Community cohesion: the views of white working-class communities

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This report discusses white working-class perspectives on community cohesion and the impact of social change.

Community cohesion has been influential in shaping government policy since the 2001 disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford. During this period, few studies have assessed the contribution of white working-class communities to cohesion. This has been a serious omission. Reviewing the experiences of residents in three neighbourhoods across England, the report is timely: ten years after the disturbances, and at a time when the value of both multiculturalism and cohesion are being challenged.

The report:

- critically reviews the concept of community cohesion and its application;

- looks at the extent to which white working-class communities are a forgotten group disconnected from policy and politics;

- discusses the complexity of whiteness, class and cohesion; and

- recommends reconfiguring community cohesion as a grassroots intervention, making a case for difference and diversity.

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Context

This report presents the views of white working-class communities on community cohesion. There have been very few studies of this type. Our goal was to increase the knowledge base surrounding both white working-class communities and community cohesion by undertaking an in-depth qualitative study. Community cohesion has been an important driver of government policy since its emergence following the disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford in 2001. It evolved into a programme that cuts across policy domains and the government continues to frame community cohesion in terms of common norms, shared values and trusting different groups and institutions to act fairly. The definition of white working-class used in the study was predicated on people in social economic groups C2, D and E, identifying themselves as white, and living in neighbourhoods that were in the top 20 per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.[1] Class and ethnicity are contested terms. For example, not all working-class communities are deprived. However, the definition used in this study was discussed with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and agreed as a practical term that helped to focus the research.

The fieldwork was based on engaging with white working-class communities in three neighbourhoods: Aston (Birmingham), Somers Town (London) and Canley (Coventry). These were not meant to be representative but to offer different perspectives on community cohesion from a white working-class perspective. Aston is a majority minority inner urban area in a diverse and dynamic industrial city that has shaped discussion of race relations in the country. Somers Town is located between the three major transport hubs of Euston, St Pancras and Kings Cross. This, and the fact that London is a global city, means that the area has experienced considerable change and challenge. Canley is a majority white neighbourhood on the periphery of Coventry. In contrast to the two previous neighbourhoods, it is geographically isolated and has experienced the impact of the decline of manufacturing in the city. These are three different neighbourhoods in three different cities.

By working with local residents and stakeholders, the aims of the project were to: find out how residents understood the concept of community cohesion and to analyse the implications for policy and practice; assess how challenges, issues and opportunities overlap between people living in these neighbourhoods; consider how community cohesion could be generated by organisations and institutions; and finally to emphasise how these communities may positively contribute to the community cohesion debate.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was deployed during the project in order to give the white working-class a voice. Our research questions demanded data that had depth and richness. We believe that this could not be achieved by conventional quantitative approaches.

More than this we wanted to move away from the traditional methodological approaches and attempt new ways to generate data, such as using community study days as well as focus groups. There were three stages to the process. The first stage was *scoping*, which began by establishing links with community organisations and agencies in the three areas. Principally this was achieved by

meeting with lead officers from local authorities in Birmingham, Camden and Coventry. The project was explored and benefits of participation explained. Once this was determined, the research team set up scoping visits and commenced a first cycle of interviews in the three neighbourhoods. These interviews were about explaining the project, identifying key stakeholders and viewing the physical environment. In short, the objective was to secure engagement of the local authority and community organisations. Second was the *active* stage, which was underpinned by different types of qualitative intervention. The project team worked with community organisations to recruit a sample of residents. Three community study days were organised to allow for reflective discussion and plenary debates. This was followed with three focus groups.

The third and final stage was *reflection*. A policy workshop was organised to enable residents to hear report findings and debate the results. This was important in terms of research ethics. Too often residents are recruited, used and then forgotten. More than this, the policy workshop helped to confirm our findings. Fieldwork notes were written using common headings and were then cross-referenced. A final report was produced with themes, findings and recommendations.

Literature review

A literature review was undertaken of secondary material about white working-class communities and community cohesion. This helped to refine research questions and gave the study a context. Compared to the rich and varied literature on minority communities, analysis of white communities and ethnicity is largely absent except for rather fleeting mentions. In much of the literature, individuals belonging to white working-class communities are variously described as perpetrators of racial harassment, hostile to immigration and inflexible.

A social construction of white working-class communities is developed. Typically communities are viewed as being problematic, dysfunctional and occupying annexed council estates. Fixed attributes are ascribed rather than recognising individuals residing in different areas with composite identities. Deviance and threat posed by white working-class communities pepper most academic and policy narratives.

In contrast to the limited material on white working-class communities, community cohesion has generated a variety of responses. Initially a number of reports were published from inquiries into the serious disturbances of 2001. The reports recommended interaction between different groups and the development of common values. The community cohesion agenda was formalised into the machinery of government following the publication of independent reports. Much more recently the community cohesion agenda has moved to the issues of integration and identity. In the ten years since the disturbances there has been very little focus on white working-class communities in the community cohesion literature. The academic literature has been largely critical of the concept and policies of community cohesion associating it with a rise in intolerance and inequality.

A new framework is needed in which to listen to and discuss white working-class communities in order to balance the sometimes exaggerated attributes attached to these groups. They are seen as excluded from mainstream society in terms of norms and space because white working-class neighbourhoods, together with individuals' pattern of behaviour, are sometimes labelled as being 'problematic'. Various gaps need to be filled that demonstrate complexity in composition and make reference to power, conflict and neighbourhood loss. People who live in these neighbourhoods are diverse in terms of tenure, gender and age. There is a need to challenge this empirical gap, together with the myths and perceptions that have enveloped discussion of white working-class communities.

Research findings

White working-class residents not being heard

Three different areas came up with similar findings. The most important of these was the view that residents' concerns were not being heard by policy-makers at local or national levels. Sometimes this was to do with a lack of political representation (Aston), being ignored (Somers Town) or not being engaged (Canley). Often this was related to neighbourhood change brought about by social and economic factors but the perceived impact of immigration and new communities should not be ignored. The strength of feeling varied in intensity, but in general residents felt that they were constrained and their views ignored.

Political disconnection

Connected to the first finding was the sense of policy and political disconnect in the study areas. Concern was expressed by political representatives and officers that community cohesion was not clear. There was a sense that government was not listening to the concerns of white working-class communities and not interested in engagement. Policy was seen in the context of political correctness, which had become a pejorative term meaning beneficial treatment to anyone who was not white working-class.

A need for fairness and equity

White working-class residents did not feel they have been treated fairly by government. The sense of unfairness was most acute in terms of access and allocation of social housing. The perception was that housing organisations rewarded groups who did not appear to make positive contributions to neighbourhoods.

Complexity of whiteness

The term white and working-class is more complex than the definition used in the study. However, those residents interviewed emphasised the importance of values based on hard work, reciprocity and support. Some white groups such as new migrants and students did not automatically qualify as white and working-class.

Interpretations of community cohesion

Stakeholders were largely critical of community cohesion and most residents had not come across the term, which has been largely focused on minority communities since 2001. Community cohesion was perceived as being driven by central and local government and not connecting with the concerns of local communities that formed this study. However, residents welcomed the opportunity to discuss neighbourhood change and commonalities with minority groups living in the same neighbourhood. Diversity and difference was not viewed as totally negative.

Policy recommendations

The need to reconfigure community cohesion

After nearly ten years of community cohesion as a key policy driver, the evidence from this study shows that it has not succeeded in creating shared values or reducing intolerance. The key priority for

community cohesion policy was to ensure that grassroots issues are debated and discussed. No simplistic remedy exists for the perceived problems of white working-class communities but the answers are partly located within those neighbourhoods.

Making the case for diversity – initiate shared conversations and address policy disconnection

Government has not been effective in championing diversity and change. For the most part, policies designed to support improved relationships between different groups have not quelled concern about the impact of diversity. Residents felt that their views were not being acknowledged and that there was no space for discussions about change, immigration and access to public resources. Local conversations could be mediated and based on the principles of conflict resolution. This type of initiative provides the basis to bring people together on common interests and concerns.

The importance of informal and routine interactions

An important recommendation is recognising and valuing the informal and routine interactions that take place between different groups. Again, policy sometimes pushes us to find the dramatic project or intervention that builds community cohesion. This means emphasis is placed on creating formal programmes or places that people should come together. The findings from the project suggest routine interactions between different groups can have a significant impact. In shops, in schools and on the street, conversations begin to break down barriers and build cohesion. Informal community engagement presents challenges in terms of quantification and outputs, but residents suggested this is where most of the work in community building happens in practice.

The state as facilitator rather than driver

The next five years will be marked by dramatic reductions in public expenditure as the new government plans to cut the structural deficit. In contrast with previous governments, there will be less money to invest in neighbourhoods and address issues of community cohesion. This will be a small state in size and philosophy. Given the perception of its role and the reduced size, there is a need for government to act as a facilitator rather than a driver. This does not mean a withdrawal, but recognition that residents and community organisation will be taking on a much more important role in cohesion and community building. For example, the government and authorities could commission local conversations, support community festivals and monitor routine interactions but continue to enforce legal powers on equality.

Policy recommendations for Aston, Canley and Somers Town

This study was located in three neighbourhoods in Birmingham, Coventry and London. Hence the findings and policy recommendations necessarily apply to these local authorities and need to be considered within a wider context. The content in terms of population and history has to shape local responses.

Issues arising

Research limitations

The project was bounded by budget which restricted the study to three areas. This was a small qualitative investigation composed of interviews and experiential research with fewer than 150 people. The sample

and methodology deployed need to be considered but from the outset this was never meant to be a representative project. The data generated from this project should spur greater investment in research into white working-class communities using different methodologies including interviews and large scale surveys. Much more work has to be undertaken.

Defining the white working-class

More research is needed to deepen our understanding of whiteness and how this is played out in the lived experiences of communities. Residents had a clear and proud sense of values and (to an extent) class, but whiteness was complex and did not necessarily include minority groups such as Poles or students. Specifically how does this vary across class and different contexts?

Grassroots communication strategies

A finding and policy recommendation is to plug the gap in terms of the policy and political disconnection that many residents in this project experienced. Concern expressed about the top-down nature and interference of policy needs to be addressed by local and national government. Given the emergence of the Big Society it is apposite to consider grassroots communication strategies using routine interactions and existing community organisations. Our recommendations have emphasised grassroots rather than top-down interventions. This could be achieved by developing a new cadre of community activists. The development work could cut across different groups and support a network of individuals who will help to focus on positive commonality rather than erosive difference. The end result will be, perhaps, an even greater reliance on grassroots community development as a tool to aid communities in understanding and accepting different groups and dispelling the notion that one has to be disadvantaged to the advantage of others.

1 Introduction

The research project looked at:

- identifying how white working-class communities perceive community cohesion;

- assessing how challenges, issues and opportunities overlap between people living in different areas;

- assessing the policy implications of community views of community cohesion and the extent to which this concept needs to be reconfigured;

- evaluating the role of community based institutions in promoting community cohesion and considering the merit of developing new organisations; and

- promoting a greater understanding of how these communities may positively contribute to the community cohesion debate.

In the concluding section of this report, these research issues will be revisited together with key findings, policy recommendations and suggestions for further research. In the course of exploring these themes other relevant issues and questions came to the fore.

Policy context

There is a clear and convincing need for considering white working-class communities and community cohesion. At the outset it is important to define these key concepts. The definition of white working-class used in the study was predicated on those from social economic groups C2, D and E, identifying themselves as white, and living in neighbourhoods that were in the top 20 per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The cities selected are provincial (Coventry), large (Birmingham) and global (London) and provide different contexts for the study. It should be made clear that the study is not equating white working-class (or indeed any other group) with deprivation. There are three different definitions of community cohesion that have been put forward since the 2001 disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford. These are shown in Appendix II. The Local Government Association (LGA) definition has been widely adopted by local authorities and emphasises common norms and a sense of belonging for all communities (LGA, 2002); it was therefore used as the definition of community cohesion in this study. There is limited knowledge on white working-class communities and community cohesion in terms of policy, research and models of practical intervention. Three reasons may be put forward:

First, the research literature in recent decades has focused largely on minority communities (Sveinsson, 2009). Consequently, studies of white working-class communities and race, and more recently community cohesion, are inadequate, allowing cultural and negative stereotypes to populate the gap (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009).

Second, macro policy frameworks have been predicated largely on the needs of minority communities, as a result of organisational campaigning on racism and wider discrimination (Back *et al.*, 2002). The concept of community cohesion started a new discussion away from simply supporting

minority initiatives and considering broader strategies based on bringing different groups together. As such, it has been highly influential in shaping discussion on race, faith and intercultural contact (see Home Office, 2001). After ten years of being widely used in public policy debates, and with a few notable exceptions, studies of white working-class perspectives on community cohesion are less developed than those of minority groups. However, the Connecting Communities programme, introduced by the Labour government in 2009, was focused largely on white working-class communities and indeed on cohesion (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2009). The new Coalition government has, however, decided to scrap the programme referencing fiscal crisis and new priorities.

Third, and leading on from the first two reasons, few models of intervention with white working-class communities in relation to community cohesion have been developed. This should come as no surprise given the deficiencies in policy and research which have prevented a framework from being established. The research for this study took place before and after the 2010 general election and the formation of the Conservative-led Coalition government. The new government has less focus on community cohesion than the last Labour government, which introduced the concept in 2001. Instead, the 'Big Society' is the key concept being put forward by this government (Cameron, 2010). The project and findings remain relevant in this new policy context, which emphasises localism, community action and reduced state intervention. The research findings demonstrate that white working-class communities do not feel they have a voice, want to be empowered and want to work alongside community organisations and government to make a case for difference. This project sought to critically analyse the concept of community cohesion by considering the views of white working-class communities through the lens of three different neighbourhoods across England: Aston (Birmingham), Canley (Coventry) and Somers Town (London). Specifically it will:

- identify how white working-class communities perceive community cohesion;

- assess how challenges, issues and opportunities overlap between people living in Aston, Canley and Somers Town;

- consider the policy implications of community views of community cohesion and the extent to which this concept needs to be reconfigured; and

- promote a greater understanding of how these communities may positively contribute to community cohesion and the Big Society.

Methodology

This project was based on a qualitative methodology. A detailed account is given in Appendix III. This was needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the views of residents living in the three areas, as well as stakeholders who had responsibility for designing policy and delivering services. It has been argued that the views of white working-class communities on cohesion have been largely ignored in the academic and policy literature (Sveinsson, 2009). The challenge was to build credibility and trust to enable people to speak freely about these issues. Our research themes have been outlined above and these were the basis for a semi-structured topic guide that was deployed across the fieldwork. This led to consistency in approach, data gathering and analysis. Across these different interactions the questions remained consistent. Data was cross referenced, themed and analysed. In this way, the findings are a reliable reflection of the issues identified through this process. The methodology was subject to, and passed, a blind peer review by Coventry University. This review also considered and cleared ethical issues connected with the research. The project was supported by an external advisory group as well as an internal management group.

Nearly 100 residents were engaged in the study through three community study days, focus groups and case study interviews, and over 20 local stakeholders were interviewed across the three study areas. In addition, and as part of the initial scoping stage to identify ideas and further interviewees, more than 30 national stakeholders with an interest in white working-class communities and community cohesion were interviewed. Although the stakeholder voice on community cohesion and white working-class communities is less evident than that of local residents, it will be discussed later in the report. A policy workshop was convened at the conclusion of the project. This provided an opportunity for a sample of local residents and stakeholders to discuss the draft findings and help to refine the report (see Appendix III for details of the policy workshop). Residents welcomed the opportunity to speak about class, cohesion and their neighbourhood, and the consequences of change. This shows an appetite for grassroots discussion.

In order to protect anonymity we have labelled the quotes under a simple categorisation of area (Aston, Canley and Somers Town), type of respondent (stakeholder or resident) and gender (male or female). A breakdown of residents is shown in Appendix I. The study is not meant to be representative of white working-class neighbourhoods across the country. These were residents in three different areas in three different cities answering the same questions. This was a small sample based on a qualitative experiential methodology. However, a number of similar issues, themes and challenges emerged, some of which accord with recently published findings of research on white working-class communities (National Community Forum, 2009). In addition, new findings have emerged on the nature of whiteness and the importance of ensuring that these groups are heard and valued by policy-makers.

Summary of research neighbourhoods

The research is based on three neighbourhoods: Aston in Birmingham, Canley in Coventry and Somers Town in London. As stated above, the study neither wanted to locate 'representative white working-class neighbourhoods' nor get consistency on approaches to community cohesion. Instead, these are neighbourhoods in three different cities chosen to capture a range of circumstances.

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK with a population in 2009 of 1,028,700 (Office of National Statistics, 2010). The city has long been associated with immigration from other regions of the UK as well as from abroad and this is reflected in its cultural diversity. In 2007 66 per cent of the population described themselves as White, 21 per cent as Asian, 6.7 per cent as Black, 3.2 per cent 'Mixed Race' and 2.7 per cent Chinese (Office of National Statistics, 2010).

Coventry is less than 20 miles from Birmingham but altogether different in size and composition. In 2007 the population of the city was estimated to be 306,700 and had grown by 1.3 per cent since 2001 (Coventry City Council, 2009). This was largely the result of migration to Coventry, especially from the European Union (Coventry City Council, ibid.). In terms of population breakdown, 74.8 per cent of the city's population described themselves as White, 11.9 per cent as Asian, 3.1 per cent as Black, 2.1 per cent as 'Mixed' and 2.4 per cent as Chinese (Coventry City Council, ibid.). Coventry, is the eleventh largest city in the UK and has long been associated with motor manufacturing plants, such as Jaguar. However, the manufacturing sector fell from 18 per cent to 12 per cent of the local economy between 2003 and 2007 (Coventry City Council, ibid.).

London has been described as the 'most diverse city ever' (Benedictus and Godwin, 2005) and as having more in common with New York and Tokyo than cities in the UK, although these cities are very different in terms of ethnic composition (Sassen, 2001). London accounts for more than 15 per cent of the population of England with an estimated 7.5 million residents (Office for National Statistics, 2007). People describing themselves as White made up 69.8 per cent of the population. This included 8.7 per cent who fell into the 'White other' group (ibid.). London is highly diverse in terms of ethnicity but the main groupings were Asian at 12.8 per cent, Black 10.9 per cent, 'Mixed' 3.3 per cent, Chinese 1.4 per cent and 'Other' 1.9 per cent (ibid.)

Table 1: Key indicators for Aston, Canley and Somers Town

| | % of population of white origin*[a] | % of population of approximate social grade C2, D & E*[a] | % of white population living in social housing*[a] | % who agree with NI1 statement**[b] | Segregation | |
					Index of Dissimilarity***[c]	Isolation Ratio**[d]
Aston	29.5	73.6	55.9	72.2	0.58	3.3
Canley	93.6	55.6	24.0	78.4	0.40	2.5
Somers Town	60.2**	56.2**	66.8**	81.7	0.44	1.4

Notes: * At ward level; ** At Local Authority level; ***At city level

Sources: [a]2001 Census; [b]2009 CLG Place Survey; [c]ODPM (2006); [d]Wood *et al.* (2006)

It could be argued that the neighbourhoods reflect the character of the cities which they belong. They, too, are different. Table 1 shows key characteristics of the three areas.

Reviewing class and ethnicity, it is evident that Aston has one of the lowest figures nationally for people who described themselves as White at just 29 per cent. However, the 2008 mid-year estimates for Birmingham showed a declining white population and growing minority communities. The assumption is that the percentage of people who describe themselves as White in Aston would have fallen sharply since 2001. Canley remains overwhelmingly white at over 93 per cent which is higher than both the national and city levels. Given the isolation of Canley from the rest of Coventry, it would be reasonable to expect that the population will be stable in terms of ethnicity. Somers Town provides a median point between Aston and Canley with 60 per cent of residents describing themselves as White. This is broadly comparable to Camden and Inner London. The white population remains the largest group in the ward. Given that this study is looking at working-class perceptions of community cohesion, it is important that the Aston, Canley and Somers Town have substantial working-class populations. At the outset we suggested those working in jobs that are deemed to be C2, D and E be classified as 'working-class'. This covered skilled manual workers (C2), semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (D) and those that are on state benefit, unemployed or of the lowest grade workers (E). In this context, the study areas have higher than the 48 per cent national average of the population categorised as 'working-class' in 2001.

Moving on to review cohesion, and specifically National Indicator 1[2] (NI1, the percentage who agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together) the results show Somers Town out performing Canley and Aston. Indeed, the former two areas mentioned are above the national average, while Aston, and Birmingham, are well below. However, this cohesion indicator was tested during fieldwork. The findings showed deep levels of resentment. This illustrates an apparent disconnection between government and communities on levels of cohesion.

Levels of segregation such as the index of dissimilarity (ID) or isolation ratio (IR) are rarely measured at the ward or sub-ward level.[3] The ID may be used to measure levels of segregation between different groups. The continuum is 0 to 1, where a higher number correlates to more segregation. An ID score between 0.40 and 0.59 is deemed to be moderately high segregation and we see the three cities coming under this cluster. Using IR we see that Aston has moderately high levels of segregation, Canley medium and Somers Town low. This may lead us to expect that findings would be different in these neighbourhoods. As we will see in the findings section, there are similar views expressed in Aston, Canley and Somers Town.

Statistically we have demonstrated that Aston, Canley and Somers Town are working-class neighbourhoods. In percentage terms they have low (Aston), medium (Somers Town) and high (Canley) proportions of people who describe themselves as White. Aston is an ethnically diverse area in Birmingham that has benefited from the £55 million New Deal for Communities programme that

concludes in 2011. Here the white community is a minority but has been stable in size for over 20 years and largely located in Witton towards the north of the ward. Aston is within ten minutes of Birmingham City Centre and is well served by public transport and road links. It is also the base for Aston Villa and Villa Park, the premier league football club and the famous stadium. Aston is next to Lozells, which witnessed rioting largely focused on conflict between the British Caribbean and British Asian communities in October 2005 (Black Radley, 2007) and also Handsworth which experienced urban rioting in 1981 and 1985 (Benyon and Solomos, 1987). Many different types of community organisations work with local communities with some being supported by an active programme of support from Aston Pride New Deal for Communities (Aston Pride, 2009). These include a community festival, supporting community centres (including the Witton Community Centre) and outreach workers.

It has been stated that Canley is 'not experienced as a reassuring neighbourhood' (Nash and Christie, 2003: 13). This was in the context of perceptions of youth crime and general anti-social behaviour and in part these are still among the most important concerns expressed by residents we interviewed. The neighbourhood is located on the extreme south west of Coventry next to the University of Warwick. The housing is low density and largely built during the 1930s and 1940s of concrete and steel. Physically the area is strung out and is composed of three different types of neighbourhoods. These are locally defined as the top, middle and bottom ends, and convey descending levels of status and income. Over 90 per cent of the population in Canley describe themselves as White (2001 Census). In recent years Coventry City Council and other agencies have invested resources into regeneration initiatives in Canley and established a Regeneration Partnership. These include a master plan on housing and further initiatives on community engagement (Coventry City Council, 2009). Despite this, and the presence of community facilities such as a leisure centre, major shopping centre at Cannon Park and the aforementioned leading research university, Canley seems disconnected spatially and in terms of governance from the city. In the area there are few signs of street activity and people who are 'out and about'.

Somers Town is located in the south of the London Borough of Camden. It is bounded by Eversholt Street, Euston Road, Crowndale Road and Pancras Road. Added to this there are the three major train stations of Euston (completed in 1838), Kings Cross (1852) and St Pancras (1868) within easy reach, together with the newly constructed Eurostar terminal. Given the location and transport connections by road and rail, Somers Town has attracted cycles of migration including people fleeing the French Revolution, Irish migrants, and people from other parts of the country who worked on the trains. Recently the British Library was located in the area and the new UK Medical Research and Innovation Building will be completed by 2015. There has been a process of change and renewal. Social housing was established by St Pancras House Improvement Society and led to St Pancras Housing Association which was formed in the 1920s (Origin Housing Group, 2010). This was built to high standards, in contrast to the slum housing which preceded it. Spacious flats, courtyards, play areas and meeting rooms were incorporated into the design and these continue to characterise the neighbourhood. Moreover, Somers Town was given coherence and identity by this early redevelopment which was embedded in social housing, families and neighbourhoods. Today Somers Town remains a predominantly white working-class neighbourhood. Since the 1980s the Bangladeshi population has increased, creating the largest concentration of this community outside Tower Hamlets and Newham. Conflict between these two communities has been well documented in the media especially after the murder in 1994 of Richard Everitt, a 15-year-old white youth from Somers Town, by Bangladeshi youths (Alibai-Brown,1994). Not surprisingly, Somers Town was portrayed as a fragmented inner urban area beset with racial tension and violence. Although not sensationalist, the film *Somers Town* (2008) directed by Shane Meadows continues to perpetuate the neighbourhood in a negative light. In reality Somers Town is well served by community organisations, schools and places of worship. In response to the events of 1994, a Festival of Cultures was organised in 1997, designed to bring people in and around Somers Town together. Now

many thousands of people attend the event in Chalton Street in July each year (Camden Journal, 2010). Somers Town is a well connected neighbourhood that has been subject to substantial change as a result of migration, redevelopment and regeneration.

Three different cities, three different neighbourhoods. Given this variance the study aimed to identify key overlaps and any differences, challenges and opportunities for white working-class communities and community cohesion. This will be explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. It is important to understand the nuanced differences that could be based on context, location and history but also to focus on core and consistent findings that emerged from our research.

This report will consider literature and policy before presenting detailed findings from the study.

Findings

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, our findings have been grouped under the key areas of investigation posed at the start of the report. These are perceptions of community cohesion, overlapping challenges and issues and the positive contribution of the white working-class to debates on community cohesion. There was relatively little discussion from residents about the role of community organisations in promoting community cohesion. This comes out more strongly in the stakeholder section. The issue of community based advocacy pervades much of the findings with references to lack of representation and disconnection from government. We will return to this issue and the other key questions in the final chapter.

2 Literature and policy review

Introduction

A literature review usually serves at least two purposes. First, it considers the secondary evidence that helps to contextualise the field of study. Second, it may refine key research questions and support data gathering. In doing so, the report will contend that studies of the white working-class and its relationship to race and latterly community cohesion in the UK have paled into insignificance compared to those on minority groups. Indeed, this had been the case until very recently with renewed academic interest and policy interventions such as Connecting Communities introduced by the Labour government in 2009 (Denham, 2009). In addition to the relative paucity of work on the white working-class, it could be argued that there is an absence of economic considerations in debates on community cohesion. As we will discuss later, a focus on cultural explanations such as language, religion and behaviours may obscure key terms such as power, conflict and access to resources. It is suggested here that the concept has been shaped by cultural explanations and this has sometimes framed communities as the problem rather than solution. Initially the report will focus on literature on race and how this shapes our understanding of white working-class communities. We will then consider community cohesion policy, different academic perspectives and discuss more recent depictions of white working-class in the media and film, as well as considering the genesis of Connecting Communities. The review identifies key themes that are picked up in the findings reported in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Most importantly these challenge the normative construction of the white working-class, consolidate an understanding of the policy and political disconnection of these communities to cohesion and related debates, and emphasise concern about neighbourhood change.

Race, culture and change

The focus of this study is white working-class communities in the context of community cohesion. It should be noted that there have been studies of white working-class communities, masculinity and working-class jobs (see for example McDowell, 2003) but whiteness was not problematic. Discussion on race[4] has been shaped by studies largely focused on the experiences of minority groups (Fryer, 1984). A body of literature has been generated that goes back at least to the post-1945 immigration from the Indian sub-continent and the Caribbean. Before reviewing policy and academic approaches on white working-class communities it is important to summarise key themes on race literature.

The minority based literature may be broadly summarised with reference to three distinct phases. The first of these can be described as cultural difference and associated with a largely anthropological approach to colonial immigration in the post-1945 period of emergent minority communities in different urban spaces during the 1950s and 1960s. The leading publications on race during this phase (for example, Little, 1947; Richmond, 1954; Banton, 1955; and Patterson, 1963) suggested that cultural differences between immigrant and host communities led to conflict. However, over the course of time increased interaction between groups would reduce tensions and achieve the goal of integration. Of course, interaction easing tensions between groups is one of the key themes of community cohesion which will be discussed later in the report (Home Office, 2001). Patterson's Dark Strangers (1963) exemplifies the impact of immigration on traditionally white neighbourhoods in South London. The

terminology is grounded in the immigrant-host-praxis and identifies the problem of integration to be with Caribbean migrants rather than with any racism in wider society. 'Common sense' narratives are quickly developed where minorities are positioned as a threat to stability, norms and behaviour of a white neighbourhood (see, for example, Lawrence, 1982).

During the 1960s and 1970s the focus shifted towards understanding discrimination operating within the state and wider society (Rex and Moore, 1967; Rex and Tomlinson, 1979). Debates were anchored in addressing racial discrimination and changing policies that prevented minority communities from gaining access to services, employment and public goods such as housing. The study by Rex and Moore (1967) was the seminal publication underlying the shift. This study of racial discrimination operating within housing markets in Birmingham allowed discussion of power, conflict and exclusion to be included in the debates on race relations. Rex and Moore also provided a framework that suggested conflict could exist between different groups outside class relations: for example, in competition for public sector housing and political access. Further studies on the theme of racial discrimination in public policy include Rex and Tomlinson (1979), Smith (1989) and Henderson and Karn (1987). The narrative in each of these important studies is that the state and related institutions were responsible for growing segregation within towns and cities because of racism, especially in public sector housing policies.

Importantly there is a reification of white communities. This group are seen as pitted against minority communities in competition for jobs, housing, education and political rights. The process of racism towards minority groups is seen as privileging white working-class communities, which is further bolstered by class-based organisations such as the trade unions and the Labour Party (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979). Here the white working-class are viewed as being resistant to change, hostile to new migrants and stubbornly maintaining power and control. In contrast, minorities are generally considered passive victims of discrimination and a type of underclass which is detached from mainstream society. Of course both could be considered as false representations based on reification and collectivised behaviours.

In response to Rex and Tomlinson, an academic literature based on cultural resistance developed from the 1980s. Here minority groups were not viewed as simply passive instruments of institutions (the inference being that previous literature had conceptualised communities into this compliant model) but organised themselves to resist racism. Political activism in both class and cultural domains was developed in critique of Rex but also Marxist writers such as Miles (1982), who promoted class as the principle model of analysis and saw race as a distraction.

Key publications on cultural resistance during this period were by Sivanandan (1983) and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS, 1982). The underlying concepts are about power, discrimination and urban crisis. Cultural difference should be celebrated and encouraged not least as a form of political organisation. This literature has been influential in opening up discussion on race and developing new debates on racism, culture and social construction. However, there is once again a lack of understanding and context about whiteness or white identity. Solomos and Back (1996) recognised the shortcomings of literature on whiteness and suggested that it was important to understand how the term is constructed and applied in discourse. Perhaps surprisingly they still warn against focusing too much on white working-class communities in case it leads to the diminution of anti-racism policies and practice. Indeed, cultural resistance literature could be criticised for using normative assumptions in the same way Rex and Tomlinson were critiqued for reification of minority communities.

So far it has been demonstrated that discussion on race and racism has largely been a minority experience. Academic literature has vicariously viewed immigrants as being problematic, victims and the most radical points of political organisation in society. In contrast, analysis of white communities has been very limited. They are variously viewed as perpetrators of harassment or seen as hostile to immigration because of a combination of racism and labour protection (Miles and Phizacklea, 1984).

Embryonic literature on whiteness: culture and pathology

In this section it will be suggested that the lack of depth and breadth in the literature has helped in the construct of white working-class communities as an ethnic rather than class group. Typically, white working-class communities are viewed as being problematic, dysfunctional and living in annexed council estates (Murray, 1996). The report contests this view focusing on different types of neighbourhoods. Collectively there is a sense that these groups are hostile to change and in the vanguard of support for extremist parties. White working-class communities are viewed as having fixed attributes which has been viewed by some as an erroneous depiction (see Skeggs, 2009 for a good explanation). There is a need to view such communities as having composite and complex identities in terms of both ethnicity and class (see Garner, 2007).

An emerging literature on whiteness has started to deconstruct the term (for example Sveinsson, 2009; Rogaly and Taylor, 2009). Some start from whiteness being the normalised position within society (Garner, 2009). Difference, identity and power are measured against this norm. To put it more bluntly, everything that is not white necessarily has to be deviant (Dyer, 1988). This is consolidated by more recent research on white working-class communities (Garner, 2006).

Neighbourhood change and loss as key markers is a recurrent theme in the study of whiteness. Somewhat inevitably it becomes coupled with immigration. In this way, whiteness literature shows parallels with studies on minority communities who are viewed as agents of change (see Patterson, 1963). For example, Hoggett (1992), discussed how white communities in the East End of London lamented the impact of a growing Bangladeshi population on previous neighbourhood norms. This has also been taken up by other studies of white communities (National Community Forum, 2009). In the following quote there is a real and urgent sense of cohesive white working-class communities coming under pressure to change, and reacting in a visceral way.

> *… We're trying to stick up for ourselves. We are white, we are … this is our country, and as they are coming in they should be taught, there should be said 'alright, what can you offer, how do you feel… living among white people? Will it be, you know, a hindrance? Will you be able to get on with your neighbours if they are white?' And if not, they shouldn't be allowed to come.*
>
> National Community Forum, 2009: 28

Before discussing how white communities are socially constructed as a problem it is important to consider the role and definition of class. For the purposes of this project it is people who occupy social and economic classes C2, D and E and live in the 20 per cent most disadvantaged areas according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. In this categorisation, working-class communities compose 38 per cent of the population (Bottero, 2009). Bottero has suggested that class is complex because of subjective interpretations. On balance it is about access to resources, power and inequality as much as occupational role (Bottero, ibid.; Young and Willmott, 1957; Hanley, 2008). A criticism of this view is that it focuses on economic explanations and downplays culture and ethnicity.

Much of the discussion about white working-class communities has been focused on cultural characteristics which sometimes have led to a simplistic analysis. For example, Roberts (2001) listed working-class values as being reward for hard work, aspiration for family improvement, solidarity, security and support for the needy. He contended that these were common values which could be found in working-class neighbourhoods in different contexts and locations. This is also developed by Joyce (1995). Both emphasised mutual reciprocity and solidarity in disadvantaged communities and made the assumption that working-class equates to whiteness. There was little discussion about minority groups as part of an organised class movement echoing observations made by Rex and Tomlinson (1979). Skeggs (2009) had a rather different interpretation. Class is inevitably antagonistic because it is shaped by exploitation and there is explicit discussion of whiteness and ethnicity as a positive agency.

One of the key themes of literature is the heavy cultural and normative inculcation of white working-class communities. Much of this has shaped a negative social construction. Being white and working-class is viewed as being problematic (see Sveinsson, 2009 for wider discussion). Charles Murray popularised the term 'underclass' in his polemical but influential article in the Sunday Times (Murray, 1996). He suggested that Britain was experiencing a white working-class problem that was getting worse. This was the result of an over generous welfare state, reduction in common norms and increasing crime.

> *There are many ways to identify an underclass. I will concentrate on 3 phenomena that have turned out to be early warning signals in the U.S.: illegitimacy, violent crime, and drop out from the labour force.*[5]

(Murray, 1996: 34)

Although Murray's research has been challenged (Levitas,1998), his intervention shaped a discourse on white working-class communities that constructed imagery of council estates marked by rising levels of lone parent families, crime and unemployment. Once again we see the ascribing of collective and dysfunctional norms that are out of step with society. These perspectives quickly became incorporated into policy and practice. The establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit was deemed in part a spatial and joined up response to the challenges in some white working-class neighbourhoods (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). Peter Mandelson was explicit in his analysis of the challenges in Britain. In the quote below he seems to be suggesting (using 'we' in a rather ironic way) that white working-class communities are problematic and a barrier against progress.

> *We are people who are used to being represented as problematic. We are the long term, benefit-claiming, working-class poor, living through another period of cultural contempt. We are losers, no hopers, low life scroungers. Our culture is yob culture. The importance of welfare provisions to our lives has been denigrated and turned against us; we are welfare dependent and our problems won't be solved by giving us higher benefits. We are perverse in our failure to succeed, dragging our feet over social change, wanting the old jobs back, still having babies instead of careers, stuck in outdated class and gender moulds. We are the challenge that stands out above all others, the greatest social crisis of our times.*

Cited in Haylett, 2000: 6–9

Murray and Mandelson seem to make a direct correlation between social exclusion, problems associated with white working-class and deviant places loaded within a problematic cultural construction. Recent interventions, such as the term 'chav'[6], has helped to shape the conventional view of white working-class communities through cultural concerns (normative) rather than social inequality (objective). These communities are thus located as being outside accepted norms within society. Moreover, embedded and fixed values are ascribed to communities. Interestingly Nayak contrasted the culturally and spatially restrictive white working-class community with dynamic white middle-class as 'cosmopolitan citizens no longer rooted to archaic images of whiteness' (Nayak, 2009: 29). Similarities exist in the narratives of minority and white working-class communities. Both have been viewed as being problematic and posing challenges to social order. This is from a culturally and heavily normative perspective that considers communities as being difficult to integrate into societal norms (Patterson 1963; Murray 1996). Policy prescriptions have focused on the ethnic dimension of minority and white communities rather than class or indeed inequality. They are viewed as resistant to change and developing behaviours that are some distance from middle-class norms. The policy prescription has been Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) with the perception that they have been applied to young white youths living in poor neighbourhoods (Prior and Spalek, 2008) but it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion (Isal, 2006). In

Table 2: Literature and policy approaches to minority and white communities

Key themes in literature	Policy responses
• Cultural difference • 'Deviant' from societal norms • Spatial boundaries • Normative assumptions/collectivised behaviours	• Integration • Equality and diversity • Social exclusion • Community cohesion • Connecting communities • Area-based regeneration
Critique of literature	**Pathologies of policy and social construction**
• Muted on white working-class communities • Reification of groups • Limited discussion of diversity within communities • Limited discussion of institutions, power and representation	• SUS (black youth) • ASBO (white youth) • Prevent (Muslims) • Connecting communities (white working-class communities)

this way there are echoes to the attribution of mugging to young black people during the 1970s and how stop and search or 'SUS' was used by the police. Table 2 is a summary of how the discussion and policy prognosis of both minority and white communities has developed.

Pathology, whiteness and class

It is suggested here that the absence of a coherent academic literature on community cohesion and whiteness has created a vacuum that has been filled by stereotypes in popular culture (McRobbie, 2008). In the main these have been negative with the representation of whiteness in popular culture either as a lumpen proletariat,[7] dysfunctional, or dangerous; or a combination of all three. On occasions the white working-class have also been represented as decent, stoical and demonstrating a 'bulldog spirit'. However, programmes such as *Little Britain*[8] provided a comedic framework; *The Jeremy Kyle Show*[9] has been described as 'proletarian porn' and again emphasises a cultural gulf between norms of behaviour of white working-class and the rest of society (Nayak, 2009).

Taking this further, some theorists (Skeggs, 2009) have suggested that the white working-class has become a distinct 'other' within Britain. This is similar to minority communities, and especially the experiences of Muslim Britons. The white working-class can be viewed as different to mainstream, common and shared norms, living in problematic council estates rather than 'segregated' inner city neighbourhoods. Mockery in popular culture (such as *Little Britain*) is viewed as part of this 'othering' (Raisborough and Adams, 2008), describing the process where class distinctions become less associated with economic accounts and engrained in cultural reproduction. Inter-community contact, shared norms and spaces have become the main points of configuration as part of community cohesion. Importantly, Bourdieu (1986) stressed how culture can be used to exclude communities and encourage the formation of hierarchies of dominance in ownership of knowledge, network and access to power. The point is emphasised by Skeggs (2009) who has suggested that culture and taste can be used to differentiate and distance groups in society, especially identifying those from working-class communities:

> … to move beyond (but still with) the economic … into understanding value more generally is to understand how class is made through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realized (or not) as a property value in symbolic systems of exchange.
>
> Skeggs, 2005: 969

The cultural configuration of white working-class culture as being problematic has been prominent in the media (McRobbie, 2008). This is not simply confined to the right wing commentators such as Murray. The popular press led to the construction of a deviant group which was taken up by commentators in broadsheets and the political class. For example, an editorial in *The Independent* stated:

> *Generations are being brought up on sink estates mired in welfare dependency, drug abuse and a culture of joblessness. And the majority of children born in such wretched circumstances are simply not making it out in later life. This is not a class problem: it is an underclass problem. And it is the failure of these sections of society to get on that is responsible for the fact that social mobility is in decline.*

<div align="right">Cited in Sveinsson, 2009: 4</div>

The implicit assumption underlying the quote from *The Independent*, the intervention of leading politicians such as Peter Mandelson, or more explicitly the writing of Murray is that societal problems can be attributed to white working-class communities. Apart from cultural classification of white communities as being problematic, it should also be emphasised that the onus is on groups themselves to resolve the societal problems. This is a communitarian approach which has underpinned much government policy since 1997 and shows no sign of retreating with the election of a new government in May 2010.

In the midst of this largely negative cultural portrayal, recent documentaries have tried to develop an informed approach to the white working-class; the BBC's White Season and also films such as *This is England* and *Somers Town* attempted to discuss themes such as class, identity loss and racism in the context of political, cultural and economic change. *This is England*, in particular, symbolised tensions within working-class culture on race and immigration in the context of societal change. These communities are not projected as being collectively racist and exclusionary but instead celebrating aspects of multiculturism. The group of young people at the centre of the film are composed of both black and white members and celebrate black culture and Ska music. This is some distance from the stereotypical image of the racist groups who attack minority communities. Indeed, discussions with residents analysed in the next section show tolerance towards most new communities and also levels of cultural diversity within families themselves that is not widely appreciated. The portrayal of white working-class communities in these types of media is far more balanced than elements of the policy and media literature.

Community Cohesion: a new policy framework

Community Cohesion has been one of the most significant policy interventions since the Labour government was formed in 1997 (Home Office, 2001). The term itself emerged in public policy discussion after the 2001 disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford (Home Office, ibid). After nearly ten years, community cohesion has generated a range of responses from policy, academic and practitioner communities.

The policy domain has arguably been the most prolific in producing published documentation. This can be organised into three phases. First, before and after the 2001 disturbances, a range of interventions at a national and local level were generated. These included Ouseley (2001), Ritchie (2001) and Clarke (2001) as well as the Cantle Report (Home Office, 2001). The initial reports stemmed from inquiries into the various disturbances and established a set of common themes that have since framed much of the debate on community cohesion. The focus was on fragmented communities divided on faith and ethnic lines living in poor towns and cities. To a lesser or greater extent, the reports recommended improved interaction and contact between different groups together with the development of common values and interventions to tackle disadvantage and perceptions of unfairness (Cantle, 2005).

Disturbances pitched the police into the conflict between Asian and white communities in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford in the summer of 2001. Relative to discussion about common norms and values there is surprisingly little in the policy literature about white working-class communities even though they were protagonists in the disturbances. However, the government acknowledged that these groups felt excluded from local investment plans and wider debates on multiculturalism as the following quote from a government minister at the time shows:

We must, absolutely, continue to tackle and challenge racist behaviour and discrimination and, of course, as part of that work we have to question why it is that often black and ethnic minority people who experience poor housing have poor achievement at school and high levels of unemployment. But I do think that nothing is more dangerous than giving the impression that this is a process driven by statistics rather than a process that is for people. That all the efforts are targeted at those communities that are most statistically deprived to the exclusion of other communities, particularly the white community or those parts of the white community that suffer similar levels of deprivation … Now I am not saying this is what happens at the moment, but the perception of that being the case is not something we can ignore.

Denham, 2002

The second phase of the policy literature could be termed the formalisation of community cohesion in the machinery of government. This happened from 2002. The focus was on defining community cohesion, generating guidance to support local government and related agencies to implement strategies and assess their impact. The guidance issued by government on community cohesion emphasised the importance of common values and cross community and cross disciplinary working. It should also be noted that the early iterations of community cohesion also emphasised tackling inequalities and clear leadership to promote diversity (LGA, 2002). Moreover, a Community Cohesion Unit was established in 2002 to co-ordinate national work and implement practice where necessary. This was supported by an independent panel of practitioners who helped to develop guidance and best practice on cohesion. Its work concluded with a final report *The End of Parallel Lives* that stressed the importance of mainstreaming cohesion into local government services (Cantle, 2005). Much of this thinking was brought together in the Home Office publication *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* (2005). This continued the strong emphasis on common norms increasing interaction between different groups. Building community cohesion was one of the four key themes alongside addressing inequality, promoting inclusiveness and tackling racism and extremism. There is also continuity, in that yet again, very little attention is given to white working-class communities in these policies. In fact, there are fewer than five references to this group in the entire report. Policy-led community cohesion persists with the focus on minority communities rather than explicit discussion of white communities and the integration of both groups.

The third phase of community cohesion has concentrated on the importance of integration and identity. This commenced with the publication of the different reports into the 2001 disturbances and witnessed government ministers discussing new forms of earned citizenship and reciprocity between different groups (Home Office, 2001; Ritchie, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Ouseley, 2001). In retrospect, the political and policy discussion could be seen as emphasising the importance of minority communities contributing to British norms and values as well as active citizenship. The language and tone was very different to that before 2001.

The starting point for an active concept of citizenship must be a set of basic rights and duties. Respect for cultural difference has limits, marked out by fundamental human rights and duties. Some of these boundaries are very clear, such as in the examples of forced marriage or female circumcision … we must strive to connect people from different backgrounds, tackle segregation,

and overcome mutual hostility and ignorance. Of course, one factor in this is the ability of new migrants to speak English – otherwise they cannot get good jobs, or share in wider social debate.

Blunkett, 2002

The theme of common norms and values, together with integration, underlined the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC). In addition the CIC urged a debate on the definition of community cohesion suggesting it was too rigid a framework to make sense of local activities (CIC, 2007). It suggested that it was important for people to get on with each other and treat each other with mutual respect. For example:

... It is simply about how we all get on and secure benefits that are mutually desirable for our communities and ourselves.

CIC, 2007: 5

Again, the CIC report focused on minorities rather than the role of white working-class communities. There is discussion of poor educational performance of white working-class boys and of concerns about immigration being shared by most groups, but very little analysis is devoted to community cohesion and white communities.

Academic literature on community cohesion is concerned with the concept and its application. First, responses to the disturbances in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley in 2001, together with the negative debates on asylum and immigration, could be seen by local authorities and community organisations as counter-productive to the goals of shared identity and citizenship. In short, new and old migrants are less likely to feel any obligation to contribute to community cohesion (and thus engagement) when they are being identified as being part of the problem (Burnett, 2004). This would be disputed by proponents of community cohesion who stated that minority communities in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford had also been victims of discrimination and disadvantage (Home Office, 2001). Second, the search for common identity could also be viewed as problematic. Minority residents who have moved from traditional neighbourhoods to contiguous neighbourhoods in urban areas have to decide on a 'trade off': moving away from accessing community infrastructure but securing better quality housing, education and health services (Harrison *et al.*, 2005). In reality they are not prepared to fully trade a clear minority identity for unclear notions of citizenship within an increasingly secular society. Access to shops, places of worship and family networks may remain important to these economically mobile residents. However, it has also been argued that community cohesion is about maintaining cultural identity (Cantle, 2005). Third, the changing nature of debates on 'race' has helped to shift the imperative to integration (see above). As suggested above, the agenda was seen by some as driven by building shared norms, a common identity and stable communities, expecting diverse groups to 'buy into' British institutions, organisations and processes (Kudnani, 2002). Fourth, some academics have suggested that the demographic trend is not towards segregation but greater diversity. There is less segregation based on 'race' and faith and not more as the government would lead us to believe (Simpson, 2004). However, there are a number of different views on segregation and self-segregation. For example, Carling suggested that increasing segregation and polarisation in Bradford could lead to conflict (Carling, 2008). Finally, the community cohesion concept is nebulous and has been shaped by government to implement an increasingly restrictive and nationalistic agenda (Cheong *et al.*, 2007). Thus the Preventing Violent Extremism programme introduced after the September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington may lead to problematising Muslim communities in the UK (Worley, 2005; also Ratcliffe, 2009).

Some critics of community cohesion view it as a new model of forced assimilation, heralding a new and nationalistic policy and political agenda (for example, Cheong *et al.*, 2007: Flint and Robinson, 2008; Eatwell, 2006). Against this there is literature which appears supportive of the community cohesion approach, notably in respect of intergroup relations and contact theory (stemming from Allport, 1954).

This literature has attempted to demonstrate that prejudice and intolerance can be reduced by direct contact and interaction between different groups. The work on social capital (Putnam, 2000) demonstrates the importance of 'bridging social capital' and the impact of diversity on its development (Putnam 2007). Indeed social capital – the reciprocal relationship that people have towards each other – is seen as being one of the key theoretical approaches to community cohesion but has been subject to critique. In particular, some have suggested that:

> *The mainstream model linking social cohesion and social capital is normative and functionalist…*
> *The dominant model associates immigration with ethnic diversity, and sees this as resulting in*
> *social fractures in values and obligations in wider society. Social capital… is then posited as*
> *alleviating the resulting disruption.*

<div align="right">Cheong et al., 2007: 30</div>

Despite the criticism levelled at community cohesion there is little doubt that it has been an important driver of policy and practice since the 2001 disturbances. However, it is not clear that community cohesion has specifically spoken about white working-class people since this point. These disturbances involved people from different groups. The debate has been very one-sided on norms, behaviours and interaction, and fixed on minority communities. The focus is on these groups with white communities (at best) being mentioned on the margins. The various reports on the 2001 disturbances spoke about social inequality and injustice facing different groups in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford. For proponents of cohesion, these concepts were never separate and it should be noted that they were always together in definitions and guidance, including under the duty to promote cohesion in schools. The key focus was on culture rather than disadvantage. This emphasis deepened and largely fixed on Muslim Britons after the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington DC and the 7 July 2005 bombings of the London transport system. There was no political inclination to discuss the role of white working-class communities in delivering community cohesion when the focus was on Muslim communities. This was codified in national policy by the government legislation aimed at preventing violent extremism (CLG, 2005) and increased scrutiny of roles, responsibilities and integration of Muslim communities even by previously progressive voices (see for example Goodhart, 2004). Community Cohesion became viewed by some academics (see Flint and Robinson, 2008) as a reaction against multiculturalism and about culture, norms and interaction.

The concept of multiculturalism has many varying interpretations. Parekh (2000) suggests that society could benefit from a constructive and critical dialogue between different groups. This needs different cultural groups to be open to discussion and change, and to respect difference. The key variation is on how difference is supported and maintained in contrast to some of the interpretations of community cohesion discussed above.

While inequality and social justice was part of the Home Office Report on community cohesion (Home Office, 2001), this became less important as cultural interaction and integration were prioritised by government.

Local approaches to community cohesion: a summary

Community cohesion strategies have been developed in Birmingham, Camden and Coventry. In addition, Canley and Somers Town were successful in attracting second wave Connecting Communities funding in January 2010. It is important to set out the local framework on community cohesion and discuss implications for white working-class communities.

Coventry

Coventry has adopted the government definition of community cohesion (CLG, 2008). In the foreword to the local authority community cohesion strategy document *Our City – Our People* it is stated:

> *Everyone deserves to live in a strong community, where everyone feels welcomed, where people get along with each other, where no one feels excluded and where everyone has the chance to play a full part in local life.*
>
> Coventry Partnership, 2010: foreword

Coventry City Council has refined national indicators for community cohesion with equality measurements linked to the Local Area Agreement. On balance, the strategy appears to be robust and comes with a five-year action plan for 2010–15. The local authority states that Coventry has a high level of integration. For example, 93 per cent of people stated that people of different backgrounds got on well together (Coventry Partnership, 2010). There are no explicit strategies developed to address white working-class communities. As mentioned earlier, the local authority was successful in attracting £96,000 as part of the Connecting Communities initiative in 2010 (Hansard, 2010). However, this was shared with two other areas in Coventry, and used to support community engagement work. Canley is the focus of a regeneration scheme (Coventry City Council, 2010). A master plan was agreed in 2007 that visualised new housing, a community building, and improved transport and retail facilities. Moreover, the money raised from selling land in Canley will be reinvested in the area. Given these localised measures, together with the wider cohesion strategy, it is clear that Canley will be the subject of renewal in the medium term. This may address issues and themes raised by residents during our project, and discussed later in the report.

Birmingham

The approach to community cohesion in Birmingham has been framed by the local authority. This was published in 2006 and defines community cohesion.

> *For Birmingham real community cohesion means: Living together positively; Having a stake in society; Building links and relationships; Being proud of the City.*
>
> Birmingham City Council, 2006

The local authority document is broad and cuts across different policy domains. It speaks about addressing social inequality and structural factors which may undermine community cohesion (Birmingham City Council, 2010). Addressing these issues should be done by the local authority working with local community organisations. The Council will not micro-manage but will work with these groups to deliver change. There are no specific references to white working-class communities in the framework document but rather the importance of people of different backgrounds getting on. Birmingham received more than £230,000 from the Connecting Communities programme, which was shared between seven neighbourhoods. In contrast to Aston, these were predominantly white working-class areas with high levels of social housing located on the periphery of the city.

Aston has been the subject of Aston Pride, a New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. More than £50 million has been invested in the NDC area delivering programmes designed to address employment, educational and health challenges. The ten-year programme concluded in March 2011. Many interventions have taken place. These include the organisation of an annual community festival, designed to showcase the neighbourhood and bring people together, as well as the renewal of Aston Park as an attractive space for local residents. These and other initiatives were partly designed to build

community cohesion in Aston. There has also been a change to the governance of the NDC moving from community board elections to a process of nomination and selection. The change was implemented because the organisation wanted to encourage a wider, more representative group of people on its board. It succeeded, with women and younger people being selected and taking part in the organisation (Aston Pride, 2006). However, there are no white residents on Aston Pride. White residents in this study perceived they did not have either a voice or representation.

Camden

'Camden Together' provides the framework for the local authority approach to community cohesion. This is a five-year plan (2007–12) with a clear aim:

> *We want people in Camden to live in safe and harmonious communities, feeling connected to where they live, and knowing that they can influence what happens around them.*
>
> Camden Council, 2010: foreword

The work of Camden Together is overseen by the Local Strategic Partnership. A Social Cohesion Advisory Forum was established in 2007 to address cohesion issues (Camden Local Strategic Partnership, 2007). A number of issues were raised at the first meeting including problems with the term 'social cohesion' because it did not easily connect with the public, the challenges of widening participation in community events, and a debate on whether community centres supported or undermined social cohesion (ibid.). These are some of the issues raised in discussions with residents in Somers Town. Again there are no explicit references to white working-class communities. However, Camden did receive £80,000 from Connecting Communities to invest in four neighbourhoods including Somers Town (Hansard, 2010). This was primarily used to undertake outreach work with white working-class communities such as talking to white men in local pubs.

Camden Council commissioned a social capital survey that interviewed 1,000 residents across the borough with the aim of addressing inequality, building social capital and supporting the community strategy (OPM, 2005). A key finding focused on social cohesion and showed a strong sense of community. Moreover, the report goes on to state:

> *Camden residents continue to place a high value on living in a multi-cultural community with 9 in 10 saying that they enjoy living in a neighbourhood with people from different cultures and religions.*
>
> OPM, 2005: 6

In summary, community cohesion is important in framing discussions on difference, sustainability and addressing community development. However, local authorities treat the concept differently: Coventry developed a robust plan of action; Birmingham created a cross cutting strategy that focused on structural inequality; and Camden made linkages between community cohesion and social capital. Of course, this reflects differences in context and location. Consistent across all three local authorities is the lack of discussion and debate about the position of white working-class communities. As we have argued, this reflects trends in both national policy debates and the academic literature. Specifically, there has been a movement away from multiculturalism and supporting different groups in a locality towards a focus on common norms and shared spaces.

Connecting Communities: a focus on white working-class communities?

Compared to research on minority communities, there have been relatively few studies on how white working-class communities have engaged with race and cohesion. However, analysis of both white and minority communities has followed a similar trajectory: a strongly cultural focus and subsequent downplaying of inequality and disadvantage; prescriptive and collectivised behaviour ignoring differences of gender, age, sexuality and tenure; and blaming communities for keeping themselves apart or not participating in building common norms (see the collected essays on the white working-class in Sveinsson, 2009). Previously, we have discussed the interplay between the social construction of problematic or dangerous labels for minority and white communities. In the former this led to criminal behaviour such as mugging being invoked and addressed by 'SUS'; in the latter a predilection to disruptive behaviour has led to ASBOs (see Table 2). Both groups have been described as residing within confined and separate boundaries: poor quality private sector housing for minority communities and peripheral council estates for white working-class communities. Communities are easily identifiable because of collectivised behaviour, cultural underpinning and residence (Skeggs, 2009).

In 2009 the terms of reference on white working-class communities changed with announcement of the Connecting Communities programme (CLG, 2009). This was a £12 million government initiative targeted at more than 160 neighbourhoods across the country that were badly hit by the 2007 recession. These areas varied in size and location but shared three themes in common: (1) a decline in manufacturing that adversely impacted on white communities; (2) increased immigration, perceptions of neighbourhood change and competition for jobs; and (3) problems with crime and general anti-social behaviour. At its core Connecting Communities focused attention on the needs of white working-class communities and on preventing the rise of support for Far Right organisations such as the British National Party (BNP).[10] In this way it was hoped that cohesion and resilience would be increased.

Local authorities were tasked with developing bespoke programmes but each initiative needed to demonstrate measures to increase leadership, 'giving people a voice' and increased connectivity with local councillors and community activists, and opportunities to access jobs, training and learning. The language of Connecting Communities talked symbolically about rebuilding neighbourhoods and effective leadership to prevent the rise of extremism.

> *… none of this will work unless on the doorstep, in pubs and community centres local people know and see that someone is speaking up for them and fighting their corner. They need to know that the jobs being created are the jobs they can get, the houses being built are the homes they can live in, and the library, the school and the hospitals are being built for them, their families and their community.*
>
> Denham, 2009

In part this seemed to be an acknowledgement that government policies on race, cohesion and related areas had ignored the white working-class constituency. Some have suggested that the threat of the Far Right in these areas was exaggerated (Goodwin, 2009). Although the BNP increased its number of elected councillors in places such as Barking and Stoke, support in white working-class neighbourhoods had levelled off with real growth in contiguous semi-skilled areas (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2009). The association of the white working-class with the Far Right follows an established (and false) narrative going back to the rise of Oswald Moseley in the East End of London (Harris, 2010). Since this point, the white working-class has been labelled as hostile to race and immigration (Teddy Boys in the 1950s; Dockers in the 1960s; Skinheads in the 1970s; and the rise of the BNP since 2000). As Goodwin points out, support for the Far Right covers a gamut of issues including social disadvantage, ineffective leadership and representation result which all lead to scepticism on the role of the state (Goodwin, 2009).

Connecting Communities arrived rather belatedly after 13 years of Labour government and now seems to have disappeared or be disappearing with the new Coalition administration. During this period we have noted how white working-class communities have been socially constructed by policy and popular culture as a problematic group. There has been little analysis of differences, inequality and ideology of neighbourhoods and communities. The limited number of empirical studies of white working-class communities led to the emergence of a pathologising of behaviours which merely demonstrated how these groups deviate from societal norms.

The focus of policy and practice on norms and inter community contact emphasised culture in the discussion of race, minorities and the white working-class. The relative absence of terms such as power, conflict and disadvantage led to a cultural reductionism. The recession means that more and not less will be expected by local and national government of local communities and organisations as the state is rolled back by political will. In this context, the Big Society is expected to fill the vacuum.

Conclusion

This project comes at an apposite time to study leadership, institutions and change from a white working-class perspective. A number of key points emerge from the review of academic and policy literature. First, in comparison to studies on minority communities and race, there has been relatively little discussion on the topic. Second, white working-class communities are framed as an ethnic rather than class group which supports an exclusively cultural analysis. Third, and because of this, pathologies of white culture are developed which emphasise exclusion from mainstream society in terms of norms and space. Fourth, there is scant discussion of the complexity of white working-class communities in terms of tenure, gender, ethnicity and age or indeed focus on key concepts such as power, conflict and leadership. Fifth, a broader literature has helped to support a new and arguably more nuanced conversation about white working-class communities. In conclusion, an empirical approach is required to test out research questions on the connections between white working-class communities, community cohesion, institutions and leadership. There is a need to challenge the evidence gap, myths and collectivised pathology that these communities have had to endure for far too long. To this end, this study advances knowledge about this under researched group and suggests that residents interviewed had a positive view about white working-class values and were interested in engaging with minority communities through the medium of grassroots discussions.

3 Perceptions of community cohesion

Community cohesion has been a key driver of government policy since the 2001 disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford (see Chapter 2). Since then the concept has developed and expanded across different policy areas. The focus on shared norms, common spaces and promoting interaction between different groups remains an important part of the definition within a broader based programme. More recently the promotion of integration has been added to the term as an important consideration in cohesion approaches, along with the importance of taking into account local circumstances (for example see CIC, 2007).

Community cohesion has been influential in shaping the direction of travel for government policy since 2001 and the project wanted to understand the views of people who had experienced the impact of these policies.

In this chapter, we will consider awareness and application of community cohesion. First, the local stakeholder perspective is given. Many stakeholders viewed it as a difficult term which was nebulous and could be interpreted in different ways. Of course community cohesion policies had to be in place but stakeholders discussed the difficulties of application. Second, resident views will be analysed. Many residents had not heard of community cohesion and the minority that had thought that it was about groups getting along. Residents were concerned that local policies on race and equality of opportunity had not benefited their lives and some viewed policies negatively as political correctness. Third, and more optimistically, most residents welcomed opportunities to meet with other groups in their area as part of grassroots interaction.

The stakeholder voice

Stakeholders were interviewed during the project (see Appendix I for a breakdown of respondents). These helped to provide a context for the study. National stakeholder interviews consisted of short interviews with individuals who held a policy related to the subject area across government. Our brief was to gather information and use interviews as part of snowball sampling. National stakeholders were interviewed at the start of the project. Meetings were held with representatives from government departments, national organisations and membership based organisations. It should be noted that the purpose of these meetings were to gain support for the project, identify appropriate research and publications and snowball sample further interviewees. In the main, national stakeholders welcomed the study and pointed out that relatively little work had been conducted in white working-class communities and community cohesion. Furthermore, there was concern by some that the rise of the Far Right in electoral politics had to be countered by evidence-based research.

Local stakeholder interviews were directly related to community cohesion from a white working-class perspective. Again local stakeholders helped with negotiating access to support community study days and focus groups but they commented on key questions. The purpose here is to record the stakeholder voice and contribution to research questions in order to better understand the context of white working-class views of community cohesion.

Perspectives on community cohesion

The concept of community cohesion was understood by local stakeholders. Policies and strategies were in place and interventions to support cohesion had been put into practice. There are differences in how community cohesion is taken forward. In Camden the term used is social rather than community cohesion. A stakeholder responded that there was no clear origin for the subtle difference but he thought it was for political reasons.

> *My guess is that at the time the Cohesion team was formed we had a Lib Dem/Conservative administration in Camden and 'Community' cohesion was seen as a term more associated with Labour?*
>
> Somers Town Stakeholder, male

This reflects the fact that community cohesion was developed and implemented under a Labour government and may reflect some of the issues associated with political ownership. A social cohesion advisory group was established with the aim to:

> *promote more integrated and harmonious communities in the borough; improve access to public and community spaces and buildings to facilitate greater interaction between diverse communities; integrate new arrivals, including refugee communities, into local communities and democratic life*
>
> Camden Local Strategic Partnership, 2007

However, it should also be pointed out that Birmingham and Coventry had Conservative-led administrations during the course of this project and both use the term community cohesion. Local stakeholders accepted the term but had varying levels of concerns. Principally these were on the difficulties in applying the concept and also the content. For example, Somers Town and Canley stakeholders had a variety of responses:

> *Community cohesion is really nebulous and very difficult for anyone to engage with.*
>
> Somers Town stakeholder, male

> *Less political correctness – we have gone too far. My dad was Latvian. Community cohesion is part of that political correctness and it alienates and divides people. Even communities have issues with it – they don't want to be tarred with the same brush. That stuff about not having Christmas and having a winter festival instead – Indians I know are aghast at it.*
>
> Canley stakeholder, male

However, local stakeholders seemed to be frustrated that the term was being imposed by national government with very little flexibility in relation to local circumstances. In practice, community cohesion was manifested in different ways across the neighbourhoods. For example community cohesion was shaped by the local authority in Coventry but the focus was on equality and access to enable people to come together. Explicit is criticism of previous approaches on community cohesion that focused on particular groups rather than the broadest possible approach to engage all groups.

> *Partnership and community cohesion strategy were all rubbish and missed the point. Most of the focus is on asylum seekers and so on – it's not just about responding. An issue is about ongoing dialogue with new communities seen as wanting special routes into the council, there needs to be access across the board, everyone should have a route – not just special cases or groups.*
>
> Canley stakeholder, female

Camden stakeholders suggested that local strategies hold the key to improving community cohesion. This is partly because it may be seen as a remote concept and also that residents have to live with the challenges and experiences of different groups in Somers Town. They need to be empowered to work with community organisations and come up with grassroots approaches.

> *Communities have to lead on integration and cohesion work. The Council can't do it because it is detached. Having local people from the area doing community work gives it a head start and lends it immediate credibility. People aren't going to trust someone who turns up with a suit and a briefcase.*
>
> Somers Town stakeholder, male

These comments suggest that community cohesion can be negatively perceived as part of political correctness, inflexible and imposed by national government. Instead there is a need for more nuanced and grassroots interventions in neighbourhoods.

Role of local community organisations

The project wanted to explore the role of locally based community organisations in supporting cohesion on the ground. In particular acting as a conduit to bring people together, generate greater understanding and increase tolerance. This is emphasised by the following stakeholder in reference to the value of community organisations:

> *It is an important conduit for people to come together because of reducing prejudice.*
>
> Somers Town stakeholder, female

Community organisations were viewed by some stakeholders as important in building cohesion, supporting civic society and holding stakeholders to account. In each study area we witnessed organisations that took on this role or were supporting this role: e.g. Somers Town Community Association organising activities that cut across race, gender and class such as childcare and catering; Westwood School in Canley teaching students about respect and tolerance as part of mainstream lessons; and in Aston the work of Aston Pride NDC on community engagement and representation. Despite this work, stakeholders had a range of concerns about community organisations.

Coventry stakeholders were concerned about the level of apathy in Canley. It was reported that there were not enough community organisations to liaise with the local authority and undertake work to build community cohesion or indeed support other activities. Community development workers and councillors had attempted a range of activities to engage local communities but these at best had been partially successful. The view was that people only get organised to protest against change rather than supporting a proactive agenda.

> *They don't come together, don't come to meetings unless we planned to knock it down, a proposed name change for the club brought them all out. We shouldn't drive communities. I couldn't think of anything that would pull them in – only the usual suspects.*
>
> Canley stakeholder, male

Interestingly, this Canley stakeholder believed that residents want minimum interference and only react when the status quo is threatened. This is similar to the complaints about community cohesion which was viewed by some as a top-down model of national government interference. The stakeholder dilemma in Canley may be summarised in the following quotes:

There is a need for an overriding organisation. There are a lot of ad hoc things going on

Canley stakeholder, male

An organisation promoting Canley, would it work? No – if we ran it from here (city) we would be interfering, if we ran it from there (Canley), they wouldn't do it.

Canley stakeholder, male

There was much discussion by residents about the importance of pubs and clubs as places of community interaction. Canley has both, but these were not regarded as vibrant places. Rather they are failing institutions that amplify the problems of community engagement in the area.

In Canley there are three pubs. A family steakhouse – it's dragged itself up, challenged groups and gangs. The X improved by becoming the X. It was taken over by devout Christians that kicked out the cliques, but in doing so kicked out its bread and butter. The Social club struggles, the smoking ban didn't help. I don't know how it is going to maintain itself, after the smoking ban they scrubbed it so it was bright and cheery, six months later it is the same old four playing dominos, it's a shame. The X is run by a little group of people, quite tight – a suit and tie would clear the place, it's a pub going nowhere fast.

Canley stakeholder, male

It is important to note that these are all commercial enterprises not supported by government, although the social club has some received public funding.

In contrast, Camden has many community centres and organisations that are supported by local authority funding. They are viewed as an important part of civic engagement of different groups across the area. Some, such as Somers Town Community Association, are generic and appeal to all sections of the community. However, others are more specific and are perceived to appeal to sectional groups. Many residents in Somers Town perceived that minority groups received preferential support and funding for community organisations which the white working-class could not access, such as the Asian Women's Centre. The theme of community organisations supporting sectional interests in Somers Town has been raised by the local authority. The agenda of a social cohesion meeting posed the question on whether community centres contributed or prevented community cohesion (Camden Council, 2007). Some stakeholders were mildly critical of community organisations, believing that they had become too focused on internal debates and processes rather than building community cohesion.

How mixed are the groups in community centres? Local interest is about running organisations and decision-making structures.

Somers Town stakeholder, male

Specifically on the community organisations, and white working-class engagement in particular, Camden stakeholders pointed to Connecting Communities funding which supported work with these groups such as convening meetings of men in Somers Town and outreach work in pubs in the neighbourhood. A stakeholder did suggest that in contrast with new communities the expectation of some white working-class communities was that Camden Council would resolve problems. For example, the following quote suggests new communities may be more dynamic:

The Congolese community pull together and have an after school club.

Somers Town stakeholder, female

Aston Pride NDC had a remit to regenerate part of the area from 2001 to 2011. Much of the focus was on supporting community organisations and organising activities that could bring people together as well as deliver services. Regrettably, local stakeholders recognised that the Aston Pride boundary excluded most white residents in the area. This led to the perception, recounted by residents elsewhere in this report, that the regeneration agency only met the needs of minority groups.

In fairness to Aston Pride, it did work closely with the Flood Action Group. Most but not all of the active members were long established white residents living in the Witton area. The flooding, by a local underground river, had galvanised local residents to form an action group that lobbied the local authority for help and support with fixing damaged properties. The group developed into a going concern that accessed wider support from the local authority. For example, members worked with Aston Pride to refurbish Witton Community Centre, which was reopened in 2010 as a space for meetings and activities.

One Aston stakeholder suggested that more could be done to increase the voice of white communities in Aston. The community carnival held annually in July was a big success in bringing different groups together but there was a major issue of representation of different types of groups. Those outside funding or representation were resentful.

> *The white community is active but don't feel they are represented. You could say that the Witton Flood Action Group gave a voice to this group but also had lots of other people.*
>
> Aston stakeholder, male

Perspectives on community cohesion and community organisations are summarised in Table 3.

Challenges for community cohesion

Despite the ending of Connecting Communities and uncertainty about government spending and policy interventions, the challenges of community cohesion and neighbourhoods remain. To this end, the project wanted to gain a better understanding of white working-class perspectives on community cohesion and whether and how it happened in practice. There was a clear division in the awareness of community cohesion between stakeholders and residents, with the former able to understand core meaning and discuss how cohesion was developed in each research site. These were individuals who were partly responsible for developing and implementing policy. The majority of residents had not heard of the term 'community cohesion', but a minority had and knew its meaning.

Table 3: Local stakeholder perspectives

	Community cohesion	Community organisations
Aston	• Provides framework • Does not speak to white communities	• Active organisations • Not enough for white communities
Canley	• Provides framework • Critical of concept/application • Bespoke community cohesion needed	• Moribund organisations • Need for new organisations/hub
Somers Town	• Provides framework • Critical of concept/application • Bespoke community cohesion needed	• Too many organisations? • More cross community working

Discussion with both stakeholders and residents demonstrated a number of challenges with community cohesion as a concept, its perception and usefulness as a model of intervention. Many stakeholders found community cohesion a problematic concept. Some associated the term with a top-down approach to community development. It was nebulous in the sense that both community and cohesion can have different meanings dependent on locality, ideology and composition of communities. The following stakeholder comment is typical of the findings:

People just glaze over. It's an expression of forced mixing of communities on people from a height. Not mixing from the bottom up. It's only sociologists and council staff that use the term. It's not an experience, community cohesion; you don't hear people asking about cohesion. You hear them asking if so and so went to the village fête.

Canley stakeholder, male

In this context, community cohesion was regarded as a generic instrument imposed on local authorities, neighbourhoods and residents by national government.

Policy-makers appeared to have an understanding of the key tenets but recognise limitations in application. Its association with national government, and its cross cutting reach, leaves the concept exposed at a time of dramatic reductions in government spending.

Community Cohesions equals authority, it's a negative. It's not necessarily about race... working-class are quite a tolerant group of people, in Coventry we have Polish, Ukraine, Asian, Irish, West Indian, Somalian.

Coventry stakeholder, male

Stakeholders welcomed new and practical interventions to support community renewal. Many suggested that community cohesion happened in these neighbourhoods prior to the concept being instilled into government policy.

After a decade of policy guidance and local interventions, there is a still reluctance by national government to recognise how difference is manifested. As seen in resident debates, difference is a lived experience for many people. Difference couched in terms of immigration and competition for resources such as housing may lead to a racist discourse. Community cohesion was viewed as shutting down discussion about the composition of communities.

We close down debates about race … conflict is not always bad and difference can be good and leads to change.

Somers Town stakeholder, male

It affects them in the same way as us … It's the worst expression to use, it disenfranchises 90 per cent of the people.

Canley stakeholder, male

Community cohesion presented a conundrum to stakeholders during the project. It was perceived as being a government instrument for forcing different communities together. However, there was recognition of its influence in shaping policy although it was not seen as easy to implement. Local stakeholders gave examples of what they thought were community cohesion initiatives in the study areas. These ranged from working with schools on hate crime (Coventry), supporting new arrivals (Birmingham), promoting a city as belonging to a broad spectrum of people (Coventry) and organising street festivals (Camden). This is summed up in the following stakeholder quote in response to listing community cohesion activities:

Positive images campaign city wide. It doesn't matter where you are from and what you like, we all come from Coventry now, the feedback from BME [black and minority ethnic] groups around a sense of belonging was very positive; neighbourhood management, community engaged is what it's about, a citizen rather than a customer; far right activity, racism, DNA testing promotion, we are different to how we see ourselves; schools – spent more prevent money; targeted activity – the gentle stuff.

<div align="right">Coventry stakeholder, female</div>

Our findings demonstrated that the real issues and challenges within neighbourhoods are not so much about bringing people together on common and shared norms, but about accepting the value of difference and how this is manifested within the arena of power and conflict such as competition for social housing or support for community projects. This resonates with resident findings discussed later in the report. Here residents felt that their views were muted compared to other groups. Concerns were not being listened to by government. More than this conflict over resources, such as social housing in Somers Town and Canley, pointed to cohesion challenges. Principally that concept has become preoccupied with cultural explanations (see Chapter 2) and less about difference and conflict. This view is summarised by a stakeholder who has responsibility for delivering cohesion policy:

Groups of people have issues and they want to make themselves distinct from other groups. We are going against this by smothering over differences. Conflict is not really bad and difference is good although it is a challenge.

<div align="right">Somers Town stakeholder, male</div>

In contrast to local stakeholders most residents had not heard of community cohesion. This is not altogether surprising because it is not an outward facing concept. It could be contended that definitional challenges on community cohesion should only concern those who work directly in policy. The minority of residents across the three areas who stated that they understood the concept suggested that it was about bringing people together:

Using community centres to bring people together, varieties of cultures, positive ways of bring people together.

<div align="right">Aston resident, male</div>

Yes I have heard of it as I go to a lot of meetings, it's about networks of activities, local people working together to improve things.

<div align="right">Canley resident, female</div>

It's everyone getting together, working together, bringing down barriers to include everyone, race, culture, it all being welcome.

<div align="right">Somers Town resident, female</div>

Although most had not heard of the term they were prompted to think further about its meaning.[11] There was a consensus that community cohesion was about bringing people together. Beyond this basic assumption there was very little about norms and shared spaces. Rather the opposite was the case. Much of the discussion with residents was focused on how government policies on race and equality at local and national level had not connected with white working-class residents. These policies were proxy for political correctness. In short, this meant that some residents viewed equality of opportunity as simply supporting minority groups at the expense of the majority. Political correctness was raised on a number of occasions during the course of the project and was seen as diminishing the rights of white working-class communities.

It means that we do what they want.

<div align="right">Aston resident, male</div>

Segregating groups – like X – the Asian women's centre. Everyone should have access – they segregate themselves and whatever funding they get they kept. It's PC to throw money at them.

<div align="right">Somers Town resident, female</div>

We could be sanguine about the fact that many residents did not know about community cohesion. This was after all developed by government and largely discussed by the policy and academic communities. A more substantive point is about policy disconnection with white working-class communities. Despite attempts to build community cohesion in Aston, Canley and Somers Town, people felt disenfranchised. The perspective of white working-class communities had been excluded from debates on immigration, race and community. Moreover, government (and community cohesion was framed in this way) seemed uninterested and favoured minorities instead.

More community interaction

Residents wanted to increase interaction with different people in their neighbourhood. This was more evident in Aston and Somers Town than in Canley. The latter is overwhelmingly a white working-class neighbourhood and there are far fewer minority communities. This being the case, the focus was on creating spaces for community interaction to take place. People lamented that the Canley Carnival had not happened for many years and community development work had declined.

The carnival in Canley stopped 20 years ago, the community centre in St Margaret's closed. People are not prepared to do something for nothing. Most people now take rather than give back. It really has gone downhill.

<div align="right">Canley resident, female</div>

Community interaction is recognised as being beneficial. It seems that the basis for valuing diversity is predicated on the role of neutral spaces and institutions such as community organisations, schools and street festivals. These are embedded in the community, trusted and credible and non-political. Thus community organisations encountered during the research are valued for providing services such as advice on welfare issues, access to childcare and signposting services. Similarly schools are focused on improved educational outcomes for young people and families living in disadvantaged communities while festivals provide a space to participate freely in a range of arts and cultural activities. These are examples of community advocacy which is provided freely and fairly to all groups within a neighbourhood.

My son is the only white kid in his class – he is seven this year – he loves it – his sister and one other are the only white kids in the school. Mainly Black, Somalian, Asian and mixed race – they like it – we have only had one incident where someone shoved dirt in his face. I think it's good for him.

<div align="right">Aston resident, female</div>

Brilliant. It's community based so no one cares; it's about being good people. We have had lots of Kosovans and Chinese move into the area.

<div align="right">Canley resident, female</div>

In the school I was working in, a lot of Bengali and Somalia community, you might have five British working-class whites in the whole school. We did a lot of work, weekly events – got a whole group

going for everyone – it didn't feel agenda based. If you keep the fairness going, everyone was equal to come and get on.

<div align="right">Somers Town resident, female</div>

Community interaction happened in each of our research neighbourhoods but at an informal rather than formal level. In shops, junior schools and in parks, people came across each other in routine situations. In this way community cohesion takes place as a series of routine interactions set against the everyday life of a neighbourhood. It is organic. Residents expressed the desire for these conversations with people who are different by race and class or both.

The places people meet each other are the doctor's surgery, the market, the pub. That's where you'd bump into someone in the street and hear that so-and-so's just died, or got married, and you'd get all your information that way – you wouldn't have to read it in a Journal.

<div align="right">Somers Town resident, female</div>

Conclusion

Local stakeholders understood the concept of community cohesion but did not feel that it had been helpful in terms of application. Some viewed it as central government interference and this was picked up by residents who complained about political correctness and unfairness of government policy on race and equality of opportunity. The fieldwork shows that people perceive that local authorities do not want to hear what they have to say, or give them any input into decision-making.

There is a need to reconfigure community cohesion to focus on grassroots experiences of communities. Most importantly, there is a need to connect policy to the day-to-day experiences of people living in these neighbourhoods. A disconnect between policy-makers and people seems to exist at the moment and appeared to be deepening. Beyond this, community cohesion needs to move from being perceived as a top-down model of government intervention to one that engages with the routine lives of people. Community interaction happens in informal and neutral spaces in a myriad of ways. Residents want to be engaged in a bottom-up debate about communities, change and the future.

4 Overlapping challenges, issues and opportunities

In this chapter, the themes that emerged during the project that were similar across all three study areas will be considered. Free and frank discussion was encouraged and generated rich and sometimes racialised qualitative data. First, a very different perspective was given on the definition of white working-class to that which is used in this study. Second, there was much retrospection and introspection in identifying neighbourhoods. Residents compared a rather idealised version of the past that jarred with some of their experiences today. Third, there was a lot of discussion about immigration and specific communities. It is argued that the racialised language used has become routine and may not convey racism nor indeed support for the Far Right. There is a need to differentiate between language and actions, and to understand the importance of competition over scarce resources such as housing. Finally, the common theme that pervaded in all three areas was the need for white working-class communities to be treated fairly and equally and to have a voice.

Construction of whiteness and class

There has been relatively little commentary on the construction of whiteness and class. Across the three areas there was consensus that the term white working-class was not about social or economic categorisation but acceptance of a values-driven framework. In this context values seemed to be fixed, exclusive and bounded, but class is permeable, dynamic and open. These communities were keen to differentiate themselves from others on the basis of both class and race, and wanted to reclaim white and working-class as an identity that should be valued by government and society as a whole. It was something to be proud of and had little in common with stereotypes.

An important and interesting theme emerging from fieldwork was the construction of whiteness. As discussed earlier much of the commentary on this group is unflattering. The focus depicts white working-class communities as a feckless group, which is resistant to change, problematic in terms of social norms and behaviours, and living in annexed council estates that are mired in unemployment, high teenage pregnancy rates and poor educational performance (Murray, 1996). Of course stereotyped assumptions have been placed onto many communities and not simply from the wider media. Academic research could also be criticised for pathologising white working-class communities. Moreover, this is a 'top-down' perspective drawn from media commentators, policy-makers and academics (Sveinsson, 2009). There is very little from residents and activists giving a grassroots view, which is a considerable weakness. To this end, we were able to get a sense of how both whiteness and class was viewed by white working-class communities across the study areas. The study gave these groups a voice, which was especially important at the time of the general election when many felt disenfranchised.

The research demonstrated that there was another type of social construction being developed in terms of ethnicity and class. Many people who took part in the study days and focus groups were eager to differentiate themselves from others who shared the neighbourhood. Again this was in terms of both class and ethnicity. At this point it should be stressed that the discussion was not exclusively about minority communities, although this was the most important theme across the study areas. Debates

focusing on newcomers included students and middle-class householders, who were seen as eroding neighbourhoods.

The negative cultural connotation of 'white working-class' was rejected. Residents were angry about the projection of values placed on their neighbourhoods. There was acceptance that a minority of residents could be viewed as celebrating a lifestyle that was dependent on benefits, crime and family dysfunction. These were viewed as outside the working-class and in many cases elicited a hostile reaction: in short, the 'underclass'. In one of the areas this was a stronger factor with recognition of criminal families having an element of control and influence.

Looking at the whole area the bottom end has changed, the middle area is quite stable. Over the road is very different. Lots of sub-cultures. It's crazy! Talking at micro level of three or four streets. It's a bit frightening just how ingrained it is – a very divided area.

Canley stakeholder, male

The urban myth is that Canley is where the most criminal families live, it is where the drug trade is run from. There is an element of truth. There are parts of Coventry that are white working-class and less isolated and removed than Canley.

Canley stakeholder, female

These comments are typical of much of the discussion about stereotypes. The reality is that a very small number of people conform to commonly held white working-class images. These are largely located in distinct parts of the neighbourhood (as is the case with Canley) or in specific housing developments (Somers Town). There is a need to accept that disadvantaged neighbourhoods are neither the idyllic vision of working-class culture nor the dens of iniquity of popular portrayal. As ever, the reality is rather different from these two opposite and extreme perspectives. Residents and other interviewees were nuanced in the way that they defined areas. The Canley quotes demonstrated recognition that problematic perceptions exist but at the same time emphasised the importance of separating sub-neighbourhoods and residents. In the same way that publications on the white working-class have been criticised for generating pathologies or 'othering' (Sveinsson, 2009), residents were inclined to differentiate themselves from other groups and neighbourhood areas that were problematic. They were not perceived to be part of the working-class.

Defining white working-class communities became an important feature of the discussions during the course of the research. For methodological reasons we suggested a social economic category of groups C2, D and E living in areas in the neighbourhoods in the top 20 per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation used by government. It was clear from the outset that the definition needed refining, and our discussions with both residents and stakeholders helped to advance the notion of white working-class. White ethnicity was viewed by some residents as being exclusive, fixed and bounded. However, some of the residents interviewed had non-white relatives, and white migrant groups such as Poles were regarded as being problematic in terms of access to housing. Class was more difficult to define. It was permeable, transitory and unbounded. This perspective requires further investigation.

Residents acknowledged cultural diversity. Many participants, especially in Aston and Somers Town, commented that members of their immediate and extended families came from minority backgrounds. Some recounted that they were of Irish, Scottish or Welsh backgrounds and this continued to be part of their identity.

It should be noted that a small proportion of those interviewed in the community study days and focus groups had family members who were drawn from minority backgrounds. This was not a blunt one-dimensional group. Rather it was multi-faceted and expressed that difference could be beneficial. Some raised and celebrated the concept of 'a melting pot' as something that should and could be embraced. On the subject of integration, it was seen as a matter of simply joining in and being part of a

community. For example, in one area the pub is owned by a Sri Lankan landlord who is a popular figure in the local community and whose wife was welcomed to the country when she relocated in 2010.

I grew up around Birmingham; I have coloured black friends and I've got a bit of Indian in me but I don't know much about that culture.

Aston resident, male

I can't be racist as I have seven half-Bengali step children… there is no division because this is their home.

Somers Town resident, male

I come from a Welsh rural community, grew up on a farm – became a lorry driver for many years – at the end I was a manager, but I still see myself as working-class.

Somers Town resident, male

These individuals continued to regard themselves as working-class because of values based on reciprocity and mutual support. The key point to be made here is about whiteness and 'othering'. As discussed in Chapter 2, some have suggested that white working-class groups have been cast as a distinct 'other' in society (Nayak, 2009; Skeggs, 2009). Residents interviewed during this project viewed themselves as a group in class and ethnic terms even though in some cases the latter was more complex. Ethnicity was implicit in the discussions while class more explicit. Groups identified themselves as white and working-class.

In the literature review, the normative assumptions about white working-class leading to the accumulation of negative cultural stereotypes were discussed. These were acknowledged and resented by participants across the research sites in two distinct ways. First, there was a sweeping assumption that everyone living in these areas was feckless and helpless. Second, but related to the first, that the white working-class are a lumpen proletariat.

They think that we are all on the giro. They think we are all the same.

Aston resident male

I may be from the nineteenth floor of a tower block, 30 and have a child but I am not stupid! I see the news. My father's got O and A levels and all that. I get fed up with being seen as thick.

Somers Town resident female

There was an eagerness to put forward another type of social construction of the white working-class. People stressed the importance of intrinsic and bounded values. These were principles that people were born into, could not be traded and were core beliefs. They emphasised a strong work ethic, respect, collective values and reciprocal support. These are very different terms of reference to those discussed in some of the literature by media commentators and researchers. Repeatedly residents emphasised these values as an important part of identity and crucially as something that differentiated themselves from other groups by ethnicity and class.

It is about who you are. It is about identity.

Somers Town resident, male

Working-class is not about money. It's about people who have always worked, live in a council area and grown up with working-class values.

Canley resident, female

The point made was that working-class is a values system based on respect for yourself and others. Indeed those who do not work and did not display these values were frowned upon.

> *The benefits culture isn't working-class. It's not the unfortunate ones that need benefits that are the problem; it is the deliberate exploiters of the system who don't want to work. They are an underclass and at odds with the working-class.*
>
> Somers Town resident, male

> *We are not low-class, I'm working-class.*
>
> Aston resident, female

The bounded set of egalitarian values are important and help the group to self-identify. Rather than being presented as a dependent community that had lost its way, participants across study areas emphasised a framework or code of working-class principles. In this way, identity could be maintained. People could understand, in a common sense way, that they were similar. Thus newcomers were not seen as being part of this value system. Most of the discussion and debate focused on minority communities but not exclusively. Newcomers could also be composed of middle-class people gentrifying Somers Town or students moving into Canley. Differentiation was most marked in how some established minority communities were viewed as uninterested in hard work, reciprocity and respect. This was emphasised in most of the discussions. Instead certain minority groups were regarded as being dependent on public subsidy and abusing the welfare system to the detriment of the working-class.

There were also complaints about groups who could be deemed either white or not from minority communities. In Canley some residents spoke about the adverse impact of Poles moving into the area.

> *I used to vote Labour, I won't even vote now because they let in so many Poles and other foreigners, they get all the work, and Labour did nothing!*
>
> Canley resident, male

> *And the Poles have been put here. On the bus (the driver) they don't even know where they are going. There will be more when the new houses go up. There are loads of Poles and Somalians, some Asians.*
>
> Canley resident, female

Concerns about white migrants in Aston were also expressed, but these were about cultural norms, as well as the problems in private sector housing allocation and the impact on the neighbourhood.

> *The private landlords are filling their houses with Somalis, Poles, illegal immigrants. My husband's the only one who clears our entry.*
>
> Aston resident, female

This suggests that the problem of community cohesion and white working-class communities may not be associated with race. In addition, white working-class identity is based on values that some newcomers may not share.

Students too were seen as being problematic. The short-term nature of lettings giving rise to neighbourhood churn led to deterioration in neighbourhoods.

> *And there are a lot of students, a lot of the buy-to-let go to students – and they aren't here for long and they don't care. Some of them are very untidy. The foreigners are the same.*
>
> Somers Town resident, female

The following quote from a resident in Aston recounts the problems of living in the neighbourhood.

Rubbish that the Asians leave around – fridges and mattresses. White students are bad as well – I saw rats in bags of rubbish they left outside.

Aston resident, female

In Canley the proximity to the University of Warwick leads to increased housing pressures as students access housing. Some of these are international students. This leads to the conflation of students and foreigners leading to an adverse impact on the area. For example, again asked the adverse points about living in Canley, the following quotes suggest students as being problematic:

Foreigners – loads of Chinese in the last five years buying houses and renting them to students.

Canley resident, female

I've lived here for 34 years in the immediate area and there are a lot of students, unruly children that break fences. I will leave as soon as I can. I hate it.

Canley resident, female

Problems associated with white minorities such as Poles or other groups such as students were raised in all three study areas. Moreover, a few of the residents involved in the research were from white minority backgrounds, e.g. Greek. This suggests that white working-class communities may not be quite as bounded and homogenous as described earlier. Hence the challenges are not simply about ethnicity as Poles are deemed to be white but present challenges in terms of integration, housing and employment. In addition, students are also viewed in a negative way in terms of cohesion and restricting access to housing. Both groups are seen as a distinct 'other' separate from working-class values and culture.

The definition of working-class shows that ethnicity is of key importance. This is implicit. People cannot belong if they do not have a certain values set. It was almost viewed as a non-transferable birth right that guides and supports throughout a life course. Of course, ethnicity is a wider and nuanced concept than race and is applicable in this context. Minority communities were family members for a small number of those interviewed. Fixed and bounded values appeared to be the key determinant for being white working-class alongside ethnicity. However, there is much less certainty when the discussion turned to the issue of defining class. Some participants thought it was about employment or about tenure.

Working-class is literally someone working and providing for their family.

Canley stakeholder, male

When I was a kid I thought it meant people who couldn't afford to buy a house.

Somers Town resident, female

Here working-class is not about being bounded but could encompass any working or waged person with a family in any neighbourhood. Alternatively it could mean all those who are in rented accommodation. Class becomes an elastic term leading to many different interpretations.

Our working definition is traditional – a group of people from those on benefits to blue collar, all semi-skilled or unskilled labour groups.

Canley stakeholder, female

In contrast to working-class values there was no agreement about the definition of class. Policies such as 'the right to buy' introduced by the Thatcher government in the 1980s weakened the notion of tenure

as a key building block of working-class identity. This was not raised in any of the sessions convened during the project as a strong indicator of being working-class. On the contrary, buying a council house was viewed as leading to increased prosperity.

Best thing Thatcher did – it gave a good opportunity to the poor.

Somers Town resident, female

I teach and so know a lot of the residents from that area – they own their own house, own other houses, rent them out to students … they still describe themselves as working-class.

Canley stakeholder, male

Class becomes permeable and transitory. It is interesting to compare this to the very clear sense of cultural identity and the powerful understanding of a values system that helped to frame identity. This is fixed and bounded. Hence, from the fieldwork, and in these three areas, the social construction of white working-class is strongly influenced by positive cultural values as much as by economic factors. However, and in contrast to much of the policy debates, culture is not shaped by a negative pathology. Again there is a disconnection with how working-class communities have been constructed by aspects of government policy, media and research. The contrary appears to be the case: a strong sense of right and wrong, earning a wage, and mutual support and reciprocity. Residents were proud of their roots and identity.

Differences between study areas

The report suggests that the three neighbourhoods had similar challenges in terms of community cohesion. In this respect the findings – the lack of voice, searching for fairness and equity, concern about neighbourhood change – echo recent publications on similar groups in different parts of the country (see Pearce and Milne, 2010 for a very recent example; also National Community Forum, 2009). However, it is also correct to suggest that the study areas were different in terms of cohesion challenges and problems. These nuances need to be noted and analysed.

A summary of the study areas was given in the Introduction. Spatially the areas are different. Aston is a compact part of inner Birmingham and the white working-class community for the most part resides in Witton. Somers Town is a bounded neighbourhood with a clear sense of identity. Furthermore, both Aston and Somers Town are named political wards in Birmingham and Camden respectively. In contrast, Canley is spatially fragmented. Local residents and stakeholders comment on the three distinct parts of the area. Moreover, it is subsumed by the Westwood Ward that, for the most part, is more prosperous than Canley. In terms of creating common norms and shared values or indeed bringing people together cohesion may be more difficult to achieve in Canley than in Aston and Somers Town because of spatial considerations.

A lack of voice and representation pervades white working-class residents in Aston and Somers Town. In the former, residents did not feel that they were being engaged by Aston Pride NDC. There was no representation from this group on the Aston Pride board and indeed Witton was outside the regeneration area. Aston residents perceived that they were cut off as a minority in the area. Somers Town residents too felt views were ignored by Camden Council although there were far more opportunities to come together in community settings such as Somers Town Community Association. Both areas were ethnically diverse compared to Canley. Community cohesion challenges were seen in terms of competition for resources with minority groups (more populous Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups in Aston; Bangladeshis in Somers Town). The key problem in Canley was not about being overwhelmed by different groups. As noted earlier, the area is more than 90 per cent white. Rather the community cohesion challenge was lack of engagement with local communities and groups such as Poles and students.

Table 4: Differences between the study areas

	Aston	Canley	Somers Town
Community cohesion	• Support for multiculturalism in part • Lack of voice • Pakistanis and Bengalis problematic • Minority immigration history	• Fragmented spatially • Lack of engagement • Students seen as being problematic • Relatively little minority immigration history	• Spatially cohesive • Lack of voice • Bengalis problematic • Minority immigration history
Resources	• Outside Aston Pride • Neighbourhood change	• Not considered • Housing	• Housing problem
Community organisations	• Present and active	• Declining	• Many and active

Aston and Somers Town are located in inner urban locations. Migration has been a feature of both areas for many decades and this accounts for the complexity in terms of ethnicity. Residents had composite identities and may have been more supportive of multiculturalism. Canley was developed in the 1930s and is located on the periphery of Coventry. There has been much less immigration from minority communities although it has attracted people from Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Canley has been more stable in terms of population than the other two areas.

Community organisations and networks are present in Aston and Somers Town. Although people are concerned about being heard by local government, opportunities do exist in Aston (Flood Action Group and resident associations) and Somers Town (many groups and organisations). This could not be said for Canley: community organisations appear to be in decline here.

These nuances between the three are shown in Table 4.

Retrospection and the search for ideal neighbourhoods

People looked to the past to inform their future neighbourhood. Not surprisingly this was evident especially (although not exclusively) from retired residents interviewed. There was much retrospection about how life used to be, and what it had become. A social construction of neighbourhood largely populated by white working-class communities was created during discussions. A sense of nostalgia permeated through the debates across the study areas. This was especially strong in Somers Town and Canley but was also referenced in Aston. Community organisations and informal spaces such as the pub, festivals and shops developed a symbolic importance as places where communities had come together. Neighbourhoods have changed and generally not for the better. New communities were seen as exacerbating neighbourhood decline not only in terms of increased competition for resources but also the closure of pubs and clubs. Of course it should be added that these were not necessarily neutral spaces but contested by class and gender as well as ethnicity. Recreating neighbourhood spirit was perceived to be difficult and required newcomers to adapt and change to accepted norms.

A key concern was the extent to which residents wanted to build community cohesion, the sense of shared space, norms and connections between different groups of people in the same and contiguous neighbourhoods. There was a great deal of retrospection about the idealised neighbourhood. Participants lamented the loss of institutions that helped people to informally interact such as the public house or street market. There was a general agreement about the need for people from different backgrounds to interact but concern was expressed about the limitations created by cultural difference. In short, race and

culture was important in idealising neighbourhood and immigration, with Muslim communities viewed as being especially problematic. This was because they were viewed as following a faith and customs that were perceived to have different societal norms. Moreover, it was felt that this group was reluctant to integrate compared with other groups, which may be the result of perceived cultural differences.

Participants had mixed views about their neighbourhood. Some, especially in Somers Town, enjoyed living in the area. This was partly due to its proximity to key transport hubs allowing easy access to the West End. In addition, residents remarked that Somers Town continues to possess a community spirit based on reciprocity and mutuality embodied by activities run by Somers Town Community Association. The working-class values discussed previously remained important in bringing people together. Many had a nostalgic view of neighbourhoods, when these values were self-evident and crucially before the impact of immigration (in Aston and Somers Town) or economic change (Canley). A picture is painted of cohesive neighbourhoods where people would informally look out for each other's children and for each other. Community institutions such as shops, pubs and clubs were important in the retrospection as was the view of people earning a good wage and accessing decent housing. The sense of life as it was is summed up in the following stakeholder quotes:

> *Coventry 1960s car factory workers were labour aristocracy; well paid, good housing, the salt of the earth type. Like the mining village mentality of everyone working together and East End gangs… the Krays were always good to their mother! The blitz spirit is a myth but you get the idea of people in the same boat.*
>
> Canley stakeholder, female

> *Somers Town was lost a long time ago. It had everything you would associate with a working-class culture – a street market, greengrocers, fish shops – but these had disappeared by the 1980s.*
>
> Somers Town stakeholder, male

Retrospection and nostalgia are a heady mix. Participants spoke about the sense of neighbourhood change and focused on the decline of community organisations. These were places where people interacted, shared information and found out what was going on in their neighbourhood. In this context the decline of pubs, social clubs and shops was symptomatic of reduced opportunities to come together. Rather than consider wider factors such as the much cheaper option of buying alcohol from supermarkets, the ban on smoking in public places and high rents, participants were quick to blame non-drinking Muslims (in Aston and Somers Town), people who had gentrified the area (Somers Town) or students (Canley) for the decline in pubs and clubs.

> *Pubs used to be what brought people together, but they've closed now mostly. Used to be good old knees up pubs, family pubs where you knew people and you kept on eye on each other's kids playing outside. It's not about people not being able to afford a drink though it's cos a lot of the new people don't drink, that's why they are closing.*
>
> Somers Town resident, female

Neighbourhood change was seen as preventing white working-class communities from coming together. More than this there is the simplicity of the past seen through common norms and the sharing of common spaces such as pubs and clubs. Many of those interviewed associated immigration with the decline of pubs. Further, it was even worse that many pubs had been transformed into housing developments, which were viewed as helping minority communities rather than the white working-class into housing, and community centres (again for minority communities).

Apart from anger at the demise of key spaces, residents also suggested that this loss had reduced opportunities for different communities to come together. Informal spaces for interaction such as street markets and more formal organisations such as community centres had also been transformed because of demographic change. Concern was expressed that community organisations simply served sectional interests and were not open to white working-class communities.

People used to all mix in pubs but they (Bengalis) don't drink. They end up in Bengali specific centres while our pubs are closing and we get resentful … why can't there be a Women's Centre and why does it have to be an Asian Women's Centre instead?

Somers Town resident, male

The people – used to be a garden competition every year, and there would be such beautiful gardens, people would really try – there's no pride anymore. People cared for each other in the past – you didn't worry if they'd think you were gonna be nosey: if they were sick, you'd knock on their door and see if you could help with the kids, bring them food, whatever. Nowadays people just go into their houses and shut the doors – people are more afraid.

Canley resident, male

The sense of a community pub with someone on the piano and people joining in may be a romanticised vision. Some residents remember them as largely male-only domains associated with regular skirmishes and fist fights. In addition, people pulling together and looking after neighbours may be based on selective and edited narratives. Retrospection sometimes blurs the collective memory. The view could be gendered although it needs to be emphasised that women who were interviewed also spoke about the loss of community pubs, social clubs and shops.

A more substantive point made related to the reallocation of space for specific minority use. Supporters of community cohesion would question the need for these types of facilities since they help to embed separateness and may increase tension between different communities (CIC, 2007). There was certainly a great deal of resentment towards the change of space for this purpose. This being said, a much broader view was that local authorities need to clearly demonstrate how investment would help to bring communities together and meet specific needs. Discussion with residents showed that this has yet to win over white working-class communities given the frequent references to being not valued and being last in line for social housing.

In each of the three study areas people acknowledged that places had undergone change. Many thought that this had not been beneficial. Neighbourhoods were more diverse, less cohesive and fragmented. Immigration was viewed as leading to neighbourhood decline, overcrowding in housing and transforming once stable areas to places that were now difficult to recognise. Despite all this, people stressed that they did not want to be perceived as racist. Indeed, in many cases they did not blame minority communities but government, at a national level, for a perceived lax approach to immigration, and at a local level for not addressing key issues such as access to social housing. Resentment was largely fuelled by how public resources were allocated.

The debates on minority communities were nuanced. At a neighbourhood level different communities were seen as adding to the richness of a community: for example, in terms of increased choice of eating establishments, an improved retail offering and extended business hours, Asian-owned shops were praised. Beyond this, Caribbean communities were seen as integrating into neighbourhoods and not viewed as problematic. There were similarities in terms of language, faith and culture.

The African Caribbeans are very integrated – where the Somalis and the Poles are at the other end of the scale.

Aston resident, male

Caribbean races mix with white communities … it will be a melting pot which will be a good thing.

Somers Town resident, male

People also recognised that minority communities had lived in these neighbourhoods for several decades and were Brummies, Coventarians and Londoners. However, white working-class communities still regarded Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Somalis as not doing enough to integrate into neighbourhoods. They were largely viewed as being outside the framework of working-class values discussed previously in terms of both ethnicity and class. Some residents suggested that the problem could be seen as Muslim culture being outside the norms of living in the UK. Specifically, concern was expressed about the views and status of women, the propensity to have large families (and thus access social housing) and the introduction of mosques creating problems with street parking. In Somers Town, the local mosque was a converted house on a busy residential street and was perceived as causing significant problems related to parking and pedestrian access. Thus some residents felt that although change was sometimes necessary the nature of difference from these communities would be much more difficult to manage.

Differentiating between racialised language and actions

The data has revealed communities who felt that they were being treated unfairly and did not have a voice. Language used in discussions across the study areas appears to be racist and yet many of those residents interviewed would take umbrage at this suggestion. Rather, the racialised commentary should be seen through the prism of neighbourhood loss, political disconnection and competition for scarce resources. Residents viewed themselves as the forgotten group. Government had not listened to them in the past, nor was it showing any sign of doing so currently.

The research project wanted to hear the views of residents on community cohesion and neighbourhood change. During the community study days and focus group sessions, residents readily spoke about these issues. Much of the commentary was viewed through the lens of race and immigration (and these two concepts were interlinked and used interchangeably during the fieldwork). In this section, frequent references are made to the problems created by immigration. Loss of cultural identity, neighbourhood change and not having access to housing were often blamed on minority communities both established and newly emerging. Moreover, residents are concerned that these views are not being addressed by the local authority. This only added to sense of being disconnected and demise of the locality.

They've been moving them in around here, but not coming round and helping with it, or asking us what we think about it.

Canley Resident, female

We wanted to be treated equally rather than feeling that we are last in line… we want to feel valued and be listened to.

Somers Town resident, female

Neighbourhood loss was closely associated with a decline in white working-class culture. As noted, people were clear about working-class values which we have suggested are fixed and bounded. There was much discussion about neighbourhood character being changed permanently. Common sense notions of cultural identity – as evidenced in social clubs, public sector housing and pubs – had largely disappeared, replaced by communities (minority groups and newly arrived immigrants) who had no claim or allegiance to the neighbourhood, identity based organisations and services. Taking this further, there were a number of reasons for antagonism. First, concerns about the pace and scale of neighbourhood change: people felt overwhelmed by having to come to terms with new communities in relatively small

spatial areas. Second, a strong view expressed related to the need for new communities to 'integrate' into British culture and identity: this was not only about language (which has now been codified by the government as an entry requirement for migrants) but also routine areas such as dress and personal manners. Third, there was a clear sense that neighbourhood change was not driven by residents but foisted on them by government. The quote below shows anger at a number of levels: (1) the failure to learn English and integrate into society and then making fun of long established residents; (2) using accusations of racism to access support; and (3) the sense of injustice and inequity on the part of white working-class people who have no right of redress.

> *You can tell the immigrants because of the language at the bus stops. A lot of them act dumb and take the piss. They play on the racists' card, if they call us a white honkey, nothing would happen.*
>
> Canley resident, female

The quote from a Somers Town resident below was stated humorously but nevertheless is an observation about non-integration. It was made in reference to Bangladeshi and Somali families that had moved into the neighbourhood. Here differences in dress are seen as a metaphor for the problems of integration with the inference that people should demonstrate much more commitment to fitting into the norms and customs of British society.

> *Why do they wear those clothes? They are in England for fuck's sake!*
>
> Somers Town resident, male

This Aston resident speaks about no one advocating of the needs of white working-class people who have either had their voice muted or being left to make sense of neighbourhood where they have become the visible minority.

> *We are the forgot about people. You plonked us here and forgot about us. Dumped in the tribal site.*
>
> Aston resident, male

There is very little here about intercultural dialogue or building community cohesion. Rather the opposite seems to be the case; that is, the separation of culture and values into positive (white working-class) and negative (minorities and new communities). Indeed it seemed that coming to the country meant that new groups needed to be acculturated into the localised neighbourhood and national identity, however nebulous. New communities needed to change to fit into acceptable norms rather than the other way around.

We noted that residents in the three areas felt concerned by population change. This had happened but not in the dramatic way that many residents seemed to suggest. Neighbourhood decline from the retrospective and nostalgic position of previous years was linked to the arrival of new communities and migrants. Residents did not accept or comprehend globalisation, mobile labour forces and the need to meet an expanding economy. Of course a perspective of being concerned and competition for resources will inevitably lead to discussions about spatial and neighbourhood pressures. In short, the country and neighbourhood appeared to be overcrowded and the conclusion was sometimes guttural.

> *The schools have been taken over now – I walked past a rounders game, and the teacher and seven out of the nine pupils were veiled.*
>
> Somers Town resident, female

We need to shut the gates. They are rude and ignorant, look us up and down.

Canley resident, male

I'd move tomorrow if I could. There are lots of houses rented out to all sorts, ethnics. Somalians often – don't know who's living there from one day to the next. In the past it was clean and there was pride around here – now there's no curtains even.

Aston resident, female

Neighbourhood change and identity loss were associated with cycles of immigration especially from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh together with the free movement of workers as a result of the expansion of the European Union. This change was also linked to the loss of power and political representation. Residents felt powerless in the face of change and seemed disconnected from both representational politics and the local authority. Partly this is an extension of the identity debate and the view that white working-class communities have become invisible to both local government officers and councillors. In contrast, it was felt that minority communities had their needs met because they were visible and in the case of Aston and Somers Town had mobilised political support in the neighbourhood and also within a local authority. The latter point is important in attempting to analyse political disconnection.

Political representatives drawn from minority backgrounds were viewed as not speaking on behalf of white working-class communities. Given the sense of fixed and non-transferable values, it is no surprise that residents found it difficult to view these local politicians as representing anything other than sectional minority interests. A strongly held view was that local government officers were supporting minority interests in policy arenas such as housing over and above the needs of white working-class communities. In this way we have the construction of a toxic mix of neighbourhood loss, uninvited population change and disconnection from local politics. The perceived loss of power and control is palpable.

They are all Asian at the council – it's like no one can understand us. It's hard, a joke around here, I hate it.

Aston resident, female

People in local government aren't interested in our views. Yeah, most of the local councillors are Bengali now.

Somers Town resident, female

We should be concerned about this type of racialised discourse which emphasised racialised differences. In 'common sense' terms, it seems to be racist with its reference to a 'swamping of culture', nationalism and a rather exclusive sense of identity. In fact, the terminology of 'shutting the gates' shows an accurate grasp of the politics of race and immigration. Policy pursued by successive governments since 1962 has made it increasingly difficult for people from former colonial countries to come to the UK (Solomos, 2003). Residents are merely repeating, albeit in unedited ways, the drift in policy and language on these issues (Back et al., 2002; Cheong et al., 2007). More damaging is the assumption that white working-class communities do indeed conform to a social construction: racist, resistant to change and a blunt lumpen proletariat. However, residents would bristle against this charge. On the contrary they described themselves as being tolerant and welcoming. We need to explore the difference in how language and actions are played out in the three neighbourhoods. It seemed that residents did not view as racist the use of racialised language that would be unacceptable to many reading this report. There is an ignorance of sensibilities on language. Alternatively, this could simply be seen as 'normal' white working-class language, part of routine and everyday discussion about race and immigration or people who appeared different.

Indeed on many occasions, residents had to check or almost apologise before they answered a question because they were concerned about being seen as racist:

I'm Canley brought up – there were the odd black – are you allowed to say that? – no – 'cos if you do you are seen to be racist.

Canley resident, female

I feel ignorant to say black person if a black person is there. I don't like it especially with African Caribbean Blacks but everyone can say white person. You can't have a blackboard so they change it to whiteboard. You can say white all day long; say black and you are racist.

Aston resident, male

We're not allowed opinions because they're 'racist'.

Somers Town resident, female

There is, however, a difference between deliberate racialised language which seems to be benign and permissible and racist action which is harmful and not permissible. For example, there was relatively little support among those interviewed for parties such as the BNP. The party was associated with being too extreme in their viewpoint on race and immigration. More than this, residents were outraged with the suggestion that their views could be considered racist. Indeed they did not want to be associated as individuals or groups with such a label. They regarded it as been unrepresentative and something that stigmatises communities. Most people simply wanted to get their views heard by government and be treated fairly and with respect.

Fairness and equity

In spite of the analysis and commentary from the section above, the fundamental theme was that the white working-class do not feel they have been treated fairly by government. For employment, social services, community development and most notably housing, there was a strong and consistent view that residents lost out to minorities and new migrants. The narrative suggests that white working-class communities have been politically marginalised and ignored.

Being treated unfairly was most vividly seen in the specific debates on social housing. Many were proud to be social housing tenants, and resented the portrayal of these neighbourhoods as council estates beset by social problems. Indeed, social housing tenants were largely content with their housing. It was affordable, regulated and maintained. In short, social housing was seen as an important resource and identified with the working-class. Many saw social housing as a right that was being denied to them by the local authority or housing association.

Given the above, it is not surprising that access to social housing became a touchstone of wider concerns about neighbourhood change. The commonly held view was that minorities and immigrants were preferentially allocated social housing in each of the study areas. This was changing 'neighbourhood character' or putting it more simply Somers Town and Canley in particular were becoming ethnically diverse. Loss was personal and recounted through testimonies. A pattern emerged. Residents were told that they did not have high priority on social housing waiting lists and were forced to live in poor conditions only to see a minority family being allocated a unit. In reality Camden Council (Somers Town) or Whitefriars (Canley) were simply following agreed lettings policy and meeting housing need. On the ground it appeared that these communities were being housed faster than white working class residents.

If you've got five kids then you get a big house and the only people that have five kids nowadays are the Bengalis and the Somalis and so they get all the big places.

Somers Town Resident, female

I was told I didn't have enough points – they haven't been here two minutes and they get a house, we have to wait years. Why should we have to?

Canley Resident, female

My cousin is black. She was here for two years and now has a beautiful house. I have been here for eight years… I don't. I'm still here. It's about skin colour.

Aston Resident, female

The inference is clear. The housing system disadvantages white working-class communities and its values and favours everyone else. In each of the research sites there was ignorance and media fuelled speculation with the process of housing allocation and the points system. This was not determined locally but part of wider housing and social policy which demonstrated that minority communities and immigrants are in greatest housing need. Added to this was the impact of housing policies such as the right of tenants to buy council housing at a discounted rate and the subsequent problems of replacing social housing stock.

The 'buy-to-let' boom created by the loosening of credit facilities may reduce cohesion and stability. Private sector landlords, unlike their counterparts in the social housing sector, are not driven by the need to promote community cohesion and mixed neighbourhoods. Rather the overriding objective is to maximise profit. More than this, at least two of the research sites could be described as reception housing markets. They provide an opportunity for those with limited income to rent or buy a property. These factors did not seem to resonate with residents who viewed housing as crystallising the sense of loss and disconnection discussed earlier. It was unfair, they were not being listened to, and others were being given an advantage that was not deserved.

Interestingly, stakeholders were sympathetic to the problems associated with accessing decent housing. There were two problems. First, housing regulation was predicated on priority need. It was evident that other groups had more needs than white working-class communities to this resource. Second, there was very little that the local housing department could do in the private sector. Landlords could charge and let properties to a range of tenants from single men to students to mobile workers. The transitory nature of these groups means it is unlikely that they will contribute to community cohesion.

Problems with accessing affordable housing combined with the depletion of housing stock emphasised the powerless position of white working-class communities. Residents in all three areas expressed a view that social capital was being eroded. Specifically, young people could no longer afford private sector housing nor could they access social housing. Thus housing was the vessel that directly demonstrated the concerns of residents: the breaking up of families, loss of networks and a dilution of core values that held many residents together.

If you can't get on the housing list and you aren't a priority case, then you have to move away and that breaks up families. None of my children and grandchildren live around here.

Somers Town resident, female

Policies on housing were seen as unfair. The perception was that housing organisations rewarded groups who did not appear to add anything positive to neighbourhoods. The contrast between cohesive and values-driven working-class communities and resistant minority communities as well as other groups such as students was telling. A message was being relayed that dependency and failure would be rewarded.

I was told that unless I was an alcoholic or a druggie, then I wouldn't get a place.

Somers Town resident, male

Housing was symptomatic of the wider concern about the future of white working-class communities. These residents viewed themselves as hardworking, values-led communities that had missed out on housing opportunities because of an unfair system. They could not compete for housing when it came to family size or social problems and these were viewed as the gateway to securing an affordable form of tenancy.

Previously we discussed how residents took exception to the view that white working-class communities were a disconnected, parochial and dependent grouping in society. This could also be extended to the issue of being seen as racist or supporters of the Far Right. Despite the vehemence of the discussion, many accepted that neighbourhoods were multicultural and understood the benefits this would bring. In this way unfairness could be separated from racism. Equality of opportunity was welcomed but in practice the legal framework led to adverse outcomes for white working-class communities. Key issues were not addressed, and unlike new arrivals, they did not seem to have anyone advocating on their behalf.

Equal opportunities are anything but. We are bottom of the pile now.

Somers Town resident, male

Aston Pride's ran by Asians for Asians.

Aston resident, male

And the England flags, the council are worried about the political correctness of it. It's England – if we can't be proud in England…

Canley resident, female

People rejected the view that they were racist or had a dislike of foreigners. Rather the blame was placed on activists who promoted equality of opportunity which led to 'political correctness'. The latter term was seen as preventing free discussion of the issues of identity, race and neighbourhood. Many thought political correctness had a stifling effect on people as they did not want to be thought of as racist or saying something that was deemed inappropriate.

It's not a problem them being here, just the rights they have over us.

Canley resident, female

Minorities now hide behind the race card. When Camden Town was full of Greek and Irish people, it wasn't like that. Everyone mixed and fitted in. The new lot don't do that.

Somers Town resident, male

A policewoman called me racist – I said you must be mad! I've been to a Paki wedding, to an Indian wedding, a Russian wedding... who made that word? [racism] We didn't learn that word when we were at school!

Aston resident, female

It is important to stress that political correctness has become a pejorative term that becomes dismissed too easily by commentators drawn from the media and research communities. However, there is a need to emphasise the reasons behind the emergence of race equality policies. They came about because of evidence that minority communities faced discrimination because of ethnicity (Daniel, 1968). During the

1970s racist language was mainstreamed into society by its use in peak time UK TV programmes such as *Love Thy Neighbour* and *Mind Your Language*. Hence equality policies have played an important role in moving us away from discrimination and racism and should not be viewed as political correctness. There is a need for free debate but this should not be at the detriment of the progress made since 1975 and 1976 (passing of Sex Discrimination and Race Relations Acts respectively). The communities that are the subject of this project need to voice their concerns and fears but within a framework of equality of opportunity and permissible behaviours.

In this way residents viewed equality of opportunity as part of government interference in private domains. Predictably they were resistant to interventions because the benefit that these policies would bring to neighbourhoods was not clear. They were tolerant of diversity and understood this as the reality of living in a modern Britain. This may be seen at odds with the views expressed previously but can be explained in terms of fairness. This concept applied to all groups. Many had no problem living alongside people of different backgrounds.

> *My street is a microcosm … Next door is Polish, then Indian, then African and then an obese white family and an Irish woman a little further. There is no hostility. Everyone largely muddles along.*
>
> Aston resident, male

> *I've found them some of the nicest people, but if I listen to what other people say I wouldn't have even spoken to one.*
>
> Canley resident, female

> *People and the media call Somers Town racist but it isn't. We never even used to notice the differences. When I was at school, about 60 years ago, a Greek boy who spoke no English at all started and we were told by the teacher to be kind to him… and we were. He still lives round here now. The indigenous population has always been accepting and we never felt threatened. Some people are threatened now but everyone is scared to say anything for fear of being called racist. I stuck up for black people …recently a black guy had to stick up for the white groups… in a housing meeting because it would have been seen as racist if a white person had said what he said. It has gone full circle.*
>
> Somers Town resident, male

In conclusion, this section has covered a range of overlapping issues across Aston, Canley and Somers Town. Being working-class was a positive construction and driven by a coherent values set. This was at odds with some of the policy and academic literature discussed earlier. People were proud of their class identity and this helped to differentiate the group from others in the neighbourhoods.

Whiteness was implicit but complex. Residents interviewed were concerned not only of the impact of visible minorities but also white minorities such as Poles and students who were viewed as not sharing values or contributing to the neighbourhoods. There was much looking back on what neighbourhoods were like before change and the types of organisations that used to bring people together such as pubs and clubs. This could partly reflect the importance of those holding these views of protecting identity as opposed to new migrant groups who are bringing a clear sense of identity with them to the country. Finally, language was racialised and may appear to be extreme. Despite this, people did not want to be seen as racist. There was a separation of language and actions. Finally and perhaps most importantly, people wanted to be valued, heard and connected to government. They wanted to be treated fairly by policies and wanted equality in access to resources.

5 Positive contributions

The communities that have been the subject of the project are viewed by some commentators as resistant to change, parochial and supporters of the BNP. Some of the data may appear to consolidate this perception. However, the acceptance of the assertion would be a mistake. Rather than being categorised as racist many simply wanted fairness and equality. They were keen to start conversations with different communities and identified ways in which people have or could come together to build cohesion. Intense competition for resources, loss of jobs and reduced opportunities did not prevent residents from developing nuanced views on diversity and change. Finally, there was active distaste towards voting for the BNP and other extreme right wing organisations. As we have seen in Chapter 4, resident concern did not lead automatically to supporting the BNP or participating in racist violence.

Nuanced views on multiculturalism and change

We argued that a social construction has developed around white working-class communities. As Skeggs suggested, the focus is on a cultural rather than an economic framework depicting them as being hostile to immigration and change (Skeggs, 2009). However, our findings show a much more nuanced perspective. Residents, as we will see shortly, were concerned with the pace of neighbourhood change but many viewed cultural diversity and difference as being positive. There is an acceptance that cities such as Birmingham, Coventry and London have attracted migrants for many decades. Initially these may have been drawn from different parts of Britain but more recently people have come from across the world. People migrate and settle in neighbourhoods and this enhances places by widening the choice of places to buy goods and services. Increased knowledge and awareness of different groups is being played out against a background of competition for scarce resources such as jobs and social housing. Despite this, there was a willingness to start local conversations between groups to support understanding.

> *I have good relationships with neighbours – on one side two Bangladeshi households, then a Somalian (Muslim and Christian) household; on the other side a Gambian Christian household, then some Muslim households... they give us lots of food!*
>
> Aston resident, female

> *Communities get on very well – everyone I know gets on, and I know lots of people of all ages. If people don't like me for what I am, they walk away. I don't happen to know any Black people, I know some Indians, Irish, Scottish, Welsh – I'm not against it, I just don't meet any – these days I'm just at home, in this cafe, on the bus to Tesco's and back. Maybe Black people drive more and don't use the bus?*
>
> Canley resident, female

> *We need these people to come into our culture and educate us about theirs. They don't do that but we can learn from them and people do want to.*
>
> Somers Town resident, female

As we have noted, residents in Aston and Somers Town live in neighbourhoods that are composed of different groups and communities. Moreover, they are part of cities that have played an important role in attracting migrants to live and work in a city. In contrast, Canley is more than 90 per cent white and appears disconnected from Coventry. In Aston and Somers Town, race, diversity and difference are parts of neighbourhood life and result in a pragmatic understanding of neighbourhood change. For example, Somers Town has experienced cycles of immigration for many years with Jews, Irish and Greek newcomers. Similarly Aston has been a reception housing market for immigrants from Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent. The points raised by residents on not being heard, problems associated with immigration and neighbourhood change, and the racialised language are consistent despite the differences between the three areas. In this way it echoes other recent studies on similar subject matter (Pearce and Milne, 2010).

Cohesion happens in a routine and grassroots way with people sharing space, services and facilities. Often it is related to improved services, cultural richness or simply people getting on with their lives.

When the Indians came, they took all our corner shops over but the majority were friendly, spoke English. We accepted that they were prepared to open longer hours than us.

Somers Town resident, female

It is fascinating working here, I was the only white person in the office to begin with, now there are five of us. It has been an interesting change, I had a couple of weeks of culture shock, being such a visible minority, but there is a cultural richness here, before too long there is no ethnic issues, after the initial surprise it's just about people are people and not skin colour.

Aston resident, male

No real problems around here – never have been, not like with the Scots and Jamaicans back in the 60s on the other side of the city.

Canley resident, male

In conclusion, communities welcomed aspects of cultural diversity for many mainstream reasons: increased personal development and awareness, longer opening hours at local shops and opportunities to support their neighbours. Despite the racialised language, there was little support found among those interviewed for the BNP or indeed other Far Right organisations. On the contrary, residents wanted local government and politicians to listen to their views and develop solutions that would resolve deep-seated grievances.

6 Implications for policy and practice

Project research questions revisited

The key issues generated in the fieldwork are interconnected and return to the research questions discussed in the Introduction. As a first step, we wanted to obtain a grassroots perspective about what constitutes the white working-class. Rather than the stereotypical and pathological labelling that litters policy discussion, an alternative construction emerges about the importance of positive values, identity and class. Moving on to key questions on community cohesion, community institutions, putting forward a positive contribution of white working-class communities and overlapping issues, consistent messages can be deduced. Community cohesion was seen as difficult to implement and externally imposed by stakeholders and most residents had not come across the term. Community institutions such as grassroots organisations were important but so also were places that people would routinely interact such as primary schools, shops and markets. These were informal and neutral spaces. Communities strongly resented negative labelling focused on behaviours and also the assumption that they were racist or supporters of the Far Right. On the contrary, they perceived themselves as open and fair. The neighbourhoods were different but consistent and overlapping messages are apparent from the fieldwork. This was bound up by a sense of neighbourhood loss, a disconnection from policy debates and unhappiness about the allocation of public resources. Residents wanted fairness.

Research findings

- **White working-class residents are not being heard:** Similar themes were identified in the three different areas. The most important of these was the view that residents' concerns were not being heard by policy-makers at local or national levels. Sometimes this was to do with a lack of political representation (Aston), being ignored (Somers Town) or not being engaged (Canley). Taken together the consensus was the project had provided a neutral space for residents to voice varying levels of discontent about the areas. Often this was located in neighbourhood change brought about by social and economic factors but the perceived impact of immigration and new communities should not be ignored. This varied in intensity but residents felt that they were constrained and their views overlooked.

- **Political disconnection:** Connected to the first finding was the sense of policy and political disconnect in the study areas. Community cohesion was viewed as a government initiative that was embedded in policy rather than enabling community interaction. Concern was expressed by political representatives and officers that community cohesion was not clear as a policy framework. More than this, and similar to other policymaking in areas of race and community, it was viewed as being imposed on local authorities and residents by government that was disconnected from reality. There was a sense that government was not listening to the concerns of white working-class communities and not interested in engagement. Policy was seen in the context of political correctness, which had become a pejorative term meaning beneficial treatment to anyone who was not white working-class.

- **A need for fairness and equity:** White working-class residents did not feel they have been treated fairly by government. They had been overtaken by minority groups and new immigrants in search of

increased prosperity and class mobility. The sense of unfairness was most acute in terms of access and allocation of social housing. The perception was that housing organisations rewarded groups who did not appear to add anything positive to neighbourhoods. The contrast between cohesive and values-driven working-class communities and resistant minority communities as well as other groups such as students was telling.

- **Complexity of whiteness:** The term 'white and working-class' is more complex than the definition used in the study. However, those residents interviewed emphasised the importance of values based on hard work, reciprocity and support. Some white groups such as new migrants and students did not automatically qualify as white and working-class. Moreover, some residents spoke about family members who were from minority backgrounds. The subject of white working-class needs further investigation.

- **Interpretations of community cohesion:** Stakeholders were largely critical of community cohesion and most residents had not come across the term, which has been focused on minority communities since 2001. Community cohesion was perceived as being driven by central and local government and not connecting with the real concerns of the local communities that formed this study. Diversity and difference were not seen as being totally negative.

Policy recommendations

- **The need to reconfigure community cohesion:** After nearly ten years as a key policy driver, community cohesion had not succeeded in creating shared values and tolerance among some of our respondents. Although the national indicators show improvements in cohesion, this did not match up with the experiences and concerns of residents that were part of the research. The key priority was ensuring that grassroots issues are debated and discussed. This is about managing change and difference, and transparency in key public policy areas such as allocation of social housing. Contrast this with the discussion and criticism in Chapter 2 of top-down and nebulous conceptualisations that are imposed on neighbourhoods and disconnected from experiences of people. No simplistic remedy exists for the perceived problems of the residents that formed this study but the answers are partly located within the neighbourhoods.

- **Making the case for diversity – initiate shared conversations and address policy disconnection:** From the perspective of those in the study, government has not been effective in championing diversity and change. For the most part, policies designed to support improved relations between different groups had not quelled concern about the impact of diversity. Residents, rightly or wrongly, felt that their views were not being acknowledged, and that there was no space for discussions about change, immigration and access to public resources as these discussions were often perceived to be racist in nature. Routine interactions apart, there was very little opportunity for different groups to come together. There are two priorities. First, local authorities should consider working with existing or supporting new community organisations and institutions to develop local conversations about neighbourhood change. These organisations are embedded and trusted by local communities. Again we are not advocating dramatic change or interventions, but grassroots and time limited shared conversations to get difficult issues onto the local agenda. Local conversations could be mediated and based on the principles of conflict resolution. This type of initiative provides the basis to bring people together on common interests and concerns. Second, and building on from localised discussion, conduit organisations such as shops, community organisations and schools could be used to make the case for diversity, and address perceived and actual concerns about the impact of

diversity on local resources. Thus, policy discussion takes place on the street as well as council chambers and the two become connected.

- **The importance of informal and routine interactions:** An important recommendation is recognising and valuing the informal and routine interactions that take place between different groups. Again, policy sometimes pushes us to find the dramatic project or intervention that builds community cohesion. This means emphasis is placed on creating formal programmes or places that people should come together. The findings from the project suggest routine interactions between different groups can have a significant impact. In shops, schools and on the street, conversations begin to break down barriers and build cohesion. Informal community engagement presents challenges in terms of quantification and outputs but residents suggested this is where most of the work in community building happens in practice. Street festivals were seen in all three areas as opportunities for different sections of a neighbourhood to come together. In the case of our study areas they seem to work due to their informality and as they generally do not focus on sensitive public policy issues. Primary school and childcare projects were given as examples of routine and informal interaction taking place. These are after all concerned with improving educational performance and making an investment in the neighbourhood. Community interaction takes place in normalised contexts and is filled with common concerns and aspirations that most people will readily admit. Recording and reporting the routine rather than trying to locate the exceptional may help to build grassroots community cohesion.

- **The state as facilitator rather than driver:** The next five years will be marked by dramatic reductions in public expenditure as the new government plans to cut the structural deficit. In contrast with previous governments, there will be less money to invest in neighbourhoods and address issues of community cohesion. This will be a small state in size and philosophy. Indeed, we have seen the announcement of the Big Society as a programme of self-help which has been described as either a grassroots approach or a cover for the cuts. The government has to become more flexible and nuanced. It needs to establish the framework for debate and set the legal parameters for equality. Given the perception of its role and the reduced size, there is a need for government to act as a facilitator rather than a driver. This does not mean a withdrawal but recognition that residents and community organisation will be taking on a much more important role in cohesion and community building. For example, it could commission local conversations, support community festivals and monitor routine interactions but continue to enforce legal powers on equality.

- **Policy recommendations for Aston, Canley and Somers Town:** This study was located in three neighbourhoods in Birmingham, Coventry and London. Hence the findings and policy recommendations necessarily apply to these local authorities and need to be considered more generally. The differences between the three areas have been discussed at various times throughout this report but, overall, similar types of issues were generated by residents. Specifically, each local authority has a good framework for community cohesion but there is a need to ensure that voices are heard, grassroots conversations initiated and a value placed on routine and informal interaction. The content in terms of population and history has to shape local responses.

Further research

- **Research limitations:** The project was bounded by budget which restricted the study to three areas. This was a small qualitative investigation composed of interviews and experiential research with fewer than 150 people. A significant portion of those interviewed were retired. The sample and methodology

deployed need to be considered but from the outset this was never meant to be a representative project. The data generated from this project should spur greater investment in white working-class communities using different methodologies, including interviews and large scale surveys. Much more work has to be undertaken for the voices of the white working-class to be heard.

- **Defining the white working-class:** More work is needed to help develop and define this term and take account of the differences within and between communities. The research could lead to much more clarity of the term and take account of values and identity.

- **Grassroots communication strategies:** The policy and political disconnection that many residents in this project experienced needs to be dealt with. Concern expressed about the top-down nature and interference of policy should be addressed by local and national government. Given the emergence of the Big Society, it is apposite to consider grassroots communication strategies using routine interactions and existing community organisations. For example, to what extent can grassroots myth busting be achieved? A new local leadership programme? Our recommendations have emphasised grassroots rather than top-down interventions. These could be achieved by developing a new group of community activists. The end result will be, perhaps, an even greater reliance on grassroots community development as a tool to aid communities in understanding and accepting different groups and dispelling the notion that one has to be disadvantaged to the advantage of others.

Notes

1   These are the Indices of Multiple Deprivation used by the government. The indices are designed to target policy and practice, as well as funding to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged areas. See www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/Info.do?page=analysisandguidance/analysisarticles/indices-of-deprivation.htm (accessed 6 April 2011).

2   See Department of Communities and Local Government (2008). The Labour government introduced a National Indicator set for local authorities to measure progress against national targets. National Indicator 1 comes under safer and stronger communities and is regarded as a government tool to measure community cohesion.

3   See, for example, the Racial Residential Segregation Measurement Project, Population Studies Center, University of Michigan. Available at: http://enceladus.isr.umich.edu/race/calculate.html (accessed 6 April 2011).

4   Race is recognised as a socially constructed term; this indicates that the meaning of race has been shaped by dominant ideologies and interest in society. In the same way, we will suggest that white working-class can also be described as a social constructed term imbued with negative cultural stereotypes (see CCCS, 1982).

5   In the UK context, this means unemployment and benefit dependency.

6   The term has been described as being largely unemployed, lower class and living in council estates (see McCulloch *et al*., 2006).

7   This was a term used by Marx to describe a feckless and disorganised group composed of 'swindlers, confidence tricksters, brothel-keepers, rag-and-bone merchants, beggars, and other flotsam of society'. This is expanded in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852).

8   A British comedy sketch show that creates exaggerated parodies of different groups in the UK.

9   A British daytime talk show that brings together poor families to try and resolve problems in front of a live audience.

10 This was referred to by John Denham MP (who, as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, launched the Connecting Communities programme during 2009) at a Fabian seminar on 'Separate and Unequal', held at the Houses of Parliament on 13 January 2011.

11 For example, the interviewer would simply ask 'what do you think it means?'

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Appendix I: Breakdown of residents

Table 5: Gender

	Aston (1)	Aston (2)	Canley (1)	Canley (2)	Somers Town (1)	Somers Town (2)	Total	% of total
Male	10	4	3	9	5	8	39	49%
Female	3	11	6	10	9	1	40	51%
	13	**15**	**9**	**19**	**14**	**9**	**79**	

Table 6: Employment status

	Aston (1)	Aston (2)	Canley (1)	Canley (2)	Somers Town (1)	Somers Town (2)	Total	% of total
Employed	3	2	2	9	5	6	27	35%
Not employed	9	13	7	10	9	2	50	65%
	12	**15**	**9**	**19**	**14**	**8**	**77**	
Not disclosed	1					1	2	

Table 7: Working hours

	Aston (1)	Aston (2)	Canley (1)	Canley (2)	Somers Town (1)	Somers Town (2)	Total	% of total
Full-time	3	1		7	3	5	19	58%
Part-time	1	2	2	1	1	7	14	42%
	4	**3**	**2**	**8**	**4**	**12**	**33**	
Not disclosed					1		1	

Table 8: Age

	Aston (1)	Aston (2)	Canley (1)	Canley (2)	Somers Town (1)	Somers Town (2)	Total	% of total
Under 20							0	0%
20–29	6		5	1	2	5	19	22%
30–39	3		3	1	4		11	13%
40–49	3			5	1	1	10	12%
50–59	3	1	1	2		7	14	17%
60+	1	12		11	4	2	30	36%
	16	**13**	**9**	**20**	**11**	**15**	**84**	
Not disclosed	1	1	2	3	4	6	17	

Table 9: Religion

	Aston (1)	Aston (2)	Canley (1)	Canley (2)	Somers Town (1)	Somers Town (2)	Total	% of total
Church of England	2	10	2	8	5		27	49%
Catholic	1	3	1	3	2		10	18%
Christian	1	1		3			5	9%
None	4		1	3	2		10	18%
Other	1				1	1	3	6%
	9	**14**	**4**	**17**	**10**	**1**	**55**	
Not disclosed	5	1	4	2	5	9	26	

Table 10: Ethnicity

	Aston (1)	Aston (2)	Canley (1)	Canley (2)	Somers Town (1)	Somers Town (2)	Total	% of total
White English	2	3		5		5	15	21%
English	1	4	1	1	7		14	20%
White British	3		6	3	1		13	18%
British	1	4	2	3	2		12	17%
Irish[1]		1		3		1	5	7%
Scottish[2]				2	1		3	4%
White other	1	2		1	3	2	9	13%
	18	**14**	**9**	**18**	**14**	**8**	**71**	
Not disclosed	5			1		1	7	

Notes: [1]Irish/Irish descent/Irish British/White Irish; [2]Scottish/Scottish British/White Scottish.

Table 11: Other participants

Somers Town (2)	14	Also attended Somers Town (1)
Somers Town one-to-ones	4	2 women 30–39; 1 Male 60–69; 1 woman 70–79
Aston one-to-ones	3	1 woman 50–59; 2 men 60–69
	21	

Total participants: **99**

Appendix II: Defining community cohesion

Local Government Association

'A cohesive community is one where:

- There is common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;

- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;

- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and

- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods'.

Local Government Association (2002)

Commission on Integration and Cohesion

'The commission's new definition of an integrated and cohesive community is that it has:

- a defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and groups to a future local or national vision

- a strong sense of an individual's local rights and responsibilities

- a strong sense that people with different backgrounds should experience similar life opportunities and access to services and treatment

- a strong sense of trust in institutions locally, and trust that they will act fairly when arbitrating between different interests and be subject to public scrutiny

- a strong recognition of the contribution of the newly arrived, and of those who have deep attachments to a particular place – focusing on what people have in common

- positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, schools and other institutions'.

Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007)

Department of Communities and Local Government

'Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on three foundations:

• People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities

• People knowing their rights and responsibilities

• People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly

And three ways of living together:

• A shared future and sense of belonging

• A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity

• Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds'.

Communities and Local Government, 2008

Appendix III: Methodology

A project based on qualitative principles

This project was based on a qualitative methodology. We needed to generate a depth of data and find out the views of residents living in the three areas as well as those of stakeholders with responsibility for delivering services. The data needed required access to the lived experiences of residents and depth that would not have been possible using quantitative methods such as surveys and closed questions. Therefore, the project was based on qualitative methods and had the following characteristics:

- **Interviews:** These were undertaken with residents and stakeholders during the project. Data was generated based on a semi-structured topic guide that had been discussed within the research team, sponsors and circulated as part of the Coventry University peer review. Nearly 100 residents participated in the interviews across three research sites (see Appendix I). These interactions comprised community study days, focus groups and one-to-one interviews. At each stage members of the research team used the topic guide themes to support discussion and debate. Importantly the application of the interview method seeks to explore behaviours, narratives and storytelling as part of the process. The aim was to give local stakeholders and residents a clear voice.

- **Group events:** Community study days and focus groups involved passive observation of residents. In these instances, the lead facilitator encouraged people to discuss themes within the topic guide with remaining members of the research team observing behaviours and taking notes. After each community study day and focus group the research team convened to identify key emergent themes.

- **Flexibility and limited boundaries:** Discussions, interviews and conversations were open-ended. The topic guide emphasised that there was no right or wrong answer and this was explained to interviewees. Indeed, the only condition placed was for people to speak freely and frankly about the issues. The visceral nature of the data showed that people felt comfortable with the research team and did voice their views freely.

- **Environment and settings:** This is very important in qualitative projects. To this end we worked with community organisations to host resident meetings in a setting that would support the interview process. For example, in Somers Town meetings took place at Somers Town Community Association, which was a trusted and credible organisation among the participants. In Aston the sessions took place at a community organisation and community centre. For Canley the research team used a local cafe.

Interviews, observation, flexibility and a supportive environment are important features of qualitative methodology. Unlike quantitative methods, the project was not about coming to a view on a hypothesis but observations and experiences from these three neighbourhoods on community cohesion. The project was very much about experiential development: identifying questions topic guide based on research aims), listening to the experiences of respondents (interviews, community study days and focus groups) and drawing up findings based on the data (thematic and emergent) and not producing a numerical score. Hence, phasing of the data collection was important as each phase informed the next.

Data collection analysis

The challenge was to build credibility and trust to enable people to speak freely about these issues. As stated the research questions were the basis for a semi-structured topic guide that was deployed across the fieldwork. This led to consistency in approach, data gathering and analysis. Across these different interactions the questions remained consistent. The process is described below:

- **Thematic analysis:** Data was cross referenced, themed and analysed. In this way the findings are a reliable reflection of the issues from this process. The topic guide provided the basis to cross reference notes and quotes generated from the fieldwork. This is thematic analysis (or content analysis) and is a well established data analysis process for a relatively small sample.

- **Reflective discussion:** Regular internal meetings with the research team were convened to check emergent themes. For example, debriefing sessions after community study days, focus groups and the policy seminar provided an immediate way to capture key themes.

- **Reality checking:** One of the most productive methods of checking the data is repeating key findings from fieldwork of stakeholders and residents. To this end a policy seminar was convened and findings presented to representatives from each study area. Those attending concurred with the findings. Further, and as part of the process of supporting local authority policies in the three research sites, findings were shared with key respondents. Again this helped to refine and support findings.

The process of research questions, topic guide, data generation, thematic recording under key topic guide headings followed by internal reflection by the research team and external validation in the three areas provides a robust and systematic process to support findings.

The policy workshop

A policy workshop was convened in December 2010 and residents and stakeholders were invited to hear key interim findings. All areas were represented (residents from Somers Town and stakeholders from Coventry and Birmingham) at this workshop. Aston and Canley residents pulled out at the last moment. It should be noted that the project was only able to cover travel and subsistence costs for this event and not pay for participation. This may account for the limited attendance from residents compared to the community study days.

Key findings were presented and small group discussions held with stakeholders and residents. There was agreement that the research had picked up key themes discussed in study days and interviews. Residents wanted to ensure that the views on not being heard and political disconnection were represented in the final report. Stakeholders understood the challenges of engaging with white working-class communities in Canley and Aston and again thought the findings to be an accurate reflection of key themes in the area.

The policy workshop was a commitment to provide an opportunity for residents to hear findings from the draft report. Residents continued to be interested in the report and stakeholders wanted to used the research to inform policy and practice. Subsequently, local authority contacts in each study area have been contacted about arranging a meeting to hear interim findings. Indeed, a confidential event has been held for a local authority already outside the scope of the project.

Table 12: Stakeholder breakdown for study area

	Aston	Canley	Somers Town	Totals
Local government officers involved in designing and delivering community cohesion	6	6	6	18
Local authority councillors	1	3	2	6
Community activists	0	1	3	4

Table 13: National stakeholder interviews

Central government	15 participants (Department of Health; Department for Children, Schools and Families; Equality and Human Rights Commission; Institute for Public Policy Research; Social Exclusion Task Force; Marmott Review; British Council; Creativity, Culture and Education; Department of Communities and Local Government; Ministry of Justice; Local Government Association; Young Foundation)
iDeA	7 participants

Limitations

The project is based on experiential and qualitative methods of data collection. There are limitations of the research and project which are important to place on record:

- **Representativeness:** The project does not claim to be representative of white working-class neighbourhoods across the country. These are three different areas in three different cities answering similar questions. However, issues, themes and challenges emerged, some of which accord with recently published findings of research on white working-class communities. The problem of representativeness is a common complaint of qualitative methodology so it is important to recognise this limitation at the outset.

- **Small sample:** The project engaged with fewer than 150 people across the three neighbourhoods. This is a small sample and again we need to counter against unfair extrapolation. Of these participants, 50 were not employed and this needs to be taking into consideration on the complex definitional challenges on working-class that the report raised. Our limited sample was based on project funding and time constraints. Indeed, there is a need for greater investment in this type of research to build an evidence base.

- **Resident recruitment:** Gaining access to residents was a critical part of the project. Several meetings were held with local authority representatives explaining the project, securing support and identifying community organisations that could help with and support resident recruitment for community study days and focus groups. These were identified in Somers Town and Aston, and community outreach workers supported the recruitment process. In Canley there were fewer organisations and much of the resident recruitment was undertaken by the research team using leaflets, and direct communication at shops and pubs. Although the use of peer organisations is

established in research there are limitations associated with recruitment of like-minded people. This was countered by small group working, focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

Table 14: Methodology summary

Qualitative principles	Data collection and analysis
• Interviews and interaction • Experiential research • Observation • Supportive environment • Giving people a voice	• Field notes • Thematic and content analysis by topic guide/ research headings • Reflective discussion • Reality checking
Limitations	**Strengths**
• Not representative • Small sample • Peer organisations and resident recruitment	• In-depth data • Resident credibility and access • Relevant findings for further exploration • Views and perceptions given a voice

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