

## **Minorities within minorities**

### ***Beneath the surface of South Asian participation***

*Heather Blakey, Jenny Pearce and Graeme Chesters*

This report looks at participation structures within South Asian communities in Bradford.

The project was initiated by Bradford's cross-sector Communities of Interest Working Group and explores how identity affects people's ability to voice their concerns, within their own communities and to statutory agencies. This is done through a focus on sexuality, mental health, disability and place of origin. It also includes a review of existing participatory structures in Bradford. The conclusions are that, while efforts are made to hear from different communities, minority voices from within them can easily go unheard. This situation impacts on those who are most vulnerable because those who are least likely to be able to contribute their views are also most likely to need help. Those who have needs which differ from the majority population most need statutory organisations to hear and address their particular needs. A greater understanding of these communities, their needs, views and aspirations would help statutory organisations build more genuinely inclusive participatory processes.

The research was carried out by four community researchers, who conducted interviews and participant observation in their own communities. While this project focused on Bradford, unpicking these issues can help with issues of identity and participation more broadly. This report is therefore of interest to members of, and those working with, communities or statutory agencies, and those with an interest in developing and using effective and meaningful structures for participation.



**JOSEPH ROWNTREE  
FOUNDATION**



**Available  
in alternative  
formats**

This publication can be provided in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, audiotape and on disk. Please contact: Communications Department, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP. Tel: 01904 615905. Email: [info@jrf.org.uk](mailto:info@jrf.org.uk)

# **Minorities within minorities**

**Beneath the surface of South Asian participation**

***Heather Blakey, Jenny Pearce and Graeme Chesters***



**JOSEPH ROWNTREE  
FOUNDATION**

The **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP  
Website: [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

### **The research teams**

The community research team was made up of Altaf Arif, Naweed Hussain, Ash Khan and Rehana Kosar.

The academic team was managed by Jenny Pearce, coordinated by Heather Blakey, and made up of Lucy Brill and Graeme Chesters from the International Centre for Participation Studies, Phil Thomas from the Centre for Citizenship and Community Mental Health, and Ikhtlaq Din and Raghu Raghavan from the School of Health.

© Bradford University 2006

First published 2006 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

All rights reserved. Reproduction of this report by photocopying or electronic means for non-commercial purposes is permitted. Otherwise, no part of this report may be reproduced, adapted, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

ISBN–13: 978 1 85935 547 3

ISBN–10: 1 85935 547 1

A CIP catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

Prepared by:

York Publishing Services Ltd

64 Hallfield Road

Layerthorpe

York YO31 7ZQ

Tel: 01904 430033; Fax: 01904 430868; Website: [www.yps-publishing.co.uk](http://www.yps-publishing.co.uk)

*Further copies of this report can be obtained from the JRF website ([www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/](http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/)).*

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	vii
<b>Introduction: power and voice in community participation</b>	ix
<b>1 Research summary</b>	1
Research process	1
Key findings: general summary	2
Specific findings: existing opportunities for participation in Bradford	4
Culture and place of origin	4
Sexuality	5
Mental health	6
Disability	6
Recommendations to statutory bodies in Bradford District and to the national debate on power and voice in community participation	7
<b>2 Methodology: participatory community research</b>	8
The research design	8
Participatory community research process	9
Some benefits of community research	11
Challenges and tensions	12
<b>3 Research findings</b>	15
Participation in Bradford: a review of statutory organisations' structures for community participation	15
What is participation for?	16
Which South Asian voices are statutory organisations hearing?	17
Barriers to the involvement of South Asian minorities	18
Community power dynamics: a culture of gatekeeping?	19
Identity and participation	20
Institutional barriers to community participation	21
Issues with existing participation mechanisms	23
Communities of interest and neighbourhoods	25
Learning from good practice: including the excluded	28
Positive suggestions for change	29
<b>4 Key findings from the participatory community research</b>	32
General barriers to participation	32
Participation, place of origin and social identities in Manningham	34
Participation and sexuality	46

Participation amongst South Asian people with experience of mental health problems	51
South Asian disabled people's participation: why participate?	54
<b>5 Conclusions</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Appendix: Interviewee data</b>	<b>64</b>

# Preface

What I believe is that something which we call participation – there's something below participation. Like we've got sea water – there's something below the sea. I think we have to get to that below the sea level first before we can get on top of the shore.

(Community researcher)

The Communities of Interest Working Group (COIWG) is excited to introduce this report. The group has been waiting with anticipation to hear the findings and we have not been disappointed.

The report highlights some key issues for service providers and also for the South Asian community itself. However, it is only a starting point and an opportunity to widen debate about participation and involvement.

The need for the research was first raised four years ago as part of the discussion about the development of the Neighbourhood Action Plans. Some communities felt their issues would be at best difficult and at worst dangerous to raise at the neighbourhood level, a concern that led to the development of the Communities of Interest Working Group and Plans.

Discussions with community organisations highlighted the key issue of the invisibility of minority voices within wider South Asian groups. The COIWG were pleased that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation supported the development of this research project looking at the issues faced by minority groups within the South Asian community. This led to the formation of a steering group to support the tendering process and help assist the research to a successful conclusion.

The COIWG were impressed with the community researcher approach employed by the International Centre for Participation Studies and the School of Health at Bradford University – this has ensured that the very process of research left behind skills and knowledge, thereby increasing capacity in some key individuals within the community.

The COIWG would like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Steering Group for its support of this valuable study and the School of Participation at Bradford University and community researchers for their excellent work. We would also like to thank the communities themselves for agreeing to participate in this innovative approach to community research and consultation.

The research is clearly a success in documenting many of the issues for minorities within the South Asian community. The real success of the report will be measured in the longer term through statutory agencies adopting practices that ensure *all* members of communities are actively engaged.

The research was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the University of Bradford.

# Introduction: power and voice in community participation

Participation is on everyone's agenda at the moment. Statutory agencies in the UK are conscious of the need to hear (and to be seen to hear) a wide range of voices. This is driven by committed local workers, national government regulation and communities themselves. Some voices, however, have more power than others to be heard. How do statutory agencies know that they are listening to all voices and meeting the needs of those who, for a number of reasons, are less able to make themselves heard?

This research drew on the Bradford context to explore these questions. Although this is a study of minority voices within the minority South Asian communities of the district, we recognise that the arguments have wider significance for how we understand power and voice in community participation. In the recommendations, we try to suggest how key learning from the Bradford case could be used to encourage further discussion nationally about this issue.

In Bradford, a lot of attention has been paid to engaging and consulting the South Asian community, the largest of its minority ethnic populations.<sup>1</sup> However, there are concerns that statutory organisations are still struggling to hear from many sections of this diverse community. It is clear that the South Asian community does not speak with one voice any more than the white community does. Agencies must think about this 85,000-strong 'community' of Bradford residents in a more nuanced way if they are to fully understand or meet the needs and aspirations of everyone within it.

A deeper understanding of the lives of 'minorities within minorities' in the South Asian community has significant potential benefits, including improved service provision. These minority groups may have different needs to those of the majority population yet find it harder to voice them within their larger community. Differences of identity or experience are often embedded in power inequalities. For 'minorities within minorities' (as opposed to minority groups within society as a whole) this difficulty is likely to be compounded by the fact that service providers do not see them as a distinct group, with distinct needs, but subsume their needs and experiences within those of the larger community – in this case the South Asian community. Therefore, service providers face a double problem: they need to ensure that their services meet the needs of these distinct and vulnerable groups; to do so they need to hear their views and experiences, but they are the very groups that they are least likely to hear from. In turn, minorities within minorities may feel alienation or simply be silenced, and this does not help the minority community to confront its own challenges as a community.

It was in recognition of this need that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation worked with Bradford's Communities of Interest Working Group, made up of representatives from the police, the health service, Bradford Council and the voluntary sector, to commission this nine-month research project, aiming to research opportunities for, and limitations to, participation within Bradford's South Asian communities. Building on existing work on participation with these communities by the International Centre for Participation Studies and the Centre for Citizenship and Community Mental Health, we undertook the research in partnership with a team of community researchers who worked within the communities to which they belonged.

We were asked to address the following questions:

- Which South Asian 'community and voluntary groups' feel – for whatever reason – unable to participate fully in neighbourhood-based consultation and action-planning structures (though it may be that on some issues they can contribute but around other issues they feel unable to express the needs of members of their community)?
- Where groups feel unable to fully participate in the existing structures and mechanisms, what are the blocks to their involvement?
- What do the groups believe is the most appropriate way to resolve the issues that prevent the involvement of all?
- What can be learnt from existing structures and mechanisms at both neighbourhood and district levels that can contribute to developing good practice in consultation and action-planning processes with South Asian groups?
- What are South Asian groups' views regarding participation and what has helped them elsewhere?

The issues raised by this project are complex and difficult. There are no easy answers to how statutory agencies can effectively involve marginalised and vulnerable groups in mainstream structures of participation and representation, or how they can address the community power dynamics and conflicting values which suppress some voices. Such challenges are by no means exclusive to the South Asian community: there are marginalised voices within all communities. While this project has a specific focus on the South Asian community, we hope that unpicking some of the issues can help us think about identity and participation more widely.

We didn't expect to find neat solutions to these challenging and sensitive problems. Nor is the research intended to judge or censure particular agencies or approaches. In the words of one respondent: 'we are where we are and we don't have to be everywhere at once ... we just have to show where the next steps are and remember why we're doing it'.

We do hope, through this research, to help people think about some of these complex issues, to help people understand more about the experiences of some of Bradford's more marginalised residents, and to contribute to the ongoing process of building an inclusive participatory culture in our district.

We hope that these findings offer food for thought about the next steps.



# 1 Research summary

## Research process

Public bodies, including local councils, the NHS and the police, all have a duty to involve the communities they serve in decisions about service provision. Efforts are made to hear from different communities, but where these are sizeable, such as the South Asian community in Bradford, minority voices can easily go unheard.

‘Minorities within minorities’ – who share experiences or identities that might make them vulnerable or less able to make their voices heard, such as sexuality, mental health, disability, gender, generation and socio-cultural origins – may have different needs to those of the majority population in terms of services or may find it more difficult to participate in formal spaces.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, working with Bradford’s Communities of Interest Working Group (which is made up of representatives from the police, the health service, Bradford Council and the voluntary sector), commissioned this nine-month research project in recognition of the need to hear from a variety of voices from within Bradford’s large South Asian population.

A team of seven academics worked alongside four community researchers who carried out participant observation and interviews within their own communities, in the areas of sexuality, mental health, culture and place of origin, and disability. The community researchers kept participant observation research diaries, in addition to carrying out a total of 28 interviews which covered a broad range of social backgrounds and identities. The project co-ordinator carried out 11 additional interviews as a review of existing structures for participation within statutory organisations in Bradford. The community researchers also acted as key informants for the study, and were themselves interviewed by their academic mentors.

The study explored the barriers to participation facing particular identity groups, chosen on a case study basis, within the South Asian community in Bradford, and understandings of how best to tackle these barriers. The research is not quantitative, nor, given the time and resources available, did it attempt a ‘representative sample’ for each case. A methodology of participatory community research was chosen as the most appropriate method for gathering often sensitive knowledge and experience from within the identity communities concerned. This also ensured that members of those communities felt some ownership in the research process and thus would be more inclined to make use of the findings. The academic mentors appreciated the greater depth of understanding and insight from this research method than the breadth which they might have gained if they had done the research themselves.

### Key findings: general summary

This research, on the experience of minorities within the South Asian minority population of Bradford District, made the following general findings:

- 1 *The South Asian minority community is not homogenous; recognising this could help foster positive social change and equity.*
  - The South Asian community in Bradford is a culturally and socially fragmented community. These divisions reflect caste, status, gender and generational hierarchies which derive from place of origin and which have been reproduced in place of settlement.
  - These hierarchies often have a significant impact on participation and on whose voice is heard within the community. By impeding participation within the South Asian community, there is a limit on the social changes which all communities need to embrace in order to remain dynamic and open to new opportunities.
  - In particular, minorities within the South Asian minority can face a high level of stigma and lack of understanding from within their own communities, as well as from the wider population of Bradford. This is particularly true for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community, but also applies, for example, to people who have experienced mental health problems.
  - As a consequence of the above, statutory bodies may not be meeting the needs of sectors of the South Asian community, and may be reinforcing the social structures which impede the expression of minority interest within the community.
  
- 2 *Formal mechanisms for participation can often reproduce social barriers to participation.*
  - Mosques, for instance, play a key role in terms of community participation. While this is an opportunity for statutory organisations to work with the South Asian community, it is a barrier for those who do not find the mosque an empowering or enabling space, for example some women, the LGBT community or those from lower-caste backgrounds.
  - Participatory spaces offered by statutory bodies often do not overcome general social barriers to participation, but this is disproportionately so in the case of minority groups because of, for example, problems of access or issues of childcare, time, dietary requirements, length and formality of meetings, transport difficulties, lack of information and feedback.
  - This results in a significant level of doubt on the part of many people in a minority position that statutory organisations are genuinely committed to hearing and acting on their concerns.

3 *Existing forms for minority participation do not enable minorities within minorities to be heard and resources allocated to meet their needs.*

- There is an expectation from some within statutory organisations that people should be able to contribute to neighbourhood-level planning and consultation, regardless of their minority status. Where the neighbourhood is mostly of South Asian origin, this expectation is not borne out by our findings. There are serious and significant obstacles to the participation of some minorities within neighbourhoods.
- Statutory organisations, while hearing from ‘South Asians’ and from minority identity groups amongst those of non-Asian heritage, by and large *do not hear from South Asian minority groups*. This is particularly true for the South Asian LGBT community.
- Where this is not the case, notably within the Youth Service, services can struggle to maintain the necessary provision to support them because of resource constraints and lack of understanding within other bodies.
- There are many committed individuals within the different statutory organisations who bring their understanding of Bradford’s different communities to the participatory processes that they support. However, they face barriers of resources, capacity and leadership within their own organisations, limiting their ability to address the needs of minorities within minorities.

4 *Organisations which are genuinely embedded amongst the minorities in question could be effective partners for meeting their needs.*

- Community organisations which cater sensitively and appropriately for a particular identity group, such as Sharing Voices Bradford (a community development mental health organisation), the ABC (Asian and Black Communities) LGBT group, Bradnet (formerly the Asian Disability Network) and BAVIP (Bradford Association of Visually Impaired People), who work with the disabled and visually impaired respectively, play a crucial role in supporting people, and act as important channels for the views of their members. If statutory organisations are to hear from and meet the needs of more excluded groups with the South Asian community, there is a need to support, resource and work in partnership with organisations of this kind.

5 *Commissioned research on minorities within minorities is not always translated into action, leading to frustration.*

- There is a level of frustration that research is not seen to lead to action. However, there is also great potential for involving community organisations

and networks, such as those mentioned above, in using research to push for change.

### **Specific findings: existing opportunities for participation in Bradford**

- Overall, statutory organisations in Bradford are predominantly hearing from articulate, educated, professional South Asians. They are also hearing from generic community of interest organisations and identity groups such as the LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) Strategic Partnership, but South Asians are often unable to use these community of interest routes to participation. As a result many South Asian minority voices remain unheard.
- The individuals within statutory organisations who are responsible for inviting or supporting participation display, almost without exception, immense personal dedication and commitment to involving and supporting as wide a range of people as possible in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them. However, they themselves face challenges from within their own organisations, including the capacity and the necessary leadership to tackle difficult issues.
- Existing mechanisms for participation are heavily focused on neighbourhoods, rather than communities of interest. Some within statutory organisations hold the view that an individual's minority identity should not deter them from contributing to neighbourhood-level planning or consultation. However, our findings suggest that there are significant reasons why many people within the close-knit but fragmented South Asian community may be deterred from getting involved with neighbourhood-level politics and themselves helping to change attitudes within the community.

### **Culture and place of origin**

- The South Asian community in Bradford is fragmented according to place of origin, a fact which is exacerbated by the rural/urban divisions in the Asian subcontinent. This in turn is intensified by different levels of education. These dynamics impact differently on men and women, and on the younger and older generation, as a result of social norms and expectations. Caste division also severely limits social mobility, with judgements on the basis of caste still being internalised by some young people born in this country. Caste and status

influence mosque leadership, which is a key space for participation within the South Asian community; it also influences the character of political representation of areas such as Manningham where residents from one area of Pakistan predominate.

- Formal spaces set up by statutory organisations to engage the South Asian community, such as the Minorities Police Liaison Committee, often do not recognise these underlying complexities, and inadvertently reproduce the representational exclusions that they generate. The key message is that even if statutory organisations manage to attract a wider range of participants, this is not enough by itself. Existing participants and public officials themselves need to be prepared to listen to the new perspectives that these new participants will bring. There is also a role for statutory organisations, working in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations, in supporting these 'minority' voices to speak confidently and honestly in what is likely to be a daunting environment.

## **Sexuality**

- The South Asian LGBT community in Bradford faces religious and cultural intolerance, expressed as religious and family disapproval, social isolation, stigma and even violence. This has a great impact on the ability of people from this community to get involved in local consultation and decision making.
- The centrality of the mosque to community activities and participation is problematic for this community, in the context of religious condemnation. In addition, the close-knit nature of Bradford's South Asian community is experienced as a form of surveillance, limiting people's freedom to act as they wish. These dense social relations, combined with religious and cultural judgements about sexuality, often discourage people from the South Asian LGBT community from getting involved in wider community activities.
- As a result, organised participation by this community tends to take the form of mutual solidarity and support, rather than engagement with statutory organisations. The ABC LGBT group in Bradford provides a much needed and valued space for this community, drawing participants from South Asian communities beyond Bradford itself. It is, however, a particular concern that lesbian and bisexual women are reluctant to attend even this group.

- In terms of more formal participatory spaces, there is a general sense of institutional indifference to the needs of this community, which is particularly strong in relation to the police.

## Mental health

- The experience of mental health difficulties underlines the need for a supportive approach to participation. This could involve preparation before people attend a community planning or consultation event and the provision of a space for people to think through the issues and work out what they want to contribute. For most people, this would be best addressed through a community-based, informal space. Sharing Voices Bradford, where our community researcher was based, is a good example of this kind of organisation. Its members value the support, community, respect and understanding that it offers.

## Disability

- South Asian disabled people do not necessarily view themselves as a 'community of interest' – most preferring to identify with their ethnic or religious community. Accordingly, in most cases disabled people simply wish to maximise their opportunities to participate as much as any other citizen. Therefore, the key question may not be why people with a disability do not participate, but why people in general do not participate.
- However, it is true that disabled people do experience additional practical barriers to participation, in terms of transport, access, support and communication.
- In relation to these questions, there is a high level of frustration with research that does not lead to action or change. However, it is also clear that there is a great potential for involving individuals and communities, through community organisations and networks, in using research to push for change.

## Recommendations to statutory bodies in Bradford District and to the national debate on power and voice in community participation

The following recommendations are aimed at statutory bodies in Bradford District. We think that they have relevance nationally as well as in Bradford District, and to all contexts where substantial minority communities exist. Statutory bodies should:

- 1 Avoid assuming that a minority ethnic group or community is homogenous; *understand its social structures* and power relationships before designing participatory spaces.
- 2 Be clear on the *issue of representation* and who is speaking for whom. Who and what makes a good representative of a community or community of interest group? Discuss this with representatives rather than assume they know what their role is.
- 3 *Support individuals within minority communities who are open to change* to organise, debate and challenge: both within their own communities and as honest and forthright advocates within the participatory spaces created by statutory organisations. At the same time, change agents should be encouraged to work with those who may be perceived as 'gatekeepers', such as local imams or elders.
- 4 *Help and prepare new voices* to participate in participatory spaces, e.g. through participatory training programmes.
- 5 When addressing the needs of communities of interests within ethnic minorities, *do not assume that they will have the same needs as minorities within majority communities*.
- 6 Build *serious and supportive partnerships with the voluntary sector* organisations which genuinely represent communities of interest within minority communities in order to:
  - encourage new forms of grass roots leadership that empower the wider community
  - create supportive spaces for communities to come together outside statutory services so that previously excluded groups can build their confidence and capacity to participate and prepare for formal meetings
  - allow community workers to act as a channel for people's views, where access is otherwise limited
  - foster a two-way dialogue, whereby statutory organisations can also learn from communities.

## 2 Methodology: participatory community research

### The research design

We took a ‘case study’ approach to exploring the relationship between identity and participation in South Asian communities, considering the impact of culture and place of origin,<sup>1</sup> sexuality, mental health and disability on experiences of participation. Within these four different cases, we researched patterns of participation, identifying barriers to involvement and gathering views on how to improve participatory processes.

Through focusing on ‘minorities’ within the South Asian community, we were able to explore the impact of identity on people’s ability to participate. Identity is not fixed or unitary. However, in conditions of powerlessness and discrimination, particular identities can become obstacles to self-fulfilment. Self-identity is shaped by many social divisions such as age, ethnicity, class, gender, disability, sexuality and culture. These differences become more significant (and have more of an impact on people’s ability to voice their real concerns), as a result of social attitudes, which can include prejudice and stereotyping as well as discriminatory practices.

While it was not possible to generate a comprehensive overview of all the cross-cutting identities within Bradford’s South Asian communities, we believe that these four in-depth case studies can offer a broad insight into the impact of identity on the experience of participation.

The research was overseen by a team of seven academics, one of whom acted as project co-ordinator. Four community researchers<sup>2</sup> worked alongside the academic team, carrying out research in their own communities. Their findings are discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, the project co-ordinator interviewed a number of staff from statutory organisations in Bradford, in order to review existing opportunities for participation (see Chapter 3).

The research was supported by a stakeholder group, made up of staff with responsibility for participatory processes from statutory and voluntary sector organisations. This group met five times during the course of the project. Its purpose was to include an organisational perspective within the research, and to ensure that the findings were useful to statutory organisations looking to improve the way in which they invite community participation.

## **Participatory community research process**

The community researchers were selected through community organisations and networks active around the issues of identity listed above.<sup>3</sup> We were looking for community knowledge and understanding and an interest in the issues, rather than research skills or experience. The selection process was intended to ensure that researchers already had good links with those communities and could be considered to be 'key informants' themselves.

Research data were generated through both participant observation and interviews. The community researchers carried out a total of 28 interviews (supplemented by 11 interviews carried out by the project co-ordinator). Participant observation data were recorded through research diaries and ongoing discussions between community researchers and their academic mentors. In addition, the community researchers themselves were interviewed by their academic mentors. Of the community interviewees there were:

- 19 male and 9 female<sup>4</sup>
- 21 Muslim, 3 Sikh, 1 Hindu and 1 atheist (2 not given)<sup>5</sup>
- 19 Pakistani (or of Pakistani heritage), 2 Indian, and 1 Kenyan (3 not given); 2 people described themselves simply as Asian and 1 as Muslim British
- 8 born in Pakistan, 3 in Bradford, 7 elsewhere in the UK and 3 in India (7 not given).

Interviewees were selected in discussion with the academic team, from the community researchers' existing networks. We were conscious of the importance of gender, age and religion, so community researchers tried to involve men and women, of different ages and faiths, to ensure a wide range of perspectives. More detail about the interviewees is given as an appendix at the end of this report. The participant observation process was discussed with and reviewed by the academic team on an ongoing basis.

The researchers received a two-day training session in research methods and the aims of the project, and later a one-day session focused on interpreting findings. Each researcher was mentored closely by a member of the academic team. Mentors helped the researchers choose data collection methods and identify subjects for interview, and supported their ongoing participant observation research. This relationship was the most important support mechanism and its success rested on the commitment of the mentor to participatory values and process.

The community researchers were offered anonymity within the community researcher team and the option of contributing to the stakeholder group in writing, where this was felt to be necessary, to ensure that no-one was made vulnerable by their participation in the research process. In the event, this level of anonymity was not felt to be necessary by the community researchers involved.

To ensure confidentiality with regard to interviewees, community researchers were trained in practical and ethical issues regarding collection, storage and use of data. Transcripts were anonymised and access to data kept limited even within the academic team, each mentor and community researcher only having access to their own data set as far as possible.

The community researchers were employed on a part-time basis. With the exception of the project co-ordinator, the academic team worked unpaid.

We chose a participatory approach because we are convinced that if communities take a more active part in research (rather than it simply being 'about them'), then the research findings themselves will be stronger. These are our reasons:

- We believe that community researchers possess important knowledge about their communities and the issues that matter to them which can contribute to the development and direction of research and enrich the data gathered. Our choice to employ them as researchers, rather than merely interview them, acknowledges that although academics bring research skills and experience, that is not the same thing as having a community perspective.
- Community researchers have existing relationships with the researched which academics could not build to the same extent, particularly in the context of a short-term project. This has many benefits, in terms of access to communities, the quality of the data gathered and the ethics of the project.
- We assume that the self-research process can have direct benefits for the researcher, in addition to the value of the findings. The process should build knowledge, skills and confidence. It also places a clear and public value on the knowledge that already exists within communities.
- Undertaking research from within communities, and returning findings to community members, has the potential to build a sense of ownership of the research. This is important in making sure that research is genuinely useful to, and used by, the communities that it describes.

For all these reasons, we are convinced that the participatory research process strengthens the research findings through the active participation of experienced community members.

Participatory community research is based on a different understanding of what research is. We did not set out to dig up knowledge from difficult places and people, but to build a shared understanding with the community researchers. We understand this to mean a process that really values the knowledge that communities bring to the research process. In this understanding, the academic researcher does not create knowledge, but helps bring together community knowledge and make it visible to a wider audience. Participatory research must be a two-way process. It should help organise (and provide evidence for) the existing knowledge of community researchers, and it should encourage them to test their assumptions.

This approach is part of a trend in academic research that challenges the more traditional idea of academic neutrality. We did not ask our researchers to lay aside their identities and assumptions, but to work with them. We asked them to reflect on and test their assumptions, so that others can more easily share that knowledge. Community research, as we understand it, is a process of reflecting critically on your own reality, without stepping outside it.

## **Some benefits of community research**

One overwhelming benefit to this way of working is the mutual trust between interviewers and interviewees. This has been most clear in particularly vulnerable communities, such as the South Asian LGBT community, where the richness and honesty of data gathered are due to the fact that the researcher is part of that community. The researcher working in the area of disability found that for some interviewees his own disability acted as a short cut to building confidence in the integrity of the research process. This was important because many interviewees had had off-putting experiences of 'top-down' research projects in the past.

The researchers' knowledge also contributed a lot in terms of designing and developing the research, in particular in Manningham, where their detailed knowledge of community structures shaped the project in a much more sophisticated way than would have been otherwise possible in the time available.

As a result of these factors, we believe that the quality of our findings is deepened and enhanced.

Finally, there have been clear personal benefits to the researchers themselves. All have found the training and experience valuable, and one in particular found that the process enabled a deeper engagement with the needs of his community.

### Challenges and tensions

In terms of this project, the greatest challenge has been that of time. Working in this way clearly requires a greater investment of time and resources than a 'traditional' academic-led process does. We found this most in relation to the time needed for training and preparation. Our approach is based on working with community members who do not have previous research experience, and who are therefore likely to need a greater level of training. It also requires a different kind of training, in that it must help researchers understand and value what they already know, before moving on to learning necessary research skills, such as participant observation, keeping a research diary, interviewing, recording data, and how to undertake research ethically. The timescale also influenced the extent to which we were able to involve community researchers in analysing the findings. With more time, community researchers could have been more involved in this process. This would have enhanced the analysis itself, but would also have created a closer link between the collection of the data and its use by the researchers and their communities.

A longer timescale would also have allowed us to involve members of community groups, as well as staff, in the selection of the community researchers. This would have allowed for more dialogue within the selection process and involved more of the community in the research process from the start, which in turn would have helped the researchers carry out the research.

A second issue relates to the point at which the community researchers became involved in the process. Because they were brought into the research after the working group had decided on the research questions, building true 'community ownership' of the research process has been more difficult. A participatory methodology would ideally allow for the involvement of community researchers in deciding research questions, in order to make sure that these questions are genuinely important to the communities involved.

A research methodology of this kind throws up other tensions. First, it is important to recognise the complexity of communities: belonging to a defined identity group does not necessarily mean that you identify with that group as a 'community'. We found this particularly in relation to disability. This researcher, while having a visual

impairment, was clear that he did not identify himself as part of a 'disabled community' – a sense that was echoed by many of his interviewees.

Even if you do identify with a group in this way, the identity group may be wider and more diverse than the part of it that you belong to. In practice, our research on sexuality focuses (though not exclusively) on issues relating to gay men. This is an inherent part of our methodology – based as it is on existing networks. As such we did not set out to produce an overview of issues relating to the participation of *all* identity groups within South Asian communities. We have chosen to narrow our focus, in order to facilitate the depth of insight that community researchers can bring.

A further tension exists between involving statutory organisations through the stakeholder group (which has resources to implement the research) and enabling the voices of the community researchers to be heard. Including professional organisations inevitably creates a more formal atmosphere, which may not be a comfortable space in which to challenge assumptions about what kinds of knowledge are valuable.

Similarly, our desire to involve the full range of interested parties led to a level of confusion. Diverse views within the stakeholder group and conflicting messages from mentors, project co-ordinator and trainers were challenging for the team of community researchers, who needed clarity in order to progress. To overcome this, we found that very clear communication was needed between all members of the process (from the start), as well as willingness on the part of the academic team to defend the community research process to other stakeholders.

The data collected through this methodology are not as easily subject to the control and rigour that academics at least claim to seek in field research. Quantitative data were not possible given the time as well as the experience of the community researchers. The number of interviews conducted was limited according to each researcher's experience and confidence, though in all cases supplemented by participant observation data. In some cases (Manningham in particular), the community researcher was the key informant, testing his assumptions and beliefs through a limited number of interviews. The research team feel that he has thrown up some valid and provocative insights, while not claiming that these represent a definitive study.

Finally, academic research is geared to academic presentation of the findings, but the written word is not everyone's ideal way of communicating. We have considered alternative ways of sharing findings, through video and drama, but with more time, perhaps more resources, it might have been possible to find more imaginative ways of recording knowledge as well.

We recognise that this is a creative approach to research, and that it is therefore an ongoing learning process for us all. It is a journey we have tried to take *with* the community researchers. As one of them put it:

Community research is like a new building – if it's rigid, it won't last. It needs to be flexible enough to move and settle – this project allowed the space for that to happen.

# 3 Research findings

## **Participation in Bradford: a review of statutory organisations' structures for community participation**

This section of the report is based on a series of interviews with 11 people from Bradford Council, Bradford Vision (the Local Strategic Partnership), the NHS, West Yorkshire Police and the voluntary sector: people who are responsible for inviting or encouraging participation in shaping Bradford's public services. Though often working with sensitive issues and in difficult contexts, they were, almost without exception, personally committed to creating real opportunities for participation by people of all backgrounds and identities.

Views expressed in the text of this section, as well as within quotes, are all drawn from these interviews. It is worth mentioning that though interviewees are speaking here as employees of their organisations, five out of the 11 interviewees are themselves from Bradford's South Asian communities. Quotes are not attributed in order to protect the anonymity of respondents.

Through these interviews, we heard about many ways in which statutory organisations try to hear from and engage communities. From the council: neighbourhood forums, the Youth Service 'Voice and Influence' team and the Equalities Forum, a committee where representatives from communities of interest bring concerns directly to councillors and council officials. From Bradford Vision: the Neighbourhood Action Planning process and neighbourhood partnerships. From the NHS: Patient and Public Involvement mechanisms, as well as work on improving race equality. From West Yorkshire Police: the work of the Minorities Police Liaison Committee and more informal work aimed at engaging the widest possible range of views. We also heard from the voluntary sector, on the experience of trying to represent and channel the views of the South Asian community.

The work described in this chapter takes place in the context of a national government emphasis on participation and community involvement. It is not the aim of this project to review the impact of government policy in this area, but some broad messages did emerge. Overall, the government direction was felt to be positive, enabling work that committed staff had been doing for years to be taken more seriously, as well as allowing more time, resources and staff to be dedicated to this kind of work.

However, there were concerns about the constraints that government direction can place on the approaches taken to participation. In particular, some felt that the emphasis on involving communities primarily through neighbourhoods makes the challenge of involving communities of interest still harder. There was also felt to be a possible conflict between the emphasis on participation and the ChangeUp agenda (by which the government intends to support the development of infrastructure within the voluntary and community sector so that the sector can assist more in the delivery of public services). Is there a tension for the voluntary and community sector in trying to act as a service provider *and* as a voice for service users?

This chapter explores how Bradford's statutory organisations address the impact of identity within their efforts to hear from the communities of Bradford. Mainstream service provision is likely to meet the needs of the people that service providers most easily understand and hear from, i.e. the majority population. One of the purposes of participation is to ensure that services can be tailored to meet the needs of a much more diverse range of communities and individuals. It is often the most vulnerable groups within a community who most need services to provide a safety net, to help alleviate some of their difficulties – usually created by others' perceptions of their identity. However, this same vulnerability can also make it more difficult for these groups to articulate and voice their concerns and needs. It is therefore a real problem if statutory organisations simply subsume the needs and experiences of minority identity groups within the wider category of the South Asian community.

### **What is participation for?**

'Participation' covers all the attempts of statutory organisations to hear from or include the views of the communities they serve within their decision-making structures. This can range from consultation (hearing views and feeding them into decision making) to participation that allows for a shift in decision-making power. The reasons behind an organisation's attempts to invite participation influence how that organisation goes about it, and this in turn influences the kind of outcomes that participation produces for the communities involved.

We heard a wide range of views on the purpose of participation, within as well as across different organisations. These ranged from being 'all about them, and their empowerment, and how they want to live their lives', to the fulfilment of a statutory duty. For some, there was an understanding that participatory processes can have broader benefits beyond their immediate aims, that they can 'encourage more active citizens in the district' and 'support ... representative democracy'. This outcome – from participation as distinct from consultation – was clear in the Youth Service's

focus on 'experiential learning' instead of 'getting the information and going and telling somebody else about it'. These things are part of wider questions, such as whether an organisation is trying to consult (gather information and use it as it sees fit) or to encourage participation, which involves some level of sharing of responsibility or decision making: 'sharing looks like that you share your power, you share your resources, you share your thinking, you share your options, that's what engagement means – or the other engagement means one-way, and then we'll decide'.

Most understood the main purpose of consultation or participation to be improved service delivery. However, this took different forms, from absolute clarity that an organisation took a participatory approach because it 'worked' when measured against delivery targets ('it's not because we hold it up as a value above all others ... our first point of call is "what works"') in terms of poverty and inequality, to a sense that given the realities of available resources, participation can conflict with getting on with the job of service delivery ('there is an issue of lack of resources, there is a statutory duty to involve, but the main statutory duty is to provide health care. The Department of Health position is that ... funding for [participation] should come from existing resources. Clinical duties have to take priority, given that resources are finite').

These are part of the bigger picture of participation across the district as a whole, within which we are focusing on the possibilities for real involvement by a range of particularly vulnerable groups. However, any attempts to involve these groups are clearly influenced by the intentions behind the invitation.

## **Which South Asian voices are statutory organisations hearing?**

On the whole, statutory organisations felt that they were hearing from the South Asian community, but accepted that they heard predominantly from 'articulate, educated, professional South Asians'. Some organisations, notably Bradford Vision, and some individuals within the council and the police, spoke about their understanding that it's not enough to stay with the 'top layer ... and say you are engaged with the South Asian community ... it's relatively easy to engage with professional Muslim Pakistani Mirpuri men in Manningham'.

The Youth Service stood out as engaging with South Asian youth of all backgrounds, who have often had more of a 'political journey' than the white youth. This service appeared to be very much in touch with a great variety of views and identities, and

worked hard to include them all, though of course no service is totally comprehensive. At the last Youth Parliament election, they actively recruited white working-class youth, disabled young people, gay and lesbian young people and black young people. There is a gap in terms of non-Muslim, non-Pakistani Asian young people, explored through this research. This produced an immediate recognition that perhaps they had 'lumped them together in our heads; we've got enough Asian young people' – and a future intention to target the temples and Gurdwaras.

Other voices identified through these interviews as often silent or unheard were Bangladeshi women, women who have experienced domestic violence, and non-Muslims. There is a failure across the board to engage South Asian gays and lesbians, by and large recognised by the statutory organisations themselves. The Youth Service, which is perhaps most attuned to issues of sexuality, experienced difficulties not in hearing from individuals in this category but in sustaining the necessary provision to support them.

A key point emerging from this review is that, on the whole, statutory organisations work to engage South Asian communities, and they work to engage communities of interest (such as the LGBT community), but very little systematic attention is paid to South Asian representation within these communities of interest. This research suggests that while some South Asian communities are well served by the wider community of interest network, others are not, most notably within the LGBT community (not necessarily through lack of will, but for reasons discussed later in the report). Where this is the case, there is little being done by statutory organisations to address the gap and hear directly from South Asian minorities.

Indeed, when asked in the context of South Asian communities which voices they were not hearing, most respondents moved on to talk about the need to engage the emerging Eastern European communities and other ethnic groups such as the French African communities, with the implicit assumption that they are hearing from South Asian communities because they are hearing from South Asians.

### **Barriers to the involvement of South Asian minorities**

This research is focused on minority groups that are likely to be vulnerable in some way, who experience some level of prejudice, stigma or isolation, both within their wider (South Asian) community and, to a greater or lesser degree, from within British society as a whole. We start from the position that all people should be able to contribute to social processes and decisions that affect their lives, regardless of their

ethnicity, culture, health, sexuality or religion. However, the aim of this research is not to evaluate or challenge attitudes to sexuality, gender, mental health or disability, but to explore how statutory organisations hear minority voices within minority communities and whether they enable them to be heard by others.

## **Community power dynamics: a culture of gatekeeping?**

Before statutory organisations try to engage communities, they clearly need to understand and consider the social structure and power dynamics within those communities. This finding is clearly underlined by our community research, in particular the work in Manningham.

The issue of ‘gatekeepers’ was brought up repeatedly by interviewees within statutory organisations. Most respondents were clear that it is ‘easy to consult with self-appointed people’; ‘men, South Asian men ... there are people who are put forward again and again ... some of them are councillors’. The bias towards these voices is clearly the outcome of the complex power dynamics described in the following chapter. These dynamics were also referred to by one respondent in talking about a voluntary sector project run by workers from outside the Pathan community:

At an individual level it probably helped because there was a level of ... confidence, people knew that we weren't ... playing into ... local, cultural norms and expectations ... people seeing it as an independent space ... but by the gatekeepers within those communities ... we were viewed with suspicion.

This is important in terms of whether people are expected to represent only themselves or speak on behalf of their community. Statutory organisations need to be clear whether they are expecting people to represent themselves or others; they should not simply assume that a single person does speak for a community (this can be the easy choice, allowing organisations to ‘tick the box’ of consulting the whole community). It is also important that, when a level of representation is expected (such as within the council’s Equalities Forum), statutory organisations don’t just take that representation for granted, but support the representative in being actively in touch with their community.

This issue is particularly relevant when thinking about minorities within South Asian communities, as one representative clearly cannot represent ‘a’ South Asian view – ‘it is incredibly difficult to get a representative view in any process, because there are so many views within [the South Asian community]’.

There are leaders in every community and sometimes you need to get past them to see what the rest think.

While most people recognised that this is a real issue, it was also pointed out that:

This is a debate which can work both ways – how representative is, say, a chief executive, how representative is a senior manager, of an organisation of 2,000 people? ... just by the very fact that somebody who would normally not have been part of that process is present ... in itself can have an impact ... *[we shouldn't]* underestimate the value of that as a starting point.

This point was made in relation to the value of including individual previously excluded voices, without expecting them to speak for others, rather than to defend relying on 'gatekeepers'.

These dynamics can also be reproduced within statutory organisations themselves, as discussed (without judgement) by one respondent:

We do have a group of predominantly Muslim, Pakistani men who work in the service who do act as a group and that can cause conflict and also it causes a little bit of a sense of gatekeeping.

Agencies also recognised the impact of values and norms within communities, which means that it can be harder for some people to engage than others. This is not just about prejudice towards vulnerable identity groups, such as gay Muslims, but also about social norms: issues of access, for example, to women, in 'literally getting past the front door'. This is clearly demonstrated in who the 'gatekeepers' are seen to be (older men of more powerful, higher-caste, origins).

## Identity and participation

There is also an issue of how you may be perceived by others within your own community if you engage with 'white' organisations:

People are accused of being coconuts, brown on the outside, white on the inside – there is a perception that it's for personal gain.

This is a two-way dynamic of course – the above suspicion is at least partly a response to the fact that people may have had to change in order to get involved

with mainstream statutory organisations. This is a critical point, raised by this review. What do people have to give up to engage? Is it possible to take your identity into that space, or do you have to leave it at the door? As one respondent put it: ‘would that old boys’ network have taken them in bearded and turbaned?’

The response to all these pressures must be sensitive. For example:

to put someone at odds with their family and community in the long term is not helpful ... although if in individual cases that is what somebody has chosen, then we will support them, we will explore with them the consequences, the impact of that, but in the end, we would support them with that choice.

The key message is that agencies can’t substitute for a real knowledge of the power relations, the assumptions, and maybe the myths, within a community, as explored in the following chapters. They have to consciously work with these things, being sensitive to the consequences of how people participate. People exist within the community, and they have to go back to it. Agencies shouldn’t be timid about addressing the issues, but they need to do so sensitively: ‘at times confrontation is important, but that shouldn’t be superimposed [by agencies] – it has to be the choice of the individuals’.

## **Institutional barriers to community participation**

Being aware of community dynamics is clearly one side of the story. However, there is another set of issues to do with the extent to which organisations are able to create and support participatory processes that are attractive to and meaningful for communities. Individuals within statutory organisations who are working to support and develop community participation often face challenges from within their own organisations, factors which make it difficult for them to create such spaces.

These issues are particularly relevant to excluded minority communities. Statutory organisations clearly need to make extra efforts to engage these groups, and therefore need the will but also the resources to address their exclusion.

Most fundamentally, there is an issue about how seriously statutory organisations as a whole actually take participation. As one respondent put it, with reference to including excluded communities: ‘it’s always initiatives, it’s always projects, it’s not: this is our core business’. This attitude was shared: ‘the majority of front-line public service staff are pretty good at trying to get things done but sometimes they are

fighting both sides'; and 'there is a lack of stringent frameworks where you can start to process issues, it relies on personal relations instead of a proper process, which leads to inconsistency'. In other words, the participatory process is not seen to be built in as an essential part of service development and provision, but depends on the dedication and commitment of individuals.

Doubts about the genuine commitment of statutory organisations were also expressed through the idea that structures for participation meet the needs of the organisations first, and the needs of communities second, a suspicion that the organisation's need is 'to be seen to do something ... the token visible project'. For example, efforts are being made to build the capacity of women to participate in the Minorities Police Liaison Committee, though the expressed views of women suggest a desire for a different style of engagement altogether.

A similar question was raised about the extent to which statutory organisations are serious about opening up actual decisions to communities. For example, one respondent suggested that where an NHS trust has a concern, the voice of communities is used to strengthen that concern and help create change, but where the views are more challenging, or not already a priority for the organisation, participation is much less likely to result in change.

These issues are seen to impact on the availability of resources for developing real community participation:

Time-limited funding is very restrictive and frustrating ... you need to give meaningful time to allow people to engage; it shouldn't all rest on one project, but it does depend on having the capacity somewhere, and you need the time to embed each initiative.

We are primarily a health service, we don't have the infrastructure to support community development community participation.

While the issue of attitude towards participation can also apply to individuals throughout the organisation – 'people feeling that they are already doing it' and so not seeing the need for change – it is clear that leadership is critically important in demonstrating an organisation's commitment to participation: 'you can have all the participation in the world but unless there's the will to act on it ... the change won't happen'. The nature of big organisations such as the council, the health service or the police can make this difficult: 'often at the top the strategic decision makers feel that they are giving those permissions and you can have a different service ... but then it doesn't come out the other end of the machine, because the machine's already going one way'.

Leadership is seen to be critical if statutory organisations are to respond to or manage the community dynamics discussed earlier. Overall, there was a strong sense that this is lacking in Bradford:

One of the biggest challenges is actually saying to *[gatekeepers]*, well, whose mandate have you got ... they are very scared of doing that in Bradford ... as a body there's no way the leader or the chief executive is going to challenge *[it]* in any kind of a public way.

Several respondents referred to a particular incident in the past, in which a hate campaign followed the establishment of a group for Asian lesbians (by council workers at the request of the young people involved). There was a perception across the board that the council failed to 'challenge the values [behind the hate campaign] ... [or] uphold the values that are inherent in our culture' because they 'didn't want to offend the South Asian community'. There was, however, recognition that the answers are not obvious: 'they didn't know what to do'.

## **Issues with existing participation mechanisms**

There are clearly factors that deter many people from across the district from using some of the spaces for participation set up by statutory organisations, whatever their identity or background. Factors raised in these interviews include the off-putting formality of the committee approach, national targets which limit statutory organisations' ability to respond to communities, and scepticism about whether change will follow. One example given related to a board of community directors of a regeneration body in Manningham – actually elected through a full postal ballot – being dismissed without any community consultation. This brought up issues about the real value placed on community representation, and was seen to illustrate a culture that asks communities to engage and then wonders why they doubt that they will be listened to.

Equally, we heard about good practice, approaches which are effective in engaging people, again regardless of their particular identity groups, for example the Youth Service's work with young people on issues that concern them directly, as part of a process that may help them go on to think about bigger issues.

How a statutory organisation goes about engaging with all the communities it serves, for what purpose, and the outcomes of the process, are big and important questions. These things affect the minority groups in this study as much as any other community. However, these issues are well covered elsewhere, and in any case are

too broad for this research project: we are focusing on factors that *particularly* exclude or include minority groups within Bradford's South Asian communities, groups whose views may not be fully represented by the majority, which is likely to affect their needs being fully considered and met by service providers.

First, there is some evidence that participation structures sometimes replicate the very community power dynamics that, intentionally or otherwise, suppress the views of particular groups of people. One example is the Minorities Police Liaison Committee (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). It is seen to be 'dominated by middle-aged older men, who to a point are the self-appointed representatives ... well respected within their own communities, but as business men, not as ... people who really do know what is going on at grass roots level'. Women, young people and minority identity groups are understood not to participate 'because there are so many dynamics going on, and clashes and politics and straightforward sexism'.

In a similar vein, Bradford Vision's 'self-selecting' Neighbourhood Action Planning groups are seen (by some) to operate as a barrier to the involvement of others. However, this may be part of a process, with Bradford Vision conscious of moving from 'starting where the energy is' to being 'a bit more sophisticated, and asking people in neighbourhoods to become a bit more sophisticated ... in terms of identifying the gaps as well'.

Second, a number of respondents raised issues to do with the formal representative democratic system as a means for people and communities to get their concerns heard. Some feel that there is an underlying tension in that this system is neighbourhood based: councillors represent geographical wards. In particular, where communities of interest feel vulnerable or silenced within the South Asian community, it can be difficult for them to raise issues via any neighbourhood-based structure. Added to this is the need for councillors to get votes: some community of interest issues are considered 'unpalatable', and so may not be so easily taken up by elected representatives.

Beyond this, the concern of some councillors that they are being bypassed by direct participation can lead to an emphasis on participation as an individual rather than as a member of a group or community:

We already have democratically elected members through the local authority who represent formally those people in the neighbourhoods ... if there are more [*active*] people across the neighbourhood, there's more for [*the elected members*] to engage with ... that makes elected members' positions a bit more credible.

However, this individual activity may not suit more vulnerable identity groups, such as those involved in this research:

The existing model of participation is wrong ... there needs to be much more of an emphasis on groups and networks engaging with structures, because strong networks have more clarity about what they as a community want, and they can learn how to influence.

This tension illustrates the major concern of this research – the balance between neighbourhood-based participation and participation on the basis of a community of interest. This is explored in more detail below.

## **Communities of interest and neighbourhoods**

As already mentioned, government policy leans heavily towards neighbourhood-based planning, something which presents a challenge for community of interest work. One respondent suggested that this is apparent in Bradford's formal approach to participation, where 'key documents have a huge weighting to neighbourhoods'.

Despite this, there is a clear recognition that there is a need for some specialist provision, beyond neighbourhood-based work, 'if you cannot raise your head safely without judgement in your community, and you do not show up in large enough numbers to be able to be counted easily in your neighbourhood'. Some also recognise that certain local issues may not be easy to express locally, for example concerns about homophobic crime.

For most service providers, there is an aspiration that this work is part of a process, rather than a long-term acceptance of the dynamics that make it necessary. One respondent expressed this eloquently:

The point is, until a community can deal with its own issues, they are not in a fit state to engage. To be confident, you need space in your own groups, to get comfortable with yourself and your views, before you engage ... this work is about 'strengthening in order to ...'.

Overall, respondents expressed the understanding that agencies can't directly address the tensions that make it difficult for some to contribute at the neighbourhood level. They can only work to hear as wide a variety of voices as possible. Moving beyond that 'requires a debate within those communities ... what we need to do is empower communities themselves to hold those debates'. This

suggests that Bradford needs to look within its communities as well as across them, in thinking about cohesive relationships within the district.

While there is recognition that some groups do need separate processes, there was also acknowledgment that these separate processes can become a comfort zone:

If we are going to get people to participate, I think that we also need to offer some challenges to communities ... about participating not only internally within their own community but in wider civic life and being seen to contribute to wider civic life ... *[meaning]* white middle-class and the white poorer communities as much as ... ethnic minority *[communities]*.

This was one of a number of concerns raised about providing specialist provision (though no one suggested that it isn't necessary for some). One respondent wondered 'whether we are colluding with oppression around women in separating resources ... there are no easy answers here'. Clearly, as one respondent pointed out, separate provision should only be offered if it is in the interest of the people concerned, and not 'because certain members of communities say it should be like that'. The risks of separating services and provision are seen to include missing some voices in mainstream debates because those conversations have been held separately, the cost involved in diverting finite resources ('there's that much money and resources to go around and there has to be some real conversations and negotiations') and taking the 'easy option' of keeping people separate, instead of asking what really empowers people to take up their places.

These are valid and thoughtful questions. However, it is important that they are not used to blur the equally real issues that suggest a need for separate provision in the first place. Some respondents questioned whether there is a tension between neighbourhood work and community of interest work: a tension that, for some identity groups at least, our community research clearly demonstrates is real.

This was most commonly expressed in the idea that it is not appropriate to raise identity issues at neighbourhood forums, and that anyone can express housing and similar issues at the neighbourhood level, regardless of their identity. This suggests a neat separation of issues: 'the neighbourhood forum is about that geographical neighbourhood ... LGB issues tend to be about services rather than neighbourhood ... those issues would be raised through LGB community networks'. This suggests that you can 'sit as a neighbour as part of the neighbourhood action planning and also decide that you want to be involved in the communities of interest work separately'. There is a logic to this, and for some people and some identity groups it may be true. However, our findings (explored in more detail in the next chapter) suggest the following qualifications:

- 1 This division of issues does not take account of the close-knit nature of Bradford's South Asian communities. The assumption that you do not have to declare your identity to contribute at a neighbourhood level doesn't take into account that people are already part of their communities. This can particularly be seen through our community research on place of origin, in Manningham, but is also true of attitudes to mental health and sexuality: 'I can see me doing all this stuff in my community and being called a poof and everything. You don't want to be called that, do you?' (quote drawn from community interviews).
- 2 It doesn't take into account the difficult realities of people's lives. Where an aspect of your identity (or other people's attitudes towards it) makes it difficult to contribute to participatory processes, this is likely to have a much wider impact on your life as a whole, from the stigma and personal challenge of mental health difficulties to the stigma and violence evidenced in our research on sexuality. Our findings suggest that these things are themselves likely to complicate your ability or desire to get involved in neighbourhood politics.
- 3 It suggests that there are no neighbourhood issues that relate to identity (as one respondent put it, 'who do they think live in these neighbourhoods?'). It is clear from our research that issues from homophobic crime to caste and class are important in terms of both identity and neighbourhood.
- 4 Finally, the neat division between neighbourhood and identity rests on an assumption that there are appropriate networks for South Asian communities of interest. It was very clear, both from the community research and the agency research, that South Asians are in many cases absent from mainstream 'white' community of interest networks. As a result, there is no obvious alternative mechanism to neighbourhood consultation and planning processes, through which South Asian communities of interest *can* raise concerns.

The reasons for the last point, the absence of South Asians from some mainstream community of interest networks, may vary across the networks and identity groups, but our findings suggest the following possibilities:

- 'For the same reasons that Asians can't get into other white spaces, same reasons, doesn't matter if they are gay or lesbian or ...'.
- Culturally different experiences, which create too wide a gulf to be crossed in the same network: 'we can't talk about our journey, because they [the white LGBT groups] ain't got a f\*\*king clue what we're talking about ... the cultural differences ... religious stuff, you know ... it's too different ... and this predominantly white

group couldn't give them [that emotional support] ... they needed to be in a setting with young Asian lesbians to talk about ... an arranged marriage or this or that'.

- Culturally determined needs for very different levels of visibility: our community research suggests that South Asians will not use visible gay and lesbian venues and services because they are much less likely to be 'out' than white gays and lesbians. Similarly, the black and minority ethnic (BME) mental health network Sharing Voices Bradford decided not to put up a sign on its premises, to make it easier for people to come in and out without fear of stigma.

More positively, the attitude of members towards both Sharing Voices and the ABC group discussed in the next chapter demonstrates how successful a culturally sensitive identity group can be in meeting the needs of its members, and in providing a space for them to share experiences.

## Learning from good practice: including the excluded

Respondents discussed a number of initiatives from statutory organisations that clearly try to address some of the issues raised by this research.

Two examples given focus on encouraging change and learning within organisations:

- Work around the Delivering Race Equality framework: 'there's a clear understanding that to create reform and change within mental health services ... there needs to be change on the outside as well, and that means community involvement and community engagement has to be central to that process of change'. This work suggests that if you understand improved service delivery to be about addressing fundamental inequalities you are likely to have very different approaches and outcomes, which are more likely to be beneficial to communities, than if you don't explicitly acknowledge these problems.
- The Communities of Interest Working Group is piloting a process with the Neighbourhood Support Service to support five disabled people in accessing neighbourhood forums. This is being seen very directly as 'a learning process', to understand the barriers, and should lead to changes which will help more disabled people be involved in the long run.

The following examples of more inclusive processes, which are seen to help statutory organisations reach a wider range of people, were given:

- The Neighbourhood Action Planning process put a lot of effort into recruitment, using appropriate network organisations to involve particular communities: ‘showing people what planning actually was, encouraging [involvement] and offering training and skills around a range of participatory methodologies’.
- Using informal routes for information, building relationships with communities at a grass roots level, for example in community centres, before inviting people to join more formal processes. As a result, representation of different communities in the police’s community-based tension monitoring is seen to be relatively good.
- The Equalities Forum, while not suggesting they have achieved their goals, works to move away from ‘self-appointed leaders’, through community development work with identity-based hubs (such as the Disabled Network). The purpose of this is to help representatives work with – and be supported by – the community they represent. They are also developing a mentoring scheme, so that experienced reps are able to hand over to different people without a loss of continuity.

Finally, two examples from the health service were offered as evidence for the importance of supporting spaces for communities to come together outside statutory services:

- ‘The survivor user movement ... has had a huge impact on mental health services, from taking those brave steps – because they demanded it’.
- Sharing Voices Bradford is a project ‘at arms length [from the NHS] which ... is embedded within communities and can work with them but also has a relationship with [the NHS] ... and acts as broker and bridge builder’. This works because people see it as ‘a place they can come, have a voice, and influence, and create change ... because people aren’t ready to come to [internal NHS] created spaces yet’.

## **Positive suggestions for change**

While we are not suggesting that there are easy answers to these difficult questions (‘it is important not to assume that excluded communities will want to talk just because they haven’t been listened to; you have to do it on their terms, and in the way that is very sensitive to their needs and experiences – it is difficult’), the findings point in several helpful directions. These were mainly about attitude and approach, but of course ‘resources usually help!’ – pointed out not as a reason that people are

excluded, but in recognition of the limits to what is possible for a given number of workers to achieve.

### ***Thinking differently about how to reach people***

Reaching excluded communities, and beyond 'gatekeepers', means thinking of different ways to contact a wider range of people. Respondents made the following suggestions:

- Reaching beyond people who have already joined a group: 'social services have access into many disadvantaged Asian households ... it could be meaningful engagement, but it is an opportunity that is not being used'.
- Working more closely with workers from communities where access is limited (for example, women who have been victims of domestic violence), to ensure that those voices are heard, asking those workers to be a channel for people's views.
- Learning from the assets of communities, the strength of communication that already exists, and that statutory organisations cannot hope to match; through engaging with community organisations, finding ways of tapping into these networks (one South Asian organisation was reported as having got 5,000 people to an event despite sending out adverts only ten days beforehand).

### ***Thinking differently about processes***

This includes thinking differently about who you are trying to reach, what makes a good representative – and who they represent. For example, one respondent pointed out that 'the right person isn't always the person who talks English ... the household where people come in the evening, that woman might be more representative than her daughter who has got a degree'. It also might mean finding a way to challenge power dynamics, rather than working round them: for example, 'a centre that is run by women for women, but not exclusively used by them – what they wanted was a centre, the reverse of the other community centres which are invariably run by men for men, which women can use occasionally'.

Other respondents suggested that it means thinking about what works for communities first, and organisations second. An example would be working together to support one place for communities to take their concerns, instead of several different forums, by extending the Equalities Forum to all services, health and police as well as the council.

***Supporting community development***

The main positive suggestion, however, that would enable minority and potentially vulnerable communities to get involved in decisions that affect them was not directly about spaces and forums created by statutory organisations. The main message, which came repeatedly from different respondents, was that these organisations need to work with and support new and existing community organisations which can work within communities to strengthen their confidence and capacity to participate.

Participation is not about having three or five people from BME communities being involved in different forums ... it's about strengthening structures within the community, outside of these institutions ... building the capacity of those that otherwise wouldn't have been involved ... or we in the statutory services will then pick and choose.

It is clearly perceived to be insufficient for statutory organisations to offer spaces for participation, unless they also work with communities to enable them to access the spaces: it is 'currently too much of a jump from being a member of a group to going to the formal spaces'; unless you 'build the capacity of those community organisations ... you have a participation which is no participation, just sitting at the table'. Indeed, it was felt that without this, statutory organisations may be putting people who 'haven't had that history, that preparation' in a difficult position: 'we have a responsibility to create a space before formal meetings, formal spaces, to go through the agenda, talk it through with people, encourage them to develop a perspective, or thoughts or questions, which can then be taken to the meeting'.

Many respondents recognised that the voluntary and community sector has a great deal to bring to this process. There was also a sense that statutory organisations are not the right people to challenge community dynamics, but that they do have a role to play in enabling communities to organise themselves, strengthening their voice and encouraging them to challenge wider society where it's necessary. It is clearly felt that this must not be an abdication of responsibility, but needs to be a true partnership between the communities and statutory organisations.

There *[need to be]* champions on the inside and on the outside, that can work together ... because I don't think it can be just done by somebody on the inside, and it certainly can't be done just by people on the outside.

## 4 Key findings from the participatory community research

The information and all quotes in this chapter are drawn from the interviews and research diaries of our four community researchers and also interviews with the community researchers by their academic mentors. As with the previous chapter, the community researchers' respondents raised many issues which are important reflections on participation, regardless of the particular community you might belong to. In this chapter, we are specifically focusing on the additional or distinct issues which face minority identity groups within the South Asian community in Bradford. However, the following section mentions in brief some of the wider problems of participation raised by respondents.

### General barriers to participation

For many of those interviewed by our community researchers, the desire to work for change in their community was apparent ('if we can make some impact on ... [our] close contacts then we can change something bigger, because they will know 15 other people and they will know 15 other people and that way we can change the world'). However, one respondent suggested that many people, whether South Asian or white, do not see themselves as activists: they have not had to mobilise to struggle for their needs – indeed they have been expected not to. This is a barrier to participation which 'top-down' government participatory spaces do not address: 'the state has been the provider. And now the state wants everyone overnight to become very participatory – that's not going to happen ... so they think "nothing happens, why should we go", and the positive becomes a negative because you're putting someone off by the system, because the government agenda has changed but the practices of participation are still the same'.

Though this deeper issue is acknowledged, most comments were around the perceived inaccessibility or inappropriate nature of formal participatory spaces. The issues included dietary requirements, recognising that people are giving their time for free (for example, through offering food), childcare, time constraints, the length and formality of meetings, transport difficulties, and poor communication from statutory bodies, including a lack of information and feedback. Respondents suggested that there was a need for statutory bodies to go out into the communities, to raise their profile and to improve participation by demonstrating their accessibility and willingness to listen. The issue of language (information in a variety of languages and

the need for interpreters) was also brought up frequently, accompanied by a level of frustration that this is still a problem: 'why are we even having these debates now? This should be in place; this should be already in existence.' There was also evidence of a need for statutory services to deal with prejudice and power dynamics within participatory spaces, discussed by a respondent who stopped attending meetings because of the racism he encountered there.

In addition to the practicalities, doubts were raised about the commitment of statutory services to involve BME communities; it was felt that although they made some effort to involve communities, these could easily be seen as tokenistic: 'the only time [BME communities] get involved is when people want to do consultation events and tokenistic gestures, and I think it's about time we moved away from that and the community played more of an active role in the design and delivery of services'.

This attitude was explored in depth by one of our community researchers through his experiences of the Court Users' Committee (CUC). He shows how participation can be a frustrating experience, not just for South Asians, but for anyone who is trying to voice real concerns and influence change:

I went to a few of these meetings and we had a very nice lunch one time to launch the committee – meeting all the different judges who sit on the bench in Bradford ... some influential magistrates and other bits and bats. Erm, which was very welcoming but ... what I felt in the court issue was that there was too much bureaucracy in the first instance and secondly, the court moves around the judge and I felt that you have to have the judge on the Board in order to get anything done on the Board because it's him who decides ... and that's the bottom line. But if he's thinking that he's not going to change for whatever reason then really there's not much you can do about it – that's how they put it 'this is my court' ... this physical space is mine ... it's always 'my' not 'our' ... the language they use is very personal and I find that difficult to understand if they're working with the community. Their lack of understanding about how people live on the ground is also very different to reality. Many of them that I spoke to come from Leeds – and very nice suburbs of Leeds ... that sort of shocks me ... One of them said to me 'Oh, I understand people from the inner city' ... which was very patronising. And there are things like that ... I just think they're of different nature from the rest of people.

It is clear from our findings across the board that people do not often distinguish between barriers to participation that are rooted in the participation mechanism itself and those that relate specifically to them as having a particular experience or

identity. While this report focuses on these specific barriers, it is of course always worth remembering that addressing the more general problems of confidence in and access to participatory spaces will equally – perhaps even disproportionately – improve the situation for minority groups as well.

## **Participation, place of origin and social identities in Manningham**

### ***Manningham: who participates?***

Our Manningham community researcher is both a Manningham resident and community activist. He is a third-generation citizen whose family originates from urban Pakistan. Despite his youth (24 years old), he already has a great deal of experience as a participant in formal spaces created by public bodies and in organisations created from within the communities of Manningham. He was a ‘key informant’ for the research in both capacities.

He is also a sharp observer of his social environment and the social and cultural factors which impact on participation amongst the South Asian community of Manningham, such as migratory origin, caste and status, religious affiliation, class, gender and age. Much of the material below is drawn from his observations and experiences which he was encouraged to test through his interviews. He is an example of the difficulties which confront one young and independent-minded local resident with ideas of change within and outside his community. The research strongly suggests that there are obstacles in both spaces to young, female and minority South Asian voices.

### ***Barriers to participation: South Asian origins, social structures and identities***

The 2001 census shows that 80.4 per cent of Manningham’s population is of South Asian origin (62.1 per cent are from Pakistan, 5 per cent are from India and 8.3 per cent are from Bangladesh). Place of origin is one source of fragmentation, but this is not the end of the story. There are many differences, for instance, amongst the majority Pakistani residents of Manningham, which impact on whose voices get heard by statutory agencies. Most come from rural areas of the Mirpuri District (some 90 per cent of the 62 per cent of Pakistani heritage), but some are Pathans from the lands bordering Afghanistan and others come from the urban centres of Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore. These places of origin also tend to reflect different educational

levels, as one young woman of Mirpuri origin expressed it: ‘the most educated people are from Pakistan, which comes under Islamabad ... the people from Azad Kashmir are the ones that are from the rural villages and who have not been educated’.

Migrants from the rural areas share some social practices of mutual interdependence which derive from village life:

You cannot be independent, you have to help out. And these were the values that these people brought with them when they came ... when they came here, I hear stories of how 12 men used to live in this house and they all used to support each other. Some of them used to make lunch, go off to work and leave enough lunch for the other men coming back off work. Some of them would make lunch in the evening and leave it for the night shift for when they came back ... And in terms of general south Asian community – most commonly from rural backgrounds – there was no machinery in the 50s and 60s – even until the 80s there was no machinery – all agriculture and farming was done by hand. You cannot do agriculture and farming within your own family – you have to help others in order to receive help.

However, the same respondent thinks that this sense of mutuality is changing. This impacts on participation; people prefer to leave others to speak and act for them:

That is no longer the case in Pakistan now – or anywhere in Asia I think – because machinery has overtaken that issue. Now it’s also overtaken thinking and that’s the problem. And I’m seeing the same thing is happening here – ‘ah, you’re going – there’s no need for us to go’. And I think that is a trend but also a mind or framework where historically one would go and do all the negotiations and talk and the remainder would just listen and accept and I think that is a problem.

The rural–urban divide is also complicated by the political divisions between those who identify with the ‘old Mirpur’ District of Azad Kashmir and the broader region. The former have an allegiance to Kashmir, not to Pakistan or to India:

Some people you’d call Mirpuris, they’d say ‘Oh no, we’re not Mirpuris, we’re Kashmiris’ and I went to one house and he had a big poster on his wall that said ‘Kashmir’s two enemies ... India and Pakistan’ – a big poster on his wall ... and for a Pakistani that’s very hard to swallow, that Pakistan is an enemy of Kashmir ... they absolutely hate Pakistan, but they carry a Pakistan passport. And they use our currency and our army

gets killed because of them as well. That causes friction ... it's embedded in their kids without a doubt.

These historic conflicts from the South Asian subcontinent have been transferred to the streets of Manningham, and even to generations born in the UK. They are the source of many underlying resentments and prejudices which prevent people from coming together as one community of Manningham. Our community researcher's interviews showed that these conflicts were still transmitted to the youth of Manningham and he concluded:

It's interesting with young people – they haven't lived that, they've been told. And where they've been told they keep it to their heart. Where communities haven't told this background to their children they don't know any different. It's fine. But many of them have been told about all these problems back in Pakistan. It's embedded in young people by their communities so there's problems there ... not such with Gujarati people because they stayed in India, so they're OK. But Bangladeshis are a big problem for some people ... their culture's different, their eating habits are different ... their language is different but there's also prehistoric issues of them taking over Pakistan.

This history of division and conflict leads many from South Asian communities to look inwards. A respondent from the Gujarati community attends a mosque used by people from different parts of Gujarat. He is a member of the management committee of a community centre used by Gujaratis from Kenya. Our community researcher concluded:

The Gujarati community has a completely different structure because they are self-sufficient. All of them have self-sufficient ways of participation and have created their own structures for their own needs – they're not even aligned to the state. And that has been evident in the interviews I have done. They have their own systems.

The Pathan community, semi-nomadic tribes from the Afghan border region of Pakistan, also has a strong sense of tradition, and limits its interactions with other communities. Their traditions make it particularly difficult for the women to interact and participate:

Now the burkha in the UK society is deemed as part of Islam ... it's not part of Islam, it's what [*Pathan*] women wear. The Pakistan women you see in Bradford, they wear a scarf around their head and a shalwar-

kamiz. It is not religious – it is part of their culture. So the problem we have ... there was a woman who lived opposite who wore a burkha and she's come to our house and wears a burkha ... now automatically when she came we had to leave the room. We couldn't sit in the room because she wouldn't take her burkha off if we did. Even her kids would have to leave the room. So those are obstacles ... natural barriers that these communities have put up to themselves. They share everything else with us but the burkha business and the rest of it is ... even in the weddings – our weddings are open in the sense – OK, women and men are separate but women don't come with veils on. Their weddings are totally separate – they have a morning session for women and an afternoon session for men. Same for death – men and women are separate.

In addition to cultural differences, religious divisions within Islam can create community divisions in Manningham, impacting differently on women and men. Below our community researcher describes one road in Manningham:

We have two families of Shia background. Some of the people of the road will speak to them but not eat any food they give to anyone ... because they have blessed that food in their own way. In our Sunni tradition sometimes we give ... an offering for something which we wanted to happen and has happened through the grace of God. When this happens we do a small prayer at home and then distribute some rice to the neighbourhood. So we distribute the rice and this is not accepted by the Shia family because they don't accept that food should be ... or they don't believe in our scripture of blessing. And this is a very minor thing, but the minor becomes a major ... And despite they're part of our community, they don't use our mosques, they have their own ... the whole thing is just because they're Shia – we don't mix with them and they don't mix with us. And people say 'all these Shias are dirty – they never keep their houses clean' and those types of things are then drawn up about what they are ... so they become barriers for communities within themselves in terms of different sects ... so they're minor problems but how do the communities ... the Mirpuri communities – some of them are just ... very much financially focused, so its 'business, business, business, work, work, work'. Whether its through legal or illegal means – so people want to keep away from them because they think they're not the right issues, they're ill educated, rural, stupid ... they have money but money doesn't make you clever so why should we associate with these people?

These differences and separations have a particular impact on participation, because they relate to power structures. They do not reflect separate but equal communities – the reality is that some communities have more status and power locally than others. Our starting point is the networks of intermarrying caste groups, or *biraderi*. Caste is an important part of the social structure of most of the South Asian communities we have discussed, but because the Mirpuri population is most numerous in Manningham, it is their *biraderi* networks that dominate the area. Caste acts as a glass ceiling to participation, which sooner or later will block women, lower-caste men and independent-minded higher-caste men from bringing about change that is not sanctioned by the higher-caste ‘gatekeepers’.

Caste division severely limits social mobility and political influence. Many lower-caste Pakistanis have managed to do quite well for themselves in Manningham, in terms of income and education. They are often better educated than their higher-caste landowning and farming neighbours. However, caste status is not directly equated with wealth, but with assets, particularly land (especially land in Pakistan), and also leisure: ‘we have a neighbour who recently went to Pakistan and said he spent nearly three weeks finding a decent horse for himself and he plays polo in Pakistan. Now, here he’s a taxi driver.’ Accumulating wealth does not mean that those of lower castes can necessarily buy land, as the law in Pakistan prevents lower-caste artisans from buying land from a caste that is higher than theirs, though those from higher castes can buy as much land as they wish.

Whatever their education or income, they will still be known as the ‘cloth weaver’, the ‘breadmaker’, the ‘litter pickers’. Interviews with three teenage Mirpuri boys suggest that these social labels remain vital even to the younger generation of Manningham South Asian residents. In response to the question ‘what do you know about the class or caste that you are in?’, the conversation went:

*Boy 1:* Because we are from quite high class it doesn’t mean anything.

*Boy 2:* It means that in Pakistan we’re superior than those hair cutters, shit cleaners.

*Question:* What do you mean by superior than the rest?

*Boy 1:* It is not an issue for us because we do not come from embarrassing backgrounds.

Caste has an influence on mosque leadership and on competition to represent Manningham on the council and in parliament. Ward boundary changes have meant that political competition is dominated by the South Asians of Mirpuri origin. The power of the mosques makes a great difference to a candidate's popularity or following. While there is no religious hierarchy in Islam comparable to the church structure in Christianity, power can be accumulated through control of the mosques, and one 'pir' or Sufi guide in Manningham is reputed to control many of the mosques of Bradford. Anyone who wants to be a political candidate must seek his blessing. This may mean a stage in every mosque to promote his candidacy. In return the pir and the mosque committees will have considerable power over the elected representative. Whether true or not, the councillor or representative is expected to have influence over planning permissions, such as converting buildings into mosques. One community researcher felt that people are often more confident speaking to the imam who would then act as a broker between the mosque committee and the councillor. These relationships do not foster a sense of citizenship participation:

... if you are connected to a religious saint [*the pir*] you become religious as well if you like, automatically because you act upon what he says. Now, so what can me as a person – as a minute person who has no link there, who has no link anywhere [*do*]?

This is likely to have even more impact on the participation of women, as this quote from the mental health research makes clear. The respondent suggested that information is advertised 'in local mosques, if it's to do with men and those issues'.

The status of councillors in the UK is relatively low compared to the status accorded a political representative in Pakistan, where our community researcher claims:

If they were a councillor abroad in Pakistan they would have much more glamour. They would probably have two armed guards and a vehicle as well given to them. So when they go from here to abroad, to Pakistan for a holiday or something and they already have contacts with the consulate – the consulate of Pakistan here – because they are Pakistani they're obliged, government there is obliged ... a councillor is coming ... now that is a big thing when they come off the plane they have people putting flowers round their necks ... when they come here they're as the rest of the indigenous population – they're not treated any much better than the rest of us.

The reinforcement of status and the preservation of caste differentials make the competition to be local political candidates intense in Manningham. Our community researcher has experience of highly contentious party selection meetings which aim to ensure that lower-caste candidates do not get the ticket to stand for election. When election time comes some voters take friendship and caste rather than competence or political position into account when they make their choices. One young woman from the Bangladeshi community felt that the Asian community is wrong to vote in this way:

In the sense that they might not know the person but somebody might say 'oh well, you know I know so and so' and gives the votes here ... could be from the family or could be area or caste ... yes a lot of them do, I've heard comments ... 'he's our own, he's our caste'.

Strict rules about intermarriage amongst most South Asian religious groups also maintain the caste and status differentials. The rules are more favourable to men, as it is the male caste position that determines the family caste. A man can marry a lower-caste woman without it affecting his caste, but a woman cannot marry lower than her caste, as this will lower her family caste and bring dishonour. These rules add more barriers to social mobility, in addition to those that have already been discussed.

For all these reasons, social, cultural and religious differences amongst the South Asian communities of Manningham have fostered fragmentation, rather than the building of a Manningham 'community'. The domination of the Mirpuri community and the rigid social structures imported from the Asian subcontinent to inner-city Bradford make it hard for minority Asian communities to participate in local politics and community decision making. These factors are also a barrier to youth participation within the Mirpuri community. Our community researcher argues that in some cases the barriers to participation might be more difficult for young men than for young women:

Surprisingly things have already changed for young women – these have been adapted because imams and mosques have talked about women's roles in society and what Islam used to do in terms of women's roles, and the Prophet, and the roles of women in the Qu'ran ... and that has opened many people's minds ... but young men's roles are still very restricted – nothing new has come from them. Women in that sense are let off the hook. Right – boys from the age of 12 have to go to the mosque. Women don't. In fact they say the best place for women to pray is at home. Men have to do certain duties, women are left off ... all I'm

saying is that women have had a major shift – of new things given to them, of roles and responsibilities ... men are still stuck with what they had ... The power for women in terms of participation – of not being restricted to her neighbourhood – are now prevalent because it's been allowed that women can be allowed to drive. So major things in terms of women, but what do men have in terms of new things? So that's why I think the men feel more disheartened than the women at present. There are many other things that women have got – there doesn't need to be a woman present with them shopping. Women are allowed to shop. It's no longer the case that women should be at home before eight o'clock. Women shouldn't work – now it's acceptable. Her earnings should be shared among the family and taken importantly, seriously. So the women's role has become having power, of running the household, the whole of the mechanism – that wasn't the case years ago – men have taken, if you like, a drop in that side, and they are feeling isolated because the power doesn't allow them to get involved politically, they're suppressed on wealth ...

Barriers to participation are barriers to change in Manningham. Social structures and cultural norms do not foster community interactions and shared agendas, and elders and the mosque committees control interactions with the mainstream political sphere.

### ***Existing structures of participation***

What is the problem with the new formal participation spaces that have opened up locally to involve the South Asian population?

In the first place, they do not address the difficulties outlined above which mean that only some sectors of that population gain access to those spaces: caste, status, gender, generation are all barriers to the first step to participation, the recognition by others and by yourself that you are rightfully a participant. In the case of our community researcher, he is the exception that appears to prove the rule. A particularly articulate young man, he has been invited into spaces that are normally reserved for the elders and gatekeepers of the South Asian communities. One example discussed by the researcher is the Minorities Police Liaison Committee (MPLC).

With respect to the MPLC, it has been difficult to ensure that participation is meaningful, and that it should therefore include critical questioning:

The reason why I joined the MPLC is that there wasn't any young people on the committee and not just that I believe that there needs to be a young person so you put a young person there, but the reason was that the people of that committee weren't really there to serve the district where they came from, they were there because they thought it was a political position – but they weren't there to give, receive and then spread back that information. I find that difficult. And ... the other problem I had was that I didn't feel that I was there to support the police or not to support the police. But some people in the committee felt that some of my questions were sort of saying 'we have a bad police force' and that isn't what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that they need to change their practices. And if that's the advice they're asking, and they're asking us to be very critical, then we need to give them a critical answer and not just say 'Oh you're doing very well – just put a sign in reception in Urdu saying "welcome" and then you'll get inside'. That was the type of participation that people were participating in this committee and I wouldn't want to waste my evening telling the police to just put up a nice little sign – I think that's a waste of my time and of their resources.

But it is not easy for a young man to take a challenging position in such a context. It requires certain qualities and even courage. If such spaces are to be meaningful, the organisation supporting them, in this case the police, needs to make efforts to encourage more honest and forthright advocates:

It takes time for a new person to go there and most of those people were double – triple my age and very prominent in the community in terms of – sort of territorial people sort of type – but I think you have to also be articulate and try to come forward as a public speaker as such and sometimes I think you have to go for some training there – to look at some icons whom you can try and be like ... and you've got to bring the rest of them on your side as well and the only way you can do that is to be nice and listen to what they've got to say – don't be rude to them and when you get the opportunity make full use of that opportunity, because it's like going for an interview – if the first time that you ever go into a committee ... I decided to speak and I took my time and I spoke about the subject they were speaking about but in a very nice way and I think they understood then – this is not someone who has no understanding about anything, who doesn't know anything, who doesn't keep an eye on anything ... this is someone who knows what he's talking about ... he comes from a background who understands these things and we should take him a bit more serious.

Public bodies that seek to broaden participation could learn from this insight, that when minority voices are invited into a space where they will remain a minority, they need support, either prior training or to help them 'read' the situation in the participatory space and convince others (within their own communities *and* within the statutory organisations) that it is worth listening to them.

Our community researcher tested his experience against that of other Manningham residents who had got involved with spaces for participation which had been opened up by public bodies. He interviewed a Bangladeshi woman about the Neighbourhood Forums, a consultation space offered by the council but which are not well attended by South Asian communities. He asked her why they did not attend:

*Answer:* It's because they've got lack of confidence.

*Question:* Lack of confidence in the system or lack of confidence in themselves, or lack of confidence in the state, the way it's run?

*Answer:* Everything I'd say, a bit of everything.

*Question:* So they have a lack of confidence in everything. Do you think it's only down to a lack of confidence?

*Answer:* Erm yes, and maybe it might be down to promises that have not happened.

The research so far has told us that setting up a space for people to get involved in local decisions, or inviting new people into an existing space, is only part of a commitment to extending participation. It is necessary to help people prepare for their involvement beforehand, particularly when they are from previously excluded groups. But existing participants or public officials also need to be prepared, so that they will really listen to the new participant and not simply expect them to act in the same way as everyone else, particularly if they have had less opportunity or experience of participation, for example young or female members of the South Asian community.

Our research amongst the South Asian communities of Manningham also showed that many change agents in that community create their own spaces for participation in order to press for community needs. It is not easy to get people who are unaccustomed to participating, or who think that the state will provide or that someone else in the community will deliver for them, to come together. One young

Muslim woman from Manningham spoke about the efforts she needs to put in to persuade local Manningham South Asian women to participate in the District Women's Forum and in the local grass roots activities which she is helping to develop, the importance of inviting people in person, and her understanding that getting people involved is the beginning of the process, not the end:

... How I try to do it with the women is actually I went, I knocked on the doors myself, did the outreach work myself. With that I had to speak to them, spend about five, ten minutes with them and say to them come to this one meeting and, but once they've come to the meeting you're not just supposed to just leave them there and give them a seat, you are supposed to see it all the way through. You know maybe have somebody to support them, maybe somebody like a one to one ... you're dealing with this person, you know, you have invited them, you look after them.

*Question:* And ... how do you choose, how do you select? Did you just go to one particular neighbourhood? It seems like a massive amount of work.

*Answer:* I just went to the area around the Carlisle Business Centre, which is in Manningham, and the areas which were closest to Manningham, and I just knocked on every single door ... wherever there were people that were interested that's how I picked. From one street there is about 25 houses, I might have got maybe three, four women to come.

*Question:* OK and the ones which you knocked on, the ones which said they are going to come, did they all turn up?

*Answer:* I would say out of five, three would have turned up ... I rang them up, I kept ringing them and saying do you remember ... it's today, and if they haven't come, I ring them again, chase them up ... and if they've got a lot of reasons, I mean everyone has their personal lives as well, you know appointments etc., so they've said no. So, OK, fine, don't worry about it, we have got the same thing happening next week, come then.

The research showed that spaces created by local Manningham residents, such as St Mary's Residents Association, can differ from formal spaces that individuals from the area are invited into, such as those described above where participants are dependent on the information that they are given. For instance:

So we're at the mercy of them, but in the residents association, the residents themselves are the ones steering the organisation, so they're not at the mercy of anyone except their own peers. They all drive how far they want to drive.

An important lesson from participation created in this way is that people have to set obtainable goals, and they have to see when they have achieved something. Leadership is thus very important, but not the kind of leadership, argues our community researcher, which South Asian communities have grown accustomed to. What is needed is leadership that is not intent on status, but which tries to motivate and energise people. Our community researcher, an activist in the St Mary's Residents Association, recognises that it is the issues and not the structure that get people involved:

Not all people like meetings or structures that say 'every six weeks we have to meet' ... so the way we work in the way of meetings is when there's an important issue – something like, at present, a housing development that wants to put up some housing on the car park behind St Mary's Road ... this is a very hot debate at the moment where the residents feel we need a meeting, so they're saying 'we need to sit down and have a meeting'. Fantastic. I don't have a problem with that – let's organise one. But the last thing I want to say is ... I don't know if you've watched the Vicar of Dibley? ... And there's only three or four of them there and they're the only ones coming. I do not want to lead an association that only has four people coming to it! So they said, 'OK, we'll organise this meeting.' Everyone comes. I don't chair the meeting.

This is clearly important in supporting participation in all communities, but the lessons from our research in Manningham suggest that support for this kind of locally based initiative is particularly important in overcoming the barriers to participation for particularly excluded identity groups.

### ***Resolving the issues***

What I believe is that something which we call participation – there's something below participation. Like we've got sea water – there's something below the sea. I think we have to get to that below the sea level first before we can get on top of the shore.

'Below the sea' in South Asian Manningham is a complex social underworld, little understood by the majority white community and policy makers. The first step, therefore, is to understand better how this community operates and what the barriers are to participation and change for many Manningham residents, including the barriers to social interactions between groups that could build a cross-ethnic community spirit.

A second step is to work with people from the community who want to make changes. There are many suggestions from local people that emerged in the course of this research:

- more independent candidates for political office
- more work with local imams, so that they are more responsive to the influences of the wider world on the youth of the area
- new forms of grass roots leadership that empower the wider community, instead of concentrating power in so-called higher-caste representatives and brokers
- greater efforts to reach the 'hard to reach' through persistent encouragement aimed at engaging them in public action.

A third step is for public bodies to think differently about how they invite South Asian communities into participatory spaces, to look beyond the 'usual suspects'. And if they open up to young men and women from a wider set of backgrounds, they need not only to support the 'new participants' but also to ensure that the 'old participants' will listen to the new voices and that there is a possibility of meaningful change as a result of attendance at meetings.

## Participation and sexuality

### ***The context for participation by the lesbian, gay and bisexual South Asian community***

There are limited opportunities for the interests of the South Asian LGBT community to be expressed within Bradford, either to public bodies or more generally. The main reason for this is that consultation and participation processes tend to be aimed at the LGBT community as a whole. However, the networks and organisations that represent this wider community are predominantly white. As a result, the particular issues facing South Asian gays and lesbians are largely unseen.

The South Asian LGBT community faces additional barriers to participation, including both religious and cultural intolerance. This is expressed in the form of religious and family disapproval, and social isolation. The South Asian LGBT community is therefore subject to multiple and complex forms of oppression which include the familiar issues of structural racism faced by BME communities, homophobic and racist attitudes within the majority community, *and* the specific difficulties of homophobic attitudes reinforced by religious and cultural norms within the South Asian community. All these things have a great impact on the ability of people from the South Asian LGBT community to get involved in local consultation and decision-making processes.

In this context, organised participation by the South Asian LGBT community tends to be limited to activities with a lower level of visibility such as mutual solidarity and support. The Asian and Black Communities (ABC) LGBT group in Bradford provides a structured space for these kinds of activities and was among the first of its kind in the UK. This group is run as an informal drop-in centre during set hours and provided the data for our research on the experiences of the South Asian LGBT community. This was the group from which our community researcher was recruited.

### ***Barriers to participation: religious and cultural***

As we have seen, for Muslims within the South Asian community participation is frequently mediated through their relationship to their local mosque. This relationship is central to forms of community representation and those defined as 'community leaders' are often either religious figures or are closely identifiable with community activities that include or are centred upon the mosque. The experiences of those interviewed and of our community researchers are that religious teaching on homosexuality in local mosques is disapproving and condemning and therefore attitudes towards the mosque amongst our LGBT interviewees were characteristically and understandably ambivalent. As Muslims the majority of our respondents wished to participate in religious and social activities associated with the mosque but experienced this as difficult for a number of reasons, including the fear of being identified as gay or lesbian and the likely outcomes of this happening:

Yeah, as we've said before I think Asian gay people are taking more abuse from their own Asian community than they are from outside.

I think it must be quite difficult for people actually living there [*area of Bradford*]- I know one individual who's actually been attacked because of his sexuality so it must be quite intimidating.

The presence of homophobic attitudes within the mosque reinforces the traditionally conservative attitudes towards sexuality of the majority Mirpuri Pakistani community, the largest single ethnic group amongst the South Asian communities of Bradford. This is in part compounded by the *biraderi* system of close family ties and extended family networks within the Mirpuri community, as explored by our community researcher in Manningham. In a small city like Bradford this was experienced by some of our respondents as a form of surveillance, leading to an enforced self-discipline that was frequently felt to be oppressive. It was also identified as a barrier to participation in spaces associated with the wider LGBT community, such as networks and pubs:

Living in Bradford's hard because it's an Asian area now. All the relatives live close and everything and if I go to town and am seen with another guy, they all say 'Oh we saw you with another English guy' or whatever. If I'm in the pub and go outside they say 'Oh you've been in the pub'.

'cos it's all Asian community, and being gay – bi, it's hard. If I go out, I get seen, people talk about you and call you all sorts of stuff, even might attack you. It is hard and living two lives is very hard.

Given the dense social relations characterised by the *biraderi* system and the religious and cultural disapproval of homosexuality, there are very clear negative implications of living openly as a gay or lesbian person. This leads to the South Asian LGBT community taking a low profile both within their communities and within the city as a whole. Some people have moved away from Bradford to live elsewhere while others socialise outside the city. Fear of being 'outed' also accounts for our interviewees' reluctance to get involved in activities they might otherwise be drawn to:

I can see me doing all this stuff in my community and being called a poof and everything. You don't want to be called that, do you?

In the future I'll be doing some work with a local organisation, you know trying to take some part in the local community and more in the gay society and organisations and stuff. Maybe teach people, *not in Bradford*, maybe some kind of organisation teaching youngsters how to be gay and to teach people about homosexuality.

This clearly underlines the importance of public bodies recognising that there is no neat, clean division between neighbourhood processes and community of interest work, as discussed in the previous chapter.

It is a particular concern that lesbian or bisexual women are reluctant to attend even the ABC LGBT group, which is a predominantly male space, for fear of the consequences, including social isolation and the possibility of violence, of being publicly outed.

### ***Existing structures for participation***

The ABC LGBT group in Bradford provides a drop-in centre, social space and advice service that is highly valued amongst the LGBT community in Bradford and elsewhere. Participants in the group come from Leeds, Sheffield, Huddersfield and Manchester. The group is supported and funded through Yorkshire Mesmac (a men's sexual health project) that has service-level user agreements with a number of PCTs and local authorities in Yorkshire. However, as resources are restricted, both the drop-in sessions and advice line are limited to one afternoon per week. The ABC group is an informal space but one that enables the South Asian LGBT community to raise and explore issues that are relevant to them; it is also a place where minority identities can be affirmed and supported.

I feel absolutely great when I come to this group and we need more groups like this to make more people feel welcome no matter what you are or who you are.

... you actually get quite a bit of information there ... especially relating to the Islamic perception of sexuality. So it's quite a useful and informative place.

I would advise those people who are like me who are out there and are scared to come forward, then to just join a group like this, and come forward and express their feelings, it might help them a lot. That's what I suggest to other people out there.

Outside this group, one individual did talk about a very encouraging experience of personal support from within the council:

Well if I ever become famous one day I will represent Bradford every step of the way ... a couple of months back I had a meeting with the council. They actually helped me have a discussion about my career and what my career prospects are and they helped and supported me with what I am and I supported them and I'll represent Bradford in that kind of way. So actually everywhere I go I will represent Bradford in that way.

However, this individual support was not replicated in the kind of formal participatory spaces where issues affecting the community as a whole could be addressed.

Because of the religious and cultural barriers discussed above, the participation of the LGBT community in formal participatory initiatives is very much limited to individual contributions, where that person's sexuality is not known or at issue. As a result this kind of participation does not lead to specific consideration of the challenges facing the South Asian LGBT community, or of the kinds of services that might overcome or address the various disadvantages or forms of oppression they might have experienced.

The choice to participate in this way, without identifying your sexuality or raising any issues to do with it, is also influenced by the perception, on the part of some of our respondents, that public services and institutions are broadly indifferent to the position of their community. This was sometimes expressed as a general frustration:

I don't know ... you get all the buildings getting funded for other groups ... drunken drivers, all that stuff, they get a lot of funding but gays don't get funding a lot.

This generalised sense of institutional indifference is particularly acute and problematic with regard to the perception and experience of policing, given the LGBT community's increased risk of being the victim of a hate crime.

I don't think police help any gay people. I think they just laugh at us ... one of my friends got attacked a couple of months ago and he called the police and the police came, just a woman and a guy, and they started sort of giggling. They took his statement and goes we will see what we have and we never heard anything since then. I think they must have torn the statement in half.

I reported it so many times that I'm being harassed, and they've got me on record, and you know I've got loads of crime numbers but the police don't do anything about it ... but I could take it further with my MP as well.

This lack of confidence in the police is particularly concerning given the extent of anxiety and fear of homophobic violence that was also expressed by those interviewed.

### ***Resolving the issues***

The South Asian LGBT community in Bradford suffers multiple and complex forms of oppression. It must cope with racist and homophobic attitudes in society in general and specific religious and cultural prejudices from within the South Asian community in particular. It is effectively underground and as such it cannot meaningfully participate in formal mechanisms and processes of decision making as a 'community' despite it having specific issues to articulate and advance. These are not barriers that can be overcome quickly; however, opportunities for participation could be improved by the local authority and other service providers (health, education, social services, police) taking the following steps:

- Provide support for existing South Asian LGBT initiatives, in particular the ABC group.
- Avoid subsuming the specific experiences and interests of the South Asian LGBT community to those of the broader LGBT community. While there are many similarities, the South Asian community has specific and particular needs.
- Do not assume that a low profile or lack of visibility in public spaces means there are no issues to address, or no community to speak to. Identify those from the South Asian LGBT community who are willing to participate and consult closely with them.

### **Participation amongst South Asian people with experience of mental health problems**

#### ***The context***

The research was carried out by a community researcher from Sharing Voices Bradford (SVB), which is funded by the Bradford City Teaching Primary Care Trust (tPCT). SVB is a community development project that works with people from within Bradford's BME communities who have experienced mental health problems. It works to challenge the social exclusion and inequalities experienced by those members of the community. The project, which is a charity, stresses the importance of spirituality, creativity, peer support, self-help and employment in helping people through crises. It also works locally and nationally with service providers and other non-statutory groups and organisations to improve mental health services for people from black and minority ethnic communities. It is particularly keen to explore how they might make their voices heard and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

However, it must be remembered that mental health problems affect people at different points in their lives and to differing extents. It is neither a static group of people, nor is it necessarily felt as a shared identity. The needs of mental health users and their desire to participate is of course affected by other social divisions such as age, class, ethnicity, sexuality and gender.

### ***Barriers to participation***

Interviewees in this area of the research discussed many barriers to participation that face the community as a whole, some of which have been mentioned at the start of this chapter. Many of these relate to women in particular, reinforcing the point that mental health is not necessarily a category in which people want to think about themselves, or through which they want to organise their participation. However, there were strong suggestions for particular support to help less experienced or less confident groups participate.

In particular, group meetings with service providers and two-way dialogue were preferred to more impersonal and one-way methods such as questionnaires. However, respondents felt that for their participation to be meaningful, they were likely to need support:

These things ... need to be supported, [*participants*] need someone to talk through these issues with before they go to a meeting maybe, or to write things down. So, one-to-one support, maybe, or mentoring. You know, those kinds of issues are important as well, I think. So, if someone wants to go to a new meeting they've never been to before, for someone to ring them and say, Are you OK? What do you want to talk about? Can we help you in any way? Do you want it to be rehearsed before you go? Or do you want someone else to read the question out that you want to ask, or – so some sort of mentoring or befriending might be useful.

### ***Existing structures for participation***

In addition to the generic difficulties faced by South Asian communities, there are specific difficulties that are faced by those with mental health problems, some relating to feelings of confidence and vulnerability and others to stigma and social isolation. It is important to note that for many respondents these difficulties were best addressed through informally organised spaces, where the sharing of experiences could take place with a degree of structured support, rather than the more daunting formal spaces for participation.

Inevitably the largest proportion were those who described their involvement with SVB, the project that the community researcher had close links with, while others had been involved with a temple or other community-based organisations (mosques and the Bangladeshi Youth Organisation) which are considered important spaces for information sharing, community activation and for beginning the process of changing statutory services. This clearly fits with the recommendations for supporting community development, arising from the review of statutory organisations' work to promote and encourage participation.

For another respondent, participation in formal spaces was important in order to challenge the marginalisation of people from BME communities:

Why did I get involved? Erm, because – once again just to reiterate what I've said earlier – the importance of the community kind of thing and the fact that, you know, for so many years or for such a long time these communities have been marginalised or ... isolated and it's about time that they were getting involved in decisions that affected their lives.

For others, initiatives like Sharing Voices Bradford, as well as being a powerful way of overcoming solitude, provide a self-organised space in which people can actively participate without the barriers of stigma or unequal treatment:

I really think it's important. The reason being I don't think there's any other organisation offers what Sharing Voices does. When I first walked in here I couldn't tell the difference between the volunteers and the staff. Everyone was smiling and treated the same. There was no stigma or labels attached or anything. You could call people by their names. People had respect for each other. It wasn't about us or them. They don't tell you what to do.

Overall then, despite difficulties and barriers to participation, amongst this group there was strong support for the principles, values and practices of participation, but meaningful participation was considered to be most evident in more informal spaces.

### ***Resolving the issues***

Those within the South Asian communities experiencing mental health problems were keen to raise issues which are widely applicable to the community as a whole, not just those with mental health problems. These are issues which might easily be addressed with additional thought and consideration, such as the location and timing of meetings. They also include the need for consideration of the following:

- Childcare and language, and the use of important community places and organisations such as mosques and temples. The research showed very clearly that people believed these things – which are so frequently brought up in relation to participation – would make a real difference in helping public bodies reach beyond the ‘usual suspects’ from South Asian communities, and hear from people who are usually excluded.
- For those with mental health problems the existence of supportive spaces where levels of participation are determined by the users, and where advice and information can be easily accessed, is of great importance. The success of the participatory element of SVB is evidence of this and should be supported.
- The community development approach, embodied by the creation of such supported supportive spaces, addresses wider issues of distrust reported within the South Asian communities, which originate from previous initiatives that built expectations without engaging those communities in meaningful participation. This is particularly the case with marginalised or excluded identity groups, who are often the targets of short-term projects as a result of not being catered for by mainstream service provision:

Within the community people are very distrustful because in the past they've had so many organisations come to them and say 'oh we're here to support you and guide you and get you involved' and then basically done what they had to do in terms of research and then walked away. So the community was really angry and possibly felt a little let down.

- In order to address these issues, there is an urgent need to support genuinely participatory community development work. Within the field of mental health, the support of Bradford City Teaching PCT for SVB and the Citizenship Agenda of the Bradford District Care Trust are positive steps in that direction.

### **South Asian disabled people's participation: why participate?**

Is this research about the participation of disabled people in their communities, in voluntary groups, in formal spaces and so on, or is it about participation as disabled people to promote issues of direct importance to them?

This was the first question posed by our community researcher, who is partially blind but whose community work centres on political activism rather than his disability. In

the event, the findings themselves were very clear on this point. Disabled people do not necessarily view themselves as part of a 'community of interest'. Many want simply to maximise their opportunities to participate as much as any other citizen. They have the same frustrations about the spaces on offer as others. But they also have additional frustrations. These relate to the kind of disability they have, the severity of the impairment, and whether the facilities enable them to participate, in terms of mobility, access and communication.

### ***Barriers to participation***

Our research showed that disabled people have become as disillusioned as others about the extent to which the participatory spaces on offer will deliver meaningful change. Most of the respondents did not see themselves first and foremost as 'disabled people'. They identified themselves first as members of the Asian community, or multiple communities, or as a trade unionist or political activist. Some felt that it would be negative for them to identify themselves as disabled:

To people who say I have a disability, I would say, I'm partially sighted and I don't ... really feel, I don't see it as a separate community for the disabled at all. I think everyone should be the same and that's what I try to do ... be part of the community. And I don't include the disabled work in it because it makes you more vulnerable and people sometimes, depending on where you are, may even look down on you.

Tackling the limits imposed by disability on participation is a means, not an end, for most people, including Bradnet, the Bradford network set up to support disabled people. Nor should it be assumed that disability is the main obstacle to participation for disabled people: the same issues that deter so many people from participating, from the experience of racism to the off-putting formality of meetings, are just as relevant for disabled people.

Our community researcher concluded from his research that 'what needs to be looked at is not why a person with a disability is not participating, but more generally why people are not participating at all'. After one interview with a young man in a wheelchair, he concluded:

What I got out of the interview was that I know many people like *[the respondent]*, all of whom have no disabilities, unlike *[the respondent]*. However, what they all have in common is that they all have left school at the age of 16 without any qualifications and are not engaged nor are they

interested in having their voice heard. They are simply not interested and unfortunately will never be. So in conclusion, in my opinion, it makes no difference that *[this respondent]* has a disability, he would not be participating in any group even if he had no disability.

However, it is also evident that those disabled people interviewed who do wish to participate face obstacles that others do not. Familiar issues, such as the timing of meetings, can be exacerbated for some disabled people. One almost blind respondent was dependent on someone accompanying her:

I need someone to go with me to a meeting; if I don't have anyone to come to a meeting with me, I simply will not go ... when something needs doing I can always take the time out, for it's not a matter of time ... more an issue whether somebody's available to come with me. Like I can go with my friends, but my friends are all working now and some of them are in the final years of their studies, so I don't like to ask them, you know.

Another partially blind respondent and activist for disabled people spoke of other mobility problems which act as barriers to participation:

Transport is the biggest headache, and don't just mean public transport, actually organising transport to get people from A to B is very expensive and again, again not enough support for the people when they get from A to B. Somebody's got personal care issues, can't do lifting or manhandling or can't do this. Somebody has epilepsy or to make sure that there is someone who is trained who can be around when that service is being provided. It's definitely with simple events, like a borough consultation, got to have so much in place to make sure that things run smoothly. For instance, last Wednesday ... there was a consultation event at Odsal around a young people's partnership strategic group, and again I think people got it horribly wrong. It was at 4.30 on a Wednesday at Odsal. People were going to special schools getting home, then just being pushed into a taxi. Kids were running late. It's very practical issues like that; I think days like that should be done over the holiday, events where people aren't rushed. It was a two hour event and suddenly, people, Oh well, we won't get the people to come, the movers and shakers if it's in the holidays because of half term leave or whatever. And it's just very simple stuff like that.

There is a clear problem with public transport, even for those with less severe impairments. The same respondent talked of the problems with the Interchange in

Bradford for partially sighted people and the difficulties of getting anything done about it:

And if somebody is going to the Interchange to get a bus, then it's not very good at all, the Interchange, the upstairs bit, for those of you who know the Interchange, is wide, is big and is horrible. Everything feels the same, so you don't know if you are in the rows where the bus stops are, where the seats are, you can't follow any lines. I don't know why they changed the old Interchange, there used to be a line going down the middle and then there used to be some tiles at the end so you knew exactly where the bus stops were ... and that's been one thing we've campaigned, campaigned, and no one, and I repeat, no one has listened from First Bus or Metro. It's been a pure lip service.

Language is another barrier to participation for South Asian disabled people, particularly for elderly people, and limits the worth of consultations aimed at assessing their needs. While this is, as we have seen, an issue for many South Asian people, there is a specific issue in the use of generic interpreters, instead of people who know the specific needs of disabled people. The issue of language must be addressed in a way that attends to the particularities of people's needs, if people's voices are to be heard.

### ***Existing structures of participation***

South Asian disabled respondents had experienced many efforts by researchers to elicit their concerns and problems. They had become very cynical about these efforts as nothing seemed to change as a result. This is particularly an issue where research is not linked directly to practice:

... the Asian disabled community, yeah, has been researched and researched. Necessarily people will do the research, file their wonderful, glossy reports away and people don't see the results or what's happening with the research. But not enough happens quickly enough and that's why people don't like time after time being asked the same questions, what do you need? How do you think things can be improved? I am very, very sceptical about research and people hearing my voice unless there is genuine outcomes and unless you're quick.

This respondent felt that the situation for disabled people had deteriorated in Bradford rather than improved. He gave the example of Asian people with learning

difficulties who are leaving school and couldn't get into college and needed day care. They didn't know where they were going to be going until the last weekend in July when they had left school. Their parents experienced extreme anxiety about the need to leave their jobs in order to look after their children.

As a result of this range of issues, disabled people have begun to organise themselves so that they can get their views across and improve services. One example is BAVIP, the Bradford Association of Visually Impaired People, a voluntary campaigning group:

Originally we were, it was a group, we were sat around thinking, the reason disabled people don't really have a voice, particularly the elderly people, once they have been to college, school, work, day centres, whatever once they have finished, there isn't anywhere for them to go and their voices weren't really heard. So we thought let's set up a group, raise their concerns and then we can take them back to the movers and the shakers, as we would say.

This respondent saw the need for partnerships with social services as well as challenges to them, and disabled people's own organisations could be a vehicle for this:

I honestly believe *[that]* people out there working in statutory agencies, whatever, people of grass roots levels, have got the same goal as what we have: it's how we meet the needs of visually impaired people, disabled people – but maybe we have different ways of meeting those goals, and that's maybe where we compromise, and within statutory services, people can't make the noises, their own staff can't challenge their managers, saying we don't think this is right. Sometimes people will knock on our doors, behind closed doors, saying right, we don't think that this person is doing a fair service, we think this person could do with a bit of advocacy.

Just as our review of statutory organisations' efforts to invite participation indicates a clear need – and opportunity – for isolated workers within statutory services to work with voluntary sector organisations in order to create change, so a voluntary group of disabled people such as Bradnet can knock on the doors of service providers and build partnerships. It was recognised that social services cannot do everything:

Let's work together, that their needs are met ... all we can do within that is keep banging on the doors and saying these needs aren't being met.

And you can talk to these people, people with complex health needs who can't really communicate, because communication is not just voice, but pictures, facial expressions.

Bradnet had begun as a specifically Asian disability network in the mid 1990s. It had changed its name in September 2005 to reflect a sense that they had achieved their aim of getting the South Asian disabled voice heard more, but they now needed to work with all communities and ensure real change takes place for all. It was felt that South Asian people had a better understanding of their rights now: 'we won't challenge for the sake of challenging, but we will challenge constructively and positively'.

Bradnet's journey from a community-specific organisation to a confident network able to present a wider voice in mainstream conversations is an important one, and a good example. It demonstrates that the aspiration discussed in the last chapter – that separate provision should exist, not as an end in itself, but 'in order to' help communities take up their places in mainstream debates – is realistic, and can be successful.

Bradnet is now able to bring its experience and understanding to issues for disabled people across Bradford as a whole:

*We [Bradnet] use the social model all the time, we always concentrate on what the person can do instead of can't do, so we're always saying it's society, it's environment what's disabling the person, it's not themselves disabling and instead of saying all the medical model, right so and so can't do this, so and so can't do that, we don't look at that, we always try and see how we can turn it round ...*

Funding, especially the short-term nature of funding, is a particular problem for Bradnet, which relies on a list of some 75 volunteers and a management committee of disabled people and parents of disabled people. People with learning difficulties, autism, Aspergers etc. need one-to-one support over the long term, and that requires longer-term funding.

### ***Resolving the issues***

Please, please, once you've got this report out, Bradnet will help to get to the shakers and the movers. Its really important that we knock on the doors of the movers and the shakers once this is done. What we don't do

is show it to one or two people, it's no good to show it to the likes of me because you know ... we can't influence people, we need to show it to the Primary Care Trusts, social services, the police and Education Bradford.

This last comment from one of our researcher's respondents is a plea that this piece of research does not end up as another glossy publication with no impact on the issues it raises. South Asian disabled people have gained some voice through organising themselves, and no longer see the need to focus just on that community's concerns. They have shown the value of self-organisation, and now they need public bodies and social services to build serious partnerships with the voluntary sector, so that they listen to the experiences and knowledge of disabled people and learn how to meet their needs effectively. South Asian disabled people still feel they do not reach the 'movers and shakers' who ultimately make the decisions.

The research has also shown that those South Asian disabled people who want to participate do so not as disabled people, but as citizens. Like other citizens, sometimes they get frustrated by the lack of meaningful participation; but they do not want to be prevented from participation by their disability. They still face many obstacles around mobility, access, language and support. Learning to listen to the particular needs of the severely and moderately disabled can enable them to participate and play a full role in society. But listening is only the first step; change must follow, and follow rapidly if more disillusionment with public services is to be avoided. Otherwise research projects such as this one may ultimately have a negative impact rather than a positive one.

## 5 Conclusions

Both our review of existing mechanisms for participation in Bradford and our community research process confirm that the concerns that led to this research are justified.

Some members of Bradford's South Asian communities are able to engage with statutory organisations and to contribute to neighbourhood-based consultation and planning processes. However, your identity – in terms of your background, life experiences, caste, age, religion, gender or sexuality – impacts on your ability to do so. Participation amongst the minority Bradford South Asian community is dominated by a minority within the majority sector of that community. While limited participation and lack of representativity of participants are problems which affect participation amongst all communities in Bradford, this report aimed to highlight the particular problems of minorities within minorities within the South Asian community, and which lie 'beneath the surface', i.e. are difficult to see and understand, especially to those who are not members of that community.

There is a growing commitment to the need to hear from communities of interest – groups which may not be geographically a community, but which have something in common based on identity or experience – such as the LGBT community or disabled people. While this is clearly critical, and very welcome, statutory organisations do not yet give sufficient attention to the diversity within or representativeness of those communities of interest. Many are, for various reasons, predominantly white. Given the size and diversity of the South Asian community in Bradford, it is essential that this is recognised.

This situation impacts on those who are most vulnerable. Those who are least likely to be able to contribute their views are also most likely to have needs which differ from those of the majority population, and therefore most need statutory organisations to hear and address their particular needs.

A greater understanding of these communities, their needs, views and aspirations, and sensitivity to the impact of engaging with statutory organisations, would help statutory organisations build more genuinely inclusive participatory processes.

Beyond these specific issues relating to minority identity groups, there are many issues to do with the accessibility of participatory processes generally, which impact equally, if not disproportionately, on minority communities. In particular, greater clarity about what is expected in terms of representation – i.e. whether participants are

expected to speak for themselves or a wider group – and support for the process of representing the views of others would be particularly helpful if a greater variety of views are going to be heard.

There are a significant number of key individuals within statutory organisations who are dedicated to creating opportunities for people to contribute their views, and who work hard to understand the needs and dynamics of the communities they serve. However, they are clearly constrained by the wider structures of their organisations, as well as a lack of organisational leadership and resources to build genuinely accessible participation. This appears to be compounded by a risk-averse culture that shies away from addressing hard questions about the tensions within and across communities that prevent some people or groups from contributing openly and easily to local planning and consultation.

There are strong supportive networks within communities that work to support less powerful and more vulnerable minority groups. While these are often not focused on helping to organise people's views, but on 'service provision' in the sense of meeting an unmet need within the community, they are clearly in the best position both to work in partnership with statutory organisations as a channel for people's views and to build capacity for individuals to get involved with local planning and consultation. The importance of these networks and community organisations to their members is abundantly clear. However, if statutory organisations want them to also play a role in supporting and developing participation, it is equally clear that they need to support, resource and genuinely work with them towards this goal. This is in fact the key message arising from our research – the need for statutory organisations to work sensitively and supportively, and in genuine partnership with community networks and organisations, in order to ensure that the 'minorities within minorities' have a voice and are heard.

# Notes

## Introduction

- 1 The 2001 Census showed that one in five Bradfordians reported a background other than 'White': 15 per cent Pakistani, 3 per cent Indian, 1 per cent Bangladeshi, 1 per cent African/Caribbean and 2 per cent Other. Approximately 85,000 residents are of South Asian origin.

## Chapter 2

- 1 The issues here include the way caste, gender, generation, and social and cultural divisions derived from place of origin impact on citizenship, community and participation, including the experiences of non-Mirpuri Pakistani Muslims, a minority within the South Asian community of Manningham.
- 2 Initially we recruited five community researchers; one later left the project for personal reasons.
- 3 The fifth researcher was focusing on the implications of gender and faith in terms of participation, aspects picked up by the other researchers on her leaving the project.
- 4 This difference is partly explained by the research on sexuality, as the interviewees were mostly gay men.
- 5 'Not given' may indicate that this was not explored by the researcher.

# Appendix: Interviewee data

**Table A1 Interviewee data**

Interview	Ethnicity	Religion	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Education	Employment	Place of birth	Parents' work	Area of Bradford
1	British Pakistani	Muslim	31	F	Not explored	GCSEs, NVQs	Student	Huddersfield	Self-employed	Not explored
2	British Pakistani Muslim	Muslim	33	F	Not explored	GCSEs	Receptionist	Bradford	Baker	Bradford Moor
3	Muslim British	Muslim	24	M	Not explored	Degree	Researcher	Britain	Not explored	Not explored
4	British Pakistani	Muslim	28	F	Not explored	Not explored	No info	Not explored	Not explored	Not explored
5	British Pakistani	Not explored	23	M	Not explored	GCSEs	Prince's Trust	Deleted	Not explored	Not explored
6	British Pakistani Muslim	Muslim	33	M	Not explored	Degree	Manager	Pakistan/Punjab	Not explored	Frizinghall/Shipleigh
7	Indian	Sikh	64	F	Not explored	School	Not working/retired	India/Punjab	Not explored	Not explored
8	Sikh	Sikh	67	F	Not explored	None	Retired	India	Not explored	Not explored
9	Hindu/Sikh	Hindu/Sikh	64	F	Not explored	Community centre	Retired	India	Not explored	Not explored
10	Pakistani	Muslim	Not given	F	Not explored	Not given	Carlisle Business Centre	Pakistan/Mirpur	Agriculture	Manningham
11	British Pakistani Muslim	Muslim	23	M	Not explored	Studying for degree	Council/self-employment	Bradford	Textile worker/taxi driver	Manningham
12	British Pakistani (Mirpuri)	Muslim	15	M	Not explored	Studying	Not given	Not given	Textile worker/baker/unemployed	Manningham
13	British Pakistani (Mirpuri)	Muslim	16	M	Not explored	Studying	Not given	Not given	Textile worker/baker/unemployed	Manningham
14	British Pakistani (Mirpuri)	Muslim	16	M	Not explored	Studying	Not given	Not given	Unemployed	Manningham
15	Gujarati (+ Kenya background)	Muslim	59	M	Not explored	Not explored	Textile worker/foundry worker	Not given	Agriculture	Manningham
16	Asian	Not given	25	M	Not explored	GCSEs/business foundation course	Unemployed	London	Not explored	Not explored

Table A1 Interviewee data – Continued

Interview	Ethnicity	Religion	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Education	Employment	Place of birth	Parents' work	Area of Bradford
17	Pakistani	Muslim	33	M	Not explored	GCSE/NPRA	Unemployed	Nottingham	Bus/Taxi driver	Not explored
18	Pakistani	Muslim	30s	M	Not explored	Law degree	Not given	Pakistan/ Punjab	Self employed	Not given
19	Pakistani	Muslim	Not given	M	Not explored	A levels/ IT skills	Banking/ Bradnet	Pakistan	Not explored	Not explored
20	Pakistani	Muslim	Not given	F	Not explored	University	Youth worker	Not given	Not explored	Not explored
21	Pakistani	Muslim	26	M	Gay	Vocational (Chef)	Unemployed	Bradford	Self employed	Manningham
22	British Pakistani	Muslim	29	M	Bisexual	Not given	Supermarket worker	London	Not explored	Bradford
23	Pakistani	Muslim	35	M	Bisexual	GCSEs	Textile worker/ supermarket worker	Pakistan/ Mirpur	Working class	Leeds Road
24	Pakistani	Muslim	26	M	Gay	Postgraduate	Student	Pakistan/ Milpur	Factory worker/ self employed	Not explored
25	British Indian	Sikh	31	F	Lesbian	pre-GCSE	Special constable	Huddersfield	Not explored	Huddersfield
26	Pakistani	Muslim	23	M	Homosexual	GCSEs/NVQ	Accounts/ supermarket/ dancer	Pakistan/ Karachi	Not explored	Not explored

