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Graftin' up 'anley duck: Narrating the influence of unemployment upon identity and crime in Stoke-on-Trent

By

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the influences of unemployment upon senses of identity and involvement in crime in Stoke-on-Trent. It draws upon the Free Association Interview method to explore the lives and experiences of a group of men living in some of the most deprived parts of the city between 2010 and 2014. It looks at experiences of unemployment, underemployment and insecure employment upon the lives and narratives of these men and their perceptions of the world around them. It aims to understand the effect of their experiences and how they have come to reconcile their position in society. The thesis strives to outline how people construct and maintain an identity which makes sense to *them* in the face of the significant challenges posed by the deindustrialisation and prolonged decline of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. It seeks to reveal how their evolving sense of self is influenced by the communities in which they live, whether that is an urban, social housing estate, a hostel or on the streets. The thesis looks to challenge existing hegemonic depictions of what it is to be part of the homogenously branded socially excluded and the manner in which senses of social order which, although they may not be seen as 'normal' or acceptable to wider society, are formed. It argues that the people deemed socially excluded are active and engaged actors seeking to find senses of security, belonging and unity in an increasingly atomised, insecure and fragmented world.

Keywords: abjection, identity, crime, unemployment, defensible self, Free Association Narrative Interview method

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore the influences of unemployment upon senses of identity and involvement in crime in Stoke-on-Trent. It explores the lives and experiences of a group of men living in some of the most deprived parts of the city between 2010 and 2014. It looks at experiences of unemployment, underemployment and insecure employment upon the lives and narratives of these men and their perceptions of the world around them. It aims to understand the effect of their experiences and how they have come to reconcile their position in society. The thesis strives to outline how people construct and maintain an identity which makes sense to *them* in the face of the significant challenges posed by the deindustrialisation and prolonged decline of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. It seeks to reveal how their evolving sense of self is influenced by the communities in which they live, whether that is an urban, social housing estate, a hostel or on the streets. The thesis looks to challenge existing hegemonic depictions of what it is to be part of the homogenously branded socially excluded and the manner in which senses of social order which, although they may not be seen as ‘normal’ or acceptable to wider society, are formed. It will seek to argue that the people deemed socially excluded are active and engaged actors seeking to find senses of security, belonging and unity in an increasingly atomised, insecure and fragmented world.

Stoke-on-Trent has struggled to come to terms with the consequences of the process of deindustrialisation which occurred in the mid-to-late twentieth century. During the period, it lost all of its steel mills and coal mines, and saw significant decline in other trades – especially the pottery industry – which were essential to the wider economic role of the city (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993). More recently it has been suggested that Stoke-on-Trent is one of the only parts of the country which may have failed to come out of recession since 1974 (Harding and Nevin, 2009 cited in Gadd, 2010: 13) whilst popular

commentaries describe the city as being one of the ten worst places to live in Britain (Jordison and Kieran, 2013) and compared to Helmand Province in Afghanistan (Britten, 2010). Stoke-on-Trent has endured prolonged decline with higher than average unemployment and high levels of deprivation with enduring health inequalities (Stoke-on-Trent Citizens Advice Bureau and Brighter Futures, 2011; Public Health England, 2014); the latter largely because of the city's industrial heritage. Regeneration attempts have struggled at best and often failed to draw in investment or meaningful work for the low-skilled and specialized workers of the city. This was compounded by the sudden decline in the fortunes of Wedgwood and Spode in 2010, formerly two of the city's largest ceramic powerhouses. Disparaging commentaries and the loss of former heavyweights in the global ceramics industry paint a particularly negative picture of the city. However, they tell little of the experiences of the people who live in the city whose lives are directly impacted by the loss of industry and the move to a post-industrial economy. It is in the face of this backdrop of a struggling city and a high population of unemployed and incapacitated individuals (incapacitated in terms of being cut off economically and socially, but also physically incapacitated through years of hard labour in heavy industry) that this project arises.

There is an extensive literature identifying the impacts of unemployment upon an individual's life and these impacts are overwhelmingly negative. They include an inability to support one's family (Wallace, 1987; Young, 1999); loss of contact with key elements of social and support networks, particularly among men (Russell, 1999: 211); severe psychological impacts (Strandh, 1999; Russell, 1999; Bowring, 2000); the loss of access to credit facilities and better legal representation (Bowring, 2000); and difficulty in securing subsequent work among the long-term unemployed (Benoit-Guilbot, 1994:3; Biewen and Steffes, 2010; Kroft, Lange and Notowidigdo, 2012; Ayllón, 2012). These amount to significant challenges to the individual and their perceptions of self.

Within political discourse, unemployment has increasingly been conflated with laziness, dependency, disengagement and fecklessness, with the fact that someone is unemployed being viewed not as a sign of structural issues within the construction of society but instead of failures of individuals (and often their families) through failing to promote a positive 'work ethic'. This has resulted in those affected by unemployment being depicted as a faceless mass – the mythical bogeyman – in need of disciplining so that they no longer represent a dysfunctional threat within society. They have become the latest manifestation of the 'sturdy rogues' (National Archives SP 46/61[1]) of old. The scaremongering and demonization, which has increased following the financial crisis, has been played out in politics, the media and in day to day conversations between people and interested parties. This has been identified as having a major impact on wider perceptions of unemployment, the perceived (un)fairness of the system and negative views of those who rely upon state support to live (Elizabeth Finn Trust 2012a; 2012b; YouGov, 2012; Tyler, 2013). These discourses, however, also have profound influences on individuals subjected to such derogatory, abject portrayals and these influences are investigated at length throughout this thesis.

Alongside discussions on the influences of unemployment, mainstream debates have been concerned with the two phenomena of crime and unemployment for a long time; often conflating the two. The English Poor Laws, which evolved over hundreds of years, and the 1824 Vagrancy Act provide clear testament to this with both aimed at managing vagrancy and idleness under the belief that the devil makes work for idle hands. Home Office statistics have historically indicated a relation between unemployment and property crime in particular, and that this is exacerbated in periods of economic downturn (Field, 1999). However, like many other studies of crime and unemployment, including that by Carmichael and Ward (2001), Field's study was conducted on a macro scale, looking at national data and employing empirical techniques, thereby failing to

investigate individual and localized circumstances which can affect both individual lives and communities. Furthermore, much of the existing literature and initiatives focus on reactionary responses of law enforcement and incapacitation (Raphael and Winter-Ebner, 1998: 2), rather than the implementation of proactive changes and initiatives.

Something of more recent interest is that the link between increases in crime levels during and following periods of extreme hardship and rises in criminal activity appears to have been broken: there has been no corresponding dramatic increase in crime levels as a result of an increase in unemployment (see Table 4 in chapter two). It is not the intention of this thesis to explore this specific phenomenon and there is insufficient space to explore all possible explanations in detail here. However, one possible explanation may be related to the fact that so many post-industrial areas have endured prolonged deprivation to the point that some communities, , may have found new ways in which to sustain themselves in the intervening years since the last recession in the 1990s; crimes which are occurring are not being reported. It will subsequently be argued within this thesis that there are examples of these communities present within the wider conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent. Alongside this, it is likely that we are looking in the wrong place and at the wrong sort of crime. In this study, there have been high levels of recreational drug use ranging from ‘soft’ drugs such as cannabis and legal highs through to cocaine, heroin and ‘monkey dust’ (*field notes*), which may point towards a reliance upon drugs among some to assist them in facing the reality of life in a deprived part of the country. These however, whilst deviant actions, and according to the rule of law illegal, tend to occur outside of the public eye and in private, thereby making their detection more difficult. These are just some of the aspects which will be considered in the ensuing thesis. Moreover, as also alluded to above, working-class communities have been known historically to form strong informal solidarities (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996; Yates, 2006) and codes of conduct which do not rely on the official authorities or, upon

the rule of law to maintain norms within their communities. It will become apparent throughout the latter part of this thesis that these informal codes also influence the individual's decision making process and in turn their role and understanding of the community.

The participants of this study are a group of people subjected to aggressive, stigmatizing and divisive portrayals of the poor. The project is particularly salient for it commenced in September 2010, soon after the Coalition Government came to power and imposed a narrative of austerity upon the country. This thesis seeks to explore a microcosm of the population of Stoke-on-Trent who have faced unemployment and in many cases stigmatisation, investigating how unemployment affects and taints peoples' lives – influencing the decisions made and the direction which individuals' lives might take. The project aims to further understanding of the role of unemployment and other external pressures have in directing one's decisions and the course of their lives. The manner in which it can define their actions and constrain their will (Crewe, 2013) in the process and, as a result, limiting their future options, choices and agency. This forms the first central lines of investigation; what is the impact of unemployment upon senses of self and identity among those who have become unemployed? And what role do wider discourses, political and media depictions of unemployment and criminality play in peoples' perceptions of self and reactions to such portrayals and rhetoric?

In line with and following this, people often have to find new ways of dealing with the challenges facing them, especially where work, and the associated benefits (detailed in chapter two), remains scarce. Accordingly some face a harsh reality of precarious, temporary low-paid employment in and out of work. It is as a result of this that some turn to crime, particularly acquisitive crime, to support themselves through periods of scarcity. In some cases, this can lead to successful criminal careers, in others, a lot of jail time and a re-evaluation of one's life course. This leads to a series of other questions

which I also seek to address within this thesis; how does unemployment influence experiences of crime? What influences lead some people becoming involved in crime whilst others do not?

The process of negotiating access to participants involved engaging a variety of gatekeepers including housing associations, non-government organisations, training providers, hostels and local government officials. Some of the themes from these discussions helped to inform the foundations of the thesis and a common theme, was a perceived lack of literature available on the impacts of unemployment within Stoke-on-Trent. One element seen to be particularly lacking is literature focusing upon the experiences of deindustrialisation, deprivation and unemployment within the city (*field notes*). With this thesis I aim to make a small step in seeking to address this gap. This is not to say that there has been no research into the city and Elizabeth Hart (1987, 2008) has examined the decline of the pottery industry upon the lives of those who have lived and worked in the industry, however her study does not examine the lives of others in the city, particularly those who have grown up in a space which has already suffered from the ravages of deindustrialisation and the loss of central elements both of its employment prospects and identity as the centre of 'The Potteries'. Furthermore the city has received considerable interest from groups with ideas on how to try to change its fortunes for the better; the Work Foundation in particular provides a clear example of this in the series of publications entitled *Transforming North Staffordshire* (2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2008d; 2008e; 2008f; 2008g). It is my intention however to expand upon Hart's investigations of the decline of the pottery industry to help in understanding how the lack of industry and work has impacted on the lives of many of the people in the city. I therefore hope that the findings of this thesis will prove useful for local organisations engaged in supporting marginalised, unemployed and underemployed populations and in helping to direct their resources and programmes more effectively at a time when they face substantial cuts.

By way of a summary the core questions which inform the direction of this thesis are:

- What is the real life experience of people who are enduring periods of unemployment?
- What leads some of those experiencing unemployment to engage in criminality?
- What is the impact of prevalent discourses upon peoples' perceptions of self, belonging and purpose?
- What are the similarities and differences in experiences between the participants in the study and how might these experiences help to understand their engagement in criminality?
- How do these experiences relate to those in other studies carried out both within the UK and beyond?

My own personal reasons for undertaking the research are multifaceted. Having first arrived as an undergraduate at Keele University in 2006, I have spent a great deal of time in and around Stoke-on-Trent and engaging with the people who inhabit the area. During this time the quirks of the communities have emerged: the parochial nature of the townships and neighbourhoods which form the city, along with their continual conflicts for resources and recognition; the general friendliness and approachability of the people here – in spite of the high levels of deprivation and adversity faced by many; the disparaging remarks from elsewhere ranging from negative media coverage to snide comments and asides about Stoke-on-Trent from those who visited once, many years past, or have driven through. This piqued my interest in the area and led to a desire to better understand what life is like in the communities that form Stoke-on-Trent. Furthermore, this interest coincided with personal experiences of unemployment. During the summer vacation of 2009, while between my undergraduate and master's level studies, I struggled to find work. I had been working in Keele for the start of the summer

and, by the time I had returned home, the few jobs that were available at a time of financial contraction mass redundancies, were gone. I found myself struggling with some of the ravages of unemployment including: isolation; an inability to attend some social activities because of the prohibitive costs; boredom and, at times, depression. Yet throughout this I was fortunate due to having a family home to live in and return to, and have been fortunate enough to have lived in the south of England, protected from the worst excesses of deindustrialisation and having gained an extensive education at the same time. Through this, I gained an increased interest in unemployment and the impacts that it can have upon the life of a person. Thus my interests in learning more about Stoke-on-Trent, combined with a desire to better understand experiences of unemployment and a background in Criminology and Sociology came together to provide the foundations for this research.

In order to inform the findings of the research, this study draws upon the experiences of people from across a wide range of backgrounds within Stoke-on-Trent, and relies upon their narratives to provide an insight into the effects of life in a community enduring high levels of deprivation and low employment. Eighteen participants who completed the research process and their stories inform the bulk of the analysis. Those who did not provide substantial narratives still shared useful information, and these are also referred to throughout the thesis where appropriate. The participants are predominantly aged under thirty, however to help control for variations in experiences according to age, six of the participants are aged thirty-five or above, thereby providing a degree of inter-generational comparisons between those who have witnessed the decline of the city and those who are seeking to eke out a purposeful and meaningful life in what remains, but all of whom are old enough to mourn the loss of the stability which was endured in the modern city. Stoke-on-Trent developed as a white, working-class city and was built around traditional industries and understandings regarding the division of labour

(Durkheim, 1984 [1933]) in terms of the role of the worker in the workplace, and the gendered family roles. Thus, to understand the challenges facing men in the city, the focus must first be upon them, with subsequent work being conducted on gender and racial dimensions thereafter.

The Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method, pioneered by Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2000 and 2013) has been utilised to collect the data which forms the backbone of this doctoral thesis¹. Names have been changed and pseudonyms deployed throughout this thesis to protect the identities and interests of those involved in the research. In extreme cases, locations have also been removed, again with the express intention of protecting those whose voices have informed the research and in these cases square brackets [] have been utilised to highlight these changes. Where possible the data has been left untouched, allowing the participants to speak for themselves about their experiences, telling the reader of their story in their own words. It is these words which have both directed and informed the thinking behind this thesis and it is imperative that the beliefs, understandings and interests of the participants are preserved and represented in the manner which they originally intended.

I seek to avoid the pitfalls of lumping together such experiences and conflating them as being central to each person; this is simply not possible. In doing so I seek to avoid assuming that unemployment becomes the master-narrative for the individual and instead look to the biographical and structural contexts in which these narratives are crafted. The motivations of each person are continually informed by their own past experience, the influence of family, friends and other peers and the circumstances in which they find themselves in. It is impossible to take their experiences, as often occurs in more quantitative studies and draw these generalizations. This is because, even where on the

¹ A detailed discussion regarding the reasons for adopting the FANI method can be located in chapter four.

surface of things peoples' experiences may appear almost identical, there will be nuanced details which will change their circumstances and the manner in which they interpret and present such experiences. Neither does this thesis seek to conduct any direct critique of the 'neoliberal project'. The concept of neoliberalism is vast and there is already an extensive critique of it (see for example Young, 1999, 2007; Garland, 2001; Wacquant, 2008, 2009; Hall, 2012; Winlow and Hall, 2013) which I do not intend to rehash. Instead I aim to build on this critique with my own extensive critique of the impacts on the individual by drawing upon the spoken words of those who have shared their narratives for the purposes of this project.

Throughout the study definitions of crime and unemployment have been left deliberately vague and instead drawn upon the Oxford English Dictionary definitions of each:

Unemployment: n. without a paid job but available to work

Crime: n. 1 an action which constitutes a serious offence against an individual or the state and is punishable by law. Such actions collectively: *the victims of crime* 2. A shameful or deplorable action or state of affairs. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2011).

The main reason for this is to provide allowances for the way in which we each construct our understanding of phenomena, for we each have different frames of reference informed by our past experiences and the communities in which we live (Bourdieu, 1990; Charlesworth, 2000). Accordingly, our understandings of terms such as 'crime' and 'unemployment' will be different from everyone around us precisely because of these varied experiences. The ambiguity of the terminology was thus deliberate, providing an additional level of analysis to be incorporated into the study. This has been reflected in the breadth of responses received from participants and points to the strengths of the FANI method in ensuring that participant's meanings and frames of reference remained at the core of the research project. The breadth of understanding of the terms became particularly evident. Regarding unemployment, understandings ranged from being out of

work and claiming Job Seekers' Allowance to being signed off on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) after being transferred from the former incapacity and disability benefits. Within this, the levels of engagement and ability to engage with the labour market varied considerably as shall be seen in more detail throughout the research. Some participants have been struggling to find legitimate employment for prolonged periods, in some cases years, whilst others have been able to work in temporary capacities, temporary either because they have struggled to find full-time work or have been struggling with dependency (alcohol and/or drugs) which has in turn impacted upon their ability to engage with work in any meaningful way. This has had a profound influence upon each individual who has taken part and it is clear that, despite their very broad backgrounds ranging from very low levels of formal education to undertaking postgraduate degrees; some having lived in the area for their entire lives and others moving from near and far; that the influence of unemployment, combined with life in Stoke-on-Trent and the hostile treatment of the poor and unemployed by the populist and political press, that there are some significant similarities within the experiences relayed by the study's participants.

This is another reason for the deliberate selection of terminology. Participants were informed that the research was examining experiences of unemployment and crime rather than how unemployment influences involvement in crime which carries with it the loaded assumption that the only form of experience under investigation involves the committing of offences. What, as is discussed in detail in chapters six and seven, becomes apparent is that for many involvement in crime is not as black and white as being either an 'offender' or a 'victim'. This is particularly evident within the data which will show that, where participants have been involved in crime (almost all have, and again the vagueness of the question assists in emphasising the breadth of involvement across the community, from working off the books to metal theft to violent and gang crime), victimisation and

offending are often closely intertwined and this will become evident in chapter seven when discussing the narratives provided by the participants.

In classing this project as a case study of experiences within Stoke-on-Trent, it is important to ensure that an unambiguous definition of the term is used. Often, a case study refers to the collection of in-depth data on one specific case, perhaps examining individual biographies, or even collecting several cases and comparing these (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000; 3). To an extent, each of the interview participants constitutes their own individual case study as each of their narratives has been examined in turn before being compared and contrasted to see what and where similarities and contradictions may lie. However in the case of this project, Stoke-on-Trent provides the main case to be studied and, more specifically, the influence of unemployment and crime upon people living in the city. What it is hoped will become clear throughout the study is that the identities of the participants are highly contingent upon their experiences and, because of the often very isolated lives some lead because of their experiences, are often in a state of flux and requiring a great deal of work to be undertaken by the individual as they formulate an understanding of their world. The population recruited for the study come from diverse backgrounds and live in diverse communities. During the period in which fieldwork was undertaken (August 2011-December 2012) some participants live in the community in supported and housing association accommodation, one was living in halls of residence at a local university and others were living in two hostels within the city where the research was also conducted. This adds yet another layer to the analysis, allowing the examination of new solidarities within the communities. It also further underlines the importance of shared experiences in engendering unities in the face of the disparaging remarks and actions from wider society and numerous, continual reductions in support from the state for some of the very people who need it most.

As a case study focused within a specific locality this study cannot be generalized to the wider population *per se*. However, the results of this study fit with an ever growing body of literature examining the impacts of ever more aggressive attacks on the poor throughout the Western, and in particular English-speaking Western nations (see for example Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001; Wacquant, 2008; Foster and Spencer, 2012; Winlow and Hall, 2013). As such, this thesis does not seek to provide a general commentary on the experiences of the unemployed and those involved in crime, either as an offender or victim, but instead lend itself to developing the critique arising from within this field.

The works of Durkheim, Bourdieu and Foucault influence the course of the study, providing the foundations for analysis of the role of the division of labour, power and shared experiences and the *habitus* in informing one's sense of self. Furthermore, the manner in which these social constructs are deployed by the participants, politicians and wider society will also be examined to develop a stronger understanding of the way in which they all influence identities and involvement in activities, criminal or not. The thesis therefore also draws upon work by George Bataille (1998), Julia Kristeva (1984) and Imogen Tyler (2013) to examine the role of the abject politics of division so rife in Britain at present to understand the influences that such politics have upon the people who have participated within the study and their reactions to this.

As is discussed throughout this thesis, everybody's experiences are different and personal to that individual; it is not possible to fully generalize such subjectivity. That said, as can be seen above, there has been considerable academic attention paid to individual subjectivities, unemployment and crime by others within the academy with increasing interest, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis. The thesis lends itself then to this growing body of literature thereby providing further examples to both challenge and support existing theories and understandings of experiences of and responses to

unemployment and crime. Moreover, when examined in relation to existing theories and understandings, more generalizable theories can be extracted and evolved. As shall be seen in the second half of the thesis, when the participants' stories are discussed in detail, responses to unemployment and the discourses surrounding the phenomenon also vary considerably. This in turn has a considerable influence upon the narratives which the participants have provided as they seek to provide a coherent and understandable narrative both for themselves and the audience which they engage with.

The results from this study will show that unemployment carries a very pervasive influence upon an individual's life, supporting the findings of previous studies outlined earlier in the chapter and discussed in more detail in chapter four. However, in addition to these findings, what will also become apparent, particularly in chapter seven, is that the treatment of people as abject 'others' acting as a drain upon wider resources and the rest of society as a whole, breeds a great deal of dejection but also resentment not just towards those identified as belonging to the 'other' group, but also among the targets of such discourses. Furthermore, this palpable resentment can boil over into frustration, resistance and rebellion, further underlining the role that politics and the media can play in generating resistance to its own system. The environments in which people live also play a major influence with communities providing core support networks and yet at the same time, in particularly closed communities, costing someone their privacy in return for providing a 'safe' haven away from the streets and the worst excesses of unemployment. I seek to draw upon the spoken words of the participants to outline the influences of these discursive projections in their own words and thus bring the analysis to life and then provide the foundation for suggestions for the direction of future studies and change as a result.

Structure

The narratives which have been shared and have informed and directed this research are the cornerstones of this project. It may then appear paradoxical that, as will be hinted at in the thesis structure below, they do not appear in any significant detail until chapter six. This is, however, entirely intentional. The first half of the thesis seeks to set the scene and assist the reader in understanding the backdrop which informs the experiences of each individual interviewed. It will outline the policy picture and the manner in which Stoke-on-Trent is constructed in policy and practice, before moving on to examine how life in the city is constructed in the minds, lives and narratives of the people who participated in the study. Thus, the second half of the thesis turns to the stories of a few of the people of Stoke-on-Trent to explain how the social, political, cultural and economic contexts, both local and national, have informed the experiences of each individual and their expectations of the future.

In chapter two, the history of Stoke-on-Trent is outlined, examining the rapid rise of the city during the industrial era from a collection of small townships to the centre of ceramic production in England before addressing the impacts of the subsequent decline and successive failures at reinvention. As will be seen, the city has been plagued by continual decline and increasing blight since the mines and potteries began closing in the 1960s and this is closely related to high levels of deprivation, health, education and employment inequalities. The chapter seeks to lead the reader through the city's chequered history and provide the foundations for the reader to be able to understand the environment and context in which these people and their experiences have been fashioned. It draws upon a brief case study of one particular community – Bentilee – to outline the challenges facing the city and its people. The role of social security, crime and justice within the city is also outlined and examined to help underscore the local context in which the people of the city live their lives and the constraints placed upon them.

Chapter three follows on from this by discussing the current political context and the depictions of the unemployed within wider policy discourses. The policies and rhetoric of the Coalition government and the popular media are scrutinized here to assist the reader gain a more detailed understanding of the way in which unemployment is once again being characterized as an individual failing rather than an underlying structural problem within society as the Coalition continues to espouse the liberal notions of ‘pulling oneself up by the bootstraps’ being the best way to succeed in life. The role of politicians and the popular media are scrutinised with examples provided of the pervasive influence of rhetoric and a continual bombardment of depictions of the poor and unemployed as a feckless, lazy, disengaged and irresponsible homogenous mass upon wider public perceptions is also undertaken and will show that the findings of the Glasgow University Media Group (1982) are still very much evident today.

In chapter four, I seek to chart the manner in which working-class identity became such an integral part of life for those living and working within the key industries on which the nation became so reliant. The chapter utilises notions of the ‘Division of Labour’ (Durkheim, 1984) and the distribution of power within society to examine the formation of new solidarities and senses of communities in the face of the harsh and exploitative conditions faced by the working classes. The discussions in the chapter also introduce Don Crewe’s conception of ‘constrained will’ (2013) as a tool for understanding the way that, whilst people are able to choose whether or not to act, this is not a free choice and a whole host of constraints are placed upon their will and the options and opportunities presented to them and their vision of their future self. The chapter goes on to discuss the impact of the decline of the working-class identities following the continued move towards an increasingly post-industrial society and the implications of this for the maintenance of identities in such communities, especially among the unemployed. It will also introduce some of the concepts, notably that of abjection (Bataille, 1934; Kristeva,

1982), which provide a framework for analysing the participant's narratives in relation to the marginalisation of unemployed and deprived people and communities which feature in the second half of the thesis.

Chapter five discusses the research methodologies used in the thesis, outlining the justifications for adopting Hollway and Jefferson's (2000 and 2013) Free Association Narrative method. The strengths and weaknesses of the method are examined and provide the framework for the rest of the chapter. The recruitment process and ethical considerations, along with collecting data from hard-to-reach and defended subjects also receive considerable attention, particularly those relating to the way in which the views and opinions are presented to ensure that they remain representative of the opinions and experiences expressed by the study's participants. My own reflections are also discussed in this chapter, providing an insight into the influence that the research has had upon my own personal development as a reflexive researcher and the considerations which were made for my own predispositions.

The sixth chapter outlines the profiles of the central characters whose narratives play the most central roles in informing the ideas which have grown from within the research. This essential component of the thesis provides an understanding of the backgrounds of the individuals who have taken part in the project, and provides a pen portrait of the key figures within the thesis, outlining their experiences and relating these experiences to each other; highlighting the shared features of the narratives; and to the contexts in which they have been gained. The chapter also seeks to highlight the manner in which people construct their identities to provide themselves with some form of coherent and articulable narrative for themselves and their audience, and thus the inconsistencies that such an activity generates are also identified and scrutinised.

The discussion of the key elements of the participants' narratives examined in chapter six form the foundations for chapter seven whereby the central themes from the research emerge. The chapter focuses upon the manner in which people formulate a "defensible self-identity" (Kearon, 2005) (herein referred to as a 'defensible self') in the face of the barrage of challenges which they face. Here the participants' narratives are drawn upon heavily, tying together the backgrounds of the individuals and the social, economic, political and cultural contexts in which these experiences are generated to underline the complex relations between wider structures and influences in society and the actions and choices made by each individual and their aspirations for the future.

The final chapter draws the thesis to a conclusion, summarising the doctoral research project and its findings and discussing some of the implications of said findings. This chapter will seek to draw the results of the research together, using them to summarise and provide a more general critique of the current political landscape and the treatment of the unemployed and precariously employed, further emphasising the role that both the abject, negative rhetoric espoused in the political and media arenas and the local economic situation play in the continual marginalisation and stigmatization of those so precariously placed at the bottom of society. The chapter will also seek to conclude the findings and discussions in the previous chapters which serve to help the reader to understand why simply getting a job is not the answer to the complex problems facing the people of the city. The chapter will seek to develop some recommendations based on this for organisations; public and third sector, who work with target groups in deprived communities and populations such as employment programmes, hostels and housing associations to better target their increasingly limited resources to provide accurate and meaningful support to the people that they hope to engage and assist.

Chapter Two: Outlining Stoke-on-Trent

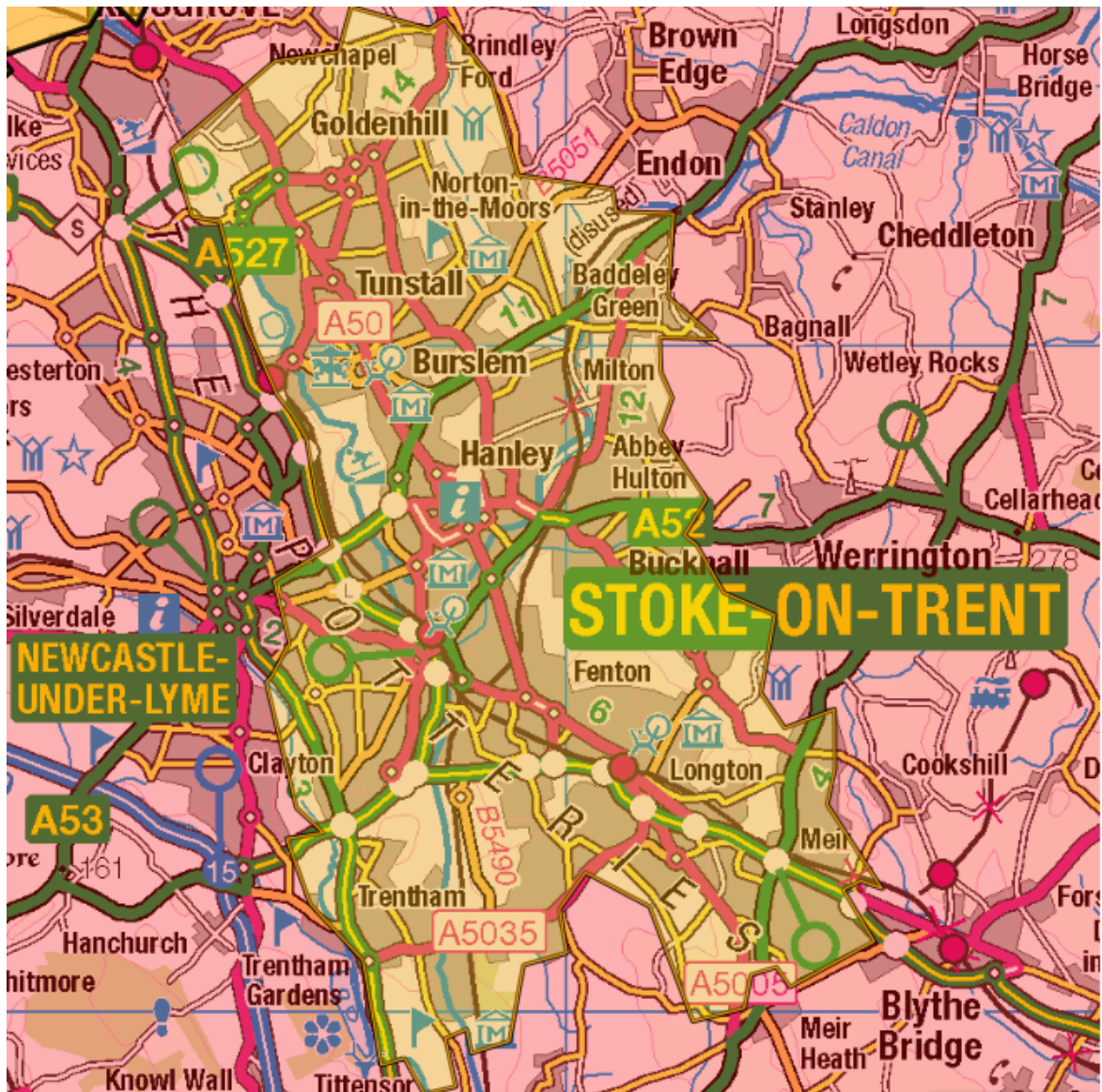


Figure 1: Outline of Stoke-on-Trent
Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2014

“Geologically the Potteries area can be described as an outcrop of quick-burning coals, clays, and marls, and it is this character of the subsoil that has favoured the growth of the local pottery industry. The story of Stoke is basically that of a community of potters, whose skill and business acumen have in the course of two centuries made Stoke the twelfth largest city in the United Kingdom and extended its reputation in the field of ceramics far beyond the shores of Britain.” (Jenkins, 1963: 80)

The rise and Golden Age of Stoke-on-Trent

Following the arrival of industry and the area's subsequent growth, the six towns; Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton became the county borough of Stoke-on-Trent in 1910 following the passing of the Federation Bill by Parliament, before eventually becoming a city in 1925 by proclamation of King George V. New areas including Meir and Trent Vale emerged as existing housing stocks were deemed inadequate (Long, 2000; 5). The city, has a distinct linear formation with six distinct townships and numerous periphery communities (Bentilee, Meir and Trent Vale providing just three such examples) and, without a clearly demarcated city centre, the city lacks much of the unity and identity that other post-industrial cities such as Sheffield, Manchester and Newcastle all share. This has resulted in clear divisions when attempting to identify the future role of the city (Greenslade, 1993).

In 1767 the relocation by Josiah Wedgwood of his growing ceramics business to a bespoke site alongside the Trent and Mersey Canal at what is now known as Etruria brought the advent of large scale factory production within what is now Stoke-on-Trent (Thomas and Hague, 2000). Around the new, purpose built factory locally based housing was provided for the workforce forming the core of the community; a model which was adopted more widely throughout the city. Following the abandonment of the site by his family when they relocated production to Barlaston in 1936, coal and iron tycoons soon redeveloped the lands of the estate and further industry arose as the business owners sought to take advantage of the vital transportation links (Ibid). There was a corresponding population rise and the population for the area rose from 30,053 in 1801 to 244,315 in 1901; an increase of over 800 per cent and twice that of the national average for the same period (Philips, 1993b; 109) before going on to peak at 276,639 in 1931 (Census of England and Wales, 1931: 122-123). Thus the towns expanded rapidly and communities grew accordingly.

At the heart of 'The Potteries' Stoke-on-Trent has a prominent industrial heritage which has provided a key founding stone for the senses of identity among those living within the area. As Jenkins (1963) identifies, the growth of a number of industries in the North Staffordshire area was almost entirely dependent upon the rise of the pottery industry within Stoke-on-Trent. By way of an example of the size of the industrial production which dominated the city, coal production in North Staffordshire alone was estimated to be approaching one million tonnes per annum (Lead, 1993:88) due in no small part to the need for in the region of 12 tonnes of coal to fire every tonne of pottery (Briggs, 1993:95).

The housing stock also reflected the needs of the city's industries, ensuring that large numbers of workers were available close to their source of employment. The traditional working-class nature of the city meant that much of the housing stock was terraced; something which has been largely retained today (ONS, 2014a). Moreover, following the rapid construction of post-war properties and particularly council properties, vast estates of semi-detached properties were also constructed. This included Bentilee, the largest council owned estate in Europe at the time of construction, built to accommodate the miners working out of Berryhill and Parkhall mines in particular.

The city's workers were ideally located in close knit communities in close proximity to their employer (see Figure 2) leading to a strong sense of community, belonging and solidarity stemming from the shared links between the people and families living and working within them. This unity was reflected more with events such as the Potters' Holidays which "brought together lowly potteries workers and 'country gentlemen'" (Holliday and Jayne, 2000: 186) despite attempts by the owners of the pottery houses to clamp down and stamp out such holiday periods, the tradition continued until the late twentieth century (Ibid).



Figure 2: View from Harper Street towards Middleport Pottery. The houses on the left, now abandoned, shows the proximity of the workforce to the pottery firm

Whilst they continued, the hedonistic event saw people heading off to local beauty spots such as grounds of the Trentham Estate, off to Rudyard Lake near neighbouring Leek, or further beyond to North Wales and Blackpool as people sought to break out from the monotony of their everyday lives (Ibid). It then becomes apparent that, in spite of the employer's attempts to reduce symbolic and historic holiday periods, there was a deeply engrained respect for these traditions which served to support and foster these senses of community. Thus it emerges, in line with Simon Charlesworth's (2000) findings, that life for people, particularly working-class men, in industrial cities such as Stoke-on-Trent was not simply focused upon work. Whilst work provided a foundation, other activities arose alongside: attendance at union meetings and events; going to the Miners Welfare Club; watching the Stoke or Port Vale match on a Saturday afternoon when the factories closed for a half day; organising and participating in fundraising and charity events; playing in the works' brass band, and so on. Work may have provided the opportunity for wider socialisation for many, but it was far from the only source of engagement or activity.

The fragility of Bone China

The rapid transformation from rural villages and townships into a thriving conurbation was not destined to last and this is where the picture of a prospering industrial hub ends. Beginning in the 1960s, following the closure of vast swathes of the nation's heavy industry Stoke-on-Trent has been suffering from considerable decline “with some socio-economic analyses suggesting that the city is the only one in Britain to have not come out of recession at all since 1974” (Harding and Nevin, 2009 cited in Gadd, 2010: 14). By the 1970s many local mines were already closing their gates following a combination of the move to push industrial production into increasingly profitable, private enterprises and the ‘dash for gas’ through the late 1970s and 1980s. The steelworks along Shelton Bar (now Festival Park), and the coal mines, closed down in quick succession so that by 1992 little remained. The decline of industry along with many of the former pot banks and kilns within Stoke-on-Trent (Table 1) has had a profound impact upon the area in terms of its economic status and the identities of the city and its population.

Industry	1939	1992	2012
Smithies	296	0	0
Blast Furnaces	2	0	0
Coal Mines	13	2	0
Pot Banks	350	80	54*

Table 1: The decline of industry across Stoke-on-Trent. Source: Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993; 177, *personal correspondence (see appendix E)

Furthermore, within the city the unions played a large role providing social activities, representation and educational opportunities among others (Charlesworth, 2000:71). The weakening of the unions (particularly the National Union of Miners) following the Miners' Strike and the loss of work which followed the closure of the mines (and

eventually other industries) meant a large scale loss of collective identity. Work was not the only element upon which people rely upon to formulate their identity and sense of belonging (more discussion of this will arise in chapter four), however it did provide the foundation upon which wider socialisation was founded in these communities. Where work disappeared, wider activities have also gradually crumbled; Miners Welfare Clubs have closed down or failed to attract new members; works based bands no longer exist and the marches no longer occur. Some vestiges remain; the Norton Cricket Club and Miners Welfare Institute still stands on the edge of Burslem, however the wider opportunities for socialisation and the formulation of an ontologically secure sense of identity and purpose have been eroded.

In line with this, Simon Charlesworth has argued that:

“Deindustrialization has, clearly, had the effect of wrapping many in a powerful sense of entrapment, as low wages, the cheapening of the qualifications they might reasonably aspire to obtain, and the shortening length of time that they hold jobs, have given them a sense of inescapable destiny, of being individuals collectively overwhelmed by historical change. Absence of security and of respect create a crisis in the reproduction of the culture that many grew up with, such as the educational links with the trade unions, the presence of union people in the communities, and the decline of the old spaces that used to be those of working people, like the pub and club.” (2000: 71)

Whilst a prime example of the centrality of work to the importance of the community can be seen in the following comment at the end of an article by David Nicholls (2011) in the Telegraph:

“I was employed by the Drayton Kiln Company for 30 years; with the majority of my work colleagues’ worked for the company for about the same number of years. We

were a family! Grew up together, we all made sure that the products leaving the factory were of a very highest standard.”

Within North Staffordshire the last colliery closed in 1998 and the latest recession witnessed two of the best known and largest pottery manufacturers in the country, Spode and Wedgwood, go into administration in 2010. The Spode brand has been taken over by Portmeirion but without the retention of the symbolic Spode Works in Stoke town; and a drastically scaled back level of production occurs at Wedgwood. However, the decline of these companies was felt beyond the closure of the two large employers in the city. Wedgwood had been taken over by Waterford and Aynsley China, whilst Spode was taken over by Derby International (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993: 184). The buying out of the individual pottery production houses by large consortiums imposed risks on the whole membership of the consortium should some elements begin to struggle financially. As has been seen, where one element failed, the fate of the smaller pot banks and production houses was placed at risk as the consortium sought to return to profitability.

At the time of submission, Stoke-on-Trent had an unemployment rate of 9.1% of the working-age population with 3.3% claiming Job Seekers’ Allowance and 19.7% of the local population being economically inactive (ONS, 2014c). We are able to see in Table 2 that the city lags significantly behind the rest of Great Britain, as well as regional competitors within the rest Midlands, on a range of key indicators including employment, earned income, education and indicators of deprivation. We are also able to see that there is a significant gap in the proportion of people out of work and claiming working age benefits.

Furthermore, as can be seen in Figure 3 below, the number of claimants per vacancy has been above the national average since March 1998, underlining the long-term trend for the city and emphasising underlying structural issues within the local labour market.

Indicator	Stoke-on-Trent ¹	West Midlands ²	Great Britain ³
Total Working Age Benefit Recipients	18.9% (30,230)	14.4%	12.9%
Job Seeker Rate	3.3% (5,310)	3.1%	2.4%
Proportion of JSA recipients Aged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18-24 25-49 50 and over 	27.5% 56.8% 15.7%	24.1% 58.0% 17.9%	24.0% 56.0% 19.9%
IB/ESA Claimant Rate	10.0% (15,930)	6.4%	6.2%
Lone Parent IS Rate	1.7% (2,730)	1.4%	1.2%
Job Density	0.75	0.75	0.78
Gross Weekly Pay (by residence)	£423.90	£480.60	£520.80
% Population with skill levels of NVQ Level 2 or above	60.9	66.9	72.5
% Population skill levels of NVQ level 4 or above	19.3	28.4	35.2
Self Employed	6.2%	9.0%	9.8%

Table 2: Key NOMIS indicators for Stoke-on-Trent.

Source: ¹ONS 2014c, ²ONS 2014d, ³ONS 2014e

What this data highlights is that the divisive rhetoric being employed by successive governments, alongside the populist attacks by the popular press that there are more than enough jobs to go around are not always wholly factual..

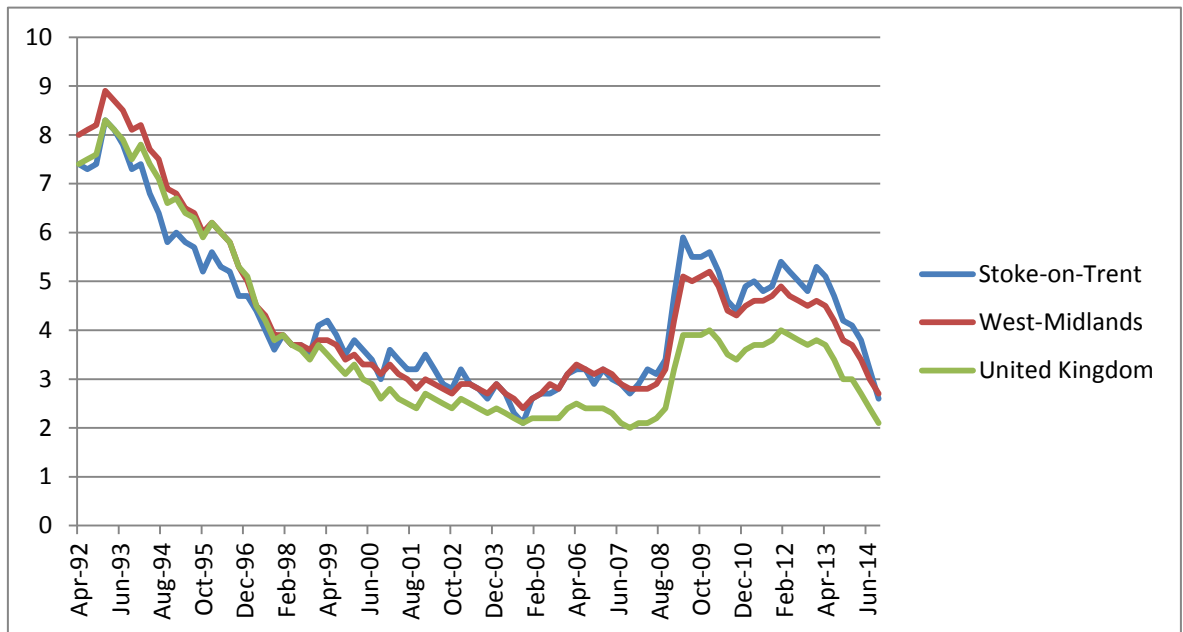


Figure 3: Chart showing Job Seeker's Allowance claimants as a percentage of the working age population since March 1998
Source: ONS, 2014c

These figures have been exacerbated by the aforementioned closure of major employers in the city including Spode and Wedgwood. The more recent impact of the closing of an Npower call centre (Barnes and Smith, 2013) and Phones4U going into administration (King, 2014) risks having a further detrimental influence upon employment opportunities within the city as it seeks to redefine itself due to a lack of employers moving to the city in their wake. Thus Stoke-on-Trent risks falling into further deprivation because of its aforementioned inability to retain or further attract those with higher levels of education. Furthermore, because large firms continue to fall into administration or outsource telemarketing arms of their business overseas, even low-paid, service industry roles are not assured in the city – casting further doubt on the city's ability to attract and retain investment as it continues to seek to reinvent itself.

The unemployment figures are only part of the issue however for the city is struggling to cope with high levels of underemployment. Over 12,000 people (amounting to 11.3% of

the working age population) were underemployed in 2013; above the national average of 10.6% (ONS, 2013e). These figures combined highlight the massive task faced by Stoke-on-Trent regarding getting people both back into meaningful work and mainstream society, especially given that nearly 15% of the population are either unemployed or underemployed.

Stoke-on-Trent has faced massive cuts to the city's spending power which amounted to an estimated 8% reduction in spending power in 2011-12 alone (Larkin, 2010). When coupled with additional cuts to social security there will, by 2015, have been in excess of £105 million per annum removed from the city's economy (Stoke-on-Trent Citizens Advice Bureau and Brighter Futures, 2011: 4). It becomes clear that the city currently faces a crisis in its finances and ability to support both the local population and industries, which is likely to see further declines in the incomes and living conditions of the population and increased threats to ontological security and identities. This is liable to be compounded by NPower's closing of operations in the city resulting in a further 550 redundancies and Phones4U going into administration, and not helped by Crewe being favoured over Stoke-on-Trent as a hub for the planned HS2 line.

Moreover, the city's fortunes are likely to suffer further depending upon subsequent changes to the political climate. The Conservative party has already been touting ideas surrounding the withdrawal of housing benefit for under-25 year olds (Wilson, 2014) as well as seeking to lower the Coalition's Benefit Cap below the current £26,000 per annum, thereby further limiting the levels of support available to people reliant upon social security to help them to live. Likewise, the other two main parties, particularly Labour, have announced that they will seek to apply further pressure to social security claimants, effectively seeking to outdo the Conservative party in terms of the punitiveness of their own policies and changes (Helm, 2013). This is likely to further marginalise and alienate communities in cities such as Stoke-on-Trent as the abjectifying discourses

prevalent within society spread deeper into the social fabric of contemporary society. This risks reinforcing resistance, defiance, anger and resignation among the populations of Stoke-on-Trent and similarly deprived localities and will pose further ontological challenges to the security of the participants and others throughout the city who are already marginalised and at times turning to deviant enterprises to get by.

Because of the city's continuing struggles to redefine and regenerate itself in the light of a loss of its traditional industries Stoke-on-Trent was ranked as the 16th most deprived of 326 English local authorities and third most deprived in the West Midlands in the 2010 Indices of multiple deprivation (CLG, 2011: 4). This indicates severe underlying structural problems within the conurbation, particularly regarding health, education and employment levels with half of the city's population among the most deprived 20% in the country (Public Health England, 2014). This is in stark contrast to the neighbouring authorities of Newcastle-under-Lyme (ranked 150^h most deprived), Staffordshire Moorlands (190th) and Stafford Borough (232nd) (CLG, 2011). The situation is likely to have worsened since 2010 when the last indices of deprivation given the dramatic reduction in the city's funding. Centre for Cities predicted that the city was likely to be one of the worst hit by the recession and requiring one of the longest recovery periods (Larkin, 2010); something emphasised by the lack of jobs growth and employment levels in the city.

Because of the devastation of the industrial heritage of the city and surrounding North Staffordshire, many of the traditional markers upon which the population relied to formulate and maintain their identities (see chapter four) were lost. The result of this has been a rise in the threat to the security and unity of the city's communities with large, formerly prosperous estates becoming increasingly deprived. This has seen large concentrations of poverty and a weakening of the social bonds and senses of solidarity and belonging which were formerly so characteristic the city. Prominent examples of

this lack of a sense of community and belonging, especially among younger people in the city, are explored in chapter seven.

Due again to a combination of the industrial heritage of the city and high levels of deprivation, Stoke-on-Trent also suffers from high levels of health inequalities and life expectancies are 8.4 years below the national average for men and 4.7 years below for women. Whilst mortality rates have fallen, they are still considerably worse than the national average (Public Health England, 2014). Furthermore the city suffers from high levels of death caused by heart disease, stroke and cancer which can be linked to both unhealthy lifestyles and industrial illnesses courtesy of the unhealthy working and living conditions known to have been caused by past industrial production. Within the city, 8 per cent of the population describe themselves as being of 'poor' or 'very poor' health (ONS, 2013a) and 23 per cent describe their day-to-day activities limited either a little or a lot due to long-term health problems and disabilities (ONS 2013b). The significance of the health inequalities, should not be underestimated due to its influence on the capacity of the population to engage with the labour market (both in terms of working as a whole and the types of work that some are able to undertake); something which the poor and unemployed are frequently lambasted for not doing enough of at present in political, public and popular media discourses (see chapter three).

For people in the city, contacts, particularly family and friends, were often relied upon to gain employment, so there was a lack of need for high level qualifications with skills instead being developed via a lifetime of experience instead (Brighouse, 1993; Allen and Ainley, 2010: 20). This lack of formal qualifications frequently led to an individual becoming part of the multitude working in low paid, manual and semi-skilled positions and is still visible today. Therefore, despite the drive towards building knowledge based sectors within the UK, Stoke-on-Trent is still lagging behind. This thereby further impacts upon the city's ability to attract investment due to a lack of a ready-made, highly

skilled, local workforce, again compounding the reason for business opting for Manchester and Birmingham with their more established and knowledgeable communities. A similar issue is also faced in trying to retain the graduates from Staffordshire University and nearby Keele University who also frequently move away in search of work which suits their qualification levels, precisely because of this lack of suitable employment within the city. It emerges that the city's failure to redevelop is compounding the experience of unemployment at a time when people desperately need a revival in the fortunes of themselves and the city as a whole.

	Stoke-on-Trent (numbers)	Stoke-on-Trent (%)	West Midlands (%)	Great Britain (%)
NVQ4 and above	29,200	19.3	28.4	35.2
NVQ3 and above	60,800	40.2	49.4	55.8
NVQ2 and above	92,300	60.9	66.9	72.5
NVQ1 and above	110,500	73.0	79.3	84.4
Other qualifications	13,300	8.8	7.2	6.3
No qualifications	27,700	18.3	13.6	9.3

Table 2: Qualification Levels in Stoke-on-Trent, West Midlands and Great Britain, Jan 2013-December 2013, Source: ONS (2013) annual population survey.

Table 2 highlights the lack of formal qualifications and training for the population. This, combined with a lack of incoming or developing employers is likely to play out more widely in the city. It means a lack of jobs for the population, thereby maintaining and increasing levels of social security dependence among working and non-working parts of the population. Moreover, many of the jobs that have previously been created, and which are planned in the future through developments such as the stalled City Sentral retail development, are likely to fall within the low-paid retail and service industries. This is likely to serve only to further compound the relative deprivation within the city. Thus, whilst employment schemes may provide the basic skills relating to working in such

service industries, they serve little role in the wider knowledge based aspirations of the city or country as a whole. Thus Stoke-on-Trent risks becoming a low wage, service city which, even with improving job prospects, will still be heavily reliant upon state support and social security to survive.

These problems are further compounded by the slow progress of developments in the city. Whilst moves are being made to draw investment into the city, including expanding INTU Potteries shopping centre (Intu Group, 2012) and the increasingly doubt ridden construction of the City Sentral retail development (which has witnessed its planning permission expire) means that there is a lot of uncertainty regarding what the future of the city holds. Moreover, these developments indicate that the city's executives continue to pursue the same consumption driven strategies which were a major contributing factor of the 2008 recession in the first instance. One element which is clear, however, is that the previous industries which provided much of the population in the city with the resources upon which to build their lives, families and identities, are not going to return and current and future populations will have to find new ways in which to secure their position in any meaningful way.

The conurbation is situated in the Midlands with good road, rail and canal links, precisely because of its industrial heritage. It is well connected to Manchester, Birmingham and London alongside other similar sized Midlands towns and cities such as Derby and Nottingham. This should mean that Stoke-on-Trent is well situated and able to grow at a rapid rate. The Work Foundation, however, has found that most industries bypass Stoke-on-Trent in favour of Manchester and Birmingham precisely because of the infrastructure and the appeal of the two larger cities, with the result being that the city is getting left further behind (The Work Foundation, 2008a). Furthermore their figures show that Stoke-on-Trent has had a poor growth rate; between 1985 and 2005 the city's growth averaged 1.5%; well behind neighbouring Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the

national average of 2.8% (Ibid). This indicates key structural weaknesses in Stoke-on-Trent and a continual inability to attract economic investment, highlighting the heavy reliance upon industry for employment and growth and subsequent struggles to reinvent itself following the loss of industry; a fate shared with many other post-industrial towns and cities. This decline has been further reflected in the reduction in the resident population from around 276,839 in 1931 (Census of England and Wales, 1931: 122-123) to 240,400 in 2001 (ONS, 2012a) as people leave in search of better opportunities elsewhere. However, the city's population has now rebounded and was approximately 249,000 in 2011; an increase of 3.6% on 2001 (Ibid) although this increase is still well below that experienced by the rest of the country; again indicating a lack of broader appeal.

Another measure of the deprivation that is faced by the city, but which frequently receives much less attention is the volume of empty properties within the city. In 2014, there were over 4,400 empty homes within Stoke-on-Trent, nearly 2,500 of which had been empty for over six months (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, n.d.). Moreover, many of the empty homes, which are increasingly cited as being unfit for the purpose of attracting the managerial and educated classes which the city is pinning its future, were brought up by the council under the now defunct housing renewal pathfinder Renew North Staffordshire, have been left empty as the city council tries to decide what to do with the properties and the land. As such, run down and effectively abandoned areas often attract further crime where it becomes apparent that there is little attention being paid to what goes on there, echoing the sentiments of Zimbardo's (1969) Broken Window's experiment. Accordingly, not only are large concentrations of empty homes a blight on the landscape, they also severely influence perceptions of the city and its occupants, both from the outside and within the city, frequently becoming no-go areas, providing a locus for crime, anti-social behaviour and deprivation.

Whilst the city may be struggling to attract investment, the growing population risks putting further strain on the city's decreasing resources. Whilst the population growth is slower than most of the rest of the country, much of this increase has been fuelled by inward migration and there are a number of tensions in some areas of the city, notably Shelton and Cobridge, which have developed Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. The increase in BME communities has led to rising tension which have occasionally flared up (for example in 2001 when the city experienced localised race riots, along with a number of other cities including Bradford and Oldham). It has also led some, locally and nationally, to attempt to apportion blame upon them and Eastern European migrants and labourers who came to work following the 2004 EU Accession which saw Polish migrants in particular being the focus of media attacks surrounding anti-social behaviour and stealing British jobs². This was a key factor in the rise of the British National Party (BNP) locally which found early success in Stoke-on-Trent. Despite the party's decline, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) have seen a large rise in their own popularity in the wake of the BNP's initial gains and this again, may be symptomatic of racial tensions and perceived pressure on the system through migration. These tensions were repeatedly highlighted by a number of participants, and this is discussed in detail in chapter seven. Within Stoke-on-Trent, the total non-white-British population stands at 13.6% thus constituting a considerably smaller proportion of the city's population than the 20.8% in the West Midlands or the 20.2% of the English population (ONS, 2013c). Whilst lower than the rest of the country, however, the city still suffers from the articulation of similarly motivated beliefs as people seek reasons for their own unemployment and thus end up regurgitating the same jingoistic vocalisations

² See, for example, Fleming and Sherman's (2013) Times Article 'Immigrants take 75% of all jobs created over last 15 years'; Chorley and Shipman's (2014) 'Young Britons beaten to jobs by 'new servant class' of immigrants: One in ten new roles created in a year went to people born in Romania and Bulgaria' in the Daily Mail; and the BNP's homepage, which claims that asylum seekers and immigrants have gained priority for benefits and taken countless jobs at the expense of the native population (Griffin, n.d.).

surrounding migrant and minority communities not engaging or integrating into wider society, stealing jobs and not respecting either their fellow man or ‘British’ traditions in the process (see chapters six and seven).

Another impact of the cuts to the local and national government spending has seen a large proportion of cultural resources within the city closed down as the city council seeks to reduce its budget in line with cuts in funding from central government. As a result of cutbacks the city council is expected to make savings in the region of £125 million between 2011 and 2016 due to receiving the 284th worst financial settlement of the 324 local authorities in the United Kingdom (Stoke on Trent City Council, 2012). This works out as an estimated reduction in funding of approximately 28% over the period, equating to nearly £900 per head of the city’s population (Stoke on Trent City Council, 2013); further emphasising the challenges ahead for the city. Because of this, public services have been cut including swimming pools, courts, libraries and museums costing the city and the people within it cultural and social resources which were formerly central to communities. This exacerbates the problems faced by cities and communities such as Stoke-on-Trent which have high levels of deprivation and working-class, social security reliant communities unable to sustain their current populations without considerable investment in the local economies.

Bentilee Case Study

To highlight the plight of the city the discussion moves on to examine Bentilee; one of the most deprived communities within the city. Bentilee was one of the neighbourhoods from which several participants were recruited and the area features frequently within their narratives and those of their fellow participants. As can be seen in Table 3, Bentilee epitomises the perceived decline of working-class communities in Stoke-on-Trent.

Furthermore, it is a key reference point among the city's communities for describing 'no go areas' and declining estates and communities.



Figure 4: Outline of Bentilee

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Lying to the south-east of the city centre, Bentilee was the largest council estate in Europe when it was built in the 1960s and provides a prime example of the city's decline. It was originally built on farmland to accommodate the growing workforce and ensure a ready supply of workers for the nearby Berryhill and Parkhall mines. As can be seen in Table 4 It has retained a nearly exclusive white working-class community with nearly 95% of the community's population self-described as being 'White-British'; well above local, regional and national averages. The figures in Table 3 show that the area suffers from significant education and health inequalities, high unemployment and large levels of deprivation.

Table 3: Key indicators for Bentilee

Indicator	Bentilee	Stoke-on-Trent	England
Total Population	10,779	249,008	53,012,456
Born in the United Kingdom ¹	94.8%	91.7%	86.2%
Born elsewhere ¹	5.2%	8.3%	13.8%
White British ²	92.6%	86.4%	79.8%
Highest Level Qualifications (aged 16+) ³ :			
None	47.2%	33.8%	22.5%
NVQ Level 1	13.1%	11.8%	8.3%
NVQ Level 2	17.0%	18.4%	15.0%
NVQ Level 3	8.3%	11.4%	10.9%
Degree or Higher Degree	2.7%	8.3%	17.4%
NVQ Level 4+	1.7%	3.4%	4.4%
Other	4.7%	16.1%	17.0%
Economic Activity (aged 16-74) ⁴			
Employed:	48.7%	56.5%	62%
Unemployed:	8.4%	5.3%	4.4%
Long-Term Sick or Disabled	12.8%	7.3%	4.0%
Health of Population ⁵			
Very good or good:	70.1%	76.6%	81.4%
Fair	17.1%	15.3%	13.1%
Poor or Very Poor	12.1%	8.0%	5.5%
Long Term health problems/disabilities ⁶			
Day-to-Day Activities not limited	71.7%	77.3%	82.4
Day-to-Day Activities limited a little	12%	10.9%	9.3%
Day-to-Day Activities limited a lot	16.3%	10.6%	8.3%
Households by Deprivation Dimensions ⁷			
No Dimensions	20.6%	33.8%	42.5%
1-2 Dimensions	64%	57.3%	51.8%
3-4 Dimensions	15.5%	8.9%	5.6%

Sources: ¹ONS (2013f), ²ONS (2013c), ³ONS (2013g), ⁴ONS (2013h), ⁵ONS (2013a), ⁶ONS, (2013i), ⁷ONS(2013j)

The area is ranked as the most deprived neighbourhood in the city with nearly 75% of the community's population being among the 10% most deprived in the country and virtually

the entire community in the 20% most deprived (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2011b: 15). This is clearly exhibited and compounded by the fact that four in every five households within the community exhibit one or more dimensions of deprivation and nearly one in six households exhibiting three or more dimensions (see table 4).

As can be seen in Table 4, Bentilee suffers from much higher levels of deprivation, including low education levels, high rates of disability and incapacitation, and high levels of disengagement with the labour market. Employment continues to be heavily reliant upon unskilled or semi-skilled industrial and service industry labour accounting for two thirds of the economically active population, with 15% employed in skilled trades and the remainder in professional or administrative and secretarial occupations (ONS, 2013k). This reiterates the heavy reliance of Stoke-on-Trent upon blue collar labour. It is, furthermore, likely that part of this reliance upon blue collar work within Bentilee compounds, and is compounded by, education levels within the neighbourhood. Over 60% of residents have no qualifications at all - more than twice the national average, and only 6.4% are educated to degree level or higher. In a society increasingly requiring higher levels of qualifications to advance careers and secure new jobs when old ones disappear, this lack of training is hindering people within Bentilee from advancing their position and gaining jobs in fields which many may be perfectly good at but without the paperwork to prove it.

Bentilee suffers from considerable levels of deprivation (see Table 3). Moreover, labour is restricted geographically with nearly half of households not possessing a car (ONS, 2013l); two thirds of the employed population working within 5km of home; and over 20% of the workforce relying on public transport to reach their place of work (Johnston, 2009: 12). This indicates a low level of geographical mobility which carries with it a number of implications. It means that opportunities for jobs are restricted to areas with good public transport links, such as the city centre or local community, as is implied by

the majority of people working within 5km of the home. Additionally it is difficult to forge ties further afield due to an inability to reach such areas. Therefore not only are job opportunities limited, but the formation and maintenance of contacts over any sort of distance is increasingly difficult. This lack of geographical mobility is reflected in participants' spatial awareness whereby some, later withdrawn, stated that family members had moved a long way away from the community in which they grew up before later revealing that they had moved to either the other side of the city or surrounding towns and villages such as Newcastle and Silverdale (*field notes*). A further impact of this is the limitation of people's ability to move from within the locality in which they live to elsewhere, for they are tied to communities not far from central work and transportation hubs, and unable to look for new opportunities further afield. Therefore, whilst many communities in which several generations of the same family live are often seen as model communities in terms of solidarity, those who live in such areas of deprivation with limited resources may be trapped and have little choice other than to engage with building solidarities and communities to provide themselves with a sense of meaning and belonging.

Due to low levels of income, the population of Bentilee is disproportionately reliant upon social security support with 30% of the population relying directly upon benefits to survive (ONS, 2014c). It has been suggested that such high levels of social security dependency indicate 'cultures of unemployment' and the idea that in deprived communities with high levels of unemployment people reject the social norms of work, instead fashioning new norms within the community which may include rejecting work in favour of a new behaviour code (de Neubourg, 1991). In contrast to such negative stereotypes and portrayals, it will become evident in chapter seven that there is a great deal of creativity being employed by people to support themselves and supplementing legitimate employment, whilst still retaining 'normal' aspirations of a family, meaningful

employment and their own home among the vast majority. Furthermore, such activity and retention of a desire for *meaningful* work indicates a willing resistance to engage in precarious, low-paid work and to the abject politics rife within society which seeks to force people into accepting such work or face marginalisation and further stigmatisation; something discussed in more length throughout this thesis.

Crime and Justice in Stoke-on-Trent

We now go on to examine how the previously discussed changes are playing out in Stoke-on-Trent. As already noted, the city is experiencing spending reductions of £125 million between 2011 and 2016 (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2013). This has meant drastic cuts to programmes, initiatives and activities which previously support people reliant upon state and local council support and who are most exposed to the cuts and reforms by central government. In Bentilee, ‘The Star’ a local, independently run job centre closed due to the withdrawal of funding, and community facilities, particularly for young people, have been closed for the same reasons (*field notes*). At the same time unemployment within the city has fluctuated between 4% and 5.5% for much of the period since May 2010 when the Coalition came to power and has only recently fallen below the 4% level (see Figure 3). Whilst the current figures appear to indicate a downward trend in unemployment levels, they only represent JSA recipients. Taking into account all key out of work benefits 16.8% of the working age population are out of work; well above the West Midlands (12.3%) and national (11.2%) averages (ONS, 2014c). What is important here is that the number of people claiming key out-of-work benefits was in decline both in the city and nationally, long before the government’s flagship reforms were even implemented, with the levels falling most steeply between February and November 2010 (Ibid); before any of the Coalition’s main reforms had the chance to be implemented or take effect. This indicates that there is more to the picture than people simply being too

lazy to engage with the labour market and find a job because they are comfortable claiming benefits.

Another factor requiring consideration is that Stoke-on-Trent has been disproportionately reliant upon benefits compared with the national average since the rapid process of de-industrialisation saw the closure of vast swathes of the city's industries. NOMIS figures from 1999 onwards show that Stoke-on-Trent has, for a prolonged period, experienced above average claimant rates for disability and incapacity benefits (both have now been replaced with Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) respectively). This indicates that the Coalition may have made some headway in their stated aim of reducing the number of people who are fraudulently claiming benefits within the city; however previous work had already been achieved in relation this.

All of this provides a stark picture for the city of Stoke-on-Trent and the people who live there, however there is another key figure relating to this which has not yet been discussed and that relates to the volume of money being withdrawn from the city. Without even factoring in the cuts to council spending, conservative estimates indicate that due to the cuts at least £105million will be removed from the city's economy *per year* as a result of the real terms reductions to social security and welfare support (Brighter Futures and Stoke Citizens Advice Bureau, 2011: 4). This will have a profound effect on the city and this is likely to be felt particularly by smaller stores and support agencies which already have low incomes and will be hardest hit by a reduction in their customers spending. Therefore the city is at considerable risk of suffering from further concentrations of deprivation and a 'hollowing out' of more of its commercial centres as companies find themselves unable to operate in the area.

Looking at the wider picture in the city, particularly relating to crime, justice and social security within the city, Table 4 shows that, Stoke-on-Trent has followed national trends of decreasing recorded crime rates since comparable records began in 2002/3. Despite this, in the year 2013/14 Stoke-on-Trent had a police recorded crime rate of 95.36 crimes per 1,000 people (police.uk). Despite a recession hitting in 2008/9; an event which, according to the ‘economic causes of crime’ thesis (Barnes, 1895; Jones 2007; Reiner, 2007 cited in Fergusson 2013) should see an increase in certain types of crime as finances are put under strain and legitimate sources of reliable income are reduced, as can be seen in Table 4, recorded crimes have continued to fall until 2013/14 (Fergusson, 2013).

Year	Stoke-on-Trent	United Kingdom
2002/3	37,635	5,974,960
2003/4	37,521	6,013,759
2004/5	34,114	5,637,511
2005/6	34,374	5,555,172
2006/7	35,662	5,427,558
2007/8	30,260	4,952,277
2008/9	28,972	4,702,697
2009/10	25,976	4,338,295
2010/11	23,909	4,150,916
2011/12	22,138	4,023,007
2012/13	20,443	3,731,098
2013/14	21,190	3,718,043

Table 4: Recorded crimes in Stoke-on-Trent and the United Kingdom. Source: ONS (n.d.)

Whilst, it is not possible to see, at present, whether this is a temporary spike or a reversal of the decline, it is also difficult to judge exactly what the full reason for this decrease. It is, however, possible to speculate. While crime and justice agencies are likely to seek to claim responsibility for such successes, especially where they face increasing pressure

from budget cuts and competition for resources, the lack of trust between the police and many of those who are frequently (over) policed, makes this unlikely. As outlined in chapter one, some of the other possibilities include the idea that post-industrial areas have endured prolonged deprivation to the point that communities, examples of which can be found in Stoke-on-Trent, may have found new ways in which to sustain themselves in the intervening years since the last recession in the early 1990s. Crimes which are occurring are not being reported. Alternatively, we are looking in the wrong place and at the wrong sort of crime. For instance, in this study, there have been high levels of recreational drug use ranging from 'soft' drugs such as cannabis and legal highs through to cocaine, heroin and 'monkey dust' which may point towards a reliance upon drugs among some to assist them in facing the reality of life in a deprived part of the country. Further investigation into the reason for declining recorded crime statistics is essential to help better understand this phenomenon.

In 2011, to reduce crime within Stoke-on-Trent, the City Council released a three year crime prevention and reduction strategy (Safer City Partnership, 2011) and a clear message which can be picked up from examining the strategy is that a 'joined up' approach to crime reduction is necessary; something which forms a central aspect of the strategy. It emphasises the need for a multi-agency approach to crime reduction that tackles offending and the sources of offending with strategies aimed at the rehabilitation of offenders. Some aims of the strategy, such as reducing the number of violent crimes across the city by twelve per cent by March 2012 compared with March 2011 (Safer City Partnership, 2011; 12), initially appeared ambitious, however a reduction of fourteen per cent was actually achieved (ONS, 2012b). Thus, when combined with other initiatives aimed at alleviating unemployment, deprivation, poverty and social exclusion more ambitious targets will become increasingly realistic. Parts of this strategy have clearly informed, and been informed by, other strategies currently in place within the city as

shall be seen below and given the significant drop in the number of crimes per 1,000 people, there is clear evidence that the strategies may be working. Unfortunately, due to the amount of money currently being pulled out of the City by the various cuts and reforms it appears that strategies aimed at alleviating poverty will be increasingly challenged and further decay in the fabric of the city may follow as a result.

One of the central agencies involved in crime reduction is Staffordshire police. At the same time as having to deliver their services however, police forces across the country have had to reduce their size as a result of the austerity measures currently being implemented by the Coalition. For the Staffordshire police force this has meant cuts of £38 million to the force's budget by 2014 and, inevitably, a reduction in the numbers of police officers (Staffordshire Police and Police Authority 2011; 23). Whilst the city council aims to implement a joined up strategy to crime reduction, police intervention plays just one part of this. One of the main aims of wider strategies is for the force to build and maintain stronger community links as part of its 'Community First' Strategy, which has been designed to increase community liaisons, as well as ensuring that officers working in a community are there for a period of at least two years (Ibid: 14), thus helping them to understand the way that the community works and providing stronger ties to the community as well. This ties in well with the increasing community integration focused policies of the city outlined below.

In line with the aims of 'joined up policing' and focusing on welfare and integration strategies, community cohesion became an increasingly important part of national and local government strategies, particularly following the 2001 race riots. Stoke-on-Trent City Council has also published its Community Cohesion Strategy (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2004) aimed at reducing social exclusion and marginalisation through working towards training, support and integration and shows a marked effort by the city to help promote tolerance and understanding in the city. The plan was expected to run until

2014 and again helps to highlight the joined up approach that the City Council appears to be aiming for with key aims including finding commonalities with various religious, ethnic and community groups rather than difference, and aiming to mitigate racial tensions. This strategy, on its own, is unlikely reduce crime figures with many violent crimes in the city occurring in the city centre and typically involve young men (for examples of discussions surrounding the cause of high levels of male post-industrial city-centre crime and violence see Tomsen, 1997; Winlow, 2001; Hall and Winlow, 2005; Winlow and Hall, 2009). As such, other elements must also be incorporated into crime reduction strategies to provide core support to reduce deprivation and exclusion, and increase the city's employment rates, thereby supporting a reduction for the need for wide ranging social security provisions within the city. Until people within the city are able to find work, the implementation of the strategy will be fraught with difficulty as people seek explanations, including migrant workers 'taking our jobs' as an excuse, and a reason, for their own failure to gain long-term, meaningful, work.

Picking up the pieces

As a result of its formation from the six towns; later expanded in 1925 to increase its size and incorporate Meir and Trent Vale there is a great deal of animosity between the towns. As their industries grew and localised competition increased alongside this, they continued to compete for space, workers and resources. The latest manifestation of this, and paradoxically one of the few remaining elements of the city's industrial heritage, is a competition for funding for regeneration and improvements when opportunities arise. This has led to what Jayne (2000) has called the 'jam spreading' of funds. Under this 'jam spreading' principle, rather than focusing upon large scale regeneration programmes in specific areas the council repeatedly shares the funds among the towns to prevent any backlash from the others (Ibid); something which has been seen to hinder the development and redevelopment of the city as a result (Works Foundation, 2008b: 26).

The Works Foundation reports highlighted this as being a key factor holding back regeneration within the city. The series of reports called *Transforming North Staffordshire* have highlighted several structural weaknesses which are preventing the growth and revitalisation of the area. The divisions and lack of co-operation between the councils of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Staffordshire Moorlands, along with this 'jam spreading' of funds, mean that the city is underdeveloped compared with cities suffering from a similar post-industrial depression such as Sheffield, Nottingham and Derby. Furthermore the reports highlight the need for the conurbation to play to its strengths and, rather than having lots of the same in each town, have specialised areas. For example Hanley as the city centre, neighbouring Newcastle as a more specialised market town, Burslem focusing upon its pottery strengths and nearby Leek and the Staffordshire Moorlands taking advantage of its location on the edge of the Peak District and focusing upon antiques etc. (The Works Foundation, 2008g). One of the major issues relating to this, however, is that The Works Foundation does not necessarily appear to have many ideas as to how to redevelop some of the other towns forming the conurbation and most notably Fenton, Longton and Tunstall. The prolonged lack of development is highlighted in Long's (2000) *Stoke-on-Trent past and present* in which he provides a pictorial history of the city. Areas in and around the Etruria corridor, Festival Park and Hanley have changed dramatically, however in much of the rest of the city, particularly Burslem and Longton, many of the older sites are still in desperate need of replacement or repair to bring them back into effective use.

There have been some advances in attempts to regenerate a variety of aspects of the city, from industry and infrastructure through to housing and communities and draw investment back in where it has previously been draining out but, with the notable exception of the regeneration of Shelton Bar into Festival Park, there has been limited success. Following the example set by Liverpool in 1984, Stoke won and hosted the 1986

National Garden Festival and used it to drive a large regeneration project, turning the abandoned factories and slag heaps into firstly a garden festival, before turning much of the site over to new businesses and leisure programmes and developing the space into the retail and leisure park which it is today (Thomas and Hague, 2000). This has however hindered regeneration and development in other parts of the city due in part to the aforementioned divided, parochial nature of the city. This is compounded by the fact that, whilst the festival there did leave a legacy of redevelopment of Etruria from contaminated former steelworks, the legacy was again of a retail development on the edge of the city which attracted businesses away from the existing commercial centres, thereby aiding, rather than combating, decline (Ibid).

More recently, due to the closure of the Spode Works in Stoke town centre during the recession, a large plot of land has remained vacant and in desperate need of regeneration. However the full redevelopment of the site is yet to begin, some five years on. It is clear that the various options available for the regeneration of the different areas of Stoke-on-Trent will cost a great deal and will need considerable investment in this single project, at the cost of reduced investment in the other towns. Arts and cultural groups have also been utilising the facilities with performances by the likes of Re:Stoke who have been utilising abandoned spaces such as the former Spode Works and Bethesda Chapel in the city centre to advance the city's cultural heritage (Re:stoke, n.d.). It is becoming increasingly apparent that the city is attempting to utilise the cultural potential of small groups and is also planning on hosting its first literary festival, further building on attempts to forge links with its heritage (Arnold Bennett being of notable literary fame) and wider cultural movements. The effectiveness of such aims and schemes remains to be seen however and it is imperative that, for such a plan to succeed, the city must focus upon attracting a diverse spread of the existing population as well as attracting groups from further afield. In doing so it may be able to regain some of its former senses of

community which, whilst it occasionally sparks to life during major events such as the Olympic Torch Relay, is frequently underrepresented across the city.

This is, however, only one element of the city's redevelopment plans, which are encompassed under the council's 'Mandate for Change' (2011) which has at its heart four main principles:

- Making Stoke-on-Trent the place to bring business.
- Supporting and developing existing business.
- Working with people to promote independence and healthy lives.
- Making Stoke-on-Trent a great city to live in. (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2011).

It becomes evident that within the 'mandate', the aims are broad; perhaps deliberately so. This breadth appears to avoid placing restrictions upon the redevelopment of the city whilst perhaps also ensuring that whatever changes that do occur, can be counted as a positive and show that the council is working towards fulfilling this 'mandate'. It can also be combined with the aims of the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) set up by the Coalition in the wake of the abolition of New Labour's Regional Development Agencies to focus upon even more localised regeneration funding and projects through re-empowering local councils and bringing in private sector investment in line with the Coalition's beliefs in Localism. The LEP has set an ambitious target of creating 50,000 new jobs and increasing the size of the local economy by fifty per cent; all by 2021 (Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, n.d.). The fact that the city is part of a wider LEP is of course particularly important, especially given the fact that its fortunes have traditionally been both reliant and intrinsically linked to those of the surrounding towns and villages, with much of the raw materials required to supply and run the city's former industries coming from wider towns and villages such as

Apedale, Silverdale and Madeley. This, however, provides an interesting point of contention as the conurbation has traditionally been at best reluctant and at worst hostile to cooperation with the likes of Staffordshire County Council and Newcastle and Staffordshire Moorlands Borough Councils and the ability of the city and region to reverse or even prevent further decline is clearly predicated on increasing collaboration among local bodies as well as employing a unified strategy that does not divide redevelopment funding between the six towns but instead focuses upon one key project at a time.

Alongside these aims, and to fulfil a number of other targets including crime reduction, promoting understanding and tolerance, supporting citizens and increasing local output, and in line with government plans, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, has devised a number of skills strategies for Stoke-on-Trent³. Furthermore, there appears to be a vision within the project to help young people in particular to increase their skill sets as the city has education and skill levels well below national averages (Tables 2 and 3). This lack of a skilled and educated workforce, at a time when there are increasing moves towards a knowledge driven economy which risks leaving Stoke-on-Trent further behind. As part of the plans, the council appears to be aiming to support those with the lowest qualification levels to get them into work, reduce social exclusion and promote integration. In addition, it is evidently hoped that the plans will help people on an individual level as employment brings a number of psychological and financial benefits (see chapter four).

Moreover, as noted previously, many of the city's welfare strategies are tied to the fortunes of national strategies. Given the fact that the main social security provisions are

³ Examples of the strategies in question include an *Interim Work and Skills Plan for Stoke-on-Trent* (Phipps, 2011), and an *Adult Social Care Integrated Workforce Strategy 2013-2018* (Kirton, 2012). These strategies are all aimed at provided targeted support to improve the employment prospects of people with a wide variety of needs, including support needs with the eventual aim of incorporating them into the labour market.

set nationally, it is highly important to ensure that all available actions are taken to assist the local population in securing work and supporting themselves financially where possible. As a result, the city wide plan can be seen to be encouraging increased training for people, and attempts at creating new jobs as a result of the city's attempts at redefining itself and new regeneration projects. Alongside this, initiatives are required to improve community life, however due to spending cuts many such initiatives have now been cut and these include cutting libraries and opening hours, the closure of some outreach centres aimed at working alongside the Job Centre Plus and also cuts to youth service and youth centres.

However, these plans must be greeted with a degree of caution. As will be seen in chapters six and seven of this thesis, simply training people to fill low-paid and temporary roles will not, on its own, alleviate the city's problems. Stoke-on-Trent has a proud industrial heritage and the work undertaken by many provided wider opportunities (see earlier in the chapter) for socialisation and education. As such, providing the skill sets for a particular service and retail industry role is unlikely to provide the security desired by many; a sense of identity is, as shall be seen, built on multiple foundations and, whilst an important one, work is only one element. I shall go on to argue that simply finding, and pushing people into, work will not support people in integration in the way in which the council and government appear to believe it will.

Despite these risks and the decline of industry across much of the West prior to the recession, there were still 7,000 people employed within the ceramics trades in the city (Works Foundation, 2008b). This shows that, despite its decline, the pottery and ceramics industry still has a role to play however it will certainly not be on the same level as previously, especially given the closure of Spode Works and the reduction in production at the Wedgwood Estate in Longton. There is, however, evidence to suggest that there has been a recent increase in demand for wares from the city (Nicholls, 2011;

BBC, 2012) with Portmeirion, who brought Spode and Royal Worcester out of administration in 2009 (although also potentially further adding to subsequent risks should the industry face further hardship) committing to the city until 2156 (King, 2013) and the founding of a Ceramics Skills Academy in the city. This, combined with an increase in sales for the Portmeirion group and a move to bring some jobs back from the Far East to the city perhaps indicate a slow revival in the fortunes, albeit on a much smaller scale than has been seen previously, for the city's main industry and with an acceptance that clear training will be required to ensure that the workforce has skills suitable for the reinvention of the industry.

Two institutions which are almost certain to play an integral role in the future of the area and the city in particular given the ever increasing focus upon the role of the knowledge economy, are Keele and Staffordshire Universities (arguably even more so now given Staffordshire University's recent decision to close its Stafford campus and focus all of its activities within Stoke-on-Trent, where it has already invested millions of pounds in renewing and adding to its facilities (McInnes, 2014)). It is precisely because of the national political obsession with developing a knowledge economy attracting and retaining students and graduates to the city (the latter point is particularly important given that the city has considerably lower levels of qualifications than national and regional averages (see Table 2). So the two universities are likely to take on ever more prominent roles. Furthermore, students support other local economies including the local student accommodation and rental sectors, leisure industries and of course commercial enterprises and local stores. However, the city's retention rate, often compounded by a lack of suitable employment opportunities for graduates once they have finished their courses, mean that it is imperative that the region provides suitable opportunities in order to retain more highly qualified elements of the population.

It is evident that there are changes afoot in the city through working and co-operating with other organisations, both public and private, however the future of the city is far from assured; plans for the City Sentral development, which was originally scheduled to open in 2016, have been shelved, with new plans submitted for a scaled back project, underlines the slow and uncertain progress as the city attempts to rejuvenate itself and its broader appeal. Furthermore, the lack of stable, meaningful jobs means that precarious, flexible, low paid work is still prevalent throughout the city. This is being compounded by the training schemes which are being laid on which in turn further increases the chances of someone becoming trapped in the low pay-no pay cycle for prolonged periods, if not for the rest of their lives.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have sought to provide an outline of the rise and decline of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. Having grown dramatically due to its strategic location at the heart of what has become known as ‘The Potteries’ the city was an industrial powerhouse. With the decline of industry due to reforms to home industries and an increase in competition from overseas, the city has been in more or less terminal decline and has struggled to grow for many years, only arresting a steady decline in population in recent years. The decline of the city has, furthermore, had a profound impact upon the identities and sense of purpose of its citizens and it is from here that the research grows and continues. Having examined the locality to understand its role in the lives of the city’s people, it is essential to also examine the wider political environment which has helped cause and compound the despair and negativity so heavily linked to the city at present. It is to this which we now turn and chapter three seeks to examine the role that the successive governments and the media have played in systematically undermining the position of the poor, thereby compounded the plight of the city’s inhabitants.

Chapter Three: Government, the media and the Welfare State

The aim of this chapter is to outline and discuss the changes which have been introduced by the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition to the social security system since the 2010 General Election. It will begin by outlining the changes that have been introduced before moving on to examine their implications. The intention of this chapter is to provide further context to the precarious existences which many of the participants in this research face whilst helping to shed some light on the ways in which their lives are influenced by political decision making, ideology and discourse and the impact that these have upon the wider population.

There has been a dramatic shift in the way that the social security debate has been approached by politicians and the media. Instead of the notion of a universal safety net provided under the Welfare State, social security has now been rebranded ‘welfare’ (such as in the case of the Welfare Reform Act 2012), and a renewed focus on the Victorian notion of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor has been attained. In line with this there have been considerable structural and political changes to the concept and role of social security within society alongside a rise in the demonization of the poor and unemployed which has seen social security no longer being seen as a safety net for people when things turn sour for them. Instead it has been branded ‘welfare’ and recipients as lazy, feckless scroungers. The chapter will focus, where possible upon using ‘social security’ in an attempt to retain the links to the purpose of the benefits and avoid the poisonous and divisive connotations with which the term ‘welfare’ is increasingly linked.

Representations of Work

Before examining the role of successive Governments in redefining and reducing the welfare state, however, it is important to highlight the way in which contemporary norms

surrounding attitudes to work and unemployment have been cast. Harry Braverman (1998 [1974]) argued that, as society evolved, there was to be an increasing risk that the lower classes would expand as increased competition would lead to suppressed and decreasing wages and a race to the bottom within society. In contrast to this, Robert Blauner (1964) predicted that the middle classes would expand as society prospered. Guy Standing's work (2011, 2013) supports the Braverman thesis arguing that the rise of neo-liberal economics in the 1970s was responsible for increased labour market flexibility and the transference of risk and insecurities onto workers and families (2011:1). He also goes on to highlight the increasing differences in earnings, with the top ten per cent increasing their earnings by over 80%, the middle 60 per cent seeing an overall decline in their share of earnings and a marginal increase for the bottom 20 per cent due to the redistributive effects of social security support (Ibid: 58). This highlights the concentration of wealth within the contemporary global society (which is further emphasised by the fact that the richest 85 people in the world share as much wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion (Oxfam, 2014)). Further evidence can be seen in the rate at which average wages have been outstripped by inflation. This has resulted in a general decline of incomes and living standards whilst at the same time grade inflation has led to degree holders filling many roles which would formerly have not required such advanced levels of formal education. It appears that Braverman's thesis was the more accurate of the two.

The results of this are highly complex and one of the outcomes of a move towards a late liberal-capitalist economy has seen the rise of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) in which society is cast in terms of the risks which actions and events pose. One such element of this relates to the actions of the individual and the role that one's actions have in determining what occurs to them; if you do not take the appropriate actions and safeguards, any negative outcomes are your own fault. In line with this, discourses drawing upon the idea that it is increasingly your own fault that you can't find work as

you are either too lazy or unwilling to accept work where it is presented to you have become normalized and people are now adjudged to be the cause of their own poverty in mainstream debates. In political and media representations of unemployment and poverty, divisive images depicting laziness and fecklessness among deprived communities are frequently drawn upon to support such discourses and advance the current hegemonic ideals. These norms have been developing since the 1980s when late liberal capitalist politics and economics began to strengthen its grip upon society. This has left the poor, unemployed, deprived and, (increasingly) young further marginalised and excluded economically and socially as they fail to comply with dominant expectations regarding employment (Standing, 2011; Winlow and Hall, 2013; Slater, 2014).

Because of this and the aforementioned grade inflation there are decreasing numbers of low skill-low pay jobs available for the former industrial working-classes to engage with. Meanwhile the hardening of attitudes in politics, the media and the public has meant that those not engaging in work, regardless of how degrading and remedial it may be, are side-lined and vilified, cast as a drain on resources and a threat to the social fabric due to their perceived lack of contribution. Among young people, those who do not possess higher qualifications are left with fewer opportunities (Standing, 2011) than someone who has been able to secure an apprenticeship or advance into higher education and who is able to use their training and education to try to advance their position. For those without qualifications, low-paid, low-skilled, work often awaits which fails to improve prospects and overwhelmingly leads to a life of poverty. In 2010, over 1.6 million young people of working age had no qualifications (Hasluck, 2011: vii) and despite the fact that the trend is towards increasing qualifications, the employment rate for people with no or low qualifications has worsened since 2008 (Ibid: viii). Despite the rhetoric stating that young people should aspire to 'get on in life' and that those who don't are failing

themselves and society (Morris, 2013), the reality is much harsher with fewer opportunities than the current political elite would like wider society to believe.

The impact of this for the individuals and communities is multifaceted due in part to the way in which former industrial communities grew up around places of work. Within Stoke-on-Trent it was common for workers to live in communities where much of the population were engaged in industry, in some cases living in housing close to the source of employment (Thomas and Hague, 2000) (see Figure 2). The closure of much of the city's industry has led to increasing concentrations of unemployment, deprivation and poverty; thereby increasing threats to the existence of many households, communities and identities. This, combined with the hardening of opinions towards unemployment (Park, Clery, Curtice, Phillips and Utting, 2012) and a perception of higher claimant levels than in reality (YouGov, 2012), has resulted in increasing numbers of people supporting the idea that people should receive less support as this will 'inspire them' to try harder to find work. This has coincided with increase in the targeting, public humiliation and stigmatising of the poor and unemployed, who are cast as 'feckless', 'lazy' and undeserving of support, which has also had a profound effect on the way that they feel about and carry themselves (Elizabeth Finn Trust 2012a, 2012b). These findings echo findings that the demonization of a group or individuals can have significant stigmatizing effects upon those targeted which can result in low self-esteem and self-worth (Goffman, 1990 [1963]; Tyler, 2013). This can lead to a range of reactions ranging from internalization of negative depictions and increased feelings of shame and inadequacy, to active attempts to resist as the individual seeks to provide themselves with an increased sense of self-worth and control. This is examined in greater detail in chapter seven.

Rolling back the Welfare State

The foundations for the path towards the current changes implemented by the Coalition under their continuing programme of austerity were laid for them by successive Conservative and New Labour governments since the 1980s. One of the most fundamental shifts which occurred during this time was a move away from the language of support and ‘social security’ towards the notions of ‘welfare’ and ‘dependency’ and this shift is particularly evident in the following two extracts from speeches by former Prime Minister Tony Blair and current Prime Minister David Cameron:

“...For 18 years, the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by government. They have been left out of growing prosperity, told that they were not needed, ignored by the Government except for the purpose of blaming them...There will be no forgotten people in the Britain I want to build. We need to act in a new way because fatalism, and not just poverty, is the problem we face, the dead weight of low expectations, the crushing belief that things cannot get better. I want to give people back the will to win again. ... But that cannot be done without a radical shift in our values and attitudes... Where opportunities are given, for example to young people, for real jobs and skills, there should be a *reciprocal duty on them to take them up*. We should encourage people...to get back into the labour market. This is empowerment not punishment... After several years of economic growth, five million people of working age live in homes where nobody works...For a generation of young men, little has come to replace the third of all manufacturing jobs that have been lost. *For part of a generation of young women early pregnancies and the absence of a reliable father almost guarantee a life of poverty*, and today Britain has a higher proportion of single parent families than anywhere else in Europe.... *Behind the statistics lie households where three generations have never had a job*. There are estates where the biggest employer is the drugs industry, where all that is left of the high hopes of the post-war planners is derelict concrete. Behind the statistics are people

who have lost hope, trapped in fatalism... Now at the close of the 20th century, *the decline of old industries and the shift to an economy based on knowledge and skills has given rise to a new class: a workless class.* In many countries - not just Britain - *a large minority is playing no role in the formal economy*, dependent on benefits and the black economy.”
(Tony Blair, speech at the Aylesbury Estate, Southwark, 2nd June 1997 [my emphasis throughout])

Meanwhile, in 2012, David Cameron, said the following as part of a speech at Kent’s Bluewater shopping centre:

Today, *almost one pound in every three spent by the Government goes on welfare* ...Take a couple living outside London. He’s a hospital porter, she’s a care-worker. They’re both working full-time and together they take home £24,000 after tax. They’d love to start having children - and they know they’d get some help from the state if they did so...they feel they should keep saving up for a few more years. But the couple down the road, who have four children, haven’t worked for a number of years. Each week they get...more than £27,000 a year. Even after the £26,000 benefit cap is introduced, they’ll still take home more than their neighbours who go out to work every day. Can we really say that’s fair?...Then there’s another woman living down the street. She’s only 19 years-old and doesn’t have a job but is already living in a house with her friends...we have, in some ways, created a welfare gap in this country between those living long-term in the welfare system and those outside it. Those within it grow up with a series of expectations: you can have a home of your own, the state will support you whatever decisions you make, you will always be able to take out no matter what you put in. This has sent out some incredibly damaging signals. That it pays not to work. That you are owed something for nothing. It gave us millions of working-age people sitting at home on benefits even before the recession hit. *It created a culture of entitlement.* And it has led to huge resentment amongst those who pay into the system, because they feel that what they’re having to work hard for, others are getting without having to put in the effort...for literally millions, the

passage to independence is several years living in their childhood bedroom as they save up to move out. While for many others, it's a trip to the council where they can get housing benefit at 18 or 19 - even if they're not actively seeking work... Perversely, the benefits system encourages this process from one generation to the next..." (Extracts from a speech by Prime Minister David Cameron at Bluewater, Kent, Monday 25th June, 2012 [my emphasis throughout]).

There are striking similarities within the two speeches and in the wider rhetoric deployed by New Labour and the Coalition towards social security recipients. Despite the construction of Blair's speech as indicating that society has played a role through neglecting to support and include all as it advanced, there are statements, including that of there being households with three generations out of work and the idea of there being 'a workless class' which have become commonplace today. As can be seen in the language deployed in both speeches, there is a clear divide being created between the idea of a 'normal', hard-working moral majority who are propping up society and a disengaged, anomic 'workless class' dominating the lower echelons of society. The divisive depictions of society have served to cause a series of moral panics (Cohen, 2011) and provide prime examples of what Dee Cook has termed '*scroungermania*' (2006: 53). This has polarised opinion within society and led increasingly to the marginalisation and stigmatization of the poor, unemployed and deprived - pitching 'workers' against 'shirkers' and reinvigorating Victorian distinctions of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Moreover, for all of the vitriol which has been espoused by the Coalition, many of the ideas are far from new; Iain Duncan Smith's (unfounded) claims that there are three generations of families which have never worked; a large minority threatening to overtake society; and cultures of dependency, have all become deeply entrenched in society and increasingly accepted as 'normal' viewpoints. It is precisely because of the manner unemployment, 'worklessness' and dependency have been portrayed for such a

prolonged period that such discourses have become increasingly normalized within society thus helping to explain why there has been such popular support for the regressive and abject treatment of the poor within contemporary British society. As can be seen, the two extracts are strikingly similar, with a strong focus upon portraying those out of work as different and undeserving of support. Within David Cameron's speech, furthermore the divisive nature of the current rhetoric being espoused by the Coalition Government, and in particular the Conservative elements thereof, are particularly evident. The spectre of several folk devils; migrants; the unemployed; large, benefit-dependent families and the 'lazy' and 'feckless' poor are conjured up to support his ideas and claims, drawing upon common-sense (in so much as they are common and therefore must make sense) notions of who does or does not deserve support and the idea that they are an anomic drain upon society.

Something which has also become increasingly prevalent is the manner in which rhetoric is being used to conflate 'welfare' with unemployment, laziness and fecklessness. For instance, whilst David Cameron stated that "*almost one pound in every three spent by the Government goes on welfare*" he ignored the fact that in excess of fifty per cent of this is spent on pensions and pension credits, whereas approximately three per cent is spent on Jobseekers' Allowance (Rogers, 2013). This is not an isolated incident and similar evidence emerges when examining the construction of benefit fraud. Benefit fraud, overpayment by the Department for Work and Pensions and genuine error on the part of either the claimant or the DWP have all been conflated. Furthermore, the levels of fraud even when conflated with error and overpayment, is still considerably lower than the levels of underpayment and unclaimed benefits to which people are entitled (DWP, 2014). Accordingly, the deliberate conflation of different elements and misrepresentation of facts is having a profound influence upon public perceptions.

Thus the previously universally accepted idea of support for all under the ‘Welfare State’ had been eroded. Alongside this there has been an increase in moves to increase individual responsibility and an increase in the sensationalising of those deemed to be deviant compared with the norm. As is initially evident in Tony Blair’s speech in 1997, New Labour paved the way for the Coalition on this matter. Two of the main focuses under New Labour were ‘responsible parenting’ and reducing childhood poverty: helping families to better provide for, educate and support their children, with schemes such as parenting classes; teaching families deemed to have poor parenting skills the correct way to bring up their children (Lister, 1998; Goldson, 2002; Walker and Wiseman, 2003; Daly, 2010), and decreasing levels of perceived ‘welfare dependency’ (Walker and Wiseman, 2003). This has paved the way for the Coalition’s more forthright attacks on the system. In another key change under the Conservatives and New Labour the idea of social security as a safety net for people who found themselves out of work was also slowly eroded. The replacing of Unemployment Benefit with Job Seeker’s Allowance between 1995 and 1996 under the Conservative Government of the time proved a key step in this. Add to this the increasing conditionality which has been continually introduced since New Labour and it becomes increasingly apparent that the current reforms and further strengthening of conditionality under the Coalition have been slowly shored up in the background by successive governments.

After coming to power in 2010 the Coalition tasked itself with cutting the UK’s ‘record budget deficit’ and paying down the national debt by 2015. A key element of this was to be carried out by implementing a series of cuts to the ‘bloated public sector’⁴ and civil service, with the social security being one of the major casualties having seen £35.9 billion cut from the ‘welfare’ budget alone by 2013 (Joyce and Phillips, 2013: 181). What

⁴ See for example Prince (2010) and o’Grady (2013) for two readily available examples

has become increasingly clear over the course of the past four years, however, is that the reforms to government funding have been heavily influenced by the ideological drive of the leadership of the Government. Whilst cuts were initially slated as being temporary with the aim of reducing spending to a manageable level, David Cameron announced that he intends to maintain the Coalition's version of austerity permanently (Morris, 2013). Furthermore, with the Coalition standing by its commitment to a 'triple lock' of increasing state pensions by the highest indicator of either CPI, the rise in average earnings or 2.5%, the cuts being made from other sections of the social security budget are effectively being moved from a precarious population to those in society who are more likely to vote on election day. This risks further marginalisation as they are coerced into complying with others' versions of 'normality' The remainder of this chapter will focus upon analysing the cuts and reforms which have been implemented under the Coalition and examining their impacts.

Following the Welfare Reform Act of 2012, an estimated £20 billion is due to be saved through the Coalition's reforms to social security funding by 2015 compared with 2011 expenditure (National Audit Office, 2011: 5), whilst local authorities across the country had their budgets reduced by of 28% by 2014-15 (HM Treasury, 2010: 49). These savings were anticipated to come from a combination of elements including reforming the way that benefits are paid under Universal Credit (including altering the conditions under which benefits are paid and withdrawn) and limiting further increases. A non-exhaustive list of key cuts and reforms which have been implemented to date are, along with a brief outline of what each entails, is listed in Table 5.

Reform	Description
Benefits Cap	Individual household benefits are now limited to a maximum of £26,000 per annum for a family or £18,200 for a single person household where no-one is in work.
Up-rating of Benefits	All social security benefits bar pensions will be up-rated by 1% per annum each year to 2015/16 instead of in line with inflation.
Replacing Council Tax Benefit with Council Tax Support	Local councils are now responsible for setting Council Tax Levels with large variations nationally. E.g. Stoke-on-Trent City Council now charges a minimum of 30% for all households that are not exempt.
Introducing the Spare Room Subsidy (Bedroom Tax)	All council and social housing occupants deemed under-occupying have their Housing Benefits reduced by either 14% or 25% depending on the number of rooms deemed to be 'under occupied'.
Increasing the waiting time to sign on	Any wishing to sign-on must now wait a minimum of 7 days (up from the previous 3 days) before they are able to claim out-of-work benefits.
Introducing Universal Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - paying all benefits in 1, monthly lump sum. - Reducing the taper rate for reductions in benefits to 65% when in work.
Introducing Job Seeker's Claimant Commitment	A prescriptive agreement that anyone wishing to make a claim under Universal Credit must sign, agreeing to undertake particular activities to either seek work, improve training or seek further/better paid work. Failure to do so could result in sanctions. (Sample copy in Appendix B).

Table 5: Key welfare reforms under the Coalition (Duncan Smith, Freud, Mcvey, and Harper, 2013)

Each of the cuts and reforms detailed in Table 5 has the potential to seriously impact upon the lives of those affected by these changes. Combined they pose a serious threat to the lifestyles of anyone in receipt of them. To highlight these threats, four examples from the list above will receive further attention: the up-rating of benefits by 1%; the implementation of Universal Credit; the move to Council Tax Support and the implementation of the Bedroom Tax, to highlight this.

Due to a perceived unfairness in the system, whereby a disproportionately small number of people are eligible to claim more than the average working family takes home after taxation (£26,000 when the cap was first considered in 2011), a national benefit cap has been rolled out limiting the benefits that a family is able to claim to £500 per week, or £300 for a single person. The main arguments put forward to support such a cap portrayed this perceived unfairness as a national travesty with some families have been able to claim in excess of £100,000 per annum yet evidence indicates that there are only five such families (DWP, 2010) with the vast majority of families receiving well below this; regardless of whether or not they are in work (DWP, 2012b). The stated aim of this is to prevent anyone from having a higher income through social security support alone, than the mean earned income after income tax and national insurance in 2011 and at the time of writing, over 19,000 households have been affected by the cap as it is rolled out (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b), with more expected as national coverage is eventually achieved. It is then becoming increasingly evident that people reliant upon Housing Benefit to support their rent will be priced out of more expensive areas (most notably the South of England and London) due to the restrictions upon their incomes. These families are increasingly being exported elsewhere resulting in concentrations of poverty in 'cheaper' more deprived areas of the country. One such case of this was reported in Stoke-on-Trent where Newham Council began exploring the possibility of placing families in other parts of the country to save costs, much to the concern of local charity Brighter Futures who exposed said plans (Bowater, 2013).

In what is perhaps the harshest and most cynical of the changes to the social security system, as of April 2013 the Government also began charging what it dubbed a 'Spare Room Subsidy', better known as the Bedroom Tax (which will be used herein). Under the Bedroom Tax, where people living in social and council housing are deemed to be 'under occupying' their home; in itself a contentious issue given the needs of some households,

they are having their housing benefit entitlement reduced by between 14% (for one spare bedroom) and 25% (for two or more spare bedrooms). This represents a cut of, on average, £14-£16 per week according to Government figures (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012a), and is on top of the other changes already discussed. Furthermore, the cynical manner in which it has been implemented - retrospectively charging anyone living in their existing property, rather than people moving into new properties, means that many households are stuck paying the extra because there are simply not enough smaller properties available for them to move into (National Housing Federation, 2013). This cut has already impacted upon 522,000 households (DWP, n.d., b) and housing associations quickly reported an increase in rental arrears as a result (Apps, 2013; Conway, 2013). At the same time, many households which are going to be affected by these changes are also affected by the move to Council Tax Support. The previous system of Council Tax Benefit which used to cover full Council Tax costs for eligible parties has been scrapped and the power to set council tax rates for people and households in receipt of benefits has been devolved to local councils, resulting in variations in the way that it has been implemented. Whilst some councils have decided to retain full exemptions for people formerly eligible under Council Tax Benefit, in the case of Stoke-on-Trent all households must pay at least 30% of council tax if they are in receipt of benefit payments unless the occupant(s) of the property are under 25 and actively seeking work; receiving Employment Support Allowance; of pensionable age or entitled to a Severe Disability Premium (Stoke on Trent City Council, n.d., b). Unless a household is eligible for full exemption, the minimum that they will have to pay in a Band A property in Stoke-on-Trent will be £285.74 per year, equating to £5.50 per week. When coupled with other changes, particularly for households hit by the Bedroom Tax, however, this means that household incomes will be reduced by in the region of £20 *per*

week; a significant amount for a household with a low income and an already highly precarious existence.

In further changes, despite current social security spending levels on working age benefits for the unemployed being lower than at their peak in the mid-1990s (Cribb, Joyce and Phillip, 2012), the Coalition has limited the uprating of all social security payments, with the exception of the State Pension, by 1% for until 2015/2016. The expected savings for the Government are estimated to be in the region of £3.7 billion (Newson, 2013: 2), however this will result in a huge squeeze on the finances of individuals and families reliant upon the support to survive. An estimated 9.8 million families are expected to be affected, including over 7 million of which have at least one member of the household in work (Institute for Fiscal Studies, cited in Newson, 2013: 12). This is in stark contrast to other social security systems around Europe. Prior to the changes the UK was on a par with the EU average for welfare support although it lagged well behind other leading nations in the European Union and most notably France and Germany. A key distinction with the French and German systems is the retention of more socially derived approaches to social security than is currently being used in the UK which has been moving progressively towards a more US based workfare model (OECD, 2013). Because of the reforms the disposable income of many low-income and benefit reliant families will be reduced considerably regardless of whether or not they are in work and there is a real risk of increased poverty among these families as a result. All of this comes at a time when there has already been a significant increase in the use of food banks throughout the UK; something which is likely to continue until action is taken to improve living conditions and household incomes through means including introducing a living wage and providing incentives rather than simply increased coercion, to get people into work. Given that people are already having to pay out considerably more where affected by the Bedroom Tax and Council Tax Support changes, the move to limit the uprating of

benefits by one per cent means that incomes and support will be further eroded, pushing people either into poverty or deeper into it where they are already there.

Lastly, under Iain Duncan-Smith's flagship project Universal Credit, the Department of Work and Pensions intends to make fundamental changes to the way that social security benefits are paid. Rather than a number of payments being made throughout the month all monies will be paid to a recipient on the same day and recipients will now have to wait for seven days before being eligible to make a new claim when out of work, rather than the previous three days. Whilst contingencies are being put in place for people who find themselves in repeatedly short-term jobs to expedite their claims and reduce the risk of them finding themselves destitute, this has the potential to pose serious problems for many people for a number of reasons. Despite the fact that the Government insists that a single monthly payment will encourage people to budget more responsibly (another return to the responsabilization agenda), many people working in low paid and service industry occupations rely on weekly or fortnightly pay. Thus, having to wait four weeks for a sum well below what they would have received whilst in work has the potential, when combined with other changes, to push people into debt, poverty and towards loan sharks and payday lenders. Therefore there is a real risk that people living a precarious existence and who, for one reason or another often find themselves between jobs, will end up suffering disproportionately.

Another important aspect of the introduction of Universal Credit is that all recipients must sign a 'Claimant Commitment' detailing activities which they have agreed to undertake as part of a plan drawn up with a 'work coach' (DWP, n.d., b) and stick rigidly to this agreement. Should this agreement be breached, there is a threat of sanctions; another element which has seen renewed focus and vigour. Whilst the use of conditionality in claiming benefits is far from a new thing, and has the potential to provide support to people in receipt of social security (Rolfe, 2012; Griggs and Evans,

2010; Gregg, 2008), the additional conditions being placed on people seeking either work, training or more work (in the case of the under-employed in particular), have the potential to undermine the overall aims of the scheme. Evidence of this can be seen in a pilot run between April and October 2010, initially under the previous New Labour Government, within which concerns were raised by both recipients and advisors regarding the effectiveness of some of the training and a lack of credit being given for activities that a person may have been undertaking off of their own back (particularly with regard to training and reskilling) (Rolfe, 2012). That same report also alluded to the fact that there was a fundamental lack of understanding as to the benefits of some courses for the people referred to them, highlighting either poor organisation and targeting of the courses, or a communication breakdown when relaying such information. It is then imperative to ensure that the correct balance is struck between providing ‘a carrot’ (effective training and engagement) and ‘a stick’ (coercive sanctions designed to ensure people remain engaged in the programmes). At present, however, the implementation of increasing both the number of reasons a sanction can be applied and increasingly severe sanctions of between four weeks and three years, combined with a dramatic increase in the number of sanctions imposed over the past year⁵ indicates that the scales have been unbalanced in favour of coercion rather than positive encouragement. Studies have indicated that the effect of this will be to push people to attend courses and programmes solely to ensure that they are still able to afford to live but without engaging effectively in them (Gregg, 2008; Rolfe, 2012). Related to this are concerns that people will not be left with enough time to look for meaningful employment if forced to do 40 hours of activities on a mandated programme, which could potentially serve to increase periods of

⁵ Recent evidence from the DWP indicates that the number of sanctions issued have increased from, 499,000 between November 2011 and June 2012 to 553,000 between November 2012 and June 2013 (DWP, 2013a).

unemployment at a time when there is a desperate push to reduce this (Rolfe, 2012). As such, a fundamental problem with the current strategy is that it relies almost entirely on adopting a ‘stick’ to coerce people into compliance whilst making the ‘carrot’ redundant. The focus has been on pushing people into any job to get them off of benefits and reducing the level of support available by a combination of decreased eligibility and increased hoops to jump through. This is instead of seeking to increase wages and incomes for low-paid jobs and low-income households and improving the work and pay conditions for those seeking either work, or more work.

Government, Policy and the Media

It has been repeatedly argued that the cuts and reforms implemented by the Coalition were necessary to fix ‘Broken Britain’ and the ‘Dependency Culture’ (Conservative Party, 2010) within society. As already noted, this process is not new and Cook (2006) has shown that it was in the years that followed the dawn of the Thatcher government in 1979 which heralded the birth of *scroungermania* (Ibid: 53) which saw a marked increase in negative depictions and treatment of the unemployed and people reliant upon social security for support. One of the main stated reasons for the intended reforms to the social security system is because of the systematic abuse by many recipients who have been variously branded ‘feckless’, ‘benefit dependent’, ‘skiving’ and ‘scroungers’. It has been difficult to go for more than a few of days without seeing reports in the press sensationalising someone for benefit fraud or receiving far more than they should be entitled to. Statistics have been repeatedly touted highlighting levels of ‘welfare dependency’ throughout the UK and perceived levels of unfairness as some households took home more in benefits alone than others earned in a single year despite apparently not engaging with the labour market. Examples of this abuse of the system were rife, with repeated policy and news stories documenting the way in which people were abusing the system including:

- *200 Families are on £61k benefits*, (The Sun, 9th Jan 2012).
- *£100,000 benefits cheat who claimed she could barely walk enjoyed jet-set lifestyle with 'carer' husband (who had a £72,000 job in Far East)* (Daily Mail 4th April 2012).
- *Benefit Cheat who claimed thousands pretending to be disabled caught lifting furniture* (Daily Express, 4th Nov 2013).
- *Benefit cheat pretended she was lesbian to hide her relationship with the father of her children to steal £18,000 from the taxpayer* (Daily Mail, 22nd Oct 2013).

These examples indicate that there are some families and households who do receive more than the average or have fraudulently claimed support. Digging a little deeper however it becomes clear that many of these sensationalist stories are just that; designed to elicit particular responses from the public in order to support either the Government or that particular broadcaster or editor's agenda. For example, in the case of the households taking home in excess of £100,000 per year in benefits, it later transpired that only five households in the country received that much, and that the overwhelming majority of households in receipt of support receive less than £5,200 per year (DWP 2012b). Furthermore, the notion that people are not seeking work hard enough has been repeatedly challenged by polls, surveys and official statistics which show that there have persistently been more than three people claiming JSA for every job on the Job Centre Plus' books (this does not include people who are not on the Job Centre's books for any given reason, whether it be because they are ineligible to claim, or have stopped claiming) (ONS, 2014c), but that a second significant issue now relates to levels of *underemployment*.

As highlighted above the Government has repeatedly used a range of information to support its position drawn from a number of sources including think tanks, wider studies, polls on public opinion and data gained under the previous Government. What is troubling though is the influence that the language employed by successive governments

has been having upon wider beliefs. Whilst it is impossible to say outright that the changes in public opinion is because of the use of increased negative portrayals of poor families in deprived communities there is a strong correlation between the shift in language, the increasing number of negative media portrayals, and the hardening of wider public opinion and the way that people see themselves (see chapter seven for wider discussions).

It is important to remember that the shifts in language and rhetoric are not new phenomena. The previous Conservative Government began the process, importing ideologies and terminologies from the US which were then adopted and built upon by New Labour. Since the recession hit in 2008 however, there has been a marked shift in the language used by politicians and the media, depicting people reliant upon social security in an increasingly negative light (Elizabeth Finn Trust, 2012a; 2012b). Moreover, after the Coalition came to power, the intensity with which the attacks on the ‘welfare’ system and recipients of benefits payments have been carried out has increased dramatically. As can be seen in table seven, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of terms including “dependency”, “entrenched” and “addiction” compared with previous Governments, as well as increasing references to fraud, which has been mentioned 85 times in the year April 2012-April 2013, compared with no use at all by Labour in their final year in power (Walker, 2013).

Term	Usage by DWP Ministers	Usage by the Opposition
Dependency	38	7
Entrenched	15	1
Addiction	41	0

Table 6: Key terms used by Ministers when speaking about welfare recipients between April 2012 and April 2013, Source: Walker (2013).

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the terminology used by ministers is being adopted by, and *is* influencing, the terminology and portrayals depicted in the media. The media has been identified by the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) as being a

particularly effective medium for the transmission of news and events, as well as informing people's understanding and the order in which events are viewed; "it sets the agenda." (GUMG, 1982: 1). In doing so, the media plays a pivotal role, along with policymakers, in directing what is likely to dominate news and wider discussions. This has led them to the conclusion that "[t]he news is a manufactured product that is organised and constructed from within very limited ways of seeing the world." (Ibid: 8). In line with this, Anthony Giddens has argued that "In conditions of modernity...the media do not mirror realities but in some part form them" (1991: 27).

So, whilst some elements of the media, particularly the ideologically driven Daily Mail and highly populist Sun have a proven track record in sensationalising stories to support the agenda of their owners and editors, reports by Turn2us have indicated that there was a significant increase in the use of negative terminology regarding unemployment, disability, people eligible for social security support and key out-of-work benefits across a broad spectrum of tabloids and broadsheets in the run up to the 2010 election and beyond (Elizabeth Finn Trust, 2012a). Moreover, their report shows that there is a perceived increase in stigma among those on the receiving end of such portrayals (Ibid). This stigmatisation is in spite of the fact that in many cases benefit recipients rarely spend prolonged periods claiming support (their analysis shows "less than half of Jobseeker's Allowance recipients claim the benefit for more than 13 weeks, and less than ten per cent claim for more than a year." (Ibid, 2012b: 12)). In an additional challenge to the government's arguments that vast swathes of the population have been 'languishing on benefits' under New Labour, the levels of recipients fell consistently from August 1995 when the Conservatives were last in power, to August 2009 when the country was experiencing the full impact of the recession. Levels fell again between August 2009 and 2010, when they subsequently stagnated for at least a year under the Coalition as businesses closed their doors and an indiscriminate axe was taken to the public sector

(Ibid: 5). This supports the findings of the GUMG who noted that where disproportionate coverage of (for example) unemployment and social security receipt is provided in the context of ‘dealing with the deficit’, so public perceptions are influenced (Glasgow University Media Group, 1982: 1-3).

	Perception	Reality
% of social security budget spent on unemployed people	41%	3%
% social security budget claimed fraudulently	27%	0.7%
% people claiming Job Seeker’s Allowance for more than 12 months	48%	27.8%
Amount of JSA received by an unemployed couple with 2 children	£147	£113.70*

Table 7: Key statistics from YouGov/TUC survey results 11th-12th December 2012 comparing public perceptions of key welfare facts, source: YouGov (2012).

***This figure has been revised up from the £111.45 cited in the YouGov/TUC report following an increase in the 2013 and 2014 financial years.**

Perhaps predictably then, there is evidence that tactics involving conflating discussions around divisive topics has led to the permeation of these arguments into the wider public consciousness. For example social security, Mr Cameron’s statement that “£1 in every £3 is spent on welfare” conveniently ignores the high proportion of this expenditure going on pensions and pension credits.

Table 7 draws upon a 2012 YouGov/TUC survey and shows that perceptions of recipients, fraud and cheating the system are considerably out of kilter with the reality.

This indicates that the disproportionate negative coverage of social security recipients has, in part at least, distorted perceptions compared with reality.

The YouGov and Elizabeth Finn Trust reports also highlight another problem and that is that the figures being reported, regardless of whether they are in favour of reducing support or enhancing it, vary wildly from organisation to organisation, even where they are fighting the same corner. A prime example of this can be seen in the reporting of long-term unemployment levels with Elizabeth Finn Trust reporting 10% of recipients going on to claim for over 12 months and YouGov reporting 27.8%. Discerning between the Truth and 'the truth' is then increasingly difficult given the minefield of information and misinformation available and thereby highlighting the impact of media portrayals and data manipulation in framing arguments around social security.

Related to all of the above is the underlying risk based agenda to increase the level of individual responsibility that people are expected to take for themselves. The agenda, which increases the pressure on people in all aspects of life from actively working to mitigate any risks (for example: eating healthily, avoiding 'dangerous' situations, not smoking, protecting their property) has seen people increasingly deemed liable for negative experiences in their life. Furthermore, at the time of writing, David Cameron, had stated that the reason for there being so few people from poor and ethnic minority families in top positions, whether in government, the civil service or the private sector, is because they do not have high enough aspirations to raise themselves up the social ladder and are failing themselves (Dominiczak, 2013). This serves to provide an example of the way in which young people and people living in deprived communities are increasingly being constructed as responsible for the environment in which they live and shows that there is waning concern among policy makers for structural issues including health and education inequalities within such deprived communities. David Cameron's statement is

not an isolated occurrence. Increasingly, rather than positive incentives to engaging with the labour market including working to increase the minimum wage or move towards a living wage, the DWP is increasingly relying on coercion, including dramatically increasing the use of sanctions, to push people into work. Whilst this goal may appear attractive to a wider audience, it risks trapping people in jobs with low pay and low advancement prospects where they may formerly have been looking for meaningful employment with a long-term career trajectory. This trapping is, again, being painted as peoples' own fault through lacking the aspiration (rather than the time and resources) to move up the social ladder to a position in which they would ideally like to find themselves.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of the chapter has been to help set the scene for the subsequent analyses conducted to examine some of the impacts of unemployment and crime within Stoke-on-Trent. The chapter has briefly discussed the longer term role of consecutive Governments in paving the way for the latest attacks by the Coalition upon the welfare state, arguing that the political terminology and rhetoric being employed has been reflected in the public press and resulted in a powerful shift in opinions related to the Welfare State and social security support.

The changes are having a profound impact upon the lives of people who are affected by them with a dramatic increase in the number of households relying upon food banks to support themselves and increased hardship among families facing the 'Bedroom Tax'. Furthermore, with over £105million per year being removed from Stoke-on-Trent due to cuts in the social security budget, it is likely that there will be a disastrous impact on the lives of the individuals and families living and working within the city.

Chapter Four: Excavating Working-Class Identity

The homogeneity of *habitus* that is observed within the limits of a class of conditions of existence and social conditionings is what causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted. (Bourdieu, 1990:58)

Work has, for a long time, been seen as essential to working-class identity, providing senses of belonging, purpose and recognition as well as defining roles in the workplace and the home (Durkheim, 1984; Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001). It has become apparent that the loss of work among the working-classes leaves a discernible void in the lives of those affected where work was once one of the central pillars around which they construct their identity and understanding of their world. This plays out in many ways, however when talking about deindustrialisation and the impact that this has upon communities such as Stoke-on-Trent, the idea that the city has declined and is a mere shadow of its former self is often accepted as gospel with little critique as to why this is and what the impact that the withdrawal of work has upon an individual's sense of self.

In this chapter I seek to address this void by charting the rise of the importance of work for defining the identities of members of the working-classes and the formation of new forms of solidarity, identity, place and belonging as society moved away from an agrarian society dependent upon mechanical forms of solidarity towards industrial society reliant upon organic solidarity to unite people and provide that sense of belonging which people are so often seen to depend upon. The loss of work in post-industrial communities will subsequently be examined to understand why the loss of work and industry has had such a prolific influence over peoples' lives not just in terms of income and employment but also through posing significant questions and challenges to individuals' understandings of themselves and their role in society. This will pave the way for subsequent analysis in

later chapters in which I seek to examine the participants' understandings of themselves, their life to date, where they see it going and how their experiences have influenced them, their actions and choices.

Formation of the Working-Classes

In pre-modern society, communities were close knit with a large number of small rural communities and a small number of larger, although still relatively low density urban townships and cities. As a result society was governed by locally reinforced moral boundaries with said boundaries being continually reasserted via religious doctrine (Weber, 2002) as well as continual informal observation and surveillance by one's peers. This was not, however to last and under modernity society increasingly moved toward more concentrated areas of production with a dramatic growth in the populations of towns and cities. As new technologies were invented larger scale industries grew and demand for labour increased. Because the existing urban population was unable to sustain such growth on its own people moved from far and wide and became increasingly concentrated in rapidly growing towns and cities all over Europe (see chapter two for a discussion on the growth of Stoke-on-Trent). Durkheim (1984) posited that as western society continued to move from an agrarian, mechanical society in which people existed in small communities bound by a moral code which governed life in those communities to predominantly industrial urban hubs with less informal social order due to the more chaotic structuring of urban society, so the moral order started to falter. Accordingly, new means of reinforcing moral order and societal boundaries were required and thus the division of labour became increasingly prominent due to the way in which "industrial processes integrate each worker's task and with those of other workers" (MacCannell, 1977: 302).

For Durkheim, the failure of mechanical solidarity to bind people to one another was due to a breakdown in the social bonds tying people to one another because of the depersonalising effect of urban life which posed a threat to the ontological security of those who live in such an environment. It was these informal social control mechanisms found in mechanical society which regulated communal practice and served to bind inhabitants of a community to it through the construction and deployment of a moral social order based around the division of labour. As society moved away from smaller communal villages and towards larger urban hubs, it became imperative to keep people bound together, reinforcing senses of solidarity in order to maintain the social fabric in the face of fewer, weaker social ties within society. Alongside the rise of industrial populations, increased divisions among workers arose as they were increasingly required to specialise in their own field and this had the benefit of increasing levels of solidarity as it became imperative for people to rely increasingly upon fellow tradespersons in the exchange of skills, products and knowledge. The result of this ever increasing division of labour meant that not only did people become increasingly specialised in their roles, but so did entire communities, towns and cities, for example the Potteries in North Staffordshire, Manchester's cotton mills, the dockyards in the North East and coastal communities, and the collieries and steel mills of the Midlands and North of England. This led to an increase in the interdependencies of both people and communities; both urban and rural, and thus peoples' reliance upon one another engendered new forms of solidarity.

These solidarities and distinctions were not, however forged purely by an increased reliance upon others for sources of trade and other goods. Industrial labour was, and continues to be, hard, backbreaking and uninviting work in dangerous environments characterised by long hours and low pay, frequently resulting in long term health issues and low life expectancies (Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001). In order to engender

solidarity in such an unnatural environment therefore, other means were also required. A multitude of institutions designed to control and regulate an increasingly divided population therefore evolved in the place of former informal community enforcement and the role of religious institutions in society. These new institutions; the criminal justice system, education system, prisons, the formalisation of the military and the factory, all resulted in the increased deployment of technologies of the self; training bodies and minds to fulfil specific roles on society from an early age and increasingly pushing for increased docility and in turn allowing for easier manipulation (Foucault, 1991). They were also designed to further support the division of labour by training people to fulfil these roles but also to regulate an increasingly diverse society in which people were undertaking a wider range of increasingly specialised roles. Moreover, they were filled with experts: teachers, doctors, judges, the police, psychiatrists and countless other professionals, all tasked with maintaining the current order to ensuring that industrial, organic solidarity was both engendered and maintained from an early stage. Society had to become more flexible and able to evolve in order to accommodate these changes whilst also maintaining order and thus organic forms of solidarity further evolved.

Following such an approach it becomes evident that power exercised over individuals as they were pushed to fill increasingly niche roles was an important element in the formation of the industrial working-classes. Power and knowledge, two mutually sustaining concepts, worked in tandem to create and maintain institutional apparatus and technologies of control, best accessed and utilised by those with higher status within society, to maintain existing social norms (Foucault, 1980). Norms are produced and maintained through the exercising of disciplinary power (Foster and Spencer, 2012: 26) and exist in order to maintain and reinforce dominant positions at that time (Foucault 1980). This infers that norms and normality are formed to advance the interests of a particular viewpoint within society at the behest of others. They tend to be informed and

directed through the deployment of discourses which are often most accessible by those with greater resources and ‘capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986 in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119) who are better able to reinforce the position of the powerful in society. Norms are, however, neither static nor concrete and continually evolve over time as new knowledge is both discovered and created (Stoeva, 2009: 5) which in turn helps to direct and inform the prevailing discourses within society, providing key reference points to social, moral and legal boundaries surrounding what is and isn’t acceptable, ‘normal’ behaviour. An additional role that they serve is to outline the potential consequences for people who do not conform to these norms; the coercive nature of which receives considerably more attention further in the chapter. Discourses are “...a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his continuity with himself may be determined. It is a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is employed.” (Foucault, 2002 [1969]: 60) something which Steve Hall has taken to mean that discourses are:

“a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment...Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But...since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect’ (Hall, 1992:291 cited in Hall, 2011 [2001]: 72).

The subject’s position is created in and through discourse and, furthermore, the way in which we understand ourselves and our position within society is directly influenced through the prevailing discursive realities of our time. Where people were required to take on increasingly specialised, albeit still low and semi-skilled roles in industry so increasing numbers of people were drawn into the industrial powerhouses which dominated modernity. Within Stoke-on-Trent people were increasingly engaged in key industries including coal and clay mining, steel working and the potteries. Because of

this it is possible to begin to see the way in which employment, especially as a result of one's increasing specialisation, became evermore important to what became the working-classes because it came to dominate their lives in a way not experienced by the middle or leisure classes. Associated with the division of labour which required people to become increasingly specialised in their roles an individual is increasingly subjected to technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988). Foucault identified four such 'technologies':

"(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality." (Ibid: 18)

Foucault went on to on to argue that "these four types of technology hardly ever function separately, although each of them is associated with a certain type of domination" (Ibid). Each of the technologies involves training the subject to build particular skill sets or attitudes and, whilst technologies of the self are mainly associated with particular forms of domination, they are equally related to *production* (Burkitt, 2002: 221). This occurs because these technologies apportion people to fill particular roles in order to produce specific goods but also produce associations between people and forms of identity related to the role that one fulfils. Drawing on this then, technologies of the self do not have to dominate an individual's life course or belief system in their entirety as there is still room for reflexivity and rational thinking and actions (Burkitt, 2002: 225) based upon their own understandings which have gained through years of experience. The fact that union

organisation, strikes and community action arose, shows that wherever power is prevalent, so resistance can arise (Foucault, 1990: 95-96) and thus there is scope for someone to choose elements of their own path and influence their own identity beyond that which the power structures prevalent in society appear to imply; something which will be seen as being crucial to contemporary experiences within the working-classes discussed later. Moreover, the productive aspects of the previously discussed technologies mean that these technologies, whilst associated with degrees of domination, also provide significant room for the appropriation of the technologies, particularly with regard to the deployment of signs and signifiers both on the body and soul but also between people and communities which in turn forges the unities required to retain solidarity in an increasingly pressurised and depersonalised society.

As such the technologies of the self which Foucault has identified are closely related to the role of the individual within Durkheim's organic society which is so heavily reliant upon the division of labour to engender the new forms of solidarity it requires. It emphasises Foucault's wider arguments surrounding power and the fact that power is not only disciplinary and controlling but also productive; improving the means of production within society whilst engendering solidarity and new identities. The factory, mine, dockyard and pot bank all further served to assist in this process. As already noted, they were and are not 'nice' places to work with workers labouring long hours to produce the wares that the factory owners and consumers demanded. Thus they were increasingly forced to co-operate and coexist in order to work towards the collective aims of the factory owners and paymasters. Through being pushed into such conditions, similarities of understanding arose, along with dress, language, actions and a working-class, industrial bodily hexis becomes inscribed on the bodies and in the activities of the working-classes (Bufton, 2003:212). For the purposes of the argument laid out in this thesis, a hexis is a form of social or personal stability that is not a given – it has to be

acquired, learned and habituated. It is “constitutive of the person, insofar as it has ‘become through length of time part of a man’s nature and irremediable or exceedingly hard to change’ (Aristotle, 1963: 24)” (Carlisle, 2013:33). Much like the concept of the *habitus* (of which *hexis* is the precursor of (Ibid)), the *hexis* provides an integral part of the individual, influencing their understanding and decision making processes.

The inscribing of a particular working-class *hexis* upon the individual was, and continues to play a pivotal role in the decision making process of the individual. This process was supported by the rise of working-class communities whereby class based habituses established themselves as a result of the experiences shared within communities. To further develop these senses of solidarity, and as has been discussed in chapter two, workers frequently lived in close proximity to their source of employment in small, cramped accommodation so that they were able to easily access work and could hear the bells calling them to and from their station (see Figure 2). This meant that not only did communities arise based around specific types of industry but also specific places of work and so not only was the type of industry important to people whose lives were dominated by the long hours endured for low pay, but so the employer itself became increasingly important too.

The technologies of control exhibited within industries lead to the formation of class based communities and similarity of experience among those who lived in such communities. However, they are not in complete control of the individual and that there is space for the individual to redevelop their own capacities based on experiences through formulating their *habitus*. The *habitus* is a:

“strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations...determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production, that is, by the actual outcome of identical or interchangeable past practices, which coincides with their own outcome to the extent (*and only to the extent*) that the

objective structures of which they are the product are prolonged in the structures within which they function.” (Bourdieu, 1977:72-73 – original emphasis)

Accordingly, “the habitus is...laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing” (Ibid: 81) thereby emphasising the role that experiences in an individual’s formative years play. This shows that it is particularly important to their perception of self, understanding of life and events around them, and reacting to future experiences and stimuli. For the working-classes, being brought up in a household close to a source of work and having it instilled in the individual, through watching the regimes of their parents what was expected of them, provided a foundation for their understanding of the world. These experiences would have helped to what their role in their community and wider society was (Charlesworth, 2000). Bourdieu goes on to argue that the *habitus* is “the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history.” (Bourdieu, 1977; 82) It becomes increasingly evident then that the *habitus* is constantly evolving and that one’s experiences are central to helping to form reinforce and evolve it. Whilst the *habitus* is informed by past actions and experiences, particularly those gained during formative years, it informs the way in which you are likely to react in future situations, acting in a manner as to structure one’s agency. Within this the experiences of industrial work; long days in dirty, heavy, industrial production, working in shifts around the clock as the continual demand from across the country demanded ever increasing rates of production, meant that the workers, like the city, were surrounded by a continual thick layer of smoke, soot and pollution by day whilst their lives were animated by night from the ever roaring furnaces as iron and steel were smelted and kilns were fired to cook and glaze the pots. This would have had a profound influence on the way of life of anyone who lived in the city and especially those who spent their lives working within the heavily gendered key industries, whether as a

miner, steel worker or potter; something which is perhaps best summarised by Collinson and Hearn's statement that:

"For many men, employment provides the interrelated economic resources and symbolic benefits of wages/salaries, skills and experience, career progress and positions of power authority and high discretion. Typically it seems that men's gender identities are constructed, compared and evaluated by self and others according to a wide variety of criteria indicating 'personal' success in the workplace." (Collinson and Hearn, 2001:146)

Moreover, through being engaged in such traditional industries, educations were gained in specific trades and crafts which then provided central elements of one's identity as well as further opportunities (Charlesworth, 2000). Unions, formerly powerful, provided both the protection needed by the heavily exploited workers and also chances of advancement; education, leadership and even a life in politics should someone so desire it (Ibid). In itself, however, the word '*union*' carries with it another important connotation; unity, standing in solidarity and supporting one another. It was often the uniting of people under a common banner that helped cement and exhibit the solidarity that organic, modern society relied upon to maintain social norms and prevent the breakdown of society. It is no surprise then that shared experience between individuals in work, the community, socialising, or at events and the union became central to one's experience and thus became such key parts of the working-class *habitus*; becoming ever more etched into the bodies, actions, speech and soul of the generations who worked within heavy industrial cities such as Stoke-on-Trent.

Agency and Will

Whilst serving to provide a sense of understanding for the individual and informing subsequent actions in the face of external pressures, the *habitus* relies upon a sense of continuity to help the individual to develop their way of thinking and to allow them to

deploy the means available to defend their position against changing pressures (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Jock Young noted that “[t]he major institutions of work and the family no longer provide the cradle to grave trajectories which embrace, engulf and insure” (Young, 1999: 7). Without that continuity the habitus is threatened and people must adapt to maintain their habitus or else fall by the wayside – discarded upon the slagheap. It is precisely this which has occurred since the mid to late twentieth century, as the continuity of modern industrial life dramatically evaporated at the time when modernity was replaced by post-modernity and unprecedented deindustrialisation.

At this point we must deviate from the flow of the narrative for a gap in the discussions which have so far arisen relates to the apparent lack of space for the role individual agency and subjectivity in determining one’s position in society. One’s agency is their ability to act and choose freely and independently (Giddens, 1984). In late-modernity, society has becoming increasingly pluralistic. As Jock Young has argued, theories of structuration “ignore the subjectivity of the citizen, the ability of human actors to stand back and assess fairness and their ability to create cultural difference rather than just reproduce a monolithic, given culture” (1999: 80). Proponents of theories of agency, however, have argued that structural and structural functionalist views of society leave no space for the agentic subject (Loyal, 2003: 51). Anthony Giddens (1991) in particular has argued that people are not formed and controlled by external agency but rather are able to exercise individual agency to make ‘voluntary’ decisions about whether to act. For Giddens, people are rational, reflexive agents who “routinely and for the most part without fuss, maintain a continuing theoretical understanding of the grounds of their activity” (Giddens, 1984: 5). Following such an approach then, people are consciously aware and possess the ability to freely choose whether or not to act. He argues that

“To be an agent means to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others.

Action depends upon the capability of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events.” (Ibid: 14).

Giddens appears to argue that people are in control of their environment and that rather than being influenced by their environment, they are able to influence and control it. Loyal notes that Giddens introduces the agent “as a knowledgeable actor rather than as a passive unknowing effect of discourse” (2003: 60) going on to argue that “Giddens often reverts to a theory of a centred abstract agent, particularly in his discussions of rule-following...but also in relation to his analysis of agents as acting, choosing individuals who ‘exercise’ autonomy.” (Ibid). As such Giddens structuration theory appears to fail to make allowances for constrained choices by presuming that a situation in which an actor has severe limits placed on a decision indicates that they ‘have no choice’ (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 84). Giddens provides the example of someone being held at gunpoint withdrawing money from a cashpoint and handing it to their assailant as them being in a situation where they have no choice (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 84). In light of this it becomes apparent that his work takes the discussion too far in the opposite direction and do not provide *enough* allowance for the role of wider social structures upon the role and choices of the individual (Crewe, 2013: 80). In *Becoming Criminal* (2013), Don Crewe argues that a better way of making sense of (particularly criminal) motivation and action is to draw upon the concept of will rather than agency (Ibid: 79). He argues that “Human behaviour is the product of constrained will...that of which we try to make sense, is bound up with two concepts, namely those of will and of constraint upon that will.” (2013: 84). Focusing upon crime as an example, Crewe goes on to argue that whilst a person may choose to commit an act, i.e. they had a will to commit a crime (Ibid: 79), the constraints placed upon us by external forces and relations mean that this choice may not always be the free one it is often posited as being (Ibid: 81-85).

The constraints upon an individual's will can come from a range of factors including their past; the environment in which they find themselves in both historically and presently (including geographically in terms of location and their position in society – socially, culturally, politically and economically); the people they have previously, are presently, and might expect in the future to be engaged with, and the influences which these elements have upon their understandings of their world, their position in it and the influence this will have upon their will to their future self. The idea of constrained will can have profound repercussions for “our choices are restricted to those that are suitable to ‘the situation’” (Ibid: 125) and that our choices are dictated by the social environment in which they must be made; thus each decision is “constrained by social structures.” (Ibid: 127). Therefore, whilst the individual may be free to choose whether or not to commit an act, it is from a finite number of options and the situation that they find themselves in will have a powerful influence over the outcome. This is not to say that our decisions are determined however, for “will is *emergent* from a human's capacity for reflexivity: the capacity for will is *emergent from* his awareness of the complexity of his history and the complexity of his situated self.” (Ibid: 132, emphasis in original). Thus the decision one makes is informed by their past experience and understanding of the world; their aims and aspirations for the future, and the present context in which they find themselves. For an individual who has lived through the ravages of deindustrialisation, such as has been witnessed in Stoke-on-Trent,, the decision could well be influenced by a whole host of other factors. Having lost their job, the individual would have been confronted by significant challenges to their ontological security (Giddens, 1979: 218-219) and their ability to provide for themselves and their family now and in the future. At a time when industries were closing down, their honed yet limited skill sets provided limited options for future employment among low and semi-skilled workers. These constraints then have a profound influence upon one's decision making process. As such the individual, when

making a decision, must factor in a host of variables which will ultimately inform and constrain their decisions and actions and so it is not possible to exercise free will in the sense that one's will is never free from all constraints. The impact of these constraints shall become increasingly evident as the rest of the thesis evolves, however the loss of industry and the subsequent decline in the role and status of Stoke-on-Trent has posed significant challenges to the individuals and constraints upon their will, as we shall now move on to discuss. Moreover, drawing upon the works of both Crewe and Bourdieu together, the *habitus* which Bourdieu argues inhabits the individual and is informed by past experience and the community both provide a framework of constraints through influencing the individuals understanding of the world.

Post-industrial identity in crisis

As discussed in chapter two, as a city so reliant upon heavy industry Stoke-on-Trent, suffered considerable hardship through the process of deindustrialisation. Vast swathes of the working-class population lost a significant and central element anchor upon which to pin their identity. Because of the loss of such a vital lynchpin used by so many to define themselves, their day and way of life, considerable challenges were faced beyond the financial implications of unemployment (although these have had a significant influence in their own right).

Moreover, it was not just men who worked in the potteries. Labour was frequently divided with men conducting the heavier, manual roles whilst women, due to their enhanced dexterity and artistic talents compared with their male counterparts undertook much of the decorating and glazing of the pots and plates produced in the pot banks (Hart, 1987; 2008). Thus, whilst hard and back-breaking, the work undertaken by the men was often seen as a source of pride due to the fact that the men were physically able to undertake such roles as opposed to the more feminine decorating of the products. It

was then not just that the men worked within heavy industry but also the type of work which they were employed to undertake which was important to themselves, their sense of purpose, sense of identity and their routines.

Whilst the work was far from forgiving or pleasant, the decline in the state and the status of the city, reflected in the lives of those who continue to live there, was a preferable experience to that currently prevalent throughout the city and other similar post-industrial communities across the nation. The decline of the status of the city and its people is further reflected in the condition of its buildings. It is clear just walking around parts of the city that it is now a shell of its former self with entire communities hollowed out and the empty homes of Middleport, Longport and beyond providing a perfect visual metaphor for the decline of the city and the hollowing out of the lives of those who live here (See Figure 5).



Figure 5: Abandoned properties in Travers Street (left); a stone's throw from Middleport pottery and Crane Street (right); a short walk from Hanley centre.

Moreover the lack of any significant redevelopments beyond Festival Park also means that the population continues to struggle, competing for work which isn't there as the city continues to decline. The loss of work means the loss of structure, stability, income, ties to other members of the working-class communities and the solidarity that was engendered through working in such heavy industries (Dennis, 1993 and Seabrook, 1978 in Young, 1999: 49).

There have been numerous studies looking at the impact of the collapse of traditional industries in Britain due to the moving of production abroad to reduce overheads, and the closing of many mines, mills and associated industries in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Willis, (1977), Wallace (1987) MacCleod (1995) Charlesworth (2000), Winlow (2001) and Hall and Winlow (2005) all contribute to this extensive literature and provide vital insights into the bleak existence of many of these post-industrial towns and cities. The studies are drawn from varying regions throughout Britain and the USA; Wallace in the Isle of Sheppey, Charlesworth in Rotherham, Winlow in Sunderland; Hall and Winlow in Middlesbrough and the North East, and MacCleod in New York and highlight the impact of the rapid decline of industry throughout the post-industrial west in industries from steelworks and mining to the potteries and ship building. Steve Hall perhaps best describes these issues, stating that:

“The *real social and economic crisis* is being experienced by traditional working class men and women who inhabit the former heavy industrial heartlands that once relied on sex-specific variations of labour in the productivist, domestic and military spheres.” (Hall, 2002:55 - original emphasis).

From this it becomes apparent that the understandings developed through years of shared experience within communities built around industry and the structured, frequently gendered division of labour has been shattered. No significant replacement is available to fill the void left behind by the hollowing out of the central sources of employment which sustained the area for well over one hundred years. There is a significant threat to the working-classes posed by the continued degradation of the city as a direct result of its inability to provide alternative sources of legitimate income or identity construction due to the way in which historically dominant roles within the family and community are now unachievable or, at times, neither relevant or desirable. Connell (1998; 2005), Messerschmidt (1993; 1997), Winlow (2001) and Gadd and

Jefferson (2007) have argued that there are many elements which constitute masculine identity focusing on the multi-faceted nature of their existence, whilst Brittan has noted, “masculinity refers to those aspects of men’s behaviour that fluctuate over time” (2001:53). Like other forms of identity then, masculine identity is not static but rather open to manipulation and redefinition based upon experiences of the individual and that they are therefore contextually dependent. However, when a group of people have developed their understandings of, and roles in, the world over such an extended period, the removal of a core portion such as employment will challenge any sense of importance and one’s role as the breadwinner, provider, leader of the family and role model; leading to considerable challenges to the individual’s psychological wellbeing (Winlow, 2001: 37). It is important to remember that “the pressure to be a successful breadwinner was a source of strain and conflict, not pride and motivation” (Kimmel, 1996: 265 cited in Winlow, 2001: 37) and therefore it is clear that ‘being a man’ was, and is, not simply a case of proving oneself at work and providing for the family, but that the role required a great deal of attention and effort to maintain. The loss of resources central to fulfilling such a role would have only compounded such issues by removing the main tools available to one seeking to fulfil it.

Building on this, studies have examined the influence which unemployment can have upon one’s life including financially, psychologically and socially. A reduction in spending power is often seen as being one of the most important due to the knock on impacts that this can have. Because of a loss of income people often end up isolated from their peers and people enduring periods of unemployment tend to have considerably higher numbers of other unemployed persons within their networks compared with people in work (Russell, 1999: 213). This indicates that networks and concentrations of unemployment can arise within society, further highlighting the need for effective, positive interventions to prevent people falling into such categories and to minimise some

of the subsequent impacts of unemployment. Furthermore, due to increased financial constraints, someone out of work is often unable to maintain the same social contact as they previously had, resulting in isolation from friendship and peer groups and, potentially, family. This can lead to severe psychological impacts often stemming from the boredom and depression of having little to do, with the majority of changes to one's lifestyle and mental state believed to occur within the first six weeks of unemployment (Strandh, 1999; Russell, 1999; Bowring, 2000).

In attempts to dig deeper into the wider impacts of unemployment, particularly among men, Hood-Williams (2001) turned to the work of psychoanalysts including Jefferson (1992; 1996a; 1996b; 1997; 1998 cited in Hood-Williams, 2001), and was followed by Gadd and Jefferson (2007), to explain the ways in which masculinities are not informed just by the social situation in which a man finds himself, but also by the life experience and psyche of the men in question. Hood-Williams emphasises the contextual dependency of masculinities and influence of the role which one undertakes in society, particularly the field in which one lives, and thus the way in which one understands their place in the world as their experiences and practices are developed. This also points towards something else central to the formation and maintenance of one's sense of self and being; that of capital.

“[C]apital presents itself under three fundamental species (each with its own subtypes), namely, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital” (Bourdieu, 1986 in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119 - original emphasis). Levels of capital; economic, cultural and social, all vary depending on one's position in society and one's experiences. Moreover, whilst there are significant differences between the different forms of capital, they are all rooted in economic capital (Bourdieu 1997:53). Because cultural and social capital are rooted in economic capital it becomes apparent that those best able to access, utilise and manipulate the power within society tend to be drawn from backgrounds of higher

economic capital which has led to the deployment of greater social and political capital such as can be seen within much of the current political elite. In investigating the role of capital, Veblen (1899) examined the way in which the 'leisure classes' are able to exercise and exhibit their more powerful position through a number of means including conspicuous consumption and dress, but also through the employment and subjugation of others to maintain their position at the head of a household or estate. Furthermore only the wealthy that can afford to pay for unproductive (i.e. non-capital producing) labour (Braverman, 1998: 284-292), such as gardeners, housekeepers and the like, further highlighting their position within society because clearly those with a much smaller income cannot afford to employ others to fulfil these roles and are the individuals who end up filling them. Accordingly, no matter what role they play in society, the poor are often dependent upon the rich for work, whether through working directly for them in factories and production, clearing up either for or after them (as per gardeners) or as consumers of the goods they produce. They are, therefore, frequently subjected to the wishes of society and are often pushed to accept that they do not possess the same levels of the various forms of capital.

When out of work, however, it is precisely because of higher levels of the other forms of capital which the middle classes are able to deploy which protects them from some of the worst excesses of unemployment. This is perhaps best exhibited by, for example, going to the cinema or ballet; fine dining; levels of education; and wider activities such as politicking and charity work which provide additional resources upon which the middle-classes and elites are able to deploy should work disappear. Sennett and Cobb (1966) and Sennett (2008) have provided examples of this in their studies of class struggles in America and their work shows that the blue collar worker who may have spent years grafting to get to where he is, feels inferior to a younger, college educated man, and that he does not belong in such a man's world due to his lesser education. Thus, one's ability

(in terms of understanding, willingness and financial resources) to consume a wider variety of goods and activities can help to mitigate the impacts of unemployment for some.

Thus it is not just the working-classes who are affected by unemployment. It is however the nature of traditional working-class identities, founded upon heavy, industrial work which has led to the significant impacts upon such individuals. When work dries up or specific industries, so heavily reliant upon people trained in particular skillsets close, the lack of formal qualifications possessed leave the working-classes and working poor particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of unemployment due to a lack of wider cultural and social resources to fall back upon (Wallace, 1987; Young, 1999; Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001). A lack of qualifications can significantly impact upon one's chances of returning to work, particularly within a society which places such emphasis upon formal education (Charlesworth, 2000). At the same time as the loss of industry, there has been a marked shift in society characterized by "the disappearance of low-skilled routes into the labour market [that has] left many young people struggling to obtain any kind of reasonable foothold in employment." (Fevre, 2011:2). This reflects the current figures showing that, despite falling from a peak of over 1 million, in excess of 737,000 16-24 year olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Mirza-Davies, 2014), despite continual promises and initiatives by consecutive governments to try and rectify this. The situation in Stoke-on-Trent echoes this with an estimated fifteen to seventeen per cent of young people in the city being classed as NEET (Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, n.d.:16) and this paints a bleak picture for the younger unemployed. However, it also mask another figure; namely the grey unknown of people who feel that they have no alternative in the current climate other than to remain in education in the hope that they might better themselves when all of the available sources of employment around them has disappeared. This is replicated

in the findings by the Prince's Trust (2010; 2013) in which they highlight the severe effects of unemployment and social exclusion upon the psychological wellbeing of NEETs. The findings show that more than "one in four young people...believing that their prospects have been permanently damaged by the recession" (2013: 8). The Prince's Trust reports show that around a third of participants in their study feel lonely and that this is exacerbated by unemployment (p.25). Their findings also show that people lost motivation to carry out regular activities which were formerly part of their day to day routine, including leaving the home and exercising, and that there was also increased conflict within the family (Prince's Trust, 2010: 7). Furthermore eleven per cent of those participating in the study turned to alcohol and/or drugs as a result of their unemployment, and over a third were suffering from depression, compared with fifteen per cent of young people nationally (Ibid). This emphasises the gravity of the situation and underscores the severe impacts of unemployment, particularly upon young people who are yet to establish themselves due to lacking in other resources to fall back on to maintain their sense of self and self-esteem.

Evidence suggests that the longer an individual spends out of employment, the harder it becomes to get back into it (Gallie and Benoit-Guilbot, 1994:3; Biewen and Steffes, 2010; Kroft, Lange and Notowidigdo, 2012; Ayllón, 2012). One of the main reasons for this is perceived to be that employers overwhelmingly prefer to employ people straight from another job, or who have only recently become unemployed and who they believe have retained a strong work ethic as opposed to those who have been out of work for an extended period of time and are deemed to have 'forgotten' what it means to work regularly (Gallie and Benoit-Guilbot, 1994; 10). The prolonged loss of work for many has already caused significant damage to them, their perceptions as to their role in society and to what they are ever likely to achieve in life. Whole estates are so often regarded as 'sink estates'; no go areas where ideas and aspirations go to die, rife with deprivation and

crime and filled with what is increasingly depicted as a 'workless' class – outsiders who no longer conform to societal norms and who must be controlled and contained before they act as a continual drain upon wider society.

Reconstructing the Self



Figure 6: The INTU Potteries shopping centre in Hanley



Figure 7: The view from the new Travelodge on Etruria Road; formerly a key industrial corridor. In the foreground is a large, edge of town shopping centre, to the back right of the image, the imposing outline of the INTU Potteries shopping centre can be seen.

The loss of such a central plank for forming and maintaining a sense of identity is important and should not be underestimated when considering the life course and experiences of someone who no longer has access to such resources. As society has

become increasingly consumer driven, so consumption as a form of status has taken increasing precedence in peoples' lives. A fitting representation of the reconstitution of people within society as consumers can be seen in the repossession of the name 'The Potteries' by the shopping centre which now stands at the heart of Hanley (See Figure 6), almost like a headstone at the top of the former Etruria Works which housed many of the industries that lent themselves to the industrial power of Stoke-on-Trent (see Figure 7). This reconstruction as such leaves a considerable void in the lives of the individual who no longer has access to the same identity resources as were previously available to them prior to the decline of industrialism in the city.

In the face of the loss of the traditional industries which people were formerly so reliant upon, and the reconstruction of society focused upon consumption, the people of Stoke-on-Trent, along with their fellow industrial kin across the country must identify new methods to find a way of reinforcing their ontological security and sense of being (Young, 1999, 2007).

This is compounded further should an unemployed individual fall foul of the law through involvement in criminal enterprise because of their unemployment. A painful impact of social exclusion, frequently associated with unemployment, is the magnification of:

“The adverse consequences for the individual of small-scale illegal activities, such as petty fraud. When poor people subsidize their low wages or taxes, the criminalization of their industriousness means they frequently find themselves barred from a whole host of other services...” (Bowring, 2000: 313).

Thus when a person moves from employment to unemployment, their initial response is likely to be one of trying to return to employment as soon as possible. However, the longer they spend unemployed, the more they will adapt their lifestyle (Ibid). Alongside this is the continual threat of sanctions and the vilifying discourses of mainstream the

politics and media which sees unemployment and reliance upon benefits not as a dark blemish on society's report card but as individual failings. Accordingly, not only does someone enduring unemployment have to get by with little help from elsewhere, they must also deal with being branded as something which must be controlled and expunged; cast to one side until they are ready to be put to work in a way which suits not them but society as it is currently constructed. This process will be sped up if the individual in question lives within a community where unemployment is rife due to mass layoffs and redundancies as a result of experiences shared by those living within such a community. Life in such a community can lead to increased exclusion because:

“Cultural influences- poor aspirations, unstable families or weak social ties – may be responsible for promoting forms of self-exclusion, and so many features of the social and physical environment – high crime rates, neighbourhood concentrations of unemployed people and single parents, poor housing, deficient services and other signs of urban degeneration – which may foster deviancy, disaffection, and personal and geographical isolation.” (Bowring, 2000; 310)

Bowring's comments indicate a fundamental challenge associated with unemployment and living in an area of high unemployment and skills deprivation because communities have to adjust to being isolated from activities not just because of a lack of income but also geographical mobility constraints. As seen in chapter two, some communities have little access to private transport and rely heavily on the rail and bus networks to get around therefore adding a large amount of time to journey times and limiting the routes available at the same time. Through this a different communal *habitus* develops based around the social and geographical isolation of such communities which in turn inform individuals as to socially acceptable norms in a different way to others. This concentration of deprivation can lead to concentrations of criminality as people struggle to make ends meet by whatever means they are able to invoke (Hall, Winlow and

Ancrum, 2008; Hooghe, Vanhoutte, Hardyns and Bircan, 2011). This has the potential to lead to the formation of localised norms as communities, often constituted by people with similar experiences, seek to understand their collective experiences and find new ways of adapting, surviving and in some cases, thriving and this is discussed in chapter seven.

The decline of formerly active communities as the sources of employment which previously supported those communities has disappeared and this has led to a fragmentation of estates, communities, and identities with increased atomisation and individualism often taking over (Foster and Spencer, 2012; Hall and Winlow 2005; Winlow and Hall, 2013). The result is a fundamental shift in the outlook of young people upon their community compared with the older members of a community (Ibid), thereby helping to explain the animosity between the old and the young such as is discussed at length by both Wallace (1987) and Charlesworth (2000) and may also go some way to explaining why many younger people hope to leave the area (see chapter seven). Associated to the decrease in communal interdependencies is an increasing sense of dislocation and detachment within such communities (Winlow and Hall, 2013), something which is most noticeable among the younger population and this is compounded by the fact that, as Raewyn Connell has argued:

“large numbers of youths are now growing up without any expectation of the stable employment around which familiar models of working class masculinity were organized. Instead they face intermittent employment and economic marginality in the long term, and often deprivation in the short term” (2005:93).

It is in the face of the continual threats to their understanding of the world, something heavily contingent upon past experiences and the community in which these experiences have been gained, that such new forms of expression, identity and strength must be forged and displayed so that each individual feels that they have a role to play in their community. This resides as a continual threat to the perception of self and the identity of

the men that have informed this study and has, along with the ever increasing societal pressures to become 'normal', at times proven too much. Suicide is a real risk to people who are no longer tied to society due to the crumbling solidarities formerly prevalent in society (Durkheim, 1984) so adversely affected are they by the decline of industry, rising bills and debts and a lack of support from the rest of the country. The way in which these men seek to make sense of their existence – a continual process subject to countless revisions – is something that must be explored further so that the effects of exploitation of the post-working classes can be better understood. Collinson and Hearn have added to this stating

“For many men, employment provides the interrelated economic resources and symbolic benefits of wages/salaries, skills and experience, career progress and positions of power authority and high discretion. Typically it seems that men’s gender identities are constructed, compared and evaluated by self and others according to a whole variety of criteria indicating ‘personal’ success in the workplace.” (2001:146).

This supports Wallace (1987) and Measor (2012) who found that many of the young women in their studies turned to motherhood to provide a sense of purpose, whilst the young men constantly battled to find and form their own sense of identity despite being well aware of the stigmatization that such decisions and actions might carry with them. Thus, it is important to investigate why some men turn to criminal activities given the unavailability of work-based identities and the fact that it is increasingly difficult to conform to dominant senses of purpose and meaning through conventional means.

With regards to violent crime, Edwards has noted that:

“It remains a sad yet well known fact that crimes of violence are still a significant, if not growing, problem in many contemporary societies and that the vast majority of violent acts across the world, past and present, are committed by men.” (2006:44).

It is important however to remember that violence is far from a uniform phenomenon and is frequently dynamic and open to interpretation (Ibid; 49). Furthermore it is not limited to physical violence but can extend to psychological (e.g. bullying) and the symbolic (including gender dominance and racism and homophobia).

Messerschmidt (1993; 1997) has argued that some men commit crime to reinforce their sense of masculinity when other methods (i.e. traditional employment and sport) are either unsuitable or unavailable for reasons including a lack of economic, cultural or social capital. Messerschmidt argues that “like gender, crime is a social phenomenon” and “criminal behaviour may serve as a resource for constructing a particular type of masculinity” (1993:27). In line with Bourdieu’s theories surrounding capital, Messerschmidt states that “[c]riminality...is strongly related to the distribution of power in both the market and the home” (Ibid; 56) and that “to understand crimes by men, we must comprehend how class, race, and gender relations are each constituted by a variety of social structures and therefore structured action.” (Ibid; 62). This is a clear indictment of the role that power based discourses have upon the ways in which people construct themselves, and helps to support the notion that identities are both influenced through discourse (Foucault, 1980). As is evident in discussions surrounding the constitution of masculinities, Messerschmidt’s argument focuses around the idea that masculinities are constructed based on their interactions and the situation in which an individual may find him or herself, however as argued earlier on, these interactions are governed by pre-existing power structures underlying the interaction and which will act to constrain the decisions and actions of the individual.

Such ideas are supported by Winlow, who argues that “with regard to violence, the masculinities of the culture can be sustained by merely maintaining a position not subject to the will of other males” and that “they are attempting to maintain a persona not of toughness but of not being soft.” (2001:19). This builds on MacLeod’s (1995) study in

Clarendon heights in which the predominantly white 'Hallway Hangers' forged their sense of identity and masculinity in direct opposition to young black males; 'The Brothers'. In his study, MacLeod found that the Hallway Hangers saw The Brothers as weak due to their focus upon working hard in school, learning, and non-violent pursuits, compared with the 'Hallway Hangers' attitudes of drinking, drug taking and fighting. The 'Hallway Hangers' attitudes are indicative of the nature of many working-class subcultures (see for example Hall, 1976; Willis, 1977; Downes and Rock, 2011) and their construction, through inverting social norms and values, of new norms in attempts to empower themselves in the light of growing adversity and accepting that they are unlikely to succeed via conventional means.

This helps to outline the role of violence in particular social settings to further one's own standing within a community and reinforce their sense of masculinity and therefore identity. MacLeod's (1995) work also helps to highlight the way that masculinities are frequently formed in binary opposition to each other; in this case white versus black and 'hard' and aggressive versus bookish. However, it cannot be possible to study the formulation of a sense of masculine identity just through examining binary oppositions. This is largely due to the fact that in order to do so, countless sweeping generalisations must be made; there is no one 'black' or 'white' cultural identity but many encompassed by each term. Furthermore rather than speaking of working-class identities, the fragmented experience and nature of the working-classes means that those employed in a low ranking service industry will have a substantially different experience of what it is to be working-class compared with a miner or a dockworker. As a result, whilst binary oppositions are likely to play a role in the construction of masculine identities, any literature which focuses heavily upon such an idea should be treated with caution.

Hood-Williams (2001), reviewing the application of psychoanalytical methods to masculinity studies, has helped to highlight a number of key flaws in structural

approaches and the theories of patriarchal, hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. This is particularly true when studying the occurrence of male criminal behaviour. Developing ideas from Butler's discussion about Beauvoir's theory that you are not born but rather *become* male or female through interactions from an early age (1987:23-27), Hood-Williams rightly argues that

"The social category 'men' is not a discriminator between criminal and non-criminal behaviour, and in a literature which collapses men and masculinity, if 'men' is not the discriminator why should masculinity be so?" (2001:43)

Whilst some men may turn to criminal behaviour, and in particular violence, to (re)affirm their position and masculinity, this is normally only a minority with numerous other forms available including participating in sports, developing strong management capabilities, or excelling in an academic context. Furthermore, along similar lines, whilst much of the literature on crime and masculinities has focused upon the role of violence, it is not just violence that these unemployed, excluded and marginalised young men engage in.

What next?

Employment continues to be eroded by stagnating wages, the concentration of wealth and growing inequality. The result of this has seen the poor and deprived being increasingly coerced into undertaking activities which carry few benefits and fail to lift them out of the 'precarity trap' (Standing, 2011: 81) that they are currently trapped in. There is a lack of hope of finding meaningful work that is so desperately desired. This has led, as we can see in chapter three, to increasing pressures being placed upon the poor as the elite and big business exercise their considerable influence and power.

Power has proven itself to be essential in the shaping of 'truth' and knowledge, particularly when it comes to informing ideas, beliefs and agendas, events and, in turn,

society; as well as the way in which we see ourselves individually and as a collective. The ability for the individual to exercise some degree of control over events is one aspect, however there is also the continual potential for power to be exercised over others; subjugating them to the will of others in society. This highlights some of the many different forms of association one forms with others and therefore the different formations of identity which must be considered; class, race, gender, sexuality, community and employment to name but a few. Among the most important discourses for discussion in this project are those related to the idea of what constitutes the 'normal' and the way in which such a norm is constituted, maintained and evolved. It has already been noted that norms are produced and maintained through the exercising of disciplinary power (Foster and Spencer, 2012) and exist in order to maintain and reinforce dominant positions at that time (Foucault 1980). Within this a significant number of groups including politicians, doctors, social workers and academics to name but a few have played a pivotal role in informing, defining and redefining what is 'normal' within society. This implies that norms and normality are both formed to advance the interests of a particular viewpoint, potentially at the behest of others. The consequences of this indicate that the power to formulate and evolve norms is predominantly available to those with the means and prowess to influence the decision making processes within society. In contrast, however, there are localised norms which are not controlled or as heavily influenced by the wider discourses of normality within society which can, as shall be discussed, lead to resistance to, and rejection of, wider norms.

So ingrained are ideas as to what is 'normal' and 'abnormal', particularly with regard to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, that society becomes self-regulating; frowning upon, marginalising, excluding or seeking to reform those who do not conform until such a time as they can be remoulded to fit what society perceives as 'normal' at the time.

Taylor (2009) has discussed the way in which prevailing norms become viewed as ‘normal’, arguing that

“normalizing norms encourage subjects to become highly efficient at performing a narrowly defined range of practices...In time, the repeated behaviors become embedded to the point where they are perceived not as a particular set of prevailing norms, but instead simply as “normal,” inevitable, and therefore immune to critical analysis...to the extent that they become naturalized.” (Ibid: 47)

Taylor thereby highlights the way in which norms become ‘normal’ whilst ‘abnormal’ actions become increasingly seen as a threat to the social fabric. It therefore becomes apparent that the unemployed are increasingly being constructed as an asocial group; sucking out vital resources from society and acting as a continual drain (see chapter three). They are increasingly becoming targeted by a campaign of vilification; branding them as abject and beyond the borders of society. Abjection stems from attempts to subvert oppressed elements of the population:

“the basic element of subversion, the wretched population, exploited for production and cut off from life by a prohibition on contact, is represented from the outside with disgust as the dregs of the people, populace and *gutter*.” (Bataille, 1934: 6-original emphasis).

Accordingly, focusing upon the deserving and undeserving poor and the branding of the ‘undeserving’ as ‘feckless, lazy, welfare dependent, scrounging skivers’ indicates a return to the stigmatizing, marginalising representations of the poor as the aforementioned dregs of society. They are cast as different and severing their ties with ‘normal’ society. Doing so legitimises the possibility of further targeting of people deemed as falling into such arbitrary categories. Kristeva subsequently developed the concept of abjection, arguing that the abject:

“lies close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries and fascinates desire which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects” (Kristeva, 1982: 1).

This details the way in which that which is deemed abject is strikingly similar and familiar to that which abjectifies it in the first instance (Ibid: 11). Kristeva goes on to provide examples of acts deemed, from within ‘normal’ society, to be abject acts, stating that an abject act or object:

“disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.

The inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. . . .

Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject” (Ibid: 4)

This construction of acts which draw attention to the fragility not just of law but also norms and perceived morality can be seen within contemporary society and perhaps one of the main reasons for the successful resonance of the current politics of abjection is precisely because people at all levels of society (but particularly among the precariously employed, low paid working poor) recognize that they are at risk of falling into the ranks of the unemployed; their demonization of those around them is based upon their own ontologically insecure position (Young, 1999: 165). Where people are “affected by what does not yet appear to [them] as a thing [i.e. they are not unemployed], it is because laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition [us].” (Kristeva, 1982: 8). Thus within society, the way in which unemployment and crime are depicted within political and media discourses informs and conditions peoples’ beliefs and views on the subject. Thus many of those who are fortunate enough to be in work and able to sustain themselves and their family, are often fully aware of the threat lurking at their imaginary borders (Kristeva, 1982: 11). Therefore, by buying into the current rhetoric and turning away from the abject, those teetering on the edge of ‘normal’ society feel in

some way protected from the threat at their borders. They seek to no longer comprehend it as they “constitute [their] own territory, edged by the abject” (Ibid: 6). The abject is banished from the central position it could otherwise occupy in their lives to linger in the shadows; society has proverbially vomited them out (Young, 1999: 56) so that they are visible only on the periphery of their vision and the edge of society. This, of course, is a useful strategy for a political elite seeking to maintain the current status quo, because this “[d]emonization allows the problems of society to be blamed upon [these] ‘others’ on the edge of society...instead of acknowledging that we have problems in society because of basic core contradictions in the social order” (Young, 1999: 110).

As can be seen in chapter three, this process of demonization has led to the increased deployment of coercive measures designed to get people to accept their position and engage with the Work Programme and other government sponsored ‘jumping through hoops’ exercises. This has undoubtedly had a profoundly negative impact upon peoples’ senses of self-worth: “Society establishes the means of categorising persons and the complement of attributes felt to be *ordinary and natural* for members of each of these categories” (Goffman, 1990 [1963]: 11; my emphasis). When someone fails to conform to these normative expectations within society they are “thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” (Ibid: 12). It is this process that leads to the stigmatisation of either a person or a group of people and the subsequent marginalisation and abjection of that person or collective.

The stigmatisation of marginalised groups, such as can be seen in the continual politics of abjection, is a painfully prevalent issue in contemporary British society and politics which carries with it serious and harmful implications for individuals and society as a whole. As is discussed in more detail in chapter three, research by Elizabeth Finn Trust (2012a; 2012b) has reported a marked increase in the use of negative language in both the political and popular press which shows an increase in perceptions of stigma among the

groups targeted by such language. Further studies have shown that the stigmatisation of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, can in fact lead to increasing the length of time that people spend unemployed due to the proliferation of perceptions of laziness amongst the unemployed by employers (Biewen and Steffes, 2010; Ayllón, 2012). This carries clear implications for the impacts of stigma upon the success rates for people currently unemployed; however there are a host of other implications of stigmatisation for individuals beyond their employment opportunities.

Stigma carries with it numerous psychological effects for the individual, including feelings of inferiority and unworthiness; a loss of self-esteem; alienation and marginalisation; and a withdrawal from support, including from friends and family and wider support agencies (Goffman, 1990 [1963]; Dovidio, Major and Crocker, 2000; Crocker and Quinn, 2003). In the face of such stigmatization, a person or group must therefore seek to address these threats and show themselves to be something other than that which they are being branded as. These actions will depend upon the resources available to the individual with levels of economic, social and cultural capital playing pivotal roles alongside experiences which have informed one's understanding of the world. Something which will become apparent, however, is that many are unwilling to be targeted by such stigmatization without responding accordingly and are not prepared to take such continual attacks and abuse; they actively resist the politics of abjection via whatever means they have at their disposal and this will become more evident in chapter seven.

“A person devoid of respect will tend towards transgression of the accepted forms of valuation, because – since they cannot be invested with the value of forms they cannot embody – their own strategy has to be that of subversion: of embracing and even celebrating their alienation as an emblem of what it is: their humanity, a human form that is degraded and stigmatized (Charlesworth, 2000: 94).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has sought to outline the formation and decline of the traditional working-classes in England, providing links to Stoke-on-Trent and the experiences of people living within the North Staffordshire conurbation. Following the decline of mechanical forms of solidarity which were precipitated by the move towards industrialised society new forms were required to unite the increasingly disparate populations sharing townships and working within the industries. So the division of labour led to people becoming increasingly specialised and more reliant upon each other whilst also subjected to increasing levels of subjectivity through the application of technologies of the self and technologies of control. The role of these technologies, particularly whilst at work, eventually led to the formation and maintenance of a class based *hexis* and *habitus*.

The move to post-industrial society and the associated loss of industry ripped the core out of many communities and the people who live in them. It took one of the key pillars of working-class identities and new challenges have been encountered as people seek to reaffirm their sense of self in a post-industrial, knowledge based economy. Increasingly precarious labour and decreasing levels of pay due to the deskilling of the population and the continual emphasis being placed upon formalised education and qualifications over a lifetime of experience providing major challenges to those affected. This, combined with repeat attacks on the poor has left them angry, dejected, confused and desperate, at times unable to articulate their experiences in a way which one might ordinarily expect because it is so difficult to put into words just how detrimental to their lives and their understanding of the world these experiences are.

It is in the face of these repeat and continual threats to which we now turn. We have already seen the statistical outline of the city, tracing its boundaries and the way in which industry, and population, have declined steadily for a prolonged period, slowly stagnating

and rotting away. We have reviewed the contemporary political context, pushing and pulling the poor, dispossessed and marginalised from pillar to post, setting up ever new obstacles to be humiliatingly scrambled through as people desperately seek the money they require in an ever more expensive and consumption driven society to survive and fit in. What we have not, however yet seen is the toll that this takes on the people living within the city or the way in which they work to survive, resist and reassert their position in society. In the next chapter I detail the methods utilised to investigate the experiences enjoyed and endured by the people of the city, detailing the pitfalls of the research as well as the challenges to my own perceptions and, hopefully, those of the reader too. After that, we shall discuss the findings of the results and answer the questions posed throughout this half of the thesis, which can be summarised as follows:

- What is the impact of both unemployment and life in a deprived, post-industrial city upon peoples' lives and how do they make sense of these experiences;
- What strategies are deployed to mitigate the most extreme hardships faced as a result of their unemployment and abject treatment by the press, politicians and wider society;
- What role does crime and deviance play in resisting these abject depictions and in supporting the formation of articulable and defensible identities and understandings of the self?

Chapter Five: Methodologies

As already argued, identity formation and maintenance are complex processes which are constantly, predominantly unconsciously, being undertaken as people work to make sense of their experiences and adjust themselves accordingly. These experiences are informed by the discursive frames of reference available within society. Presently, this is particularly important for people who live in post-industrial communities enduring high levels of unemployment, health inequalities, deprivation and in many cases, crime. It is these communities which have repeatedly experienced attacks through political manoeuvring to increase the personal responsibility of individuals for their current socioeconomic status and therefore divert attention from latent structural issues in society. They are branded as 'feckless', 'workshy', 'lazy' and failing to comply with what is being touted as 'normal' within society. It is a small selection of such individuals who form the core target group for this research project.

The repeated negative press which the city has received including being branded among the ten worst places to live in the UK (Jordison and Kieran, 2013) and being the unhappiest place in the country (ONS, 2013d) has had an equally profound impact upon peoples' sense of belonging and pride in their community. It is in light of the investigations so far that the main research focus within this study will be placed upon the following:

- What is the real life experience of people who are enduring periods of unemployment;
- What leads some of those experiencing unemployment to engage in criminality;
- What is impact of prevalent discourses upon peoples' perceptions of self, belonging and purpose;

- What are the similarities and differences in experiences between the participants in the study and how might these experiences help to understand their engagement in criminality;
- How do these experiences relate to those in other studies carried out both within the UK and beyond?

As a localised case study, this research cannot be generalized per se due to the unique nature of the experiences of the individuals involved as well as the locality. However, as argued by Lincoln and Guba, whilst generalizability is an appealing concept, the application of it in its classic form is too deterministic and “When a generalisation has been devised, no member of the class, kind or order can escape its pervasive influence.” (2000: 29). Therefore, by not seeking to generalise the data collected, I intend to avoid arguing that these experiences are synonymous among all who live in Stoke-on-Trent, and more importantly, deprived communities. The fact that other studies identify similar experiences and themes within the UK and throughout Europe and beyond⁶, show that these are not isolated experiences but rather are symptomatic of life in deprived communities throughout post-industrial economies. Therefore case studies from across the world can be used together to critique and highlight wider issues, challenging the dominant discourses without applying any direct generalizations to the data which has been collected. Moreover, as previously stated, there are significant potential benefits for the locality through carrying out research at a local level in terms of providing detailed studies in order to inform and direct local policies, initiatives and interventions which

⁶ There are a range of on-going studies being conducted along similar lines. There have been a number of publications from Canada in particular, including Foster and Spencer's, (2012) *Reimagining Intervention in Young Lives*; examining experiences of unemployment in Ottawa. Further publications from Canada have been released from both the National Bureau of Economic Research and The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives are regularly commissioning and publishing research into the field, with examples including Geobey (2013) *The Young and the Jobless, Youth unemployment in Ontario*, Foster (2012) *Youth Employment and Un(der)Employment in Canada*, and Davis, M. 'Canadian Unemployment Benefits Encourage Unemployment' (The National Bureau of Economic Research, n.d.)

cannot be based on studies conducted elsewhere because of the unique characteristics of each community throughout the UK.

Free Association Narrative Method

In order to effectively assess the impact of experiences of unemployment, crime, relationships, and prevalent discourses upon the people who have taken part in this study it was important to choose a method which allowed their experiences to shine through. It is clear from the questions which I want to address that structured forms of data collection including structured interviews, surveys and questionnaires would not yield the required depth or quality of data. Furthermore, in order to collect the data in such a way as to ensure that it was possible to achieve this goal it became clear that a qualitative approach was required as it tends to provide a “more humane and conscientious model of social research, especially when it comes to people who are often measured but rarely heard from in any substantial way” (Foster and Spencer 2012:6). This is an idea supported by Malson (2000) and Widdecombe (1993) and represents a classification that people living in deprived communities are frequently seen to experience due to the lack of political capital available to them. Further justification for adopting a qualitative approach stems from the notion that it is impossible to understand the influence that the world has on another person without first attempting to view the world from their point of view and immersing ourselves in the reality of those we wish to understand (Weber, 1949; Berger and Luckman, 1991). Whilst such a position is arguably more related to ethnographic methods, it highlights the way experiences are influenced by the discourses historically available to us (Foucault, 2002; Gadd and Jefferson, 2007:43), along with the fact that we are influenced and guided by our position in society and more widely through policy and the media.

With this in mind, the Free Association Narrative method developed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) was adopted. Doing so meant that participants were able to talk at length about what *they* believe to be key experiences which have shaped who *they* have become and thereby shed light on what has affected their lives and the way in which they have constructed their understandings and narratives in light of these experiences (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; King and Horrocks; 2010:17).

In carrying out the research using the Free Association method I worked, where possible, to stick to the four key principles put forward by Hollway and Jefferson:

- Use open ended not closed questions – the more open the better;
- Elicit stories – turning questions about given topics into further chances to narrate experiences;
- Avoid why questions to ensure that you don't detract from the participant's own meaning frame
- Follow up using respondents' ordering and phrasing to avoid imposing upon the narrative. (2000:34-36).

Free-Association narrative methods carry a string of benefits in terms of seeking to represent a participant's experiences in a way which not only draws upon their narratives but does so in a way which maintains the participants own meaning frame. Eliciting stories and prolonged narratives, whilst often difficult, and especially so with 'defended subjects' (Ibid: 19), can provide much greater detail through allowing the participant to deviate from the main line of enquiry and reveal more about their own understanding of the topic being discussed (Ibid: 35). In line with this the context of the experiences is also considered and this again has a powerful influence in experiences. By deploying the participants' own phrasing, the researcher seeks to maintain the participants' meaning (Ibid 35-36). This is of vital importance given the varying levels of education and grasps

of vocabulary among participants and the researcher. By substituting the participants' own terms in the interview for their own, the researcher risks changing the frame of reference (Ibid: 37). This can cause conflicts, particularly if the terminology involved leaves the researcher feeling uncomfortable such as when talking about racial groups defined by participants as 'Paki's' or 'Asians', especially given the negative connotations carried by both. However by retaining the same terminology, the researcher is better placed to avoid shifting the frame of reference and ensuring that it is the participant who is generating the meaning in their narrative.

Narrative interviewing was piloted whilst reading for an MRes in Social Science Research Methods (Mahoney, 2010) in which I conducted research into the lived experience of students who self-identified as being from a working-class background. In that study the participants were asked to talk at length about their experiences with a focus upon the impact of moving to a campus university, often a long way from home. This provided me with an appreciation for the methods which I hoped to employ further down the line as well as for the uniqueness of the experiences of each individual. Whilst homogenous generalisations including 'working-class experience', 'the unemployed' and 'benefit claimants' are repeatedly utilised by politicians and the media to describe people living in deprived communities (and frequently desperately reliant upon external support) everyone within these groups is, first and foremost an individual person with differing experiences to those around them. In line with this, it has also become increasingly evident that the experiences of each individual vary, and that they are very different from my own. As such, whilst overlapping themes have been identified and understandings of the experiences of these individuals have been gained, it would be a considerable step to argue that I understand their lives better than they do. My own position has evolved and become increasingly critical of the role of wider discursive formations in the formulation of criminality and the construction, definition and enactment of deviant and criminal

behaviour. An increasing awareness of the structural disadvantages faced by many, and the role that this can have in influencing behaviour has been developed. Furthermore, it is my belief that the contradictions within society (for more detail see discussions in chapter seven) are echoed in the contradictions in the narratives produced by the individuals. As a result I have sought to draw upon a research method which helps to account for the fragmentary and contradictory nature of some narratives, and in turn helps to understand the influence of past experience and wider societal discourses upon the framing of the experiences of an individual.

Lois Presser has argued that narratives can be viewed as antecedents to criminal behaviour (2009: 178) and that “Narrative criminology ‘focuses on how people establish who they are – their identity work – by emplotting their experience’ and ‘seeks to explain crime and other harmful action as a function of the stories that actors and bystanders tell about themselves’” (2012, cited in Sandberg, 2013: 71). In contrast to Hollway and Jefferson’s and the idea that narratives reveal something about the underlying beliefs and motives and the construction of a defended narrative, Presser argues that we should study “the narrative itself, as opposed simply to the events reported in the narrative, as a factor in the motivation for and accomplishment of crime and criminalization.” (2009: 178). Whereas, for Hollway and Jefferson the focus of narrative methods, and the FANI method which they have adopted, should be the individual who creates the narrative, rather than the narrative itself (2008: 304).

Hollway and Jefferson also suggest that “According to psychoanalysis, unconscious dynamics are a product of attempts to avoid or master anxiety” (2008: 309) and that “narrative analysis has a preoccupation with coherence” (Ibid). The Free Association Narrative Interview Method is rooted in psychoanalysis and aims to get research participants to talk freely about their experiences, drawing conscious and subconscious

links between experiences and events accordingly. Despite this, I do not class myself as a psychoanalytic researcher but rather a qualitative researcher drawing upon the Free Association Narrative Method to tease out the intricacies of a defended narrative. The method focuses upon the idea of the ‘defended subject’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 296) and the idea that people are not “unified, rational actors” (Ibid). In contrast, the narrative method in criminology focuses on the idea that “through narrative we forge a sense of coherence” (Presser, 2009: 180) because “self-narrative communicates a complex character that has unfolded over time and thus has the potential for further change.” (Ibid). In both traditions, it is essential to account for the role of the researcher in the research process for:

“Narrative is generally coproduced by the research participant and the researcher, if not during the interview then certainly in the process of analyzing data later...In this regard, reflexivity and the analyst’s disclosure of what she or he calls the narrative and why are crucial.” (Presser and Sandberg, 2015: 14).

I have sought to avoid privileging my own interpretation however, for despite the fact that I may have identified things within the participants’ responses, my own interpretation still relies upon those responses and the narratives shared “are tailored to the purposes of storytelling” (Presser and Sandberg, 2015: 3). It is unlikely that the research participant will have ever revealed their full self, especially given the evolving nature of an individual’s identity and the role of underlying anxieties in the formation of the defensible self-identity. However, by examining the contradictions arising from within the narratives some of the underlying anxieties and ontological insecurities of the individual can be revealed. This research draws upon the FANI method to help

understand where these contradictions which are revealed as people seek to formulate and articulate a defensible understanding of the self.

One of the main problems which has been identified with the application of Free Association methods is that the researcher no longer takes the spoken words of the research participant as 'telling it like it is' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:57-58). Critics of increased interviewer involvement and interpretation argue that this has the potential impact of influencing the data insomuch as the researcher is allowing their own interpretations to influence the way that the data is read, and thus the outcomes of the study, thereby jeopardising their position as a neutral observer (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Baxter and Eyles, 2004: 505; Denzin, 2009). However, in response to such criticism, any exploration relies upon the interpretation of the researcher, whether using more structured or wholly unstructured approaches and, as previously discussed, an interview is far from a neutral interaction. In fact an interview is arguably as staged a scenario as they come with each participant adopting a role, or perhaps better still character whereby they reveal some elements of themselves, whilst hiding others to protect their more vulnerable side (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2003; Gadd, 2004). Furthermore, the participant has already made it clear what elements of their story are important by choosing those elements to share in the first place. Polanyi has previously argued that "*Stories* are told to make a point, to transmit a message...about the world the teller shares with other people." (1985: 12 cited in Chase, 2003, 274 [original emphasis]). In light of this, the narrative has already provided the meaning and the problem lies not in the interviewer not taking the spoken word as gospel, but rather in ensuring that the nuances of the *whole narrative* are considered rather than fragments thereof. Through using the Free Association method I have documented my own changing thoughts and opinions in order to analyse these and the influence that they may have on the data. As shall be seen elsewhere there have been

several events which have challenged my own dispositions as the research evolved and this has led to increasing reflexivity throughout the project.

Identifying the communities

My initial intention was to focus upon conducting the research in the community, concentrating upon the way that experiences of unemployment and crime can vary even across a relatively small city. To identify the areas in which to situate the data collection statistical data from the census, indices of deprivation and ward profile reports were reviewed in order to identify the key areas for study and these were examined to see which areas in the city suffer from the highest levels of unemployment and deprivation relative to surrounding areas. In order to provide what is hoped will prove to be a suitable comparative range of data this was essential. The analysis of the data helped to identify the key areas for the study as Bentilee, Forest Park, and North Shelton and Etruria and there is a clear contrast between the areas.

Bentilee, as is discussed in chapter two, is an almost exclusively traditional White-British, blue collar community in what was, when it was built, the largest council estate in Europe and has the highest income and employment deprivation in the city (Johnston, 2009a). North Shelton and Etruria and Snow Hill have the highest minority populations, particularly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent, and a growing student population courtesy of the location of the Stoke campus of Staffordshire University (Ibid, 2009b), providing potential for an additional culture clash. Lastly the Forest Park and Cobridge area which is listed in almost all counts as the single most deprived area in the city, with a large volume of abandoned, boarded up properties which were bought up by the council under the, now defunct, Housing Renewal Pathfinder (Ibid: 2009c).

Shortly after recruitment began, however, local political boundaries were changed which meant that the statistics for each area also changed due to their new catchments (Local

Government Boundary Commission for England, 2011). The significance of this change decreased over the course of the study however due to the adjustments required in the recruitment process. Whilst it was possible to recruit a small number of participants from Bentilee, it was decidedly difficult to recruit participants from the remaining neighbourhoods. Housing organisations, support groups and residence associations were engaged at an early stage, and whilst their assistance was appreciated and a strong degree of interest was garnered among these groups, they ultimately provided more of a signposting role to other organisations in the city than to locations within their community.

Because of the difficulties in recruitment and the fact that two hostels and supported housing providers, a housing association and a local employment programme had agreed to get involved, I focused upon recruiting through these. This was again haphazard with a number of participants dropping out for various reasons (one due to concerns for his own mental wellbeing if he did participate; one due to being charged with theft and subsequently sentenced to a custodial sentence; and several more due to moving on from their accommodation with no mode of contact or communication, or falling 'off the wagon' and returning to alcoholism (*field notes*). Whilst switching focus in this way meant that I was unable to study specific communities in the way that I had originally intended, it did mean that I was able to develop an understanding as to what community life within these locations was like. Moreover, some of the participants live in the same hostel and sharing some experiences through living in that location, they did not all spend their formative years living in the same location. Such a 'captive population' such as was found in the hostels meant that it was possible to develop an understanding of the different experiences of life in a wider range of communities than I had originally envisaged. Another related benefit stems from a number of the experiences which the participants spoke of relating to a wide variety of locations within the city including those

which I had originally planned to study. Thus it was still possible to develop an appreciation as to what life in those areas was like.

Recruitment and Data Collection

One of the greatest challenges which needed to be overcome was that of recruiting enough participants fulfilling the criteria set out at the start of the study. In light of the fact that I already knew who the target demographic of the study was, I utilised an *a priori* specification to define the population that I would be recruiting so as to ensure that the appropriate cases and samples were identified (Bryman, 2012: 422). Building upon this, I employed a purposive sampling model due to its ability to allow me to target individuals who fit the criteria of living in Stoke-on-Trent and being unemployed as the main sample group, with a significant proportion having had experiences of crime. What will become apparent throughout the ensuing chapter is that the process was lengthy and challenging. The participants of the study belong, perhaps paradoxically given the disproportionate amount of political and media attention received, to a 'hidden population'; often hidden in plain sight. Three challenges had to be overcome; firstly in recruiting enough participants to share their narratives; secondly in maintaining contact with them long enough to obtain their stories and follow up with them where required; and lastly to elicit the narratives from defended subjects who often come from backgrounds whereby revealing any sense of emotional or ontological insecurity or weakness is looked down upon by their peers (MacCleod, 1995; Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001). These challenges are addressed throughout the discussions which follow.

Ethical approval was gained on 18th August 2011 (see Appendix A) following a lengthy process of negotiation with the Ethical Review Board following initial feedback which, due to the nature of the research, would have meant that the project would have been unfeasible due to their initial recommendation that all criminal disclosure must be passed

on to the police. An eventual agreement was reached whereby any disclosures of threats of harm to the participant or others, or any future criminal conduct, would be passed on to the relevant authorities and participant information sheets were amended to reflect this.

The majority of participants were recruited through third party organisations serving as gatekeepers. This provided a number of benefits and challenges. Contact was made with a vast number of organisations with only a handful providing a positive response *and* helping to facilitate the research. This distinction is essential for I received several favourable responses, but only limited contact from these organisations thereafter. By the end of the process two hostels and support housing providers, one housing association and one employment and training scheme provided the support and access which I required to conduct the research itself. Most of the organisations which were engaged provide support to a large number of unemployed people throughout Stoke-on-Trent whether in their own homes, through social or supported housing, hostel accommodation or employment and training schemes. Whilst it is likely that I would have been able to access most of the participants required for the study through one or two organisations due to their large customer bases, engaging a larger number of organisations provided greater scope for a variety of responses because they, collectively, have a much larger client base and serve each of these in different ways. Reliance upon gatekeepers carried other risks, however, particularly with regard to the potential for recruiting participants outside of the project specification. A good example of this relates to a young participant who was removed from the study because, despite the study being targeted at over eighteens with experiences of unemployment, was still seventeen and in college when he took part. However, given that he had signed the consent forms and agreed to partake in return for remuneration from myself (which, it became increasingly clear was the main

motivation for his engagement with the project), I still felt obliged to provide him with the same reward as the other participants.

Furthermore, what should have been a key benefit in engaging people living in hostels was that it should have meant that it was reasonably easy to contact and meet with the participants in those locations. In reality, however, there were three challenges which had to be overcome during the research process. Firstly, some participants had a prolific offending history and, as it later transpired, were still offending up to and during the research process. It was as a result of this that one participant dropped out of the study before any full interviews could be conducted. Alcohol dependence was another major issue and meant that several participants, particularly from those recruited to compare the experiences of older participants, were again lost. The final hurdle related to the reliability of some participants to attend the meetings when and where they were arranged. In some cases participants have lived particularly chaotic lives and were in the process of piecing their lives back together. For some their keyworkers proved to be particularly helpful as they maintained the diaries for those individuals, whilst in other instances persistence and frustration became hallmarks of the research process. One aspect which was particularly interesting is that, despite the introduction of a financial incentive, the ability, or perhaps willingness, of some participants to attend the interviews remained surprisingly elusive. There were a number of occasions whereby interviews and meetings were rescheduled in light of this. Darren was a prime example of this situation and I ended up heading to the same interview three times. On the first occasion, I arrived and he had gone to the wrong location, the second time he had forgotten and asked me to come back again, and the third time, we eventually managed to conduct the interview.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, especially given the current controversy relating to the setting of sanctions targets and league tables, access to participants via the government agencies

was difficult at best. At the time of conducting the research, the probation service in Stoke-on-Trent was undergoing major changes in line with the reductions in spending occurring under the Coalition's austerity plans and thus access to participants via this route became increasingly difficult to secure. With hindsight, accessing the Probation Service at a much earlier stage in the process would in all likelihood have helped to speed up the recruitment and data collection process and, were I to repeat the study, this would be one of the first avenues approached. Whilst conducting this project, however, I chose not to due to a desire to focus upon the impacts of unemployment as the lowest common denominator rather than proven involvement in crime. The project was further undermined by the unwillingness of the Job Centre to provide me with any assistance. Upon asking contacts within the Job Centre, I was instantly rebuffed due to a fear among the civil service of breaching data protection laws despite repeat assurances that it would be a case of passing on my details to participants and asking them to sign pre-formatted referral forms agreeing to have their details passed on in the first instance.

Initially I looked at a number of ways of gaining access to participants including various community and voluntary groups, council and police sponsored programmes, housing associations and assorted support groups. Having contacted a number of these, it became apparent that housing associations could prove to be a particularly useful group of organisations, but would also allow me another area of analysis in terms of the provisions available to assist individuals enduring social exclusion, unemployment and life in a deprived community. Other organisations were also keen to be involved on the condition that I did not 'use' the young people which they were working with and supporting, and were particularly happy when I outlined my plans to do anything but that, particularly following the introduction of incentives. Evidence of my student status was provided and two approaches were adopted when recruiting participants: with the housing associations, letters were sent out to individuals living within the three areas within which the study

was based informing them of my research aims and inviting them to participate, whilst in a minority of cases I approached the individuals personally and explained the aims of the research.

A loose interview guide (Appendix D) was created to support myself, as the researcher, in directing the interview. Whilst the FANI method requires the researcher to let the participant lead the interaction through their responses, thereby allowing a narrative to develop and the underlying emotional responses of the participant to come through, it is essential to see how these responses relate to the areas of discussion. Open questions including “Can you tell me about your life experiences to date?”; “Can you tell me about your experiences of unemployment?” and “Can you tell me about your experiences of crime?” paved a loose path for participants to follow. This helped to take into account differing understandings of crime and unemployment which can vary from person to person. Following this, more sensitive topics were addressed, with questions such as “Can you tell me about relationships with your family?”, before delving further into examining the detail related to participants’ initial responses. This allowed me to build a positive rapport with participants and help them settle into the interview, before delving deeper into the narratives elicited and thus helping to increase the volume and quality of the data. There were however some exceptions to this; earlier interviews provided the foundations upon which to build but, as the research evolved, so new avenues were opened up for investigation which were missed in these earlier interviews.

Some participants were less forthcoming than others, often resorting to much more guarded responses. This meant that the same question needed to be asked in multiple ways to extract the information. In order to increase the volume, depth and veracity of the data collected over the fieldwork process, a number of methods were employed including multiple meetings with each participant. It was clear from an early stage that I would not gain the level of data required simply from meeting each participant once and

interviewing them about their experiences. Firstly the area of research is sensitive to each of the individuals partaking in the study and a large degree of trust is required so that they are aware of the purpose of the study and that analyses will provide a fair representation of them and the information which they have provided. Secondly, with regard to the changes in lifestyle and their consumption practices and networks, particularly in the case of those who had become unemployed either shortly before or during the course of the study, a single interview would limit my ability to follow up on any aspects which were incomplete or required further investigation. In each case, following the initial recruitment meeting, participants were invited to provide information about their backgrounds, visually where possible (e.g. via walking or driving around key locations with myself), before moving on to carry out the interviews. This provided an opportunity for me to develop an understanding not just of the experiences of the individuals but also *where* key events had occurred, whether related to a family home, school, past workplaces or other locations within the community. This afforded an additional valuable opportunity in that I was able to build stronger rapport leaving the participant feeling more comfortable and thereby, hopefully, increasing the potential to elicit detailed narratives from them (King and Horrocks, 2010: 48). Whilst still an unnatural setting (it is rare for someone to show a complete stranger around important locations at any other time), I believe that this helped to improve the quality of the data. It allowed a more naturalised interaction, increasing the possibilities of the participants, as ‘defended subjects’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 19) providing a less ‘defensive’ story through engaging in a more readily available form of communication – a conversation – than can normally be achieved in an interview setting. Moreover, in some cases this provided more information than the interview itself. In the case of Gandi, who fell asleep in the interview and then became uncontactable thereafter, the additional fieldwork

undertaken proved invaluable to filling in the blanks and providing further information on his narrative.

Through providing multiple engagements with the participants in a variety of settings it was possible to identify underlying conflicts, contradictions and unconscious narratives in their stories. According to Hollway and Jefferson, the adoption of a psychoanalytic framework, “not only takes biography seriously, but also the contradictions with which lived lives are riddled” (2000:136). This helped to develop a deeper understanding as to the impact of participants’ experiences upon them, whilst highlighting some of the issues faced when accepting the participants’ spoken word as gospel (i.e. contradicting the idea that the conscious, spoken representation made by the participant is the Truth, rather than the ‘truth’ as they have constructed it; a longstanding problem with any type of qualitative research (Effers, 2010: 13)). This proved to be particularly useful, as exhibited by Simon, who initially disclosed a story about getting involved in a fight and cutting someone’s arm with a knife after they’d tried to break down the door into his flat (*field notes*). In the interview he contradicted this, telling the same story but with the person who initially tried to break into his flat cutting himself on broken glass. When pressed, he stuck to the story that said that there was never a knife, and I am unable to ascertain which the real story was. This outlines the ways that people adapt their story for the environment that they are in and the image that they are trying to portray but also underlines one of the major weaknesses of conducting any research which relies upon participant disclosure to inform it.

A list of the activities undertaken to improve the quality and veracity of the data are shown in the table below:

Activity	Description
Triangulation	Data was collected from multiple meetings in varying environments to allow cross-checking and cross-referencing of stories and highlight contradictions and conflicts within the participants' narratives.
Visiting key locations	Where participants were willing to do so, important locations from their life were visited including: former homes; workplaces; and sources of criminal activity to provide a picture of the participants' lives. This provided a less formal setting in which to elicit stories as well as additional stories related to these locations.
Primary Interview	In the primary interview open questions were used to ask the participants to talk at length about their experiences. Subsequent questions were based around the content and order of their narratives so that they were directing the interview and thus working to reduce the power imbalance traditionally found in the interview setting.
Reviewing the Data	Following the primary interview the data was reviewed and any particular themes which were not discussed in enough detail, or any conflicts and inconsistencies in the data were identified ready for re-examination.
Secondary Interview	In the secondary interview, the inconsistencies, conflicts and gaps in the data were examined to provide a more holistic understanding of the narratives provided and to help highlight the differences between the conscious representations put forward by the participants and the information that they provide unconsciously over the course of the narrative.

Table 8: Research activities undertaken

When attempting to recruit participants it became apparent that the vast majority of people did not have the same interest in the research I had, perhaps in part due to a lack of incentives to partake. This is highlighted by the fact that, over the first five months of the field work, only two participants were successfully recruited and this provided cause for concern resulting in two major adaptations being made to the study. Firstly, the recruitment net was cast wider thereby increasing attempts to arrange access through organisations already contacted; the communication process with many of the support agencies in the city was slow with it taking weeks to get a response from some at times and thus groups which provided more traditional, legitimate routes towards reinforcing a sense of masculinity, notably gyms and sports teams, were also contacted. Whilst, at times, some of these proved willing to help, the recruitment process was still slow. Eventually this picked up, however it is unclear whether this was down to the fact that I

had, by now, introduced a payment scheme so that each newly recruited participant would receive a £20 top up on their utility payment cards (or a gift voucher for a local store⁷), or the fact that two hostels in Stoke-on-Trent had agreed to provide access to their customers and tenants, along with interview rooms on a regular basis where required. Whilst it has been previously noted that incentives are not always a motivating factor for everybody, it is likely to have a positive impact upon the engagement of some participants. In support of this, previous studies have suggested that the inclusion of a financial incentive can have a positive influence on recruitment and retention rates (Patel, Doku and Tennakoon, 2003) and it has also been suggested that this is one way of addressing the power imbalance in the research process by providing money in return for time (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:84). For instance, whilst this is not a postal survey, there is evidence to suggest that a reward for participation can significantly improve both response rates and times (Patel, Doku and Tennakoon, 2003). To minimise the risk of the incentive being ‘misspent’ on items such as alcohol and drugs (a source of concern for support organisations), where the participant was living in social or rented housing, they were offered a £20 voucher towards gas and electricity. Where participants lived in a hostel or did not pay their own gas and electricity charges, the participants were given the freedom to choose where they received a voucher for, subject to not being able to purchase any alcohol or tobacco from those locations. This enabled me to thank participants for their time, whilst also serving to increase retention and engagement rates by those participants.

Furthermore, because of the recruitment process, I was also able to recruit people from diverse backgrounds which included those who had moved to the area, in addition to

⁷ Where participants were offered the gift vouchers, certain stipulations were applied to avoid the potential for participants to ‘misuse’ the proceeds. Participants were not allowed vouchers for anywhere that they were able to purchase alcohol or tobacco in any form.

those who had spent most of their lives in the city. As will be seen in subsequent discussions, however, this has had little impact upon some experiences, suggesting that many experiences are shared beyond localised geographical boundaries.

As anticipated, recording the interviews proved helpful. It ensured that I was able to accurately capture data gained in each interview - an essential part of any research project (Patton, 2002; Denscombe, 2002) - and also freed me up from making continual notes throughout the interview so that I was able to pay more attention to the participant, including their mannerisms and intonation when speaking more emotively about a subject. Likewise, I was able to provide further acknowledgement of the participant throughout, adding to my ability to build a stronger rapport with them. Following the first interview, and in line with the Free Association method, I took the recordings back and listened to them back several times, noting any areas which required revisiting whether due to contradictions and inconsistencies in the initial interview, a topic had not been covered, or because more detail was required on a topic. This enabled me to ensure that all of the required data was collected before providing the participant with their remuneration for participating. I then followed this up with a second interview, approximately 1 week later wherever possible, to collect any missing data and check and recheck aspects of the narratives which required further validation and investigation (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; 2008; Andrews, Day, Sclater, Squire and Treacher; 2002). As discussed previously with regard to Gandi, some participants did not respond to attempts to follow up on the initial interview. In each case however, the interview was not the first stage of data collection. What became apparent however is that in cases where participants did not respond to attempts at follow ups, the information disclosed in early fieldwork sessions became invaluable by filling in some of the gaps as well as providing interesting background context. For instance, despite completing all of the interviews, it was during the opening stages of the research that Storm disclosed that he

felt ashamed of his inability to support himself at present due to having struggled to secure any work whereas his mother had gone from strength to strength. As such, despite the fact that she would have welcomed him back home, he did not feel that he could return (*field notes*). He did not disclose this voluntarily in the interview stage and thus this information would have been lost had I not engaged him in such a way. Equally, Phil, who did not respond to follow up attempts, was able to link his narratives to specific locations and these provided additional background stories which helped inform my understanding of Phil and his background, including the areas he had grown up and the way that these had influenced his lifestyle. For instance, because he had grown up in an area in which macho portrayals of masculinity were essential to one's standing, he repeatedly made reference to his desire to maintain a strong physique and to get involved in a scrap to preserve his own masculinity and prevent any victimisation himself (*field notes*). Once again, despite touching on this during the interview, the lack of ability to follow up with him afterwards meant that this extra data proved invaluable.

Some participants have remained in contact, the reasons for this are at times unclear but some additional benefits have come from this, particularly with regards to Craig with whom contact was initially lost but then regained after meeting in a supermarket. I then visited Craig in his new social housing flat where he provided me with a series of bits of paper on which he had written a talk he was giving to people attempting to deal with their own alcohol dependency issues, and on which he had detailed the causes of his own anxiety and alcohol dependency; something he had not previously disclosed. Thus the building up of trust over time through maintaining contact can help to reveal further data to assist the researcher in making more sense of the context and further improving the content of their analysis.

Data Analysis

The data was transcribed by me, by hand. I had considered outsourcing the transcription, however as I had stated in the participant information that I would be the only person engaging with the raw data, combined with the sensitive nature of some of the stories, I opted to carry out the transcription myself. This was a long and tedious process; however it did enable me to begin to draw some of the narratives and themes out of the data at an early stage whilst listening to the interviews back. Furthermore, my perceptions of some of the participants evolved throughout the transcription process as I had to pay much closer attention to the data. This has been documented when discussing my reflections on the process at a later stage, and was a useful way of assisting me in examining and charting the evolution of my abilities as a researcher and my understanding of the key themes emerging from within the data.

Through transcribing the interviews manually I was able to begin to gain an idea as to what the themes and underlying narratives which emerged from the data were from an early stage. I initially began working with QSR NVIVO to code the data, however, due to a series of corrupted data files and a desire to focus on the whole narrative rather than fragments thereof, I eventually decided to code the transcripts by hand, using colours to highlight specific themes which were identifiable within each transcript before comparing the transcripts to see which themes ran where. The idea of fragmenting the data by picking out only certain elements when coding, and removing them from their original context is not a new one; when critiquing her earlier work, Malson noted that:

“In ‘chopping up’ the interview narratives and focusing instead on extracts (which had thereby been decontextualized from the wider stories in which they had been embedded), the overall coherences of the ‘lines of narrative’ of each transcript were perhaps being sacrificed in the analytic process of extracting and elucidating the various discursive constructions of ...subjectivities.” (2000: 155).

This again underlines the strength of the Free Association Narrative method in taking into account the discursive formations of the participants. This is not something that I wanted to have happen to the data in this project and therefore, having transcribed the data, I created pen portrait for each participant, providing an outline of who they were and detailing important aspects of their narratives and experiences. This was particularly important because it is the stories that the participants have shared which form the core data for the study and it is important to represent the participants as whole people by not simply fragmenting the data, aka their stories, to suit the needs of the study.

Because of the nature of the research and the potential risks associated with interpreting peoples' responses (namely imposing the researcher's meaning and frames of reference upon the data), reference is made to contradictions and tensions within the narratives. Through examination of the underlying narratives provided by the participants it has been possible to delineate between what is consciously stated and what emerges unconsciously. In such instances, I have sought to identify the distinction between what was disclosed by a participant and I have understood from the process. Taking participants' testimonies at face value carries with it significant risks, particularly given that they are constructing their narrative in a particular way aimed at portraying themselves in the way that they want to be seen and understood (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2003; Gadd, 2004). It is for this reason that analysis has occurred of the underlying narratives so as to ensure that accurate portrayals and understandings of the narrative in the social, political and economic circumstances in which they are constructed are provided is reflected upon throughout.

Ethical Considerations

Bryman has argued that it is important to provide protection to the research participants to ensure that their safety is not jeopardised through participation in the project (2012:

509-514). There are a number of ethical considerations to take into account when carrying out such a study as outlined by the British Sociological Association (BSA) (2002) and British Society of Criminology (BSC, n.d.) and the university, to protect the participants, researcher, university and the professional reputation of the discipline. In accordance with guidelines, ethical guidance forms have been completed and agreed upon by both supervisors and ethics boards within the institution. To conform to the regulations outlined by the university, BSA and the BSC, prior to commencing the interviews all participants were provided with full participant information sheets and consent forms (Appendix C) for their own records to ensure that they fully understood the aims and expectations of the study. Consent forms were signed by the researcher and participant on each occasion.

In accordance with standard ethical procedures, full anonymity was provided to all participants, with names changed throughout (Bryman, 2012). The maintenance of anonymity was seen as essential in this project for a number of reasons. Firstly it is necessary to protect their identity, particularly given the nature of the study and the fact that elements of the research touch upon criminal activities. Moreover, based upon experiences learned when piloting the interview techniques at Master's level, the promise of anonymity proves a useful tool in helping to discuss potentially sensitive matters. Safe in the knowledge that it is only the researcher who would know the names of the participants, as well as anyone that was discussed, it was possible to get the participants to talk about relationships with families and friends that they may not have done otherwise. The only exception to this was if, at any point, cases of serious harm or abuse to themselves or another were disclosed to the researcher, including past events and threats of future events. This was to ensure the ongoing safety of the researcher, participants and associated others and all participants were to be informed of this at the start of the study so that they were fully aware of this fact. Some other alterations to

locations were also made to protect them from identification, particularly where they lived in hostels. As a result identifying features and remarks were removed or replaced by [location], however I have worked to minimise any further changes to avoid warping the narratives thus altering the data beyond recognition which would risk altering the meaning of a participant's spoken word (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Malson, 2000). This was done to ensure that the participants' stories were not misrepresented or taken advantage of as the research unfolded. This was imperative to ensure that participants felt comfortable and unthreatened at any point during the research process.

In light of this, whilst hoping to take each participant out for them to show me around their communities, in some instances, the participant made it clear that they did not wish to do this. Reasons for this included fears about bringing up bad memories, and fears of engaging with people that they no longer wished to associate themselves with as they work to move on in their own lives. Interviews were conducted in locations convenient to the participant, whether in their own homes or in an interview room in the hostel they lived in where appropriate. This was done to address the power (im)balance which is frequently observed as occurring in an interview setting (Elwood and Martin, 2004; Clandin and Connelly, 2000; Fontana and Frey, 2008). The reliance upon open questions, as per the Free Association Narrative Interview Method also assisted with addressing the power balance by leaving it open to the participant to lead the interaction, choosing how to follow up each point that they made, and directing the interview accordingly (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This was done to ensure that the synergies linking the topics and themes discussed were more natural, compared with those which might have been imposed by myself had I provided the structure for the interview. That is not, however, to say that I did not have any input upon the direction of the interview. At the start of the process, each participant was informed that I was examining the links between

experiences of unemployment and crime, however definitions of ‘unemployment’ and ‘crime’ were left deliberately vague.

These vague definitions of both the terms ‘crime’ and ‘unemployment’ were deliberately selected for fear of becoming too focused on specific offences or experiences, in addition to the manner in which everyone has different experiences and perceptions of any phenomena based upon their own background (Foster and Spencer, 2012; Effers, 2010; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The results of this approach are visible in the remainder of this thesis. Following each of the interviews a full debrief was given about what the researcher hoped to uncover through analysis of the interview. Where possible, a summary of the interview was also provided to each of the participants to ensure that their views were being correctly portrayed, thereby ensuring that the aim of providing stories and information from the point of view of the participants was fulfilled as successfully as possible. This was not possible in some cases as some participants ‘disappeared’ either part way through, or soon after the research was conducted and I was subsequently unable to trace them.

Something to which careful attention had to be paid was in ensuring that participant views and narratives were relayed in such a way as to ensure that they retained their meaning. As noted by Malson (2000: 155), ‘chopping up’ narratives can lead to their decontextualisation. However, equally, a failure to consider the social, economic and political contexts which have informed an individual’s experiences also have a detrimental impact. It would be impossible to discuss the testimonies of those who took part in the research in a way which divorces them of their meaning because to do so would render the results meaningless and unrecognizable to the people who shared their stories and made this research possible in the first instance (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). In doing so, not only would the data lose all of the meaning that it is laden with due to misrepresentation of the experiences of the individual by separating the experiences and narratives from the

environment in which they have been gained, but it also leaves both the data and the participant open to systematic abuse through decontextualisation by substituting the original meaning with one which suits the means of the person interpreting the data, not those of the original speaker (Ibid). Whilst it is, of course, still possible that I have done this unwittingly, by returning to the context and its influence throughout, it is hoped that this has been mitigated as best as possible as I seek to maintain the truest representation of the participants' testimonies possible. Failure to do so would mean that I, as the researcher fail in the primary aim of understanding the experiences of life and unemployment within a deprived community such as Stoke-on-Trent and the impact that this can have on both the individual and their experiences of crime and deviance (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Malson, 2000).

The potential for decontextualisation becomes increasingly evident when examining the testimonies themselves. Something which is repeatedly stated by numerous participants, but most noticeably by Mohammed, Michael and Hatman is that they are 'lazy' and do not try hard enough to support themselves. Taking the following extracts from Mohammad's transcript as an example:

MA: "Well I didn't think that, I didn't think there was any jobs out there but I didn't do any searching n' shit. I've just got a lazy attitude n' yeah."

MA: "Yeah mate since I was ten 'til I was sixteen I was always boxing an' then sixteen an' a half I went into volunteer coaching and then I stopped when I was eighteen or about nineteen 'cos obviously I still went up when I was eighteen but I kept not turning up and it wasn't fair it was when I started smoking weed. First thing that went, it was just laziness to be honest. It is laziness. [IM: have you found that you've always felt like that?] No it was only since I started smoking weed since I got a bit older, just I don't know. I just think of life as what's the point? Then I just started with the weed and being lazy..."

MA: "I don't judge people on how they look mate. I've grown up like that, I ain't bothered, I am what I am, if I'm lazy, I'm lazy an' if not it's on me, who can change me?"

Taken at face value this would appear to support the political consensus that the poor are poor not because of structural issues in society, but because of personal failings; they appear as lazy, feckless, disengaged and disinterested and such statements appear to support the social security reforms and pillorying of the poor which have continued for a prolonged period under successive governments. However, when accounting for the context in which these statements have been made, and the backgrounds of the people making them, what becomes apparent is that the way in which an individual understands their position is directly affected both by the environment in which one lives; the way that they have experienced this; and the way that an individual's experiences may or may not fit with the *habitus* which has been instilled in them from an early age. Mohammed has grown up in a post-industrial city which had already seen significant decline since long before he was born. Born around 1990, of the industry that formerly dominated the city and surrounding North Staffordshire was already a shadow of its former self – the blast furnaces and smithies had vanished, only two coal mines remained and the pottery industry had declined dramatically (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993: 177). Accordingly access to one of the main resources which formerly dominated working-class life for young men living in an industrialised estate became increasingly rare.

As such, it was imperative that these factors were paid due consideration to ensure that the data was analysed effectively, but also fairly to avoid misrepresenting participant views. Failure to do so would risk betraying the trust that they had paid in myself as the researcher and undermining the ethical considerations made when planning and implementing the project. One area of considerable interest within the data collection process related to AJ and the fact that he was the only participant taking part in the study

who expressed a desire not to be quoted directly within the analysis of the data. Many of AJ's responses were short and provided considerable challenges during the interview process. It was then important to ensure that, through paraphrasing AJ, his narrative was not altered, which in turn required a considerable focus upon his manner, whilst avoiding inferring meaning because he did not, or could not, answer a question. This, combined with his inability to articulate his experiences, repeatedly saying things like "I don't really know what to say anymore" and "I can't get my words out" indicate important underlying issues. One of these could be a lack of self-confidence, perhaps related to his childhood experiences of physical abuse at the hands of his stepfather combined with poor educational attainment and a failure to receive recognition from his peers (see chapter six). It may also be symptomatic of a wider issue facing the working-classes, particularly young men, who no longer receive the informal training through unionisation in how to represent themselves, their ideas and experiences.

Reflections

Through adopting the Free Association Narrative method I was able to track the evolution of my own thoughts, as well as identify predisposition and beliefs as the study evolved. In many cases, my opinion on some participants changed as the process went on. It was, at times, easy to feel sympathetic towards participants during the interview due to the way in which they relayed their experiences. It was only upon reviewing the data that it was possible to challenge these initial feelings by noting inconsistencies in the story and ensure that as objective a stance as possible was retained. Jay provides an excellent example here of the underlying narrative in his story and exposes his belief that he is the victim of his circumstances. Yet content from the rest of the narrative, including his involvement in drug dealing and theft from chemists and pharmacies belies his involvement in criminality and that his own actions frequently increased his vulnerability

to victimisation. Thus the manner in which a narrative is constructed is clearly designed to serve a particular purpose for the individual who creates it.

I also found myself needing to be careful about the language deployed in the research depending on who I was speaking with. Discussions with supervisors and others within the academy frequently included a large volume of what could be deemed more specialised language which was not appropriate when talking to either gatekeepers or participants. Whilst this view may seem somewhat narcissistic, I initially found myself rephrasing things for gatekeepers as I sought access, but also the ethical review panel who required a suitable level of language to be used for participants. This has helped me to further appreciate the differences between individuals and groups from all walks of life.

Having conducted the first interview with Mohammed Abdullah, he asked if I could drop him down to see a friend as it was on my way, to which I agreed. In the car, we began talking about music as I had Radio 2 on, and it transpired that James Dean was Mohammed's favourite musical artist; a stark contrast to what I had initially suspected for a young, 23 year old male living in one of the most deprived parts of Stoke-on-Trent. Upon discovering this, I immediately considered what other biases I might have had so as to work to mitigate these and ensure that they were not unconsciously imposed upon the interactions with the participants. This early reflexivity helped to ensure that I maintained a high level of self-reflection and that I was increasingly aware of my own underlying thoughts and background in the process. Furthermore, listening back to each interview, before transcribing, provided useful insights into my own practices. Whereas initially I frequently found myself having to repeat questions due to talking too quickly, and unwittingly asking more closed questions than I would have liked, over the course of the fieldwork, I have focused upon slowing my own speech, breaking down the questions put to participants and focusing increasingly on their content in the interviews.

The interviews with Craig at times left me feeling somewhat awkward, especially when, like Pickles, he began drawing links between our own experiences in order to provide a reference point between the two of us. Several other participants assumed connection between their own experiences of the world and their assumed understanding of myself and my own experiences. This assumed shared understanding proved helpful through acting to speed up the building of rapport which in turn allowed them to trust me as the researcher. At times, however, it also left me feeling awkward and as though I had misrepresented myself; the people participating in this study have endured prolonged periods of unemployment, often have low educational attainment, and have experienced the ravages of deindustrialisation and deprivation on a large scale. By contrast, being born in the south-east of England, I was largely protected from the same experiences of deindustrialisation and deprivation and have been fortunate enough to be comparatively well educated. Furthermore, my experiences of unemployment lasted a relatively short couple of months rather than the years that some of the people in this study have faced; and even then it involved living with a supportive family. There were also periods whereby Craig in particular sought reassurance with regard to his own course of action regarding interactions with child services and his former partner. He asked if I thought he was correct in his course of action despite my knowing little of the situation. This led to potential internal conflicts for myself through not wanting to appear unable or unwilling to engage on a more personal level, whilst also seeking to maintain a distance between myself and what were clearly important and pressing experiences for Craig as a person. This did, however, reveal the potentially cathartic role that the interview process could have for people given that they were able to reveal and in some cases unload a large amount of information about themselves which they might otherwise not feel comfortable revealing to a closer acquaintance for fear of that information being misused or another party becoming alienated.

Concluding Remarks

Through this chapter I have sought to outline the reasoning behind the choice of methods and the manner in which this has benefitted the study through allowing the participants' voices to direct the project whilst, at the same time, allowing the contradictions in narratives to be drawn out. This has, as shall be seen, helped to underscore the complexity of the process of identity formation and maintenance undertaken by the individual and the way in which representations of the self fluctuate over time and depending upon the audience. I have also discussed the potential ramifications of the methods underlying the study both upon the participants and myself, reflecting upon the research process and the information divulged and the way in which this influenced the direction of the study, challenging my own underlying predispositions and beliefs. This has allowed me to develop a better understanding of the field of study and has helped to improve the quality of the analysis and my development as a researcher.

What I hope has also emerged is the level of input required to engage such hard-to-reach and defended subjects. The process was testing and required a great deal of dedication: Firstly to secure the engagement and testimony of many of those who participated given that, despite belonging to a well-publicised population, with the lack of agencies such as the Job Centre providing access, this can be a difficult group to reach; Secondly, retaining interest and commitment throughout the process was challenging given the drop-out rates and rescheduled meetings and this was compounded by the chaotic nature of the lives of some participants; and lastly, the defended nature of the narratives meant that a strong rapport had to be developed to ensure that people trusted me enough to share their stories. Whilst the process may have been cathartic for some, the sensitive nature of the experiences shared, combined with the past experiences of those who narrated them and the struggle for some to articulate these, meant that the process was particularly challenging.

The complexity of the narratives is also symptomatic of the context in which these experiences have been garnered and I have argued why it is essential to consider these contexts when analysing the data to ensure that it is fairly represented and provides at least some justice to those who have shared their stories. In line with this, the ensuing chapter provides a sketch of the background to each participant and assist in understanding how the wider themes within discussed in chapters seven have been reached.

Chapter Six: Participant Profiles

Before analysing the narratives provided by the participants, and in order to fully appreciate and understand the idiosyncrasies within their stories, the reader first needs to understand a little about them. This chapter draws upon the transcripts from each participant alongside brief field notes and annotations and is designed to provide this understanding which will help to inform the subsequent analysis. By drawing out key features of the narratives the chapter thereby helps to develop a more detailed understanding of what their experiences mean to each individual. In each case a brief outline of the main points from the participants' narrative will be provided and it should quickly become evident that for each person, the impact of key events has had a profoundly different influence upon each person's senses of self and comprehension of the world around them. At the same time some similarities will emerge between the experiences and their influences and it is down to the researcher to help synergize the links between the individual experience and the way in which this can lead to commonalities of understanding. As previously noted, names have been changed to protect the identities of participants and participants were invited to choose their own pseudonym, however not all wanted to do this. In some cases the choice of pseudonym can be revealing in its own right. For example Gandhi drew on his nickname not because of positive associations with Mahatma Ghandi, but instead because it was a derogatory nickname which he received at school which he gained because the other children (correctly) assumed him to be gay. In doing so however, he also appears to be referring back to a nickname he gained during one of the few periods of stability in his life. As such, despite the negative connotations associated with his nickname, it provided links with a period of stability and relative positivity.

A number of the participants, but notably Brian, Craig and Jay have remained in touch. The reasons for this are unclear and appear personal in each case they vary; Brian retains an interest in the study and this appears to be linked to his own personal interests but may also be to do with his own educational attainment during which time he worked towards, albeit did not complete a doctoral research project of his own. Jay, by comparison appears to maintain contact in the hope that, due to a shared interest in gaming, I might be able to assist him in getting hold of games. Craig, by contrast, provided further information regarding the source of his anxiety and alcoholism. As such, it is possible that they now view me as a distant element of their support network upon which they are able to offload certain problems or concerns, largely related to the research, in confidence which they might otherwise struggle to speak about.

The profiles are not exhaustive in terms of the level of detail about each individual, nor in discussing everyone who was involved in the research. A number of participants withdrew from the study, often by failing to maintain or return contact between initially agreeing to participate and being interviewed, or not engaging in the project from the outset and the information provided by them is not included in this chapter. Instead the focus is upon those whose narratives are most visible and who have been the driving force behind the analyses conducted in the following chapters.

Tristan

Tristan, aged forty-two, was living in social housing with his ex-partner. He was seeking new accommodation as they had recently split up. Tristan had been his ex-partner's full time carer for four years and, as a result of their splitting up, he became unemployed. He had been seeking work for several months and had sent up to 30 applications in the previous month however he had received only four responses and only one of those was an invite to interview, thereby underlining the difficulties that people face when seeking

work. Because of his time as a carer, which involved spending much of his time around the home, Tristan was not heavily affected by becoming unemployed. However, his caring duties placed a great deal of strain upon his relationship: "I suppose I did sort of lose contact with people I used to work with and things but...it kind've occurs to me that...is why we're splitting up. Because of...boredom." As such, the previously discussed influences of unemployment upon an individual (loss of networks, boredom etc.) appear to affect not just the unemployed, but the unconventionally employed too. Tristan stated that he had previously been to the Job Centre whilst acting as a carer to enquire about work however he was told that he would lose his caring allowances and income support if he worked more than 16 hours per week or earned over £100. His experiences thereby emphasise the quandaries faced by many in seeking work and highlighting the way that, for some, not working provides greater security than working.

He is from Cardiff, having moved to Stoke-on-Trent seventeen years prior and has two children at a local school, with two other children from a previous marriage (however he sees little of them due to the distance and a lack of contact). Prior to becoming a carer, Tristan had a number of roles including as a delivery driver and working in various factories in low and semi-skilled roles, working his way up to foreman of a team in the final place that he worked.

Tristan spoke proudly about the last job which he held:

"I used to be a kit marshal which meant 8 hours a day, humping 25 kilo bags around and things like that...I had um 3 or 4 people under me. Working two shifts. I was on one shift but I was sort of responsible for the work of the other shift as well...I was responsible for the work for the 16 hours...They're a good bunch of lads. I virtually built the department up from scratch anyway so if there was a problem I could usually solve it within minutes."

As such this role appears important to him and his sense of purpose. Around a month after the interview Tristan had found a new job and was living in a flat of his own.

Tristan noted that there is crime in his community however he appears to have normalised this. He does not believe that crime levels in the area are particularly high this may in part be related to a decline in visible crime within the community:

“I wouldn't say there was uh, an undercurrent of constant crime, there's the usual vandalism and err the occasional idiot... but it's not as bad as it was made out to be when we first moved here. I was expecting like, things going missing all the time and people stealing and stuff.”

He has been the victim of crime on two occasions having had a brick put through a car windscreen and another car stolen and burnt out however he has had no involvement in the perpetration of illicit activities.

Mohammed Abdullah

Mohammed, aged twenty-three, is a white male who was living in social housing. He chose his own pseudonym for the study. The choice of pseudonym was deliberate and, as shall be seen, belies significant racial tensions. It has additional significance given that Mohammed is Christian and regularly attends church and the ‘Alpha Course’ run there because:

“Even though I've fucked up and I've done a bit of bad stuff, n, I ain't done bad stuff but I've done some bad stuff but the thing is I'll always believe in the good book, and I dunno why but I just do. From me conscience bit. Some people can say there's in't a god, I believe there is a god so there's always one of two and two of the other isn't there... I've got one of me mates who comes Alpha with me, he's alright... The alpha's learning more, learning all about Jesus Christ, and receiving all his spirit. Thing is at the moment I believe in God but it's all just gobbledygook at the moment is what I'm saying, I mean I'm just getting like more knowledge of the bible and stuff.”

Thus it appears that religion provides Mohammed with stability, and wider networks which, in turn, lends support to the idea that religion can be seen to have a positive influence on an individual's life course, even where they might be classed as socially deviant. It has also provided him with an aim; notably travelling the world:

"I've always wanted to see Jerusalem an' Bethlehem an' all them, Nazareth. An' I wanna go all, what ya call it I wanna go Peru n' see the Aztec thing, I can't even think is it the, it's the urm, I think it's the Inca's, I wanna see Macchu Picchu an' all that stuff. See the old trails of South America. Wouldn't mind going Switzerland either, wouldn't mind going Eastern Europe, France places like that. I was thinking about going on a volunteering holiday this year but...Probably fuckin', I mean I won't, there'll be no reason, it's just too much to lose."

However as the end of the above passage indicates, because Mohammed is unemployed and reliant upon benefits to maintain his accommodation, he is unable to realise this dream without losing his home.

As the pseudonym suggests, Mohammed has strong views on migrants however these are also somewhat contradictory; particularly given Christian teachings promoting tolerance:

"Dirty bastards, dirty bastards I don't like their morals, don't like how they treat people and then they can go around burning poppies but we go round and fucking do a load of shouting and get fucked and all they get done is a community order and an eighty pound fine for burning a poppy. Cheeky bastards!"

At the same time as this, he goes on to discuss the way in which those migrants he has worked with are hardworking and he can't fault them for this:

"Okay credit where it is due, they are harder workers than us. They're harder workers, fuckin' hard. They're fairly good grafters but it's just their attitude and that sort of stuff."

Thus Mohammed may be exhibiting the complexity of the narratives which we weave to help us to understand our experiences and how the interactions which they have with others have come to be understood. Furthermore, what becomes apparent is that the cultural perceptions which Mohammed carries and the way in which others engage with him appear to be a source of conflict. Moreover, whilst this at first appears to be due to cultural conflict and contains a degree of racial antagonism, this may not be the case.

Some time after the interviews had taken place I discovered that Mohammed had secured work with a housing association and was given 'three strikes' but subsequently lost his job. The first strike was for not engaging with the project he was working on; the second for calling friends and letting them know where they could find scrap metal around the estate on housing association properties; and the third strike for looking for a fight with local workmen carrying out maintenance (*field notes*). It appears therefore that, whilst he may want to work, his demeanour and belief sets may not be compatible with all forms of employment, particularly where his actions may run counter to the expectations of his employer. As such, we see that the source of the problem may not be Mohammed's racial views but rather his ability, or potential lack thereof, to follow orders from someone which he may not fully respect.

At the time of interview, Mohammed was officially unemployed and had been so for 9 months, struggling to secure the manual work that he has sought because he did not possess a valid CSCS⁸ card for working on building sites. He has often worked off the books as a scrap metal merchant 'tattooing'⁹ however would receive only a fraction of the income that you would expect if working for a legitimate company. He however was

⁸ A CSCS card is required by anyone who wishes to work in construction to show that they are qualified and trained in site health and safety.

⁹ 'Tattooing' is a colloquial term used by Mohammed to describe working in the scrap metal (or rag and bone) business.

happy with this as he can use it to top up his dole and he is able to choose the work that he does, something which is returned to in the next chapter.

There are numerous contradictions in his narrative whereby he refers to himself as having “a lazy attitude” before later stating that he is hard-working when he has the opportunity to work: “I'm a hard worker. I'd say I'm a hard worker. That's why this guy has me out on the van.” This is indicative of the pervasive nature of contemporary discourses surrounding the unemployed as being lazy, feckless and dysfunctional (see chapter three). In line with this he has adopted a fatalistic outlook on life: “I won't get far in life” and we return to this in chapter seven. Mohammed sees little of his father who lives elsewhere in the city but still works in one of the remaining pottery firms and stated that his grandparents were particularly important to him growing up. At the same time, Mohammed has a strained relationship with his mother who had him arrested once for possessing a significant amount of crack cocaine. He has regularly engaged in consuming recreational drugs, still regularly smoking cannabis, as well as occasional dealing. Mohammed used to box and relies on his size and physicality to look after himself. He has been arrested on numerous occasions, normally for drunk and disorderly conduct or fighting and this is clear testimony to this.

Pickles

Pickles, aged forty-eight years old at the time of interview, lives in social housing. He came across as an intimidating character when he spoke passionately about a subject, something enhanced by his military background and size; he is relatively short and broad, with a sizeable set of weights in his spare room. He lives in a clean, one bedroom flat in a housing association owned property in Bentilee, the same community that Tristan and Mohammed live in. Pickles was brought up in a children's home and gave detailed accounts of the brutal treatment which he received there. His experiences there have

prompted him to commence further research into the systemic abuse which has occurred in children's homes as he is otherwise unable to work on health grounds. Whilst in the children's homes he gained the nickname 'Pickles'. Because of this, his nickname was selected to provide an identifiable link to his past.

Pickles served in the army for several years and learnt to read and write there having entered illiterate. His narrative provided detailed examples of his experiences in the army and it felt at the time as though these examples were chosen deliberately to affirm the image of Pickles' dominant masculine presence and to try to elicit an according response from me as the interviewer and guest in his home. After leaving the army Pickles became homeless and then worked in a hotel, gaining additional respect and internal promotions and training whilst working in the kitchen. When he disclosed that he had served in the army, Pickles found he gained additional respect from others in the kitchen: "He said 'Bloody hell! Why didn't you tell us?' He said 'Your position'ed [position would] be a lot different if you'd told us that.' 'cos I'd had that discipline". We can therefore see the respect often afforded the armed forces due to the nature of their experiences. Furthermore, it also indicates that, despite the abuse experienced by Pickles in the children's home, a combination of the strict disciplinary rules there and in the army left him in a position to benefit in the future, albeit in a subordinate position due to his ability to follow instructions.

Following his work in the hotel, Pickles became homeless again. He was squatting in an empty home committing hire/purchase fraud by selling the hired items when he was arrested. He spent time in prison as a result, but due to the experiences which he had gained in other institutional settings, this had a limited impact on him. Indeed, he feels that prisons are becoming 'soft', stating that society should "put prisons back the way they used to be. You wouldn't get half these offending again, they'd shit themselves. It really was when I was in 'don't drop the soap in the shower room.' It really was that

then.” Pickles again returned to the streets after prison and returned to Stoke-on-Trent for the first time since joining the army and developed a heroin addiction which nearly killed him. At the same time as this he suffered a heart-attack which he still suffers the effects of.

Pickles’ expressed concerns over his neighbours who are Polish:

“They’re nicking their own, they’re stealing from our kids but you don’t see an ‘ungarian [Hungarian] or Polish become best friends to an Englishman or an English girl, you don’t. You don’t. They don’t bother with me, these upstairs...I’ve got Polish living above me...I sit in here sometimes at night time and all you can hear is them talking. All you can hear is Polish and it fuckin’ sickens your ‘ead and I think “I did the army for this?” My job was keeping the front doors fuckin’ locked. You know what I mean?

However he goes on to state that “I’m not racist, it’s a political view, they come and nick everything, know what I mean?” In doing so Pickles indicates that his views are based upon fact and, because of his experiences of active service overseas, this means that his views are not based upon racial assumptions. The underlying causes of such expressions are investigated in chapter seven. His experiences and assumptions are, furthermore, likely to be exacerbated by the fact that Pickles does not work and his home, dog and garden are the main sources of pride for him and are central to his ‘world’.

Pickles has two daughters by different mothers, however he rarely sees either daughter:

“Because the women [their mothers] are with other men and I say it to them, I’ve said to both women, even though they’ll give me access, it’s not fair on all me kids. I said when they get older, if they come looking, I’m here, you know where I am. But while they’ve got another stepdad around or whatever, but there’s a stepdad, I’d rather leave out the way, keep out the way.”

As such he seems to want to ensure that his daughters have a degree of stability in their life; it becomes apparent that he did not appear confident in his ability to provide this stability, given his inability to work or gain a steady income, as well as his own physical and mental health issues.

Pickles was asked by a local group of young drug dealers if he might join them due to his previous experiences of both drugs and being on the streets (*field notes*) however because of these same experiences and a desire to avoid inflicting the same harm upon others, Pickles declined. He does hope to work again within his own community supporting young people through youth activities. Part of this is likely to be because he suffers panic attacks when in confined and noisy spaces. When combined with the state of his health as a result of his former heroin addiction, this severely limits his ability to work and the options available to him. Pickles asked if I could bear him in mind should I become involved in any outdoor community based programmes in the area in order to provide him with employment options. At the time, he was researching a book he hoped to write on children's home abuses, drawing upon his own experiences. It is likely that one of the reasons for this was the cathartic nature of being able to document his experiences in his search for justice.

Darren

Darren, a twenty-three year old male, was living in supported housing having recently moved on from a hostel. He embraced drug dealing having moved to a Southern English city whilst doing his own plumbing apprenticeship. Darren grew up in Stoke-on-Trent and completed school, during which time he divided his time between his divorced parents and thus ended up with two friendship groups. He had to reconcile his self-identity with his performed identity (Goffman 1990) for each group, but claims that he is generally easy going at the same time:

“When I, obviously when I lived in [location one], they were better...people as I’d say and then you had like the [location two] side...I reckon I’ve got both sides in me really ‘cause like, if you see me mates from [location one], then they’re like me but only in certain ways, in other ways like, whereas like they aren’t the talkative like people and then you get the [location two] people who are like. I dunno. So do you understand what I mean?”

He said that he was popular when young and his first experience with drugs and alcohol was whilst at school, which has led to a strained relationship with his mother due to being seen as a bad influence on his brothers and sisters. Darren’s parents have always been employed and his original intention was to follow this, undertaking a plumbing apprenticeship. The resulting jump in income lead to him adopting a pleasure-seeking approach to life in his teens. During this time he moved south and got involved with drug dealing and consumption. At this point his life became ever increasingly hedonistic through another dramatic jump in income. Darren later had to return to Stoke-on-Trent however after the police raided the drug business which he was part of. He evaded capture by virtue of not being present at the time. He sees this as the best time of his life and does not appear to have any regrets having continued to engage in small scale dealing upon his return to Stoke-on-Trent. Another close shave with the police has however made him increasingly concerned about potentially serving a custodial sentence. Because of his drug dealing and taking Darren has been arrested several times but has not yet served time in prison due to evading arrest the last time he was nearly caught.

Due to living in supported housing he was struggling to get a job. Living in supported accommodation meant that he can’t afford to make up the difference between his income and outgoings as a result of the enhanced level of housing benefit that his accommodation supplier receives; something which he has in common with the other participants in the study. He stated that he finds life boring at present because he cannot afford much and

often runs out of gas and electricity; a major problem in the winter when he was interviewed. And yet, he chose a voucher for a jewellery store for his girlfriend over gas and electricity through the research, which may indicate the important role of his girlfriend. The loss of income through desisting from the level of criminality that he was engaged with has had a significant impact upon Darren, again reinforcing the reason for some struggling to desist. He has been sanctioned by the job centre for not turning up but disputes this stating that the first time he wasn't told the date and the second time thought it would be closed over Christmas. Given the chaotic nature of Darren's life (it took five attempts to conduct two interviews (*field notes*)) it is unclear if this is true. However, the fact that being sanctioned is not an isolated case both in this study and more generally may indicate that his statement bears some truth (see chapters three and seven for more discussions on the topic). At the time of the research he acted as a small time fence, buying cheap and knock-off goods and then selling them for a small profit. He has no real plan for the future and it appears that he is not ready to turn his back on crime, but is considering getting an SIA¹⁰ licence. This is, however, unlikely to succeed due to his past convictions. We thus see here a practical example of the constraints placed upon Darren's will to his future self (Crewe 2013) and the manner in which his past, as well as wider structural complications and demands, can influence the realities of the individual's decision making processes and future opportunities.

Interestingly, when I visited his flat, Darren asked that I ensure that I do not reveal the location of his home to anyone at his former hostel (*field notes*). It appears that he was seeking to 'knife off' (see Laub and Sampson, 2003: 149 in Maruna, 2007: 105) and make a break with the hostel (despite frequently returning there to see certain friends) and move

¹⁰ Security Industry Authority licences are required by anyone working in the security industry, for example bouncers and event security.

on from that stage in his life. This may be indicative of attempts by Darren to reform his character.

Phil

Phil, was aged twenty-one, was living in a bail hostel serving the remainder of a prison sentence on licence. He was sharing the hostel with three other men, all of whom he said are alcoholics. The accommodation was in poor condition with doors missing and the whole place having a run-down feeling. He is stocky, and both his fitness and ability to fight are important to him. He carries himself in such a way as to suggest that he has a high degree of confidence in his ability to 'be a man'. This is reflected through his speech and demonstrated by his focus upon providing short answers to questions and either an inability or unwillingness to open up at any length. He has strong associations with a local football team having played for their academy and relies on his continued associations with some of their players as a sign of status.

Phil has a strong relationship with his mother but little contact with his father and witnessed his mother being hit by her partner and was kicked out of the house as a result after "having a go at him [the partner]" and his mother left, however she later returned home leaving Phil in his own home. He completed school, gaining thirteen to fourteen GCSE's (he can't remember exactly how many) before undertaking an apprenticeship as an electrician on his granddad's advice, however he was made redundant following the company downsizing as a result of the 2008 economic crisis.

He first got into crime after losing the apprenticeship. By fencing stolen goods and found that he could quickly make a lot of money:

"I brought loads of dodgy stuff about two weeks in, with about, 'cos I had about three grand savings and I brought it all with that three grand so like a week or two and then it was easy money like so I never really looked for other jobs."

However he “got done over for...twenty-five grand cash” and stopped doing that, continuing to hold a grudge against the person who did so. Because he was able to make “easy money”, Phil led a hedonistic lifestyle: “Yeah I was living the life, I was only young. I wasn’t gonna save it was I?” He was arrested after blackmailing his then girlfriend’s mother (in conjunction with his girlfriend), and physically assaulting someone else. Whilst in prison he often found himself fighting and revealed underlying racial prejudices stating with regard to ‘Asians’ that he hates them and that the reason for this is that “Me family does so I ‘ate [hate] ‘em, do you know what I mean? That’s how it works.” He also attempts to explain that this is because “Them as racist as us you know, you just don’t hear it as much”.

Phil wants to ‘go straight’ and gaining a significant other appears to be one of the reasons for this. He wants to feel like he’s earned the money: “when you go for a meal sand that like and you’ve bought it through going work, it’s different when you’ve just got like ten grand off a quick deal” and this was as a response to her statement that

“She says ‘anyone can get ten grand and shower me in gifts, it doesn’t mean that like.

It means that you’ve gone and you mean it like.’ You know what I mean? ‘Cos you’ve got to work hard for it, d’you get what I mean?”

A problem here is Phil’s criminal record. He has struggled to find work, having to settle for a place which does not ask for a DBS check, thereby limiting his options considerably.

In an interesting contradiction, he claims never to have been involved in dealing drugs yet goes on to state that “I didn’t deal, I just, I used to buy like a quarter like of coke and then like for about three, four hundred quid, and then when I went out like sell it fifty quid a gramme”. This indicates a distinction between what he views as drug dealing (i.e. large scale supply) and small scale dealing which he has undertaken. It also bears similarities with the manner in which cannabis and other recreational drug users seek to distance themselves from people who use and are addicted to harder drugs (see

Hathaway, Comeau and Erickson, 2011), thereby neutralizing the severity of one's own actions.

Michael

Michael, aged twenty-four, was living in a shared flat when he took part in the study. He was one of the most highly educated participants and was working towards the completion of a Master's degree at a local university. He moved to the area to start his first degree and had remained in the area for much of the following two years, partly as a result of a (now dissolved) relationship. Michael is articulate, especially compared to some of the other participants which may reflect his upbringing and private educational background. As a result he relayed the manner in which his experiences had affected him particularly effectively. Despite the educational advantages which a private education is often heralded as providing, Michael was struggling financially because of a lack of income and had previously spent two years in and out of employment, struggling to find any permanent or meaningful work. He has worked on and off filling temporary roles and vacancies, often undertaking cash-in-hand work to get by. His narrative helps to underline the manner in which the idea that progressing through higher education will help to boost one's life chances is increasingly becoming a myth (Standing, 2011, 2014), something revisited in chapter seven. In September 2014, Michael secured a funded doctoral research position elsewhere in the country. Michael then appears to continue to hold education as the panacea for his continued struggles to find employment despite his past experiences and the fact that the master narrative within his account is one of failure in spite of his enhanced education.

Despite being unable to afford much, Michael regularly trained in karate and was an active paintballer; something which is, from personal experience, an expensive hobby in itself. He stated that "It did stop me going mad, which is quite important I think 'cos

otherwise I would have literally had nothing but unemployment, shut off with myself.” He shows awareness of the atomising and isolating nature of unemployment. He appears to blame himself for much of the situation he was in stating frequently, like Mohammed, that he was lazy. However this is at odds with the work he did put in and serves to highlight the pervasive influence of wider political, media and societal discourses surrounding unemployment and benefit claimants:

“I don’t like taking money off of people if at all possible. I mean I’m not going to lie, I’m here because my dad is paying my fees and I made a promise to myself that when I get a job I will pay him back...I’m increasingly unwilling to take money off people...I suspect I’m falling prey slightly to our erm beloved government’s erm plans for demonising people on Job Seeker’s ...I just, call it an admission of defeat as well I guess.”

He has evidently struggled to reconcile this desire for independence with the fact that his family were sponsoring his Master’s in the hope that it might result in improving his job prospects stating that his father was paying for it but that he would pay him back at the first opportunity. What also emerges is that Michael sees receiving support as a sign of weakness. His statement “I...call it an admission of defeat” indicates that he again sees himself as a failure, and perhaps those around him who also find themselves in need of support, as having failed, because of accepting that they need the support.

AJ

Twenty-one year old ‘AJ’ lived in a hostel. His pseudonym is based on a nickname he picked up when younger and which he has subsequently retained. He had a turbulent childhood with his mum leaving at an early age and him getting beaten up and physically abused by her partner at the time which ultimately ended up with him moving to his “auntie’s”. AJ was involved in regular shoplifting, theft and violence from an early age, and this led to his being incarcerated aged fourteen to fifteen. He spent a prolonged

period sofa surfing with friends and identifies this as being when things went wrong for him despite his previous childhood experiences potentially indicating an earlier influence. AJ indicated that his peer group was one of the major influences in his criminality as he tried to gain the respect of older peers. This saw him get caught several times due to being slower and smaller than his peers. AJ maintains traditional understandings of not 'grassing' on peers (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996; Yates, 2006) and implies a continual desire to develop and maintain their respect. However, that appears to have not materialised. He no longer associates with this peer group and appears to be keen to 'knife off' (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 149 in Maruna, 2007: 105) from his path, and again, a new relationship appears key to this. AJ deploys numerous neutralization techniques (Sykes and Matza, 1957) to explain the way in which he retains a greater level of morality and higher 'standards' than some of his peers in seeking to mitigate the impact of his actions compared to 'more serious' offences such as mugging someone on the street. Drugs, particularly cannabis, have played a prominent role in AJ's life and there was a distinct smell of cannabis upon his clothes at the follow up interview (*field notes*) indicating that he still relies upon the substance.

He expressed regret that he had not left the area with his mother when she left with his three siblings and who he has little contact with. He did not finish school and was regularly fighting throughout his teenage years, which saw him suspended for racial assault. AJ has a limited employment history having worked for a door-to-door window sales firm, struggling to find the motivation to work and live on the commission paid to him. His aspirations included getting a home for himself, away from the areas in which his previous associations caused him a number of problems (although paradoxically, especially given that he regrets not moving with his mother, still within Stoke-on-Trent) and to secure work as a commercial mechanic.

Spanish Omelette

Spanish Omelette (referred to herein as Spanish), aged twenty-five, was living in a hostel. His narrative shares many similar aspects to AJ's. Spanish selected his own pseudonym, however he did not suggest any particular reason for this, beyond stating that it was the first thing that he thought of (*field notes*). He was born in a Northern English city when his mother was fifteen, and was looked after by grandparents until the age of three when he was put into foster care, being adopted aged seven by a devout Christian family. He received a great deal of abuse, particularly psychological, because of the family's zealous views, and ran away aged fourteen, dropping out of school in the process. He fell in with a gang and dealt drugs to survive, working his way through the gang's hierarchy. This poses a significant challenge to accepted ideas about the positive role that religion can play in one's life, a distinct contrast to Mohammed's experiences. He still bears the physical scars from this time, and his lack of trust in others suggests psychological wounds as well.

Spanish moved to America aged nineteen to escape the city. However, having not found any work due to not having a visa, he again fell back into crime and ultimately fled back to the UK. Because of his criminal activities, Spanish has been in and out of young offenders' institutes and discovered the violence and masculine hierarchies prevalent in such total institutions with everybody seeking to affirm their position: some as 'top dog', and others seeking to avoid being seen as the weak and easy target:

"I'll admit at first I was scared. 'Oh no! Everyone wants to batter me!' Because it was like that in the young offenders' institution, like with the boys like obviously they all think that they're hard and they're trying to prove a point so every day you're fighting. Someone's got a problem with you for something. Even if don't want to you can't avoid it, you're having a fight that day or someone's gonna stab yer or try and do something to yer. You know boiling hot water and a bit of sugar 'Tsssss' in

yer face. It fuckin' hurts. It burns yer face and the sugar gets stuck in yer face, in yer, in yer blood, it's horrible!"

Like Phil, Spanish has discovered the inherent problem for someone carrying a criminal record in that he has struggled to find employment. This led to a return to growing and dealing cannabis post-release. He has had five children: one lives in the US; two more died of cot death; and two more live with his ex-partner and who he occasionally sees as they are still on relatively good terms, however he acknowledges that they "aren't good together anymore. It started to get violent for both of us." Partway through one interview Spanish revealed that he was still smoking cannabis and that he continues to view himself as a criminal:

"I've had about two spliffs already today. I can't stop smoking that, it calms me down...See, I'm still a criminal now, I'll tell you that now. I don't pay for things. Things I've got in my room I don't pay for anything, like me razor, my deodorant, little things like that I just put it in a bag and walk out the shop. It's not hard, it is not hard at all. You'd be surprised."

He continues to shoplift because of a lack of money. He has a large gap in his CV, due to his past and, the money that he does receive goes on maintenance for his children. Despite seeking to change his life and desist from crime, it becomes increasingly apparent that desistance is problematic, and that desistance is a process, and often a long one at that. Thus Spanish has desisted from drug dealing and gang related activity and instead engages in comparatively petty offences instead.

Spanish met his biological father, a convicted paedophile, when he was eighteen. His father later tried to kill Spanish and his family by burning their house down whilst they slept, and so Spanish has again severed ties with his father. He has also made contact with his biological mother who he stated is a "pothead, her head's fucked" and he doesn't get on with her either. Spanish then cannot rely upon strong family relations to support

him in his attempts to redeem himself. Furthermore, two of the key role models in his life also exhibit considerable deviant behaviour and he does not have any 'positive' examples to follow. He has two half-siblings via his mother, one of which is autistic and very smart and whom Spanish is proud and protective of, despite not seeing them due to his mother refusing to let him near them due to Spanish's background.

Spanish stated that he made a lot of money via his gang affiliations and criminal exploits, however said that "I don't wanna bring money here. I could just get a private house, get a car, get meself a little business going but I don't wanna do that 'cos it is dirty money." Instead, he stated that "if somebody offered me a fuckin' job even if was cleaning the sewer with me own fuckin' toothbrush I'd fuckin' do it mate because I can't be arsed with crime anymore" indicating sentiments similar to Phil. It is for this reason that Spanish moved to Stoke-on-Trent in the first place as he seeks to leave his criminal background behind. He views the hostel in a similar manner to a prison, understanding its similarity to total institutions (see for example Sykes, 1958; Toch, 1992; Foucault, 1991). In his attempts to change the direction of his future Spanish is hoping to undertake training as a Youth Activities Coordinator, steering young people away from crime and expressing classic signs of desistance and redemption narratives (Maruna, 2001; King, 2013). He has stated that this is because he has acute coronary syndrome, having suffered three heart attacks already, and does not want his children to remember him as a "a bad person".

He has in the past worked sporadically in a bar and as a landscape gardener however on both occasions was seduced back to crime stating "I'm too used to having too much money. It is, it, it is difficult. Once you have something and it's gone, you realise what you had". Reflecting upon his experiences, Spanish has branded himself "a fucking idiot" and, as will be seen in more detail in chapter seven, appears to have internalized the risk based, responsabilization agenda prevalent within contemporary discourses (Beck, 1992; Young, 1999; 2007). His experiences have left Spanish distrustful of everyone and this is

reflected in his views on politics, where he is highly disenfranchised with the current political elite:

“It’s all fucked up, the government has just fuckin’ wasted this country. I think David Cameron has fucked this country completely and I don’t even see the point in even having a fuckin’ government.

Simon

Simon, aged twenty-four, was living in a hostel. He has spent three years on and off homeless and living in hostels, once securing housing but later being illegally evicted by his landlord. For Simon, who also wants to gain his SIA licence, his past indiscretions pose similar problems to those faced by Darren. He was living in a hostel after having split up with his partner, who remains in their old home with their children. He moved from a London suburb with his family when young and has had several stepfathers resulting in a lack of continuity in terms of both family composition and also positive father figures. One step father “used to lock the fridge, put locks on the fridge locks on all the cupboard doors, the doors in the kitchen and the living room and we weren’t allowed to go in by ourselves and things like that so I got brought up, it was a shitty life really.” He stated that the reason for the move away from London (which saw one of his brothers left behind) was due to he and his brother having been banned from multiple shops, however he later also revealed that his biological father had been involved in drug crime and that as a result his family may not have been safe at the time. The younger of Simon’s brothers (both are older) was in prison whilst his oldest brother would periodically send work Simon’s way where and when he was able to in the form of short-term, cash-in-hand projects, however this was not a reliable source of income. Simon has two sisters who he calls ‘goodie two shoes’ indicating a potential lack of respect for them due to not getting into deviant activities at a young age as he did, however also noting

that they are still fifteen and, given that the family no longer live in the same community as Simon first lived, may not have had the same criminogenic influences.

Whilst growing up, because he wasn't given a key, Simon often spent time waiting outside his mother's home to get in after work because she was working later. He was eventually kicked out of the house and this is likely to be a key catalyst for the weak relationship that he has with his mother.

He was first exposed to crime at a young age with his father involved in drug crime but also via his cousins who worked as sex-workers. He has been engaged in abduction, assault and drunken disorderly behaviour. Most recently he has been engaged in metal and fuel theft, both of which represent relatively easy and profitable targets. He was arrested for assaulting a bouncer, however states that he received a hefty blow to the head by the bouncer, and again by the attending police officers. He has taken a range of drugs, although never 'crack' because of the effect it can have.

He dropped out of school to work as a boat builder and during this time, stating that when he moved to high school:

"I moved down a set. I had to do my SATs again like because my birthday's on a weird date, sixth September when everybody goes back so what they've done is when I've moved from London they've put me down a year so I had to redo my SATs so I didn't really like school really and I reached the age of fifteen up here and started working as a boat builder."

It appears then that Simon prioritised engaging in a role which he enjoyed and gave him a sense of purpose over remaining at school, which he did not enjoy in the first instance.

Simon has worked in a variety of manual trades including welding, fabricating and freezer work at a large food storage unit, often working several shifts back to back to make some money. He stopped working three and a half years prior to the research to watch his

children grow up and found that he was able to support himself and his girlfriend relatively comfortably off of the state benefits which they received, however, he has an unstable relationship with his children's mother and her family with the police being called several times to various incidents.

As noted in chapter five, Simon maintains that he has been set up on each occasion as he is a "pussy cat" (*field notes*), however there are a number of inherent contradictions within his narrative to contradict this. A notable example of this was revealed during preliminary activities, when he stated that he'd chased after someone who attempted to break into his flat with a knife, which was subsequently disposed of by a helpful neighbour. He later amended this story in the interviews and made no such mention of a knife. In doing so he provides an excellent example of the complexity of the constructed narratives and the way in which they are often constructed for a particular audience. Something which may also have influenced the change in the story however, was the fact that Simon was aware that any divulgence of incidents of harm to the self or others could potentially be passed on to the relevant authorities. As such, his story may have been changed to protect himself, thus highlighting the potential constraints placed on such a study in order to fulfil ethical compliance.

Simon has struggled with little income for some time and this took time to adjust after earning over £400 per week when working and this has caused serious hardship. He has had to borrow off of people, however their generosity has its limits as he has discovered, and this led to several suicide attempts. Therefore we see evidence of the severe pressures placed on them by financial instability and this can be compounded by wider experiences associated with unemployment (see chapter four).

Gandi

Gandi, a twenty-seven year old male, lived in both hostels which partook in this study. Gandi's pseudonym is based upon a childhood nickname, which was used to highlight his sexuality at school. As such, whilst it carries with it significant negative connotations, it may also represent a link to a period of stability within his life, and may explain the reason for choosing a pseudonym with such derogatory connotations. He fell asleep during the interview as a result of a come-down from a drug-fuelled night the night before, and so his testimony is limited. This meant that analysing Gandi's story required a heavy reliance upon additional field notes collected earlier in the research process.

Gandi spent a long time living on the streets whilst battling a heroin addiction, also struggling with the pressure of not having 'come out' to his family. This pressure was a major contributing factor to Gandi's multiple suicide attempts. However, since 'coming out' relations have improved and he has made no subsequent suicide attempts (*field notes*). After leaving school, Gandi worked consistently, going on to undertake an apprenticeship in IT. During this time, a peer at work first introduced Gandi to heroin. He developed a habit and eventually lost his job after stealing computers from a school to fund his addiction (*field notes*). This resulted in prolonged bouts of homelessness and rehabilitation.

This led to his becoming involved in crime, especially theft; and he was willing to take whatever he could get. This included from family which led to him being cut off by them for a period. He harbours deep feelings of regret, particularly with regards to his nan who died whilst he was in rehab:

"I stolen off her and basically took her for a right...like if I asked to borrow money, she'd tell me to go and get her money, she used to keep her money in one of them lockboxes, so I'd go and get that and help meself to another forty or fifty quid...there's a lot of guilt over that. And me sister was ringing saying nan wasn't

ill, nan was ill sorry, er, she wants to talk to you, she just keeps asking for you, no-one else but 'cos I was too interested in meself and doing me own thing I just basically kept trying put her to the side and er, I got a phonecall... at the weekend saying that she had renal failure or something like that. Then I got a phonecall the next morning, about half seven saying that she died. Erm, so that hit me like a ton of bricks. It felt like me world was just imploding on me 'cos like she was, she was more than a nan to me, I'd lived with her and it hurt like 'cos I was in rehab and I'd got no way of getting back, so I only got, literally like I went to the funeral, didn't have chance to go the wake after or her remembrance do or whatever they are so I didn't even get ter see her off properly so that hurt. It really hurt that did."

The destructive impact of drug addiction is detailed explicitly by Gandi: the desperate lengths taken to secure money to fund a habit and the impact that this can have upon the relationships between people and their families.

In addition to stealing from family and friends, Gandi has been engaged in metal theft around the city, stripping out abandoned buildings and selling off the metal in the process (*field notes*). He has also committed hire car fraud on several occasions, hiring vehicles for others who would then use the vehicles to conduct other illicit activities. This has led to trouble with the police on several occasions:

I was renting out, renting out cars for people... That was uh, I ended up with erm, what was it now, some car rental place up in Fenton who'd made out that I'd erm, hired a car and stole it basically. Erm, and on top o' that I'd got these other people I was hiring cars from, all over...I'd got police from Manchester, Derbyshire, Shropshire, our police, Cheshire, pretty much in a big circle, every police force, coming on me door... I think one week I had five different forces come visit me."

Gandi's deviant exploits were wide and varied, and yet it appears that he was often able to cover his tracks, by virtue of the fact that he was not driving the vehicles that have often been used by others for illicit means.

More recently, Gandhi has been working to repair relationships with his family and now has a much more positive relationship with his parents and sister. This, combined with working to improve the IT systems for a gay rights charity and the hostel that he was living in, indicates that Gandhi is seeking to turn things around for himself and that he is better able to support himself in the process. He does, however still consume various narcotics on an ad hoc basis and this was the cause for his falling asleep in the interview:

“[I] still smoke a bit of weed...last night we had a...blast on...phet [amphetamine] last night...like weed...I can take it or leave it and ‘phet, the same again...Probably why I’m nodding now, happens every time when I come down. I was hoping it’d come later in the day.”

Therefore, as has been seen with regards to Spanish’s tempts at desistance, for Gandhi, reducing his drug consumption has seen him stop consuming heroin, but he still enjoys cannabis and amphetamine which he feels that he can manage and control the use of. Thus the level of control that he is able to exhibit over his usage is clearly important here as is the idea of desistance from drug use also being a process rather than simply a result.

Storm

Storm, aged twenty-three, had been living in a hostel for several months. He has a positive relationship with his family but did not feel that he could return home. He attributed this to two factors in particular: being ashamed of the fact that he was now unemployed and unable to support himself (*field notes*), and so he did not want to feel like a drain upon his mother’s resources; secondly, because he felt that his mother lived in a fairly rural area, and that this would limit his employment prospects.

Storm finished school with good grades and went straight into an apprenticeship however, like Darren and Phil, he never achieved the highest level qualification because his company reneged on a promise to fund it. He is therefore struggling to find work as

he cannot work on gas piping, and employers would rather contract out work to people who can undertake all aspects of the role rather than part of it. Unlike Darren, Storm hopes to complete his training and become a fully-qualified plumber and he aspires to develop his own business so that he is able to employ others and widen his operations. However, he does not intend to do this in the UK because he does not see any significant opportunities here. He has looked at funding the training himself, however due to his current financial situation this is cost prohibitive.

Storm does not know his biological father, and was raised by his mother and stepfather who both working continually. His stepfather is a computer architect and his mother worked her way from a purchase ledger clerk to a financial director of a large logistics firm. This led to his family moving around a lot as his parents followed the work, and he has lived around much of the West Midlands and North West of England as a result. He has struggled to form many stable relationships because of this. As a result, Storm appears proud of his mother but they are relatively isolated from much of the rest of their family.

Storm formerly attempted to join the Royal Marines, undergoing their pre-recruitment training programme which he enjoyed because his day was structured. However, his girlfriend at the time was pregnant and so he left the programme. She subsequently died along with the baby and this caused a number of psychological issues:

“I’d been with her since I was fourteen and she was probably the only one who stuck with me through anything and everything, she was my best friend. She was pregnant with my daughter as well and I lost them both and that’s why I got stressed and depressed.”

He withdrew into himself, playing a lot of computer games and taking cannabis to cope and became skilled gamer, regularly entering competitions as part of a team. He appears

proud of his gaming identity which created an escape from reality for him and provided a separate, autonomous identity alongside his 'real life' persona:

“because I had to concentrate so much on what I was doing to play at my best I was able to ignore everything that happened. ...I was good at it, I felt good about it, people started to know who I was, who I am.”

However he sought to keep his gaming life and 'real' life separate:

S: “I keep it very separate...I know that I'm good err at gaming, I know that I'm very good. I know that they've changed the game around the way I play...

IM: “Okay...any of the confidence from being good at that, has it carried over into the rest of your life or anything?”

S: No, definitely not. I'm not, I wouldn't say I'm confident at the moment...I'd say they see the real me and this is a front, me being here because I don't connect with anyone here whatsoever. I can, they don't know what I look like, they know me as Lucky, they know that I like anime and no one judges me 'cos everyone's different whereas you get judged in the real world basically, and that's how it is an escape.”

Thus it appears that Storm is still concerned about the stigma associated with some of his interests: gaming and anime. This may stem from the fact that he was bullied at school as well whilst also losing a vital part of his support network when his girlfriend passed away. Whilst he did not select his own, the associations with gaming and the provision of his gamer tags provided the idea for his pseudonym. Storm has not found life in a hostel to be a positive experience. His health has always been important to him having been active as a swimmer and footballer when younger and he does not feel that the food provided in the hostel is good enough for a healthy diet, however due to the nature of life in the hostel and the relatively small amount paid to cover food and utilities, there is little that he can do about this. He has also found himself and his relationships under increasing strain:

“because I’ve been bored, I’ve been getting agitated by people in here who have nothing better to do than wind people up so mine and my girlfriend’s relationship isn’t at its best. She decides to ring me at the worst times and when I don’t answer she gets worried.”

As such, the combination of distance (his girlfriend is at university elsewhere in the UK), little privacy and a lack of other activities or opportunities, Storm’s relationship also continues to suffer at a time when his girlfriend appears to be a major part of his support network to the point where he used the participation voucher to buy her a present rather than spending it upon himself.

Hatman

Hatman, aged twenty-six, was living in a hostel. He chose his pseudonym based on the fact that he is rarely seen without a hat. He moved to a hostel in Stoke-on-Trent when his mother and stepfather kicked him out of their home. Hatman claims that he has no real ambitions and described his life in a nonplussed manner:

“I came from school with no real ambition, had kids at quite a young age, I didn’t really do anything. From the age of sixteen to twenty I was on quite a lot of drugs as well, erm, and all sorts of different drugs...that’s how I met my, met me ex as well; through drugs and then I had me daughter and I stopped everything for her like, I sorted me life out, got a decent paid job erm, but yeah. I had everything at one point but then it all got lost through her cheating on me and that’s why I ended up turning to drink and what have you, through depression and that’s why I am here, Stoke [hostel]. That’s pretty much my life, anyway, not far off anyway.”

He sees little of his daughter due to living away from her. What is clear, however, is that his daughter is a major influence in his life and she is likely to be the driving force behind any changes which he does or does not make so that he is in a better position to see her. His mother tries to help him out when she is able to but because of his previous drug use

and involvement in acquisitive crime, they do not have a strong relationship. Hatman finished school and went straight into semi-skilled work at a haulage firm. He has little patience and because of this, has struggled to hold down work citing nepotism within management at the companies that he worked as one of the pivotal reasons for this. Since moving to the hostel he got into a relationship with another person living there and she is now pregnant. He is not sure if the child is his or not due to relatively high levels of infidelity amongst the hostel's inhabitants and she has since moved on from there and has little contact with Hatman.

His first introductions to crime were via his cousin and peers, further challenging the deep-rooted, lay assumptions that strong family ties represent the best way to avoid crime (see chapter seven). He became involved in acquisitive crimes, particularly fuel and metal theft because "It's always tempting when you ain't got no money and how easy it is as well, 'cos it is easy." However he no longer does this because of a fear of getting caught and the implications that this might have upon his relationship with his daughter. Hatman was quick to point out that he has never targeted individuals but businesses which are in a better position to absorb the costs, something echoed by Shaun and Gandi. As such Hatman is setting himself apart from what he deems to be more immoral crimes, and neutralizing the harm associated with his actions in the process. The fact that the two reasons he identified for being in work previously were his daughter and being pushed to find work by his ex-partner indicate that Hatman has a lack of motivation to engage with work. One reason for this may be located within a need to be challenged and stimulated; something which is difficult to achieve in many of the post-industrial occupational routes available to a man in his mid-twenties with no post-sixteen qualifications and a patchy employment history. He highlighted by stating that

“I think I’m just going end up getting some rubbish job working in retail and I see all them jobs going in warehousing ... I don’t mind warehousing, in fact that’s my sort of work really erm but I don’t want to ‘til I’m eighty.”

One strategy in particular which dominated Hatman’s attempts to explain this lack of motivation was the attribution of his motivation to external factors. However, rather than focusing upon (for example) cronyism in the workplace, or structural issues in an overcrowded labour market, Hatman’s focus was instead upon the impending Mayan Prophecy which would signal the end of the world in late 2012. He has attributed much of his current lack of motivation to engage in effective job seeking activities or to support himself in anything other than the most remedial ways (ensuring that he eats) to this event. It is unclear, however, as to how likely any potential lifestyle changes were going to be once the prophecy was proven to be inaccurate or misinterpreted.

Hatman is unsure where he wants to end up living; either back where he grew up in a relatively nearby town, or remain in Stoke-on-Trent, and this is likely to be related to his lack of motivation or wider aspirations for the future. He stated repeatedly that he would like to learn a trade, particularly that of an electrician, however that he does not want to ‘waste’ three years of his life in the process. This appears to be symptomatic of a desire for instant gratification and a return to a lifestyle in which he has a reasonable disposable income, rather deferring to the possibility of increased future stability through learning a trade. What has become evident from the experiences of Phil, Simon and Storm is that learning a trade no longer carries the security that it once did, and this may also be weighing on Hatman’s choices.

Brian

Brian was forty-one and living in a self-contained bedsit within a hostel. He has since left and now lives in a one-bed flat. He retains an interest in this research project, being one

of the few participants to maintain contact. Brian grew up in Stoke-on-Trent and was pushed into sport by his father, which he initially enjoyed, becoming a leading member of his football team but ignoring many of his studies, before one day deciding that it was not for him. He attributes part of this to the fact that he struggled to fit in at school and suffered from a variety of obsessions (particularly obsessive compulsive disorder), developing a number of 'tics' as a result. This appears to have further undermined his confidence:

“[At] fifteen I gave sport up...just one day decide I was going to quit everything...which got a really bad reception from me father because he was really disappointed. Me sports teachers as well...It was just a case of ‘alright then, well you’re a waste of space, never thought you would amount to anything anyway.’ So that was kind of how it was treated and...I became err very introverted.”

Therefore, whilst sport is seen for many to be a positive experience; improving fitness, enhancing teamwork capacities and providing a release for others, it becomes apparent that sport can lead to additional pressures and strains upon the individual's life, and the relationships with those close to them. Brian has not had a positive relationship with his parents who split up when he was in his teens. This became most apparent when he became a virtual prisoner in his mothers' home after returning there to try to deal with a period of heroin addiction, before eventually being kicked out following an overdose. Brian has repeatedly fought drug and alcohol dependency and his first encounter with heroin came about after returning home one day to find a close friend had died there:

“I’d never seen anyone dead let alone me best friend. I really struggled with that, I didn’t deal well with it. I was in floods of tears for two or three weeks, you know? I couldn’t stop crying and err I started drinking...I was in a right state, I couldn’t concentrate, I didn’t wanna be there and I was drinking that much I realised that

something had to change because I was pretty sure I was making myself very ill, physically ill. So I decided one day to take heroin and that's how it started."

This same period of dependency also led to Brian developing into a relationship with a fellow drug user which led to continual recreational, and eventually habitual, drug use.

Brian is reflective and intelligent and this is mirrored by his educational background. He completed a degree at a local university and commenced his own doctoral research elsewhere in the West Midlands; however he never submitted his thesis due to developing heroin and alcohol dependency. Brian has a son who he spoke at length about, indicating both pride and concern over his son who has dyspraxia and who was born when Brian was aged twenty-one. Brian and the mother of his son's relationship ended when Brian was around twenty-four, when he first experienced long-term unemployment.

He has lived around Stoke-on-Trent and around other areas of Britain and mainland Europe with another former partner, having fled the city to avoid being made homeless as a result of their combined drug addictions. It emerges that a lack of stability is a key challenge for Brian. This is supported by the way in which he spoke positively of periods of stability whereby things progressed for him:

"I ended up on this engineering foundation year when I was twenty-five and that's really when...I stopped drinking, I decided... 'enough's enough' and I just quit one day and I didn't drink for...three years. I didn't touch a drop or anything, I just thought 'right I'll concentrate now, study, see how it goes.' And it went great, I really enjoyed it so that was kind of where I found me footing I suppose, when I found something I was good at and something I really enjoyed"

We see here that having something positive to work towards has been important for Brian, and has repeatedly provided him with the impetus to turn things around. He has little experience of committing crime with small time drug dealing and begging being the two forms of deviance he noted. However, he was on the receiving end of a continued

campaign of threatening and abusive behaviour when living in a particularly deprived part of the city, and this was not helped by the lifestyle Brian and his partner were living there at the time, which saw them relying heavily on alcohol and drug use. This resulted in Brian and his partner having to leave that area quickly to avoid subsequent victimisation.

Brian now writes poetry and aspires to get his work published, whilst assisting other aspiring poets. This belies an underlying desire to assist others, perhaps as part of a self-redemption strategy (Maruna, 2001); however he appears to be unlikely to return to completing his PhD because of a fear of returning to past habits. Brian asked for a gift voucher in return for completing the research and used this to invest in a new electric razor because his previous one was broken and he wanted to keep a more 'presentable' appearance, indicating an awareness that the presentation of self (Goffman, 1990) remains important in interactions with others.

Craig

Craig, aged forty-two, was also living in a bedsit within a hostel. He has since moved out into his own flat which is owned by a local housing association. Like Brian, he has remained in limited contact following the ending of his direct involvement in the research. His new flat is in the same community in which he grew up because this is where he feels most at home and most comfortable with his main networks remaining in that community. He has battled alcohol dependency for several years and, later revealed that this was related to witnessing a friend being beaten close to death by a group of people who were in fact looking for Craig (*field notes*). This alcohol dependence eventually led to Craig becoming homeless after his relationship deteriorated with his partner. He has three children, two of which were taken into care whilst the third lived with her mother. His eldest son was, shortly after the interview, serving a custodial

sentence for theft after becoming involved with a group of people involved in the supply of cocaine (*field notes*). Craig is hoping that now he has settled into a new home and is no longer dependent upon alcohol he will be able to support his son upon his release to assist him in avoiding continuing down the same path. Supporting others is also important to Craig and he is currently involved in voluntary peer mentoring schemes which he hopes will lead into more work.

Craig spoke proudly of the work which he had previously conducted and it is clear that this was a major part of his life and identity:

“I’ve been left school twenty-six years, so I’ve had twenty-six years availability for work as such, are you with me on that one? [IM: Yep] For twenty of those years I’ve actually worked and I have got experience in the building trade, you know. Erm, I am a qualified groundworker and I learnt, how I learnt me trade was because I started erm, when I got into the building trade, I’d had little bits of jobs beforehand but I always wanted to get onto building sites, you know. And after a couple of years I got on building sites and now I’ve got eighteen years’ experience working on building sites and how it all started, I got, I got a job just working as a labourer on a building site and I was helping all the other tradesmen out like the joiners, the plasterers, the roofers, you know, the groundworkers, the bricklayers, I like labour for all the tradesmen, are you with me?”

Before later saying that:

“we [Craig and his colleagues] enjoyed it, you know we used to, you know, after work we never had a lot of, a lot of social life truthfully speaking because obviously after twelve hours shift you were ready, you were ready for, for get your head down anyway. We used ter get together in the caravan, a couple of cans, you know and just get ready for the next day, you know. But basically it was really good money and that’s what it’s all about, I mean that’s the, you know, apart from like obviously you’ve got to enjoy your job yourself anyway”

He experienced repeated bouts of short-term unemployment when between jobs due to being a contractor, highlighting the potentially precarious nature of work in the construction industry which suffered significantly following the 2008 financial crisis. However, because he is developing arthritis in one of his hips, his ability to return to labouring as a ground-worker is increasingly limited.

Craig has been involved in several incidents with the police, all of which were drink related and include drunk and disorderly behaviour, and drink driving. As such, it appears that alcohol has been the driving force behind any deviance.

Stan

Stan, aged twenty-one, was living in a hostel. He spoke with an air of nonchalance, disinterest and narcissism throughout both interviews. He suffers from arthritis which limits his movements and ability to stand up for prolonged periods of time, something which he stated was a particular issue when it comes to job seeking giving the nature of many of the service industry jobs available.

Stan has two brothers, one of whom currently lives in the same hostel as him and the other who is serving in the military. In contrast to the experiences of Pickles who found that people who found out that he has a military background provided additional support and respect, Stan views that being in the military is not 'real work' stating that "[my brother] kinda grills me about being unemployed when he's never actually had a real job. The army is the only job he's ever had..." He therefore provides an example of both the animosity he feels towards his brother. However, given Stan's limited mobility, it may also potentially denote Stan's envy of his brother given that Stan has arthritis and cannot achieve the same level of physical activity or physique as his brother.

Stan had an abusive relationship with his father, who was an alcoholic, and Stan and his brothers were often beaten when their father had been drinking. The role of inflicting

violence upon Stan and his brothers was subsequently taken over by a step-mother after his father remarried. The significance of this change is not discussed here, however it is apparent that Stan and his brothers did not find themselves in a supportive or positive environment.

Stan completed school and struggled to find work since; He has had two jobs, namely washing cars and working in a gym. Both are low-skilled roles. He has been fired from both of these: one for arguing with his boss, and the second as a result of a fellow staff member making allegations that “I’d told her that I’d hated my job and I didn’t.” He disputes this, however and said that “I actually liked the job but err obviously they can’t have staff members saying that they hate the job on premises can they?” However this statement also appears to indicate that Stan readily accepted the decision and perhaps masks other underlying reasons for his departure, however he did not disclose them.

He has had a great deal of experience of unemployment having been unemployed since losing his job at the gym, and as a result spends a great deal of time in the hostel. This has led to him involvement in numerous, potentially dangerous pranks to alleviate his boredom, however he chalks this up as “playful banter”:

“[we] mock each other really. That’s all it really is now, I don’t like dislike anyone. But well I’m not the nicest of people, it’s like I say harsh things to people I do but they just need to learn it’s only a joke”

He later stated that, with regards to small time criminality and petty theft that he did it for the following reasons:

“I think it was more of an attention thing but it kinda grew up into, like people’d [people would] always look at me and expect ‘oh yeah, he’s just the disabled little nerd, he’s not going to do any harm to anyone’. So it was more the proving them wrong kind of thing really.”

Like many of the other participants, Stan has no significant aspirations for the future. He indicated that he will receive a significant inheritance in the future as a result of the successes of other family members and he appears intent on using this to live off rather than working, however he did not disclose the size of the inheritance he does not appear to have considered many alternatives should this not occur:

I'm just kinda hoping that I do get my inheritance when I turn twenny five which should keep me good for the rest of my life so that's all really, looking for really.

That's the only thing in the future that I do pay much attention to.

This then may be symptomatic of a 'get rich quick' ideal and a desire for instant rather than deferred gratification (Straus, 1962; Lasch, 1991), perhaps something aided by stories of lottery winners winning vast sums and TV shows such as 'The Apprentice', 'X-Factor' and 'Britain's Got Talent' providing opportunities for people to make quick money.

Jay Etherington

Aged twenty-nine and living in a hostel, Jay chose his pseudonym through a combination of a nickname and his favourite footballers. He still remains in occasional contact, often when he is seeking help in getting hold of computer games that he wants to play. He has had a prolific offending and victimisation history, with both closely related to his involvement in drug supply and use, and his former focus upon stealing large volumes of prescription drugs from pharmacies and chemists. He has two sisters. The eldest introduced Jay to drugs when he was twelve years old, and he eventually developed a habit which led to him shoplifting:

Jay: "[W]hen I was twelve...I was really ill. I was throwing up, crying, really poorly and she [his sister] used to do her drugs in front of me all the time, and this day she was doing the drugs in the bedroom, cos we shared a bedroom...an' she said

... do you want me to make you feel better ... she said gimme yer arm. So I gave her [his sister] me arm and she injected me with heroin and I didn't know cos I was only twelve, what the consequences were an' every single day after that for weeks on end she was givin' it me, injectin' it me, every single day and because I was like so young, sweet an' innocent she used to take me to places, tell me go in here, steal this, go in there, steal that, an' I did an erm she bought the drugs with it an' she gave me drugs an' erm one day I woke up an' I was really poorly cos I was addicted to what she'd been giving me, and then when I actually needed it she wouldn't give it me so then I had to go out and get it meself so I ended up, I ended up, I started to steal for it, and erm yeah so I would start to steal for it, erm yeah I'd steal for it an' all that stuff..."

Once again, we are able to see the consequences of having an older sibling introducing someone to deviant behaviour and thus acting as a catalyst for drug use and crime. This continued on and off for many years and eventually led to his incarceration on several occasions. Jay is very fond of his second sister and was mortified to find that, when he woke up from a coma having ended up on a trunk road (he cannot explain how he got there), he at first did not recognize her or had pushed her away whilst unconscious. The accident has left Jay with a metal plate in one leg and some neurological problems which have required continued support.

Jay does not know his biological father; however he has gained a father figure in the form of his mother's ex-partner. This has led to internal conflict for Jay after his 'father' left his mother for her best-friend. He formerly worked with his father as a decorator and plasterer, however lost this job as a result of his drug habits which led to him walking out of work on a 'come down' and not going back.

Jay was expelled from school for stealing a teacher's purse just prior to his exams and did not complete his formal qualifications, having instead taken them in prison. His narrative portrayed Jay as a victim of events, circumstances and the actions of others, mitigating

his own role in the process. This was particularly the case where he has become a victim of assaults due to his dealing. These neutralizations indicate attempts by Jay to provide himself with an understandable and articulable narrative which helps him to make sense of his experiences.

He also discussed being sexually abused by an acquaintance when younger, however gave no specific details. It is apparent that this abuse, and his perception of victimisation, has left him with little faith in others:

“I don’t trust anyone...I always think people are out to set me up. I always think people are trying to steal things off me or trying to think of a way of getting me to spend something they want me to spend it on, trying to get money off me. I just don’t trust people so it is hard to make friends.”

He was on probation at the time of interview for stealing ice cream and batteries whilst homeless, however he attributes this to the accident as he does not remember taking the ice cream and claims to have been set up for stealing the batteries.

Shaun

Shaun was aged thirty-eight and living in a hostel. He had a dishevelled appearance and asked for a voucher for a clothing store to buy new clothes. Shaun appears to hold a desire to turn his life around as part of that involves presenting a cleaner, more positive image of himself, something he shares with Brian. Shaun has spent his whole life in and around Stoke-on-Trent, and was kicked out of his family home aged sixteen. Since then he has had a precarious existence, often living on the streets during which time he developed a heroin addiction:

“Me mum kicked me out when I was sixteen and I’ve been living on the streets off and on since then. *I first got onto heroin when I was sixteen erm, just started taking it to*

keep warm cos it was cold like and it just went from there. The next thing you know, a few weeks later I'd got a habit and I kept robbin' and graftin' and stuff to get a fix like..."

He has been through periods of stability, mainly provided through relationships. It was during one of these periods that he first got into metal theft and raiding abandoned and condemned buildings after being introduced to the activity through a friend. Like others, engaged in acquisitive crime (particularly AJ and Scott), he neutralized his actions, explaining that he would never target a household and all of the places he went to were already abandoned or condemned (*field notes*).

He has worked on and off, mainly as a labourer in the construction trade or with local gypsies who have, in the past, been happy to take him on in cash in hand roles. This eventually ended whilst he was living on the streets as he found it increasingly difficult to hide the fact that he was homeless. His current girlfriend, who lives in the same hostel, has also fought addiction and both were enjoying a period of stability and making plans for the future which would see them setting up their own fast-food business catering for events and festivals. In order to achieve this ambition Shaun has undertaken voluntary work at the hostel and they have also provided training and support to help fulfil this aim and provide Shaun and his partner with a chance of being able to support themselves.

Tim

Tim, aged twenty-six, was living in a hostel. He had moved there relatively recently after his grandmother, who he had been living with, died. His parents split up when he was young and he moved with his father and two sisters to Scotland, whilst his mother remains in Stoke-on-Trent. Tim completed school, however often did not engage whilst he was there, and ended up with average grades. He moved to Finland stating that "I went to Finland as a boy and came back as a man". He has a child with an ex-partner and he is aware that his daughter misses him, however he cannot afford to get back there very

often as they live over an hour away by train. He is interested in going to university to undertake a linguistics based degree.

He has worked for much of his life, mainly in call centres and telesales, however frequently turned up late. It appears, however, that the failure of the company to enforce its disciplinary procedures meant that potential sanctions appear to have lost their meaning:

“I had about four or five final warnings. It was all because of lateness and sick days and stuff. And err they just didn’t fire me because they said that they couldn’t afford to get rid of me because I was too hard a worker to get rid of me [IM: Right, okay] so they weren’t going by their rules to get rid of me. They’d just keep me there and then it got to a time where I just felt it was time for me to go.”

Tim stated that he has had a number of jobs, but often left after two to three months. The roles included working as a cleaner, kitchen staff and glass collector as well as in a security company’s call centre. He has filled predominantly low-paid roles with little chance of advancement:

“the problem I’ve always had...I always worked hard and I got to the stage where they started asking me to do more work...they used to push me and push me and push me...and that’s when I start to lose interest because I feel like people are taking advantage because I can work as hard as they want me to work...if I started slowing down a bit they’d just moan at me because they knew I could work hard.”

Tim then was well aware of the exploitative nature of the companies which he worked for, and this appears to have served as a catalyst for his disenchantment with the organisations and ultimately as the key reason for him leaving.

Tim noted the close confines of a hostel and the lack of privacy as being a particularly negative side of his experiences, and he is concerned that he may be falling into “a rut”.

Tim got involved in a relationship with someone else living in the hostel, however this

ended “because there were too many people poking their noses in and it got too much for us”. This echoes sentiments expressed elsewhere, such as by Storm, and indicates that living in such close confines with others can place significant strains upon relationships.

He has no real experiences of criminality despite the fact that his father, who he stated drinks quite heavily and was actively involved in football related violence and hooliganism in the past, encouraged Tim’s engagement in it.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has sought to sketch a brief outline of the lives of each of the participants whose voices have been essential in informing the formation and direction of this thesis. The profiles outline the impact that life courses and unemployment has had upon the individual and the manner in which they seek to comprehend and articulate their experiences.

Two things should have begun to become ever more apparent: firstly, many of the participants have a number of shared experiences, the most obvious of which being that all are enduring, or have recently endured, prolonged periods of unemployment. Furthermore similarities arise now that they are living in similar localities, whether in the same community or hostel. Many share similar experiences of criminal engagement as victims and offenders, high levels of drug use and dependency and, in some cases, family breakdown. Secondly, these similarities have arisen despite coming from disparate backgrounds, whether educated or not; with a supportive family or without. This serves to underscore the fact that, despite all belonging to the group commonly defined as ‘the unemployed’, it emerges that simply reducing their status and experiences to a two-dimensional, homogenised mass is problematic and self-defeating.

This chapter has highlighted the precarious nature of the existence of many of these men and the way in which decisions about what to buy, or whether or not they should go to

work are hinged upon the impact that it will have upon identity and their incomes, and whether or not they will in fact lose out. What has also materialized is that other people and organisations which are traditionally seen as positive influences and central to keeping people 'on the straight and narrow' are not always the positive and effective panacea which we are led to believe. Whilst they may work for some, they do not always carry positive influences for all and this is in line with Jock Young's (1999) argument that there is no direct relationship between family stability and crime (1999: 155). Religion plays a positive role in Mohammed's life, but led to significant abuse for Spanish, becoming the catalyst for him leaving his foster family and becoming engaged in crime. For Michael, Storm and Tristan, who had supportive families, crime did not become a major part of their lives. In contrast, family influences appear to have been a major influence on the direction of Jay, Hatman and Simon. Therefore, experience of a particular phenomenon, or series of events, cannot be used as a predictor for the outcomes of an individual's life course. In the next chapter I seek to discuss just what these similarities and differences of experience mean and how they play out in the narratives of these individuals as they seek to wrestle some control over their life course and understand themselves and their identities.

Chapter Seven: The formation and maintenance of the ‘Defensible Self’

At the end of chapter four a series of questions were posed regarding the impact of unemployment upon experiences, identity and crime within Stoke-on-Trent. These were:

- What is the impact of both unemployment and life in a deprived, post-industrial city upon peoples’ lives and how do they make sense of these experiences;
- What strategies are deployed to mitigate the most extreme hardships faced as a result of their unemployment and abject treatment by the press, politicians and wider society;
- What role does crime and deviance play in resisting these abject depictions and in supporting the formation of articulable and defensible identities and understandings of the self?

This substantial chapter seeks to answer those questions, drawing upon the experiences and narratives of the participants to outline the way in which they seek to understand and define themselves despite facing ongoing hardship and continuous assaults, particularly external but also increasingly internal (through the internalization of wider discourses and rhetoric), upon their character and status within society. The chapter draws heavily upon both the participant profiles discussed in chapter six and the testimonies provided by the participants. As can be seen in chapters five and six, the stories and narratives weaved by the participants are highly complex, nuanced and at times contradictory and so this too is taken into account throughout the analyses conducted below.

What should become apparent is that the central theme emerging from these narratives is the desire to construct a defensible self-identity as they seek to understand their experiences in light of a lack of traditional resources upon which working-class men in an industrial community could formerly rely. The manner in which this is conducted varies

considerably between people despite shared and similar experiences and it is the way in which this occurs to which we will first turn. Alongside these attempts to formulate a defensible self, additional projects are undertaken, often as a result of the environment in which the individual finds themselves and the need to draw upon the support of others to maintain these identities. What is also apparent is that for some, the traditional support networks – family and close friends – are not always the positive influences that they are frequently postulated as being and can in fact be the trigger – directly or indirectly – for engagement in crime and deviance in the first instance. We shall see that identity and narrative formation and maintenance is a complex process which requires considerable effort and draws upon a range of, often conflicting, resources as the individual seeks to understand and explain their experiences and identities. Moreover we shall see that for some, crime and deviance plays an integral role within such strategies.

Perhaps paradoxically, however, we do not begin by discussing the manner in which participants engage in the process of forming and maintaining a defensible self. Instead, in line with earlier discussions surrounding the importance of the context in which phenomena are experienced, the initial focus will be upon the background in which experiences have been gained. The chapter will initially outline the way in which the narratives are socially informed before outlining the role of wider societal discourses upon an individual. Only once this discussion is complete will it move on to examining the way in which people formulate and articulate their sense of self in relation to their understanding of these wider social, political and media discourses prevalent throughout society.

Shared Experience

Before we analyse the main narratives shared among the participants of this study, it is essential to understand the way in which, despite the disparate backgrounds

(geographically, socio-economically and historically), a number of similarities can be identified, thereby emphasising that experiential similarities are engendered by external factors. Experiences are essential in informing and reinforcing our understanding of the world; from an early age we learn what is right and wrong and are quickly streamed into an education system which begins the process of training us to fulfil specific roles in a society. Accordingly, we become accustomed to living specific routines in the process precisely because “[e]arly experiences have particular weight” (Bourdieu, 1990: 60); the division of labour begins at an early age (Foucault, 1980: 125). The division is not of course just about labour. Other forms of socially constructed differences, notably gender, class and age are all significant when examining the nature of shared experiences and the ways in which solidarities are engendered by those who have shared their experiences, even where such similarities are shared across geographically and historically different backgrounds. These experiences, and our understanding of them, provide the context for our lives, supported and informed by our interactions and the world around us. When a void as large as that left by the loss of work is experienced, so other means must be deployed to fill it. Crime and deviance become prevalent and work conspicuous only by the void which it leaves in people’s lives. Subsequent generations, to which some among those whose testimonies inform this study belong, will have little idea as to what the work that occurred in the pits, pot banks and steelworks of the city entailed; they were not here to witness the rapid decline of the city but rather to live and exist among its decaying and declining remains. Their experiences are thus tainted by the scars of what went before and the knowledge that there was once ample work which did not require continual education and formal qualifications and which once successfully sustained the communities and people of the city which they now live in and amongst, the remains of which are discussed in detail in chapter two where the socio-economic history of the region is examined. However, some participants are old enough to have worked in

various industries and whilst the younger participants may not be old enough to remember the industry, they will have seen family working in it. As such, given the lack of suitable alternatives and replacements, all remember enough to mourn the loss of work.

Understanding the social, political and economic background of an individual's experience is therefore imperative when representing their narrative. The potential for decontextualisation has been discussed at length in chapter five when discussing some of the risks associated with qualitative research and will not be repeated here. The socio-economic and political contexts these experiences have been garnered are vital to understanding the nature and articulation of experiences within this study. In formerly industrial communities there was often an expectation that the individual would follow family members into work (Hart, 1987). However, with a lack of work, let alone suitable work, available, people have been largely disengaged from the labour market. Alongside this lack of work, there has, as is laid out in chapter three, been a considerable increase in attacks on the poor for being lazy, feckless and dysfunctional. There is considerable evidence to support the idea that the continual stigmatization of a person will eventually become internalized (Goffman, 1990) and the abject politics of division which have been hammered home in recent years have had a profound influence in Mohammed and others and their understanding of his position in the world and the way in which he understands himself. Between the lack of available work and the constant attacks on the poor, leading to the internalization of this stigmatization of being feckless, lazy, disengaged and welfare dependent, it is then little surprise that Mohammed has come to see himself in such a light. This is especially so especially given the way that one's *habitus* is influenced by external stimuli. This is not an isolated case; Stan frequently stated that he cannot work anything more than part-time due to long-term arthritis issues; AJ appears, on the face of it, utterly disengaged; and lastly, at least for the purposes of illustrating this

disengagement; Hatman, who has only spent a comparatively short amount of his life in the city yet also hails from a post-industrial community in the North-west, has no idea as to what he wants to do and has a perceived lack of interest in coming up with ideas as to what to do or how to get there. What is apparent from these narratives is that these young men (none of these four are over twenty-six years old) are not equipped with the knowledge or skills required to succeed in a knowledge and service based economy. They are pulled from pillar to post by a political class with no understanding of what it is to be working-class, never mind young and out of work as a result of the continual process of de-industrialisation and redefinition which has been going now for well over thirty years (Winlow and Hall, 2013: 88). These young men epitomise their position as products of a system which has trained them to fill roles in a declining industrial society which no longer exists in a way which provides the opportunities that they require to engage or, as Simon Charlesworth put it:

“Living in a world in which the horizon of secure, well-paid employment has been replaced with the uncertainties of a life lived within the constitutive horizon of an uncertain world of itinerant, low-waged, low-skilled, patronized work, with the ever present threat of...unemployment, has left many working-class people with fragile identities and low self-esteem.” (2000: 159)

Except that there is one significant difference for many people now, the threat is no longer of unemployment; for many this has become a painfully prevalent part of everyday life. The greater threat now is of further marginalisation, stigmatisation and coercion into a role that they know will support nobody except the employer, who in turn knows that the amount that they pay is of little consequence given that the state will pick up the bill leaving them free to exploit the dispossessed and secure their own position on the backs of the poor (See for example Charlesworth, 2000; Wacquant, 2008, 2009; Tyler, 2013).

Something which is essential to understanding the role which the social, political and economic context in which experiences are gained is the way in which experiences are shared among the study's participants. All of the participants have come from different backgrounds; Michael is from a middle-class family from the South East of England and has received a university education in one of the local universities; Simon moved to the city at an early age; Spanish and Hatman both moved to the city much more recently; Tim, Brian, Phil, Pickles, Darren all moved away from the city at various points before eventually returning; whilst AJ, Phil and Stan have either lived their whole lives in the city or spent the vast majority of them here. Darren, Phil and Storm all have trades, albeit having not managed to complete the highest level of qualification available to them which would, in turn, have provided increased work opportunities and thus further security through wider work opportunities (Darren due to dropping out because he got involved in drug dealing, Phil because he was made redundant three years into his four year course, and Storm because the company he worked decided it would be cheaper not to send him on it). Despite all of these differences, despite some having complete, traditional, nuclear families, others having suffered from family breakdown or living in foster and care homes; despite the huge variety of experiences and the fact that no two have identical experiences to any other, their stories share many similar elements. Whilst the individual nature of each person's experiences is something which should be remembered throughout, the way in which such similarities shine through provide clear evidence of the way in which experiences engender similarities among people, particularly among those who are from a similar locality and share a class or group *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990).

“[C]lass *habitus* results from homogeneity of conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious reference

to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or...explicit co-ordination.” (Ibid: 58-59).

It becomes evident that the conditions and environment in which one lives play a pivotal role in the formation of one’s understanding of themselves and wider society. Furthermore, the fact that some participants either moved away from the city for prolonged periods of times (often years and, in the case of Tim, even to a Nordic country which still retains a social democratic ethos) or did not move to the city until long after their formative years were over, shows that the experiences of the people of Stoke-on-Trent are not confined to the area despite the city’s claims to be highly unique and unusual due to its parochial nature (Jenkins, 1963: 252). Its people endure the same hardships and struggles as other post-industrial cities, thus suggesting that the condition of its population is symptomatic of the condition of the post-industrial working-classes more generally in the UK and further afield (Foster and Spencer, 2012). A challenge to these ideas of a class based *habitus* arises when examining the nature of Michael’s experiences. As discussed in chapter six, he comes from a middle-class, educated background and his experiences, particularly the formative ones, are not shared with the other participants and yet, in many ways, there are still significant similarities between his experiences and theirs. It becomes apparent that there are wider discursive structures which serve to shape experiences beyond the class-based understandings of events. This lends support to the thesis that it is not just the social but also the political and economic environments that provide essential components of an individual’s experiences. Furthermore, it is precisely because these elements of experiences are shared that similarities arise among people from even the most disparate of backgrounds that live within the same environment. And this is compounded for those living within particularly close knit groups such as communities and microcosms thereof.

Taking into account the shared nature of experiences and the manner in which they can inform the individual's identity work, the discussion moves on to examine the nature of said experiences and the complex task of forming and maintaining a defensible self. This begins with a discussion of the way people negotiate desistance and criminality before looking at the influence that socio-political discourses and rhetoric play in informing perceptions of the self.

Negotiating desistance and criminality

One of the most common narratives discussed within academic literature relates to the way in which people seek to desist from crime (whether over short term periods or full, lifelong desistance) (Maruna, 2001; King, 2013). In line with this, the majority of participants have expressed desires to turn things around and to improve their situation, actively engaging in a process of self-reflection and stating that they themselves are the cause of the problems they have faced. In some cases this is inevitably true and we all have some influence over our lives, albeit in a way influenced and constrained by external factors such as the area in which one lives and the opportunities available in said area to allow one to advance one's position and increasingly one's patronage and inherited position in society. The process of self-reflection undertaken by those who took part has, overwhelmingly, led to negative feelings about themselves and their past decisions and activities; something which is particularly evident in the extract from Spanish Omelette below:

S: I think that I'm a complete fuckin' idiot to be honest. Compared to, I don't know, I think, I blame, I used to blame my foster family who adopted me but then I think I didn't have to settle for it, I didn't have to be a gang member. I could've got the right help, social services. I could've got them done for what they did to me, but then again they could've got me done for some of the stuff I did. I fuckin' deserved it anyway. Erm, yeah I don't know, I just chose the wrong path. Totally the wrong path and

yeah I had some good times on it but...yeah I, I wish if I could turn back the hands of time I wish I had finished school properly, I didn't go to a young offenders institution, I, *I wish I went to college and university and had a normal life, got married, had kids that way* instead of having two baby mothers in two different countries and I had a normal job like being a banker or summat, some nine to five job.

What is of interest here, however, is not the process of self-reflection in itself but what has been revealed in the process. Despite having had a string of negative experiences and being branded as among the dregs of society, utterly disengaged and with significant moral deficiencies and have inverted societal norms, the overall goals of Spanish all point towards having conventional goals. He wants to secure meaningful employment and his home (ownership versus rented accommodation was not a theme discussed at length) and being able to provide for a family of their own; something shared with the majority of other participants. Despite struggling to provide even for himself, Spanish has not rejected societal values but rather the abject judgements which are passed upon him by others. Where participants already have a family, notably Brian, Craig, Simon, Spanish and Hatman, they desire being reunited with them, yet still fulfilling the main roles of being able to support and provide for them. To achieve these goals, however, significant changes are often required to the lifestyles and motivations of each individual and redemption narratives were prevalent throughout the stories provided by the participants. These narratives were not necessarily related to desistance from crime, but closely intertwined with people turning their lives around and helping others to avoid the pitfalls which they themselves have encountered and proving that they are not the failed citizens which they might previously have been painted as.

We return to Spanish Omelette to provide the best example of this: as seen in chapter six, he was involved in gang crime in a Northern English city and subsequently moved away, becoming both an offender and a victim of his past and present experiences. As a result

his past experiences and desire to become a better role model, Spanish is seeking to become a youth coordinator and to help young people avoid following down the same path as he did. As we have already seen, Spanish's life has been informed by experiences whereby violence, aggression and crime are the norm; something that he wishes to reject and turn his back on in order to provide a role model for his children. However, at the same time he must challenge his past and overcome his previous norms to achieve these goals. Through expressing a desire not to be seen as a bad father and bad role model by his children and the impetus this has given him to re-evaluate his life and ensure that he is able to provide for his children in the future we see that Spanish is attempting to desist and 'knife off' (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 149 in Maruna, 2007: 105) from his criminal past. His withdrawal from the criminogenic context in which he formerly lived to formulate a position as a better role model for his children is essential here. Moreover, he exhibits other 'classic' signs of desistance through seeking to draw upon his previous experience to redeem himself from his previous transgressions in the eyes of himself and his family as is discussed in more detail further on.

Where people have been living in a hostel in particular, voluntary work assisting others who have also fallen is a common theme, and is similar to peer mentors within the criminal justice system, with people seeking to help others with similar experiences turn their lives around. Maruna (2001) has focused upon the role of mentoring to help people achieve desistance stating that "This ['professional ex-' role] seems to be an increasingly popular path for former deviants who desist from crime and drugs." (Maruna, 2001: 102), however what is apparent from the participants in this particular study is that they are not doing it to become 'professional exes' (Brown, 1991). Rather, they share many of the same characteristics as the participants on the Liverpool Desistance Study (Maruna, 2001) in terms of producing new 'generative scripts' (Ibid, 118) aimed at "fulfilling a void or emptiness in a person's life." (Ibid). This focus upon assisting others implies the aim of

the individual to redeem themselves with Gandi working for a gay rights group whilst Craig, Stan, Mary and Shaun work in voluntary capacities to give back to the organisations which have helped them and to assist others in helping themselves in the process. This is, however, a long and slow process and requires a great deal of time firstly for people to pick themselves up and turn their own lives around and then to develop the relationships and skills required to assist others. The constant pressure to 'get a job' and generate capital through their activities means that these aims are increasingly difficult to achieve. Paradoxically however, for some, this youth co-ordinator role is one of the few routes available to them. Spanish Omelette has had a prolific offending history, having made a successful albeit dangerous career out of his gangland membership; however as a result of this he has a patchy employment history and a chequered criminal record. Combined with the fact that, because of suffering from acute coronary syndrome, Spanish is acutely aware of his mortality and the unlikelihood of making it to old age or be able to fulfil the position of being an effective role model for his children when they grow up. We therefore see a powerful example of the way in which one's aspirations for the future can be heavily constrained by the past and present context in which a decision is made. It is as a result of these factors that Spanish has sought to desist from crime, that he said the following:

"I know I won't live past forty. So I wanna do right. I don't want my kids growing up thinking 'my dad was a right knobhead selling drugs and was a bad person'. I want them to go, 'yeah he might have been bad in his past but he sorted his life out halfway through his life cos this is more than halfway through my life cos I know I'm gonna be dead by the time I'm forty"

Before further qualifying the statement by saying that:

"Well to be honest with you I was gonna commit suicide, I was really depressed. I walked in front of a bus once but luckily he slammed, the brakes were smoking and

the brakes, he was that close to hitting me. I just walked out in front of it and he slammed 'em on and I was stood there staring at the driver and he were ranting at me. Then I put two bricks around me ankles and I thought I'm just gonna jump in the river and then realised how shallow it was [both laugh] and I thought fuck that. I was thinking about all sorts of shit, how to kill meself and I thought I'd just get off me head on ecstasy and then I could die high as a kite. But then I though no, I thought about me kids and I thought I don't want me kids thinking, like I just said, thinking I was an idiot so I thought I'd stop kids doing what I did, and turning out the way I have, by being a youth worker. So I thought 'Yeah! Fuckin' buzzing!' So I've got something to look forward to now and I'm focusing on that."

These statements highlight the way a person seeking to desist from crime and remain 'on the straight and narrow' tends to seek ways of generating new 'scripts' (Maruna, 2001: 118) aimed at fulfilling at least some of the following aims:

- *Fulfilment*: Generative roles can provide an alternative source of meaning and achievement in one's life.
- *Exoneration*: By helping others, one relieves his or her own sense of guilt and shame.
- *Legitimacy*: The penitent ex-offender who tries to persuade others not to offend is a well-known and established role in society.
- *Therapy*: Helping others actually helps the ex-offender maintain his or her own reform efforts." [original emphasis] (Maruna, 2001: 118-119)

Thus by working towards becoming a youth worker, Spanish will be able to help others and formulate a new understanding of himself which relies upon utilising his past experiences for the benefit of others rather than at the cost of others.

The role of positive influences and becoming effective role models shouldn't be underestimated, particularly with regards to the desire to foster positive relations with

their children. This was a particularly important element for virtually all of the participants in the study who have children and highlights the significant positive role that the desire to be a positive role model can have upon someone with little else to work towards. Maruna has spoken about the way in which change occurs when the individual is in a place to do so. Such life changing events appear to provide the impetus for sustained desistance as people find new ways in which to generate fulfilment (2001: 119). Other participants also have children and Brian, Craig, Simon, Tim and Hatman share the same goals so that they are able to support not just themselves but their children, providing positive role models for them so that they have someone that they can be proud of and look up to. This provides evidence supporting the idea that someone gaining important figures in their life, is important in the rehabilitation of many offenders and the reengagement of the dispossessed to at least some extent. This is especially so where there has previously been a void left by either never having had positive influences, or where the figure who previously filled the gap had disappeared. In all cases, the parents were estranged from their children whilst in a minority of cases the children had been adopted as the parents were unable to look after them at that point in their lives. In many cases, however the children live with their other parent and so the individuals must prove not only to themselves or their children that they have changed, but also their former partners; an unenviable task for many!

The introduction of significant figures has also had a profound effect upon the lives of the participants and their desire to turn things around for themselves. AJ for instance, despite not wishing to be quoted directly for reasons already discussed, became considerably cheerier in the interview when talking about his girlfriend and the fact that she is the main reason that he is now staying on the straight and narrow precisely because of the positive influence that their relationship has had. Positive life changing events including the developing of relationships with significant others can provide necessary stability

which can in turn set the foundations upon which someone can build for the future. However, this is far from the only factor which can influence desistance (Maruna, 2001, 2003; King, 2013; Laub and Sampson, 2001) and often “multiple processes appear to be involved in sustaining and reinforcing the decision to change.” (Laub and Sampson, 2001: 36). Thus it is a combination of internal motivation and access to the required external support at the critical time which is most effective (Maruna, 2001; Foster and Spencer, 2012: 5; King, 2013). The nature of many of the experiences here - hitting rock bottom (and in some cases moving into a hostel) – show that even the smallest amount of stability, a place to sleep and regular meals, can provide the bedrock for these new relationships to be built. Thus people begin to work towards fulfilling their goals and building towards the future. However what is also apparent is that the gaining of a significant other, or other life changing events, are not the only determinant factors in people turning their lives around and that it takes a combination of elements including personal motivation, a desire to change and appropriate external influences (such as gaining a significant other or having children) provides the prerequisites for change and, where involved in crime, desistance.

For those who do not seek to redeem themselves through engaging in voluntary or charity work and put back into the organisation which has supported them, there is the risk of a lack of suitable work opportunities due to the criminal records which follow them around. Simon and Darren have set their sights on working in the security industry; however they both have criminal convictions and have struggled to get themselves the relevant training to make this a reality due to the DBS checks. This is not a problem faced by them alone. Phil has also experienced this despite wanting to work in industry; he received a job offer which was later revoked when he was told that he had to apply for a DBS check. The result of this means that for those who seek to advance their position, both in the short-term and long, there are considerable constraints placed upon

their choices. Thus they are likely to continue to be in precarious, low-paid, unrewarding, unskilled roles and “[f]or many, the psychological lesson of coerced, hard labor may be that work is punishment and something to be avoided.” (Maruna, 2001: 128). The result is that the opportunities for people to turn their lives around, particularly where they have a criminal conviction, become increasingly closed off and they end up competing for low end jobs with little chance of progression. They find themselves stifled – cast aside or worse still forced into working for their social security support under the ever more draconian workfare programmes. There is then a risk that, even where the individual is seeking to desist, the lack of suitable work may suppress their attempts (Maruna, 2001; King, 2013).

This shows the potential for people to grow out of crime (Rutherford, 2002), however also underlines the complexities of the task which must be undertaken to successfully achieve prolonged or permanent desistance. Shaun confirmed these arguments when explaining why he got out of drug dealing and also that, having spent time in and out of prison, he no longer wanted to be bouncing between the streets, hostels and prison because:

“[I was] just getting in trouble and I thought that I’d try and sort my life out ‘cos you can’t really do it all the rest of your life can you? In and out of prison and all that all the time, I can’t be arsed with it now.”

Furthermore, the provision of the correct support, when and where needed are also essential in helping people to take the opportunity to get themselves back on their feet and back to where they want to be. Keyworkers within the hostels where some participants lived have adopted approaches whereby they provide the support that is desired. For instance one hostel only provides support when people want it, regardless of whether they have dependency issues, thereby emphasising the fact that understanding of the complex backgrounds to people’s lives is essential in assisting them in turning things around. As such, said hostel often has high levels of drug and alcohol use within its walls

yet it provides a safe haven for people who, when they are ready to turn things around, are then provided with the support that they desire to do so.

What is equally apparent is that when this support is not provided when required and when additional pressure to reform is placed upon people at precisely the time when they are already at their lowest point, this is the point at which some are pushed to return to crime as a quick fix and desperation is again a central element within this. This can be further compounded at the point when they are attempting to find a way to change their lifestyle into something both which will help them fulfil their aspirations and also fulfil society's normative expectations. Desperation can therefore also lead to some considering returning to crime as they try to break from the cycle. Spanish Omelette has considered this on numerous occasions but has not yet succumbed, stating that:

“I don't know, I just want to change me life around now but I'm not getting the help I want, if I don't get it after Christmas then I might have to resort back to crime.”

Spanish thereby indicates that, for someone who has been actively engaged in criminality for a long period, it can act as a safety net; something to fall back onto when all else fails, especially when they have developed a certain expertise and understanding of the way in which the black economy works. Moreover, what is apparent is that, as discussed by Foster and Spencer, interventions are best utilised when the individual, and in particular young person, is actively seeking the support themselves (2012: 5). Spanish, has been trying to get legitimate work, however he has little experience of what to do and is reliant upon others to support him in this. This thereby underlines a major barrier faced by some in gaining legitimate work and the fact that, if the support is not provided in a timely fashion, then there is a real risk that people will fall back towards crime because they do not feel capable of accessing the legitimate resources themselves (Maruna, 2001; King, 2013). Furthermore, where support is targeted effectively, it has a high success rate. Brian and Craig both received support when they needed it and they have now

proven to be success stories, receiving support where needed and they have now moved into their own properties with improved relationships with their children. They are now in a position to support themselves and Craig now volunteering with groups focusing upon supporting others through dependency issues; again evolving his understanding of himself and utilising his negative past experiences to benefit others and, as a result, himself (see for example Maruna, 2001; King, 2013).

Peers have previously been identified as important influences in deviance from societal norms and involvement in crime (Katz; 1988; MacLeod, 1995; Girling, Loader and Sparks, 2000). This is echoed by AJ who was searching for what transpired to be non-existent respect from his peers when he became involved in shoplifting. Evidence from AJ's interviews has highlighted the way in which he, because he is not as astute or experienced in small scale criminal enterprises (particularly shoplifting) and not being able to flee as quickly as others, has frequently been caught whilst others have escaped. This has led to several successful prosecutions and his serving time in a Young Offenders' Institute. Upon release, having returned to the same peer group and despite not having 'grassed' on them, he gained little in the way of respect and continued to seek said respect before eventually moving on from them and into the confines of a hostel in his own attempts to move on from his past. It becomes evident that socially ingrained practices such as not 'grassing' on your friends and peers have had a clear influence upon AJ, like others in this study, however, this has ultimately been to AJ's detriment. As a response to this, AJ no longer wishes to engage with his previous 'identity' and is seeking to move on from it; an important step in the desistance process (Maruna, 2001). Instead, it is a new relationship which has provided the turning point for AJ and this is something that he is particularly keen to hold on to in order to retain hope of change for the future, thereby providing the foundations and impetus upon which he is able to build. Moreover, because he has left that peer group behind, AJ has been seeking to forge relations with

different peers with different values and form new solidarities and friendships within the hostel community in which he lives. Thus the complex role of peers becomes more apparent, especially when one moves from different groups which can lead to inherent tensions between the individual's existing beliefs and understandings and those of the new group. Darren also provides examples of this having been part of two friendships groups when growing up:

"I dunno it was just, it were weird living between two different, I had to be like two different people growing up, I had to be me [location 1] side and I had to be me [location 2] side like so it was a bit thingy but like it was, me family as well like, I'll just explain about me family. Erm, after I'd started like say smoking and drink, like I was drinkin' about thirteen, fourteen, so after I was drinkin' and stuff like that, like it was then I turned into the black sheep of the family 'cause all me brothers were too young to do that so they were still the golden child like and I was obviously the oldest one so me like didn't go through a kid going on a teenage 'what teenagers do' which they do don't they, they all go for a drink and stuff but they didn't go on, she isn't used to it like as well."

Darren notes the difficulties in negotiating two separate groups and constructed identities, but also the strain that his actions, something exacerbated by putting on multiple fronts based on the friendship groups, placed upon family relations as well. The idea of undertaking different roles depending on the situation is not necessarily surprising. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have discussed the way in which people adopt differing positions depending on the group in which they belong, emphasising the multifaceted nature of masculine identity in particular. They argue that it can be imperative, particularly when trying to ensure one's position in relation to the dominant masculinities of a social situation, that one orientates himself in a particular way to avoid victimisation (Ibid: 834). Brittan's statement that "masculinities are those aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time." (2001:53) is particularly pertinent here and it is

the social, economic and political environment which is a key contributor to such fluctuations. Thus it becomes clear that the values shared and transmitted between groups and individuals can be highly complex and a great deal of effort must be expended to portray the kind of identity required to conform to the norms and expectations of a specific group or community (Duneier, 1992, 99-100). This means that, for someone who has come from a background in which criminality was encouraged by peers, new value sets and norms must be learnt and understood for the individual to fit in; something which can take a great deal of time, trial and error for some. Of additional interest here is the proximity of the two locations which Darren is speaking about. The heart of the two locations are just two miles apart and, given the roaming nature of many groups of young people, this is far from a significant distance; yet Darren speaks as if they are spatially disparate localities. The strong sense of place which often ties people to North Staffordshire, as is discussed in chapter two, is likely to have an impact here. Despite the fact that Darren moved a considerable distance to a Southern city, he still does not own his own transport and this is likely to have an influence inasmuch as it limits his ability to travel large distances of his own accord. A similar example of this can be seen in relation to an early participant who dropped out before the first interview was conducted and when talking about why she doesn't see much of her family, it was because they had moved a 'long way away' however, when asked about where they had moved, it transpired that rather than leaving the area, they lived in North Staffordshire village bordering the city itself (*field notes*). It becomes apparent then that, particularly for the younger participants who spent little time outside of the city, ideas of spatial mobility are firmly rooted in what can be accessed relatively easily via public transport within the city.

The role of Family

For some, family plays a central role in not getting involved in crime in the first place, transmitting their values accordingly. Michael and Storm all had strong relations with

their families and continue to maintain these relationships today. Given the importance of family in informing one's *habitus* and providing role models, this would indicate that the influence of familial role models plays a pivotal role in guiding their decisions and actions, even going so far as to override peer pressure. This is best exhibited by Michael:

"I spent an afternoon following them [friends] round when they decided collecting car badges would be fun. So it's not particularly criminal it must be said but erm, given your sort of way I was brought up, criminal damage made me very uncomfortable so I ratted him out to his mum basically. Well I told my mum then she told his and then she went up to his room and found this like bag full of car badges and then I was so terrified he was going to beat me up all the time that I basically haven't actually see him again apart from occasionally driving past in the car."

Here Michael, at a young age, rejected a show of solidarity with his peers and instead decided to inform his parents (as authority figures) (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996: 366-367) who then reported the same information to the friend's parents (again, as further authority figures). It appears Michael did not feel bound by the same unwritten rules and 'moral code' (Ibid: 372) regarding 'grassing' on friends and collaborators within the local community (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996) even at that early age; in direct contrast to the experiences found by Yates (2006) when investigating youth, crime and grassing in a working class community. This suggests that, perhaps because of the different upbringing which Michael had to many of the other participants through living in middle-class suburbia and, after starting out at a local state school, educated privately, his understandings of norms and morality were been informed via different subjective experiences (Yates, 2006: 202) to those which inform the belief systems of others in the study (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996). This is, in itself interesting. Whereas ordinarily, not 'robbing from one's own' is a hallmark of close-knit communities (Ibid),

Michael did not enjoy the protection that someone living in such a close-knit community might expect and instead appears to have viewed avoiding crime and conforming to the letter of the law as a more appropriate course of action; something which we will see is at odds with the experiences of people living in close knit working-class communities.

In contrast to Michael's previously discussed experiences, the idea of not being a 'grass' outlined above continues to dominate the thinking of many, particularly among the participants of this study and this is in line with wider understandings of solidarity within communities and seeking to protect one's own community rather than undermining relations by stealing from one's own result (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996; Yates, 2006). This indicates that such informal rules remain particularly prevalent in their communities and thus that attempts by local and national government to, for example, try to stamp out benefit fraud and working off the books are doomed to struggle at best and be a catastrophic waste of money at worst precisely because of the close knit communities and the informal rules and respect that dominate them. Pickles' for instance was asked by a local drug gang to get involved and help them, however decided against it because of his own experiences of drugs and he made a moral judgement that he did not want to inflict the same suffering upon others. When asked if he might pass on my details to see if they would be interested in the study, he categorically refused to do so again citing that he did not want to appear as a grass. Jay, by contrast has been arrested several times after being caught shoplifting and, it appears that he was always operating with others. Again, his desire for the respect of his peers led to an unwillingness to grass them up and thus he took the fall each time. This combination of not wanting to be seen as a grass and a continual search for respect can cause significant problems for some with a risk of increasing engagement in more serious crimes with higher risks, often on behalf of others, should things go wrong. Spanish on the other hand was formerly in a privileged position having worked his way up through the gang in which he operated

until he became a key figure and was able to command the respect of those around him. As a result, he was able to secure and protect his position with others taking on AJ's role of taking the punishment as they themselves sought the respect from their peers and perceived superiors. Accordingly, the respect afforded to people with an elevated position in the eyes of their peers are clearly afforded considerable social protection by those seeking to affirm their own respected position in a community (Katz, 1988: 322; Winlow, 2001; 44).

In contrast to the dominant theories surrounding desistance from and avoidance of crime more generally as are exhibited above, however, participant testimonies indicate that key networks, generally regarded as essential to assisting someone in leading a crime-free (in terms of non-offending) lifestyle (i.e. family) can play a pivotal role in leading people to, rather than from, crime. Hatman, Jay, Spanish Omelette and Simon were introduced to crime at an early age and crucially this was done by family members. This is in contrast to the discussion above surrounding the positive role which family can play in an individual's life course and shows that family can also play a detrimental role, again underlining the inherent difficulties faced by some in identifying a positive support network. Hatman was introduced to theft, particularly fuel theft, by his cousin:

IM: "You mentioned sort of your various experiences of crime, stealing, drugs, how did you get involved in all that?"

Hatman: "Erm dead easily. There was, there was a lot of people, a lot of people I used to hang around with and especially my cousin, he used to do it all the time so it was just a case of he would say like "Do you want come with me tonight?" and I'd be like "Yeah alright then" and I'd do it and then sort of realise how, how easy it is you know, how much money you can get through it..."

Whilst for Jay, as we have seen in his profile, the influence was his sister. Spanish was exposed the day he ran away and fell in with a gang aged fourteen to escape an abusive

foster family and Simon was introduced to the black economy when he was a child via his older cousins who worked as sex workers, whilst his father had been using a variety of narcotics. This resulted in his family being put at risk of violence on several occasions. In each of these cases, they went on to be more heavily involved; Jay in burgling chemists and pharmacies and getting involved in drug dealing; Simon in fuel and metal theft and violence and Spanish Omelette in gang and drug related crimes. It becomes apparent that the influences which lead to people getting involved in, and in some cases eventually desisting from, crime are highly complex. Moreover, some networks and resources, traditionally seen as positive and beneficial to the living of a 'crime free lifestyle' can in fact be quite the opposite. These are just a few examples of the way in which family can lead to people getting involved in crime from within the sample approached for the data collection. Simon was also involved from an early age with his brother and these testimonies all point towards the major influence that families have when it comes to the direction in which one's life can head.

Drugs

In all of these cases the participant went to get involved in further criminal involvement, often combined with drug use; another major influence in the reasons for some becoming involved in crime. Of the people taking part in the study, a recurring feature repeatedly reported was the use of drugs of some form from cannabis and legal highs to the regular use of drugs including various combinations of cocaine, 'monkey dust' and heroin. Of these, heroin has most frequently been relied upon among those who have become homeless. Whilst not all who have become homeless have taken heroin, Gandi, Shaun, and Jay did so, with the majority explaining that they gained their habit whilst on the street and Shaun explains how this came about for him in chapter six.

The pressure to look after oneself when out on the streets with a lack of resources and a desperate need to stay warm can influence some people to start consuming hard drugs in the hope of staving off the worst excesses of homelessness. Some, such as Dec who was also homeless did not end up taking any drugs, relied upon alcohol which had a similar effect; protecting him from the outside (*field notes*). At the same time he still witnessed the fatal effects of heroin upon some as those around him and deterred him from taking the risk himself. What becomes clear is that for many resorting to taking substances such as heroin is not a free choice in the sense that the environment and context in which they live plays a pivotal role in the decisions which are made and thus can have a major influence on the decisions themselves (Crewe, 2013). Moreover whilst the unemployed, homeless and residents of hostels and deprived communities are frequently attacked for their failure to take appropriate actions to support themselves, it becomes evident that they are often taking the most appropriate actions available to them to ensure their survival in the situation in which they find themselves at the time.

This is not to say, however, that early familial influences can be seen as an accurate predictor for the involvement of an individual in criminal activities. Tim's father was actively involved in football hooliganism and violence and at times encouraged Tim to attend matches and 'get involved' himself. Tim, however showed no interest in this and has avoided crime, instead moving to Norway and then eventually back to Stoke-on-Trent to live with his mum, before moving to his nan's and eventually in a hostel after having children with his ex-partner. Thus we see further evidence that the influences leading to involvement in, avoidance of, or desistance from crime are complex and it is a convergence of stimuli and factors which result in some people adopting deviant or criminal lifestyles. Following this, as previously stated, to understand the process behind peoples' decision making and subsequent actions, it is essential to investigate the

role of the political context and depictions of the poor, unemployed and impoverished and the influence that this can have upon an individual and their life course.

In line with the questions asked at the start of this chapter we will move on to discuss the manner in which strategies, including deviant and criminal strategies, are deployed to mitigate the effects of the social, economic and political context within which people live. Before doing this, however, and to further underline the complex motivations behind some getting involved in such activities, a brief review of some of the other motivations to crime is required. We have already seen that familial influence can, for some, be an important indicator especially whilst they are at a young age, whether by leading people into crime themselves or by leaving no other option (such as in the case of Shaun getting kicked out of the house at sixteen and being forced to fend for himself).

Theft was a regular theme throughout the data collection and the relative ease with which it could be carried out provides a strong indicator as to why it can act in such a seductive manner by allowing people to make quick and easy money (Katz, 1988). Financial gain through working off the books and easy pickings through fuel and metal theft was raised by numerous participants which, whilst illegal, was not discussed as criminal per se by some as they seek to neutralize their actions and highlight the way in which their actions are not deviant. Working off the books is still work and an income is provided in return for services provided, which may in turn influence the ways in which people perceive the idea of criminality in relation to carrying out such work. Michael worked for a host of people and companies on and off for two years, largely off the books, yet did not want to go into details about the specifics of some because he remains friends with them and clearly knows that their agreements were not entirely legitimate. Mohammed was more forthcoming when talking about his work in the rag and bone trade and Shaun disclosed that he has worked with gypsy crews cash in hand, again indicating off the books work and tax avoidance in many cases, whilst Craig frequently

carried out ‘foreigners’¹¹ to bring in some extra cash at home. The motivations for undertaking such activities vary, however the work is still seen as just that; *work* rather than ‘theft’ or anything else illegal. This perhaps identifies why people do not readily associate working off the books as criminal in the same way as they might class theft and thereby indicating classic examples of the deployment of neutralization techniques (Sykes and Matza, 1957) which receive further attention later in the chapter. Metal theft is a prime example of this and has been rife in the city with numerous groups and gangs able to take advantage of the colossal number of empty properties, both residential and industrial, which blight the city. Shaun, Gandi and Simon have all worked within this and Shaun in particular was able to make a large amount of money out of it, topping up his income whilst in work and then in place of legitimate employment thereafter. Simon and Hatman have successfully reaped the rewards of siphoning off fuel from lorries and tankers parked up for the night, as well as from depots; again showing the ease at which such activities can be undertaken. Simon, however, also noted another common theme; that such activities are largely undertaken when legitimate forms of income have been exhausted.

In a minority of cases, however, particularly as exhibited by former gang member Spanish Omelette and the entrepreneurial fence Phil, the amount of money on offer was a major attraction to continued offending:

P: “I brought loads of dodgy stuff about two weeks in [to unemployment], with about, ‘cos I had about three grand savings and I brought it all with that three grand so like a week or two and then it was easy money like so I never really looked for other jobs.”

IM: “How much were you making on it?”

¹¹ A colloquial term used by Craig to denote carrying out additional, cash-in-hand labour.

P: "About ten grand a month."

Crucially for Spanish, the lure of easy money became too great later on and this led to successive failures to desist:

SO: "I tried it, I tried changing me life three times and I've tried going on the straight and narrow and I've always come back to..."

IM: "Why do you think that was?"

SO: Money, I'm too used to having too much money...it is difficult. Once you have something and it's gone, you realise what you had"

Accordingly, the current trend towards continually falling crime levels appears to be at odds with the reality of life for the impoverished; acquisitive crimes are committed to survive and provide a source of income when others become unavailable or exhausted. With increasing levels of poverty and few opportunities for people following the austerity programme being conducted by the government, crime levels should arguably be rising. What the testimonies do point to however is that the crimes that are being committed may be going undetected with people focusing upon metal theft, fuel theft, shoplifting and working off the books. These offences are considerably less likely to be reported or recorded and in turn less likely to be part of the recorded crime statistics. Thus the data showing that crime is falling may be erroneous, further indicating that we are looking for crime in the wrong places due to the manner in which "illegal markets, criminal trafficking, violence and intimidation are now normalized aspects of socio-economic activity in a socially divided and politico-economically insecure world" (Hall, 2012: 2).

For Darren, however, his criminal exploits provided him with the best time of his life:

It was the fuckin' best, I'll be honest with you it were the best life I've ever had and I'd love still be there doing it. I'd wake up in the morning, I'd have to do an hour's worth bus journeys going drop off like. After a few months I'd built up enough

money to go half's with him on it and then someone else did what I did like but it was like, I'd wake up in the morning, do an hour, hour and half on the buses dropping off, by dinner time, me mate'd ring me up go 'where are yer?' he'd pick me up, go restaurant for me dinner, then come outta there, ring a few people, collect some money, go round the city, collect a bit of money. You're only working a bit, go out for tea, after tea we'd get on it. It was like every single night I were down there we'd go out at night, just have a few beers or whatever. 'Cause me mate had too much money. He was one of them like we'd go out, order forty shots and everyone who was with us, loads and loads of us like. Like 'forty shots on the bar now' and we'd do that and we'd do that every single night and that was all we did. Drop offs in the morning, money in the afternoon, eat between and get wrecked at night.

It is then not difficult to see why some are so attracted by the seductive allure of crime and the perceived benefits which it brings. However there are times within the narratives of some of the participants whereby there is considerable overlap between the wider discourses and rhetoric prevalent within society and the way in which they articulate their experiences. In some instances it is possible to see a link between the activities that some people undertake and the depiction of said individuals in policy and press (see chapter three). In line with this, we move on to discuss the role that the current portrayals of people living within poor and deprived communities of Stoke-on-Trent have in informing the understandings, narratives and subjective realities of the people who have taken part in this study.

Abjection

The divisive politics of abjection is having a profound impact due to its continual deployment against the poor, deprived, unemployed and marginalised within society. As outlined in chapter three, there has been a marked increase in the use of aggressive,

demeaning language against such groups and individuals, homogenizing them as ‘feckless, lazy, benefit dependent scroungers’ draining society of valuable resources. What we shall see next is that participants appear to deploy a combination of positions accepting and resisting the wider political attempts to characterise them as dysfunctional and in need of intense paternalistic guidance to reform and push them into becoming ‘normal’ and ‘functional’ members of society.

Acceptance

The stigmatizing rhetoric has a profound effect upon those targeted and, as suggested by Iris Young, “Abjection...might help us understand the ways in which negative inscriptions and interpellations are internalized.” (1990 in Tyler, 2013: 202). As noted above, some appear to lack the confidence or authority to relay their own experiences, whilst others are internalizing these stigmatizing discourses and speaking about themselves in the same terms. Michael is a prime example of this; he has sought work across the area after completing a degree at a local University. He has handed out CV’s throughout local towns and taken on voluntary experience and low paid roles working for friends for experience and to support himself. He has, however, repeatedly said that he has not tried hard enough and was heavily reliant upon temporary, cash in hand work where it was available. Moreover, having declared his work to the Job Centre once and found that his benefits were reduced Michael subsequently decided that it was inadvisable to continue to inform them of any cash in hand work, reinforcing the idea that there are few incentives for people to declare their work given the subsequent lack of financial benefits when they do. What follows is an extended extract from the primary interview conducted with Michael and, whilst long, it helps to underline the way in which such discourses and ideas become internalized.

MF: Well I’m sure I could’ve done more with regards to getting employment. I’m sure there are means with which for sort finding work which I didn’t use. I’m fairly

certain of that just because as I said *these same people that I had this conversation with, [who] have never been unemployed...* I mean that being said I wasn't actually straight up unemployed and had no income at all for much of the time. I think I did something like five or six jobs in the time between graduating and coming back here so I was officially employed for much of the entire time we're speaking but it was *all cash in hand, casual, or the only one that wasn't lasted three days...*

IM: So what other things do you think you could've done?

MF: Erm just more of it. I mean I went around handing out CV's which is how I've always got a job before, and it worked. Erm I'd call people up, I sat on like Monster and you know, got all the updates every day, I still get them now. There are things that I could have done, even like networking...Yeah, the thing is I'm sure there was more I could've done. Like even if it was just more of the same things like going a bit further afield and handing CV's to people. Erm like every, everyone I talk to about job seeking has always got a new something to go and look on but I don't know.

IM: So erm what, sort of is it motivation or what stopped you at the time?

MF: Erm it's probably, at the time *I got nowhere with the stuff I did at all*. That seems like an odd motivation to stop, I accept that, but I dunno. I think it was partly that *I was never really truly desperate at any point*. I wanted a job, yes, but I was never that desperate because I had money from savings or money from previous jobs or whatever else, to go and you know, really beg someone for work. Actually, that being said I did beg a couple of people but they sort of tended to be people I knew, erm and I think I have explained that somewhat before so there's no point doing it again.

IM: So you think if you had had less resources to fall back on, you think you would have been?

MF: Yeah, if I had, if it was a case of watching the end of the line coming at you, you do try that bit harder but I honestly don't know.

IM: And erm, so you said tying in with that, that past laziness was a bit of an issue for you, did you feel that at the time or is that just from hindsight?

MF: *I think mostly in hindsight.* I did think I was doing, not necessarily everything I could have done but enough I think. As I said, I did scrape by so...And it was a reasonable quality of life as, yeah, I've stated. I could've just lived in that flat and eaten and that could've been it eventually that you know, if I was that desperate, that would've happened but it didn't at any point so...

IM: Okay, and erm you said sort of that you became quite exercise focused for a while because it was something to do and it struck you as the most effective form of punishment you could think of?

MF: Ah well that was due to non-work related stuff, that was due, well no I guess it was due to work related stuff. That was mainly due to the failure of my relationship with my girlfriend who I moved in with that year, and that was why my motivation to stay here was literally being here. My only motivation was to live with her. Erm *having completely failed to a) get a job, b) make something useful of myself and b), err c) continue with that relationship, that was what was required punishment so to speak.* Which is why my motivation for getting a job went up significantly after that as well.

IM: So was not getting a job one of the reasons that things went sour?

MF: Erm I think the conditions under which I didn't get a job were responsible, i.e. my disinterest in getting one. Erm again, not disinterest really, it wasn't that I didn't want one, I just wasn't willing to work that hard for one at the time. Certainly that, that first year. The second year I was working a lot harder to get a job and still not particularly successful about it because the first time I had a) three times more, in fact no, what, okay a lot more money to live off from job seekers, so that wasn't, enough money when you got desperate. I was sitting watching it ticking away and I was, you know, *I was a graduate, I was getting a job, it was fine.* It was *only after a year I thought 'okay, I've got nothing and my things, my qualifications are out of date so, work a bit harder,*

go for the lower end jobs. But yeah, I'm not going to get a shitty job I have to work really hard for because I didn't have to at the time and now I understand I should have done that at the time.

IM: Okay, erm and sort of the shame that you sort of felt from signing on, was that the same sort of shame you felt with regard to being unemployed or?

MF: Erm, I think that, I mean it's hard to say because I don't like taking money off of people if at all possible. I mean I'm not going to lie, I'm here because my dad is paying my fees and I made a promise to myself that when I get a job I will pay him back, at whatever cost necessary because certainly, more and more recently, I'm increasingly unwilling to take money off people, again, says the man whose life is being paid for at the moment. But I don't, I never did like the idea of taking money off people, I don't like the idea of it. I suspect *I'm falling prey slightly to our erm beloved government's erm plans for demonising people on Job Seeker's which is erm fair enough I guess, kind of a little bit.* [My emphases throughout].

Whilst a long extract, it is revealing of the way Michael understands himself and the process of reflection that he has undertaken. It is therefore imperative to include all of the details above to be able to understand the way in which he has been broken down to feel personally responsible for his apparent shortcomings and subsequent failure to secure work. In line with this, it is essential that a little more space is devoted to analysing the content of Michael's testimony.

External pressures have played a pivotal role in the way that Michael feels about himself, especially when he assumes that, because others have been fortunate enough to have never been unemployed, they must know more about looking for and securing work than he does. The continual pressure placed upon him not only by himself but by familial and societal expectations should not be underestimated and this is likely to have increased the feelings of failure and at times despair. Following this line of enquiry, something else

emerges from the data; as a result of the pressure and stigmatizing discourses prevalent in society, Michael has tacitly accepted the demonising of people in receipt of social security support and has internalized many of the statements and attacks at the same time. This extract provides an excellent insight into the way in which such pervasive discourses become internalized by the individual and the impact that this has on someone; the feelings of self-doubt, shame and personal failure which drag them down further until they are ready to accept just about anything to avoid being targeted for being the lazy, disengaged and feckless individual that the unemployed are increasingly labelled. Furthermore, it is *only* through reflecting on his experiences at the time that Michael feels that he was being lazy at the time despite applying for countless jobs. This thereby underlines the continual process of self-reflection being undertaken as he attempts to make sense of his experiences and why he hasn't yet achieved the successes that he was expecting to, further stressing the way in which identity formation and maintenance is a continual, highly reflective process for all (Giddens, 1992: 30 in Adams. 2006: 513). At the same time as this Michael also experienced intense upheaval with the ending of a long-term relationship and losing his home; both significant events individually, however potentially disastrous when coupled together. Despite this, Michael does not appear to have forged the link between his unemployment and the strain that it placed upon the relationship initially, before soon after accepting that "the conditions under which I didn't get a job were responsible, i.e. my disinterest in getting one." Yet we have already seen that Michael has been trying to find work for two years! Thus the complexity of his narrative as he attempts to make sense of his experiences becomes clear. Coupled with this is the feeling that he should be punished for the failings in his life, as if somehow using this as a form of discipline (Foucault, 1991) would provide the impetus to succeed, and yet still it didn't. We therefore see the realisation that the effort expended in obtaining work is not commensurate with the anticipated reward. In line with this, perhaps one of the

most telling statements made by Michael is the revelation that being a graduate is not enough to help him secure employment. Higher Education has repeatedly been sold as the tool necessary for people to move on in life and climb the social ladder; fulfilling aspirations of moving from the working-classes and onwards towards the middle-classes (Standing, 2011; 67). Michael however reveals otherwise. He has come from a middle-class family which continues to support him in fulfilling his aims (something which is simply not an option for many other participants either because they have little, if any, contact with their family or because doing so is simply unaffordable). Crucially, however, after graduating he found the idea of education being the great emancipator of contemporary Britain to be a myth; something which, given the way that it has been sold so successfully, evidently takes a considerable amount of time to be accepted as the reality which it has increasingly been revealed to be (Ibid); something noted by Pierre Bourdieu in 1998, some 16 years earlier (Bourdieu, 1998; 98). Moreover, Brian, who himself embarked on the long doctoral training journey but never completed it, and Michael's experiences indicate that the reserve army of labour is ever growing and increasingly filled with graduates, further support Harry Braverman (1998) and Guy Standing's (2011; 2014) theses that the middle-classes are increasingly at risk of losing their comparatively secure position and falling into precarity. As such, the decline in status for many of the middle-classes brings with it increasing insecurity as society is increasingly polarised between the plutocratic elites and the rest (Standing, 2014). Therefore even the positions of those with higher level qualifications and training are far from assured, underlining the constant threat of a decline in status for all but the super-rich and those with the right connections as those below are engaged in an increasingly desperate struggle for survival (Ibid).

Furthermore, it appears that the aggressive, stigmatizing portrayals are being internalized by those targeted readily as the invisible scars left by the stigmatizing

statements dig ever deeper. Bataille has argued that, to become truly abject, an individual must accept and fully internalize the idea in itself, stating that:

“...misery does not engage the will and disgusts of both those who experience it and those who avoid it: it is lived exclusively as impotence and does not leave any possibility of affirmation whatsoever.” (1999: 10).

To accept one's position of abject means to accept the idea that the individual is repulsive and serves no useful purpose within society, existing instead upon the periphery of society as a constant reminder to reinforce the moral boundaries as they are redrawn to benefit the rich and undermine the poor with no chance of acceptance as long as one remains abject. Or, as Sylvie Lotringer has put it “When it ceases to be experienced as an act of exclusion to become an autonomous condition, it is then, and only then, that abjection sets in.” (1999: 7). Thus some within society are in an ever more precarious position, unable to support themselves and rejected by ‘normal’ society for failure to conform successfully. There is evidence, such as can be seen in Michael's narrative, that some do accept their position as abject beings, internalizing and regurgitating the same ideas as those who would brand them as abject and stating that they are “lazy” and unwilling to engage. Moreover, the acceptance of one's position is exacerbated by the continual efforts to push people to accept responsibility for their position, actions and the effects of said actions. Again, it is possible to see the ways in which this has occurred with some people accepting their culpability:

It's a myth towards young people to say that all young are criminal, all young do this. It's bullshit. It's bullshit but at the same time look at me. I grew up with no parents but they didn't blame me once, that's bullshit. I grew up with no parents and went in the army and yeah I did have a period when I was on drugs and shoplifted and being unemployed as well. That was my doing, that was my fuck up. Unnerstand? No one's to blame for that. (Pickles)

Within Pickles' statement, we are clearly able to see the way in which Pickles has internalized the idea that he is responsible for his actions. Despite acknowledging that he grew up without parents and had a particularly rough upbringing in a children's home, Pickles appears to accept that the subsequent problems and criminality he faced were entirely down to his actions and had little to do with his wider experiences. Spanish exhibits the same elements within his story as can be seen in the extract earlier discussing his reflections on his past experiences.

So we see the pervasive influence of the responsabilization agenda which sees people pushed and 'encouraged' to take responsibility for their actions, yet with few rewards for doing so. Rather than seeing people supported for accepting any culpability for their situation, the individual's history is increasingly held against them as a constant reminder of their past indiscretions. This can be seen by the fact that someone who serves a prison sentence of forty eight months or more is seen as unable to be rehabilitated (Lipscombe and Beard, 2014), carrying their criminal record with them for life and further reinforces the vindictive nature of current society whilst at the same time limiting the options available to that individual. It is in light of this that we now turn to examine resistance and subversion to understand the ways in which some refuse to accept these abject portrayals and instead seek to find new, and at times deviant ways of preventing themselves from fully becoming abject objects of disgust.

Resistance and Subversion

In contrast to the way in which people accept and internalize the abject stigmatization of the poor and dispossessed, not all appear willing to accept such a position. It is then little wonder that there are signs of resistance to the abject treatment of those branded as such. Michel Foucault has argued that "Where there is power, there is resistance." (1990: 95) indicating that resistance to such aggressive, derogatory portrayals of the poor from above (i.e. those able to exert power over others), will continue to occur precisely because

such abjectifying discourses exist in the first instance. Moreover, Foucault makes it clear that the power relationships which give birth to this resistance “depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance” (Ibid) and that there is “no locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case” (Ibid, 95-96). Accordingly, individual displays of such resistance occur precisely because of the diffuse nature of the power relations in which they exist, “distributed in an irregular fashion” (Ibid: 96), however the lack of subsequent unity is arguably because “the unemployed and casualized workers, having suffered a blow to their capacity to project themselves into the future...are scarcely capable of being mobilized.” (Bourdieu, 1998: 82-83). This is exhibited in the transcripts from the participants of this study and, when considering the possibilities and forms of resistance, a number of factors become clear. Firstly, the people interviewed are switched on to what is going on around them; they are well aware of the way they are being treated and, despite often having low levels of formal education, they are engaged, providing critical social commentaries, particularly of the inequalities and inconsistencies between the treatment of the rich and that of the poor. Moreover, the depiction of unemployed people as lazy and deviant serves to compound the problems by forcefully excluding those targeted (Young, 1999: 79). In line with this and the ongoing process of self-reflection and readily exhibited by the people who have taken part in the study, it is little wonder that such resistance arises. Some are, as already discussed, better placed to articulate their ideas than others. Despite the fact that there is a great deal of anger stewing away among many who were interviewed, many are not necessarily able to relay in a clear and articulate manner why they are angry or at least unable to relay it in a particularly eloquent manner to their audience, such as can be seen with Darren:

“I try not to watch the news it just pisses me off, like with fuckin’ David Cameron. I hate the bastard! All the stuff, everything he says is just wrong innit? Any quotes

you hear on telly, they're just wrong like that...“I can't think of any off me head at the moment but just everythin' you hear....his views on poor”

Something which should be particularly evident is that the poor, disenfranchised and dispossessed are angry and are well aware of their continued exploitation. Moreover, they are aware that this exploitation is getting worse as the economy continues to be reconfigured, wages are further suppressed and they continue to be forced to fulfil roles for which they are not trained and which they receive no benefit from fulfilling:

“They tell everyone to take a pay cut but I don't see none of these fuckin' MP's willing fuckin' to slash a couple of grand a year do you? Do you know what I mean? Fuckin' wankers! Then I'd be willing to take a pay cut but no, they aren't willing to take a pay cut but they fuckin' hike up all the fuel tax n' everything, everyone's gotta pay more money, they aren't gonna pay more money are they? It's just wrong. Just a vicious cycle and they're in power and that's just wrong to be honest.” (Mohammed)

These two statements indicate the level of resentment at the marginalisation and stigmatisation experienced, especially given the nature of their experiences of being told what to do, and when to do it. Mohammed's statement is of particular interest given that he raises the idea of the repeated attacks being cyclical. This is supported by findings from the Elizabeth Finn Trust (2012a; 2012b) which show that negative depictions of people in receipt of working-age benefits increases considerably at the point in time whereby there is a political regime change. There was a dramatic increase in the use of negative vocabulary in and around 1997, followed by another large spike in and around 2010 (2012a: 8). This lends further merit to the idea that the poor are being used as political pawns by those with the power to do so, with little regard to the interests and needs of those most affected by any changes. Furthermore, people are well aware of the

inherent unfairness currently ingrained within the system and the fact that there is little which they can do to further their own position:

“They’ve changed the sanction part so it’s a lot harder to be on Job Seekers’, or actually get paid Job Seekers’...they’ve given me a piece of paper now and it says everything you can possibly do wrong and there’s very little you can do right basically.” (Stan)

This, combined with increasing evidence from whistle-blowers throughout the Department for Work and Pensions and the Job Centre Plus¹², indicates that the cards are increasingly stacked against the poor and those unable to provide any serious representation for themselves. However, there is a lack of focused or organised resistance to this, perhaps in part due to the manner in which, as has already been noted, people retain the same hopes for the future despite their position in society; there is perhaps a lack of desire for wholesale change but rather an overall desire for conformity with access to appropriate resources.

What is increasingly apparent within the interview data is that despite the lack of effective and organised resistance, it continues to exist, reinforcing Foucault’s point that resistance occurs in ‘plurality’ and that each instance is in itself, a special case. The position that people find themselves in: oppressed, pilloried and marginalised from repeated attacks by the state and the press, mean that new ways of supporting oneself and resisting the current status quo are sought as people aim to provide a sense of control over their own lives and utilising whatever limited forms of resistance that they now have:

¹² There have been numerous exposés emerging highlighting the culture of the Job Centres and Department for Work and Pensions and the manner in which sanctions are being encouraged in order to force people off of state support for even the most minor of infractions. At times this appears to include the use of underhand tactics including changing appointment dates and times at short notice and using league tables for referrals and sanctions to instil a sense of competition between centres (see for example Domokos, 2011; Wintour 2013).

“Like on Job Seekers’, I’d do what they tell me but err like the whole rebellious side like pops into play then and I don’t’ do well with people telling me I have to do stuff and yeah I do it because I want a job but when I’m being forced to do something it’s a lot harder so I don’t...I don’t try as hard.” (Stan)

Stan underlines this, however he also emphasises something else; the avenues and modes of resistance available are few and far between and a fine line is being walked between resisting abject treatment and ensuring that one has the means to support themselves and, despite their best attempts, often remaining subjected to and in some cases even complicit in their own subordination. However, what we see here is that rebellion and resistance arises precisely because of the level of pressure being applied to claimants by the ever changing regulations surrounding the receipt of social security support and the constant attacks. The demands being placed upon Job Seekers’, especially following the introduction of the new Claimant Commitments, have led to considerable additional pressure being placed upon anyone out of work and in need of social security assistance as is articulated by Stan. The increasing numbers of sanctions means that people are left with shrinking room for error or missing an appointment, regardless of whether they are at fault or not. People increasingly finding themselves sanctioned for things that they are not at times aware of such as was the case for Darren.

D: “At the moment I get about ninety quid, I’m being sanctioned or some shit, I haven’t got a clue what’s going on, I still need to sort it out.”

IM:” How come you’re being sanctioned?”

D: “I don’t know. They said I didn’t turn up to an interview or summat that I didn’t even know I had.”

Before later going on to state that:

D: “Yeah, well they gave me a warning about it about six months ago apparently but I don’t even know about that. But nothing happened six weeks ago and they’ve given

me a four-week sanction now. It was over Christmas, so I was meant to have gone like two days after Christmas, or three days but I thought it would be shut then. I swear that's what they told me but...so yeah I'm...it's proper fucked me up a bit."

Whilst it appears that Darren may have had a degree of complicity in his current predicament, the fact that this is not the only instance in which appointments have been arranged for people with a lack of communication means that his position is far from indefensible. Moreover, Michael, despite having returned to University, continued to remain on the Work Programme books for the duration of his studies and Hatman, despite having provided several notifications to the Job Centre and Work Programme that he had moved to Stoke-on-Trent and needed to be moved to a new programme provider, received numerous sanctions for failing to attend placements in his former location:

"I've been sanctioned three times in the last few months because I'm supposed to be on the Work Programme but I moved from [Northern town] but me old Job Centre was [Northern town] and that was when I first got put on the work programme, so that was ten, eleven months ago. Erm I didn't attend the first one err I hold me hands up for that, I just didn't go to it so they sent me, they phoned me up and said "Right, you need to attend this one." By this point I was moving to Stoke, so I moved to Stoke so they sanctioned me for not turning up. No I told them I'm moving to Stoke, and they said "Right, we'll sort you another work programme out." So I was like right and they said "Expect a phone call." So I said okay, and then I got a phone call again saying I didn't attend a thing, and I said like "I'm waiting for a phone call of someone" and then they sanctioned me again and I'm still now waiting for this phone call from them but every time I ring the Job Centre they always say that they can't get the contact number for the work programme for some reason. They've still got me down as the Work Programme in Stockport and they've already told me they

don't expect me to travel there every day and they've told me to wait and they'd refer me to another work programme in Stoke"

Darren goes on to describe the impact of the sanctions upon him:

"Well I'm freezing like I am. I've had no gas for a week now I have because when they told me I'd been sanctioned I had to buy enough food, but I'm out of food now anyway erm, so I bought that and I just spent it all. Now I've got no gas, I've hardly got any food and I can't just go out and get some, you know what I mean, it's just hard."

As a result of this and an unwillingness on the part of the state to provide any sort of leeway or support when sanctions have been applied, Darren goes on to talk about deploying other means to support himself. He could engage with the official labour market, however with a lack of jobs or a lack of security and work within those which are available (the ONS (2014b) has shown that a significant proportion of new jobs that have been created rely on zero hour contracts with an estimated 1.4 million employed on such contracts at present) and being utterly fed up with being pushed, pulled and being made out to be worthless, that would appear to be the least appealing option available. He instead appears to prefer to seek other means of support:

"I'm on benefits...if you want money, you have to make it another way like..."

Within this, Darren is talking about acting as a fence, something which he did not want to go into detail about during the interview for fear of subsequent repercussions. What becomes increasingly evident is that people are willing to risk struggling and suffering yet further still, at times risking complicity in their own oppression, to ensure that they retain some degree of control over their lives and, furthermore, that they do not have to succumb wholly to the abject stigmatization to which they are increasingly subjected, something supported by Mohammed who said:

“It’s wank they are absolutely fuckin’ useless. It’s wrong how they’ve done that to people, making them work for free. If anything do what they used to do. Top your earnings up on the dole.”

And this is precisely what Darren and Mohammed have both done. Because of the stipulations regarding disclosure and not wanting to risk his contacts, Darren was careful to avoid disclosing exactly how he does this, but it was clear from the information that he did provide (and that he tried to sell me two gift vouchers for an online ticket purchasing site (*field notes*)) that he has become a ‘Del boy’ style businessman dealing in knock off goods and fenced items to supplement his income, something also undertaken in the past by Phil until he ultimately found himself cheated out of business by someone stealing from him and leaving him with significant debts to others which he is still to pay off. Thus, as people become increasingly fed up with being made out to be worthless, and pilloried by politicians, the media and the rest of society, so their resistance takes shape. Refusing to engage with employment programmes and the job centre; venting at every opportunity about the levels of injustice; and crucially, when having nothing left to lose, engaging in theft, fraud and further deviance as they reject the state increasingly seen to have abandoned the interests of the very people that it is designated the role of protecting and supporting (Tyler, 2013: 204).

The quotes on their own, however, tell little of the modes of resistance and it is only when paying attention to the details behind the narratives provided which it becomes clearer. As already discussed, Mohammed has, for a prolonged period, worked off the books assisting friends in the rag and bone trade, often for a pittance and earning far less than he might if he were working as a registered employee. Whilst in doing this he is arguably complicit in his own subordination (Foucault, 1991: 202-3) by virtue of being willingly exploited by those for whom he works, he at least retains some semblance of control over the situation (Hayward, 2005: 225 in Young, 2007: 20); a stark comparison to undertaking

work on the Work Programme. Two things become apparent within these discussions surrounding resistance however; they are largely ineffective in terms of pushing for social change or the rescinding of the increasingly harsh penalties and stringent measures to which people are increasingly subjected. These resistances provide little direct benefit for the individual and no real reconfiguring of their experience; almost certainly because of the way in which “unemployment isolates, atomizes, individualizes, demobilizes and strips away solidarity.” (Bourdieu, 1998: 98)¹³. However, what is possible is the potential for the individual to create some sense of control over their lives so that they are not simply a passenger subject to external forces. It is this which helps to illuminate the intrinsic value for the individual in exercising such resistance. Another issue which arises is that, even whilst resisting the treatment to which they are subjected, so many peoples’ financial lifeline remains attached to the activities which are being resisted. This means that it is increasingly difficult to carry out any form of protest for fear of losing the limited support to which one was formerly entitled. Pickles, however provides an excellent description as to why such activities and risks are undertaken, serving to reinforce the previous point regarding the intrinsic value of such actions to the individual:

“I woke up one morning, I’m in that place, my life’s so down and low, I thought
“What have I got to lose?” because that’s the point, I’ve just answered the question,
what have I got to lose anyway?”

For those who have taken part in the study, and in particular those who have exhibited such forms of resistance, they have already hit rock bottom with no significant links to their family or the outside community. They are desperately reliant upon the few links that they have retained and the state are two of the three things that they have left, the final one being pride.

¹³ For further discussions on the individualizing and isolating effects of unemployment see, amongst others, Strandh, 1999; Russell, 1999; Bowring, 2000

It is then little wonder that people with nothing left to lose but their pride should seek to resist the very treatment that demands that they surrender and succumb to the status of abject beings outside of society's norms, opening themselves up to and validating the serial venomous abuse which has been levied in their direction by the media, elite and wider society (see for example Wacquant, 2008; Tyler, 2013) and summarised by Jock Young:

“Economic marginalization is a potent source of discontent: ‘political’ marginalization in the sense of manifest powerlessness in the face of authority is the catalyst that transforms discontent into crime...For it is the very fact that the force of law and order acting illegitimately which snaps the moral bind of the marginalized that is already strained and weakened by economic deprivation and equality.”
(Young, 1999: 161)

Or, as Mohammed put it:

“Fuck off! I’ll tell them fuck off, who do they think we are? Fuckin’ black in the fuckin’ eighteen hundreds? Fuck off! Fuckin’ times are changing and you try and fuckin’ make it look like you’re creating more jobs and are you fuck! You fuckin’ make us work for free and then fuck you off. That’s what they do.”

Of additional interest in this last statement is the reference to the racialising discourses of the past, particularly those encountered when exploring the views and rhetoric deployed by far-right groups and parties towards minority groups and racial minorities. Mohammed is likening his experience to the treatment of such groups, exploited (particularly, as Mohammed suggests, during the slave trade) for the benefit of their captors and plantation owners. It can therefore be posited that Mohammed sees himself as a victim of a system which is returning to colonial ideas with the poor and impoverished taking the place of former slaves. It is, at this stage, unclear as to how prevalent such ideas are and this area requires further investigation.

Forms of resistance have been discussed elsewhere, most notably by Imogen Tyler (2013) when she examined the manner in which resistance has manifested itself in an array of scenarios ranging from the treatment of asylum seeker to the eviction of travellers from Dale Farm to the 2011 riots, and the global Occupy movement. The notable absence within Tyler's writing, however, is that of the individual who is not part of a larger protest group and is isolated within their experiences. The individual nature of these resistances, however, also emphasises the fact that every form of resistance must have, at its heart, a source (or series thereof) and individual's actions can be seen as forming the nuclei of resistance awaiting a unifying order to bring them together and mobilise them. The signs of resistance indicated above represent an early form which has not spread to the point where it is able to form new unities and more organised and effective forms at such a point. What is missing is the organisation and leadership required to motivate, engage and structure this resistance so that it is able to be harnessed in such a way as to prove effective in affecting real change. Once again, a significant reason for this is likely to be the lack of empathetic and effective working-class representation and education in political engagement coupled with the divisive nature of the politics of division and experiences of unemployment.

So far, the discussions surrounding the role of the abject politics of division and an individual's responses have focused upon the adoption of a position of either acceptance or resistance and rebellion. As has already been alluded to however, it is not simply a case of adopting one binary position or the other. For Mohammed, who as discussed in chapter five has already exhibited examples of the internalization of such discourses, branding himself as 'lazy' and unlikely to ever progress of his own accord the story is considerably more complicated. What we therefore see is that the formation and maintenance of a sustainable, defensible-self is complicated and, furthermore, that the inherent contradictions within the individual's narrative can be exacerbated when there is a

conflict between the prevailing socio-economic direction of society and the experiences and desires of the individual. Furthermore, when these factors collide, a turbulent process is undertaken, assimilating some elements whilst at the same time seeking to retain some control and autonomy over the situation which that person faces. Mohammed's fate is symptomatic of people with similar experiences facing choices between acceptance of abject portrayals as lazy and in need of coercive 'help' to push him into becoming a 'normal' and 'functional' member of society, and resisting them in order to retain some semblance of control. Furthermore, what is increasingly apparent is that as additional sanctions and restrictions are placed upon benefit recipients, so the limited forms of resistance become increasingly sparse and ever narrower tightropes must be walked for, should someone refuse to accept and wholly internalize the wider negative discourses surrounding laziness, disengagement and dysfunction, they will be penalized.

The Defensible Self

What the narratives show so far is that a great deal of time and effort is expended in formulating and maintaining an articulable defensible self in which the individual is able to provide themselves and their audience with a coherent outline of their life to date. In doing so it becomes evident that the individual draws upon a range of resources in order to identify what happens and, from their perspective, why. This is evidently problematic at times, especially when seeking to portray oneself in a particular way and the more complex the back story and numerous the resources and experiences being drawn upon, the more the idiosyncrasies that appear in the narrative. The audience remains important with many participants having sought to garner sympathy whilst at the same time maintaining a degree of machismo and ensuring that they do not come across as 'weak'. The manner in which Jay describes his past encounters is a prime example:

“I was walking up this street that was full of Pakistani’s and...this Pakistani guy, this Paki said ‘What the *fuck* do you think you’re doing walking up my street?’ So I looked at him and I said ‘why is this your street?’ and he said ‘Cos I live on this street, what’s your fuckin’ sort doing walking up my street?’ and I said ‘what do you mean ‘my sort’?’ and he said ‘you honky fuckin’ druggie motherfucker’ yeah? So he was being racist to me and calling me a junkie and he called me a motherfucker. So I said listen, I’m just going and I’m going. So I carried on walking and erm he come running up the street, stopped me, and said ‘right, come on, fight me!’ and I said ‘listen, I don’t wanna fight you, I’m busy, I gotta go. As I turned around he punched me in the back of me ‘ead and I fell over and he run up, kicked me in me face so I got up and started fighting with him and I was winning the fight and within ten seconds I was surrounded by about fifty Paki’s...and I swung at the guy and fifty of them, they all started having a go, they all started hitting me. Erm and then eventually I broke free and I went.”

It becomes apparent that Jay was prepared to ‘go down swinging’, however somehow managed to overcome apparently overwhelming odds and this is a repeated element within his narrative. The desire to ensure that Jay is able to defend himself from excessive victimisation becomes a common and clear part of the narrative and draws upon a host of techniques, including neutralizations, to ensure that his own role in proceedings is that of unwilling participant. It is to these neutralizations and ideas surrounding the garnering and maintenance of respect to which we now turn as we examine the wider strategies involved in maintaining a defensible self and the associated benefits (including engendering new solidarities and resiliences) to which the discussion now turns.

Neutralizations

What should become apparent from the narratives and meta-narratives discussed so far is that vulnerable populations are engaging in complex practices of identity work in order to provide themselves with an of understanding of their experiences, they are formulating

a 'Defensible Self'. Throughout the narratives, closely associated with those already discussed surrounding anger and shame, and equally informed by the politics of division is the way in which participants form and express a defensible identity. What has become apparent throughout the data is that, as people seek to make sense of their experiences and try to understand events they focus upon where things have gone wrong for them, rather than where their actions have led to them getting involved in such circumstances in the first instance. Jay's statement again serves to reinforce this fact. This becomes increasingly important as they seek to form a defensible understanding of the self and reaffirm some sense of their ontological security (Giddens, 1991). These attempts take many forms and rely upon the availability of resources allowing for this in both time and space. In some cases, the adoption of a "victim stance" (Maruna, 2001: 128; Clarke, 2011: 8) becomes prevalent as participants have sought to neutralize (Sykes and Matza, 1957) and legitimize their actions. For others, however, there is a targeting of marginal groups, notably migrants and those in similar positions to the individual, who can be painted as less deserving of sympathy and as a cause of the problems faced both by the individual and society as a whole as people again seek to explain why their lives have so far turned out the way that they have.

The Victim Stance

As noted earlier, Jay is a prime example of this; he has extensive experiences of both offending and being a victim of crime. His sister introduced him to heroin at an early age and he has been fighting addiction on and off ever since then. He later began breaking into pharmacies and chemists and stealing thousands of pounds worth of drugs. Because of the money he found that he was able to make by selling the prescription drugs on the black market, Jay became a target and was repeatedly attacked and had his home broken into whilst continuing to go on drug fuelled binges. After becoming involved in drug dealing he again fell afoul of others and again attacked, nearly having his throat slit and

being stabbed several times (he still bears the scars). Most recently, he found himself under a car on a nearby trunk road, but with no recollection of how he got there and has received considerable physical and mental injuries as a result. He has been on the receiving end of violent assaults and shoplifting charges following this and has been homeless for a prolonged period of time culminating in his arrival in hostel where I met him. Whilst narrating these experiences, there was an overwhelming focus upon the experiences of victimisation with considerably more attention paid to such experiences. It appears that part of Jay's strategy to form a 'defensible self' – an understanding of his position in society which reinforces his sense of ontological security – draws heavily upon experiences of being a victim compared with those of offending and deviance. What is apparent from within this is that Jay's involvement in crime cannot simply be split into being either a 'victim' or an 'offender' but rather that both his offending and victimisation have often gone hand in hand. Jay's burgling of pharmacies and chemists, fuelled by a desire for drugs and the lucrative returns from prescription medicine, meant that his success brought with it increased risks of victimisation because he was known to have money as a result of his criminality. Likewise, for Spanish, who was involved in gang crime elsewhere before moving to Stoke-on-Trent, the two often went hand in hand and it was because of his gang affiliations that he ultimately left the city in which he had grown up in order to protect his children. It appears that a 'victim stance' has been formulated by Jay in particular as he seeks to present himself in a positive light whilst taking into account the problems faced as a result of prolonged unemployment and weakened social ties.

Jay and Spanish are not alone in prioritising victimisation. Craig and Brian also, apparently subconsciously, invest heavily in seeking to form a defensible self. In contrast, however, they accept a greater degree of responsibility for the situations that they have been in; Craig, whilst having little by way of experiences of crime beyond alcohol related

offences (this is not to say that they haven't been serious; he was charged with driving under the influence – something for which he remains mortified), has battled alcohol dependency for many years alongside family breakdown and limited access to his children; Brian has battled drug addiction and was a victim of being further marginalised within the community by neighbours for 'not fitting in'. Brian was, however, well aware that his actions at times exacerbated the situation (he once staggered out of a taxi wearing a skirt following a night out; something which he later quickly learned to be highly inadvisable in a working-class community still dominated by traditional understandings of working-class and masculine identities (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007; Connell, 2005; Winlow, 2001)). What these narratives show is that, to understand one's position in society and how they got there, especially within such a deprived community, people invest a great deal of time and effort in seeking to analyse their experiences and identify what happened and where as part of their reflexive process (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994:14-15). Something which also becomes clear is that the availability of wider societal discourses can help to facilitate the construction of a 'victim stance' by the individual in order to help them to explain why they are struggling to succeed in a society where we are continually informed that such apparent failings are because of individual weaknesses. Brian was close to completing a PhD of his own and yet has never quite made it and is unsure if going back to complete it for fear that it will serve to dredge up bad memories and draw him down the same path which he is attempting to escape from. Therefore, to create a clear understanding of their experiences what emerges is that Jay, Craig and Brian are not seeking to exonerate themselves of guilt for their actions but rather formulate a position from which they are able to understand what has happened to them. Furthermore, these men come from a formerly proud community with working families (not from families enduring Iain Duncan-Smith's now infamous intergenerational unemployment) and some duly followed them into work; Craig in the building industry, Jay as a painter and decorator with his

stepfather; Phil undertaking an apprenticeship based upon his grandfather and uncle's advice and experiences, and Brian in a variety of jobs, never quite settling but nonetheless working to support himself and his family. This poses serious challenges for the current rhetoric of worklessness and dependency and shows instead that people are trapped in poverty not because of their own failings but by structural failings. This is compounded by an unwillingness by employers or the government to provide the support and opportunities required to really help people back onto their feet rather than shepherding them into exploitative 'back to work' schemes.

Othering

This is not the only manifestation of attempts to formulate a defensible-self appearing within the narratives. Another theme which comes through strongly and appears linked to the current political climate and the prevalence of wider debates is the targeting of migrant workers and communities. For some, especially Shaun and Phil, racial conflict stemmed from early confrontations with peers at schools and fighting with members of the local Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities within Stoke-on-Trent after school. Mohammed, Pickles, Jay and Spanish provided particularly illuminating commentaries into their view of the role that minority ethnic communities and economic migrants have played in Stoke-on-Trent and more widely, as is clearly exhibited in the passage below, drawn from Spanish's interview:

We're letting all these immigrants in the country as well and they're taking all the jobs you know what I mean. I wouldn't have to resort to crime, it's like I said if someone offered me a job and I had to clean the fuckin' sewer with me toothbrush I'd fuckin' take it because someone's paying me to do it. There's no jobs around because there's so many immigrants working for fuck all that is who they employ. And they're good at it is well. If it was stuck just to English bred people, no immigration in the country whatsoever, everyone would be on a thirty or forty k year job at least.

That'll be the poorest person in the country, do you understand? That is where I think the country should be. I know they'd say it's racist but you're just looking after your own aren't you? It's fucked, this country's fucked and it's never gonna get on its feet again.

Whilst Pickles stated that:

“ I've got Polish living above me [IM: Okay] I sit in here sometimes at night time and all you can hear is them talking. All you can hear is Polish and it fuckin' sickens your 'ead and I think “I did the army for this?” My job was keeping the front doors fuckin' locked. You know what I mean?”

Before later saying that

"that's political, not racist. I'm British. Anyone can be British, I'm English, you're English, you're born and bred, from generation by generation, from your father from your father's father's father, you know what I mean.”

Whilst Mohammed was particularly animated when commenting on the idea of respect for 'our culture' and 'traditions':

“Dirty bastards, dirty bastards I don't like their morals, don't like how they treat people and then they can go around burning poppies but we go round and fucking do a load of shouting and get fucked and all they get done is a community order and an eighty pound fine for burning a poppy. Cheeky bastards! That's our heritage and you're going burning poppies in front of our fucking dead soldiers fuck off. Pisses me off but they let it go on and on and on and on and on and next thing you know is it's finally grown an head the problem with this country, as soon as we let 'em in we go across there to go and help their country out and they fucking cut our heads off. They come over here and burn our fucking poppies about our heritage and we give them an eighty pound fine.”

These sentiments are increasingly reflected within wider society with right-wing commentators targeting migrants as the cause of the problems of low wages and unemployment within society and, furthermore, provide an accessible narrative which is readily available to help those suffering from prolonged unemployment within areas of decline (Standing, 2011, 2014). The rise of the BNP and UKIP throughout England and Wales provides clear testament for this. The continual scaremongering and moral panics created in late 2013 and early 2014 surrounding the lifting of restrictions upon migrants from the latest EU accession countries reflects these sentiments and again fuels the fire of division and despair within communities still struggling to come to terms with, and adapt to, the loss of key industries which formerly supported them. These discussions also underline how such discourses, served up in ready-made parcels, are readily accepted, internalized and regurgitated by people seeking to better understand their own subjugated position within society; something which continues to be prevalent within deprived communities such as in Stoke-on-Trent:

“Once an object of pride, rooted in traditions and sustained by a whole technical and political heritage, manual workers as a group – if indeed it still exists as such – are thrown into demoralization, devaluation and political disillusionment, which is expressed in the crisis of activism or, worse, in a desperate rallying to the themes of quasi-fascist extremism.” (Bourdieu, 1998: 100)

For the people within this study, who relay their views as “not racist” (Pickles), but rather rational, politically calculated and informed beliefs (Rydgren, 2004) it becomes apparent that their “subjective reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1971: 34) is informed by such discourses. This is arguably because of such readily available discourses aimed at channelling discontent towards other marginal groups, thereby diverting attention from the underlying structural causes of unemployment and marginalised position within society (MacLeavy, 2006: 90). One of the reasons for this is that the information

accessible to people stems from personal experiences (i.e. a change in the racial composition of a community over time, or working with migrant workers) and the reliance upon information from trusted sources (Rydgren, 2004: 125). Tversky and Kahneman have argued that “people rely on a limited number of heuristic principles which reduce the complex task of assessing probabilities and predicting values to simpler judgmental questions.” (1982a: 3). This can often lead to “severe and systematic errors” (Ibid), especially when combined with mediatised stereotypes. “Stereotypes...can bias the gathering and storage of information and subsequent impressions. A consequence is that unjustified inferences about social groups or individuals may be perpetuated in the absence of empirical tests.” (Taylor, 1982: 198). The manner in which such discourses are repeated within the political and media arena, when coupled with the *a priori* forms of knowledge (Simmel, cited in Rydgren, 2004:127) which the individual generates and relies upon to construct their understanding of the world, means that xenophobic attitudes appear rationally informed to the individual who espouses them despite the invalid reasoning behind such formulations (Rydgren, 2004). These beliefs, informed by experience and ‘trusted sources’ are subsequently expanded by the availability of certain heuristics.

What is interesting, however is that whilst participants have displayed a distinct animosity to minority and migrant workers and communities, they have still, unlike much of the popular press, retained a distinct sense of respect for the work ethic of migrant workers with whom they have worked even where they do not like the ‘attitude’ of those with whom they are working:

“Like I said I would never work in a warehouse but then I ended up working in a warehouse cos I wanted to do work but I was fed up of tatting but then I work in a warehouse and I get spoken to like crap by some sort of Kosovan as well. It’s not happening mate. Treated like a piece of shit by some foreign guy who’s come across

to this country and telling me what to do. It's fucking fucked up, we've got work in a fucking warehouse. [IM: Tell me a bit more about your experiences of working with foreign guys] Bastards. *Okay credit where it is due, they are harder workers than us.* They're harder workers, fuckin' hard. *They're fairly good grafters* but it's just their attitude and that sort of stuff.” (Mohammed)

The ideas and statements being articulated are not a regurgitation of the rhetoric espoused by the established powers but are complex and we again return to the work of Tversky and Kahneman (1982b) to understand why:

“The strength of causal reasoning and the weakness of diagnostic reasoning are manifest in the great ease with which people construct causal accounts for outcomes which they could not predict, and the difficulty that they have in revising uncertain models to accommodate new data. It appears easier to assimilate a new fact within an existing causal model than to revise the model in the light of this fact. Moreover, the revisions that are made to accommodate new facts are often minimal in scope and local in character.” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1982b: 126).

Mohammed has encountered evidence to challenge the idea that migrants and migrant labourers are bad, yet has localised this knowledge to indicate that those who he has worked with are the exception rather than the rule. This reinforces the account which he already possesses and understands whilst making small allowances for the individual cases which challenge his current understanding. This emphasises the way in which narratives are intertwined with both a respect for the hard work and desire to succeed exhibited by economic migrants and a need to provide a sense of understanding and meaning to the individual's own life. As such, Mohammed appears to be seeking to explain the reasons for their own position in a society in which the individual is repeatedly, and ever more increasingly, cast as being at fault for their failure to succeed. What becomes apparent is the links to previous statements made by participants regarding the ideas of being 'lazy'

and unwilling to engage. It becomes manifest that experiences of working alongside foreign workers has served to compound these sentiments and further undermine the feelings of self-worth which have already been weakened by continually failing to secure meaningful work due to the lack of formal qualifications increasingly relied upon by employers. This continual weakening of the individual's positions and sense of self-worth plays out in the future which they see for themselves and the trajectory which they see their life courses following. As a result the desire to achieve recognition and respect within one's own community, despite lacking many of the resources formerly available, becomes increasingly important. In doing so, "the subject therefore perceives the cause of his autonomic responses as "external" to himself and feels and behaves accordingly." (Nisbett, Borgida, Crandall and Reed, 1982: 104). However, because of the prevalence of mediatised stereotypes and surrounding the easily accessible role of migrants in supposedly undermining the economy and the position of the unemployed, the responses of each individual are thus directed in the same direction, increasing animosity accordingly.

What is more, where the individual has worked with migrant labourers in high intensity, low-wage environments, the stereotypical views informed by the aforementioned 'trusted sources' are challenged, thereby laying the foundations for more inclusive conditions. Instead, however, what occurs is the maintenance of divisions and borders, in some cases physical, which serve to reinforce the animosity within society and in particularly deprived communities:

"Them Poles up there never go in the garden because I've told 'em, "you don't sit on my chair, you don't sit on my bench."...I've got the parasol, four chairs and everything and one day I had me parasol out, the summer, they come into me back yard, and you remember I bought that, I've done all the gardening, I've bought the soil, I've put the compost in and everything right? And this one day they've come

out and I've just come back with me mate in the van and I said to [friend] like, "Are you staying for a beer mate?" And he said "Oh I've got a lot to do like." So I said "Well I'm gonna have a beer in the garden." It was a fuckin' beautiful day, you know that period of, you know about May when we had that period and it was pure, beautiful fuckin' heat wave, it were brilliant. And I sat in the garden like and I did, I had a few bottles of Newcastle Brown in the fridge. And as I come out, the fucker's sitting on me fuckin, me chairs, you know, got me parasol up. Now I'd had the parasol in, I'd closed the parasol and had the little wrap on it, you got what I mean? With the little bag over the top? And me seats were closed, leaning like that round the table....Well the cheeky bastards, they come 'ere, and I'm not racist, it's a political view, they come and nick everything, know what I mean? Everything in that place has been fuckin' given to them. Carpets, they've moved in, carpets down, everything! They've just, I'm screaming because I'm after new radiators, I've been fighting it for two years. They've just had all new central heating put in this week, I mean last week I mean. Bathroom suites, kitchen units, everything. I need a new kitchen suite, bathroom, everything, radiators. Two years on I'm still fighting for it now. All they come here, they just weld the fuckin' break in the pipe or cut a piece of piping off and replace it with new and it's took me two years just to get a brand new radiator."

We again see the reinforcing of Pickles' belief systems by attributing the actions of the Polish neighbours (who had in reality done little wrong bar assuming that the garden furniture was available to use) as a means of reinforcing the threat that they, as outsiders and an external threat, pose. The consequence of this is that readily available heuristics and biases are being deployed because "people strive to achieve a coherent interpretation of the events that surround them, and that the organization of events by schemas of cause-effect relations serves to achieve this goal." (Tversky and Kahneman, 1982b: 117). The articulation of ideas portraying migrants as 'taking our jobs' and undermining 'British values' based (ironically) around respect, tolerance and mutual appreciation plays a pivotal

role. This is because, to successfully maintain the defensible self-identity which is so carefully crafted using a multitude of resources and techniques, people rely upon those around them for sources of respect and reaffirmation whilst also positioning themselves as better than those around them. They buy into the divisive focus upon individualised society and continue to entrench negative solidarities (MacCannell, 1977: 303; Winlow and Hall, 2013: 12) built on division rather than unity.

A second point of interest within the extract from Pickles' is the idea that he has to wait for maintenance to be carried out on his accommodation. In contrast, his Polish neighbours have apparently had their property renovated before moving in, and Pickles appears to attribute this to the fact that they are Polish. Of significance here is the fact that both properties are owned by a housing association that, when *any* new tenants move in, a property is appraised to see what the needs of those tenants are and what maintenance is required for the property. As such, regardless of who the new neighbours were to be, the same maintenance would have been conducted. However, because the new neighbours are Polish, Pickles has taken exception to the work which has been conducted and evidently believes that the housing association has discriminated positively in their favour. It is, furthermore, likely that such sentiments will become increasingly widespread given the rise in migrant populations within the city which has seen the non-British and Irish White population more than double in the city from 2,003 to 4,671 between 2001 and 2011 with the mixed-race and non-white population increasing from 12,529 to 28,296 over the same period (ONS, 2013c). Therefore, the potential for racial confrontation, especially given the volume of inflammatory stories distributed throughout the press aimed at inciting such conflict, is likely to increase with further potential for animosity such as is exhibited by Pickles.

Now that we have seen some of the main strategies deployed in order to mitigate for or internalize and reconcile the social, political and economic climate in which people live

and the abject treatment of themselves by society, I seek to discuss and analyse the wider challenges which can threaten the individual's attempts to formulate and articulate a stable and defensible self. These influences are particularly important for developing a better understanding as to the nuances within the narratives of the participants and explaining some of the reasons behind so many contradictions arising within a person's explanatory narratives.

Respect and Reputation

It should by now be clear that respect, both in the eyes of themselves and the eyes of others is a central element of peoples' identities. R. D. Laing explored the idea that identities are created through the eyes of the other and could not be formed or understood without external influences (1961: 70). Further support for this thesis can be seen in Erving Goffman's writings whereby he contends that "we find that the individual may attempt to induce the audience to judge him and the situation in a particular way, and he may seek this judgement as an ultimate end in itself" (1990: 13). This thereby further emphasises the performative aspect of identity work and the idea that respect is an essential element within this, whilst further stressing the need to 'act tough' to preserve one's position within the community. It has been argued elsewhere (see for example Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001) that respect within a community is essential for several reasons; it provides status and standing within the community which can in turn provide subsequent benefits, especially when help is required from peers; and it provides security, particularly from being singled out as weak by others in the community seeking an easy target in their own search for respect. Charlesworth has provided a series of examples regarding this, particularly when it comes to being challenged by groups of young people in the community:

“when the sense of honour that characterized a community has been destroyed; when the presence of large gangs of young people cut off from the relations in which an older generation learnt its values, and for whom those values of mutual respect can make no sense because they derive respect from their having no respect for others as an instantiation of their hardness...” (Charlesworth, 2000: 82).

This is reflected in the testimony provided by Mohammed, Jay, Phil and Spanish; Mohammed trained as a boxer and Jay in kickboxing. Both have been involved in violent incidents, with their training helping to get them out of said incident on each occasion. Phil, meanwhile, spent a lot of time working out and seeking confrontation at times whilst Spanish, through his gang affiliations, had to ensure that he was able to defend himself. Mohammed spoke repeatedly about respect and the way in which it can be gained and lost within the community, referencing ‘smackheads’ in particular:

MA: I'm not trying to preach a greater god or anything but I do believe that everyone falls and in the glory of god no one's perfect smack heads aren't perfect but if they come up to you and speak to you and speak to you fine then fine, let 'em be. So long as they aren't fuckin' hurting you, you aren't hurting them. That's the way I believe in things.

IM: And do you think a lot of people think that?

MA: I don't know, a lot of people that I speak to think they are dirty smackheads but everyone around here just gets on with it. They know who smackheads are and if they all speak to us they're sound. That's the way I believe in things anyway.

Before later going on to describe the circumstances in which he would apply such a derogatory term to someone:

Sometimes we get pulled over for daft things...we were pulled over to have a look in a house in [location in Stoke-on-Trent] to have a look at a house to rent off someone. Some fuckin' girl who looked like she was drugged up or summat accused us of nickin'

fuckin' her bed out of her garden. She says "fuckin' hell you were loaded up, you were loaded up you took a big massive load on." So he says to her "duck, we've only been out today and got half load on. It's a shit load. 'You've cleaned it off and gone out again'. I go "shut up duck and get away you fookin smack'ead'. That's when I call someone a smackhead, when they've treated me wrong. They speak to me wrong and that's when I speak to someone nasty. I don't judge people.

As such respect is evidently important to Mohammed, but furthermore that he engages in a complex process of sense making to ensure that he is clear about where the boundaries lie, drawing upon past experience in order to provide a detailed understanding as to where respect is afforded and earned, and the manner in which mutual respect for appropriate interactions is gained and maintained. Furthermore, in other discussions with him, it was evident his physicality and size serve to protect him and provide a degree of safety from being targeted by others in the community. However, we also see the contradictions emerging from within Mohammed's statement whereby, on the one hand he claims that some people 'deserve' to be labelled a 'smackhead' and yet, at the same time, the idea that he doesn't judge people. He is often quick to react to a situation; something which is shared with Phil. At times both have sought the opportunity for a fight to assert his position in the community and increase his reputation as someone able to handle themselves and unafraid of confrontation (*field notes*). The confidence which Phil in particular has gained from this carries through into the way that he handles himself in day to day scenarios:

P: "You see like in life like, you know you can defend yourself, you never really have any worries, d'you know how I mean? See how you said you don't fight much or nothing yeah? If you walked into a rough pub and there was some bald head meat heads all tattooed up, look a bit scary, you might feel a bit intimidated wouldn't you?"

IM: "Probably"

P: “Me I just go in I do. Just bop right in like, you know what I mean? I aren’t bothered if they beat me up like if you get what I mean.”

It is important, however to note the opposite side of all of this, and of being on the receiving end of derogatory terms such as ‘smackhead’ as can be seen below in the case of Jay:

“one of me friends, who was a brilliant friend, he used to do the drugs on the odd occasion with me, but when you get to be known as a smackhead, and I hate that word, because I wasn’t. There’s a difference between someone that uses drugs and there’s a smackhead. A smackhead will go and steal a woman’s bag off her in the street. Someone that uses drugs wouldn’t do that. That’s the difference. So because, when you take heroin, people think you’re a smackhead and erm, because of that I lost all me friends.”

It emerges that some drugs, and especially heroin and crack cocaine, carry with them a much more severe level of stigmatization than others. Association with these can therefore lead to being ostracized and isolated with the loss of essential support networks, often at crucial periods. As discussed earlier, Jay’s testimony has an underlying victim narrative whereby he seeks to comprehend his position in such a way as to provide meaning in a city devoid of such a thing for many. This is addressed in more detail elsewhere. Furthermore, it is also apparent that he seeks to distance himself from such stigma, defining what a ‘smackhead’ is and explaining why he is not one, again reinforcing the role of negative solidarities as people seek to distance themselves from the stigma associated with being among the most ‘undeserving’ within society. His experiences are likely to have had a profound impact upon him and his perceptions of himself as a result. This in turn will have influenced the way he feels about his past and how he relays these experiences to others whilst seeking to make sense of said

experiences and formulate a defensible self which he understands and can make sense of and subsequently articulate.

Respect is also a useful resource for people living within a hostel. I will subsequently discuss the way that it can be lost and people can in turn lose the support of their peers if they take advantage of others generosity or fail to return the favour. However before this, the reputation that some people carry means that they are both protected from abuse and assault within the community but are also seen as a protector the weaker members, something which Spanish knows all too well:

“sorting everyone else’s fuckin’ problems out because they see me because I’m an older person and they come up to me ‘oh this guy’s bullying me, what should I do?’ and I normally end up having a word with them like you know ‘fuckin’ leave him alone or you’ll have me to deal with. I’ll fuckin’ throw you out that window and they wouldn’t know about it mate and I’d make it look like an accident now leave him alone.’ Because there are a lot of people in here try and bully innocent, like vulnerable people. I don’t like bullies, I was bullied myself at one point and I did not like it.”

This serves to highlight the role of respect in securing the individual’s position within their community, whether it be a microcosm of the wider community, such as in a hostel, the local community or the wider city. Respect in a total institution conveys a number of benefits and security, yet also risks, especially if someone finds themselves in a young offender’s institute whereby everyone is either out to prove themselves as the top dog, something which even Spanish and Phil, despite their violent backgrounds, did not wish to engage in beyond defending themselves from victimisation. These will be discussed in relation to hostels further in the chapter.

Norms and Solidarity

In addition to the role that the individual's experiences and actions serve in formulating and articulating a defensible self what has also become apparent is that there is evidence of new norms and forms of solidarity being formed because of the way in which so many of the experiences, despite being on an individual basis, are often shared. The idea of 'normal' is particularly important for another reason beyond what has become 'normal' for the individual. For Bourdieu:

“Though it is impossible for all (or even two) members of the same class to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for members of that class.” (1992: 59-60).

Therefore, despite the fact that people within a community will rarely share identical experiences, the communities in which one grows up and the experiences garnered there are central to one's understanding of the world around them (Charlesworth, 2000) with some estates, being branded as magnets for dependence and anti-social behaviour. Tyler (2013: 159-160) draws upon Tony Blair's 1997 Aylesbury Estate speech to exemplify this but it is the influence that experiences of living within these communities has which are most important. Whilst crime and anti-social behaviour within a specific community may be considerably higher than local or national averages, they are still seen as 'normal' by those living there. This reinforces the idea that communities generate their own norms based upon the collective experiences of those who live there (Bourdieu, 1977: 53). When talking about life growing up, Shaun spoke about his childhood as being 'normal', engaging in racially aggravated violence, stealing bikes, breaking windows and smoking weed from an early age. He, Mohammed and Tristan speak of the estate on which they live as having 'normal' levels of crime compared with elsewhere, despite Pickles' assertion

that crime, and in particular drug dealing, is rife on Bentilee despite a lack of recorded evidence to the contrary. What is pertinent here is testimonies from Mohammed:

M: It's alright, it's just [Estate] isn't it, just another estate. Even if you live in [Neighbouring Estate] you've still got your pricks up there ain't you. You got your little, your push fuckin' middle aged kids thinking their fuckin' hard going round there and you come to [Estate] and it's just what's it called dressed a bit scruffy, that's it. That's what I think anyway.

IM: So no real trouble or anything else like that?

M: Yeah you've got your trouble. Every where's got your trouble haven't you? Don't you think that?...You know what I mean, trouble! Everyone comes from a different background. You come from another background to what I do. You used to like your parties n' you used to like your scrapes and bumps when you were younger and shit happens. It just, because it is on a council estate it is a bit more violent to middle class like and that's just the way it is ain't it? If you get what I'm saying. Everyone has their scrapes and bumps everywhere but cos this is a poorer area it is discriminated and it's wrong.

In support of this, Shaun stated that his experiences growing up were 'normal':

S: Yeah erm, it was just normal really mate. *I just grew up on a normal housing estate*, erm, did *normal things with kids like breaking windows and stuff like that*, trialling bikes, messing with motorbikes, stuff like that really. Just stuff you do when you're a kid, playing football and shit like that.

Before later going on to say, particularly regarding crime:

IM: So what was life like growing up around there, a lot of crime or?

S: Erm there was mate but sort of we didn't notice '*cos we were on the inside*, you know what I mean? *For people on the outside looking in, they could see the flaws* of it but whilst

we were living in there, do you know what I mean, there didn't seem like any crime at all, *it just seemed normal*.

Both Mohammed and Shaun both identify the fact that normal for their community may differ from other peoples' understandings of normality. Despite a lack of further education and a lack of engagement at school both Mohammed and Shaun are switched on to what is going on around them and fully understand the way in which everybody's perceptions of normality are entirely different and directly informed by their own experiences; they are both actively engaged in reflective contemplation of their past and have a well-informed understanding of their own experiences as a result (Giddens, 1991: 52-55). These understandings of what is 'normal' also carry with them significant ramifications for one's experiences, particularly given that an individual's formative years are largely seen to be particularly important when it comes to formulating their sense of self and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990). However life in the community is clearly not the only thing which influences perceptions of normality and family life is equally important and particular examples of this can be seen in Phil's transcript whereby he specifically cites two important influences. In the first instance, he speaks about the influence that his grandfather has had on his life, particularly when it comes to employment and directing him towards undertaking an apprenticeship:

GM: Yeah yeah I had two apprenticeships lined up, a plumbing one and an electric one and I didn't know which one to get like. They both offered it me so me granddad has owned a caravan in [Location], one of them big static ones and I had the choice like and I had to decide on the Friday and he was telling me, 'cos me uncle, his son like, is a qualified plumber, he just said I think you should go for the electrician one, so I went for the electrician one like.

The second manner in which his familial influences are gained takes a more aggressive approach, particularly towards migrant and minority populations within the community:

IM: So why don't you sort of get on with people from an Asian background?

GM: Never have like, I just grew up like. Me family does so I 'ate 'em, do you know what I mean? That's how it works.

IM: So did you have any reason prior to that?

GM: No...

Thus it becomes clear that many of the early experiences gained by a person continue to inform and dominate their understandings and belief systems for much of their lives, something which is particularly important in industrial and working-class communities where understandings of work are often based around engagement in heavy industry and ingrained expectations regarding the role you are expected to undertake. The schism experienced by the decline of industry has led to significant challenges being posed to understandings precisely because of the way in which one's *habitus* informs their understandings (Bourdieu, 1990: 62) and people continue to struggle to find new ways of making their way through these experiences as a result. Such statements and narratives also reveal something else which poses significant challenges to the current hegemonic discourses portraying the poor as lazy and disengaged. The reality is significantly different and shows that people are well aware that what is 'normal' for them may be significantly different for those from elsewhere. This carries with it significant repercussions when considering the argument developed in more detail later on that self-proclaimed advocates of the poor and dispossessed fail to fully represent their needs precisely because they have no experience of what it means to live in the communities they seek to represent. This is due to their own massively different background in which "today's Labour politicians, groomed on a fast-track educational and research path to power, [who] do not speak to 'their world', 'their beliefs' or 'their attitudes'." (Winlow and Hall, 2013: 14). Or as Michel Foucault put it long before the full extent to which this became apparent:

“Intellectuals have got used to working, not in the modality of the ‘universal’, the ‘exemplary’, the ‘just-and-true-for-all’, but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them...And they have met her with problems which are specific, ‘non-universal’, and often different from those of the proletariat or the masses.” (1980: 126)

The risk in this instance is that they see their own experiences as ‘normal’ and impose their own form of normality upon communities leading to further alienation and supporting claims that political representatives are increasingly removed from the populations which they seek to represent. “These communities are incapable of providing members with opportunities to be meaningfully engaged in activities and social relations, to feel a sense of belonging and identification, and to meet other psychological needs.” (Sonn and Fisher, 1998: 459). Therefore needs are increasingly underrepresented and further marginalisation and stigmatization continues to arise. In order to effectively engage such communities, rather than imposing a new model from the outside, a more effective approach would be to work with and actively engage people at a grass roots level to more effectively harness the solidarities and resiliences already naturally occurring in the community.

Implications for aspirations

What is apparent is that, for people in such desperate need of support, living in an area with high levels of deprivation combined with repeated attacks on their position via the political and populist press, especially when it becomes normalized and mainstream in day to day conversations within society, is that feelings of shame and inadequacy become exacerbated. Where one’s own emotions and experiences are mirrored in the lives of those around them the environment in which one exists becomes increasingly pivotal and Tim clearly indicates that the longer you are ‘stuck in a rut’, the harder it becomes to pick yourself up. This is something which is further supported by literatures previously

discussed surrounding the duration of unemployment and the hardships faced by people who struggle to find a way out (for examples, see Gallie and Benoit-Guilbot, 1994:3; Biewen and Steffes, 2010; Kroft, Lange and Notowidigdo, 2012; Ayllón, 2012).

A concern expressed by the participants, and best described by Tim as “getting into a hole I’m struggling to get out of” is the negative impact that living in areas with high concentrations of deprivation and desperation can have upon people. Tim goes on to state that the people around him were part of the cause of this because “they’re quite relaxed about it [their situation] so I sort of just sunk into the same mood as that.” Therefore, being surrounded by poverty and living in such an environment is especially debilitating. Several others including Simon, Storm and Mohammed also feel trapped. The impact of this should not be underestimated and has led to Mohammed stating that

“I won't get far in life. I'll just be plodding along 'til I die to be honest mate. I mean you never know, I might win the lottery you never know, you got more chance of fuckin', well you've got more chance with the lottery.”

This emphasises the feelings of fatalism and helplessness which can abound with few options or ideas to turn their lives around and can also lead to an increase in the apportioning of responsibility for one’s loss of motivation to external factors which are beyond the control of the individual (Nisbett *et al*, 1982: 104) as people continue to develop a ‘victim stance’. Alongside this, we also see that Mohammed has few expectations or aspirations for the future, due in no small part to his past and current experiences which act to constrain his outlook and thus influence his decision making process (Crewe, 2011). We return to Hatman for an example of the debilitating effect of this. Having already stated that he has little motivation to do much if anything despite wanting to be able to work towards supporting himself and his family, he continually

referred to the impending end of the earth¹⁴, and has attributed his lack of motivation to this external influence hanging over him:

“I know it sounds daft but I just find it hard to motivate myself to do it because of next month. It’s like, I don’t know. It’s like to be honest I don’t want to be happy for that reason. I don’t wanna be happy and enjoying life and it just end, I’d rather be in a position where I don’t care if it ends or not sort of thing.”

The loss of motivation combined with a lack of opportunities, both perceived and real, means that people are increasingly suffering from rising anxiety and pressures which they are struggling to manage. For those in work, the threat is from unemployment, for those out of work, it is from further marginalisation and ending up ever more dependent upon the social security system and being unable to support themselves or find any meaningful role either in society or as a role model for their children (see earlier discussions involving Spanish as an example of this).

This can lead to the individual becoming overwhelmed by events, resulting in a dramatic increase in suicides, particularly where economic crises are involved (Durkheim, 1984; 2002: 201) and this is, according to Pierre Bourdieu, because:

“You cannot cheat with the *law of the conservation of violence*: all violence is paid for, and, for example, the structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of layoffs loss of security, etc., is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence.” (1998: 40)

However, for those already out of work, the powerlessness experienced by the individual in attempting to exercise any serious level of agency or control over their situation,

¹⁴ Hatman was interviewed in December 2012, shortly before the 21st of December and there had been increasing coverage via a range of media and in particular popular internet sites of the Mayan prophecy and the declaration that the world would end on that date.

especially when coupled with other underlying issues and pressures (for example Gandhi who was not only unemployed, homeless and addicted to heroin, but was struggling to deal with the pressure of his family not knowing that he is homosexual), the ever rising threat of insecurity, particularly among the poor and impoverished, through increased competition for even the most basic of resources (Tyler, 2013: 191) can take over and become too much to bear for the individual.

This is further reflected throughout a recent study indicating that since 2008 Europe and North America have seen 10,000 additional suicides committed due, at least in part, to additional pressures being placed on people by both the recession and austerity programmes (Reeves, McKee and Stuckler, 2014). Meanwhile, this doctoral research study has found that over half of the participants having either paid serious consideration to taking their own life, or attempted it on at least one occasion. This is of particular concern, especially given the high levels of youth unemployment and even more so when combined with the abject, stigmatizing portrayals of the unemployed which continue to marginalise and undermine self-worth and engagement. There is an implication here that the financial hardship being faced by many is providing considerable strain upon individuals and families and this is only exacerbated among those so reliant at this point upon state support. The withdrawal of benefits for some has already pushed them to suicide (BBC, 2013) and this appears set to continue for some time to come unless the pressures can be relieved somehow (Reeves *et al*, 2014).

Despite feeling stuck in a rut, however, people largely retain conventional aspirations. Aspirations are heavily informed by understandings of normality (Taylor, 2009: 47). As norms become socially ingrained and appear 'natural' (Goffman, 1990: 11) those who agreed to participate in this study largely retain them despite their downtrodden experiences and the fatalistic views which some have come to express. For the majority of those who already have families, they desire a 'normal' life in which they are able

secure meaningful work in order to gain their own home and provide for their family. Meanwhile, those who do not yet have their own family retain the aspiration of working themselves into a position whereby they are able to support themselves and a family of their own. Therefore, in spite of being treated different, at times subhuman, and often dysfunctional, even the most marginalised retain largely orthodox views on life. Furthermore, whilst the norms which inform their experiences may not necessarily be shared by the elite, their views are still informed by the more ingrained societal norms as to what is expected in terms of providing for themselves and their families.

Something emerging from all of this, and which is holding back the ability of people to achieve these aims is a lack of money. We are repeatedly told that work is the best way out of poverty, yet there is increasing evidence that this is not the case with people living in 'in-work poverty' now outnumbering those who are out of work and impoverished (Aldridge, Kenway, MacInnes and Parekh, 2012: 25). Whilst this provides a significant contrast to the dominant political narrative at present, it provides stark relief to those at the poorest end of society. What is more, because of the way that society has been reconfigured towards an ever more consumerist one based on credit, debt and spending this is unlikely to change anytime soon. In line with this, the idea of sharing of resources, including cigarettes, also points to something else and that is the consumption practices of the participants and the way they have been trained to become not just a reserve army of labour but also one of consumers (Winlow and Hall, 2013). Current norms dictate that anybody short on money, particularly those in receipt of state support who purchase items such as cigarettes or alcohol, or anything other than the bare essentials, is branded as irresponsible and undeserving. This has seen the idea that benefits should be paid 'in kind', including in the form of vouchers or on a prepaid card given increasing consideration by the government with restrictions on what can be paid for using the card (Cameron, 2012). This would mean a paternalistic state treating many of those so

desperately in need of support with less trust than a parent would their own children, despite continually stating that people should be given increasing responsibility for themselves. What emerges, despite these discourses is that for many, cigarettes and alcohol remain a regular purchase, often bought ahead of other essentials despite the individual having little money to live on. For those living in hostels, this is offset by paying a fee of just over £30 per week on top of their housing benefit and are guaranteed gas, electricity and 3 meals a day. They are therefore assured of receiving food and are not simply spending money they can't afford – saving them from calls of 'irresponsible'. This strategy, however, fails to provide even meagre savings which would provide little benefit anyway thereby providing instant gratification at the behest of deferred gratification which they may never attain anyway. Moreover, for someone who has nothing and is in a position to take little pleasure from their lives, it should be of little wonder that small pleasures such as cigarettes and the odd beer are held on to at the behest of all else. In a society where mass media and education teach us what it is to be 'normal', including the rewards of material possessions and symbolic consumption (Young, 1999: 82), people branded deviant through consuming when it is deemed irresponsible to do so are, contrary to popular depictions, not deviant but rather hyperconformist in their actions (Winlow and Hall, 2013). Those who are economically excluded from society only too readily share its dominant culture (Young, 1999: 89). Thus, finding any source of money in which to provide even the smallest amount of relief to their inability to spend or consume is often a powerful motivator and, given the lack of other resources, can lead some to crime in order to meet their consumption practices and needs.

The alternative of this involves working off the books (Mohammed), acting as a fence (Darren and Phil) or theft (Spanish and Jay both continue to shoplift on an ad hoc basis when finding themselves out of money). Crime provides a powerful substitute for

legitimate employment where other opportunities are unavailable. Moreover, where the individual came into particularly large sums of money, such as was the case for Phil whilst he was fencing large shipments of goods, there is little intention of saving money:

P: [I] was rich wan't I. I was going casino, buying three-hundred quid bottles of champagne for people and all the girls loving it like, you know what I mean. I hired a Bentley one day for two-thousand odd quid with five grand deposit.

IM: Sort of quite a large, extravagant impact then.

P: Yeah I was living the life, I was only young. I wasn't gonna save it was I?

Phil exhibits the hedonistic lifestyle of younger men who have little to save for and instead are enjoying life. Moreover, he did not simply keep the money for himself, instead spending it on friends and family as well; something for which he reaped the benefits at a later stage after being sent to prison for blackmailing the mother of his girlfriend of the time and having very little money post-release. He was able to rely upon friends more readily following his release and thereby survive more readily than might have otherwise been the case. Within Phil's narrative, as well as most other participants, is an underlying narrative of change within their stories as they develop plans for the future and corresponding responsibilities. He stated that he wants to 'go straight' because "when you go for a meal and that like and you've bought it through going work, it's different when you've just got like ten grand off a quick deal, you know what I mean?" Again the role of the significant other becomes apparent but in this case it is not just about the criminal practices involved in acquiring the money but also about the pride which Phil associates with hard work and 'earning' the money he intends to spend. We again see evidence of the pervasive influence of ingrained norms and the idea that 'hard work' is rewarding, regardless of the low income that Phil makes compared to his former deviant exploits.

Belonging

Another implication of the lack of aspirations and opportunities, particularly for younger people, within Stoke-on-Trent is an increasing level of disconnection with the area. Older participants retain a strong sense of belonging, with Pickles being a prime example, stating that “I started craving for Stoke”. In contrast, Stan, Phil, Simon, Storm and Michael all share a desire to leave the area and not return. Whilst Michael only arrived in the area for his degree at the age of eighteen and has since left the area, the other younger participants have all lived in and around Stoke-on-Trent for much of their lives and yet have no desire to remain, long-term, within the community. Storm provides an excellent summary of the sentiments expressed by the young men in the study:

“I don’t wanna stay in England whatsoever. I don’t like the country if I’m honest. I think they’re alright taking money off you but as soon as you want summa t back it’s different. It’s tax, VAT and you get taxed on your wages and then you buy stuff and that’s got tax on. Why are you getting double taxed? I don’t like the country whatsoever. Erm I’d either go Australia or America in a heartbeat and I have applied to.”

One participant who did not complete the study and was, when last contacted, homeless, frequently found his way back to his original community when on the streets precisely because, despite the fact that he had no home and no-one to support him, he was able to rely on a sense of kinship with others he grew up around (*field notes*). This highlights the links that older participants, even those who are still relatively young in that they are in their thirties and forties, still have with the communities in which they have grown up. The disparity between older participants and the younger, dislocated members of the community thus becomes increasingly evident and underscores the lack of a sense of belonging arising within younger elements of the city. There is, as such, a risk that the city will ‘hollow out’ with the young increasingly leaving the city with an ageing

population increasingly reliant upon those who remain; many of whom lack the resources and mobility to leave.

Resilience

The concept of resilience is becoming increasingly prevalent with top-down, managerial strategies increasingly being deployed to make communities more resilient against future natural and economic shocks. I now seek to argue that many communities are already resilient to such shocks and the resilience already developed within communities that have endured inordinate suffering and desperation has taken on a wide range of manifestations; many in direct conflict with the forms that the political establishment would like to see engendered.

Bartley (2006) has characterised resilience as “an ‘unexpected’ positive outcome being achieved in the context of high levels of adversity.” (cited in Batty and Cole, 2010: 7); something which is particularly evident in cities such as Stoke-on-Trent which are suffering the prolonged effects of deindustrialisation. This resilience has led to the formation of communities which, despite lacking in resources and capital, are able to sustain themselves, frequently through engaging in working off the books and/or engaging in the black market. Bentilee and the hostels both provide good examples of this. In the case of Bentilee, according to official statistics, crime in the community is comparatively low (Johnston, 2009), however the experiences of participants paint a somewhat different picture. Pickles explained that drugs are rife across the estate and furthermore that he was asked to join a group because of his age and experiences on the street (*field notes*). Meanwhile Mohammed’s testimony (and several other events afterwards and which are discussed in chapter six) points to instances of violence and acts of outwardly aggressive behaviour as he seeks to ensure that he is not seen as weak but rather as someone to be reckoned with. This is perhaps to ensure that he does not

become a victim by falling down the hierarchy within that community (Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001) and intrinsically tied up in notions of respect and maintaining a reputation as discussed earlier. Meanwhile Jay and Simon have both lived in Bentilee for periods of time. Simon spoke of having a brick thrown through his window and others trying to break into his home whilst Jay has been in several fights and, by virtue of being engaged in crime whilst living in the area, shows that there is a great deal of criminality within the community, much of which appears to go unreported. This may be because of informal understandings within the community and a fear of being branded as a 'grass' as a result (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996; Yates, 2006). What this shows, however, is that due to the lack of legitimate opportunities available to the community, a wide variety of other opportunities have been undertaken. Mohammed also works as a scrap metal merchant's assistant where possible in order to top up his social security payments. Furthermore, despite only earning around £20-£25 per day with the person with whom he was working with during the research, and thus clearly being exploited compared with the amount of money that he would earn if he were working in legitimate employment, he is at least in control of his position. As such, whilst arguably complicit in his own subordination, it is on his own terms, again reinforcing the sense of resistance to the stigmatizing, abject portrayals in the press as discussed earlier. He therefore retains some semblance of control over the direction that he is heading in whilst also exhibiting elements of resistance to the approach adopted by central government, and also proving how inventive he can be in ensuring that he is able to survive with a suitable enough income to be able to live off in the process. This resilience, furthermore, should not be underestimated, either on an individual or communal level. Post-industrial communities such as Stoke-on-Trent have, for many years, had to endure prolonged decline and the resident population has had to seek new, inventive and at times subversive modes of survival where the means previously available are no longer accessible.

The formation of such resilient communities and lifestyles is, however, at odds with the forms of top down ‘resilience’ which current political leaders and elites appear to wish to engender. The dominant rhetoric is that there is a need to ensure that communities become ‘resilient’ to future shocks, whether they be natural, or resilient to ‘crime’ and future economic factors such as large scale job losses during recessions as has occurred previously. The expectation is to ensure “[t]he capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure, and identity” (Cabinet Office, 2011: 3). Within such constructions of ‘resilience’ and ‘resilient communities’ the communities are supposedly filled with ‘resilient individuals’ (Ibid: 15) who are able to “adapt their everyday skills and use them in extraordinary circumstances... [and] are actively involved in influencing and making decisions affecting them.” (Ibid). Whilst these definitions sound similar to the organic forms of resilience which arise as people find new ways of surviving in communities which no longer possess the traditional resources to draw upon, there is a move to introduce so called ‘community champions’ (ibid)¹⁵ to foster links with authoritative bodies. The reliance of these managerial discussions on ‘resilience’ rely heavily upon ‘experts’, ‘expert citizens’ (Fraser, Hagelund, Sawyer and Stacey, 2014) and ‘community champions’ in order to generate community cohesion and activism indicates a clear vision as to what ‘resilient communities’ should look like. This implies that the best way to achieve this is to impose strategies from the top down rather than fostering the organic solidarity which has already arisen within so many communities. It is evident that these top-down approaches which are couched within normative assumptions of what constitutes ‘good’

¹⁵ There are other examples of the use of the term ‘Community Champion’ in literature surrounding communities, regeneration and building resilience. Examples can be found within local government initiatives (for example those developed by Rochdale Council, whilst others include the likes of Lincolnshire Co-Operative (Lincolnshire Co-Op, n.d.) and more locally the ‘1000 Lives’ project being conducted in Stoke-on-Trent which identifies it’s key aims as bringing ‘people, skills, resources, opportunities and enthusiasm in the city together to make it a better place to live for everyone’ (1000lives Stoke-on-Trent, n.d.).

and socially acceptable forms of behaviour are in conflict with the organic forms identified throughout the discussions in this chapter. The “portrayal in official discourses of communities....as being fearful, distrustful, disorganized places which lack any level of social cohesion is...at odds with the complex functioning of social networks of trust” (Yates, 2006: 197) within such communities. We again see evidence of attempts to push people into conforming with socially accepted forms of behaviour based on normative assumptions made elsewhere and a return to the moralising discourses discussed in chapter three in relation to the abject treatment of many of the poor. Moreover, the normative assumptions in which top down discussions on resilience are couched show further evidence of the way in which whole communities are now being viewed as dysfunctional; a further manifestation of the disciplinary power being exercised from above. Such disciplinary undertakings point again to the way in which, as discussed in chapter four, technologies of the self (Foucault: 1988) are disciplinary and productive. They ensure the construction of specific forms of behaviour which benefit the needs of the powerful, whilst seeking to marginalise alternative forms. The interests of the individual are routinely ignored in favour of the interests and aspirations of the population, regardless of the effect that this may have and the conflicts which can arise (Foucault, 1991: 100). Furthermore the role of sanctions, combined with the application of managerial approaches to the building of specific forms of ‘resilience’ means that disciplinary measures are clearly being deployed in order to manage the population in order to achieve such aims (Ibid).

Evidence of such top-down interventions can be found throughout national and local policies. An example of this is the ‘Troubled Families’ initiative whereby the government identified 835 families as ‘troubled’ and in need of assistance in Stoke-on-Trent (CLG, 2014). Interestingly, however, the local council plans to work with 10,000 ‘troubled families’ in the city with a ‘key worker’ being assigned to assist them in order to help deal

with the issues that those families face (Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board, n.d.). The criteria for these ‘troubled families’ are households where:

- members of the household are involved in youth offending and/or antisocial behaviour
- A person is not/not regularly attending school or is attending a Pupil Referral Unit
- An adult is claiming out of work benefits

And crucially

- One other *locally determined flexible criteria* which can be negotiated with the programme team. (Ibid)

Despite the fact that the government has only been able to identify 835 ‘troubled families’ in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, the local council has identified 10,000 with a deliberately broad final criterion. The pervasive influence of normative assumptions regarding what constitutes normal behaviour and the fact that claiming out of work benefits is seen as ‘troubling’ underlines the way in which such assumptions can influence one’s life and how a person is categorized in a top-down system of social regulation and control. A secondary implication within this is that the informal methods of social control (including the division of labour and informal surveillance) are no longer powerful enough to maintain desirable norms within society. Communities instead develop their own norms which are at odds with the prescribed norms and action is required in order to foster the bonds, solidarities and links that the current political elite desire in order to ensure the continuation of the current social, cultural and economic plan. This is concerning given the language used when documenting the figures in central reports. In the latest update from the government on the progress of the ‘Troubled Families’ initiative, one of the key performance indicators is the “total number of families turned around” (CLG, 2014),

indicating that these families were on ‘the wrong path’ and therefore either on a road to nowhere or a pathway to oblivion; the normative assumptions guiding such programmes and strategies is plain to see.

As we can see from the contrasts between these managerial interventions and the reality of life in Stoke-on-Trent, the application of such ‘top-down’ ideas is in conflict with the natural and organic forms of resilience which have already grown up in and around many communities. It is increasingly likely that:

“the enforcement of these ‘alien’ state definitions, in the form of crack downs’ on certain types of behaviour, could potentially jeopardize the ‘social’ functions of some forms of crime in the local community and in particular those crimes which played a role in the informal economy, for example the market in stolen goods.” (Yates, 2006: 202).

This again underlines the potential threat to the population of such communities which have evolved strategies for dealing with deprivation and yet are facing the potential new threat of the undermining of such strategies and thus threatening the success of the approaches so far undertaken. Furthermore, the way in which the organic forms of solidarity have grown up in the face of adversity and a decline in the socio-economic status of communities means that the populations have had to become increasingly resourceful in securing the money they need to survive with varying tolerances for different forms of activity. In the case of Bentilee, discussed in more detail in chapter two, despite being one of the most deprived wards in the city of Stoke-on-Trent and the single most deprived in terms of income and employment, the crime levels are massively out of sync with what might be expected (it is ranked 27th of 54 wards in terms of crime and disorder) (Johnston, 2009: 30). Whilst this data might suggest that crime has decreased within the community, given the findings discussed throughout the chapter, what is more likely is that the types and visibility of crime has changed and a more

regular underground economy is up and running. This is reinforced by Pickles' testimony that "It's all over. It's all over, what you don't see it happening anyway", a statement supported by his claim that he was asked to 'come on board' with a local group of drug dealers because of his age (*field notes*). This confirms Young's thesis that "the strong community can well support criminal networks and subcultures." (1999: 177). Further evidence can be found in a discussion with Simon during the early stages of the research whereby he spoke of a time whereby someone tried to break into his flat only for him to approach them with a knife which his neighbours subsequently hid to protect him (*field notes*). This is interesting in its own right given that during the interview, he denied ever having possessed a knife in that situation indicating the importance of retaining the image of someone able and willing to defend themselves from the threat of aggressive others. Furthermore, crime has not so much declined as shifted further into the shadows whereby it is harder to track and this is a clear sign of the way in which communities, particularly working-class communities, continue to ensure that they are self-policing and are willing to overlook some indiscretions if there are wider benefits (such as drawing money into the locality) for that community. Moreover, as is exhibited by Mohammed who works off the books for a friend in order to top up his benefits, the forms of activities undertaken to survive and resist the abject position being thrust down from above, so further examples of the resilience within the communities emerge. It emerges that "run-down estates have...considerably stronger kinship networks, lack of geographical mobility (because of unemployment) and knowledge of each other than middle class areas which have extremely low crime rates." (Young, 1999: 177). Accordingly, it is clear that "the distinction between what is 'social' and 'anti-social' is indeed [highly] subjective" (Yates, 2006: 203) and that, furthermore, there is a clear need for these subjective tolerances to be taken into account when designing and implementing proposed interventions designed to improve 'resilience' in such localities (Ibid).

Hostel Life

Hostels have proven to be particularly conducive to the formation of new solidarities and the maintenance of reciprocal arrangements (Gouldner, 1960; Whyte, 1981: 257) which in turn further engender and cement new solidarities. The confines of a hostel provide a unique setting to live in, and in which norms can form. Given that so many participants have lived in them, it is essential to ensure that such experiences are discussed accordingly. This is especially so given the conflict between providing a set of rules and routines to those who live there whilst maintaining the appearance of ensuring that people have a safe environment within which to reflect on their past and set themselves in the direction that they wish to continue. In some respects life in hostels appears to be similar to that of students living in many halls of residence: communal living, shared facilities, a canteen and activities based in and around the hostel. What is missing, however, is the sense of purpose. Within the university environment, the students are, theoretically at least, there to work towards fulfilling a degree and developing their flexible employability skills. In contrast, hostels are filled overwhelmingly by those seeking to identify a route out of their current situation. It is a location providing them with a degree of stability in what has otherwise been a chaotic period in their life, providing support via ever dwindling channels as funding is cut by the Coalition's austerity programme. There is a clear purpose and expectation that people will not be staying in the hostel forever, aided by limits placed on the time someone can spend there, and rules governing what is, even in an often chaotic institution, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. These institutions, tasked with providing shelter and helping people back onto their feet play a vital role for many in engendering solidarity, providing support and training whilst rebuilding self-esteem and value in peoples' lives.

Those living within a hostel must accept that, in return for accommodation and support, they are engaging with institutions exhibiting characteristics akin to total institutions

within society (Sykes, 1958; Foucault, 1991; Toch, 1992). It emerges that institutions designed to support people through particularly tough times where they have little contact or support from friends or family serve to reinforce current norms (Foucault, 1990; 1991). They provide discipline, structure and routines following those which have been instilled throughout society, thereby fulfilling an additional role in structuring and bringing routine to the individual's day. They continually discipline them so as to conform to the norms and requirements of society more broadly (Foucault, 1988, 1991). Education and training is provided where required and much of this involves creating CVs, conducting job searches in the available computer room and engaging with internal courses designed to instil new skills and ideas aimed at becoming further integrated with the current labour market. In both the hostels engaged, the day revolved around meals and curfews at set times. Access to the individual's room by staff emphasises both the disciplinary influence being exerted by the institutions upon those living there. In this sense, hostels conform to the total institutions depicted by Foucault (1991) whereby regulation, routine and supervision are regularly imposed upon the individual to control, discipline and coordinate their actions (Ibid: 140). The hostel is an enclosed space; the "protected place of disciplinary monotony." (Ibid: 142) and is ideally placed to reinforce societal norms and train people into conforming through the routinization of meal times, curfews and providing activities at set times. This can, of course, have detrimental effects for people not used to such routines and structure, as was encountered by Spanish when he came down late for breakfast on his birthday one day:

"I was two minutes late right 'cos I was enjoying me shower 'cos I treated meself to some proper shower gel 'cos I'm skint all the time so I was having a proper shower. Woo it's me birthday! Twenty-five and I'm stuck in a fuckin' hostel. Trying to make the most of it. I couldn't even have a coffee or anything, I was two minutes late for

me breakfast and they wouldn't give me a bowl of fuckin' cornflakes when I pay me rent so I went mad."

At the same time, as has just been alluded to, and again reminiscent of the experiences of others contained within disciplinary institutions the world over, people living within a hostel must accept that they will have to negotiate a distinct lack of privacy. The loss of privacy can have profound effects on the individuals living in these institutions and the negative effects can lead to conflict and the ending of relationships with people who have come to form an essential part of an individual's support network. When asked about the status of a relationship which had been flourishing in the original interview (bearing in mind the follow up was only two weeks later) Tim said that:

T: "No, that went down the drain, not through anything that I'd done or that she'd done but a lot of people were poking their noses in the relationship when there wasn't an issue. I would've understood it if the relationship wasn't working, but it was working and it kind of just went."

IM: "It just fizzled out?"

T: "Yeah it just got too much for us because there were too many people poking their noses in and it got too much for us, so we thought, before we start hating each other for no reason, just leave it here. We're still good friends so it's not ended on a bad note for us."

Privacy is at a premium with the aforementioned access to rooms by staff and the additional pressures placed through everyone knowing each other's business which can have a significant impact upon relationships within the hostel. Hans Toch has suggested that this is because "the multidimensionality of environments frequently requires a person to "trade off" a dimension he may prize for another that he also needs." (1992: 35). Whilst speaking about prisons, Toch's work is also applicable here with the need for shelter and some degree of security being more pressing than a desire for privacy. The impact of this

lack of privacy is complex and, as discussed, shows clear parallel with total institutions within society in which meals are provided at set times, cleaners must be permitted access to rooms for set periods and curfews for visitors are carefully monitored with limited access to residents bedrooms for anyone except residents of the hostel. This may indicate attempts by the staff at the hostels to support the tenants through imposing a routine upon their behaviour. However, it also means that the tenants have limited privacy thereby ensuring that, should someone wish to remain within the hostel, they must ensure that their behaviour is befitting of the environment in which they live. This is often combined with a social hierarchy within each institution whereby people are engaged in a continual cycle of seeking to gain respect and thus status in the hostel and, where it is either lost or someone struggles to gain it in the first place, they risk victimisation from some of the more established characters within the institution as is discussed in more detail earlier in the chapter.

It is apparent that living within the confines of a hostel can pose significant strains upon one's lifestyle. One reason for this may be that they do not wish for the individual to become too settled for fear of ending up 'stuck in a rut' and become too comfortable there as has already been discussed previously. Not all experiences within a hostel are negative, however, and a number of positive influences and relations are often engendered. For some, because of the nature of their past experiences, whether in abusive relationships, due to dependency issues, or simply due to general isolation, hostels can have a profound and positive influence:

"It's kind of really brought me out of my shell a lot since I've been here. I'm a lot happier. Erm, I've kinda, I'm a lot more jokey than I used to be, I used to be really reserved erm but err, having friends for the first time in like six years and my relationship, it's nice to have friends." (Tim)

“Like I was on me own, I was dead lonely before I moved in there because I lived with me mum and went in me shell and that. I was just on the internet, the only really social life I had were talking to people on chat sites or MSN or whatever it was you used. Erm so coming from that to moving ‘ere, it was just great because I had all me mates, I started getting close to people and that and started getting really good friends and that ‘cos there are some really, really good people in there.” (Hatman)

However these experiences are often tempered by a continual reminder that hostels are based around disciplinary processes and procedures and the individual must abide by the rules of that institution:

“it’s hard to get close to people in there ‘cos you can get kicked out for such little reasons which I think’s wrong really because obviously if you get kicked out of there, that is your emergency you know, home. So you get kicked outta there and you’re literally on the streets and they don’t care.” (Hatman)

The generally supportive environment provided by the hostel then can have significant benefits for some. Another, more positive and equally important element of communal living within a hostel environment revolves around forming support networks and solidarities within the microcosm. In both hostels engaged in the research, sharing and borrowing was commonplace with everyone frequently relying upon those around them to support them when they are short and “this in turn fosters a sense of symbolic space in which participants feel as if they belong” (Karabanow, 2003: 379). Cigarettes and rollups become a form of currency as reciprocity becomes increasingly important with everyone relying on those around them when they are short and returning the favour when they have some and others do not; something which is particularly beneficial in an environment where everyone receives their lifeline that is social security payments on different days of different weeks. How this will work out when the new Universal Credit system is rolled out fully remains to be seen given the proposed changes to payment

plans and schedules. This sense of sharing and commonality emphasises the solidarities which can be engendered by living in such close confines even if it also carries some risks and negatives including a lack of privacy, something which receives further attention later. Reciprocity “is a key intervening variable through which shared social rules are enabled to yield social stability” (Gouldner, 1960: 161). Gouldner, drawing upon Parsons and Shils, goes on to argue that “Social system stability...depends in part on the mutually contingent exchange of gratifications, that is, on reciprocity of exchange.” (1951, cited in Gouldner, 1960: 168). Accordingly, the examples of reciprocal exchanges are essential to the maintenance of positive relations within the hostel and, furthermore, emphasizes the shared understandings and unwritten codes which define social and moral practice. It has been suggested that one of the possible reasons for reciprocity is a shared social history (Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe, 1994: 132). As is suggested throughout these discussions the shared experiences of marginalisation and impoverishment are perhaps some of the main reasons for the rise of such solidarities and reciprocities. This in turn indicates that, despite attempts to weaken solidarity by emphasising the individual status of each person, many of the poorest, vulnerable and most marginalised within society are, paradoxically, being pushed to form new solidarities through being forced to rely increasingly upon those around them in the face of the hardship which they are continually experiencing. This is in stark contrast to the experiences of Michael earlier whereby he was not as concerned about ‘grassing’ on his friends when younger, indicating a lack of understanding of solidarities. In contrast to such a situation, communal values remain strong whilst ensuring that an informal disciplinary framework is retained which discourages people from ‘robbing from their own’ (Evans, Fraser and Walklate, 1996)

These new solidarities and reciprocities however, do not come free of constraints and an associated expectation is that favours will be repaid accompanies them. Numerous testimonies indicate that some are happy to borrow cigarettes and tobacco off of others

but are quick to disappear when their own payments come in. This perhaps indicates a combination of self-preservation but also the permeation of the nature of the politics of division among some, with a focus upon the individual which sees some willing to exploit the generosity of others without seeing the need to return the favour; strengthening their own individual position and yet weakening links to the collective in the process. Everybody who had or was living within a hostel spoke at length about this. In the case of Craig he actively stopped lending to others because he was repeatedly asked for support by others and his generosity was frequently taken advantage of, with little return for himself:

“Last year I was in this hostel yeah? And I stayed here for six months and then I left on me own accord, I just upped and left and I went stay with me mates and whatnot and do you know why I left? Because I were sick of people asking me time and time again, every day, have you got a fiver, have you got two quid, have you got one pound fifty, have you got some tobacco, have you got some smokes. Asking me for stuff constantly, every day and I was lending people money and not getting none back so when I come this time, still people were here, who are in this hostel now, who owe me from when I was here last time and they don’t ask me for nothing because they know what the answer is and I made it clear when I come, to most people, I said ‘Listen, before we start, I’ve been here before, I’ve got the t-shirt. I know what goes on borrowing, lending, asking.’ I said ‘I’ve lent money out when I was ‘ere last time, I’ve never got it back, I’ve lent tobacco out last time, all sorts and never got it back so don’t bother ask me.’ Truthfully though I was straight with ‘em mate.”

As such, there are significant limits on the amount of abuse and misplacing of trust which people are prepared to tolerate before they withdraw from the reciprocal arrangements in which they formerly participated to protect themselves from further abuse. Given the nature of communal living with so many people in such a small space, however, the trade

in tobacco and other coveted items is perhaps unsurprising. For someone who has so little of their own anyway, it is one of the few things that are still held precious; even expensive electrical goods; consoles, televisions, radios, bear little by way of comparative value, often changing hands for significantly less than their market value. This lends further weight to the idea that, in a world where someone lacks any significant financial support, bartering and loaning of items remains commonplace.

Leading on from this, the current situation faced by many in a post-industrial environment would appear to echo the formation of wider solidarities among the working-classes who worked in factories and heavy industry for long-hours in torrid conditions and thus had to employ strategies which lessened the negative impacts of their experiences. Through falling through the gaps in society and hitting rock bottom, it appears that people surrounded by others who have endured similar experiences can engender a sense of belonging and synergise new solidarities and bonds where they might not otherwise have existed. What we see is that hostels, despite their disciplinary and totalizing natures can play a vital role in helping people to adapt in the face of their struggles and assist in the process of building resilient microcosms within society where people are able to develop their own solidarities and support themselves in the process.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have sought to outline the central themes which have emerged from the narratives and experiences of those who have shared their stories, accounting for the context in which their experiences have been gained and the manner in which experiences have influenced understandings of their own lives and the narratives which have been produced as a result. Using these narratives, I have sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the impact of both unemployment and life in a deprived, post-industrial city upon peoples' lives and how do they make sense of these experiences;
- What strategies are deployed in order to mitigate the most extreme hardships faced as a result of their unemployment and abject treatment by the press, politicians and wider society;
- What role does crime and deviance play in resisting these abject depictions and in supporting the formation of articulable and defensible identities and understandings of the self?

In answering these questions, what we see is that a great deal of complex and time-consuming work is undertaken by each individual in order to formulate a narrative in which they are able to understand their experiences and construct a 'defensible self'. Furthermore, because of the conflicting nature of some experiences, a number of contradictions arise and the inherent fallibility of socially constructed narratives is highlighted. Moreover, the stories divulged and analysed show that the social, political and economic environment in which one lives play a central role in the formulation and maintenance of such narratives. Depending on one's position in relation to them, the context can have a pronounced influence on peoples' perceptions of themselves and the way in which they act and this is exacerbated when such work is undertaken in the face of extreme hardship and deprivation. The effect of the stigmatizing discourses of abjection and the continual labour of division within society is therefore of great cause for concern and has a particularly profound impact upon people. The effect is not just upon those who have had to become increasingly accustomed to temporary, precarious work in the absence of the city's former industries but also, increasingly, to the middle-classes who are no longer able to rely on their comparatively privileged, often educated position in order to secure the work and position in society which they have traditionally been fortunate enough to occupy. A lack of opportunity combined with early exposure to

crime; witnessing prostitution, violence and drug use, or partaking themselves, points towards a society in which the moral boundaries, are blurred from an early age. It also points to the way in which early experiences play such a central role in informing the formation of a 'defensible self'.

Much the same can be said for unexpected schisms in life: the loss of work; the loss of loved ones and key support networks; the sudden realisation that the idea of education as a panacea is increasingly a fallacy for many; becoming homeless; witnessing a brutal assault upon a friend. All of these can have a profound impact and result in a major re-evaluation of one's position. In the meantime new strategies are deployed to mitigate the circumstances and reliance upon alternative means to support oneself, including the potential for engagement in crime and deviance, becomes increasingly prevalent. The financial draw of crime and the relative ease that many acquisitive crimes can be carried out, especially in a city rife with deprivation, blight and abandonment, provide significant seductions to draw some in. The easy access to the abandoned properties means easy access to a host of precious metals and materials which can be sold off on the cheap and much the same can be said for fuel theft with the large haulage depots and truck layby's populating the main access routes to the motorways. This again can provide rich pickings for those prepared to take the risk and support themselves outside of the legitimate economies.

Furthermore, new solidarities are engendered as people from disparate backgrounds find themselves in similar situations of desperately seeking support. In such situations, particularly where people are confined in a small space such as a hostel, forms of support including reciprocal trade and 'borrowing' become essential and provide positive bonds at a time when someone has hit rock bottom. Masculinity and hierarchical standings still reigns supreme in many communities and hostels as people vie for status using the resources which remain available for them and this leads to the new forms of solidarity

being engendered. Moreover, this is reinforced by the repeated attacks on the poor and dispossessed which will potentially have one of two outcomes; people will become further alienated and pushed into such a small corner that they no longer fit until the point where they become broken and succumb to the label of object beings which they are continually lauded as; or they will be pushed into relying increasingly upon each other, subverting the norms which are forced upon them as they seek to retain some sense of the self. Stronger unities are formed until the point where the resistance, currently so ineffectual, becomes more coordinated and another outpouring of widespread anger occurs. There is then likely to be considerable future conflict arising between people who have found new, enterprising forms of survival and the establishment where the resilient communities are pushed to become 'resilient communities'.

However, many struggle to organise this resistance without any effective support and Pickles asked if I could bear him in mind should I ever find myself intending to run any programmes for young people aimed at alleviating poverty and disillusion within his community (*field notes*); the people are aware and engaged but lack the resources to mobilise and organise themselves. Whilst some, such as AJ presently do not feel that they possess the authority to talk about their own experiences with confidence, much less those of others, this support, which is still available to far too few, shows a great deal of potential for improving their life chances and engagement and the possibility of slowly working towards change for the future. How long this might take remains unfathomable at present because of the success of the labour of division that has been underway for over three decades and which has successfully pitched neighbours and communities against each other, exploiting the fact that so many lead such a deprived existence and do not wish to be part of the ever growing elements of Standing's (2011) Precariat; those labelled the feckless, lazy, dependent poor and who will instead turn to point out the failings in those around them.

Something else which has hopefully become apparent is that experiences of unemployment are complex and its influences vary from individual to individual. Therefore, whilst some people may be more predisposed to crime due to their background and informative experiences, there are no definitive factors which can be used to determine criminal involvement. Furthermore, the influence of political, social and economic influences upon one's experiences can have a profound influence on the narratives espoused by people as they seek to make sense of and understand their position in society and formulate a sense of self which reaffirms their sense of purpose and the reason for their current position. This can involve internalizing wider discourses and adopting a victim stance in order to neutralize their role in proceedings; or acknowledging one's position but actively engaging in whatever meagre means of resistance can be adopted in order to show that the individual still has some degree of control and agency whilst adopting a victim stance in order to reaffirm their position as being downtrodden by a system geared against them. This is something which is only reaffirmed by public sentiments about the unemployed which continually attack their status, labelling them as feckless, lazy and non-productive drains on society, thus serving to inform a vicious self-defeating cycle or, to paraphrase Maruna, "societies that do not believe that [people] can change will get [people] who do not believe that they can change." (2001: 166).

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Summary

The findings of this study indicate a deep-rooted crisis within the current social and economic system. This crisis sees some of the most vulnerable in society systematically marginalised and denigrated with no real opportunities afforded them to change their position. People finding themselves unemployed, undereducated and carrying with them criminal convictions, all find their future options and opportunities constrained. They are, whether short or long-term, unemployed, underemployed or precariously employed, outcast and subject to these abject discourses and portrayals in creating an increasingly divisive society. Within this, mainstream discourses are all too readily deployed, pitching people against both each other (i.e. neighbour against neighbour) and the mythical, homogenous 'other', whether that be the supposed masses of the unemployed or migrant benefit tourists and cheats.

As stated in chapter one, the main areas for investigation were:

- What is the real life experience of people who are enduring periods of unemployment;
- What leads some of those experiencing unemployment to engage in criminality;
- What is the impact of prevalent discourses upon peoples' perceptions of self, belonging and purpose;
- What are the similarities and differences in experiences between the participants in the study and how might these experiences help to understand their engagement in criminality;
- How do these experiences relate to those in other studies carried out both within the UK and beyond and what are the implications of these findings?

In line with previous research (see for example Russell, 1999; Strandh, 1999; Bowring, 2000; Charlesworth, 2000; Winlow, 2001), the influences of unemployment are pervasive and overwhelmingly negative; people become isolated from friends and family because of a lack of available funds with which to spend on social activities and transport, or because they feel ashamed about the fact that they cannot support themselves effectively. What has become evident throughout this is that the formation and maintenance of a defensible-self in order to provide a sense of security and cope with continual, ontological challenges, is a constant ongoing process. Moreover, it often involves constructing a defended narrative which seeks to mitigate for any aggravating actions undertaken by the individual. For some, their ability to formulate a defensible-self is challenged and they come to rely on a 'victim stance' in order to understand and relay to others why their life has followed the course that it has. See, for example Jay's narrative in which, despite his own deviance and criminal enterprise arguably being the cause of his subsequent victimisation, it is the victimisation upon which he focuses. Hatman arguably follows the same process; he got involved in crime of his own accord and his struggles to find work are, according to his narrative, unrelated. And yet he speaks of nepotism within the workplace and adopts a fatalistic outlook on life, again indicating that the problems which he has faced are outside of his control and that he is again a victim of circumstance and the actions of others. What is more, the boundary between 'victim' and 'offender' is far from distinct and both often merge into one. Hatman, Gandi, Spanish, Jay, Scott, Shaun and Phil have all been regularly engaged in crime as an offender and a victim with both being intertwined. The political binary positions are a clear fallacy and this study lends itself to other studies (see for example Maruna, 2001; Farrall and Maltby, 2003) in underlining this fact.

Furthermore, structures, groups and organisations traditionally seen to be positive influences on the development of the individual do not always fulfil this role and, at times,

end up undermining the individual. Religion, sport, family, children, work and new relationships; phenomena traditionally seen as having a positive influence upon one's life course, have proven to be as much causes of strain, pressure and catalysts for negativity, disengagement, crime and deviance for some. Traditional ideas surrounding the positive role of these events and relationships in both desistance and changing paths are challenged and highlight the need to avoid applying one-size-fits-all solutions to social problems. Moreover, throughout chapters six and seven, the participants involved in crime have revealed what has led them to crime and family has played an influential role for some.

In line with the variation in effectiveness of wider institutions within society, so the motivations for engagement in crime also vary. For some, an early introduction to crime (for example Jay, Spanish and Simon) has proven to have continued through their lives. By contrast, Pickles had no experiences of crime until he ended up homeless. Homelessness, furthermore has been seen here to be another influence in encouraging criminality with people reliant upon crime, especially acquisitive crime, to survive or to fund addictions and habits which themselves have at times been developed whilst on the streets. In other cases, understandings of the idea of crime lead some to neutralise their actions and depict them as not being deviant so much as for survival, particularly working off the books. Michael pointed to working for a range of local organisations and not claiming benefits, well aware that he was being paid below minimum wage – as he sought recognition from his employers – and as such was clearly aware that he was being exploited; something echoed in Mohammed's narrative (although the latter was more willing to exploit the support available from the state to make his life more comfortable in the process). The uncomfortableness of Michael in claiming the social security support to which he was entitled also speaks volumes about the political context in which he was seeking support.

The fact that so many are being treated as abject subjects has led some to rebel and resist this treatment should be of little surprise. Perhaps most worryingly, however, these reactions are largely ineffective in terms of affecting any significant change. They serve to provide the individual with some sense of control over the situation in which they find themselves, however this is largely it. Rather this resistance appears to be compounding their position; they are working off the books, stealing, fencing and carrying out fraudulent activities which, were they to be caught doing so, would leave them vulnerable to prosecution and further ostracisation at a time when support, acceptance and integration is needed most. What emerges then is that the process of vilification and marginalisation – intentional or otherwise – must be brought to an end. Failure to do so will lead to more and more people becoming further isolated with despair and deviance following accordingly. What forms and projections this despair and deviance might take are unclear, and at present it is unlikely to be mobilised in any meaningful way.

Attitudes within society towards the unemployed continue to harden and divisive depictions within the populist media and political discourses continue largely unabated. Until those deemed abject within society are effectively engaged by those seeking reform, change and a move towards a progressive, inclusive politics “which starts at the edges and goes in as far as is palatable (which is a long way) rather than that which starts at the centre and goes out as far as is charitable (which is not very far).” (Young, 1999: 27), any real change which provides for the needs of the disenfranchised and disengaged will remain a distant and unattainable ideal.

Within this then, there is a need to seek methods of harnessing and engaging the anger and animosity within marginalised populations to engender positive change aimed at improving the lives of all rather than by engaging in the labour of division which has, in part, aided the rise of populist groups such as the BNP and UKIP. It has become increasingly evident that the current status quo does not serve everyone in society

equally and that many are acutely aware of this. By way of a reminder, statements such as can be seen below are clear testament to this:

“It’s all fucked up, the government has just fuckin’ wasted this country. I think David Cameron has fucked this country completely and I don’t even see the point in even having a fuckin’ government... I wouldn’t have to resort to crime, it’s like I said if someone offered me a job and I had to clean the fuckin’ sewer with me toothbrush I’d fuckin’ take it because someone’s paying me to do it. There’s no jobs around ...”
(Spanish)

“They tell everyone to take a pay cut but I don’t see none of these fuckin’ MP’s willing fuckin’ to slash a couple of grand a year do you? Do you know what I mean? Fuckin’ wankers! Then I’d be willing to take a pay cut but no, they aren’t willing to take a pay cut but they fuckin’ hike up all the fuel tax n’ everything, everyone’s gotta pay more money, they aren’t gonna pay more money are they? It’s just wrong. Just a vicious cycle and they’re in power and that’s just wrong to be honest.” (Mohammed)

“I try not to watch like the news, it just pisses me off, like with fuckin’ David Cameron. I hate the bastard! All the stuff, everything he says is just wrong innit? Any quotes you hear on telly, they’re just wrong like that. [IM: Any specific examples?] I can’t think of any off me head at the moment but just everythin’ you hear is just everythin’ you’re hearing, his view on different things, his view on like poorer people or asylum seekers, it’s just, it’s just all wrong, everything you ever hear off him. I’d just rather he were dead. I would. Like I don’t try and have much to do with political shit but this David Cameron is a dick.” (Darren)

These statements show a clear understanding that there is a distinct lack of support aimed at assisting people in integrating within wider society, with the current hegemony still dominated by expectations that people must ‘pull themselves up by the bootstraps and get on with it’. As can be seen, Spanish Omelette is crying out for a job and support to build new networks away from crime, and yet the support is not forthcoming. Meanwhile

Mohammed and Darren have correctly identified that the system is currently operating in such a way as to benefit the powerful at the behest of the weak. All of this engenders anger and animosity along the way.

In line with the analyses conducted throughout this thesis then that it is increasingly clear that considerable and severe constraints are placed upon the opportunities for each individual and, therefore, upon the choices available to them which in turn plays a direct role in influencing the decisions that they make. Their will is, as suggested by Don Crewe (2013) constrained. These constraints arise from a combination of their past experiences and understandings of the world and also by the circumstances in which each individual finds themselves in at that point in time. The constraints limit their future options and expectations for the future. In each instance the choices are not free for anyone; the options are limited by the circumstances in which that decision is to be made. Moreover, whole communities have found new ways of surviving, providing a realistic, albeit politically undesirable, template upon which strategies for building resilience within society could be modelled. New forms of income have been identified outside of the legitimate economy and apparently away from the prying eyes of authorities. Norms within those communities do not regard a reliance upon the agencies tasked with upholding law and order as either desirable or necessary, perhaps in part due to their failings, perceived and actual, to serve and protect their communities.

The combined strategies; resistance; rebellion; rejection of established social norms; formulation of new belief systems and associated norms; the deployment of heuristically available othering discourses; drug consumption; and formulating new solidarities where established forms and bases for solidarity and unity have been eroded, point towards a highly extensive and complex amount of work being undertaken by each individual. This work is essential in allowing them to understand and cope with the strains placed upon them by the withdrawal of traditional support networks and systems which these men can

no longer rely on. Some of them are too young to have benefited from such resources directly, but all are old enough to remember them and mourn their loss. Even Michael, who comes from a middle-class background and moved to the city experiences the lack of wider resources and desperately clings on to karate and paintballing as he seeks to maintain wider social networks so important to him. What we see from this then is that the homogenised, two-dimensional figures of the feckless unemployed males as constructed in political and media narratives mask the reality. These are complex, reflexive and creative social actors who are expending a vast amount of energy constructing and maintaining a defensible self with a sparse and unconventional set of building blocks. As criminologists this creative work gives us an 'in' in terms of how we help and support and facilitate individuals like this to build and maintain defensible desisting identities.

The fact that much of the criminality engaged in can be traced back to acquisitive crime, and especially metal theft may perhaps also be of little surprise given the state of the city. The abundance of empty properties, commercial and residential, means rich pickings for firms who seek to renovate properties on the cheap and those prepared to take the risk of breaking into a property to steal any valuable metals and materials (anecdotal evidence from a housing association indicates that even properties under renovation and uninhabited are not safe from such exploitation). Therefore, where the council and police want to improve community relations and reduce opportunities for crime, dealing with the glut of empty properties is an easy target. However there are also legitimate opportunities to assist people in undoing the harms created through the process of social exclusion; the city has introduced what so far appears to be a successful £1 housing scheme (Stoke-on-Trent City Council (n.d., c) with people buying a property for £1 and then paying back a £30,000 loan from the council designed to bring the houses back into habitable standards over ten years. Prior to this there was the (now abandoned) Renew

North Staffordshire housing renewal pathfinder. In each case empty properties were being replaced or renovated, however this has a cost. But, at the same time, it represents an opportunity to provide work, skills and training and help people develop tools for a meaningful, engaged existence.

Housing furthermore provides the foundations for a helpful metaphor: To construct a house there needs to be a full set of foundations before construction can begin. Without setting the foundations the project is destined for failure, either through complete collapse or substantial repair work. Without this, the metaphorical house may as well be built on sand. Similar can be said for formulating working-class identity; work is only one of the foundations upon which identity is constructed. Until the other foundations (social recognition; a meaningful and effective replacement for the traditional working-class hexis; strong social networks) are set, the construction project will always struggle to get off the ground, or come toppling back down.

Situating the study

This thesis set out to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of some people who are subject to unemployment and, in the process, has paved the way for future studies in the community of Stoke-on-Trent within which a range of opportunities lie ahead. The focus was to develop a more detailed understanding of the coping strategies of young men in a previously hyper-masculine culture of hard physical work, an almost exclusively white working class culture rooted in some quite traditional assumptions about gender roles and (implicitly) ethnicity. The findings represent only a microcosm of experiences among one element of the city's diverse communities. Moreover, even within Stoke-on-Trent there are a variety of other studies which could, and arguably must, be undertaken to further understand the complexity of relations within the city.

As discussed in the introduction, working with a small sample means that the results cannot be generalised *per se* beyond the experiences of those who have participated in the study. However the richness of the data which has been gained, which has allowed for the detailed analysis which followed, emphasises the strength of the method. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, there are a range of other studies (see for example Wallace, 1987; MacLeod, 1995; Foster and Spencer, 2012; Tyler, 2013; Hall and Winlow, 2013) which have found similar occurrences of disenfranchisement and disengagement, as well as marginalisation and misrepresentation of the most vulnerable within society. It is then possible to draw more generalizable conclusions from this project when viewed in conjunction with these other studies.

Narrative enquiry relies heavily upon the researcher as part of the research apparatus and can be viewed as being highly subjective with a risk of imposing the researcher's own meaning frames upon the stories supplied by the participants. I have sought to avoid this by drawing directly upon extended extracts from their statements, and by identifying times where my own interpretations have been engaged. The potential risk of such subjectivity cannot be wholly mitigated, but appropriate actions have been taken at every step where possible and this has also helped to improve the quality of the analysis by ensuring that consideration was paid not just to the spoken word of the participants but also where my own inference has played its part. In line with this, a reflexive researcher should become increasingly aware of their own research practice and predispositions throughout conducting such an enquiry and this can only serve to benefit the researcher. Through developing a better understanding of their own dispositions, they can better understand where the differences between a participants' meaning and their own interpretation (or misinterpretation) of these meanings may lie. This is greatly assisted by the maintenance of good field notes and this is something that, for my own part, still needs further development.

Opportunities for future study

As already identified, this study was focused upon the experiences of white, working-class men living in and around a predominantly white-working class, formerly industrial conurbation. It therefore leaves scope for further research to build upon the findings of this study by examining the impact upon gender and race relations. Stoke-on-Trent, like many other cities, has some areas with large BME communities; Cobridge and Shelton to name two, and this has been cause for significant tensions in the past (such as the race riots of 2001 along with other locales including Bradford and Oldham). As such these are two populations; women and BME communities which also need investigating to allow an examination of the extent to which experiences such as those described among the predominantly male, predominantly working-class sample who have taken part in this study, are shared among the wider population; particularly among those who have experienced, or continue to experience, unemployment. Further interest might also be drawn from examining levels and experiences of underemployment within the city. Whilst the unemployment rate has been falling locally and nationally, only one in forty of new jobs created in the UK have been full-time (TUC, 2014) and it is likely that a significant proportion of the population is underemployed and thus still under considerable strain. Additional studies might therefore also wish to consider the influence of underemployment.

One element which did not come through strongly was discussions centred on interactions with the Job Centre Plus or the Work Programme. Whilst they arose, they did not feature heavily. This was surprising, however the Free Association Narrative approach lends itself to following the participants' flow rather than the researcher's line of enquiry. As such, the fact that it was, in the main, not raised by participants is in itself of interest.

There have been numerous stories in the popular and in particular left and liberal-left wing press from whistle-blowers indicating that the Job Centre Plus is reinforcing the problem through the application of quotas for sanctions and also by its treatment of people reliant on social security support to survive. I am conscious that work is being undertaken elsewhere in relation to the Work Programme¹⁶, and so other studies might instead investigate the holistic experiences of engagement in the programmes in wider society. Given that this study began in 2010 and yet it was not until late 2012 and 2013 that the most significant reforms to the Welfare State really began to take effect, this study was not able to address these changes in any significant detail. This again means that there is a need for follow up investigation with new participants (such as the female and BME groups already identified) and even with existing participants who remain trapped in the low-pay-no-pay cycle to see how this has influenced lifestyles and perceptions and maintenance of the formation of defensible selves.

In addition to what has so far been discussed, something which has also emerged is a need to understand the dynamics of life within the hostel environment. I have identified some of these dynamics, many of which appear similar to those which one might expect to find in total institutions ranging from prisons to the army barracks and as are discussed at length by authors including Gresham Sykes (1958), Hans Toch, (1992) and Michel Foucault (1991) to name but a few. However, there currently appears to be a general lack of understanding as to the role that hostels, as institutions, play in the lives of those who find themselves living within their walls. Moreover, the variety of provisions which are available from hostel to hostel vary considerably; the two which agreed to open their doors for the purposes of this study were, by all accounts, largely regarded as providing a

¹⁶ John Jordan, a doctoral research student at Manchester Metropolitan University, has been conducting an ethnography of a Work Programme provider to investigate the role and the impact that being enrolled on the work programme has on people's lives.

supportive and safe environment for their residents. Anecdotal evidence however, especially from the testimonies from participants during the introductory stages of the fieldwork, indicates that this is not always the rule. It is hoped that the outcomes of this research, furthermore will assist them in the development of further activities and furthering the support available to vulnerable people such as those who took part in the project.

Transforming the future

In conclusion, there is a pressing need to find ways of engaging people discarded on the metaphorical slagheap in a meaningful way so that they begin to feel that they belong in society and not on its margins. Failure to do so means facing the prospect that whole communities develop ever more localised norms. They are becoming increasingly resilient to the changes which are occurring in wider society, and at the same time becoming further isolated precisely because of the way in which these localised norms deviate so much from the mainstream and the 'acceptable'. Defensible, yet deviant and socially problematic narratives are formulated which allow the individual to articulate their experiences and understandings thereof in a manner which seeks to affirm their sense of identity and provide even the smallest degree of security. As such, for so long as the current status quo remains, we should not be surprised that resistance remains; for it will always be there (Young, 2007: 77).

In the face of continued demonization and the withholding of essential support, the self-identities developed and normalised by these young men will become increasingly habituated as part of the self-reinforcing cycle of abjection which sees so many pushed to the margins of society. The findings from this research support Foster and Spencer's assertion that those who hold 'pull yourself up by the bootlaces' views on the world "are out of touch with, or downright ignorant of, the structural barriers to social mobility" (2012: 5). The role of aggressive, stigmatizing portrayals of people in influencing their

decisions and actions should not be left unstated: “the responses of the state have repercussions in reinforcing and exacerbating the exclusion of civil society and the market place.” (Young, 1999: 59). The abject treatment of those seen as an undesirable drain upon society can have profound impacts in terms of strengthening the resolve of those targeted not to engage in the way that those who stigmatize might envision, but rather to act so as to resist such depictions in such a way that provides them with a sense of control over the situation in which they find themselves. Excluded from the mainstream by a mutually reinforcing combination of wider disgust at the actions which the individual deploys in order to fill the void left by work and involvement in wider communal events (see chapter two for a more detailed discussion), they provide themselves with a sense of purpose in an ontologically insecure world which continues to throw up further challenges on a daily basis.

At present, and as has become clear throughout the synthesising of this thesis, “we live increasingly in a consensus of broken narratives; jobs lost, relationships ended, neighbourhoods left and localities transformed beyond recognition” (Young, 2007: 201). What we see, therefore, is that there is a real and pressing need not just to provide, or push people into jobs and work, but rather to provide and co-construct (for without engaging those most excluded at an early stage, the legitimacy of such actions are liable to be questioned from the outset) a new set of building blocks to found one’s identity and sense of belonging, which can in turn support people and engage them within society as a whole.

Furthermore, the homogenisation of experience within research and policy, combined with the application of a one-size-fits-all approach to interventions aimed at alleviating unemployment, poverty, opportunities for crime and deprivation will then continue to be ineffective. The fact that other studies echo some of the links between experiences of unemployment, crime, deprivation and social exclusion and vilification of the poor

indicates that there is a degree of generalizability within the experiences discussed and analysed within this study. However, as has become evident throughout the study, there are limits to the generalizability of experience with people having different formative experiences as well as aspirations for the future.

The fact that communities, such as Bentilee, have found ways of surviving when facing a lack of meaningful, well-paying or full-time work, are testament to their resilience. Lessons should be learnt about the manner in which such naturally occurring resilience emerges, particularly in the face of adversity. Doing so would increase the likelihood that communities can be engaged rather than ‘managed’ by outside agencies and thus improved relations and effective strategies can be more effectively introduced.

Rather than admonishing and punishing people for rejecting jobs and not conforming to mainstream norms and expectations, society as a whole must, to invert John Major’s famous words, seek to understand a little more and condemn a little (although arguably a lot) less. Jock Young (2007: 202) is correct when he identifies that it is necessary to avoid further marginalisation and othering; both of which are highly destructive and far from effective forms of engagement or engendering anything other than negative solidarities, for these in turn further undermine the social. What we need is a move to transformative policies (Ibid). By this I mean, a move away from the affirmative policies (for example managing people into work or through Work Programmes into jobs which provide no real benefit for them) which are “a key manifestation of liberal othering” (Ibid) and towards policies which seek to provide “distributive justice and social recognition” (Ibid). In introducing transformative policies it would be possible to assist people in finding not just work but also meaning alongside wider networks and interactions outside the workplace. This is in contrast to the current strategy which could perhaps be described as a race to the bottom at best and has seen substantial cuts to social security in terms of both reduced eligibility as well as reductions in real-terms incomes, attempting to force

people into work by withdrawing their safety net is patently absurd. For this is part of the current problem which needs addressing; people have found new ways of coping with life without work. Communities have become more resilient, underground economies and informal reciprocal agreements have developed and, alongside this, people have been able to develop modes of security which do not rely on a job.

The experiences of Darren, Phil and Storm however indicate that there is a pool of skilled labour within the city with people often desperately seeking ways to secure an income. Moreover, people in a similar position to Mohammed; an individual who ideally wants to work outside and on sites, grafting, means that there is potential to engage the disengaged and provide them with opportunities to secure a legitimate income as well as further training. This would provide a stronger foundation for the future than a low-paid job such as is currently frequently thrust upon people enduring unemployment and therefore act as a more stable springboard for the future. Unfortunately, however, these opportunities carry with them costs and it is unlikely that the funding for these opportunities will become available as long as local authority budgets continue to be cut under the austerity agenda which is in place at the time of writing. As long as this agenda is pursued, the options for someone cut off from the legitimate labour force, even those who want to be engaged and, in some cases exploited (see for example Mohammed's story in which he is willing to work for little money in return for a friend), are going to be limited if not cut off.

To conclude, by forcing people to accept a low-paid, temporary job with long hours and no real prospects for the future, we, as a society, are stripping people out of the newly developed social networks that they have developed (we have seen, with regard to Russell's (1999) work in chapter four that the networks of the unemployed often have a higher concentration of other unemployed people in them than in wider society), and returning them to the ontologically insecure and atomised state which they have been

working to avoid. The methods that have been developed and deployed have arisen precisely because of the nature of the experiences of the socially and economically insecure and excluded. Where traditional resources for the formulation of an ontologically secure, defensible self-identity in a traditional white working-class environment are removed or denied, so alternative modes of affirmation are evolved and employed. In contrast, by assisting someone in constructing new building blocks which allow them to retain the positive elements of their past and wider networks (i.e. the time and funds to actively participate in wider society and social engagement), it is not just work which is provided but also the foundations upon which to construct an ontologically secure, meaningful existence without the need *per se* to turn to crime and deviance. That is not to say that it will stop everyone from turning to crime however as the causes of and motivations to crime are complex and, as have been seen throughout this thesis, vary from person to person. However, it will afford people the opportunities to construct their identities in a way which benefits themselves and wider society.

The people who took part in this study are not passive subjects fulfilling the role prescribed to them by others within wider society. They are not the, abject, two-dimensional 'others' depicted in popular political and media discourse. Nor are they simply subjects of intervention upon which the reformist gaze has fallen. Whilst some, for example Michael, have come to internalize the negative discourses, for many others, their resolve is strengthened and their actions intentionally deviant. As such it is no surprise, given that they are human actors, that people seek to rebel and resist for ultimately, as Julia Kristeva posited, "who, I ask you, would agree to call himself abject, subject of or subject to abjection?" (1982: 209).

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Appendix A: Ethical approval awarded by Keele University's Ethical Review Board on 18th August 2011.



K E E L E
UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC SERVICES
RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE

18 August 2011

Mr Ian Mahoney
Lindsay G Flat
Keele University
ST5 5DX

Dear Ian

Re: 'Unemployment and Criminality in Stoke-on-Trent: What is the impact of unemployment upon criminal careers in an area of high skill and employment deprivation'

Thank you for submitting your revised project for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your project has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

Amendments to your project after a favourable ethical opinion has been given or if the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application (31 December 2012) you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via Michele Dawson.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Michele Dawson in writing to m.dawson@uso.keele.ac.uk

Yours sincerely

PP Dr Nicky Edelstyn
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager, Supervisor.

Research and Enterprise Services, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK
Telephone: + 44 (0) 1782 733371 Fax: + 44 (0) 1782 733740

My Jobseeker Profile

jobcentreplus

Department for
Work and Pensions

THIS JOBSEEKER PROFILE DOES NOT FORM PART OF YOUR CLAIMANT COMMITMENT

Name

National Insurance Number

The types of work I am
most likely to get:

I believe this because:

• My qualifications
are:

• My employment
strengths and skills
are:

• My experience is:

My circumstances:

JSACC 04/14

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My Claimant Commitment

jobcentreplus

Department for
Work and Pensions

Name

National Insurance Number

In return for my Jobseeker's Allowance I will do everything I reasonably can, each week, to give myself the best prospects of securing employment. The activities I have agreed in this Claimant Commitment are designed to offer me the best chance of doing so.

My types of work:

I have agreed with my Coach that:

- I will be available for all types of work, and
- I will seek and apply for all types of work that give me the best prospects of securing employment.

Where I will work:

I will look for work that I can travel to within 90 minutes each way from home.

My availability for work:

I'm available to attend a job interview immediately.

I'm available to start work immediately.

I am available to work for any hours on any day for at least 40 hours per week.

I know if I am not available as agreed above my Jobseeker's Allowance and / or National Insurance Credits will be stopped.

If I then make a new claim to Jobseeker's Allowance after such failure, I may not get paid benefit for:

- four weeks, or
- 13 weeks if it has previously been decided on one or more occasions that my Jobseeker's Allowance should be stopped because I was not available for or actively seeking employment within 52 weeks (but not within 2 weeks) of my last failure.

My actions for getting work

I know I must do everything I reasonably can, each week, to give myself the best prospects of securing employment. I have agreed with my Coach the activities that I will take to seek employment and to improve my chances of finding employment. These are listed below.

	How often	
	Daily	Weekly
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will respond promptly to contacts and notifications from employers and jobsites.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will use jobsites and employer websites to find and apply for jobs I can do.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will ask family, friends and former colleagues about vacancies, and apply to those I can do.		

JSACC 04/14

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My Claimant Statement

- I have read and understood my Claimant Commitment.
- I will do everything I reasonably can to give myself the best prospects of securing employment.
- I understand that my Coach is there to support me but ultimately getting work will be up to me; and putting more into this will help me get a job sooner.
- I understand Jobcentre Plus will give me help and advice to do the things set out in my Claimant Commitment.
- I understand I must attend the Jobcentre when required to do so.
- I understand my Coach may require me to take other specific actions to improve my chances of finding work.
- I understand my Coach may require me to take part in certain schemes to help me improve my chances of finding work. I am aware if I would like more information about these schemes I can access a guide at www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-back-to-work-schemes or if needed my Coach can help me access the guide. If I have any questions about it I can ask my Coach.
- I understand Jobcentre Plus may seek feedback from employers about any jobs they have told me to apply for.
- I understand this Claimant Commitment is my Jobseeker's Agreement for the purpose of section 1(2) (b) of the Jobseekers Act 1995.
- I understand that this is general information and not a full statement of the law.

Claimant signature

Signed Date

Coach signature

Signed Date

Name Contact number

This Jobseeker's Agreement is treated as made on

Other actions I will take to improve my chances of finding a job.	How often / By when	Completed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will use Universal Jobmatch account to search for and apply for jobs	2 x weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will take my C.V to employers	1 x week	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will upload a copy of my C.v or bring a copy to my next appointment on		<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will use Fish4jobs website to search for and apply for jobs	2 x weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I will register with Council for housing by		<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that detailed planning for how I will undertake these activities is essential to give myself the best chance of success. The 'My Work Plan booklet' will help me to plan and manage how I will do these things and anything else I think will help improve my chances of moving into work. My Coach will work with me on this.

I know I must show that I have done all that is reasonable to give myself the best prospects of securing employment. I will keep evidence of what I have done and take this with me every time I go to the Jobcentre. My Work Plan booklet will help me do this.

If I cannot show I have done everything that I reasonably can, each week, to give myself best prospects of securing employment, I know my Jobseeker's Allowance and / or National Insurance Credits will be stopped.

If I then make a new claim to Jobseeker's Allowance after such failure, I may not get paid benefit for:

- four weeks, or
- 13 weeks if it has previously been decided on one or more occasion that my Jobseeker's Allowance should be stopped because I was not available for or actively seeking employment within 52 weeks (but not within 2 weeks) of my last failure.

My rights

I know if there is a disagreement about my Claimant Commitment, I can ask for this to be reviewed. I also know that if there is any dispute about my benefit, my case may be sent to a decision maker, which could result in the loss of my Jobseeker's Allowance and / or National Insurance Credits. If this happens I will be told. If I am not satisfied with the decision I can ask for it to be explained or reconsidered. If I am still unhappy with the outcome I know I have the right to appeal.

Changes in my circumstances

I will tell DWP immediately if my circumstances change in any way which could affect my Jobseeker's Allowance and / or National Insurance Credits. I understand that if I give false information or do not tell DWP of something I should, I may have to repay any overpayment of benefit. I might also have to pay a financial penalty or face prosecution.

Appendix C: Recruitment letters, participant information sheets and consent forms.

Ian Mahoney,
Criminology PhD Candidate,
c/o Centre for Social Policy,
Darwin Building,
Keele University,
Keele.
Staffordshire.
ST5 5DX
September 2012

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Ian Mahoney and I am currently studying towards a PhD in Criminology at Keele University. My project is entitled 'Unemployment in Stoke on Trent: What is the impact of unemployment upon senses of identity, lifestyles and experiences of crime in an area of high skill and employment deprivation?' and my aim is to try to understand how high levels of unemployment can affect crime levels in a community.

I am writing to you because I understand that you have experience of what it is like to be out of work and to see if you would be willing to help me with my research by sharing your views and experiences unemployment, crime and life in your community. In doing so you would be helping to inform my work and ensuring that your views and opinions are heard. It must be stressed that at no point is it assumed that you are, or ever have been, involved in any form of criminal activity.

I have attached an information sheet which will hopefully address any questions which you may have about the research. You are under no obligation to take part however your help in the project would be greatly appreciated. Any information which you do provide will be treated with full confidentiality and anything you do say will be anonymised to protect you in all but the most exceptional of circumstances.

If you have any further queries then please contact me either by post at the address above, or via telephone or email on the details below. I hope that you are interested in the project and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Faithfully,

Ian Mahoney
I.l.mahoney@ilpj.keele.ac.uk
07823 323682

Information Sheet

Study Title: Unemployment in Stoke on Trent: What is the impact of unemployment upon senses of identity, lifestyles and experiences of crime in an area of high skill and employment deprivation?

Aims of the Research

The project aims to examine the experience of people who have been unemployed within neighbourhoods with high unemployment levels in Stoke-on-Trent.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study 'Unemployment in Stoke on Trent: What is the impact of unemployment upon senses of identity, lifestyles and experiences of crime in an area of high skill and employment deprivation?'

This project is being undertaken by Ian Mahoney, a PhD Candidate at Keele University.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study as you live in Stoke-on-Trent and you are currently unemployed. As mentioned in the title, one element being examined in this research is experiences of crime, however **AT NO POINT IS IT ASSUMED THAT YOU ARE INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES WHEN BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH.**

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one copy is for you to keep and the other is for me. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

I will meet you and explain the aims of the study in more details, and answer any questions you may have, before arranging a suitable time and place to interview you about your experiences of unemployment, crime and life in your community. Other meetings may be arranged over the course of the next year to see how your experiences have changed over time. All interviews will take place at a time and place which suits you and transportation will be provided where required.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

You will be asked to provide information regarding life experiences and events in the interviews in order to allow the researcher to build ideas and theories about experiences of unemployment upon yourself and life in your neighbourhood.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

In taking part you will be able to inform a piece of research designed to help understand the experience of unemployment upon identity and the changes in lifestyle. You will also have the chance to have your say about existing provisions within your local community and their effectiveness.

In addition to this, at the end of the research process, you will be provided with a pre-paid token worth £20 towards your gas and electricity bills in order to thank you for helping me to complete the research.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

You may be asked to recall potentially sensitive memories as the interviews progress, however you will not be expected to divulge such information unwillingly and you are free to decline answering any questions which you feel may be too distressing. It is however hoped that you will be as open as possible and provide as much detail as possible regarding events. Information regarding groups who can be contacted to assist with discussing and dealing with issues caused through the recollection of such experiences will be provided to you and contact details for the researcher and my supervisor are included on this information sheet (which you should keep for your own records). Furthermore, the organisation through which you have been contacted has a number of support staff who you can talk to.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Ian Mahoney by telephone on 07823 323682 or via email at i.l.mahoney@keele.ac.uk. Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher, you may contact my supervisor Dr Tony Kearon on 01782 734382 or a.t.kearon@keele.ac.uk, or Nicola Leighton, Research Governance Officer on 01782 733306 or n.leighton@keele.ac.uk.

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton, Research Governance Officer, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire. ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@keele.ac.uk Tel: 01782 733306

How will information about me be used?

The data will be collected in a number of formats. My own observations will be recorded through brief notations over the course of the time I spend with you. Interview data will be recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed before the data on the Dictaphone is destroyed to prevent unauthorised access by others. The data provided will be analysed and compared with information from other participants to look for similarities and differences in experiences. Some data may be retained for up to five years for use in studies building upon the findings of this current research.

Who will have access to information about me?

With the exception of cases of exceptional circumstances as outlines below, **I am the only person who will have access to information which you provide to me. It will not be shared with anyone else.** All hard copies of information which you provide will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, with electronic copies being held in password protected files on a password protected computer. **All names, and where necessary dates and locations will be changed in order to maintain full anonymity** for you and anyone else taking part in the research. The data will be stored for at least five years. After this period has expired, all data will be destroyed.

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding and organising the research?

The research is being funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council.

Contact for further information

For further information please contact me, Ian Mahoney at:-

Ian Mahoney, Criminology PhD Candidate, Centre for Social Policy, Darwin Building, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire. ST5 5DX

Email: i.l.mahoney@keele.ac.uk Tel: 07823 323682

Alternatively please contact my supervisor: Dr Tony Kearon at:-

Dr Tony Kearon, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Director of Learning and Teaching for Sociology and Criminology, University of Keele, Keele, Staffordshire. ST5 5BG

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CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Unemployment in Stoke on Trent: What is the impact of unemployment upon senses of identity, lifestyles and experiences of crime in an area of high skill and employment deprivation?

Name of Principal Investigator: Ian Mahoney

Please tick box

- 1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
- 2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. ☐
- 3 I agree to take part in this study. ☐
- 4 I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication. ☐
- 5 I agree to the interview being audio taped ☐
- 6 I agree to allow the data collected to be used for future research projects ☐
- 7 I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects. ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

CONSENT FORM (for use of quotes)

Title of Project: Unemployment in Stoke on Trent: What is the impact of unemployment upon senses of identity, lifestyles and experiences of crime in an area of high skill and employment deprivation?

Name of Principal Investigator: *Ian Mahoney*

Please tick box

- 1 I agree for any quotes to be used ☐
- 2 I don't want any quotes to be used ☐

_____ Name of participant	_____ Date	_____ Signature
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_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature
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Interview Discussion Area Checklist.

During the interviews which I will be conducting as part of my research project, the conversation may lead on to discussing some areas which you may find sensitive to discuss in detail. In order to avoid causing you undue distress, please may you indicate on the checklist below any areas which you would not like to discuss in depth should they come up. As I have stated previously, all information which you provide will be treated with complete confidentiality and sensitivity.

Area of discussion: to	Happy to Talk:	Unhappy Talk:
Family relationships (e.g. with parents or brothers and sisters)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extended family relationships (i.e. grandparents, aunts etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationships with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationships with friends and peers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Growing up (including your time at school)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Growing up (after leaving school)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiences of being a victim of crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiences of involvement in committing crime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you face any barriers to securing employment opportunities or social housing? If so, would you be happy to explain what they are?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other areas that you do not feel comfortable discussing not covered by the themes above (please state below):

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Interview Outline:

Please tell me about yourself.

Please tell me about your experiences growing up

- Areas to discuss:
 - relations with family and friends,
 - Activities involved in when growing up
 - School

Tell me about your experiences after leaving school:

- Areas to discuss:
 - work
 - Friends and family – what did they do
 - What are they doing now?

Tell me about your experiences of unemployment:

- Areas to discuss:
 - length of unemployment
 - What support do/have you receive(d)
 - What do you think about the support you receive
 - What training have you received? Voluntary work etc.
 - What are the effects on your lifestyle – friends, contacts, family etc.
 - What is your daily routine like?

Tell me about your experiences of crime

- Areas to discuss:
 - Experiences of offending
 - Experiences of victimisation
 - Motivations
 - Impact of experiences

Tell me about what you want to do in the future?

- Areas to discuss
 - Aspirations for the future
 - Do you face any barriers to achieving these? If so, what?

Appendix E: Personal correspondence from Steve Hibbs at the ONS regarding the number of active pot banks registered in Stoke-on-Trent

IDBRDAS@ons.gsi.gov.uk

28/05/2012

to i.l.mahoney@keele.ac.uk

Hi Ian,

I've excluded manufacture of refractory products, and left the following SIC groups; 23.3 - manufacture of clay building materials, and 23.4 - manufacture of other porcelain and ceramic products. As I mentioned, we do not hold records of active kilns and pot banks. I've also run two analyses; one at enterprise level, and one at local unit level. the results are:

Enterprises VAT and/or PAYE based in Stoke on Trent for year 2011 by SIC group

23.3	10
<u>24.4</u>	<u>54</u>
total	64

Local units in Enterprises VAT and/or PAYE based in Stoke on Trent for year 2011 by SIC group

23.3	12
<u>24.4</u>	<u>60</u>
total	72

With regards,

Steve Hibbs

Details