with the skills required to enter employment:

*“Well, well we’ve recently been donated an IT suite which has been fantastic. And what we’re gonna do is, we are gonna do a full day of training which is erm, teaching kids how to write up a CV, how to set up a hotmail account. And it’s gonna be in a safe place where they can come in, erm, write off letters to get employment.”*

They also support young people with vital life choices:

*“...we’re there to help you get on the right track. Help you get into college, help you get in work. Mentor you the best way we can. Get you off the streets, turn your life around.”*

Participants felt that they were able to offer such a wide range of services due to the diversity of the people involved with MAV:

*“...there are so many diverse people in MAV as well, and we do tackle different issues...”*

*“We’ve got academics who can research things... I think, if people think people are uneducated then they don’t take them seriously. We’ve got three graduates, three people with degrees, two or one doctor, one hopefully potential doctor...and all of those people are from Moss Side...”*

MAV were eager to relay this diversity and their willingness to share and engage with a variety of people:

*“So, I think that the message I want to get out, or that I would like MAV to be able to portray is that: we are fully inclusive of all people...”*

*“I think I want it to be able to be a service that is considered a service for the community, to support the community, regardless of the background really, or the experience of people.”*

### Rehabilitation

The voluntary, professional and academic experiences of participants had provided insight into possible ways forward from current challenges. They were particularly passionate about rehabilitation as opposed to punishment:

*“You’ve got to put in resources...and we only have four therapeutic prisons in England, this, oh, how can we allow that! You know there is no therapeutic programs so for twenty odd hours of the day they are sat there festering.”*

*“...I hear the argument from people saying, “They should be in there, throw away the key and lock them up,” and maybe that’s why things aren’t put in place. But on the other side, we have experiences of people going in prison, and coming out, and doing tremendous work, and changing their lives around. And I think that if we want to make a change you’ve got to be investing in some of those things.”*

MAV members also felt that there was a lack of rehabilitation provision after people had completed their sentences, and returned to the community:

*“They’re lost. Number one, they’re left, they’re lost, and within weeks they fall back into the only thing they know, which is not productive. You know, and I think we have to, we have to find some way of stopping that, we really do. I mean you would never watch, you would never go and save a man out of the river, and watch him go and jump back in again, would you?”*

Again, their sympathies were particularly with young people. They felt that young people did not always have the life experience to understand the consequences of their poor choices:

*“So, to have a young person whose found himself in this predicament, and next thing you know he’s on a charge, and he’s on a serious charge... And, he’s marginalised from wider community. People are very judgemental. You know, half the time they don’t know the full facts but they’ve hanged, drawn and quartered the person already, haven’t they?”*

*“...remember these are young people, you know. They haven’t got adult wisdom yet. They haven’t got the years of experience behind them...you make decisions when you are young and sometimes you wish you didn’t, but you do.”*

MAV members expressed compassion for young people who had offended, together with a belief that they could succeed:

*“It will be hard coming out after all this time...he was a child, everything’s changed... hopefully he will be able to settle down and get himself a job. Live a normal life.”*

*“...Mothers Against Violence is supporting a number of young men who have been involved in gangs but have actually come out of that and have turned their life around. Have gone with qualifications...”*

Discussions of the lack of rehabilitation provision, linked back to wider arguments about structural issues impacting on the area:

*“I think if people put more of an effort into trying to find out the reasons why they feel the need to join a gang or, why they feel safer with a gun in their pocket. Rather than, at the other end of it, the punitive end of it... If they find out the reasons why it happens in the first place.”*

### Relationship with the Police

As well as having reservations about lack of rehabilitation provision, MAV members also raised concerns about policing tactics in the area. Some of their criticisms were around historical issues, but it was felt that stereotypical images of young people can still cause aggressive policing:

*“...and the policing back then, was not how it is today. It’s improved a lot, but you know, there is still a lot more room for improvement. But there were a case of young men, and mainly black men, being stopped on the street, arrested, assaulted, erm, thrown in the back of the black Maria’s then, and all that kind of stuff... We’d had days and weeks of the riots...of not living in fear, but of people very tentative around the police... ‘cos you know, people we’re just getting dragged up off the street.”*

*“And when people like to say, “...that was then”, it happens still, but in a very more subtly, and we have ‘stop and search’. You know we have lots of young people who have been stopped and searched numerous times on the same day, and erm, to go through that experience time and time again, leaves something with you, do you know? Injustice...”*

More specific examples of recent aggressive policing were provided by participants:

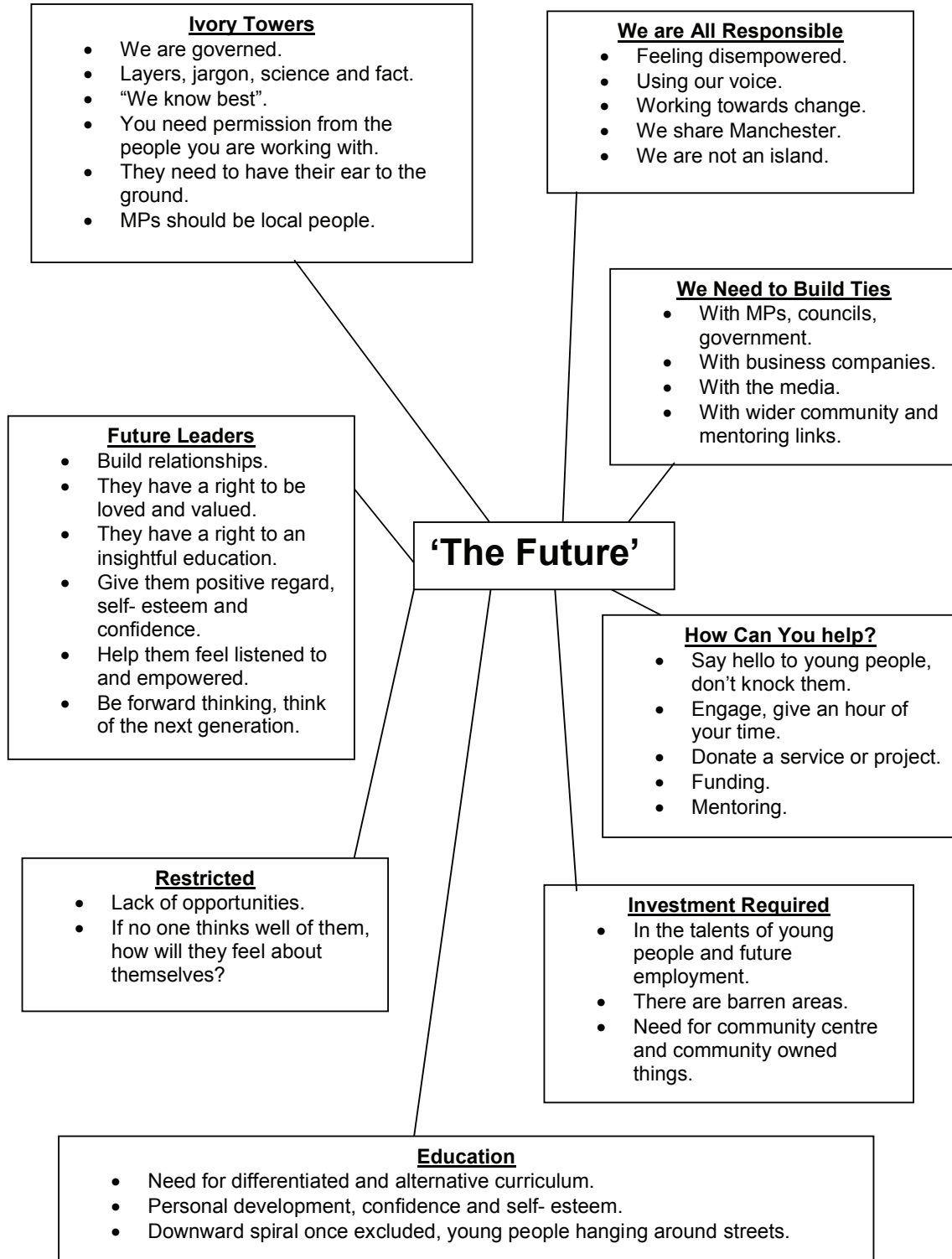
*“...there was a local community group that set up erm a big dance, kind of an X Factor type thing. Erm, now when there is usually an event at the Bridgewater Hall it doesn’t need to be policed, because it’s classical music or it’s, you know, some, a nice event. Because this was a group of sixty kids from Moss Side and Hulme, and surrounding areas, they felt the need to police it... A parent had come to pick up a child, who was eight, nine years old. Erm, they saw the police and asked them what they were doing. They was immediately arrested, and thrown in the back of a van. The panic button was pressed. There was helicopters, dog vans, erm police vans, armed units. All came, all descended on the Bridgewater Hall... they actually made the mistake of arresting some community leaders, who actually know their rights, and know what they are talking about.”*

*“...the kids had access to all the back areas of Bridgewater Hall and there was no damage, there was nothing done. They were really, you know, they really treated the place with respect. But immediately, they knew it was a gang of kids from Moss Side, in our lovely nice Bridgewater Hall, and they chose to police it. And, responded ridiculously as well.”*

Participants felt that the biggest issue with “heavy handed tactics” was that the local community would be more reluctant to engage with police and other structural services, in order to support change:

*“I think that it just doesn't do the police any favours. Because, when they then need help in the community, they're not gonna get it...they don't treat people...they don't speak to people, properly even, to even have a conversation with them, never mind get people to risk their safety to give them information.”*

## 5.5. 'The Future'





Members of MAV were concerned about structures of control, and the power of governing bodies to make decisions without genuinely consulting local people. Part of the reason MAV were willing to participate in this research, was their aim to share ideas about how to bring about positive change. MAV wanted to communicate their knowledge and expertise to a range of agencies. They wanted to engage the media, government and wider community with their transformative aims. MAV wants to be an inclusive group, and provided various ways that the wider community could become involved. One of their major objectives is to improve access to education and opportunities for young people. This was related to their belief that young people are “*blessings*”, “*future leaders*”, and will be the bearers of brighter futures.

The overall tone of narratives collected was hopeful, despite recognition of major challenges facing their community. Participants wanted wider society to perceive them in their entirety, providing a more secure base for future ambitions:

*“...it is a community with a history. It’s got a past, it’s got a now, and it’s got a future. And the future is in the people, it’s not in the things. It’s in the people, their ideas, and what they are going to bring forward. We have a diverse culture of people that’s in this community, and they bring diverse ideas that can be put together. And the beautiful thing about people working together, whatever culture they come from, bringing all those cultures together and seeing them work together, and building on the successes that we have, and we can actually share the failings together as well, whatever they are. ‘Cos I really believe our failures are the fertiliser to our future.”*

### Ivory Towers

One of the issues that participants felt needed to be addressed, was the level of decision making about community issues, by people unconnected to the area:

*“...unfortunately, people who are doing it are doing it from nine to five. It is not their real life and they all go home at the end of it.”*

*“You ask you know, whoever the MP is, you ask them what it is like to live in Moss Side, and go to ‘Ducie’, or to go to one of the other schools, and they have not got a clue. So, how can you expect these people to represent the people in that area, if they don’t live that life?”*

Participants voiced that for positive change to occur, local people needed to have more control over decisions and funding affecting their locality:

*“...the people in power who’ve got the money, the people in the ‘ivory towers’ who have not got a clue...get some real people behind the cheque books rather than people who don’t live the life... We should have the cheque books not these people that don’t know what they are talking about.”*

Government agencies often financed projects which were not endorsed, engaged with, or beneficial to the local community:

*“And one of the things that I think happens, even within local authorities, they don’t recognise that you have to have permission from the person you are working with. They just put it into place...”*

There was also frustration when local authorities believed nationally prescribed programmes could be applied to any area:

*“I think that if they actually listened to people from Moss Side instead of following you know, a model that has been, you know, used in London, Birmingham and everywhere else. It’s a unique place.”*

In order to find appropriate solutions governing bodies needed to listen to people from the locality they were engaging with:

*“We’re governed locally and we are governed nationally. And I think again, if you have your ear to the ground, and locally having your ear to the ground means listening to the views and the groups that are working there. Then, hopefully you are reflecting what needs to be done. When your ear is not to the ground you’re missing it completely. And we have certain erm, systems in place where they’re missing it completely. You know, and we have to kind of bring them, and remind them that your impact and decisions, might not affect you personally ‘cos you don’t live here – you know, in your communities wherever your community is - but it impacts on our community. So, you do need to understand the mechanisms of how we are. And I think that there has been, erm, an attitude of we know best. Based on what, I don’t know. You know, it might be based on research, based on academia. But based on real life experience, we know also.”*

MAV members wanted to contribute and offer their knowledge as part of a solution orientated process:

*“I’m not saying that MAV have got all the answers to everything. But, I think for the experience and the knowledge and the people that are in the group... If you can’t get some sort of information from them to do something positive, then you’re barking up the wrong tree completely.”*

Unfortunately there was a clear frustration with consultation processes. Members generally did not feel that they were being heard. Instead they felt their inclusion was an attempt to pacify, rather than genuine intention to engage:

*“Engaging more with the community rather than paying lip service to it. Because, MAV get consulted on various home office round table meetings. Erm, we get asked about legislation. And I think that’s just paying lip service to say, “We have consulted a community group.” I don’t think for one second that they take on board what we tell them. I don’t think for a minute that they appreciate the value of our knowledge and our expertise in this area, and what we actually know to be true about this area. I think they only do it to say, “We’ve consulted with the community and they’ve said...and they agree.” Cos that is all you’re getting. You might get a hundred and fifty six page white paper report, but out of that, the one line will say, “And we consulted the community groups.” And that is just so they can say that they have done.”*

Systems and language used by local authorities and government agencies could also alienate the community:

*“...all these different layers society have created, erm, can be off putting. You know, the jargon that people use can be off putting... People can blind each other with science and facts.”*

MAV’s frustration with the current systems resulted from numerous years of waiting for genuine consultation and shared decision making:

*“Cos sometimes I think I suffer from déjà vu. ‘Cos I sit at meetings and I go to...and I think, I’ve heard this. I’ve heard the same promises, I’ve heard the same rhetoric. But now, we are ten years down the line, you know now we’re fifteen years down the line in some places. And I think it’s not acceptable. And, erm, it becomes acceptable if you don’t speak out. And if you don’t bring it, on the agenda and make change.”*

## We are All Responsible

The lack of hoped for change had resulted in feelings of disempowerment and resignation for some local people:

*“...people have resigned themselves to think that they can’t change nothing. And erm, the only thing you can do is, is try to direct people into how they can change things. Erm, put things in place where they can see things have changed. It’s a very difficult one.”*

*“Because so many of us at some point in our life feel disempowered and feel that we have no power to change things around us... That’s why you might hear parents saying, “Well that’s just the way it is”. But what does that really mean? ...Women have fought for centuries to get equality, you know. Erm, our fore-fathers fought for centuries to get equality based on race. So it’s never a case of, “That’s just the way it is.””*

They also hoped that more people would use their “voice” in working against the challenges the area faced:

*“You know, that thing is not my business, it’s got nothing to do with me, doesn’t minimise the impact for parents who are grieving because they’ve lost their child, and they don’t know who killed their child. It doesn’t minimise the impact for erm, for parents whose children are serving life for murder. It doesn’t minimise anything. It doesn’t help either... We can’t, we can no longer turn away, do you understand?”*

Participants felt that their “voice” was a powerful force in maintaining hope for positive change:

*“...I’m a powerful voice, ‘cos I’ve got a voice. ‘Cos God gave me a voice, and in that, in itself, is power. And so I see myself as a powerful voice and I’m utilising that to the best of my ability...”*

They cited the local people who were working with them towards a better future:

*“I am saying that I know there are people who I can call upon personally to get support, and erm, move things forward. And that’s always reassuring.”*

*“...that’s testimony of the community that is here...people who do get up and want to do something and want to actively change the environment, for the better.”*

*“And, we’re strong in many different ways, you know. Sometimes you need the numbers... You know, and we have to be ensuring that we’re reaching who we can reach, to the best of our ability, and, not to become blinkered. We are all responsible, if we are going to improve.”*

This linked with widening perceptions about who the local community included:

*“...we live in a community, and that’s made up of everybody, erm people that come in and work seven hours a day, they’re still part of our community. People who strategically plan what happens must always remember they’re part of the community, you know.”*

*“When we start talking about communities, sometimes that’s where we get selfish. We just think about our community. We must remember that we share Manchester with so many, and it’s our duty as well to make sure that we are also bringing in and working, and looking to extend our relationships with other communities.”*

*“Mothers Against Violence works around the issues of gangs and guns. But do you know what, there are so many other different children of different races and culture affected, that we do really need to remember that we have to be reflective of all our needs. And, not to become too insular, you know.”*

By incorporating the wider population MAV felt that issues affecting them would be less stigmatised as being solely related to inner city, young, black men:

*“...if we have more people involved in dealing with this, if we realise that this is not just a black problem; it is not just an inner city problem; it is a wider problem. Then we can start dealing with it, erm, as a, as a country, rather than just as pockets of communities. Erm, Yes.”*

This related to a ‘good Samaritan’ ethos, together with a respect for each individual’s ability to contribute:

*“...if any one of us was walking down the road and we collapse, we need somebody to pick us up. It doesn’t matter how much money you have, or how rich you are, which area you’re from, you need somebody to pick you up.”*

*“We’re not here to judge each other. We are here to learn about and care about each other... And when we remember that we’ll be more humble and we can then deal with each other in the correct way, and we can make our community more profitable, more developed, more beautiful. And when the time comes that we have difficulties, we are able to sort them out properly.”*

*‘So, we are not an island on our own... We are individuals but we need each other. Without each other we will not survive, honestly we will not survive.’*

## We Need to Build Ties

To encourage this process of working together, MAV were eager to build ties, beginning with strengthening communication within their locality:

*“...I think that we have to engage with the people that live here first. So, we are understanding their needs, and we are not just perceiving a need, based upon our own experiences... And for me that was a big learning curve because there were lots of things and cultures within this community, that I didn't even realise were here. And there are lots of ways of thinking, especially from young people that were really far removed from my experience of the community. So, being able to represent the whole community was really, really important. I couldn't draw only from the experiences that I had within this community, without engaging with the people here.”*

Once local people were fully engaged, MAV members hoped to build stronger connections with government agencies, businesses, and the wider population:

*“...once we are engaging with the people here, it is then to be their voice, where it concerns our local MPs. Erm, so that we can influence them, and what they are taking back to the government. Erm, also our local communities, erm our council. And, those people that have influenced, not only erm, through the public or private sector. But also with companies. Erm, the companies that make money from many of the people that live here. The stores that are here, we engage with them, even like ASDA and Tesco's, things like that. When we need their support we, you know, engage with them. So it's using every avenue really. Public, private sector, government. And, see how we can erm build ties with them.”*

Members were aware of national agendas, and how their hoped for evolvment linked with these:



*“There is big influence now within our government concerning, erm, collaborative working. Everybody needs to be working together. I think for Mothers Against Violence, we have been doing that for a very long time, we realised at the beginning that we are going to have to engage with service providers that were bigger than ourselves. And identify with them, and be able to share the vision that we had, in order for them, to help us, to be empowering and fulfilling.”*

They also hoped to engage the media more with positive storylines about the locality:

*“...if everyone was a bit more positive, than the world would be a better place... if the media showed good news as well as bad news...then it might make a bit of a difference, you know.”*

They specifically referred to the helpful impact of a more positive approach to the area, by Channel 4's 'The Secret Millionaire':

*“Erm, I think...one of the good things that came erm out, was the media event that we took part in: erm ‘Secret Millionaire’. Because that gave us quite a lot of exposure. Erm, so I think the media is a very, very powerful tool. And I guess it is a powerful tool to create, as well as powerful to destroy. I think we would like to be able to be erm, involved more with the media. Erm, and getting our voices out there, to people out there. Erm, that represent us in a very, very positive way. But, I think that it is about reaching as many people as we can.”*

MAV are now in the process of encouraging local young people to document the area from their own, more authentic position:

*“One of the projects that we are getting involved in right now is a young man who is filming documentaries, short documentaries. And, he is doing it from the perspective of someone who lives within the community. Often, documentaries that we see are people coming from outside the community, and coming in. And, showing what they perceive us as ‘Moss Side’ and ‘Hulme’. I think it is nice for someone from the community is actually going to create a film, a documentary, that is a view from a young person that has lived here, that has worked here... hopefully that will give a good picture of what this community is like.”*

Young people were more generally seen as a key vehicle for communicating to the wider population the talents, gifts, and positive attributes of the local community:

*“I wouldn’t want them just to be able to show their talents off in this community, I’d like them to be able to go further... For them to spread themselves, and travel, and actually be able to say that this is where they have come from...to show another image of Moss Side’s young people.”*

#### How can You Help?

They explained simple ways in which the wider population might be able to support MAV:

*“You know, you don’t have to join a group to help, just help the young people, you know, just say hello to them.”*

*“...even if people, they gave an hour of their time to our group. That would be a lot. It would help. There’s only a few of us, and try to, we work all up and down the country.”*

*“...even if they were to signpost agencies that they were to come across... To donate, a service, or even donate a project.”*

*“My niece, my nephew and my son, they were all nine, they baked cakes, and they raised something like a, eighty something pounds for MAV.”*

The group were interested in new projects, funding streams, and accessing mentors for their young people:

*“...one of the things we would like to do is a mentoring programme...if companies released their staff to be able to mentor. People would be coming to mentor people in our communities, maybe in the schools. That would really be wonderful if you know, we had one of the big companies in Manchester mentor a few young men from schools or places in Moss Side. The big companies in London, or, in Manchester. To let them see another way of living. Another type of life.”*

### Investment Required

Mentoring programmes were one aspect of strong assertions that young people within the area were worthy of investment:

*“...there is a lot of talented young people here, that just need investment.”*

A need for investment was linked to structural issues of unemployment:

*“...we are seeing what we didn't invest in years ago, that's what we are seeing today. Twenty five years ago...they didn't build into thinking that these children are going to grow up and want jobs. And, they didn't realise that the influx of drugs would have such a massive impact on our communities. Now we know all that now...but we're not forward thinking enough to think okay, the next generation, the generation after... What are we actually leaving for our children, you know?”*

Participants also highlighted the importance of investing in physical aspects of their area, and local facilities:

*“...community gardening groups, erm, re-opening like, the old Moss Side precinct, and the old Moss Side market...That was great, that was a real good community central point...you could guarantee to see people you knew on there.”*

*“You know they’ve knocked down places over the road there and they have just left it barren. So if, if people look out the window and they see an old scruffy field, they are not gonna feel pride in their area. So, I think making the place look nicer for one. And I don’t mean putting hanging baskets up. I mean, making a playground, or doing a quad bike or skate park. Or, something, but then have that linked into one of the community groups. So that, people in the community own their own things. ‘Cos I think that when the community owns something, they will take care of it. If it doesn’t belong to them they are not going to respect it. If it’s owned, just a city council, standard, twelve foot by twelve foot thing, then it, with those silly colours and the bouncy floor, then they have got no respect for it. If it’s something they build themselves, and they’ve invested in themselves, they’re gonna look after it. They’re gonna make sure it is alright, and that it doesn’t get vandalised.”*

### Education

MAV participants were concerned about the long term educational opportunities that young people might not be accessing:

*“We walk past the university, we drive the bus, but how many of our young people are actually in it? Do you understand?”*

They felt young people needed support through more innovative and relevant educational experiences. These approaches would benefit from considering emotional literacy, and personal and social skills development:

*“...do different things rather than the same old, same old all the time. Because if it was working we wouldn't have the problems that we've got...so obviously something's not working.”*

*“...education for me is about empowerment... Look at all their individual skills and what they need and what they can and can't do... Some kids don't fit onto that box, so for the ones who don't fit into that box, give them a different way of doing it...”*

*“...a sheep market, we're putting our children through certain types of education, to get them to come out and have a certain type of job. And we forget that the most important education that they need is about development of their own personal skills and needs and their own self. Self- development is, should be number one.”*

*“I believe they have to learn about themselves. And most people don't know about themselves. If you're gonna be effective in anything, you have to learn about yourself. You have to learn about your strengths and weaknesses.”*

From their experiences of working with local youngsters, MAV members were clear about the results of negative educational experiences and exclusion:

*“I think that once they're out of the education system, they've been excluded from school, it's a downward spiral for them then, and it's very hard for them to get back on track.”*

*“Don’t exclude them from school, ‘cos if you exclude them from school you, you gonna lose them to the street...they are gonna just go out and they’re gonna drift into something.”*

*“...the majority of the young boys in gangs are excluded from education...”*

### Restricted Opportunities

Participants felt that exclusion from education was at times only one aspect of more general exclusion from facilities, opportunities and employment:

*“I meant by the term restricted that opportunities are limited.”*

*“I think because er, when you look around locally the doors have been, have tended to be closed to young people... We’ve tended to close our doors, and focus on different areas. So we might have elderly groups, we might have, you know disability groups, we might have mental health groups. And erm, we have neglected our young people.”*

*“...so young people, in terms of restrictions, haven’t got what we had. I had, I could go to a youth club five days a week. Always in different places as well...Today, that doesn’t happen.”*

*“When the young people go to get a job, or go to something you know, in a different place, “Where are you from? Moss Side.” They get a reaction. They think, “Oh no, no, no, we don’t want you here.” So it stops them from receiving the things they need to receive. And to develop the way they need to develop. Being free, you know, free to choose, and to do.”*

Participants discussed the fear being experienced by young people about the situations they were finding themselves in, which in turn affected their access to wider learning experiences:

*“...they are young people, and they’re very frightened about what is going on around them.”*

*“...young people are restricting themselves on where they can go... So then, they become stuck to where they are at.”*

*“Cos there is no boundary between Doddington and Gooch, it’s nothing, it’s invisible, but it’s in the mind. If they are stuck there, in that little corner, then they, you know, for me – it sounds a bit... I’m not meaning to be disrespectful but – they are like goldfish. Just going round, and round, and round. Not growing, not nurturing, not learning. And so everything there just becomes, I don’t know, meaningless. So in that way they are restricted because travel opens and broadens the horizons.”*

MAV members felt that the negative stigmas attributed to young people were part of the restriction, exclusion and marginalisation they experienced. MAV also feared that these stereotypes may become internalised by the locality’s young people:

*“I think they are already starting on the back foot, because they’ve got this stereotype that has been put upon them. So, they either fight it in a positive way, or they go along with it. If you tell someone for long enough that they are stupid, they’ll believe it themselves in the end.”*

*“I am a big believer in, if, ‘you reap what you sow’... You tell these kids they are gonna be horrible, little shits who are gonna go out an stab and mug people and never amount to anything, they will eventually live up to what you tell them that they’re gonna be. Because if you, if you feed them with the negative, then they’ll turn out negative. Look after them rather than down, you know, standing, treading them down all the time.”*

*"We talk about our children now like 'feral children' like they're rats running around the wood."*

*"We as a society and we as a community are not caring for them"*

### Future Leaders

MAV members felt that a large part of their role was supporting young people to develop themselves as confident individuals, providing them with the positive feedback that they often failed to access through media or public services:

*"Kids are like a sponge, they soak it in. So, you know, soak them with something nice and give them some love and attention..."*

*"...if you celebrate what the kids do, and empower them. And tell them that they're gonna be fantastic. And tell them that they can achieve anything they want to achieve. Then they'll also go along that path..."*

They have developed trusting relationships with local young people, built over long periods of time:

*"...if they can speak to someone in their own language who is from their area, you'll find that you build up a really nice relationship with these kids. And they are really, really nice kids."*

*"...most people who work with young people, and especially those young people who are marginalised, if you want to use that word, trust is not there, you know. You're just another adult, saying what you're saying to them, getting, trying to get out of them what you want to get out of them. And we've got to replace that with real trust, and that takes time."*



MAV believes in promoting the rights of young people they work with:

*“I think every child has the right to feel loved and valued. I think every child has the right to a productive and erm, insightful education. I think every child has the right to a decent diet. I think every child has the right to experience things that they may never get to experience again – once in a lifetime experiences. And every child, fundamentally has the right to be listened to, and empowered. Because those children will become our leaders. Definitely.”*

They particularly emphasised young people’s right to be heard. This was required in order for the young people themselves to become empowered, and for the growth and development of the community as a whole:

*“I’m all for empowering young people personally...”*

*“And, if you give them a voice and listen to them, then they’ll appreciate it. And they have got some fantastic ideas. Some of the ideas they come out with, it’s like, ‘Whoaa’. We don’t think of it ‘cos we are older and fixed in our ways and that...some of the things they throw at you are amazing.”*

*“They have new ideas, they will say new things...each generation comes into the world with new ideas to be developed. So, the older generation should be the kind of a wise head, especially about life, to help the younger generation to not fall into some of the mishaps. But they have to start listening to each other, and that’s what I want to see happen in our community.”*

*“...we want our children to be leaders in our community. Fore- runners of change. And they can only be fore- runners of the change if we empower them to do that, and relinquish our power...”*

In terms of overall narratives, MAV members related their work to themes running through their own lives, and across generations:

*“Always remember the people who have gone before you .So I, I look at that and think ok, people might think of the Maya Angelou and the Martin Luther King. But I am thinking of people like, my father, my auntie, I’m putting it more close to home.”*

*“I look at my children and I think about being a grand- mother and I look at the next generation, I’m forward thinking. I don’t want them to have to go through the same things I’m going through. I want them to be able to skip from level A straight to Z. And we can build that in. We have the, the ability to build that framework within our communities...”*

*“...it is not easy but it is achievable. And I believe that once we start to empower our young people, and that is what I firmly believe in and I am working towards... I am going to sit back one day and be an old lady and be very, very happy.”*

## **6. Discussion**

This aim of this research was to find out how MAV felt their community was being storied, and their response to perceived storylines. Narrative practice questions were used to explore the effects of unhelpful narratives, and elicit MAV's preferred authoring of their community. Research questions have been presented with literature which reviewed government agendas and meta-narratives about communities. In the discussion government rhetoric will again be considered, alongside the narratives of participants.

### **6.1. Meta-Narratives and Stereotypes**

In designing the research questions and methodological approach, my aim has been to collaboratively work with MAV, actively attempting to create new knowledge. At the same time, I need to continually be aware that I am separate from the participants I have engaged with. I have not had their life experiences, and so can only endeavour to portray a reflection of their views. I have been permanently altered by the humbling experience of witnessing their commitment to change. I therefore hope that within this discussion, I can meaningfully link my understanding of their narratives to local and national concerns.

My initial motivation for wanting to re-engage with Moss Side/ Hulme, was related to my teaching experiences there, which have been the most positive of my professional career. The memories I take away from the area include witnessing incredible talent during music, dance and poetry performances. I was also inspired by the aspirations of students engaging in additional curricular study, and university orientation events. In many ways my prior involvement left me with views which could be described as attributing a '*saints*' mythology to the area (Connor, 2010, p1). This concept was previously discussed in the literature review. Current meta-narratives about communities can often separate people from the circumstances in which they live. This permits the person, group or community to be held entirely

responsible for constrained choices within their situation. Whilst initially appearing positive, a 'saints' mythology can fail to recognise the extent of inequality and power differentials. Research in areas of oppression such as abuse, have also cited concerns about 'resiliency' labels (Furman, 2005). It is argued that such attributions may reduce more complex realities, and add pressure to individuals who continue to struggle. In essence, reductionist explanations may unintentionally reinforce 'sinner' mythologies (Connor, 2010, p1). If we argue that one individual, group or community has overcome adversity, we may inadvertently be trivialising the intense challenges that people continually face. This in turn may support condemnation of actions and choices made by some, within difficult and oppressive situations.

The 'sinners' mythology referred to in the literature review, was related to government rhetoric (Connor, 2010, p1). New Labour and the Coalition government have both described particular sections of our society in derogatory ways, ranging from 'anti-social' (The Respect Task Force, Home Office, 2006, p1) to 'sick' ([http://www.publicservice.co.uk/news\\_story.asp?id=17130-20.08.2011](http://www.publicservice.co.uk/news_story.asp?id=17130-20.08.2011)).

Misrepresentations of communities experiencing challenges have also been present in academia, and the media (Holman, 1998). Participants in this research were particularly concerned about how their area was being characterised by the media, through one dimensional reporting which "only tells you bad news of things that go on". They repeatedly raised concerns about how such portrayals impact on their community, in terms of lack of investment and truncated opportunities for residents perceived as "wicked and terrible and bad". Concerns about media portrayals echo the findings of prior research, which cites mass communication as a source for creating and re-creating enduring stereotypes (Pickering, 2001). In his seminal book, 'The Nature of Prejudice', Gordon Allport described the media as part of the collective process of forming and securing stereotypes:

*'...there is an additional, and exceedingly important, reason for their existence. They are socially supported, continually revived and hammered in, by our media of mass communication – by novels, short stories, newspaper items, movies, stage, radio, and television.'*

(Allport, 1979, p200)

In addition the media is also charged by academics of *'fuelling intolerance'* and *'undermining the ability to accurately perceive social problems'*, whilst *'creating barriers to their effective resolution'* (Watts and Utting, 2009, p11). The media can *'generate a spiral of signification that dramatises and escalates the initial cause of concern'* (Pickering, 2001, p192). Exaggerated reporting techniques have been linked to the present and previous governments:

*'In an ideological climate dominated over the past twenty years by the New Right combination of neo-liberal economics and neo-conservative moralism, there has certainly been no shortage of cheap sensationalism and reactionary moral campaigning, that mounted by the Sunday Times against a new 'underclass' being but one example.'*

(Pickering, 2001, p185)

Ideas about stereotyping people and groups originated in 1922 with Walter Lipmann. He reflected on his observation of printing tools, where some tools were used to 'type' numerous or 'stereo' versions of the same item (Brown, 1995, p82). Stereotypes have been described as part of *'our basic cognitive natures to place things and people in categories'* (Schneider, 2004, p11). Unfortunately, in attempting to *'fix in place'* people within our society, (Pickering, 2001, p47) stereotypes *'reduce everything about the person'* (Hall, 1997, p258). They are therefore viewed as simplistic, reductionist attempts at assigning inaccurate labels to complex realities:

*'They are seen as deficient either because they encourage an indiscriminate lumping together of people under overarching group signifiers, often of a derogatory character, or because they reduce specific groups and categories to a limited set of conceptions which in themselves often contradict each other. Stereotypes are also discriminatory because the stunted features or attributes of others which characterise them are considered to form the basis for negative or hostile judgements, the rationale for exploitative, unjust treatment, or the justification for aggressive behaviour.'*

(Pickering, 2001, p10)

Over the last century the use of stereotyping has been attributed to specific personalities, particularly in relation to atrocities committed during World War II. People predisposed to judging individuals or groups were believed to have more 'authoritarian' personalities (Brown, 1995, p19). However, recent research warns against believing that stereotypes are individually created and owned. This prevents us from seeing the ways in which such processes are *'rooted in relations of power, patterns of privilege and vested interests, inequalities of income and broad disparities in the distribution of resources and opportunities'* (Pickering, 2001, p26). Those in power make decisions about a preferred status quo, and acceptable norms. The process of stereotyping and differentiating then *'excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different'* (Hall, 2004, p258). Issues of stereotyping need *'to be made part of a bigger story'* (Pickering, 2001, px). This 'story' needs to recognise that *'some groups in a society have more power than others'* and that this power can be used *'to create beliefs and institutional structures that perpetrate this power differential'* (Schneider, 2004, p274). Various tools may be used to create storylines, inclusive of *'news narratives, social documentaries, feature films or advertising'* (Pickering, 2001, pxi). Oppressive power will usually be *'directed against the subordinate or excluded group'* (Hall, 2004, p258), with stereotyping being *'a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence'* (Hall, 2004, p259).

This form of power relates to the discussion of Foucault's work, introduced within the literature review. The norms constructed by those in privileged or powerful positions maintain a self-serving status quo (Hall, 2004). The privileged position they retain, is preserved at the cost of those subjected to stereotypes:

*'For those who use a particular stereotype, this may create an element of order by seeming to lock a category irrevocably into its place, in an apparently settled hierarchy of relations. The feeling of security or superiority resulting from this may help explain why such imprecise referencing of other people or cultures spreads rapidly and is taken up uncritically on a widespread basis... This is convenient for existing relations of power because it lends to them a sense of certainty, regularity and continuity.'*

(Pickering, 2001, p4)

Foucault provided examples of structural widespread poverty in France, and the ways in which society's deficits were ascribed to the individual failings of 'vagabonds' and 'savages' (Rabinow, 1984, p131). Similarly there often appears to be a resurgence of stereotypical descriptions of groups, during times when those in power face threats to their interests (Brown, 1995). 'Scapegoating' is used to describe increasingly negative perceptions of particular groups, when majority sections of society feel under pressure:

*'Scapegoating involves the symbolic identification and isolation of a social problem in a single individual or stereotyped category of person. The pathologisation of those scapegoated and their expulsion from the social body reasserts the boundaries of normality within which moral judgement wishes once more to sit pretty...those that are scapegoated are regarded as having departed from a given set of norms...deflecting attention from real social problems and contradictions.'*

(Pickering, 2001, p183)

## **6.2. Inequality**

In the context of this thesis, power differentials have been cited by participants as affecting access to employment, education and opportunities. This thesis follows a case study design, and therefore does not claim to be eliciting information representative of society as a whole. However, some of the inequality issues raised by participants may relate to wider societal themes, and could be worthy of further investigation at this level. Within a specific case study the themes obtained from comprehensive responses, can provide information which has the potential to aid movement towards positive change (Lyons and Coyle, 2007).

MAV participants advised that we should learn from the past, and consider the consequences of deficient planning and investment during previous generations. As

introduced in the literature review, inequality is believed to be a fundamental catalyst of frustration (Blackshaw, 2010). It may also incite an interest in less socially acceptable forms of financial gain, if individuals feel that they do not have the opportunity to progress according to conventional norms (Pitts, 2009). Young people have voiced that crime can be a means of *'getting by'* in the face of the *'constraining forces of poverty'* (Mowlam and Creegan, 2009, p66). This will not be new information to those in power. In his review of factors pre-empting national disturbances thirty years ago, Lord Scarman advised that:

*'...the disorders cannot be fully understood unless they are seen in the context of complex political, social and economic factors which together create a predisposition towards violent protest...'*

(Scarman, 1981, p195)

From the perspective of government rhetoric, such as New Labour's theory of negating social exclusion, employment is essential in creating financial stability and mainstream inclusion (Pierson, 2010). However, participants interviewed repeatedly referred to difficulties local residents experienced when seeking employment. They felt that potential employers were fearful of the negative stereotypes perpetuated about the area, and by association individuals who lived locally. Negative perceptions were believed to be particularly prevalent in relation to those more closely resembling nationally publicised stereotypes such as young, black men. These views accord with prior research, which has revealed that black men, particularly those between sixteen and twenty-four, have greater difficulty in securing employment (Pitt, 2009). Employed black men, on average, earn less than white counterparts with similar educational attainments and qualifications (Schneider, 2009).

Employment difficulties experienced by residents of Moss Side and Hulme, should also be contextualised within the decline of manufacturing industries which has affected post-industrial cities such as Manchester (Carley, Campbell, Kearns, Wood, Young and Low, 2000). Service sector jobs rarely offer the same income, security, or union protection of the prior manufacturing industries (Pitt, 2009). Again,



unemployment and racism issues prevalent within inner cities across Britain, is information that has been accessible by governing bodies for some time:

*'Unemployment is a problem which faces both the white and black people, but there is evidence that its weight falls disproportionately heavily on black people... There can be no doubt that unemployment was a major factor in the complex pattern of conditions which lies at the root of disorders in Brixton and elsewhere. The solution, of course, depends on a successful outcome of current economic problems. But the structural causes of unemployment are deeper and more complex. In order to secure social stability, there will be a long-term need to provide useful, gainful employment and suitable educational, recreational and leisure opportunities for young people, especially in the inner city...'*

(Scarman, 1981, p205)

Definitions of poverty are useful in helping us to understand the impact of truncated employment and educational opportunities. *'Absolute standards of poverty'* relate to international comparisons between countries worldwide. *'Relative poverty'* on the other hand refers to the inability to *'participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities that are widely approved and generally obtained by most people in a particular society'* (Pierson, 2010, p14). Disadvantages may include *'unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate healthcare and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation'*. Pierson feels that the definition is closely related to that of *'social exclusion'* (Pierson, 2010, p15).

As well as exclusion from employment opportunities, participants repeatedly raised concerns about the impact of school exclusion. Participants felt that excluding young people from mainstream school was the first step in *"a downward spiral"*. They offered positive solutions towards ensuring that educational opportunities better met the needs of their young people. These included hopes for more personalised approaches, with a greater awareness of *"individual skills"*, *"self-development"* and *"empowerment"*.

Participants did not dwell upon class and racial inequality in relation to educational experiences. However these issues have been raised in prior research, with parents citing '*classism*' and '*racism*' as factors affecting educational provision (Gerwitz, Dickson, Power, Halpin and Whitty, 2005, p665). Pitt explains that '*a disproportionately large number of black and mixed heritage children and young people*' are '*experiencing problems of truancy, exclusion and underachievement*'. He raises concerns that '*some, otherwise able and compliant, students were absenting themselves from school because they believed they had been unfairly treated by a member of staff*'. In agreement with the participants within this thesis, he also argues that '*proper provision should be made for children and young people excluded from school and that alternatives to exclusion should be explored*' (Pitt, 2009, p29).

Participants raised concerns about educational opportunities post compulsory education. One participant commented on how closely MAV were located to Manchester University asking, "*We walk past the university...but how many of our young people are actually in it?*" Brown has previously cited the low percentage of young people from lower income families who attend university, in contrast to those from higher socio-economic groups (1995). These findings have been further supported by Forsyth and Furlong (2003). Recent changes in fees applied by universities may have further detrimental effects on the feasibility for young people to have equal access to graduate qualifications. Mowlam and Creegan found that young people '*spoke of a struggle to achieve their goals of education, training and employment in the face of financial constraints*' (2009, p57), whilst '*the government was blamed for the financial hardships*' (2009, p60).

In addition to limited employment and educational experiences, there were contrasting views about recreational opportunities available for young people from the area. Some participants emphasised that they lived in a "*normal community*" with "*lots of services*", "*activities and fulfilment*". They described the number of people contributing to these locally based provisions, including employees and volunteers at the "*Powerhouse*", "*Zion*", "*Charisma*", "*Next Generation*" and the "*Reclaim Project*". Others felt that recreational opportunities could be improved, and that more investment was needed in the area's young people. They described young people as "*restricted*" with limited opportunities to attend recreational events, "*not growing, not*

*nurturing, not learning*". In prior research of inner city areas there has been 'a regular complaint from parents' of 'there being little for young people to do in the areas in which they lived' (Seaman et al, 2005, p24). This is concerning as 'promoting constructive use of leisure and community networks' is believed to facilitate the development of resiliency, in the face of potential adversity (Seaman et al, 2005, p7). Similarly, an investment in 'youth work relationships and experiences' has been found to underpin 'subsequent positional change- in terms of labour market engagement, family responsibilities, and desistance from substance misuse and crime' (Williamson, 2009, p13). Williamson argues that understanding the 'package' young people require to succeed 'does not require the thinking of Einstein'. It generally consists of 'family support, good education, access to new technologies, attachment to youth organisations, opportunities in sport and music away from home experiences, international travel and exchange' (2009, p15).

As well as being eager to improve fundamental opportunities available to young people, MAV participants were keen to raise awareness of the need for rehabilitative approaches. This related to humanitarian concerns for those who had transgressed the law, and wider societal benefits of rehabilitation. Their ideas reflect academic concerns that 'too many children are being criminalised and brought into the youth justice system too early' due to the Britain's 'very low age of criminal responsibility'. The 'vast resources' required for prisons and custodial sentences, might be better used 'for preventative work in the community' (Zulueta, 2009, p84).

One participant gave a clear account of how unhelpful prison could be citing the lack of "therapeutic programs" which result in a prison day consisting of "twenty odd hours...sat there festering". Mowlam and Creegan argue that 'lack of effective rehabilitation and the prevalence of drugs in many jails meant that offenders were being released with the same or worse problems than they went in with' (2009, p60). Schneider argues that the use of custodial sentences should be reconsidered. He states that community based rehabilitation has been found to be at least as effective as prison in reducing crime rates, with less negative repercussions:

*'Prison teaches bad habits, and it is horribly expensive. Moreover, incarceration keeps people from learning relevant job and social skills, reduces their capacity to support families, and creates major roadblocks in their abilities to gain meaningful employment once they are released; young, black males are especially victimised by all this.'*

(Schneider, 2004, p314)

The potential difficulty in providing preventative, proactive experiences again links to the meta-narratives communicated about sections of our society. Participants described this as a *"throw away the key"* mentally. Zulueta connects these concepts to a *'moral perspective'* within British society. This is illustrated by *'politicians, police and the press'* who *'clamour for still more prisons'* rather than *'any thoughtful enquiry and any preventative action based on scientific research'* (Zulueta, 2009, p70). He further discusses the impact on perceptions of a society divided geographically, socially and economically:

*'Since many British politicians and civil servants have been brought up in private boarding schools, cut off from their families and from the rough and tumble British multi-ethnic city life, with very little real experience of inner city life, they are likely to follow the same inclination as their ancestors in the pursuit of law and order and aim 'to clamp down on knife crime' and 'curb street gangs' and build still more prisons, following closely our American model.'*

(Zulueta, 2009, p84).

Concerns about the division between those in positions of power, and wider society have been discussed in relation to the British police force. John Alderson, a former Chief Constable published a *'statement of community- policing creed'* in 1979. It aimed *'to enhance social cohesion and integration and thus prevent crime'*. It encouraged police officers to engage with *'activities removed from overt law enforcement, such as cooperating with local government agencies'* and *'consulting the public to discover what they thought about the problems of law and order'*

(Waddington, 1999, p207). Connections between traditional police services and the wider public were also cited as important by Lord Scarman, in his analysis of historical disturbances across Britain:

*'I recommend that the Home Office, with Chief Officers of Police, and in consultation with Police Authorities and representatives of the ethnic minority communities, conduct an urgent study of ways of improving ethnic minority recruitment into the regular police and of involving the ethnic minorities in more police-related activities.'*

(Scarman, 1981, p199)

Unfortunately, despite ambitions for a diverse and inclusive police force, some sections of society still experience negative treatment. This was a theme which re-occurred across a number of narratives within this thesis. It was communicated in relation to stereotyping and abuse of power. One participant felt that the police had an attitude of *"Let them kill each other. It saves us the trouble of locking them up"*. Others cited negative experiences of people being *"dragged up off the street"* during the 1980s and today's *"stop and search"* procedures. Participant narratives reflect academic criticisms of the police, such as descriptions of interactions where police might *'invade the personal space of others, shout at and threaten them with all manner of penalties'* (Waddington, 1999, p154). The personal experiences described by participants, inclusive of *"fear"*, are therefore part of a wider narrative about understandings of the police force. This may not be a dominant societal narrative, but it does appear to be prevalent in the context of ethnically diverse areas:

*'Almost every black person, poor or middle class, has stories to tell of being stopped and in some cases hassled by the police just because of skin colour. This not only is alarming on the moral face of things, but undercuts attempts to deal with crime problems, given that respect for police and their work is an important component of any solution.'*

(Schneider, 2004, p313)

It appears that issues of *'institutional racism'* advanced by the 1999 Macpherson Report after the death of Stephen Lawrence, are still believed to be rife by participants. Institutional racism refers to *'the ways in which services and practices produce discriminatory results intentionally or unintentionally'* and defined a racist incident as *'any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim, or any other person'* (Macpherson, cited in Pierson, 2010, p173). It is also important to be aware that issues of racism will be compounded by continuing financial inequality, and related frustration, which may be perceived threatening by governing bodies:

*'...the realities of material power are not easily swept aside and changes in the economic structure have reversed the process of inclusion and re-asserted patterns of exclusion... Excluded sections of the population are increasingly seen as a threat that must be contained and there is less concern about how that containment is achieved.'*

(Waddington, 1999, p250)

### **6.3. Genuine Consultation**

What I found most distinctive about narratives provided by participants, was their frustration at not being heard when engaging in consultation with those in power. Even when contextualised in the positive, participants talked about an eagerness to *"build ties"* with local and national governing bodies. As indicated by one participant, MAV members have *"experience and knowledge"* and if they are not being listened to *"then you're barking up the wrong tree completely"*. The participants clearly want to contribute to their community, and have a *"powerful voice"* in decisions made about their community. They were also adamant that their own motivations, and those of MAV, did not occur in isolation. They discussed a wider range of third sector organisations and volunteer groups contributing to the area. These included the *"local church"*, *"Peace FM"*, *"Street Pastors"* and *"young people that actually do things"*.

Members of this community have an unmistakable commitment to participate. Government policies such as New Labour's Building Bridges and the Coalition's Big Society appear to encourage this cooperation. Therefore it is difficult to understand why partnerships have not yet been successful. Participants illuminated some of the problematic issues present in consultation and collaboration. Whilst these are presented in the context of this case study, they may reflect wider themes across communities facing challenges. One of the major difficulties cited, relates back to the divided society we have allowed to evolve. This results in people in power often being very far removed from those whom they claim to assist. Participants relayed that local politicians "*have not got a clue*" about the local geography of their area. Holman described similar difficulties during his analysis of an estate on the outskirts of Glasgow:

*'...government policy makers rely upon advisers and members of think tanks who are more likely to have had experience of Oxbridge than council estates, who are more likely to be privileged than deprived. Yet the same government says, "We are about building a fairer society...where every family can feel it has a stake in society."*

(Holman, 1998, p210).

Partnership forums have been found to be '*unrepresentative*' of the local areas they are based in, with high compositions of '*white, males in professional or managerial positions*' (Gerwitz et al, 2005, p659). This is exacerbated by '*under-representation in most partnership structures, of women and ethnic minorities from the resident community*' (Carley et al, 2000, p37). This can create difficulties in communication, due to the '*language of meetings*' (Carley et al, 2000, p15) and '*formal structures*' which can be '*intimidating*' (Carley et al, 2000, p37). There are also likely to be practical '*barriers*' preventing engagement that may not be understood by external professionals. These could include lack of '*affordable transport and childcare*' together with diminished confidence in the consultation process, as a consequence of prior negative experiences (Henderson and Mayo, 1998, p8). Unfortunately '*local voices*' in partnership working processes '*are said to feel that they exert little or no influence*' (Carley et al, 2000, p46).

Local authorities can '*blame apathy*' for a lack of engagement. However, it is imperative that they acknowledge '*their own lack of skills with regard to consultation*' (Blackshaw, 2010, p173). Academics reiterate the complaints of participants in this thesis, citing statutory services who relay the '*we know best*' rhetoric (Carley et al, 2000, p17). Many local authority and government officials have '*limited knowledge and experience of community development*' (Henderson and Mayo, 1998, p15). They will require training in order to acquire the listening and consultation skills required for sensitive and empathetic engagement:

*'It is essential that those who normally operate in environments outside the communities which are the subject of major regeneration programmes learn how to communicate with partners in dialogue, rather than being presented as outside experts – without the most crucial expertise of all, genuine understanding and respect.'*

(Henderson and Mayo, 1998, p3)

Participants also complained about specific projects which have been based upon areas removed from their locality. They emphasised the individuality of their area, and the need for tailored responses: "*I think you need to get to know a place before you can deliver something to it*". This complaint reflects criticisms of '*top down*' approaches designed by central and local governments (Pierson, 2010, p193) which rely on '*evidence based programmes*' (Clarke, 2009, p63) and '*notions of infallible professional expertise and bureaucratic procedures*' (Pierson, 2010, p63). Such programmes often operate from '*deficit assumptions*' (Gerwitz et al, 2005, p669) rather than recognising the strengths and abilities of the people they are working with. This '*exclusionary*' process risks creating further '*powerlessness*' and '*stigmatisation*' (Pierson, 2010, p63). These projects are also unlikely to be successful. As one participant pointed out, "*you have to have permission from the person you are working with*". Interventions need to recognise '*the voices and perspectives of those who they are designed to help*' (Gerwitz et al, 2005, p663). '*Consultation is not sufficient*' (Pierson, p65, 2010). For projects to be successful they will need to evolve from '*joint action*' with local people using their '*fresh ideas*' in



order for them to *'own the solutions'* (Pierson, 2010, p67). This is more reflective of the advanced stages of Sherry Arnstein's *'Ladder of Participation'*, where local people are genuinely collaborated with, as opposed to simply being asked for opinions on pre-decided categories (Pierson, 2010, p65).

Residents often have more credibility than external professionals due to their personal links to an area and/ or cause. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that *'local people, drawing on their experiences of life, are best placed to identify the issues that need to be addressed'* (JRF, 1999). They also have the added benefit of already being familiar with local residents, and being available outside of the hours of *'statutory'* workers, who tend to *'commute in'* (Holman, 1998, p.172). Their understanding of the locality is more likely to result in sustainable, *'non-stigmatising, culturally relevant support'* built from *'bottom up'* processes of being sensitive to the needs of their community (Pitt, 2009, p27).

Despite knowledge, experience and skills, local people do need support in combating social exclusion. Thesis participants voiced the many forms of help required, inclusive of funding. Holman also emphasised that *'voluntary projects require the means to flourish'* (Holman, 1998, p207):

*'Neighbourhood groups have no secure source of funding. Central government will finance the large national voluntary societies but not the local ones. Local authorities do grant aid to some neighbourhood groups but, when cuts are made, they are the first to suffer... Neighbourhood groups are sometimes advised to seek sponsorship from local industry to set up profit making enterprises in order to be self-sufficient. The advice tends to come from those who do not live on peripheral estates where there are few local firms and where there is no market for enterprises.'*

(Holman, 1998, p.209)

Members of MAV were all generous in terms of the time they gave to the organisation. Their commitment to the organisation did appear to impact on the amount of time they could spend on their personal lives: *"Cos you can't rely on*

*goodwill forever...I can only give so many hours of my time*". Their narratives are reflective of experiences of third sector volunteers generally, who *'have a tough job and often give up large amounts of time and energy for no pay and often limited or no power'* (Pierson, 2010, p148). In addition to time spent organising events and supporting young people, I also noted during meetings that members were in the midst of having to learn new skills. These ranged from administration to accountancy, and completing applications for grants and funding. One way of supporting the third sector might be to aid them with some of the core tasks necessary within any developing organisation:

*'...there is a need for a central facility that would employ specialist workers to undertake programme support services (writing bids, commissioning, monitoring and evaluating, writing final reports) in partnership with small voluntary, community and faith groups.'*

(Pitt, 2009, p37)

Support which could be offered to local communities might be referred to as *'capacity building'*. This could include training required for local people *'to acquire and to use power and influence to secure certain democratically determined objectives'* (Pierson, 2010, p137). It could also involve advising the third sector on how to *'access to the places where key decisions affecting them and their neighbourhood are made'* (Pitt, 2009, p27). Any capacity building training would need to be respectful, and work with volunteers from the starting point of their *'wealth of existing knowledge and skills'* (Henderson and Mayo, 1998, pv). This will only be possible if investment is available, and resources *'encourage residents to articulate their own training and learning needs'* (Henderson and Mayo, 1998, p3). Academics highlight the necessity for full ownership of solutions by local people, in order to ensure long term participation. Community owned projects may also offer opportunities for employment, providing that government agencies invest in regeneration and locally based support programmes:

*'Learning for participation in area regeneration relates to wider agendas for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is vital to enhance individuals' employment prospects and to promote active citizenship, to combat social exclusion and to extend democracy in our society.'*

(Henderson and Mayo, 1998, piv)

#### **6.4. Re-visiting the Research Question**

The research question asked: ***How do Mothers Against Violence feel that their community is being storied, and what is their response?***

The prior sections discuss some of the ways that MAV members feel that their area is viewed, and their response to these perceived “*looking in*” perceptions. MAV members feel that a “*stereotypical view*” has been ascribed to their area and people within their area, particularly young, black men. They have explained some of the impacts of “*stigma*” created by dominant discourses. These include emotional effects such as “*fear*” and more concrete inequalities in relation to investment, education and employment opportunities. MAV’s in depth narratives reveal more complex accounts of challenges. They document historical, social and economic factors which have impacted on more negative aspects of their community. Their personal stories of bereavement would hopefully encourage empathy and understanding as opposed to “*judgement*”. As with all aspects discussed in the thesis, a MAV member highlighted that it is possible for anyone in society to be affected by loss and disadvantage:

*“...people think it doesn't happen on our doorstep. It happens somewhere else. Well no, actually it does, because it happened on mine. It affected me.”*

(MAV Member, 2009)

Part of the response of MAV members to the research question, involved a need to communicate a more “*normal*” community narrative. Participants believed Moss Side and Hulme to be “*a wonderful community*” with “*lots of facilities*”. They wanted to emphasise the many “*activities*” and opportunities for “*fulfilment*”. These included community resources such as the “*Powerhouse*”, “*Zion Centre*”, the “*local church*” and “*gospel choir*”. They described a major strength of their community as being its “*diverse*”, “*multi-cultural*” character which contributed to local endeavours such as “*PEACE FM*” and the “*carnival*”. Participants were aware that negative attributions ascribed to the area, also impacted on individuals within the area. They highlighted that their community consisted of “*good people*”, “*stable families*”, and “*a lot of good kids*”. They relayed the “*openness and willingness*” of people from the area. Young people participate in “*dance*”, “*drama*” and “*cultural things*”. They are described as “*going to school, taking their grades, being nice, and doing things that are important*”. Participants wanted to help “*show another image of Moss Side’s young people*”. They felt being able to communicate their “*voice*” to wider sections of society might “*give a good picture of what this community is like*” in a “*very, very positive way*”.

I would like the research to be helpful in MAV’s process of reflection, which is allowing them to support wider issues within and outside their community. MAV are continuing to evolve into an organisation which helps more and more young people across Manchester. They have maintained links with local organisations such as PEACE FM, Manchester Alliance for PEACE and CARISMA. More recently, they have been working with ‘Life-Share’. This is a charitable organisation which supports the homeless, aiming to ‘*alleviate aspects of poverty and hardship through redistribution of resources*’ (<http://mavuk.org/-14/05/12>). This partnership acknowledges the structural commonalities affecting both voluntary organizations, including an unfair distribution of resources. MAV have also made connections with other groups, including students at Manchester University. They are meeting their objectives to “*build ties*” and “*share the vision*”. The range of people that MAV are engaging with reflects their “*inclusive*” ethos. They are progressing quickly towards having “*more people involved in dealing with this...wider problem*”. This will help to ensure that issues of social injustice begin to be tackled “*as a country, rather than just pockets of communities*”.

MAV's aim to connect with wider audiences has influenced the energy they have focused on their website and online profile. MAV have now developed an interactive website which links to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Through these platforms MAV are able to update subscribers about their work, and invite large numbers to the events they organise. MAV have also developed an organisational pledge which is further supported by a set of group objectives:

*'Together we will do this: I pledge to become a good example for children and young people by encouraging and helping them to fulfill their potential. I will value and celebrate their lives as I work to make our community a safer one.'*

(<http://mavuk.org/-14/05/12>)

MAV have experienced some set backs in terms of cuts to funding. They are in the process of moving from the offices that they had developed over a number of years, to more economical accommodation. This seems sad, as the offices were in an ideal location for young people to access. They were also situated alongside a number of businesses which represented an alternative and more positive narrative about their locality. MAV are fundraising. They have attached a 'Paypal' donation feature to their website. They continue to arrange events such as local collections, support with ASDA bag packing, and the 'Million Mothers March'. They have also been coordinating activities which may be more representative of the wider community they are engaging with. In the Autumn of 2011 they presented a poetry and music event at 'Dry Bar' in Manchester. Dry Bar opened in 1989, and is considered '*historic*' in Manchester, as a venue celebrating the city's music culture (<http://www.drybar.co.uk/dry.php-14/05/12>). Making this association provides MAV with explicit connections to the positive storyline of Manchester as a multi-cultural, dynamic city.

A focus on music and poetry seems to be a particularly positive way of celebrating achievements. When I attended the 'Million Mothers March' I was amazed by the level of talent and creativity displayed. I heard a particularly distinctive song, written and performed by young people, called 'I'm Only Human'. Like this thesis, it was an attempt to provide a more complex explanation of issues affecting the Moss Side/Hulme area. The young people were presenting their talents on a Sunday afternoon, and had contributed a great deal of their spare time to organising sound systems, equipment, and publicising the event. Their hard work is illustrative of efforts being made across the community by energised people, at a very young age.

At the event Patsy McKie provided a message of inspiration:

*"And so we have chosen today, to make this day a day, where we not only think about those who have gone on before our children. But also for the ones that are alive and living now. I want us to live in hope, and to know that you are responsible, and that you can change your world."*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZvcqI\\_iVMg-14/05/12](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZvcqI_iVMg-14/05/12)

I have been very fortunate to have received direct communication from Patsy McKie throughout the thesis collection and writing up stages. Her words have always been kind and motivating. I would like to continue to have opportunities to work alongside MAV in the future. One participant advised that people able to "*donate a project*" would be of benefit to the organisation. I have read some of Amartya Sen's work on the connections between economics and freedom (2001). I am now in the process of gathering texts on social entrepreneurial projects, in the hope that some of these ideas may be supportive to MAV's aims (Bornstein, 2007; Dearden- Phillips, 2008; Mawson, 2008). It would be a positive experience to be able to offer something back to MAV. I am grateful for their help with this thesis, and for the positive changes they create in our society, on a daily basis. I am completing final thesis corrections in the week that Jessie James would have been celebrating his twenty first birthday. MAV are working tirelessly to try to prevent these tragedies, across the UK.

## **6.5. Evaluating the Research**

As described in the introduction, this research has evolved extensively from the initial thesis proposal. Through supervision sessions I was able to question whether focusing on a topic such as sudden bereavement, would be helpful to the Moss Side and Hulme community. Such a thesis may have replicated prior media, political and academic interests in the area, with a focus on negative events. My supervisor's encouragement to 'widen the lens' of the research has led to a much more intense learning experience. It has steered me towards a holistic analysis of current societal issues such as inequality, and structural processes guarding the status quo. Expanding the subject area has also caused difficulties. Broadening the perspective required extending literature searches and reading lists. I have endeavoured to present the evolved research findings in a manageable and readable way, but this has been a challenge.

There have also been methodological issues with taking a wider approach to the research. An example would be the use of the word 'community'. In initial discussions with MAV, this word was used by participants to define the geographical area of Moss Side and Hulme. However, for decades the implied meanings of the word community have been debated (Smith, 1996). The word can generally refer to both the geographical area, and relationships between the people within a geographical area (Nasar and Julian, 2009). This is one of the reasons that the more specific definition of '*locality*' never appeared to flourish in the same way as '*community*' studies (Crow and Allan, 1994, p4). Whilst participants began talking about their community in relation to Moss Side and Hulme, it became clear during narratives that community meant much more to some participants. One participant talked about the need to "*build ties*" within the immediate community, and across wider society. Another felt that "*we share Manchester with so many*", and there was a need "*not to become too insular*". This emphasises that community often means something different to every person involved.

The epistemological approach of the research acknowledges the differing perceptions we all have of reality. Participants asked for narratives to be jointly

presented, representing MAV's views as a whole, of their local community. This reflected the process MAV were working through, of rebranding their organisation, ethos, and group membership. The narratives they provided did give a richer and more authentic understanding of their organisation. However, there are issues of representation on a number of levels. As previously discussed, I can only present the views of participants as I have perceived them. Despite attempts at member checking, these may still be removed from how participants felt they expressed themselves. Only five participants took part in the research, so it is difficult to argue that their views will define the perspective of the group in its entirety. Academics have also voiced concerns that research projects inadvertently focus on the views of the most confident, due to the nature of participation and consent requests. The participants were all active members of a local community group, and discussed education, professions, family and friends during our meetings. They may therefore not represent the most vulnerable members of their community, who could have voiced quite different perspectives and views (Yow, cited in Mertens, 2005). During the interviews participants described the diversity within their community, with MAV members acknowledging challenges present in engaging with all groups: *"...for me that was a big learning curve because there were lots of things and cultures within this community, that I didn't even realise were here."*

As acknowledged in the methodology section, there were other ways in which information could have been gathered. Visual forms of communication may have encouraged those less confident to contribute. Participants emphasised MAV's aim for *"our children to be leaders in our community"*. They felt that children needed to be listened to, as *"each generation comes into the world with new ideas to be developed"*. If I were to follow up on this research, I might attempt to elicit participation from young people in order to guide me towards the most relevant research questions for their future. Visual forms of research have been discussed by Marcus Banks (2007) and John Prosser (1998). They have also been used extensively by participatory action researchers (McIntyre, 2008). Helpful techniques might involve video diary booths, providing disposable cameras for relevant snapshots, or asking young people to draw their area highlighting the most salient aspects. MAV also support numerous young people with projects including poetry, music and art. Donations of creative work could be analysed for themes. I would



hope that any future work would allow for joint analysis of collected data, through group sorting exercises. It would also be useful to discuss the most appropriate and relevant forms of presenting results, which might involve more visually accessible and multi-media communication techniques.

## **6.6. Reflections on Professional Practice**

Until completing this thesis, I was not aware of how decisive some childhood influences have been on my thinking and identity. By deconstructing my concepts I have been able to re-trace some of my earliest feelings of mistrust in meta-narratives, circulated by government agencies and the media. Some of these were related to heroic endorsements of Margaret Thatcher in the face of Irish hunger strikers (Jenkins, 2007). These were very different perceptions of events from the ones I heard locally on visits to the West of Ireland. Thatcher's claim that, *'There's no such thing as society. Just individual men and women and there are families...'* (cited in Bryson and Fisher, 2011, p3), also conflicted with my experiences of growing up in North Manchester. As a child I watched my mother carefully package toys and clothes for younger families, and we similarly received 'new' packages at regular intervals. This was a process of circular giving that happens in many communities. My father is still firmly embedded within the economy that operates from his local public house. I suspect that the exchange of building, roofing, joiner, plastering, plumbing, electrics, ground-work and mechanics skills is reflective of economies that operate from flat roof pubs across Britain. My father's local contacts enabled me to renovate a 'two up two down' terraced house considered 'unliveable' by the local council. I later sold the house to a professional couple, and the profit I made has subsidised this qualification route, towards becoming an Educational Psychologist.

When we begin to question the messages we are given by dominant agencies, we are critically engaging with meta-narratives. Through this process of *'problematization'* people start to consider *'what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live'* (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1997, pxxxvi). Freire similarly advises that *'conscientization'* or the process of becoming aware of our own positioning, in

relation to structural controls, is our first step towards intellectual freedom (Freire, 1972, p51). This allows us to begin connecting our *'personal experiences'* to the *'political'* so that social justice starts to permeate our everyday thinking (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997, p182).

Reflecting on my personal positioning has provided a platform for me to consider the choices I make professionally, and the ethics that guide my work. Tom Billington's research repeatedly emphasises the child as the client within an educational psychologist's work (2000; 2006). He discusses the need to consider the structures around the child, rather than focusing on blame discourses directed at the child in isolation. He recognises the difficulty in this endeavour, in terms of reactions from other professionals and schools:

*'Assessments of children and young people...can invariably focus on a young person in isolation from others. It may be that families become the targets for investigation, but considerations of the adults involved and especially the institutional contexts within which they operate can be just too difficult or too politically contentious to incorporate any analysis of an individual child. Yet recent analysis into our public services would suggest that until we do consider the services we provide for children within those broader contexts, little will be done to advance the needs of our young people.'*

(Billington, 2006, p54)

Fortunately I am currently working in an environment where I am encouraged to consider the ethical considerations of assessments I complete, and the voice of the child within those assessments. My supervisor shares a similar ethical viewpoint, and holistic conversations are feasible. This negates some of the tension that professionals often feel when balancing ethics with expectations of work based tasks (Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997). I hope that supervision sessions will continue to permit reflections between educational psychology work, and themes of dominant voices, structural power and injustice. These conversations are essential in understanding

why a child or young person may have internalised negative discourses and perceptions of self (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005).

This doctorate qualification has involved both research and professional practice. Within both aspects of my role I have needed to become more aware of epistemological approaches to reality. I believe that different people have different views on any given situation. These will relate to past experiences and understandings (Moon, 2007).

This research is supportive of residents of Moss Side/ Hulme. I recognise that many would have approached the research in alternative ways. I have tried to acknowledge that there are other views about the area. I have attempted to provide '*visible authorship*' to enable the reader to judge this research within the context of my prior experiences and relationships to the locality (Coffey, 2003, p324). My initial interactions with MAV have been built upon my connections to the community. On a personal level it was important that I was honest and respectful towards MAV members. I was also aware that their 'truth' might be different from dominant meta-narratives, due to my teaching experiences in the area.

Throughout the research process I have been reflexive, using research diaries to note intentions, emotions and perceptions. It has also been important for me to engage with academic literature to understand how my own journey relates to centuries of '*critical activity*' within the '*reflective sciences*' (Habermas, 1968, p310). This will hopefully allow me to develop an ethical, theoretical approach to new learning opportunities.

I have attempted to story the challenges within the Moss Side/ Hulme area by taking a critical approach to meta-narratives. Freire insists that education is never a '*neutral*' endeavour. When we engage in teaching and learning we must consider whether we aim to bolster structural '*conditioning*' or encourage '*freedom*' (1972, p9). I have linked critical psychology approaches to a community psychology ethos. I have tried to develop an '*egalitarian partnership*' (Jason et al, 2002, p4) with MAV members by respecting their '*competence and expertise*' (Orford, 2008, pxiv). Orford also recommends '*immersing ourselves*' in the communities we work with (2008,

p181). This has obvious impacts on how we might position ourselves within the research, further emphasising the need for transparent authorship (Ely et al, 1994).

Nelson and Prilleltensky feel that *'listening'* can be the *'first step'* towards *'undoing the damaging stories that society has constructed'* (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p24). As people share their stories they begin to recognise similarities in their own struggles and the difficulties of their social group. This process permits a critical understanding or *'conscientization'* of positioning within wider society (Freire, 1972, p51), helping *'individuals and collectives to reclaim their history'* (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005, p25). Narrative practice provides techniques to support researchers to elicit alternative stories, which can then be used a platform for positive change (Monk et al, 1997). Foucault argued that we can challenge power and meta- narratives, by sharing and recording alternative truths.

Throughout this research MAV participants voiced that they did not feel heard by local and national government. They acknowledged that they were invited to consultations, but felt that this was *"just so that they can say they have done it"*. MAV participants did not feel represented by government policies, referring to the *"one line"* where they might be mentioned post- consultation. I feel that MAVs experiences are representative of marginalised sections of society. The process I have used in this research attempts to use critical, community and narrative psychology as a basis for working with these groups. I feel that to story social groups we need to recognise that their knowledge may be of *'equal and sometimes superior status to professional knowledge with regard to issues such as...self and identity'* (Crossley, 2000, p63). In attempting to provide a record of marginalised voices, my work is likely to contain elements of advocacy and support often found in community psychology research (Orford, 2008). I feel this is permissible providing I acknowledge that reality is perceived in different ways by different people (Willig, 2001). I must also share my personal understandings, to allow transparency for the reader.

I am interested in developing *'social storying'* skills which enable people, groups and communities to establish their identities and cultivate solutions for the challenges they face. I feel that collaborative working provides a scaffold for *'real innovation and alternative thinking about a new route to social justice'* (Blackshaw, 2010, p207). The

words of communities themselves can be more powerful than academia and ‘*second hand reports*’ (Orford, 2008, p341). This thesis has provided a basis for me to consider my values and priorities as a psychologist:

*‘There are costs and difficulties in stepping out of the well-trying and ineffective ways of working. It has to be an individual choice, made by each psychologist, each psychology student. Your choice.’*

(Bender, 1976, p134).

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Extract from Times Online Article

### Youth crime: this is fiercely protected turf, where people die in the name of tribal loyalty

**Russell Jenkins**

Published at 12:00AM, July 2 2008

The knot of youths lolling on a park bench or sitting astride their mountain bikes, occasionally exchanging extravagant greetings, looked as if they owned the place. They probably do.

This is Broadfield Park, a scruffy area in the centre of Moss Side, South Manchester, and the most fiercely protected gangland turf in Britain. People have died here in the name of tribal loyalty.

Jessie James, a schoolboy, was ambushed and shot in the early hours of a warm September night two years ago as he cycled through the park and into the inner sanctum of the notorious Gooch gang.

In hindsight, it was not the smartest idea for me, a middle-aged man in shirt sleeves and suit trousers, and most importantly a stranger, to start asking questions about their notion of loyalty to each other, their families and community.

A young man on a mountain bike fixed me with a withering look of contempt long before I reached the youths sunning themselves in the middle of the park: "You think about the word loyalty, man. You approach them boys, and mention that word, they will run you out of the park."

One hundred yards away, police officers dealing with an incident involving Somalis on the corner of Broadfield Road were protected by body armour. The question was, did I feel lucky?

"I ain't saying they will beat you or take away your glasses but you are the one who started talking about loyalty," the man on the bike said. "They don't speak to no strangers." Others nodded in agreement.

Moss Side, the inner-city area that became synonymous with gun crime during the 1990s, is a rabbit warren of streets to one side of a highway. It is a constantly changing urban landscape of ethnicities, and hence gang loyalties.

Gang membership is fluid at any one time, with younger "soldiers" forming fresh offshoots. Guns, notably coveted automatic weapons, are the accessory of choice to garner "respect".

One constant is the rivalry between the oldest gangs prompted by competition for control of the drug trade. Moving across Alexandra Road is not simply crossing a street but moving from Gooch to Doddington territory.

## **Appendix 2: Extract from Transcribed Interview**

**Interviewer:** Ok, erm, what ideas do people have about your community?

**Participant:** What ideas do people have about my community? I think that's a very big question, because I don't know everyone. I don't know how they think. But, from the media perspective, and some people around, they are seeing the problems as kind of the biggest thing in our community i.e. the crime, the violence. So, because it's part of our community, and I'm sure it's part of lots of other communities, because it's part of our community, that's how people see our community. It's not that I see it that way, but lots of other people see it that way. And I really believe that if people think that way, they are gonna behave in the kind of way that will, er, magnify the problems.

**Interviewer:** And can you give me examples of how they may behave to magnify those problems?

**Participant:** Well, I think the media, when they go out, and look for the stories. Erm, when they hear something terrible has happened in a particular area, they go out, and they follow that story, and then they bring it to the community, they bring it to the wider world. And then people then judge the community by that. Not about all the other great things that's happening in the community, 'cos nobody's looking for that. They're just looking for stories of crime and disaster and that kind of thing. So, once you kind of bring that to the people, they see it. And some people say that seeing is believing, and so they believe it. And so it becomes a, a kind of way of life fraught, and people become fearful and afraid. And their life style diminishes.

**Interviewer:** And is that the people within the community become afraid and their lifestyle diminishes, or the people outside?

**Participant:** I really believe both do. Some people do and some don't. Er, I think the people outside tend to say, "*Well you know, being in Manchester, blah, blah, blah...*" So I think the people outside tend to take it on much more than the people would living within it. Even though there is some people, and I think usually the vulnerable, would see it, like the elderly, and maybe young people - 'cos they're vulnerable. Would see it as being, "*Yes, this is what our community is like.*"

### Appendix 3: Extract from Narrative Analysis Grid

<u>Tone</u>	<u>Imagery</u>	<u>Themes</u>
<p>1. 'that's one of the reasons I enjoy what I'm doing. Because if no-one else is going to give the young people positive regard, self positive regard, then even if I have to do a few, then a few will tell a few and it will spread. That's how rumours spread you know.'</p> <p>2. 'It's our duty to be responsible, to find out what's in our community. And if it's not there, go and lobby and start it.'</p> <p>3. 'We've come to a place in our lives where we've said, "You know something, if it feels good, do it." It's destroying our communities...If you are saying that to children, and you are doing it yourself, then what do you expect the children to do? Where do you think they are learning from? ...when we go into ourselves, it's very destructive...'</p> <p>4. 'My son was you know, one of those young men. So then I had to catapult myself out of the church when I heard that, 'cos before I didn't see the community as my community. I didn't think in that way...I went to church, and that was the community that we</p>	<p>1. 'I really believe that if people think that way, they are gonna behave in the kind of way that will, er, magnify the problems.'</p> <p>2. '...there are people who have risen up.'</p> <p>3. '...out of our pain...empathy ...compassion... These are where these qualities are born...patience ...humility.'</p> <p>4. Imagery: "And we don't go there, and if we go down there we hang on to our purses, we hang on to our bags..."</p> <p>5. 'I walk the streets in these places and I have no fear at all, of walking the streets of Manchester.'</p> <p>6. Imagery of 'spoon fed. You do that for a child. Otherwise it ain't gonna get no food...But after a while, you ain't gonna bottle feeding him all the time.</p>	<p>1. 'I don't know everyone. I don't know how they think.'</p> <p>2. '...from the media perspective, and some people around, they are seeing the problems as kind of the biggest thing in our community i.e. the crime, the violence.'</p> <p>3. 'It's not that I see it that way, but lots of other people see it that way.'</p> <p>4. 'I think the media...when they hear something terrible has happened in a particular area, they go out, and they follow that story...And then people judge the community by that. Not about all the other great things that happening in the community, 'cos nobody's looking for that...and people become fearful and afraid...'</p> <p>5. 'I think the people outside tend to take it on much more than the people would living within it.'</p> <p>6. '...there is some people, and I think usually the vulnerable...like the elderly, and maybe young people...would see it as being, "Yes, this is what our community is like".'</p> <p>7. '...there are more people that's doing good...young people going to school, taking their grades, being nice...you've got the older ones who are working with young people, you know, helping them, supporting them, being there for them. And you don't hear stories about that.'</p> <p>8. '...you have lots of groups in this community that's doing things for young people. Groups that are doing things for the elderly, you know. Groups that's doing things for the mentally and physically disabled.'</p> <p>9. 'The principles and the lifestyles that come out of lots of people, even if people sometimes do things that are not so, that are considered criminal activities then.'</p> <p>10. 'If you look for those people who are actually doing good and put them</p>

## **Appendix 4: Extract from Individual Thematic Grid**

### **Assumption is the lowest form of knowledge**

- I don't know everyone. I don't know how they think.
- ...from the media perspective, and some people around, they are seeing the problems as kind of the biggest thing in our community i.e. the crime, the violence.
- I think the media...when they hear something terrible has happened in a particular area, they go out, and they follow that story...And then people judge the community by that. Not about all the other great things that happening in the community...
- I think the people outside tend to take it on much more than the people would living within it.
- I think they feel kind of sorry for the area...They assume things.
- ...they have this idea...that all people down there are wicked and terrible and bad.
- ...they assume that they're not educated. They assume that they didn't grow up in the right environment, or the right home...
- "And we don't go there, and if we go down there we hang on to our purses, we hang on to our bags..."

### **To 'magnify the problems'**

- They start spreading rumours...they don't come to the area...And then they treat the people who come from this area in not so nice way.
- It sabotages learning...development...For the person...the one who is giving, but the one who is receiving as well...
- Then some people become afraid of young people...If you're afraid of young people, what does that lead them into? It leads them into fear, and they will start operating out of fear...They'll think that nobody cares about them, nobody likes them...nobody thinks well of them.
- When the young people go to get a job...in a different place...They get a reaction.
- So it stops them receiving the things they need to receive. And to develop the way they need to develop. Being free...free to choose, and to do.'

### **Some people within the community**

- ...there is some people, and I think usually the vulnerable...like the elderly, and maybe young people...would see it as being, "Yes, this is what our community is like".
- ...they start looking at each other and wondering...Elderly people start feeling they can't go out...Their homes become their prisons...People don't talk to each other, because they are afraid.