

ANGLIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

GENDER RELATIONS, MASCULINITIES AND THE
FIRE SERVICE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
FIREFIGHTERS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF
MASCULINITY DURING FIREFIGHTING AND IN
THEIR SOCIAL RELATIONS OF WORK.

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A Thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Anglia
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ANGLIA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GENDER RELATIONS, MASCULINITIES AND THE FIRE SERVICE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FIREFIGHTERS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY
DURING FIREFIGHTING AND IN THEIR SOCIAL RELATIONS OF WORK.

By Dave Baigent

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This thesis is a qualitative study of firefighters, and focuses on how firefighters, a predominantly male, white and able-bodied group with popular public support, form tight knit teams on and off the fireground, and their motivations for so doing. It is also a study of gender, which aims to describe and deconstruct masculinity. In part the thesis was undertaken with a view to assisting the fire service (specifically the few women who are firefighters) with its difficulties in relation to equal opportunities.

One understanding the thesis provides is that firefighters bond around a common professional ethos: *to provide an efficient service to help the public*. To achieve this, firefighters form informal hierarchies through which they create protocols for firefighting, thus setting the standards for what comprises a '*good firefighter*': a label firefighters test themselves against when they '*get in*' to fight a fire. However, before firefighters can achieve this they must first access the skills of firefighting (which experienced firefighters are pleased to hand on), but only after a newcomer '*fits in*' with the agendas of the informal hierarchy, some of which have little to do with firefighting.

However, there is a second view, and this suggests that '*fitting in*' and '*getting in*' to pass the test of being seen as a '*good firefighter*' also coincides with the way firefighters form their masculinity. This then provides a second common cause amongst firefighters, and so might explain why firefighters gather so successfully under the umbrella of their union to resist their officers' attempts to deskill and cut the fire service. Cuts would limit firefighters' ability both to fight fires as they currently do and to pass the test of being a '*good firefighter*'. Thus blocking a third central but unacknowledged element: that of masculinity. This analysis involves a discussion of class, and recognition that antagonistic relations between officers and firefighters are not only economic, but are also about petty dividends involving power, status and gender construction.

The conclusion provides a comprehensive overview to suggest that firefighters form their masculinity by acting at work in the way they subjectively judge that they are seen, by themselves, their peer group and the public. In so doing, they set themselves apart from the '*others*' who cannot meet their expectations. It is these '*special people*', as identified by both firefighters and others that this thesis has studied, a group of '*special*' men and women.

Acknowledgements.

Firefighters and sociologists are alike, they have to learn how to do their work and at each stage they have to pass certain tests. In order to be seen as a '*good firefighter*' a firefighter must 'prove' to their colleagues that they can '*get in*' at a fire and to enable them to breathe in the poisonous atmosphere in which they will be working, they use breathing apparatus. This is a sort of aqualung and they train to use this safely inside a smoke chamber where teams of firefighters negotiate what they call a 'rat run', a series of physical structures/obstacles placed in their pathway. Firefighters soon learn (often by the physical knocks they take in bumping into the structures and tripping into holes) how to avoid these pitfalls and because they work in teams they share this knowledge as they train by pointing out to the next firefighter in the team the presence of obstacles. Breathing apparatus training not only teaches firefighters about manoeuvring in smoke, but how to '*fit in*' as a team and alongside all the other skills a '*good firefighter*' may learn, '*fitting in*' makes firefighting safer.

The route to a PhD is somewhat similar to that of being seen as a '*good firefighter*', there is a need to avoid pitfalls along the way and finally to seek peer group approval. However, for the student as opposed to the firefighter the structures to be overcome are not physical restraints- you are not liable to bump your head or fall down a flight of stairs. The restraints are social and applied by other academics as a form of test that has to be passed to gain their recognition. To help them to negotiate and '*fit in*' with the structures of academia the PhD student chooses supervisors and at that time neither student nor supervisor know how this relationship is going to develop. Four years ago I was in that situation, and whilst during the research and writing process I might have occasionally wondered if my supervisors were actually on my side, it is clear to me that without them this thesis would not have been produced. Their support has been magnificent; they have not protected their skills, but shared them. They have allowed me to '*get into*' academia by guiding me through the social restraints and protocols that academia lays down with a level of patience that I am in awe of. To Shirley Prendergast and Jeff Hearn, two very special people in my life, I say thank you.

There have been others who have helped me with this research, but apart from one other very special person there are only five more that I can name. The unnamed ones are those people who talked to me, provided the evidence for this thesis and whose identity I must keep secret. Amongst these are individuals and sections within the fire service and related organisations that gave assistance and information, especially the library staff at the fire service college who helped me on so many occasions. However, most of those who are not named have not been as silent as the librarians; they are the firefighters and officers who took part in the interviews so essential to my thesis. Some of them may recognise their words in the pages that follow and I hope I have represented them properly, because they are this thesis. To all of them I say a heartfelt thank you.

One person I must thank, (although as the enormity of the task became clear I wonder why), and that is Tom Ling. He had sufficient belief in this working class boy to suggest that I did a PhD and as such showed the same confidence as Kevin Bonnett did at an earlier time when he accepted me at APU to study for a first degree (when the only qualifications I put on my application form were that I had a GCE and was very good at kicking down doors). In what comes as a complete surprise to me (possibly even more to those teachers who first taught me pre-1960 in my secondary school), is the fact that this thesis is now complete and examiners willing I should soon have a PhD. If anything ever proved how wrong selective education was, here is the evidence. As an old rather than mature student, the lecturers at APU gave me a second chance and to each of them I say a big thank you.

Three people have been outstanding friends to me in regard to this thesis. During the writing up stage two have helped me to put my words in a more coherent manner, and to David Howells and Sue Ferguson I say thank you. I have had one contemporary throughout the four years research, Marilyn Meadows, who without her illness would have completed before me. To Marilyn I say thank you for your friendship: it is your turn next.

That leaves only one other person without whom I could not have completed this work. However, I am not thanking her for what she has done, but rather for what she has not done. That is Carole my partner, who married a firefighter who turned into a sociologist. At times this thesis has physically stolen me from her, at other times I have been ensconced in my office at home as if a stranger renting lodgings and when we did spend time together I seemed unable to talk about anything but my research. Had our situations been reversed I would not have been silent at such times, nor I suspect would I have been quite so accepting of the changes that occurred in my partner as they moved from firefighter to academic. She proved her love by giving me the freedom to do this PhD, and to her I say the biggest and last thank you. Perhaps now we can return to normal, whatever that might now be.

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1. CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

These are also powerful arguments against any naive, fixed or essentialist concept of masculinity: masculinities are recognised as diverse, socially constructed and structured in terms of their own hierarchies, notably between hegemonic masculinity/ies and subordinated masculinity/ies (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985; Connell 1987) Hearn 1994: 53.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This is a thesis about firefighters, a group comprising mostly white males who so organise their work as to be able to construct what I identify as *firefighters' masculinity*: a subject this first chapter introduces. Second, I will introduce the questions that I have asked to interrogate firefighters' masculinity. Third, I will introduce my methodology and, in so doing, I explain that I intend to give a very hands-on account of the fire service by using, as part of the research, my own experiential¹ knowledge of being a firefighter for over thirty years. Fourth, I shall introduce the history and organisation of the fire service; whilst some parts of this are inevitably analytical, this is not an attempt to pre-empt the findings of the whole thesis, but an attempt to use my experiential knowledge to set the scene for those readers whose knowledge on the fire service is limited. This section puts into context the next section, an overview of relevant gender and class debates. Finally, I shall introduce the remainder of the thesis.

1.1.1 Firefighters' masculinity

This thesis will suggest that most firefighters develop skills/qualities/attributes in common, that generally these associate with their main job, firefighting, and that this occurs because as a mostly male group firefighters form an informal hierarchy, through which older firefighters pass down their knowledge about the skills/qualities/attributes necessary for firefighting to younger firefighters. However, the fire service is predominantly a white, male, working class, heterosexual, able-bodied and pseudo/para-military organisation that is institutionally sexist (see Baigent 1996; HMCIFS 1999), and alongside the skills/qualities/attributes that firefighters might have to learn in order to become efficient firefighters, they are also offered and frequently accept other forms of behaviour. Much of this behaviour will be familiar to them and likely represents their chosen preference as boys, youths and now as firefighters, to achieve the "false monolith of what men are supposed to be" (Hearn 1996: 211). In this respect, this thesis will suggest that firefighters' 'false monolith' is one that they develop both individually and as group through their informal hierarchy.

It is possible to write this thesis using and extending the list of social characteristics that describe firefighters' behaviour, but it is not practical. I have therefore chosen a term that might describe this collective behaviour for firefighters. Whilst I accept that this is not everybody's preferred option, not the least mine (because I accept that the term is so ubiquitous as to have no fixed meaning), I am going to call this behaviour *firefighters' masculinity*. This I am going to do because without a label for firefighters' behaviour this thesis will fail in one of its key aims, which is to encourage male firefighters to look again at how they act at work (which they would call their masculinity). In particular I would note that whilst firefighters might talk about masculinity in a generic sense as if all men had it, they would, when pushed, identify their masculinity as characterising something different, even something special that 'other' men could not achieve.

¹ When I use the term 'experiential' I am talking of hands-on experience of having done something, in this case my experience of having been a firefighter, in particular about firefighting and firefighters' hierarchies (see Willis-Lee 1993b). At no time do I consider experiential knowledge is innate knowledge.

It is true I could spend a considerable part of this thesis discussing what would, or would not, be a possible label for firefighters' behaviour, and this would include an extensive theoretical debate about identity. I will say it once (to make it clear where I stand), I have no notion that masculinity is 'pre-given' in any biological or psychological sense, nor that it can actually be defined in any fixed way. However, this is not how most firefighters see it. Many believe that their masculinity is pre-given and they might currently find it difficult to understand a life without such a word. It may even be that male firefighters (like Calvinists) set out to 'prove' their 'calling' (see Weber 1971). As an example of why I say this, as some proof of why I believe firefighters' masculinity is social and not given, this thesis will suggest that it is a pattern of firefighters' behaviour that they not only seem to believe they must 'prove' to *themselves* that they can achieve the 'false monolith,' (possibly even their 'special' status above 'other' men), but also to *their watch* and *the community* they serve. Arguments about social construction become even more persuasive when held against evidence suggesting that firefighters use a Foucaultian gaze (and harassment when necessary) to help them and their colleagues achieve their masculinity. Crucial in this process is the way firefighters perform their operational duties, which can involve firefighters working in a dangerous and a risk-laden environment (see Chapter 3). Moreover, their gender construction also continues at the station, where working environments are more relaxed and firefighters temporarily live together: a place where the gaze is no less stringent (see Chapter 4).

Paradoxically, firefighters' informal hierarchy also develops as a resistance to what Weber (1971) might call an 'iron cage': the formal, bureaucratic and authoritarian hierarchy, which officers would appear to have you believe controls the fire service (see Chapter 5). This may appear as a classic case of revolutionary consciousness to protest against their economic disadvantage (see Giddens 1982: 163-164), but, firefighters' resistance may be more to do with the action of a group of workers who are aware that they need to act *conservatively* against officers to protect their masculinity: a situation which improves firefighters ability to resist their officers because firefighters believe they are only proving what is given; part of their uniform so to speak: a belief that becomes real in its consequences (see Thomas 1909; Janowitz 1966: 301). However, firefighters' masculinity and the metaphorical uniform they wear to 'prove' it, is similar to the Emperor's new suit, *it is an illusion*.

1.1.2 Research questions

I became interested in the construction of gender during my first degree, which focuses on equality issues. My final dissertation (Baigent 1996), which focuses on equality issues, indicates that majority white male workforce² were harassing female firefighters³. I resolved to continue my research at PhD level to see if I could help the fire service with the ongoing difficulties they are having with equal opportunities. Initially I started my doctoral research with two questions in mind. First, how did my 30-year close association with firefighters influence my gender construction (masculinity) at that time? Second, can a study of firefighters throw any light on the argument that *gender labels as masculine/feminine are social applications* and not determined by biological/physiological sex (MacKinnon 1979: 154-155)? However, during the course of this research it became clear to me that I might best answer these two questions and help the fire service with its difficulties over equal opportunities, by focusing on how firefighters construct their masculinity. As a result of these thoughts, the two questions were replaced by 'new' questions, about four specific areas. These are:

² 99.2% are men, 98.4% are white (HMCIFS 1999; FBU 2000; see Appendix 1).

³ The formal structures of the fire service and the FBU have adopted a generic term of firefighters, to replace what was the single sex term fireman. When it is necessary for me to differentiate between women firefighters and men firefighters, I shall refer to them as male firefighters and female firefighters. I shall do this to avoid the terms firewoman and fireman, which I consider have become political terms that frequently default to the term firemen. The media in particular are prone to do this and this not only reduces the visibility of women in the fire service, but provides succour for those misogynist firefighters who still resist the term firefighter.

Firefighting:	<p><i>how</i> do firefighters develop the protocols and skills necessary for firefighting?</p> <p><i>what</i> does ‘<i>getting in</i>’⁴ mean to firefighters?</p> <p><i>why</i>, given the apparent danger involved, do firefighters ‘<i>get in</i>’ at a fire?</p>
Relations at the station:	how do firefighters organise their social relations at the station?
Class:	<p>can the dynamic between class, hierarchies and resistance help explain how firefighters construct their masculinity?</p>
Gender:	how do firefighters construct their masculinity and what does this tell us about gender debates?

In the event, all these areas are interrelated, but to make some sense of what I have found I provide a chapter for each of the first three. The fourth area, gender construction, is a consideration throughout the thesis and in particular I produce a *reflexive view* of firefighters’ *actions* looking for the *unacknowledged conditions* and *unintended consequences* of these actions (see Giddens 1979: 56)⁵. All areas will be re-considered in the conclusion.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

Before coming to academia, I was a firefighter for over 30 years and as my research is about firefighters’ masculinity, I wanted to develop a methodology that would make best use of my experiences (see Appendix 2). I also had to consider that my PhD had a political aim, which was to help the fire service with its difficulties over equal opportunities and therefore should be available to firefighters themselves. Consequently, my methodology had to be flexible enough to enable me to respond to any leads, use my experiential knowledge of the fire service with academic rigour and provide a thesis firefighters could understand⁶.

Chapter 2 will describe in detail the development of my methodology, but for now let it be understood that I collected the bulk of my data using qualitative methods of interview, observation and auto-critique, and that some data was collected through quantitative/qualitative questionnaires. Collation and analysis of this data took place using grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to provide a considerable ethnography of the fire service, which became especially revealing because the actual analysis (my epistemology) took place using Hearn’s (1994) notion of pro-feminist auto-critique⁷.

My use of pro-feminist auto-critique allows me to reveal much about the fire service from my own experiences, including some of the previously hidden *joint understandings* that firefighters use to

⁴ One particular way that I shall use my experiential knowledge will be to use firefighters’ in-house language. When this occurs the text will be placed within quotation marks in the recognised way that metaphors or other collegial language is used, for example ‘*getting in*’. Some words such as ‘*getting in*’, ‘*fitting in*’, and ‘*The Job*’ are so important to this thesis I shall also italicise them thus ‘*getting in*’, ‘*fitting in*’ and ‘*The Job*’. However, once the term has become recognisable, normally after its second use, I shall drop the ‘...’.

⁵ Whilst it was Collinson (1992) that sent me back to reread Giddens (1979), there is some strange sense of *deja vu* in how Giddens uses a hands-on approach to explain the notions of ‘unintended consequences’. His use of the example of how hydrogen and oxygen combine to produce (an unintended consequence) water provides exactly the same sort of grounding to knowledge as I hope to provide for firefighters. It is almost ironic that firefighters’ main medium for firefighting is water; in fact the whole scenario I explain here is a further example of an unintended consequence.

⁶ There are a number of books which help researchers to find a method and I consulted many of these before I chose my particular mix of pro-feminist auto-critique and grounded theory (Bell and Roberts 1984; Bell 1987; May 1993; Jones 1993;

⁷ I shall return to Hearn’s (1994) notion of pro-feminist auto-critique in Chapter 2. However, it needs to be understood that pro-feminism is a politically charged approach to sociology that attempts to enlighten men about how their behaviour is damaging: to society, women and themselves. Pro-feminist auto-critique is an attempt to do this by men searching back into their past to reveal some previously hidden processes by which men perpetuate their power.

perpetuate their power⁸ (see Chapters 2-6). Section 3 is an example of how I use pro-feminist auto-critique and involves an *experiential* view of the fire service that my fieldwork influences. As I have already explained this is produced at this time to provide some context for those whose knowledge of the fire service is limited, and to separate it from the remainder of the thesis, which is fieldwork led and influenced by my experiential knowledge. As a warning, it may appear that the thesis moves away from debates about gender. However, I am trying to develop a more complex understanding of gender by listening to how firefighters actually explain firefighting and their social arrangements on the station, in the belief that working arrangements for firefighters are influential in how firefighters construct their masculinity. Chapters 3-5 are the outcome of this practice. In Chapter 6 I shall conclude the whole thesis in a critique of the social/political construction of gender amongst firefighters and move this discussion to wider debates about gender. However, gender is about power and any understanding of how firefighters construct their masculinity first needs a prior explanation of some important structures/traditions in the fire service, how the fire service works and some other important features concerning firefighting⁹. This explanation follows and I recognise right from the onset that this explanation is a partial view. It is done with academic rigour, but cannot be divorced from my subjective way of seeing the world.

1.3. THE FIRE SERVICE

1.3.1. History

The Great Fire of London (1666) was the dynamic for establishing the fire service, but the fire-insurance brigades that sprung up after the fire were part of the wealth creation process and not a humanitarian response¹⁰. In origin each brigade had a distinctive uniform, mainly as an advertisement for their insurance company (see Appendix 3¹¹) and firefighters only fought fires in the property insured by their company—they *had no life saving role*. As cities expanded, fire-insurance companies (and brigades) increased. In London, the first economic rationalisations occurred in the fire service (1827) as fire-insurance companies started to amalgamate their brigades to eventually pool their resources in forming the ‘General Fire Engine Establishment’ (1833). In 1866, the responsibility for providing a fire service in London passed to local government who formed the London Fire Engine Establishment. This forerunner of the London Fire Brigade (LFB), under the command of Massey Shaw, experienced immediate financial restrictions. The budget was less than Shaw wanted¹²: a problem that still exists today (see Chapter 5).

⁸ During my education as a working class man, I learnt that there were understandings and forms of behaviour that men support and test themselves against, what I will later generalise as ‘masculine standards’. The fact that these standards had to be achieved, rather than that they were natural, is something that men do not publicise, nor particularly discuss, but nonetheless the groups they form do police these standards. As an example when I joined the fire service I was expected to conform to the way the experienced firefighters operated (what I later explain as conforming to firefighters’ hierarchy), this was in effect a very similar situation to that I had accepted as a working class boy, but these standards were rarely if ever formally discussed, they were just policed. Keeping to these standards and yet not publicising them is what Goffman (1959: 216) identifies as dramaturgical loyalty.

⁹ Later in this chapter and in Chapter 2 I will explain that this thesis will not be another ritual discovery of harassment in the fire service that produces simple to find examples of how firefighters harass women (see Howell 1994; Baigent 1996; Lee 1996; Richards 1996; Archer 1998; HMI 1999).

¹⁰ Segars (1989) argues that the financial revolution saw the provision of fire-insurance companies as a response to a need by merchants to protect their properties from fire (particularly in the aftermath of the Great Fire of London). Having provided the insurance, it then made economic sense for the fire-insurance companies to protect the risk by establishing their own individual fire brigades.

¹¹ On the day that fire-insurance premiums were due there was a parade of firefighters in the City of London. The distinctive uniform, more there to advertise individual companies, was totally inappropriate for firefighting (see Segars 1989). Dixon (1994) would understand about inappropriate uniforms that were designed more to flatter the organisations and to create an image, than to be practical (see Strangleman 1997).

¹² The insurance companies contributed 30% of the cost, which represents a saving to them of about 50%, but this did not prevent them complaining about having to contribute towards the fire service’s ‘new’ role of *saving life from fire* (see Segars 1989).

Large cities followed London's lead, but parish arrangements remained haphazard. Not until the country prepared for war (1938), did the government require local authorities to organise a fire service. The fire service was nationalised during the war (1941): a situation dominated by London, which had the largest number of professional¹³ firefighters¹⁴ and was able to dispatch them as officers and trainers to areas with little or no provision for firefighting. After the war, The Fire Services Act (1947) returned the fire service to local authorities, but it appears that the whole tradition of the modern fire service had its foundations in a model established in London (see Blackstone 1957; Holloway 1973; Segars 1989).

1.3.2. Fire Services Act (1947)

The Fire service Act (1947) established that in England and Wales local government is responsible for appointing a Fire Committee to provide an *efficient fire service* that will *protect life and property from fire*, and *render humanitarian services*. To comply with this requirement local government in England and Wales provides for 50 brigades with 589 wholetime stations and 139 day crewed stations (Audit Commission 1995). Staffing these stations are 33,656 wholetime firefighters of which only 258 are women, 315 are black and 74 Asian (see Appendix 1). There are also 868 retained stations staffed by 14,665 retained firefighters: 14,421 are men, 244 are women, 24 are black, 16 are Asian and 13 others¹⁵. The total annual cost is £1.474 billion—56.87% of which represents professional firefighters' wages (see HMCIFS 1999;)¹⁶. Government also accepted in 1947 that there would be *national pay and conditions of service* for firefighters negotiated between the employers and the Fire

¹³ The more usual use of the term professional might follow Hall, (1968; see also Wright 1982; Lucio and MacKenzie 1999; Devine et al 2000) and relate to the work of recognised professionals, such as doctors, accountants and lawyers. These have a professional body that is: self-regulating and controls entrance to the organisation and ethical considerations; acts almost as a public trustee, to be relied on to ensure that a profession will retain the highest standards. Most professionals can be elitist, having undergone a period of higher education, followed by further qualification in work-based examination/s and time served. Professionals also consider there is status to their work and incumbents attempt to control the work-process, mainly on the basis that professionals know best how their work should be done. Professional work in the UK can also be identified as predominantly white male work (Grint 1998: 209-214, 254-256) and in the same sexist terms male managers are increasingly terming themselves as professionals (Kanter 1977; Collinson et al 1990; Collinson and Hearn 1996).

The fire service is somewhat different having little in the way of educational standards for entry to define it as professional, yet is selective in its recruitment policy by choosing mostly working class, white, heterosexual males who are able-bodied, physically fit and have to reach high medical standards. Firefighters are also chosen for a predisposition to learning experientially, suited for team working activities and are expected to follow masculine standards (see Burke 1997; Chapters 3 and 5;). Firefighters' use of the term professional has two interpretations. First, the term is self-labelling by firefighters who see their work as professional in that: firefighters have their own work ethos related to helping the public; firefighters consider their job has status and characteristics that are not simply rewarded by pay alone; becoming a 'good firefighter' involves a great deal of experiential learning of professional skills learnt on the job (see Chapters 3, 5 and 6; see also Willis-Lee 1993a, 1993b; Manuel 1999; Smith 1999; O'Brien 2000). In a similar way the army advertise themselves as 'The Professionals' and the police take a similar view (see Campbell 1999). Second, firefighters use the term to differentiate between those firefighters who are employed wholetime (on exacting standards regarding suitability for the job), as opposed to the retained firefighters, who more often have full-time jobs in other occupations and do not have to fulfil such exacting recruitment standards. In many areas where retained pumps provide the fire cover there are difficulties in getting enough retained firefighters to staff the appliance, even on the lower standards applied. As might be expected, wholetime firefighters have a considerable animosity for the retained service, because if it did not exist there would be more jobs for fulltime firefighters, and the lower standards applying to recruitment might denigrate the status of wholetime firefighters.

¹⁴ Out of the 4272 professional firefighters in the country nearly half of them were LFB (Segars 1992: 139).

¹⁵ The retained section of the fire service contains a higher percentage of female and non-white firefighters than the fulltime one. I suggest this occurs because, unlike the fulltime service, the retained service has difficulty in recruiting sufficient firefighters. Therefore, 'starved of choice', prejudice cannot operate so freely and it may be that female and non-white firefighters are a reserve army of labour, which fills the gap left when white-men are not available, or prepared, to undertake such work (see Gamarnikow et al 1983: 3).

¹⁶ Under the Standing Spending Assessment for 1997/8 the fire service in London costs £34.42 per head, West Midlands costs £27.42, Essex £22.26, Surrey £22.34 (FBU 1998).

Brigades Union's (FBU), and that the FBU also had authority on technical questions within the fire service: a situation that still remains today (Segars 1989: 342).

The Government maintains control over the fire service through Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire service (HMIFS), which reports to the Home Secretary on fire service *efficiency*. Historically HMIFS have concentrated their efficiency inspections on the firefighters' *product*: the saving of life, property and the rendering of humanitarian services. However, as in all government organisations over the past 20 years there has been an expansion of the terms of reference for efficiency (see Maidment and Thompson 1993; Corby and White 1999). Now HMIFS inspect to identify areas where financial savings can be made, Health and Safety, Best Value, Fire Prevention and even more recently equality provisions (Fire 1998: 10-11; HMCIFS 1999). The move by the HMIFS to inspect for wider efficiencies, rather than at point of delivery, represents what I suggest is part of an increasing divide in the fire service between officers and firefighters. This divide, I will now discuss.

1.3.3. Fire service ethos: to provide an efficient service to help the public

Up until the 1960's, 'all' firefighters had undertaken military service. Tradition and honour (Dixon 1994) passed from the military to the fire service, despite long hours and often-harsh discipline (Segars 1989) the fire service appeared to have one view about service delivery. Officers and firefighters bridged any gap between them by their *shared understandings* about what I call a *professional ethos*: 'to provide an efficient service to help the public'. This ethos closely links to another *shared understanding*, the fire service's *raison d'être*: *the saving of life; the suppression of fire and the rendering of humanitarian services* (what in the military might be seen as a sense of honour, see Dixon 1994). Then in the 1970's politicians increasingly looked for budget savings in the fire service. At first, almost all uniformed staff resisted these economies; another *shared understanding*, which appears as a tradition ever since Massey Shaw. Now, on the one hand, you have those who still want to retain a fire service based on a traditional model of efficiency, which equates to the fastest and best service delivery: the Massey Shaw model, which the public appear to support¹⁷. On the other hand, you have those officers who would increasingly prioritise other agendas and willingly cut back the fire service to meet economic boundaries. This division divides the workforce almost horizontally, between those firefighters at the station who actually *do* the firefighting (who my study focuses on) and senior officers and politicians¹⁸. In particular, this division and the dynamics around it may have a direct impact on firefighters', 'forcing' solidarity amongst them (and separation from their officers) to resist cuts (see Chapter 5). I do not see firefighters' resistance in straightforward class terms, or as solely in defence of their ethos. It may also be that firefighters' solidarity and resistance is in defence of the means they have to construct their masculinity (see Chapter 3-6).

1.3.4. Stations

Generally, firestations are purpose built and strategically placed so that fire engines (appliances/pumps) can attend fires in accordance to standards laid down by the Home Office (see Fire Services Act 1947). These standards vary, but in most cities/large towns there is a requirement that two fire engines ('pumps'/'appliances') should arrive at a fire within 8 minutes ('the attendance'). In high-risk areas, the first pump must arrive within 5 minutes and the requirement in rural areas is

¹⁷ The notion this thesis has of the public is a generalised view of the community that firefighters seek to protect. In return the public respect and support firefighters (see Compton 1994; Audit Commission 1995; Hetherington 1998; HMIFS 1999), and this thesis will argue that this often leads to firefighters seeing the public they protect as an 'other' (who cannot do their job).

¹⁸ This division is a generalised view, some senior officers and politicians retain 'old fashioned' values as opposed to neo-liberal ones and some firefighters can be surprisingly neo-liberal. However senior officers do not come out in public and argue against the cuts as firefighters (and police chiefs) do.

that one pump arrives within 20 minutes¹⁹ (see Appendix 4). The fabric of firestations can range from grand Victorian buildings, designed for horse drawn appliances, to the most up-to-date modern designs²⁰. Central is the appliance bay (the garage for the appliances), the tower/yard (used for training), the watchroom (the communications and central reporting area), office, lecture room and breathing apparatus servicing area. However, there are other necessary requirements in a building where workers must be self-sufficient 365 days a year, 24 hours a day: a kitchen, mess, dormitory/locker room and shower/toilet area²¹.

1.3.5. Watches

Wholtime firestations provide *continuous and equal* staffing levels over the whole year. This is achieved by a *nationally agreed* rolling shift pattern and personnel (riders) are permanently attached to one of four watches (Red, White, Blue and Green)²². An eight-day tour of duty averaging 42 hours per week consists of two 9-hour day shifts (0900-1800), two 15-hour night shifts (1800-0900)²³ and four days off (Appendix 5). The top rate of pay for a firefighter is £20,021 per year (see Appendix 6). Whilst only wholtime firefighters feature in this thesis, there are other shift systems. These operate at stations covering lower-risk rural communities: day-crewing (professional firefighters who go to the station during the day and are called from home at night and weekends) and retained firefighters (part-timers, who are called from their main occupation or home by pagers).

Each watch operates as a self-sufficient integral unit and all firefighters train in the use of breathing apparatus (BA). Firefighters are very flexible workers who can interchange their role according to the task they are allocated at role-call. Firefighters do not get any extra pay for qualifications (including driving) and are therefore not in competition with each other over pay²⁴. The watch strength (riders) is dependent on the appliances at the station. National standards require that every pump should have a minimum crew of five riders and one of these must be a crew-commander

¹⁹ However, most brigades will send two appliances to a house fire.

²⁰ It may be that firestations, as prominent buildings, present a lasting reflection of the architectural style of the day.

²¹ Any visitor to a firestation may be surprised at the facilities provided, which appear to enhance the living arrangements for firefighters. Much of this is traditional: a result of the long hours of continuous duty firefighters worked up until the 1960's. Firefighters still cannot leave the station to have a meal, and the long night and day shift means that firefighters must arrange to supply their own food in-house. Some brigades do provide a cook, but the watch have to purchase their own food. To organise their eating arrangements most watches appoint a mess manager, who is paid £23.52 a month. The mess manager can be a sought after job, especially by older firefighters, because it can afford some status and an opportunity to avoid some of the more arduous work at a fire station. On some watches, the job mess manager has no status and some watches individually bring in their own food, but this arrangement is more often temporary until a watch can sort out a method of appointing a mess manager, sometimes by each watch member undertaking the job in turn on a rolling rota. The mess manager is always operational and available for fire calls, just like any other watch member. However, if the station has a special appliance, that is to say a hose layer or turntable ladder, it is possible the mess manager will ride that.

²² Firefighters do not often transfer, perhaps in their first few years they may move once to get closer to home or move to watch on which they feel more comfortable, but it would not be unusual for a firefighter to serve their whole 30 years service on a single watch.

²³ The European Working Time Directive (Hegewisch 1999: 126), which requires that there is an 11 hour break from work each day and that night shifts should not exceed 8 hours duration, would make firefighters' 15 hour night shift illegal if the FBU were to challenge it: firefighters fully support the FBU stance not to do so.

²⁴ The UK fire service is not like the US big city model, which breaks down firefighting into task-orientated groups such as hose crews, search/rescue crews and ladder crews. Firefighters in the UK undertake all firefighting duties and a long established tradition of the FBU require all firefighters to be able to carry out all functions. This stance avoids the elitism that occurs in the US and reduces the likelihood that one job can become more important than another. There is no extra pay for day-to-day qualifications, for example for driving or BA, and increments in pay are time served. This reduces the possibility that firefighters might argue about getting a qualification because of the extra pay involved, what Marxists might call a *contradiction* that can divide the proletariat by putting them in competition with each other, rather than recognising their real 'enemy' is capital: a false consciousness which divides the proletariat and prevents their solidarity and cohesiveness (see Burawoy 1979: 67; Collinson 1992, 1998).

²⁵ To allow for leave and sickness each watch on: a one-pump station requires 5 firefighters and 2 officers; a two-pump station requires 10 firefighters and 3 officers. There are local agreements about staffing for special appliances such as Turntable Ladders, Hydraulic Platform and Emergency Tenders. Each watch has an officer-in-charge: a watch-commander who rides to all incidents on the appliance and is responsible for their watch's day-to-day administration, discipline, training and welfare (see Chapters 3-5)²⁶.

1.3.6. Formal hierarchies

The term officer can have a wide ranging meaning in the fire service, in this thesis I try to differentiate between the always operational watch-officers, and senior officers who are not attached to a watch and only have a limited operational involvement²⁷. Promotion in the fire service is by single tier entry promotion (STEP), a system by which every officer must have first served as a firefighter and the hierarchy is so arranged as to ensure promotion is achieved step-by-step: there is no leapfrogging of ranks and in achieving promotion officers must serve in each rank before applying for the next²⁸. Overall responsibility for the four watches at a firestation, or a group of firestations, falls on the Station-commander. This can rank can vary in some brigades it will be a Station Officer and in others an Assistant Divisional Officer [ADO]. ADO's are the first senior officer rank, addressed as 'Sir' and saluted when met. Station Commanders do not have 'hands-on' responsibility for the watch or firefighting, but they are responsible for ensuring that each watch organises according to the rules and regulations. Groups of stations might also be organised as Divisions, then Divisional Officers coordinate the ADO's²⁹. The upward hierarchy continues to principal rank with Deputy Assistant Chief Officers, Assistant Chief Officers and a Chief Officer (Appendix 6). Officers' working week averages 72 hours, divides between day desk-hours and hours on call from home. *All* officers can be called from their desk, or home, to a fire at a moments notice.

Coordinating four watches that operate around the 24 hours is not easy. To facilitate the operational and administrative organisation of the fire service, especially during the absence of senior officers, written Brigade Orders (BO's) provide *the complete wisdom on how to run a fire service*. BO's cover every conceivable administrative concern, and a written procedure for *almost every type of emergency incident* (despite firefighting being *hands-on* see Chapter 3)³⁰. In an organisation where rank is supposed to provide unquestionable authority, rank also implies a greater ability and there is little room for entrepreneurial questioning during or after the rule making process (see Dixon 1994³¹).

²⁵ Without the required riders the appliance is not available ('off the run') until a firefighter, or officer, from another station is drafted in as a 'standby'

²⁶ The term watch-commander is new to the fire service (used in some brigades and not others) and in some brigades the rank of this officer will be a station officer and in others a sub officer (Sub O). Firefighters might have a variety of names for this position such as 'Guv', 'Guvnor', 'Boss', 'officer-in-charge' and 'OIC', and this term can replace a formal salutation of 'Sir'. On watches with good relations with their watch-commander, there is an increasing tendency for the watch to use first names and only use a more formal term when senior officers are present. Whilst the watch-commander will also be a crew-commander, stations with more than one appliance will need additional crew-commanders. These are a subordinate rank to the watch-commander, either a Sub O or a Leading firefighter (Lf.) and both these ranks are called junior officers (JO's).

²⁷ Chapters 3-6 differentiate between watch-commanders who are operational and senior officers who are deskbound.

²⁸ STEP is my abbreviation, chosen because it aptly reflects that promotion is only achieved step-by-step. The lack of accelerated promotion and outside entry at senior level may cause the fire service considerable difficulties regarding expertise, restrict the ability for entrepreneurial decision making and contravene equal opportunities legislation (see Chapter 5).

²⁹ Each brigade may organise their own structure and re-organisations occur on a regular basis.

³⁰ Sometimes situations occur for which there are no written procedures. Then, principal officers write an Order to cover the situation as soon as possible afterwards, even though they may have little understanding of current situations on the fireground (see this Chapter, Chapters 3 and 5).

³¹ Dixon (1994) provides a very clear explanation of how military officers have been historically 'given' the right to lead. As his account of the countless blunders in the many battles that the UK has been involved in indicates, this actually

The expectation is that firefighters accept officers given right to lead and will comply with BO's, but this thesis will suggest that firefighters often make entrepreneurial interpretations to avoid officers' 'iron cage' (see Chapters 3-5). It may be that senior officers are aware of this breakdown in discipline, but few recognise it publicly: content almost that they have written the orders in such a way as to protect themselves and unconcerned that the bureaucracy is failing (see Chapters 3 and 5).

1.3.7. The link to the military

The formal structure of the fire service may be organised along military lines, but despite the regimentation, the traditional attachment is to the, "highly disciplined and immensely strong sailors of the Royal Navy" (Lloyd-Elliott 1992: 24; see Segars 1989; Bailey 1992: 4; Divine 1993). It is easy to see how the link with the navy served the fire service, because firefighters have historically worked extremely long hours, in groups isolated at a station and in dangerous and confined situations (see Segars 1989). The link with the navy is mostly only one of tradition now: firestations can still be referred to as ships and shifts are called watches; *the fire service often acts as a senior rescue service*.

As in the military, officers report to the officer above (see Dixon 1994). Chief Officers report to the Fire Committee and write the impersonal Brigade Orders (BO's) to cover 'every' contingency with the belief that they are dictating how *their* brigade will organise. Weber (1971) could identify BO's as creating an iron cage of rationality, especially as the fire service makes convincing claims to be a uniformed disciplined service, where the rule is "*salute and execute*" (CCC 2000: 21; see Archer 1999: 94). Whilst it would be easy for a researcher to accept this view, it is a view I query. Much of my evidence collected from politicians, at The Fire Service College, on stations and from the FBU, challenges the whole concept of the fire service as disciplined in any military sense (see Chapters 3-5). Analysis suggests there is a concerted attempt throughout the fire service to pretend that the disciplinary model still exists (see Chapters 3-5). Each level of the hierarchy might have different reasons for maintaining this image, but I choose to take the view that firefighters take when they suggest that *every officer appears to justify their rank as if they were the centre-pin* of the fire service. Therefore, if any officer admits they were not in control, they would destroy their own justification (if firefighters were to publicly admit officers were not in control, they might draw unnecessary attention on themselves and lay down a challenge to officers). Chapters 3-5 will expand this theme, but it needs to be understood that there are times when firefighters are prepared to put on a show for their senior officers and make-believe officers are in charge, and times when senior officers are in charge (see Chapters 3-5). However, with the exception of recruit training, no officer would, or perhaps could, expect firefighters on a watch to follow orders blindly. Firefighters' resistance is so organised that perhaps it is best to consider the fire service as having three structures, each of which can apply at different times:

A formal authoritarian hierarchy (disciplined in a military sense): this will normally apply when firefighters and senior officers are in close proximity.

A formal bureaucracy (rule book led/BO's cover 'every' exigency): again this will apply when firefighters and senior officers are in close proximity, but for the majority of the time the watch-commander and firefighters informally negotiate how BO's will apply.

means that 'right is might'. The senior rank is not only in charge, but identified by their subordinates as having absolute power and there is little room for negotiation of this right. Not forgetting the 'Charge of the Light Brigade', one recent examples of this behaviour is the Commons Public Accounts Committee's criticism of the Ministry of Defence handling of the enquiry into the Chinook helicopter crash that claimed 29 lives in 1994. They suggested that the ruling by two Air Marshals who blamed the pilots for the crash was unsustainable. Yet, Sir William Wratten, one of the Air Marshals on the original RAF board of inquiry, dismissed the charges of arrogance. "As far as I am concerned there is no doubt whatsoever. There wasn't then, there isn't now," he told Newsnight (BBC, 30-11-00; see Norton-Taylor 2000a 2000b). To a lesser degree, this thesis will indicate that fire service officers might have a similar belief in their own infallibility.

An informal hierarchy (charismatic): this is the way the watch organise and length of service is a considerable indicator of place in the hierarchy, but some younger leaders might emerge.

1.3.8. Respect

The system may give officers respect, but firefighters themselves have always expected their officers to earn their respect. In the past officers used to do this by *ordering and leading* firefighters into a building to fight a fire. Then the use of breathing apparatus (BA), which provides a firefighter with a supply of fresh air, was frowned on as sissy. *Good firefighters* (Chapter 3) were acknowledged ‘*smoke-eaters*’, who competed with each other to get the furthest into a fire without having to find fresh air³². Some ‘smoke-eating’ (autocratic) officers were legends in their own right, leading crews into the fire, ensuring they were ‘safe’ and then leaving to take control from outside. Most officers were then chosen for their *firefighting abilities, experiential skills and ability to lead firefighters* above other considerations. Firefighters ‘had’ to respect them, because it was the officers who taught them their job and officers quite literally held firefighters’ lives in their hands. Now however, fumes from the petro-carbons in a fire make smoke-eating almost impossible, Health and Safety legislation is rigidly enforced by the FBU to ensure that BA has to be worn at even the smallest fire³³. The minimum size BA crew is two and this is an important safety factor, which allows for the second crewmember to rescue an injured partner in the case of accident³⁴. Safety procedures also prevent crews from splitting up once they have entered a fire, and therefore an officer whose primary roll is to organise firefighting from outside, can no longer lead a crew into the fire, then return outside and take command. Officers now have to *wait outside*, dependent on the firefighters *inside* to fight the fire. This reduces officers’ ability to be seen as *good firefighters* and as a consequence the authority/respect that their firefighting abilities gave them. Now those experiential skills are in the hands of firefighters, who *without their officers to teach them* have established their own protocols for firefighting (see Chapters 3 and 5). Technology, in the shape of BA, has effectively required firefighters to reskill and in firefighters’ eyes, officers are increasingly deskilled; little more than managers who stay outside of the fire, *away from the risk*, to provide a series of safety checks, ensure that nothing has been forgotten *and do the paperwork*³⁵.

1.3.9. The gap between firefighters and senior officers

While senior officers may have lost respect as their earlier firefighting role became impossible, they have not given up their notion that they are still firefighters (see Chapter 3 and 5). Deprived of the ability *to get into the fire*, officers now elevate their command and control responsibility *outside the*

³² This situation still apparently happens with ‘Rescue One’, the famous New York fire team (see Chapter 3).

³³ Improving workers’ safety became a major issue in the 1960’s and the Health and Safety Act was a result of increasing agitation by trade union leaders (often almost against their members wishes). One prominent member of the TUC General Council who campaigned for health and safety legislation was the then general secretary of the FBU, Terry Parry, who went on to become a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Commissioner. In what might be seen as a typical example of the concerns the fire service had for the health and safety of firefighters, the fire service applied for exemption from this act, but was refused and from personal experience at the time I am convinced that had Terry Parry not been influential in governmental circles that the fire service might have found itself outside of the act. Officers to an extent lost control of some of their authority because of this act, because it gave firefighters a first ‘legal’ right to question their officers’ judgements. Officers’ resistance to the inclusion in the act may have been on the basis that their given right to be in charge at a fire was first answerable to the Health and Safety Act and subsequently to firefighters who might challenge the legitimacy of an order which they saw as dangerous. Chapter 5 argues that this situation has been somewhat turned upside down, with firefighters ignoring (when they consider it appropriate) the HSE and in particular ‘dynamic risk assessment’ and their officers enforcing it: a cynic may see officers as using the HSE as a weapon to hit firefighters with in an attempt to regain control of the fire service.

³⁴ This may account for why firefighters place such a high priority on physical strength and being able to trust your BA partner (see Chapter 3).

³⁵ Watch commanders can avoid this gap by retaining the title *good firefighter* and the respect this gives them; see Chapter 3).

building on fire as if that were firefighting³⁶. Examples of this appear within the firefighters' journals, where the description of major incidents often inflates officers' role to a point where firefighters' attendance at the incident almost appears coincidental: an unskilled job that anyone can do³⁷. This has increased the gap between firefighters and officers and the way officers marginalise firefighters' skills, appears to support firefighters' view (above) that officers always see their own position as key in the organisation. It is also very noticeable that when research takes place by the members of the Divisional and Brigade Command courses at The Fire service College (FSC)³⁸, it is predominantly about command and control (how officers control firefighters, manage fire brigades and technical developments): a view that invariably looks down on firefighters and does little to take their views into account³⁹. Further examples of how officers marginalise firefighters' skills (a point that particularly angers firefighters), is that at an important incident, it is always senior officers who appear on the television, as if to steal firefighters' glory. As one watch-commander pointedly said during a lecture on command and control at FSC, "*as soon as the cameras are around the command structures collapse – the white hats are there*"⁴⁰.

1.3.10. Senior officers' firefighting experience

All senior officers have to take their turn at being the 'duty officer' whose responsibility it is to take charge of 'makeups'⁴¹ within their area. However, following the 1977/78 firefighter's strike, there was an increase in the numbers of senior officers (probably to improve managerial control). This speeded up promotion, thus reducing the experience an officer got before their promotion. It must also be considered that the increase in officers, without an additional increase in makeups meant that there were fewer fires for officers to attend. As an example, after the strike (1977/78) each of the 12 LFB divisions of 11 stations had an increase in senior officers from 5 to 16. Recently, senior officer numbers are reducing, but there are currently 264 senior officers in the LFB. These officers have to share the experience to be gained from the 581 makeup incidents that the 112 LFB stations attended

³⁶ This thesis is not particularly interested in officers except where they impact on firefighters, and therefore I am not going to comment in detail on the rights and wrongs of single tier entry promotion. However, in Chapter 5 I do suggest the difficulties of such a system, and here I suggest that the fire service might be better managed if officers concentrated on managing and forgot the notion of being operational. Officers though are unlikely to propose this because once they were 'reduced' to being managers, then managers from outside the fire service could apply for their job. The single tier entry system would then no longer support their sole right to be officers and the employment of professional managers would reduce if not stop completely the right of firefighters to rise through the ranks. The way that officers resist the employment of professional managers may be partly responsible for why the fire service finds it so difficult to change its approaches, especially to equal opportunities. Strangleman (1998) identifies that railway culture only really changed when managers from the private sector were brought in.

³⁷ Segars (1989: 5) raises exactly the same point when he argues that "most fire service histories ... concentrate excessively on chief fire officers and their role in technical innovation as leaders of men. ... The part played by the ordinary rank and file fireman and his importance is totally ignored."

³⁸ Each student on these two high profile courses has to complete a dissertation from their own research. In the case of the Brigade Command Course, the research involves an international project funded by the Home Office. All these dissertations are available in The Fire Service College Library. They are clearly in-house, written for the examiner and therefore unlikely to challenge current wisdom, but they do provide an understanding of the view of future officers and those who train them. It is my judgement that in academic terms they range between A level standard and Masters.

³⁹ Most of this research is quantitative and little of it involves interviewing anyone, least of all firefighters and those interviews that are done appear not to have been transcribed. One senior officer at FSC told me about his research and his metaphors were interesting in that they portray a common view amongst senior officers that *running the fire service would be easier without firefighters*. He spoke of station-commanders as "*sleeping with the enemy*" and about the "*pathological behaviour of the watch*." However, aware as they are of firefighters' ability to resist their actions, apart from innocent asides, officers do not publicise this knowledge. Nor do they use their research opportunities to look at why the problem exists, but just seek to find better ways of managing firefighters *without identifying the dynamics behind the actors they are trying to manage*.

⁴⁰ Senior officers wear white helmets at fires and the point being made is that whilst officers were supposed to be in control, once the media arrived, especially television cameras, officers left that duty to be seen, as it were, in the spotlight.

⁴¹ This term relates to fires where the officer in charge decides the initial attendance of two appliances is insufficient to deal with the incident and radio for more pumps to control the fire (see Chapter 3).

in 1998/9. Although a crude example⁴² this suggests that each senior officer might attend 2 incidents in a year, and because only 19 of these makeups involved more than 8 pumps, this supports a view that not only is senior officers experience of attending fires limited, but that only rarely and by chance do senior officers actually attend large fires.

One example of the gap developing between officer and firefighters is when firefighters complain that officers have ‘lost’⁴³ substantial buildings by withdrawing firefighters from the fire too early (see Chapters 3 and 5). This argument stems from the fact that if a fire is spreading inside a building, it can only be stopped by firefighters ‘*getting in*’ to extinguish it (see Chapter 3). If officers withdraw firefighters from a fire too early, there may be some truth in firefighters’ argument, because as the explanation above suggests, officers are now clearly less experienced at actually firefighting and might err too far on the side of safety. However, firefighters’ arguments might not be altogether fair when they accuse senior officers of ‘losing’ a building. It should be understood that once a fire has reached a certain size and intensity, then it is very dangerous for firefighters to remain inside the building. Therefore, it is possible that some of firefighters’ argument will be just anti-officer. Skilled firefighters should also recognise the danger on such occasions and would ‘withdraw’. However, if an officer instructs firefighters to leave, instead of the firefighters shouldering the responsibility for ‘pulling out’, they can blame the officers: it is the officers, not them that have ‘bottled out’ and ‘lost the building’.

1.4. FIREFIGHTERS’ INDUSTRIALISATION AND ORGANISATION

1.4.1. Left wing union

Fire service naval origins do not sit well with independent trade union activities. However, firefighters almost continuous duty and harsh discipline⁴⁴ finally forced firefighters to organise. It was not until 1920 that their continuous duty system was amended to achieve a second watch and the 72-hour week: a situation that lasted until the 60-hour week saw the introduction of a third watch in 1946 and a 56-hour week in 1956 (see Segars 1989 for a full explanation). During this industrialisation, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) leadership became very leftwing (see Segars 1989⁴⁵; Bailey 1992; Darlington 1996, 1998; Chapter 5).

1.4.2. Undermanning

The fire service’s history of working long hours for low pay (Segars 1989), became even more of a problem when, in the late 1960’s, a buoyant economy reduced fire service recruitment⁴⁶. The

⁴² There is a considerable amount of data produced in Appendix 10 and this particular use of the data hopes to provide an overview and uses averages. Some senior officers will attend more fires, but that inevitably means others will attend less. The statistics may also be skewed, because at large fires several senior officers will attend, although only one will be in charge. However, most makeups are not generally large fires: the majority will involve 4 pumps at a single house fire and most of the work will be done before the senior officer arrives. The senior officer might have a considerable distance to travel to the fire and does not get the call until the makeup is sent (by the watch-commander who has arrived at the fire).

⁴³ The term lost means that the fire has ‘won’, firefighters have had to withdraw and have in affect given in (see Chapter 3).

⁴⁴ Prior to 1920, firefighters worked continuously for 13 days before getting 1 day off. Accommodation was provided at the station, thus bringing families within the discipline of the fire service as well.

⁴⁵ Up until 1956, almost the whole leadership of the FBU were members of the Communist Party. After the Hungarian revolution was crushed by USSR (1956) many resigned their communist card in protest. However, Militant, Socialist Workers Party and other far-left groups, still have direct links into the fire service. Terry Fields, the MP who was removed from the official labour list because he was a Militant member, was previously an Executive Council member of the FBU. Derek Hatton was also a firefighter, before becoming leader of Liverpool Council.

⁴⁶ Women were prevented from being firefighters at that time and it took until 1982 for the first female wholetime firefighter to be employed. However, if the current rate of women’s employment in the fire service were anything to go by, women would not have made any difference to the understaffing in the 1960’s. Of interest the FBU allowed sexist cartoons in their *Firefighter* journal at the time (see Compton 1976) and in so doing supported a view that trade unions would resist women coming into men’s jobs (see Stockard and Johnson 1992: 42).

shortage of firefighters became so acute that pumps often rode with a driver, a firefighter and an officer (as opposed to today's minimum standard of 5). This increased the risk to firefighters, particularly regarding the support available outside the fire for those who 'got in' (see Chapters 3 and 5). Shortage of riders also severely restricted leave⁴⁷. The shortages also meant that long hours could not be reduced (from 56) and this further deterred recruitment. As a result, the workforce (which more and more included people like myself with no military experience) became angry and the FBU increasingly focussed firefighters' anger on industrialising the fire service (see Segars 1989 for a full report of this). The employers' response was to first resist, then reduce hours and increase pay. However, once firefighters' militancy had been aroused, the FBU were able to ratchet up their bargaining power, which then trapped the employers in a vicious circle: as fast as the working week reduced to appease the existing workforce, more recruits were needed to fill the vacancies that the reduction in the working week created⁴⁸. The massive influx of 'new' firefighters at this time may also have been important in building a gap between firefighters and officers.

It may also be that the authority of the FBU increased in part because rationalisations were occurring in the fire service to reduce the number of brigades. For example the new LFB (1965) was the result of amalgamating eight Brigades and firefighters moaned about lost conditions and *undermanning*. This gave the FBU an opportunity to provide leadership and a sense of belonging before firefighters focused their loyalty on the new brigade. I was very much a part of this process of industrialisation, being, at the time, a prominent member of the London Negotiating Committee. I remember that the LFB, with vacancies for 1000 firefighters out of an establishment of 6000, continually faced *spit and polish/emergency calls only* disputes involving firefighters refusing to drill and maintain the cleanliness of the station to military standards. Firefighters' denial of their officers 'right' to maintain the previous military levels of cleanliness, 'proved' just how unimportant that bullshit was (see Dixon 1994) and this alone had a marked effect on discipline. Firefighters' resistance to officers also became clearer and more pronounced, with the result that firefighters refused to accept any order from officers unless they were attending an emergency call. The ability to refuse orders and get away with it also demystified officers' autocratic authority and at the end of each dispute, the gap between firefighters and officers increased as officers lost more respect, while firefighters' industrial strength and confidence in the presence of their officers increased⁴⁹.

1.4.3. Service for the sixties

Alongside the disputes over hours, the FBU campaigned for a more professional fire service by trying to involve firefighters in Fire Prevention (FP) (see FBU 1960; Holroyd 1970). This eventually culminated in a discreet FP branch in the fire service, which consists mainly of officers who have moved permanently sideways away from line management and some officers who intend to move back after getting their FP experience⁵⁰. This branch carries out inspections to ensure properties comply with a variety of legislation intended to prevent/control fire and to save life. It was also anticipated that firefighters would carry out inspections after their 'Service for the Sixties' campaign,

⁴⁷ In an organisation operating round the clock for 365 days a year, it is more important to be able to take leave when reasonably requested than in traditional 9-5 working.

⁴⁸ The hours reduced from 56 to a 48-hour week in 1965, but this often involved firefighters working compulsory overtime to cover shortages and the hours effectively returned to 56 in 1967. It was not until after their national strike that firefighters finally achieved their current 42-hour week duty system. Even then, after the agreement was made as part of the return to work deal, the employers tried not to implement this reduction and firefighters had to threaten a further strike to get the 42-hour week.

⁴⁹ This was also a time when the Health and Safety at work act came into use in the fire service (see Chapter 5) and firefighters were increasingly able to challenge their officers' right to be in charge on the grounds that their orders were a breach of safety regulations.

⁵⁰ The senior officers in FP, who have little to do with the operational firefighters in a day-to-day command sense, but they do have an operational roll, take their turn as 'duty officer' when they will turn up, 'out of the blue', and are expected not only to be in charge, but also to control firefighters. Some brigades unable to staff their FP vacancies have offered inducements in the form of temporary promotions to those who 'choose' to go into FP and other brigades require, as a condition of promotion, that officers serve in FP.

but this has not really occurred. Firefighters and FP are not a ‘natural’ mix and after an initial surge of interest, firefighters quickly became unhappy with FP. They particularly disliked the paperwork, which firefighters feminise as office work and not compatible with their status as firefighters (see Chapters 3 and 5). To marginalise FP, firefighters carry out their own form of soldiering (see Taylor 1947): a process made easy because firefighters who carry out FP remain ‘on the run’⁵¹. The inevitable result, even for quiet stations, is that an emergency can disrupt the inspection. After the call, the firefighters return to the station to clean up and this frequently leaves no time to return to the inspection⁵².

Currently in some brigades, FP is an important part of firefighters’ duties and in others only token inspections occur. This might suggest that some Brigades are keener to accept FP than others are, but what is more likely is that they are in a different point in a cycle. This cycle starts with a new initiative such as visiting schools (see Sacre 2000)⁵³, but might also involve some ‘follow-up inspections’ after the fulltime FP department have visited a premises. However, the brigade has to train and involve *all* firefighters in FP⁵⁴ before this can be done. After a time each initiative gradually loses momentum and grinds to a halt. Then a few years later the FP initiative starts again and the same cycle repeat itself; each time firefighters have to retrain to incorporate changes in FP legislation. Recently a new FP initiative is starting, called Community Fire Safety (CFS) this is more orientated towards firefighters getting involved with the public and could be instrumental in changing the way the fire service operates.

1.4.4. Cleaning

Once the FBU won the argument and as FP started (as a condition of it starting in LFB), the FBU insisted that now that firefighters were professionals, it was no longer befitting for firefighters to do their own domestic cleaning and after a further spate of industrial disputes ‘civilians’ took over station cleaning. These disputes completed a new phase of industrial relations in the fire service and heralded the end of discipline in any military sense. Gone were the military standards of cleaning: scrubbing and polishing floors, cleaning windows, toilets and polishing brass—bullshit (see Dixon 1994). Gone too was officers right to ‘prove’ their authority and reinforce firefighters place at the bottom of the hierarchy, by ordering higher standards of cleaning as a local punishment for deviant firefighters⁵⁵.

1.4.5. Discipline code

⁵¹ ‘On the run’ means the appliance is available for emergency calls. In this case, the driver remains on the appliance (in touch by radio with control) and can summon the crew who have left the appliance to carry out the inspection.

⁵² Firefighters have to wear their best uniform for the FP inspection, but if they receive a call to a fire they discard their best uniform and rig in their firegear on route to the incident. Firegear is inevitably dirty and even when they have nothing to do at the incident their hands will be dirty, they then need to return to the station to wash and straighten out their best uniform. The trip back to the station is never as fast as the trip to the fire. Factory managers, who have to set aside time to show firefighters around on the inspections, are often angry at how their time is wasted under such circumstances.

⁵³ Currently the term Community Fire Safety is being used to describe what earlier may have been called FP. Community Fire Safety is a re-branding and a new attempt to involve firefighters in carrying out what effectively is FP but on a more local and interactive approach. In this thesis the terms CFS and FP are almost mutually interchangeable and I predict that unless this re-branding is well handled firefighters will soon recognise this form of work in the same way they do other FP work (see Chapters 5 and 6). It also has to be noted that those stations with the most time to carry out CFS are the stations which receive less calls and that the busier stations (which probably have more need for CFS involvement) have less time to help prevent fires through CFS.

⁵⁴ In line with the FBU’s fundamental policy that all operational firefighters carry out the same work, when operational firefighters carry out FP inspections, everyone at the station must be trained and do their fair share. This avoids a situation whereby only ‘interested’ firefighters are trained, and the competition over who does and does not do FP inspections.

⁵⁵ This might be seen as similar to the informal methods of discipline in the military where officers given right to lead is supported by officers’ administering summary punishments for minor misdemeanours.

The fire service has a discipline code (laid down by Act of Parliament) and 'Charges' can be served on firefighters to be answered at what best resembles a court marshal. However, the fire service rarely use its disciplinary procedures and, nationally, only 168 firefighters (almost ½ of those investigated) were found guilty during 1998/9 (see Baigent 1996; Appendix 7). This lack of use occurs mainly because the discipline code is so cumbersome, but there are other reasons. First, firefighters are skilful in avoiding direct confrontation that might produce the type of evidence required to support a 'Charge'. Second, the FBU is very effective in avoiding and winning initial cases and the system of appeals that can go up to the Home Secretary. Third, if an officer has to resort to discipline they are almost admitting that they cannot control firefighters. Officers have also lost the opportunity to gain respect from being good leaders/firefighters and now firefighters have less need of officers' skills at a fire. Officers who lack the respect of their firefighters are therefore trapped in a system where they are expected to lead, almost in military fashion, without the ability to impose punishments summarily (as in the military) and are not expected to bring formal charges.

1.4.6. Cutting the fire service

In recent times, attempts to cut the fire service have almost forced firefighters to act in self-defence again (see Segars 1989; Bailey 1992; Darlington 1996, 1998; Chapter 5). However, only a few firefighters show the revolutionary consciousness⁵⁶ that might be expected in such an apparently successful working class organisation. Their view is close to printers (see Cockburn's 1983, 1991a): individual firefighters' trade unionism can be seen as left wing, and self-centred and conservative⁵⁷. Lashing out to defend *their* service ethos may be an equally rational explanation of firefighters' behaviour, alongside or instead of the class action and solidarity that Segars (1989) recognises. A further explanation that I explore in this thesis is the possible link between firefighting and masculinity, which firefighters might be conservatively defending (see Chapters 3 and 6). Whatever the reason the FBU mixes a powerful cocktail for resistance that makes them a substantial union the employers have to reckon with. Despite the general view that they were forced back to work in 1978, it might be argued instead that firefighters actually won their national strike, because they returned to work with a pay agreement that locked their wage to a point on the industrial wage scale for skilled labour (see Segars 1989; Bailey 1992).

1.4.7. Shared understandings

Importantly the strike made obvious to firefighters that the so-called '*shared understandings*' between firefighters and senior officers (in general) were little more than a sham. Senior officers, who might until the strike have been seen by firefighters to have *joint understandings* and therefore held firefighters' esteem, now sided with the government⁵⁸. These officer 'scabs' not only helped to train the troops brought in to break the strike, but led them at fires. Senior officers at the time made the argument they were defending the public. However, in the light of this thesis, it is possible to see senior officers as accepting, if not supporting, the earlier understaffing and bad conditions that firefighters endured. It also appears that post 1965, when firefighters started to fight back, officers have increasingly sided with the employers, who were first keen to run the fire service as cheaply as

⁵⁶ Giddens (1982: 163-164) argues that many groups have 'class awareness', which involves an understanding that groups form around norms. He does not consider that so many have 'class consciousness', which he describes as, "conscious of the other classes and relationships and antagonisms between them." Giddens goes on to break these into three categories:

1. Aware of other classes and class differentiation;
2. Aware classes are in conflict, with oppositional interests;
3. Revolutionary consciousness.

I will for the purposes of this thesis use the term conservative to describe those firefighters who I consider are 'aware classes are in conflict, with oppositional interests'.

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note how Cockburn (1991a) is an update on Cockburn (1983) by including the redundancies caused by the move from Fleet Street to Docklands.

⁵⁸ Segars (1989: 315-316) argues, "It was not until 1977 that firefighters eventually came to terms with both the special nature of their job in an emergency service and their best interests as working people."

possible and, after firefighters' gains of the last three decades, are now intent on cutting the cost/size of the fire service. Despite the increase in emergency calls and attempts to increase the FP/CFS duties of firefighters, officers have not stood up (in the way that senior police and military officers have) for their service. Officers' position may be less to do with protecting the public from fire and more to do with officers trying to 'prove' or reclaim their authority in an environment where firefighters have become increasingly resistant (see Chapter 5)⁵⁹.

However, attempts to cut the fire service remain unsuccessful and no firefighter has ever been made redundant. In comparison with other groups of unionised labour, firefighters do not experience job insecurity. The fire service remains one of the few havens where men can celebrate their physical strength⁶⁰ and embodied skills in *permanent* employment with a pension after 25/30 years⁶¹, which in turn allows firefighters, collectively and individually, to reflexively view themselves in a positive light and not in competition with each other (see Burawoy 1979: 67; Collinson 1992: 24, 1998). Of particular interest, the authority of the FBU, gained during 1960's, when firefighters were in short supply, has not been eroded as problems over a labour shortage turn into problems of how employers process 80,000 applications for 120 jobs (see Webb 1998: 26-27)⁶². In part, this may occur because the FBU have added public support to their cocktail of resistance by successfully manipulating the concept of Total Quality Management. Rather than allowing politicians and officers to use *public interest* as a reason for introducing economies, which in the NHS involves an emphasis on cost, rates of delivery and not 'customer' satisfaction (see Lucio and MacKenzie 1999: 168-169), the FBU have turned the tables and formed an alliance with the public and public bodies (who are the real stakeholders in the fire service) to challenge politicians by an innovative use of performance measurement and consumers rights (to have 'Best Value' from an efficient fire service in delivery terms rather than economic) to maintain their service at 1980 levels.

1.4.8. Secondary work: fiddle jobs

Most firefighters have secondary employment ('fiddle jobs'), through which firefighters use their entrepreneurial skills away from the station to improve their income. The shift system is well suited to 'fiddling' and this second job can boost firefighters' incomes above that of their officers. Much of this work is casual labour, but many firefighters operate as self-employed builders, window cleaners and mechanics. In fact, firefighters suggest that if you want something done there will be a firefighter somewhere who can do it⁶³. When such entrepreneurial 'skills' are pitted against officers, rather than encompassed or harnessed by management, then this adds to officers' difficulties in controlling the workplace.

⁵⁹ This may be a classic case of how firefighters' consciousness was raised as they recognised that their officers had been exploiting them. However, as to whether officers were acting on behalf of capital, or in defence of a petty dividend that gave them prestige over firefighters is left until Chapters 5 and 6 (see Wright 1984).

⁶⁰ The notion that firefighters have to be strong, which caused the fire service to look for sailors in the past (above), continues today and in research (Richards 1999: 49-50) over 80% of all respondents considered a firefighters' job was physical.

⁶¹ Whilst firefighting is a manual job, it also involves mental skills. Firefighters should be thought of throughout this thesis as a thinking labourer, whose workplace is far from the assembly line and officers' surveillance.

⁶² Outside of the remit of this thesis, but difficult to ignore, this mix of formal and informal structures appears to provide an efficient fire service that reflects the wishes of the community and it may be that the fire service provides a good example of 'Best Value'. If politicians really want to change the fire service and promote an efficiency based on economics, then they will probably need to implement a root and branch rethink of the formal system. However, moving towards a cost based criteria for efficiency might work against the secondary stakeholders' (the public) views on 'Best Value', as Chapters 3, 5 and 6 will suggest.

⁶³ In many ways, those firefighters who choose self-employment in their 'fiddle jobs' and those who are employed in 'fiddle jobs', but not dependent on the wage this work gives them for survival, might be seen as independent artisans (see Wright 1984: 122). Fiddle jobs, might also develop firefighters' independence in ways not so available to those workers whose 'normal' hours at work do not provide the options that firefighters have. For a few firefighters, 'fiddling' becomes their main occupation and then the fire service is almost a hobby.

1.5. WELFARE AND BENEVOLENT

Before examining firefighters' working arrangements, it is important to recognise that the FBU is not the only organisation that looks after firefighters' welfare and to provide a sense of belonging. There is also The Fire Services National Benevolent Fund (FSNBF) and The Fire Service Welfare Fund (FSWF), both registered charities that provide services to firefighters. FSNBF provides rehabilitation, therapy, convalescent care, and financial grants, for sick and injured firefighters and their families. FSWF provides a more local need and in London it operates three social venues, two large sports facilities as a focal point for the many sporting clubs that firefighters organise, and provides sporting equipment to stations (LFBWFM 2000). There are numerous other fire service societies and a National Retired Members Association. Firefighters are good fundraisers and apart from supporting their own organisations, they are prominent campaigners for national charities and one-off issues, especially those associated with children.

1.6. WORKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIREFIGHTERS

Firefighters are involved in three forms of working arrangement: one predominantly takes place in the public arena, the other two, mainly in the private. My description of these types of work, in the next three sections, recognises the colloquial terminology of the fire service, which uses military terms to explain firefighters' work as a *duty*: first, there are firefighters' *operational duties*; second, firefighters' *standing-by duties*; third, firefighters' *standing-down duties*⁶⁴.

1.7. OPERATIONAL DUTIES

Operational duties are the fire service's *raison d'être*: the saving of life; the suppression of fire and the rendering of humanitarian services. This is the public face of the fire service, recognisable as a mixed bag of emergency calls/'shouts'⁶⁵, many of which do not involve fire (Burns 1995: 28; Archer 1999: 98; see Appendix 8). 'Shouts' can and often do involve periods of intense activity in an uncomfortable and hazardous work environment. At these times, firefighters, "can act with conspicuous courage and devotion to duty" (Fennell 1988: 83). My understanding has led me to suggest that firefighters have a *professional ethos*: 'to provide an efficient service to help the public' and this might apply to anytime the public ask for help. However, firefighters indicate that they believe firefighting is the single most important, even defining, feature of their work. Therefore, firefighting is treated as central to firefighters' gender construction and a focus of my thesis. It is important to note that if any risk is associated with firefighters' work, then it is normally to be found at a fire. Whilst there will always be exceptions to the rule, it is possible to identify that the other 'emergency' incidents firefighters attend do not involve so many unknowns and consequently the danger element of that work is largely reduced.

1.7.1. Attending emergencies

Each firebrigade has a central control to receive, evaluate and determine the attendance to 999 calls. The control then 'put the bells down' at the station, a 'call-slip'⁶⁶ prints out in the watchroom 'ordering' the appliances to 'turn-out' and the whole watch will run to the appliances. The commander of each appliance collects a call slip and route-card⁶⁷ from the watchroom, before continuing to the appliance where the crew will already be 'mounted' with engine revving ready to

⁶⁴ The terms 'stand-by' and 'stand-down' are of Naval origin.

⁶⁵ The term 'shout' is understood to have risen from the way that, before bells and sirens, firefighters used to shout to the public to get out of their way (Lloyd Elliot 1992: 25-26). There is even an argument that the Prince of Wales in Victorian times, who is known to have attended fires with the London Fire Brigade, may have been instrumental in using this method of getting people to move out of the way.

⁶⁶ The call slip provides the address, type of incident, the appliances to attend and the route card number.

⁶⁷ Each brigade will have its own type of route-card, but typically there will be one card for each road on the station's ground and these will comprise of a small map of the area and have a written instruction of how to get from the station to the road concerned.

go. The officer jumps onto the appliance and it will leave, often within 40 seconds of the ‘bells going down’.

In most areas, the appliance will arrive at the fire within 5-10 minutes. The watch-commander then has to make immediate decisions on how to fight the fire, as there is no time to prepare a plan because this might allow a fire to spread further. The watch-commander is also under pressure to radio a message back to control indicating how the incident is progressing (see Appendix 9)⁶⁸: a ‘stop’ message, indicates no more assistance will be required; an ‘assistance message/makeup’, indicates that the initial attendance is insufficient to contain the fire and asks for extra appliances. If people are trapped in a fire, the watch-commander must send back a ‘persons reported’ message (see Chapter 3) and it is almost mandatory to ‘make pumps four’ at persons reported incidents. Messages have the advantage that central control know how to arrange their resources, but the need to comply with tight time schedules may also be an example of a Foucaultian gaze over the officer in charge of the fire. On receipt of a makeup, the central control will despatch a senior officers to take control, but they will not arrive for a considerable time after the initial attendance.

1.7.2. Always ready

Firefighters have no warning when a shout will occur and the importance that firefighters place on always being ready for action cannot be overemphasised. The possibility that in 40 seconds they could be heading down the road with sirens blaring means firefighters priorities are mostly focussed on preparing for this probability. Even on the quietest of stations, such as Biggin Hill with less than 200 ‘shouts’ a year, the appliance will always be ready with doors open and ‘firegear’ (protective clothing) laid out on the seats to facilitate ‘rigging’ as the pump weaves through the traffic to the incident. There is no room for leaving equipment behind, everything, including the firefighter must always be ready for action⁶⁹. Adrenaline levels are likely to rise, even *en route*, because the call slip will more often only indicate ‘fire’, the rest is left to the imagination. As one firefighter explained, “we only come back from false alarms, we never go to them.” Driving to a fire is in itself an adrenaline-raising experience. Drivers can take advantage of the knowledge that other traffic will not deliberately hinder them and apart from the call to duty, *the ability to have an adrenaline-raising drive* encourages firefighters to treat all calls with equal urgency. It appears that firefighters spend on average 12.5 minutes at each call⁷⁰ and whilst false alarms clearly skew this statistic, it is true that many fires do not take very long to extinguish. Firefighters really enjoy firefighting⁷¹ and as an example of this and their sense of duty, it is true to say that such statistics are only made possible, because once they extinguish a fire, firefighters do not then stretch out the job. They hurry to become available (‘on the run’) in case there is another incident⁷². However, if firefighters wanted to they might extend the time spent at each fire by up to 3 or 4 hours⁷³.

⁶⁸ The radio has now replaced the female despatch riders who carried out this service during WW2 air-raids. Some brigades require this message to be sent within ten minutes of the call. This forces officers into making a decision as to if they can control the fire or not, but is a considerable feature of control that enables senior officers who are not at the fire to reach out, as it were, to the fireground. It might be possible to see this as a Foucaultian gaze.

⁶⁹ This can make toileting difficult.

⁷⁰ A fire service statistician whose name will not be revealed supplied this statistic.

⁷¹ Deakin (1977) explains that firefighters told him “you look forward to going out ... I wait for a fire all the time.”

⁷² Firefighters, unlike other workers (see Collinson 1992: 14), do not require production bonuses to work harder at what they identify as ‘*The Job*’. However as Chapters 3-5 will show they resist carrying out ‘other’ work, which they do not relate to their operational duties, such as FP, or what they call unnecessary drills; they impose what might be seen as unofficial embarkation lines. Chapters 3 and 4 will explain that firefighters do not only work for wages, they also gain other dividends from their employment.

⁷³ Once a fire is over the speed at which firefighters work does not materially slow down. They are quick to collect up their equipment, tidy up and to then radio control that they are available for other fires. Firefighters have not yet resorted to a form of soldiering that would see them staying at an incident longer than necessary and thus increasing the need for extra reserves of firefighters to cover any other incidents that occurred. It is surprising that firefighters have not yet used this form of action as a warning of what might occur if further cuts in the fire service were to take place.

1.7.3. How many calls?

The LFB have provided me with considerable statistical evidence; I have adapted this for my own use to indicate how busy firefighters might actually be and the type of emergencies they attend (see Appendix 10). From this Appendix (Figure 1), it is possible to suggest that in the financial year 1999/00, the 112 LFB stations attended 174,564 emergency calls. Figure 2 indicates that 77 people died in fires and 239 were rescued⁷⁴. Figure 3 is the result of my using SPSS to manipulate the statistics for 'Total Calls' to select stations at five percentile points over a period of four financial years. In the year, 1999/2000 it can be ascertained that:

- the busiest station is Soho (percentile point 100), which attended a total of 3954 emergency calls in their area;
- the quietest station is Biggin Hill (percentile point 1), which attended 166 emergency calls in their area.

Figure 3 also provides statistics to generalise how many calls a firefighter on one of the four watches at the percentile stations might attend. Thus, in the year 1999/2000 a firefighter stationed at:

- Soho attended 988 emergency calls in their stations area;
- Biggin Hill attended 41 emergency calls in their stations area.

Figure 4 involves a similar use of SPSS for fires in properties (primary fires) and from this it can be ascertained that in the year 1999/2000:

- the busiest station, Tottenham (percentile point 100), attended a total of 431 fires in buildings in their station's area and a firefighter on one of the four watches might attend on average 2 fires *a week*;
- the quietest station, Biggin Hill (percentile point 1), attended 50 fires in buildings in their station's area and a firefighter on one of the four watches might attend on average 12 fires *a year*.

Figure 5 represents a breakdown for the total calls for the percentile stations, including makeups. Figure 6 is a total of the makeups⁷⁵ the LFB attended in four financial years. Figure 7 breaks these statistics down station by station for the year 1998/1999 and this indicates that:

- there were 581 makeups
- Biggin Hill had no makeups;
- Soho had 11 four-pump fires;
- Tottenham had 10 four-pump fires;
- no makeup resembles the size of the Kings Cross disaster (Fennell 1988).

I provide these statistics to make the point that contrary to popular belief firefighters are not always firefighting⁷⁶, indeed and as later evidence will verify firefighters have a considerable time free from firefighting to organise their social hierarchies.

1.8. STANDING-BY

When firefighters are not attending emergency calls, they use the terms *standing-by*⁷⁷ or *standing-down* to describe their working arrangements. Whilst standing-by firefighters prepare for their operational role and this can involve routine (but important) duties, such as testing their equipment⁷⁸,

⁷⁴ In 31 year's working as a firefighter in a 'busy' area of London, I was present at about 16 rescues.

⁷⁵ Fires where the initial attendance of two/three pumps was insufficient to deal with the incident and the officer in charge had to ask for the assistance of extra pumps (a makeup).

⁷⁶ Cunningham (1971) suggests only 3% of firefighters' time is spent firefighting.

⁷⁷ Firefighters can also use the term 'standing-by' or 'stand-by' to describe a situation when they go to another station for the shift to cover a temporary shortage.

⁷⁸ Every piece of operational equipment has a standard test laid down in writing. This test will indicate how often the piece of equipment is tested and how the test is done. When the test is complete the test card is filled in to substantiate

drilling⁷⁹, technical lectures, 11D inspections⁸⁰ and FP. Normally the amount of time spent on this work is prescribed in Brigade Orders (see Appendix 11). Some firestations will be organised '*to the book*', but this is rarely the case (see Chapters 3-5). Custom and practice provides that watch-commanders and firefighters will reach an *accommodation at watch level* over working arrangements. There are at least three reasons for this. First, officers' administration duties take up a lot of time. Second, firefighters are self-motivated about maintaining operational readiness. Third, many firefighters consider routines for testing equipment, drilling and lectures are over prescribed (see Chapter 5). Were watch-commanders to force issues in these areas, they would have to constantly oversee firefighters and their 'admin' would not be done. As an example of the accommodation that can be reached on a watch, once important duties are complete a watch-commander may suggest that the firefighters should, "check the appliances." This simple statement can provide a number of messages to firefighters. On some occasions, the appliances may actually need attention, but equally, these duties may hardly be necessary and officers may be inventing work to prevent *the devil from making work for idle hands*. Control then passes to the peer-group leaders who organise this apparently ambiguous situation, spreading the work through the time-lapse between meals or other anticipated activities. The peer-group leaders are normally the senior firefighters ('hands'⁸¹). However, leadership at such times is conditional on the acceptance by the watch of the senior hand's status. Charismatic leadership is important at a firestation, (in both the formal and informal hierarchy) personality rather than rank can command respect, and often a younger peer group will emerge and be very influential. This can occur because older hands have chosen to pass on some authority to the younger peer group in exchange for an easier life⁸².

Dependent on the view of individual watch-commanders *and their ability to implement those views*, one outcome is that the station work environment can be 'relaxed' (see Chapters 4 and 5). This is not to say that watch-commanders are negligent. They were first employed for their physical skills as firefighters, are often burdened by the paperwork and have to spend more time at their desks than they might otherwise choose. This pushes the task of managing firefighters to secondary importance: a task made easier if a 'good' officer can come to an accord with the peer leaders on a firestation⁸³. Friendship between watch-commanders and their firefighters can develop to such an extent that official hierarchies may almost be suspended once the operational readiness of the station is ensured. Watch-commanders

this. As an example a wooden ladder is tested by fully extending it against the tower. Then a firefighter goes to the top and jumps on each 'round' (rung) of the ladder as they come down. Then a line is tied halfway down the ladder on the 'string' (side) and the weight of three firefighters is applied. The ladder is then fully inspected for splinters and damage. This test takes place after *every* operational use of the ladder and weekly. Testing does not always take place and this will result in records being falsified to make it appear the test did take place.

⁷⁹ 'Drilling' relates to training with the equipment on the appliance and this normally takes place in the station yard. Firefighters are in effect rehearsing for a fire.

⁸⁰ Section 1.1.D of the Fire Services Act (1947) allows for the fire service to visit industrial premises for the purpose of familiarising firefighters with the buildings in case of fire. These visits will normally be carried out with the watch remaining available for calls (on the run) in a similar way to when they carry out FP inspections. As a generalisation, it is possible to suggest that each watch at a station will visit premises with an expected high risk of fire, or where difficult circumstances might be expected if the building caught fire. Hospitals, hotels and factories are particular examples. It is left to the watch-commander to organise these visits and if the area had a docks, ships also would also be visited. Some areas might be visited more often, because of their popularity and will likely involve locations where children (and their mothers) might be found or attractive women might be working or at leisure.

⁸¹ The use by the fire service of the word 'hands' is taken from the Naval term where sailors are often referred to as 'hands', and it is my view this relates to how the past embodied, experiential nature of the rigging ships for sailing and how important hands were in doing this.

⁸² Senior 'hands' might 'disappear' and avoid all the drills by going in the mess to help the cook (see Chapters 3-5).

⁸³ It might be that this is a case of give and take: a workplace strategy by managers to gain conformity in wider areas (see Burawoy 1979; Salaman 1986). However, I believe Salaman's analysis is relevant, but does not account for the strong ties that exist between watch officers and firefighters. More likely watch officers legitimise firefighters' informal working arrangements, because officers too have interests at stake. Clearly officers' life at work will be easier if they do not upset firefighters, but more likely officers share values with firefighters, and until they move from the watch and break the tie with those values, they are less likely to see firefighters' actions, through the eyes of a senior officer whose rules firefighters break, as deviant or pathological.

may then be explicit and suggest that firefighters, “disappear” (keep out of the way). Firefighters will then take this instruction as a signal to go to more secluded areas of the station and read or chat. In the event that a senior officer arrives and disrupts this informal arrangement, then firefighters are unlikely to let *their* officer down; they will ensure they appear to be working. Watches can then become almost little fiefdoms of resistance and it possible that drill records and log books may actually be falsified to make a station look like it is organised ‘to the book’⁸⁴. However, it is unlikely that senior officers will arrive surreptitiously to check up on firefighters. In part, this will be because most senior officers were party to such practice when they were watch-commanders and partly because it is difficult for a senior officer to arrive unannounced at a station. Tradition requires that on arrival at a station a senior officer must go to the watchroom and ring ‘one-bell’ to summon the duty-firefighter and the watch-commander, which warns firefighters that they must now look busy⁸⁵.

1.8.1. Conflict

Occasionally the understanding between the watch-commander and the firefighters can change: a disruptive group of firefighters can emerge, or a watch may believe their commander is ‘out of line’. This might most commonly occur when a new watch-commander arrives on the watch or if an officer tries to enforce a new Brigade Order without negotiating with the watch. Then a test of strength can take place to establish boundaries of control. These tests will often result in the watch carrying out a range of ‘soldiering’ activities, mainly, but not always during less important non-operational duties. Disrupting the informal working relationships can be uncomfortable for both officers and firefighters; officers must neglect their administrative duties to control firefighters and this disrupts firefighters comfortable work arrangements. If firefighters stick together they can have an advantage, because they are aware that officers are unlikely to want to make the dispute public by resorting to discipline procedures against the whole watch. The right to apply for transfer *en masse* is a further threat firefighters have over an officer, because again this makes public the officers’ inability to control their watch (see Chapter 4). If these disputes are not quickly settled they can involve real upset to station/family life: a whole series of changes may then result as firefighters take entrenched positions or transfer to happier stations. Experience suggests that the type of officer who ‘takes on the watch’ can only be successful for a short time and quickly moves on: moving sideways or *getting the promotion they have ‘proved’ they are capable of having* (see Chapters 3-5). To prevent disputes escalating⁸⁶, wise officers or older hands will often call a ‘*hats off meeting*’⁸⁷ to restore the normal *collaborative way* the watch and their officer organise.

⁸⁴ Most brigades have a ‘drill record book’, which watch-commanders complete, to ensure that each member carries out the prescribed amount of drill each week/month/year. ‘Log books’ are a record of the activities that a station undertakes in a day and normally completed by the duty firefighter. As with ‘test records’ these records can be falsified to make it appear the watch have done things they may not have done (run by the book; see Chapters 3-6).

⁸⁵ In most brigades one firefighter on each shift is responsible for maintaining the log book, answering the telephone, the teleprinter and dealing with visitors (they are though on the run and in the event of a call the station is left empty). Traditionally, when senior officers arrive at a station they go to the watch room and ring ‘one bell’ to announce their arrival at the station. The duty-firefighter and the watch officer then go to the watchroom. The duty-firefighter will ‘book the officer in’, in the Log Book and with Brigade Control. The watch officer has to ‘report to’ the senior officer and salute. The senior officer might then inspect the station and can require the firefighters to drill or line up and answer questions. When the officer leaves, the duty-firefighter will ‘book them out’ in a similar fashion to ‘booking them in’. It is also incumbent on the duty-firefighter to ask “where shall I tell control you are going Sir/Maam.” The answer is not only relayed to control, but to the station they go to visit next. This warns the next station, giving them time to prepare. As traditions decline in the fire service this practice might be getting less formal and it might be tempting for officers to sneak up on a firestation. However, society has almost conspired to help firefighters, vandalism and theft are now so common that firestations are now securely locked and senior officers would have great difficulty in gaining entry without actually knocking on the door.

⁸⁶ Disputes normally remain within the watch: *a culture of ‘keep it on the island’* (LFCDA 1995: 13).

⁸⁷ Officers of a senior rank must be saluted when first met. However, this recognition of rank only applies if the officer is fully dressed i.e. with their hat. The argument goes that it is the rank that the subordinate acknowledges, not the individual. It might appear strange to those not acquainted with the workings of uniformed services, but when held

Watches, especially large ones consisting of up to 30 firefighters, may have more than one peer group and sometimes conflicts can occur between these groups. However, except in extreme cases, the watch will not intentionally extend their internal domestic conflicts so that they affect their operational effectiveness. In the 'public' operational sphere, the fire service ethos apparently takes precedence, and when *'the bells go down'* the group put aside conflicts until after the incident is over. If viewed in context, the refusal to allow private disputes to affect service delivery is a sign of how much store firefighters put behind their professional ethos. Such abilities might also explain how a service that is recognised as institutionally racist prevents this from affecting *their* service delivery to non-whites (Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999: 52 and p.80).

1.8.2. Firefighters' protocols for firefighting and more

The Audit Commission (1995: 36) recognises that officers allow unofficial relaxation periods. This space might appear similar to that, which engineers, or the mentally ill might make to resist authority (see Goffman 1961; Linstead 1985; Collinson 1992⁸⁸). However, the spaces that firefighters colonise are larger, last longer⁸⁹ and are often used to reinforce their hierarchies (by harassment if necessary; see LFCDA 1995; Baigent 1996; Chapters 2 and 5). On a less negative note, firefighters will often use these unofficial spaces to share experiential skills, develop trust and understanding between team members. Talking and working are synonymous activities for firefighters, and this thesis will show that firefighters' informal hierarchy unconsciously organises the joint experiences of firefighters to add to the drills and lectures through which the watch bond before an emergency. The outcome is that the watch develop tactics for all types of incidents, almost create their own equivalent of Brigade Orders, but these are far more flexible than the official structures and despite being only spoken understandings, *they have the authority of the watch* (see Chapters 3-5). These tactics are part of what I call protocols, because they involve more than just tactics, but also unspoken understandings that develop amongst men about testing themselves against their own standards (see Connell 1995; Hearn 1996; Seidler 1997).

The informal hierarchy does not only help to develop firefighters protocols for firefighting, it develops coping strategies for dealing with the iron cage of bureaucracy that autocratic officers would impose (see Chapter 5). It also provides the support to debrief the traumas that occur during firefighters' work. A mature group might sit in silence genuinely grieving at a life lost, then someone will break the ice and they will move on. A probationer who has seen their first dead body will get help from those with more experience, and it may be that firefighters can cope with their own trauma by helping someone younger. Death and injury is not the only suffering that visits firefighters, and they see human despair in all its worse forms. People who have their homes destroyed by fire get

alongside the notion that rank is *'might'* as it were, the suggestion is that rank is also *'right'* and cannot be questioned. Whilst the outcome is that it is individuals who use this might/right, it is the understanding that the rank, not the person, has these attributes. When an officer visits a station they will keep their hat on, the civilian notion of removing your hat on entering a building does not apply, as an officer without a hat loses their rank and the *given right* their rank holds. Therefore, when an officer visits and takes off their hat, they are so to speak reducing the formality of the occasion and effectively giving up their rank. This has led to the expression 'hats off meeting', which means that an officer and firefighters meet as equals. This romantic notion though has its caveats and it is unlikely that firefighters will trust a senior officer as an equal under any circumstances and such an arrangement might only apply within watches and their own officers. Nor do officers hold true to such an arrangement and I have witnessed them putting their hat back on when they are losing an argument (as if they ever really take it off; see example of officers in a university, Chapter 4). The railways had a similar understanding concerning the wearing of hats (see Strangleman 1998).

⁸⁸ Goffman (1961) suggests that even in total institutions have their areas of vulnerability, where formal structures are resisted. These are often supply rooms or sick bays and Linstead (1985 cited in Collinson 1988) suggests there are areas or times that the workers colonise, such as meal breaks. Workers might also *make* the time to meet in specific areas as a resistance to managers (see Collinson 1992).

⁸⁹ Collinson (1992: 16) found that workers were uncomfortable and unused to talking about themselves or their organisation. They were also conscious of taking up someone's time, presumably because this might affect the bonus. Firefighters do not have that problem and in some ways talking is also a way of filling in the monotony between calls.

comfort from firefighters, who, in turn, cope with their trauma around the mess table by *planning how they could have done the job better* and by making jokes out of the ironies that occur at the job.

However, discussions can also be about politics, nights out, sex, sport, families, cars, do-it-yourself, fiddle jobs – the list is endless, but even more than that the watch contains a considerable experience of life, and firefighters bring their problems to work to get advice. These problems may involve buying or repairing a house/car or the best way to winter geraniums, and there will be little the watch does not have an opinion on, *nor prepared to share*. This will include giving advice on the most intimate situations and now I have left the fire service new work colleagues are often shocked by how intimately I am prepared to talk. Sharing might be paternalistic on a watch, but it is also similar to the way that women operate in their networks. As a place where pride in *The Job* meets the personal, so to speak, the mess table becomes a source through which firefighters develop their understanding of the world. In a simple aside, since my retirement, when I am discussing something with my wife, she has frequently said, “don’t you think you should run that past the green watch.” Joking apart, I realise what she means⁹⁰.

1.9. STANDING-DOWN

Standing-down time relates to when firefighters only duty is to attend emergency incidents, or to carry out *essential-work* necessary to maintain the operational efficiency of the station. Firefighters have established national embarkation lines over definitions for essential-work in The National Joint Council Conditions of Service (1993, the Grey Book⁹¹). At a typical wholtime firestation, standing-down differs between the day and night duty. On day duty, firefighters stand-down for two 15-minute tea breaks, 1-hour at lunch and 1-hour towards the end of shift. On night duty there is a 1-hour supper and breakfast-break, and 6-hours between 1200 and 0600. Whilst standing-down firefighters are ‘free’ to relax and can play cards, darts, table tennis, snooker, pool, sport or watch television; at nights they can sleep ‘fully clothed’ in the dormitory⁹².

1.10. COMPARISON WITH SIMILAR ORGANISATIONS

In many ways, the fire service stands astride two types of working class employment: it is paramilitary and yet industrialised. When protecting the public from fire, firefighters operate as *self-disciplined* military style units and yet, firefighters’ resistance is able to challenge formal discipline at these and other times (see Chapters 3-5). As a group, firefighters are similar to those in many other working class or uniformed organisations. Amongst these are the:

- military⁹³
- police⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Later in the thesis, I shall indicate that Firefighters might actually use the watch and the understandings they form through their informal hierarchy as a way of knowing the world. The watch can be seen as a *primary reference group* for wider understandings and opinion forming in general. Within this context I have no difficulty in seeing firefighters working within their informal hierarchy as acting to defend an ‘occupational community’ that occurs when “people who work together choose to establish a form of relationship amongst themselves” (Salaman 1986: 75; see Hart 1982: 182: 233).

⁹¹ The term ‘Grey Book’ is a reference to the colour of the cover of the book that records the decisions of the National Joint Council (which comprises representatives of National Organisation of Employers Local Authority Fire Brigades and Fire Brigade Union) regarding the conditions of service of all firefighters.

⁹² Most firefighters will strip to their underwear.

⁹³ I have during the period of my research spent considerable periods of time with the military. This has given me an insight to how men in the various wings of the military operate (see: Dawson 1991, 1994; Barker 1992, 1994, 1995; Dixon 1994; Barrett 1996; Owen 1996; Higate 1998; Holden 1998; Karner 1998; Dyer 1999). However, the uses to which I can put this experience are limited, because it was not formally part of the research project (see Chapter 2 and 6).

⁹⁴ As with the military I have spent considerable periods of time during my research in close contact with the police, but this took place at times not formally connected with the research. At first glance, the police force/service might appear the closest example to firefighters, but I challenge this view as a commonly held perception based on similarity of uniform and that they both provide an emergency service, which confuses the reality. I do not choose to see the firefighter, whose skills manifest themselves in the manual work of firefighting, in the same ‘class’ as a police officer, whose occupation I

- railways⁹⁵
- engineers, miners, printers, shipbuilders and similar non-uniformed groups of skilled working class industrial labour⁹⁶.

Nevertheless, whilst the fire service might appear similar to other occupations, it is not the same⁹⁷. This thesis will refer to these organisations to gain some perspective, but social research on the fire service is limited and it is my intention to use my exceptional perspective to provide a view of the fire service that other researchers might at a later date use to draw out the comparisons and differences with other groups of workers.

1.11. THEORETICAL VIEWS ON GENDER

Most cultures socially construct gender by labelling occupations, activities and goals as either masculine or feminine. These binary gender divisions polarise gender characteristics to advantage men and what is seen as appropriate behaviour in one sex, is sanctioned in the other⁹⁸. In very simple generalised terms this can lead to a society that encourages boys/men to:

- think ‘rationally’ (that is what is socially constructed as ‘rationally’);
- limit their emotions and caring skills;
- develop their ability to be physically and mentally aggressive;
- prove they are not sissy/feminine.

These standards are all characteristics that firefighters would say form a fundamental requirement of their job/masculinity. The polarised opposite happens for girls/women. They are encouraged to ‘prove’ their femininity by:

- connecting with their emotions;
- being unthreatening, attractive and caring (for men);
- limit their physical skills and experience within a narrow feminine range;
- prove their attractiveness by demonstrating dependence on men.

see as white-collar work and involving constables upholding the Queen’s peace through a range of non-manual duties (often, according to Macpherson [1999] in particular and Reiner, [1992] with their own political motivation). However, the class location of the police officer is increasingly becoming ambiguous, as when policing goes from being a service to a force. Policing then becomes manual labour, when the police use their right to legitimate violence to physically control a social situation (see Reiner 1985; Smith and Gray 1985; Graef 1989; Dunhill 1989; Jefferson 1990; Fielding 1991 1999; Young 1991 and 1995; McConville, and Shepherd 1992; Punch 1993; Northern 1995; Pallister 1998; Campbell 1999; Dodd 1999; Mcpherson 1999; Norton-Taylor 1999; Chapters 3-6).. Currently, on the mainland the extent to which UK policing can be seen as manual labour may be increasing, but only in areas of Northern Ireland where policing is paramilitary (see Northern 1996) and the police operate as an army of occupation/suppression, when, as with the soldier, their work skills are manifested manually, might policing be seen as blue-collar labour. However, political allegiances apart, the police often do not have public support for the way they do their work. The same cannot be said for firefighters who are rarely criticised by the public and in stark contrast to the police are more often seen as the public’s friend. The fire service also differs because it has a TUC affiliated trade union with considerable working class credentials based on a democratic (and ‘free’) leadership.

⁹⁵ See: Strangleman 1998, 1999).

⁹⁶ See: Braverman 1974; Willis 1977; Devaney, 1982; Giddens 1982; Strangleman and Roberts 1999; Cockburn 1991a; Collinson 1988, 1992, 1994, 1998; Grint 1998; Blum 2000.

⁹⁷ This thesis will argue that firefighters have found a way to keep public support and this is a fundamental to firefighters’ resistance *and* their gender construction in at least two ways. First, in general terms the public support the commonsense notions concerning masculinity, and more specifically that firefighters are masculine and male (see Chapters 1 and 5). Second, I take the view that the public are primary stakeholders in ‘Best Value’ terms and as such they provide support to firefighters who resist attempts to cut and deskill the fire service (Young 2000, argues that the Strategic Fire Authority is the ‘primary stakeholder’ and that the public are the ‘secondary stakeholder’; see also Hutton 1995; Chapters 1 and 5).

⁹⁸ This view is supported by a number of writers, although their reasoning may differ they all consider that the social environment influences gender (Kanter 1977; Millett 1971; MacKinnon 1979; Hartmann 1981; O’Brien 1981; Hochschild 1983, 1989; Gerson 1986; Pateman and Gross 1986; Walby 1986, 1990, 1997, 2000; Bradley 1989, 1992, 1994; Segal 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Collinson *et al* 1990; Humm 1992; Morgan, 1992; Hearn 1994 1996; Connell 1989, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2000; Hollway 1996; Kemp and Squires 1997).

In even simpler terms, these social characteristics lead to the belief that ‘boys don’t cry and girls do’ (Frieze *et al* 1978; Toch 1998). All roads point to men’s superiority and a world led by masculine standards makes a self-fulfilling-prophecy out of a gender hierarchy erected on those standards. The outcome is a view in which “[m]ass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity ... inherent in a man’s body” (Connell 1995: 45; see also Kant 1959; Pateman and Gross 1986: 5; Cockburn 1991a: 206; Hearn 1994; Seidler 1997; HMCIFS 1998; Kimmel and Messner 1998). This *commonsense* understanding, in turn, underpins men’s assumptions that they are the dominant sex and the patriarchal *dividends* men get from that assumption (see Connell 1995)⁹⁹. And one of those dividends (for male firefighters at least) is the commonsense belief that only men can be firefighters (see HMCIFS 1998¹⁰⁰).

1.11.1. Social embodiment

It appears that there is a historically constructed, generalised cultural base for masculinity. This pre-exists the contextually specific and acts as a commonsense guideline; *a standard for men’s behaviour*: “a false monolith of what men are supposed to be — heterosexual, able-bodied, independent” (Hearn 1996: 211; see Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985, 1987: 179; Seidler 1997; Connell 1995, 1998)¹⁰¹. Early in this century, the soldiers, sailors and airmen who defended the Empire, became examples of how masculine aggression and embodiment serve the nation (and men as a group). In more peaceful times, sportsmen heroes replace military figures as a cultural base for masculinity¹⁰². But, what of women? Their historical embodiment has been as mothers and wives, patriarchally ‘protected’ by the

⁹⁹ However, when the combination of these so called and false ‘natural’ advantages fail to subordinate women, men often resort to their socially acquired physical and psychological human capital resources to take physical or verbal violence against women to remind them of their place (MacKinnon 1979; Collinson and Collinson 1989, 1996; Walby 1990; Cockburn 1991a; Hearn 1998; Allison 2000). Rape is also part of this process and because some men have raped some women, it is argued that all men might ‘gain’ from the fear this creates (Brownmiller 1975; Dworkin 1981; Hearn 1998) and the same might be said for all acts of male violence. This is a dividend pro-feminists argue against and Hearn (1992, 1994, 1998) argues, often men’s behaviour is at a price that damages society, and individual men and families. In particular, a main theme of Seidler (1995, 1997a, b) is a critique of the outcomes for men who celebrate/develop their objectivity and oppress themselves by rejecting their own feelings in a *constant test to ‘prove’ themselves against the dominant (but social) masculine standards*: this argument about men testing themselves against a masculine standard is a central theme of this thesis. One way these standards are perpetuated is through the media (see Sobieraj 1998).

¹⁰⁰ Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Fire service in Scotland provides a very good example of how he supports the commonsense notions about masculinity (see Connell 1995). I quote extensively from his annual report on *equal opportunities* (HMCIFS 1998: 19):

It would seem to be unrealistic, therefore, to expect equal numbers of females as males to apply to become firefighters the work of which requires, *by its nature, the spatial skills of males rather than the verbal skills of females*. Recent wide-ranging research into the brain differences of females and males emphasises that males, in using their ‘visual right-brain skills’, have advantages involving manipulative and mathematical tasks. This would affect fire service operations such as pitching ladders, parking vehicles, sensing directions etc whereas females, using both hemispheres of the brain, are better with words and at recalling landmarks to find their way over a journey, using verbal skills to tackle visual tests. The research reveals that the differences in brain structure and organisation between the sexes inevitably lead to differences in job choice: for example females choose language based topics while males choose mathematical /engineering topics.

Whilst it may be argued that this research is not conclusive, there is, at the very least, an obvious need to investigate these phenomena further. It may result therefore, that *the Fire Service should try to recruit females not as firefighters per se but to recruit them specifically for disciplines that use their brain differences and aptitudes to best advantage*. The choice and range of working roles in such a community education, fire investigation, control room operations and media relations are examples where females can undoubtedly be of advantage to themselves, the service and the public alike. In these roles they could use their inherent verbal fluency and communication skills were females are generally though to have superiority over their male counterpart.

The only reference that could account for “wide-ranging research” in his bibliography is Moir (1998).

¹⁰¹ It is sometimes difficult to understand that a man might challenge the behaviour of other men. Four authors that I refer to frequently intend their work to be recognised as a critique of masculinity: Hearn, Connell, Collinson and Seidler.

¹⁰² According to Connell (1998: 12) the sportsmen provides an example of *hegemonic masculinity, which validates the gender hierarchy* (see Lipman-Blumen 1976: 23; Parker 1996).

military and the male wage¹⁰³. However, some women are currently resisting this location and are avoiding family life to increase their human capital¹⁰⁴. In response to this resistance, a backlash by men reduces the space these women take up by valorising a ‘new’ slimmer more feminine figure. The super-model provides an example. She emphasises women’s sexual objectification by idealising feminine as the slim, almost pre-pubescent, semi-naked body. This model reduces women’s physical presence and is not so empowering as the male one, because it increases women’s objectivity, reduces their physical strength and emphasises their reliance on men (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Hochschild 1983; Pateman and Gross 1986; Connell 1987; Segal 1990; Walby 1990, 1997; Lorber 1994). Sadly, when women seek to achieve such feminine standards they appear to be supporting their representation as the sexually available weaker sex. It is also possible to question if super-models and those women who follow them, are participating in their own subordination by supporting a masculine *hegemony*¹⁰⁵.

1.11.2. A picture of masculinity

Whilst sportsmen might provide an example of the masculine standards of aggressive heterosexuality, physical/mental strength and stoic discipline, it might also be that firefighters can have similar characteristics. Firefighters also encompass the status of the paternalistic protector without the savagery of the military. The painting “The Rescue” (Millais, 1855; see Appendix 12) provides an example by portraying a Victorian fireman rescuing children from a fire, with their mother at his feet thanking him and in so doing glorifies all that is good in proletarian masculinity. However, Cooper (1986) sees two other images in this picture, gender and class: gender, because a man is rescuing children and their mother thanks him; class, because the missing father indicates that it would be inappropriate for an upper class Victorian *man* to thank a working class fireman. However, the wife/mother does not have such a place in the hierarchy, and in stark contrast the upper class woman is able to thank the working class fireman. This is important in patriarchal terms, an acknowledgement that the Victorian mother’s status is dependent on her husband and in his absence she can be subordinate to all men (see Goldthorpe 1983; Lipman-Blumen 1976: 19). It is also possible to suggest that Millais found it difficult to portray a father in the picture at all, because the

¹⁰³ Walby (1990: 20) argues that there are six structures of patriarchy: the patriarchal mode of production; patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal relations in the state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. In so doing Walby crystallises how a gender hierarchy, created and perpetuated by men, can restrict women by giving cause and effect to the argument that gender division is a natural order: a situation that is hegemonic and which influences mass cultural beliefs about gender. In particular I would like to suggest that when Beveridge suggested: “In the next thirty years housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and British ideals” (Beveridge Report 1942: 52 cited in Westwood 1996) after WW2 he was not only appealing for ‘white supremacy’, he was also pushing the ‘reserve army of women’ back into the home to make way for the male workers they had replaced during the war.

¹⁰⁴ Some women are avoiding the difficulties that Wollstonecraft saw when she argues that women who preen themselves, birdlike, ‘prove’ the male notion that they are biologically inferior and deflect themselves from their education (see Todd 1994). Contextually a similar argument was made by Lipman-Blumen (1976: 21) and now Walby (1997) acknowledges that growing numbers of women are resisting the hegemonic understandings that they can fulfil their life by marriage and childbirth. These women do not neglect their education, increase their human capital and consequently improve their position in the labour market (but only if they lead similar not complimentary lives see Cockburn 1985: 13-1).

¹⁰⁵ Women who ‘accept’ they are dependent on men and do not learn how to develop their physical or technical skills must rely on men to: mend the car; carry heavy loads; do the physical work. Put another way, if men are encouraged to be strong and physical then consequently they can become strong and physical; if men are taught to be technical they consequently become technical (see Connell, 1995; Seidler 1997). Women’s dependency that follows, which women participate in (see Connell 1987: 108; Collinson 1992: 91), then supports the commonsense notion of men’s superiority. This is a hegemony; “Gramsci wrote of the hegemony, the leadership by force of ideas as much as by force of arms. Like capitalist class hegemony, male hegemony is organised in the main by consent, by identification with the status quo and as a belief in common interest or in inevitability” (Cockburn 1991a: 205-206). One site that reflects this hegemony is the gender division of paid-labour; when women increasingly undertook paid work after WW2 in the UK, many forgot the ‘masculine’ work they did in that war (and which some of them were forced to give up to make way for returning male heroes). They complied with an environment that, again, supported the commonsense belief that women’s work was secondary and that women’s natural task was to raise families and care for men: a hegemony, which can still underwrite the current gender division of paid labour.

father has failed in his duty to protect his children. Today, such a picture might appear in a newspaper as a photograph under a banner headline, "Mother thanks firefighter for saving children in Pimlico fire." However, although not so artistically contrived, a discerning eye might witness similar political messages. First, the firefighter would more likely be male and would therefore be undertaking the patriarchal responsibility of protecting children; second, it is still a mother's place to thank the firefighter (because women still have the responsibility for caring for children).

According to Cooper, "The Rescue" is more about sex differences than sexuality, but she does notice that the female child is struggling against the fireman's hand on her genitals. Cooper's gaze does little to emphasise the submissive position of the mother, but she is less clear about another heroic image "Saved" (Vigor, 1892; Appendix 12). Here, Cooper sees the rescue of a pre-pubescent child almost as if a victim of rape. Implicit in Cooper's observation is that proletarian heroism does not hide the physical threat embodied masculinity poses to women (see Brownmiller 1975; Dworkin 1981; Hearn 1998). As if to explain what Cooper might imply, Lorber (1994: 62; see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Hochschild 1983; Pateman and Gross 1986; Connell 1987; Segal 1990) argues that the threat of sexual desire/possession is one way that men make women dependent on them for protection as partners¹⁰⁶. Lorber also recognises that firefighters, soldiers and policemen protect women¹⁰⁷. Leaving unchallenged for the moment the commonsense assumption, which Lorber appears to support, that all firefighters are men, then "The Hero" is a typical example of how a male artist has used a firefighter to portray and support the commonsense belief that men have a fixed masculinity "inherent in their body" (Connell 1995: 45; see also Pateman and Gross 1986: 5; Cockburn 1991a: 206; Hearn 1994; Seidler 1997; Kimmel and Messner 1998). This artistic impression epitomises a historically constructed base for masculinity (see Connell 1995, 1998; Hearn 1996). There are dividends to be gained from such an image and commonsense beliefs, and these are available not only to firefighters, but to all men¹⁰⁸.

Historically, the firefighter has always been identified as male and masculine¹⁰⁹, but not all firefighters' images are so contrived, or complimentary. Firefighters are a group of men who will adopt extreme physical measures to exclude and harass women (see Hearn and Parkin 1987, 1995: 74; Walby 1990: 52)¹¹⁰. My thesis in no way intends to challenge these findings, but it will suggest that *now* female firefighters too are actively defending their rights to be firefighters through their networks¹¹¹. However it will also report that the few trailblazing female firefighters I have spoken to are as active as their male counterparts in constructing and testing themselves against the positive

¹⁰⁶ MacKinnon (1979), Hadjifoutiou, (1983: 9) and Cockburn (1991b: 142) would all identify that women at work suffer harassment from the male gaze, pinching their bottoms, pin-ups and pornography. It also has to be considered that men often use violence directly against women to remind them of their place (Hearn 1998) and that violence/rape are a source of power that allows all men, violent or not, to scare women (see Brownmiller 1975; Dworkin 1981).

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly Lorber appears to stereotype these occupations as male.

¹⁰⁸ Connell (1995) calls this dividend a patriarchal dividend, which is available to all men and not because all men have, or even support those characteristics, but just because there is a commonsense belief that all men have such characteristics (see also Hearn 1994).

¹⁰⁹ So much so that the fire service (alongside the police) sought to gain exclusion from equal opportunities legislation arguing that, "women could not/should not perform all the duties" (Corby 1999: 99).

¹¹⁰ The incident referred to is one that occurred at Soho fire station (see Ballantyne 1985). There are no clear publicly available details of this incident, but I understand it involved a considerable *physical sexual abuse* of a female firefighter. However, there are even dividends that men might gain from firefighters' abuse of their female colleagues. This behaviour seeks to exclude women and, as in all male violence against women, it puts women in fear of men's physical strength and is taken as a false proof that women cannot take the pace in men's jobs (Brownmiller 1975; Dworkin 1981; Hearn 1998; Chapter 1).

¹¹¹ These networks are organised by women, but have been mainly sponsored by the FBU. Recently the government (no longer prepared to accept women's harassment and token presence) and employers are now supporting these female firefighters by taking a new proactive approach to women by setting targets for their recruitment (Home Office 1999a, 2000; see Lovenduski and Randall 1993 for an account of how women can organise their networks and the difficulties they might find).

characteristics of firefighters' masculinity, which promote their ability to fight fires (see Chapter 3), and even some that promote firefighters' status (see Chapters 3-5)¹¹².

1.11.3. Gender and class

Marxism's answer to patriarchal inequalities is that they result from the contradictory relations between individuals and classes involved in the capitalist system (see Engels 1973: 29-46; Giddens and Held 1982). This understanding is challenged by Hartmann's (1981) dual systems theory, which develops an argument to suggest that patriarchy and capital both subordinate women (and also argues that patriarchal hierarchies exist within each sex¹¹³). Although Hartmann's theory, similar to much class theory, can imply determinism, almost reifying capital and patriarchy, I choose not to interpret Marxism this way. I prefer to use class understandings to develop the debate about firefighters' gender, because I anticipate it might draw out some new arguments (see Chapter 5).

However, I shall not be concentrating on examples of harassment of female firefighters, in what might appear as classic exclusionary tactics to protect male wages that evolve out of antagonistic contradictory social relations within the working class. As I have said earlier, this is not to avoid the subject. It is an attempt to concentrate on how class debates might help explain if there are other reasons, rather than matters of utility, for why firefighters might wish to exclude women. As an example, in Chapter 5, I suggest that firefighters' 'product' is firefighting and whilst I accept that utility is one reason why firefighters work, I also provide evidence that there are more dividends to be gained from firefighting than as a way of earning money.

1.11.4. Firefighters' masculinity

To provide some early warning of what these dividends might be, it is important to note that an argument will develop that will suggest the way firefighters actually do their firefighting is a test, which allows them to construct, reproduce and police their masculinity in the terms of:

- their own self-esteem;
- their status in their peer group
- their status with the public.

However, because firefighters' status and their masculinity evolves from the particular way that firefighters arrange how their work will be done (which might be seen as the skills of being a firefighter), firefighters increasingly have to resist officers attempting to take their status away by:

- deskilling and cutting the fire service;
- increasing firefighters' work to include (feminised) Fire Prevention duties;
- trying to take firefighters status for themselves.

To understand the antagonistic relations that result between officers and firefighters, I equate their relations to some traditional class debates. This can be approached in a variety of ways:

¹¹² My interest to interrogate how male firefighters construct their masculinity did not lead to me seeking out female firefighters for interview. However, when a woman was amongst a group of firefighters I was interviewing I interviewed her, *unaware* how significant her words might be. It is important to look out for these women in the data (see Chapters 3-5). They so clearly reiterate what their male colleagues are saying that it is possible not to identify that women are speaking. I nearly made that mistake, not realising until late in the analysis that whilst I was constructing a framework for male firefighters' masculinity, that female firefighters were adopting and defending many of the attributes and understandings that the men held. I will further develop the consequences of this in the conclusion.

¹¹³ "Patriarchy ... men's domination of each other ... a set of social relations in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to control women" (Hartmann 1981:14 [Key throughout the thesis .. pause, ... missing words] see also Millett 1971: 25; Lipman-Blumen 1976; Cooper 1986; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b).

1. by locating firefighters as a work category within the general economic class structure;
2. by discussing if there is a 'product' to firefighting;
3. by discussing the relationship the fire service has with capital;
 - as an unnecessary expense;
 - as a way capital can prevent a loss of profit caused by fire;
4. by relating officers' and firefighters' relations to those between the proletariat and bourgeoisie;
5. by seeing firefighters and officers in a struggle over who has authority in the fire service regarding;
 - how firefighting is done;
 - safety procedures, particularly BA;
 - FP;
 - relations on stations;
 - equal opportunities;
 - deskilling and cuts.
6. as a struggle about the way firefighters (and perhaps officers) construct their masculinity.

All these six examples are considered throughout the thesis and in particular Chapter 5. However, at this stage I would like to briefly discuss how I see the last three. Regarding example 5, which suggests that officers might be acting to help capital almost in false consciousness, this is not a view that I particularly take. I prefer to see the antagonism between firefighters and officers as closely related to a power struggle between two groups, which might both be trying to construct their masculinity in the same environment. In particular, points 6 and 7 indicate there are areas that officers would control and where firefighters might understand that officers are trying to steal their masculinity from them (see Chapters 3-5).

The thesis will also explain that any antagonism firefighters have for their officers is made worse and their resistance more vehement, because officers were once working class firefighters who have become upwardly mobile¹¹⁴. In so doing officers have left behind their manual skills, blue-collars and their *shared understanding* that they supported whilst they were firefighters. For firefighters, this means that officers have lost their status as firefighters and whilst officers might dispute this (another cause for antagonism), officers are in the course of establishing a new status by proving they can order firefighters about. One way they might do this is to now interpret efficiency as economic rather than in service terms and 'prove' their authority by attempting to deskill and cut the fire service in what might be seen as a marriage with capital (see Chapters 5 and 6)¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ The fire service retains single tier entry promotion (STEP), which means that all officers were once *working class* firefighters (see Giddens 1982: 158-61, Hart 1982: 46-48), who achieve promotion after passing examinations and serving for the required time in each rank (see Chapters 3-5). The first promotion, to leading firefighter requires a minimum of two years' service, to sub officer requires a minimum of four years' service, and to station officer requires five years' service. Promotion above station officer has no time served requirement, but there is no leapfrogging of ranks *and an entrepreneurial station officer cannot quickly achieve senior command*: each rank must be obtained before being eligible to apply for the next rank and whilst it is not the remit of this thesis to particularly discuss how effective STEP is it might serve the fire service well to look at least at the possibility of providing accelerated promotion for Station Officers and to look at employing officers at various stages of entry. Flanagan (1998) recognises that it is difficult to achieve principal rank in under 26 years (see Currie 1996; Home Office 2000: 16). Firefighters can retire after 30 years service and whilst slightly different arrangements apply to principal officers, firefighters *must* retire at age 55.

¹¹⁵ In effect, firefighters see officers as traitors to firefighters' professional ethos, which firefighters believe was a joint understanding. Similar outcomes occur in engineering when a shop-floor worker moves into management (see Burawoy,

There is also a further site for conflict between firefighters and officers and this is recognised in Chapter 5. In more recent years firefighters', who were almost exclusively a white, working class, male, group, have found their masculinity under challenge by officers forcing 'others', in particular women, on them as firefighters¹¹⁶. This has been a basis of considerable difficulty in the fire service, because firefighters' masculinity has been previously constructed on the premise that it was only available to (white) men. Therefore, their reactions to women might appear as a conservative defence of the petty dividend of masculinity and I hope this thesis will have considerable impact in developing this area of thinking.

1.11.5. Looking at a way forward

Despite the increasing weight of debate that continues to make visible the politics of gender division, there remains at least one area that may confuse and hinder equality in the fire service. This relates to the commonsense notion that only men can achieve the embodied standards of masculinity required to be a firefighter, which in turn perpetuates the hegemonic gender division of labour in the fire service. The outcome has been that when women apply to join the fire service, male firefighters have taken the view they are unlikely to achieve the masculine standards a firefighter requires, and this has led to the marginalisation and harassment of those women. What then occurs is that male firefighters' behaviour is seen as a challenge, not only to equal opportunities, but also to officers' authority. Officers then, their authority on the line, take an approach that dictates, rather than investigates, how to solve the problem. This has resulted in some heavy-handed solutions, which might miss some of the more subtle understandings that sociology has to offer¹¹⁷. Therefore, my intention is to look

1976; Collinson 1992, 1994, 1996; Chapter 5). Hollway and Jefferson (2000), illustrates a similar effect in families, which in many ways might apply to the fire service. Their account indicates that one family member, Tommy, believes he gains respect on his council estate by holding true to norms, which he values as important. His sister, Kelly, does not respect Tommy's norms, and has moved away from the family and the council estate. In doing this, she challenges the source of Tommy's values, values that Tommy believes she held and he sees her as a traitor. Hearn (1994) too, has a similar view, which suggests that men who use pro-feminist auto-critique to 'make visible the invisible way that men subordinate women', may also be seen as traitors.

¹¹⁶ Salaman's, (1986) study of station officers' (WO's) resistance to equal opportunities in the fire service, particularly the imposition of female firefighters, provides an interesting view of why the fire service resisted female firefighters. Amongst the 'discoveries' that Salaman made were that station officers (watch-commanders) do not trust their senior officers. This he explains as a form of jealousy, because firefighters (who eventually become officers) start from a similar background and qualification to their senior officers. Therefore, watch-commanders explain their "*relative failure*" (Salaman 1986: 52) at not achieving senior rank by suggesting, not that the successful senior officer is more competent, but that they have achieved their senior rank by devious means. I have difficulty in accepting Salaman's view as representing anything like a full explanation, although I can see why his limited study led to that conclusion. His considerations have some merit, particularly when he argues that firefighters form an *occupational community*: a view that Hart, (1982: 160-182) took (although Salaman does not acknowledge Harts' work). However, Salaman writes as if the bitter resentment that watch-commanders have for senior officers was new. There is a considerable history (see FBU 1960; Hart 1982: 94, 161; Segars 1989; Bailey 1992) of resistance to senior officers by firefighters and their watch-commanders. It is also possible to suggest that having 'discovered' an occupational community in the fire service, Salaman might have noticed (because it is unlikely that anyone in the fire service would have told him) that there is a clear separation between what watches and senior officer would understand as *their* occupational community. This might have a 'knock on effect' to prevent many watch-commanders from seeking promotion, because they might not wish to leave their watch and *their life as firefighters behind*. Rather than hold bitter resentment for officers who had been more 'successful' than them, it might even be that watch-commanders could also consider that by increasing their hours (from 42 a week to 72 a week) they 'sell themselves and their family for promotion' (partly because many of these extra hours involve being on call from home). Salaman's failure also to acknowledge the importance of senior officers' '*scabbing*' during firefighters' strike (1977/1978) is almost a careless neglect. Particularly, when senior officers' actions at that time may have been a direct result of the hostility between them and watches. On the one hand, there were the striking firefighters/watch-commanders and on the other hand, the senior officers who supported the government by training and leading the troops brought into fight fires, and as firefighters suggested at that time, 'senior offices 'suddenly' became aware of their duty to the public'.

¹¹⁷ Sociology, in particular feminist sociology, has been important in acknowledging that gender is a political construct to favour men. However, feminists mainly identify the cause and effect of this labelling by pointing to how inequality is organised by men and reinforced by harassment/violence (see MacKinnon 1977; Hochschild 1983, 1989; Walby 1988,

closely at what male firefighters might call their masculinity. In so doing I start from a premise that firefighters' masculinity is not natural, but a result of socially learnt behaviour that firefighters adapt to enable them to do *The Job*. Rather I should say *forms* of behaviour, because I accept right from the onset Connell's (1995) argument that masculinity is not singular, but plural: there are *masculinities* and there are *femininities* (see Hochschild 1983; Segal 1990; Cockburn 1991b; Hearn 1994, 1996). However, I do not accept that in the fire service *The Job* makes the man¹¹⁸, more that it makes the person (Kanter 1977: 3). There may be some central attributes that firefighters might follow and seek to achieve, which they might collectively identify as masculinity at work, but the label masculinity does not account for the gender of those female firefighters who also adopt the same standards whilst firefighting (see Baigent 2001b).

In part Hearn's (1996) argument that the concept of masculinity has become so ubiquitous to be in need of clear reformulation might provide a way forward. As an academic, I accept what Hearn argues, but I am not convinced that such statements will change firefighters commonsense beliefs that sex causes gender. However, what Hearn does do is to encourage the debate, in particular, for me to reflect back and analyse how (before I came to university) I accepted commonsense notions about innate binary gender divisions. I now recognise that I made a choice when I did this, but it needs to be better understood that the working class commonsense discourse I grew up in indicated that sex causes gender; the outcome was that my beliefs became true in their consequences (see Thomas 1909). Contextualising this analysis, I would question if my father and his father before him, the teachers at my school, my social group and the people I worked alongside all believed masculine attributes are natural, then where was I to get the knowledge that things might be different? I know now that gender is a social construction, but I question, *before I came to university, how was I going to accept women could be firefighters*¹¹⁹? My reflexive view encourages me to suggest that it is time for sociology to investigate further the social construction of gender. The aim to extend the debate from a situation whereby sociology provides evidence of how men *learn* and *protect* their so called 'natural qualities', to a situation where sociology can 'prove' to men just how social these qualities are by providing research that suggests women are *learning* similar attributes. This new emphasis would develop at least three arguments:

- Connell's (1995) argument that there are a multiplicity of masculinities;

1990, 1997; Connell 1987 1995; Collinson and Collinson 1989, 1996; Collinson *et al* 1990; Segal 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Hearn 1993, 1994, 1998).

¹¹⁸ Doyle (1996: 13) indicates there is a popular adage in the fire service, "You may take the man out of the Fire Service, but you can't take the Fire Service out of the man," and this indicates that to male firefighters, like other men, that "gender is fundamental to the way work is organised; and work is central in the social construction of gender" (Game and Pringle 1984: 14).

¹¹⁹ There are clear arguments to indicate that parenting and role models are important in this process (Heward 1996) and although I denied them at the time, this did not stop me from making politically inspired decisions as the following example suggests. When my daughter joined the fire service in 1993, she defied a commonsense notion that firefighters were male, but my friends adapted their common sense view to suggest that public service was in her blood to excuse her 'transgression'. From their perspective this was true as her great grandfather served as a railway Station Master for over 50 years, her grandfather served in the police for 25 years, and I had been a firefighter for 31 years. Therefore everything pointed towards a (different) causal link and at that time I held the same view. The ambiguity of what I have just argued does not escape me, because at that time I appear on the one hand to believe that gender and sex are linked and then on the other hand to argue that there can be exceptions, but these must be blood-related. However, in the commonsense hands-on world that I lived in then, my powers of analysis were not as now. *Now I have a different view*. I would argue that my daughter's sense of public service was not genetic, but socially acquired and although I might deny it I must have had some sense of this then. Take the case of my daughter: it may be that then I had already recognised the dividends associated with masculine behaviour and I did not allow her sex to 'restrict' her social development of human capital. She learnt her view of the world in a house that offered her both masculine and feminine opportunities, and she helped with the building work I was doing and she also helped to wash up. Her determination to succeed was encouraged, her rebellious spirit was channelled to provide controlled aggression, she was not taught to be sexually subordinate to men, but encouraged to do what she was comfortable with and not to be forced into situations that she did not want. When she wanted to be a firefighter, I encouraged her and passed on my skills to her. In sociological terms, she lived within the influence of social structures that were strongly steeped in public service and her masculine 'strengths' were encouraged alongside her feminine ones. In many ways the tools to good employment (human capital), which Walby (1997) advises many women are now choosing were offered to my daughter and she took them.

- Hearn's (1996) proposal that there needs to be a clear reformulation of the notion of masculinity/masculinities;
- Walby's (1997) suggestion that women can, by increasing their human capital and avoiding patriarchal structures, gain access to good employment.

From this starting point research might provide arguments to critique the commonsense notions that *masculine* standards are essentially men's standards, by providing examples to suggest they are socially learnt standards that women may also obtain and vice versa.

Challenging such a basic structure in our society as gender might not be easy. However, many women *cross the binary gender divisions*¹²⁰. And rather than take a view that these women are being defeminised, a reserve army of labour, or being forced to accept men's standards, perhaps sociology should consider if these examples might be analysed to celebrate women's agency and at the same time critique/influence commonsense views about gender. Fortuitous in the events occurring during my research is an intervention by Lorber (2000). She argues that feminists should now form a *degendering movement* and challenge the whole concept of binary gender divisions¹²¹. Lorber's wake up call is perhaps a next step for feminist and pro-feminist research to consider and this thesis will contribute to her arguments by identifying how male firefighters construct their masculinity and consider in the conclusion what gender label do we give the female firefighters who act the same.

1.12. THE THESIS

The Thesis comprises six chapters, each combining relevant literature, data and analysis.

Chapter 2, **Methodology**, explains in detail the methodology and methods for the research, my own experience of the research process and thesis production.

Chapter 3, **Firefighting: *Getting In***, begins by identifying current thinking on masculinity and image presentation before providing a close look at the business of firefighting, the product of which (can be seen as economic, but in this chapter) is: saving lives, protecting property; and

¹²⁰ Gender beliefs that separate male and female work are being broken all around us, but these events have yet to be fully recognised in the terms I will suggest. There is clear evidence that men elevate their position by making women invisible, except as wives and mothers (Pateman and Gross 1986; Segal 1990) and this situation is not new. Feminists argue that in early Greek society women's activities in the Aristotelian polis were hidden by men (see Coole 1993; Tong 1993). *History* also marginalises the women who had toiled alongside men in feudal fields; disguises the turn of the 19th century sleight of hand by which men used industrial or political muscle to label work as either unskilled women's work (associated with natural feminine skills used in the 'private'), or skilled work that only men had the natural resources to learn (see Cockburn 1983; Walby 1986, 1990; Hollway 1996: 27). Also conveniently forgotten by men, though not by feminists, were the ways in which women became a reserve army of labour during two world wars (see Gamarnikow 1983: 3). An interval when women undertook 'men's' work by replacing the men who had gone to fight the war in: commerce; factories and farms; to a limited extent in directly defending the country by staffing anti-aircraft guns (although they were not allowed to pull the trigger as the mother of one of my friends told me) and staffing radar stations. In the fire service at the time, there is no conclusive evidence that women actually fought fires as regular crewmembers on an appliance. The general view was that women should not, or could not, be subject to the danger of firefighting during air raids. However, in a typical piece of irony, during the research I met a wartime woman control operator and she told me that during the war she was trained as a despatch rider (a motorcyclist who took messages from the fire to the control and back again *during air-raids*). Females are as a rule kept away from the high-risk industries, *which empower men* (see Lipman-Blumen 1976: 23) and this might better explain why women were excluded from firefighting. Similar views led to the way women were deliberately taken out of the mines in a series of trade-union sponsored industrial laws that preserved labour (and I suggest proletarian masculinity) for men (see Walby 1990). Currently, examples of women acting in a similar fashion to men can be found in all areas of employment, from managers to road sweepers and in all industries and professions, but as I argue earlier, this is not seen as masculine behaviour, but as women acting like men or being defeminised (Cockburn 1991b: 69).

¹²¹ This may have been argued earlier by, amongst others, Hearn (1994, 1996). It is possible to see Wollstonecraft taking such a view: "She claimed to be androgynous in her self-presentation, but manly in her force and reason" (Todd 1989: xxix-xxx) Wollstonecraft (1994) also suggests that women were 'human before feminine' and that 'the soul was unsexed' (almost an opposite argument to that of Kant 1959 who saw men as naturally rational and women as naturally irrational).

rendering humanitarian services. This data led chapter focuses in particular on the tightly knit teams of firefighters (watches), how they fight fires and their motivations for doing so. Foremost from this evidence comes the understanding that to firefighters, firefighting is not just another job, but a service that they wish to carry out to the best of their ability; if this involves challenging some company rules, then so be it. However, the analysis places some question marks over if firefighters motivations for doing their job and providing their service is only humanitarian (the Millais model) and I produce a list of possible motivations that firefighters might have for firefighting. This list develops to suggest that whilst firefighters are ostensibly helping the public during firefighting, firefighters might be testing and proving their masculinity at the same time, although this is not a judgement that their reactions to any similar situation at another time might have the same motivation (see Giddens 1987).

Chapter 4, **Relations at the station: *Fitting In***, moves from the fireground to the firestation and provides detailed data from firefighters concerning their working relationships on the watch. This data suggests that despite the fire service having a formal hierarchy, the watch more often form around an informal hierarchy; group membership is conditional on firefighters *fitting in* with peer group gatekeepers. To help explain these relationships including the resistance that firefighters might show to the informal hierarchy a list of loose categories or stages, which firefighters might pass through or join, is produced. There is no intention to suggest that firefighters' behaviour will always fit those categories, the list is just a tool to aid understanding.

Chapter 5, **Class, Hierarchies, Resistance and Gender Construction**, reviews some issues surrounding class to indicate the framework of analysis for the data that follows from both officers and firefighters. In particular, I investigate the relations between the formal hierarchy (officers) and the informal one (firefighters) in class terms. The data supports a view in all the previous chapters that despite fire service claims to be a disciplined and united service that there is a vast disparity between public claims and private outcomes (because of firefighters' resistance to officers). The industrialisation of the fire service is seen as a focus for this resistance, but in a class orientated analysis about control of the means of production and surplus values it is possible to recognise that not all resistance is about economic dividends/surplus values, but that the gap between officers and firefighters is also about petty dividends involving power and status.

Chapter 6, **Conclusion**, will bring the findings of the thesis into a conclusion. It does this by referring back to the four areas, which Chapter 1 provides for investigation. In particular, it analyses how firefighters construct their gender at work, what this analysis adds to the debate on gender construction and how this thesis might help the fire service. There is also a critique of the research and thesis, and a discussion of some areas for further research.

2. CHAPTER TWO METHODOLOGY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

It is my view that my experience of having been a firefighter for nearly 31 years will considerably influence my PhD research. I can see no way that I can stop this from happening (even if I wanted to), nor can I ‘prove’ how good or selective my memory is. I am using the eye/I of Kondo (1990: 8¹²²) and acknowledge that my view is subjective (and partial) in a similar way that the term ‘masculinity’ is subjective (and not positive). There can be no doubt that I ‘know’ a lot about being a firefighter and contextually I share Blum’s (2000: 107) view¹²³ when I argue that the fire service is my world and that academia still remains somewhat difficult to me. Notwithstanding this ‘confession’, my subjectivity is not an excuse to produce a journalistic account of the fire service and I have tried to make my research as rigorous as possible (see Morgan 1987). I am firmly of the view that had it not been for Hearn’s (1994) notion of pro-feminist auto-critique, which calls on men to make visible the hidden understandings of how they construct their masculinity, that I may well now be claiming to have created a similar method, but rather than auto-critique I would be calling it *re-search*. However, Hearn was there before me and this chapter explains how I developed his method to both contain and exploit my subjective views as I use my I/eye to research the fire service.

I collected most of my data using qualitative methods of interview, observation and auto-critique, and some data through quantitative/qualitative questionnaires and statistics. The data was collated and analysed by using my own special mix of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and pro-feminist auto-critique. As much as any man can be, I have been a feminist in this research. I have a political agenda, which is unashamedly to challenge sexism and help the fire service with its difficulties over equal opportunities, and the bulk of my data relies on narrative and personal reflections. This chapter will also explain how my feminist-inspired concerns over not exploiting my informants are partly eased by putting firefighters’ words at the centre of the thesis. I hope firefighters find this thesis accessible; that they recognise their words and my conclusions and do not see them as some far off theoretical blueprint.

2.2. PRO-FEMINIST AUTO-CRITIQUE

2.2.1. Feminist methods

The development of contemporary feminist methods takes place as an attempt to raise the profile of women subjects and researchers, and as a critique of positivist malestream methodologies (see O’Brien 1981; Reinhartz 1992; Hammersley 1993; Mies 1993; Wolf 1996). Feminists suggest that malestream claims to objectivity and scientific accreditation, *which this thesis will explain as the methods the fire service prefers*, are a covert attempt to marginalise women: a subjective prejudice in research, which is hidden behind an argument of objectivity and underpins the commonsense understandings that support the hegemonic gender order of ‘men’s natural superiority’. Making their politics obvious, feminists undertake action research to critique masculinity and consciously favour women. In doing this, they hope to highlight women’s exploitation, consider their subjects’ agendas, present narrative as data, place the researcher’s subjectivity within the findings and not exploit them by using the research just to gain academic recognition (see Jackson 1987; Hammersley 1993; Wolf 1996).

2.2.2. Pro-feminist auto-critique

¹²² “that any account, mine included, is partial and located, screened through the narrator’s eye/I” (Kondo 1990: 8; see also Giddens 1979, in particular 43-44).

¹²³ Blum is a shipyard worker who went to academia and now writes about his work.

My research parallels feminism in the critique of masculinity and I shall be following its methodological agendas closely. However, pro-feminist auto-critique is not so much about elevating women, its orientation is towards enlightening men about how their actions might be self-harming. Therefore, if I am to avoid ‘hit and run’ research that exploits the firefighters who are my informants, I must be particularly careful that I prepare this thesis in a way they might *want* to understand. I say “want” because I am acutely aware that firefighters do not like reading academic literature and in general terms they show distaste for anything academic. I know that firefighters prefer to learn experientially, that is to say by actually doing something or at least relating new knowledge to their experiences in the past and therefore I have tried to make this thesis as ‘hands-on’ as possible. One way I will do this is by including as much narrative from firefighters as I judge academic limitations will allow me. However, the narrative is not there to ‘prove’ the analysis, it is part of my pro-feminist auto-critique; as such it is so arranged to form part of the analysis. This style has two outcomes for firefighters: first, it allows firefighters’ subjectivity to speak for itself by reproducing their own words as they occurred; second, it will allow firefighters to hear themselves in the thesis.

There are a relatively small number of men who are sympathetic to feminism and problematise current notions of masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995; Morgan 1987; Collinson 1988; Collinson, and Collinson 1989; Collinson *et al* 1990; Jackson 1990; Seidler 1992, 1995, 1997; Hearn 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998; Collinson and Hearn 1994; Collinson and Collinson 1996; Collinson and Hearn 1996a, 1996b; Mac an Ghaill 1996; Whitehead 1996; Kimmel and Messner 1998). Some of these are pro-feminists (see Hearn 1992: 29), but the men amongst them are not being patronising. Sympathy with feminism does not mean helping out a subordinate in a patriarchal manner by arriving like the cavalry to save women. Pro-feminists intend to help *men* become more aware of the negative aspects associated with masculinity¹²⁴. For some this means making visible the invisible myths of male power by a reflexive critical study of men: pro-feminist auto-critique (Hearn 1994: 50-60; Hearn 1998: 3). What I believe Hearn anticipates (and I support in my thesis) is that if men will critically unmask their own understandings, they may rewrite some *history*. In my case, this might mean that I can add my own reflections to the data I collect and make visible some understandings between firefighters through which they replicate their masculinity. In the wider field, feminism already has a project to do this in their search to expose patriarchy, but contextually this is often a case of the ‘have-nots’ studying the ‘haves’ (see Hearn 1994: 3). My location is as an insider, both as a man and as an ex firefighter, and if it is necessary I am prepared to be a traitor to my sex and possibly accelerate understanding by revealing information that might be of direct emancipatory value to other males, females and myself.

2.2.3. Some pro-feminist auto-critique

I arrived at university in 1993 after nearly 31 years proud service as a firefighter (Appendix 2). My aim was to get a degree, but from my arrogant yet naive firefighters’ perspective, this was just a means to an end. It was my belief that a degree was simply a qualification that I could bolt onto my existing experience. Then I would be able to fulfil my main aim, which was to return to the fire service and help with the problematic issues of equality surrounding females becoming firefighters¹²⁵.

¹²⁴ For some very clear examples of men’s negative behaviour in a pro-feminist style see Bowker (1998; see also Huggins and Haritos-Fatourors 1998; Karner 1998; Messerschmidt 1998; Sobieraj 1998; Toch 1998; Websdale and Chesney-Lind 1998).

¹²⁵ I had recognised that in our increasingly ‘certificated’ society that bits of paper were important, yet I had no real idea of why. Fire service promotion examinations are called ‘tickets’, presumably because they grant you access to promotion. Many of the officers I have interviewed seem to have a similar understanding to the one I had as I joined university. They realise a need to get qualifications, *yet have no real belief that the knowledge gained in getting these qualifications will be of any practical use*. This understanding is fostered at firefighter level, because firefighters are protective of their belief that ‘*The Job*’ can only be learnt by ‘hands-on’ experience (see Chapter 3). This attitude serves them well because it helps them to retain a large degree of control over their work process (see Chapters 3-5; Willis 1977: 152). One way that firefighters keep the learning process centred on their experiential knowledge is to distance themselves from those officers who firefighters identify as incompetent, and to argue that those officers have learnt ‘*The Job from a book*’. Firefighters’ association between book learning and incompetence also increases their wariness of anyone who does not have hands-on

So, I decided to ‘*pop along to university and get a degree*’. Not for one minute did I have any understanding how much my views on masculinity, a dynamic I was part of, but relatively unaware about, might change during the successful completion of a degree in sociology¹²⁶. Nor did I think that eight years later I would still be at university and using pro-feminist auto-critique to reflect on how my previous workplace may identify the social aspects of male power.

Now, I look back and recognise how sociology introduced me to a radical new way of understanding: the idea that social life and in particular gender, is a social construction rather than natural¹²⁷ (see Chapter 1). Sociology also provides the knowledge for me to recognise that whilst I celebrated my masculinity, this had negative connotations, one of which was that I was a harasser women and ‘lesser’ men. This recognition came as a considerable shock and becoming increasingly uncomfortable with this aspect of my behaviour, I began to use my newly gained knowledge about gender construction and agency to realise that as my masculinity was not fixed by nature as commonsense understandings suggest (see Connell 1995; Chapter 1), I could assess and change my behaviour¹²⁸. I recognised that I had ‘chosen’ to be a patriarch, but under circumstances where I did not realise that the masculinity offered to me by my class, family and particularly my work was not the only option available (see Willis 1977; Walby 1986; Collinson and Collinson 1989: 95; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Connell 1996; Collinson and Hearn 1996b; Seidler 1997)¹²⁹. However, despite late arrival, I was now in a new environment: one that offered me alternative models of masculinity and new opportunities to exercise a different kind of agency. Consequently, given the need and will to change I started to develop the tools sociology provided (in particular, Hochschild’s (1983) understanding that if an actor plays a part [*surface-acts*] for any length of time, this behaviour develops into *deep-acting* [a natural to them way of living]), and I ‘chose’ a target identity as a pro-feminist academic and started a long and complicated journey towards achieving it.

This was not as simple as the words suggest. I did not just decide to change and ‘hey presto’ it happened. Fifty years of socialisation are not easy to ignore. Change to me is an ongoing process not an outcome and my ‘born again’ attempts to ‘surface-act’ until it becomes ‘deep-acting’ never end. The negative influences of masculinity that I once thought ‘natural’ now cause me considerable angst as they threaten to (and occasionally do) ‘schizophrenically’ flash me back to patriarchal agendas and the mental violence and sexism I have used to achieve them¹³⁰. I am not a new male divorced from the old male. I still harass those around me, but I increasingly recognise this and apologise in the hope I can repair the damage I have done. Therefore, whilst I am attempting to change, that change is slow, nothing is set in concrete and the whole process needs constant vigilance. Hearn (1998: 106) suggests that many of the violent men he interviewed claimed a double self: first, as the man in the past who was violent; second, as the non-violent (new) man of the present. At the start of my research, I claimed I had left behind my patriarchal identity and replaced it with my male pro-feminist status. However, I now recognise this was wrong. There is no ‘old’ man or ‘new’ man, but me. I am

skills. This can then lead to firefighters almost labelling *any* form of book learning pejoratively as ‘*academic*’: an inverted snobbery (see Chapters 4 and 5). It is important to recognise throughout this thesis that firefighters’ understandings of the term ‘academic’ will not only relate to studying from a book, but also to any form of paperwork or ‘admin’ as they call it. In broad terms the outcome of their approach might be summed up to suggest that blue-collar work is *real work and masculine*, and white-collar (office or academic work) is feminine and not real work at all.

¹²⁶ I chose sociology just because it had the word harassment in the prospectus.

¹²⁷ During my introduction to sociology (Bilton *et al* 1996) I opened my mind to ‘hear’ what was being said, a skill that once developed became a very useful tool for theorising alongside the data: what Orona called “free fall” (1997: 178).

¹²⁸ One analysis of this situation could suggest I was again using my agency to my own advantage; I had recognised that an identity as a patriarchal male did not have the same advantages when I was at university reading sociology and women’s studies, as it did in the fire service. I do prefer to see myself as being ‘saved’ as it were by sociology, whatever the reason this has become a ‘salvation’ (see Walker 1991).

¹²⁹ This use of Marxism seems appropriate to the position of firefighters. They ‘choose’ an identity without the full knowledge of hegemonic agendas that they are operating amongst (see Giddens 1982), which harm them, females and the world (see Hearn 1994; Seidler 1997). This might be seen as a false consciousness, but this implies and almost excuses completely firefighters’ subjectivity as if it were beyond their control.

¹³⁰ The biggest difficulties I have had to confront are my use of mental violence, particularly what I would describe as fire service humour (see Chapter 4) and my sexism.

a man trying to be less of a patriarch. New consciousness and location has allowed me a new ability to mediate on who I am. However, as in my past (see Chapter 1), I am constructing myself within a bubble of knowledge, but now I am increasing its size by the use of resources that I was previously not aware of¹³¹. Therefore, this thesis is not just about how firefighters construct their masculinity, it is also involves an auto-critique of my involvement in challenging my masculinity and my journey towards pro-feminism. This is a story of men, told through the subjectivity of a man who has been one of those men, but who has undertaken PhD research using pro-feminist auto-critique. In its own way this project is ‘unique’ and hopefully therapeutic.

2.2.4. Not a traditional academic

My ‘late arrival’ in academia means I do not have a traditional academic background, but one based on commonsense understandings (see Chapter 1). Traditionally, academics are likely to have been within or near academic discourse for most of their life and their understandings, from early education to their current location, will involve academic rigour (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strathern 1987; Wolf 1996; Strauss and Corbin 1997). My situation was almost the opposite. As a ‘late arrival’ in academia, I lacked academic rigour and my view of the ‘real world’ took place using working class, commonsense understandings. Similar to most firefighters I was close to Willis’s lads¹³²; my learning was *experiential* and I had a general disdain for anything academic (see Willis-Lee 1993a, 1993b). However, as an undergraduate, I gradually warmed to book learning and I found that my earlier experience and understandings had one advantage. My earlier lifestyle became a resource, because I realised that the type of person that academics were often looking (down) at, were like me. This was particularly so when I read about class, race and sexism and I was able to ground much of the reading by looking into my own past. Of prime importance and the initial motivator for this research was how, when I looked back into my past to find an example of Walby’s (1986) theory on patriarchy, I saw myself, a ‘perfect’ patriarch¹³³. It is my ability to re-search from my past that is integral to my approach to pro-feminist auto-critique.

2.3. THE RESEARCH

2.3.1. Using experiential knowledge

My suggestions so far are not completely new. Contemporary ideas already suggest that reflexive use of one’s experience should be cultivated, rather than suppressed, to provide a base for systematic theorising (see Glaser and Strauss 1967: 252; Davis 1959: 158-165; Strauss 1987: 16; Narayan 1989). Morgan (1987) used this approach when he carried out a self-interrogation of his experience as a

¹³¹ This argument, which again points to my false understanding, is not a defence of my earlier behaviour. Had such knowledge been available and it may have been, I would have undoubtedly marginalised it.

¹³² Willis (1977) suggests that boys who become working class males, reject the middle class (precursors to academic) standards at school. They ignore their education for the immediate pleasures of fooling about in class and a quick route to work. Such ideas updated by Canaan’s (1996) study of youth sub-cultures in Wolverhampton. In particular, the group she studied appear to be the type who may turn to become firefighters. But when they become firefighters they do not suffer the entrapment in subordinated employment that Collinson (1992: 52) argues is the outcome when the lads in Willis (1977) chose work that they believe will allow them to celebrate their commonsense belief in ‘macho’ masculinity, freedom and independence. In many ways what Willis and Canaan have found amongst boys is repeated for girls. Walby (1997) identifies that many girls affect their life chances by accepting the commonsense notions about being a family-maker, neglect their education, and choose instead the quick fix gratification of being a wife and mother: a situation they often regret when their dreams of homemaking go wrong if they are deserted by their partner and then have to make their own way in the world.

¹³³ This suited my working class hands-on fire service approach, because it made tangible the things I was hearing. Further analysis also suggests that my provision of experiential data to ground the theories from the books I was reading was a slightly different approach to the process most authors would have used when they wrote a book i.e. author reads theory – searches for data to create theory – produces ‘new’ theory – writes books. At that time I read theory – then to understand the theory I sought out data (experiences from my own life) – grounded the theory.

national serviceman to ‘start’ the masculinity debate. However, my insight /experience as a ‘late to arrive’ academic, goes far deeper than traditional academics probably envisage. When, as a retired firefighter, I relate to firefighters today, I seem able to reactivate some of my pre-academic understandings: to almost return home¹³⁴. To use a simple example, firefighters have a ‘distinctive’ way of climbing a ladder and this is something I learnt and cannot consciously or unconsciously forget. Whilst climbing a ladder will be of little use to this thesis, the example may be. I have learnt many ways ‘natural and peculiar’ to firefighters from my 31 years socialisation with them, and this increases my sensitivity in the field by helping to explain firefighters’ conversations, their symbolism and behaviour. Similar to the way I discovered my patriarchal identity by searching my pre-academic experiences, it may be possible for me to search my memory to such an extent that my earlier insider experience as a firefighter may become a resource that helps this research. Many of the understandings I held as a firefighter, although often mediated by academia, are still with me, and I expect my insider knowledge to help reveal data, recognise and interpret issues that ‘others’ may miss. Possibly amongst my experiential knowledge are some of the hidden understandings between males that underpin male power. As Hearn suggests, I might make the “*invisible visible*” (1994: 60)
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2.3.2. Am I ‘at home’ or not?

My claim is similar to that of many researchers who consider their insider knowledge makes for better research by improving the interpretation of respondent’s views (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987; Narayan 1989: 263-264; Jackson 1987; Jackson 1990; Hearn 1993: 7; Hearn 1994: 63; Wolf 1996: 14). However, there are two counter arguments: first, that a researcher’s desire to produce results can problematise their feminist intention to help their informants (see Warren 1988: 39). The second relates to the possibility that now I am striving to be an academic I might not fully recognise that I am more an insider (at home) in the academy than amongst firefighters (see Jackson 1987; Strathern 1987: 16). This possibility can have several consequences and I now intend to look at these.

2.3.3. Marginal natives: auto-anthropologists

Wolf (1996) is amongst those researchers who have tried to address the problematic notion of being ‘at home’¹³⁶. Similarly, Strathern critiques “*auto-anthropologists*” (Strathern 1987: 16), for being ‘at home’ in the academy when they think they are ‘at home’ in the field. There is a view that these researchers are neither insider nor outsider, but “*marginal natives*” (Freilich 1977 cited in Altorki 1988: 16). Taking the view that most researchers have their roots firmly in a global academic discourse, it is possible to suggest these researchers may not fully appreciate how much their current theoretical understanding will influence any previously held common understandings with their informants. Failing to recognise what is in effect ‘looking down’ from an external academic theoretical perspective, may result in a researcher filtering out the original meaning behind their informants’ words, behaviour and psychology. This can then result in a thesis that gains academic recognition, but, which moreover, the subjects of the research do not recognise: the arrogance of looking down, hidden behind a supposedly objective insider view¹³⁷. If this were to happen to my

¹³⁴ Jackson (1987) uses the term ‘at home’, to describe research by people with experience of the area they are working in. I use this term as well and in this particular context have chosen to widen its use by replacing the common academic and now somewhat offensive term of ‘native’.

¹³⁵ Corbin (1986a: 92, 1986b), Strauss (1987: 11) and Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987: 187) all suggest that the more the researcher understands respondents at these levels the better the theory. Hearn (1994) more specifically, suggests that the possibilities of a ‘critical sociology of men’ is made more credible if pro-feminist men use their experience, understandings and insight, not as disinterested observers, but to become active participants in a critique to achieve change.

¹³⁶ Other writers also claim ‘at home’ status and show an awareness of the problems they encounter in making this claim (see Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987; Berik 1996; Matsumo 1996; Ping-Chun Hsiung 1996; Zavella 1996).

¹³⁷ Chenitz (1986: 46; also see Corbin 1986: 92; Hann 1987, 143-4; Strauss 1987: 11; Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987: 187) explains how ‘filtering’ can damage the research. I take their critique to suggest that much of this filtering may be to produce tidy research, which accords with current understandings. It may also be that researchers who claim to be insiders

research, then the firefighters who have made my research possible may feel exploited, because I have not used my knowledge to interpret what they have said in a way they understand. The outcome will then be that I would justify those firefighters who argue ‘that academics do not know anything about *their real world*’.

Of note, when researchers argue they have a common understanding with their informants, it reminds me of the difficulties in the fire service regarding the gap between firefighters and officers. Chapter 5 will suggest that officers claim a *shared understanding* with firefighters as a way of justifying their single tier entry promotion system. However, as Chapter 5 indicates, officers may anticipate they have *shared understandings* of having been a firefighter, but this belief is a site of considerable conflict with firefighters throughout this thesis (see Collinson 1992, 1994, 1996; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Baigent 2000, 2001a, 2001c). In fact, the evidence of Chapter 5 puts this whole notion into doubt and the misunderstandings that occur between fire service officers and firefighters may involve similar dynamics to the misunderstandings between some returning researchers and their informants.

The debate so far illuminates how researchers (and fire officers) can believe that they are insiders when they no longer are. In comparison, I intend to support my argument (above) that my contextual location is different to traditional academics. Experience in the field suggests that I have not lost touch with the way I used to think when I was a firefighter and I often flashback to my earlier understandings when amongst firefighters (see section ‘The boob test’ later). Sometimes I do this unconsciously (as in climbing the ladder), but I am also able to subjectively search my memory to ‘recreate’ my earlier understandings. This helps to remove some of the divisions building between my commonsense and academic understandings. Sometimes when I look at incoming data, both as it occurs and later in my office, I can almost move back and forwards between my two sources of knowledge *and recognise I am doing so*¹³⁸. At these times by being both insider and outsider, via my own experience and the mechanics of flashbacks, I may be able to interpret what firefighters say in a manner that both academics or firefighters can recognise: to make some of the invisible visible.

2.3.4. Self-interrogation: a critique

Considerable criticism can be made of auto-critique/self-interrogation, for example the issue of memory failure, or more specifically that my insight may have already been ‘contaminated’ by my new knowledge (see Jackson 1990: 4-9; Young 1991: 392). Morgan (1987) argues, when carrying out a similar process that his was a disciplined attempt to gain knowledge. Morgan was not claiming pure objectivity, but an objective use of his subjective knowledge. I am aware that I may be working on ‘the edge’ of what is acceptable from qualitative evidence (especially as I have political intentions to raise male consciousness), which could lead to me being disowned by both academics and firefighters alike. Yet, I am not able to ignore the opportunities that my experience could provide to get close to firefighters. It is my view that this experience is better used in a disciplined way, because, whatever, the flashbacks would still occur. I make no claims other than that my research is a subjective yet disciplined attempt to increase understanding without deliberately making selective choices¹³⁹. As with all qualitative research my data is subjective (see Swanson 1986: 66), but I expect to sceptically analyse my experiential views in the same way I would any respondent’s answers (see Glaser and Strauss 1967: 253; Swanson 1986: 66, 73).

2.3.5. Some more auto-critique

may start to look down and interpret their respondents’ actions for them because they (the researcher) *really* understand what is going on: the malestream view (see O’Brien 1981).

¹³⁸ Strathern (1987: 18) believes the real insider needs to be able to “draw on concepts which also belong to the culture under study.”

¹³⁹ Morgan (1987; see Jackson 1990) suggests that a tendency to select what you find in your memory to suit your argument can be a problem with reflections.

In particular, I must not ignore the likelihood that the scientific fire service lobby might claim my research is too subjective, reliant on contaminated knowledge or provided through false memory. The fire service has little time for subjectivity, believing in the malestream world of objectivity and scientific proof¹⁴⁰. To reduce this possibility, test the methodology and keep the research at the ‘cutting edge’, I shall follow Corbin (1986: 93) who believes credibility improves by verification. My experiential knowledge will therefore be ‘tested’ by the rigour of grounded theory, to ensure it guides, not leads the research. In this way, I hope to remain faithful to feminist methods and my own experience, while at the same time strengthening the potential impact of my research on the fire service

2.4. ACCESS AND ETHICS

This section starts by discussing the way firefighters bond and how this may produce some form of dividend that an ex-firefighter carrying out research might use to get access, and the ethical concerns that arise from doing this. First, my kinship as an ex-firefighter might lead to firefighters providing information that may have the potential to damage them if made public. Second, and very connected to my first concern, I already suspect that firefighters celebrate their masculinity and if they treat me as an insider they will do so in the belief that I share their dramaturgical loyalty to not reveal the taken for granted understandings between firefighters that some things should not be publicised (see Goffman 1959). This has led to me not being entirely honest with firefighters, especially when their gatekeepers set tests that ‘force’ me to uphold their sexist agendas, and I report on one particular incident in detail and discuss a problem this caused for my attempts at pro-feminism. Lastly, I shall explain that the fire service at officer level was not entirely welcoming to me and had it not been for the firefighters I might not have gained any access at all.

2.4.1. Kinship, closure and dividends

This thesis indicates that the fire service shares a *professional ethos: to provide an efficient service to help the public*. To help achieve this it is necessary for firefighters to be able to work together and the fire service develops formal and informal methods to ensure this happens. Training, procedures and equipment is standardised, and this helps firefighters from different stations to work together at large fires. Commonly firefighters suggest they ‘work, train, play, eat, sleep and die together’ and although this might be a touch overdramatic, firefighters believe their work provides them with a bond in life and death¹⁴¹. So if a firefighter’s car breaks down in Birmingham, whether in England, Alabama or

¹⁴⁰ During my time spent at the FSC it was clear that research in the fire service follows scientific lines. Mostly based in the hard sciences, research rarely strays into the humanities. Those few research projects into human behaviour generally were around management techniques, which had a strong element of psychology. The lecturers, although jokingly, spurned my sociological background and it is easy to see why the limited attempts to understand human behaviour that stray into the social sciences, stay firmly planted in the statistics that questionnaires provide. This is particularly true of the research done on the BCC. During my time spent with this high profile course, on which each student is given funding for international research, those students I spoke with indicated that they were ‘persuaded’ by the markers of their assignments to follow number crunching methods.

My attendance at three research conferences at the FSC indicates that despite officers arguing they are becoming research conscious this belief in any true sense is embryonic. In particular, the conference runs alongside the courses and the students are not encouraged to attend. The fire service is not an organisation that takes critique lightly and careers are made, or at least enhanced, by sponsorship (Flanagan 1998). Most presenters follow the corporate image that all is well in the fire service. This of course was in the interest of those presenting the papers (see Dixon 1994), who were in effect trying to *promote* themselves. The format was for many of the presenters to leave soon after their paper. This is not a sound basis for research and progress. Two students on the BCC were actually carrying out international research into promotion in the fire service and I spoke with them after their presentations to indicate my desire to share knowledge. Neither attended my paper delivery, nor contacted me and during my presentation I did attempt some action research by critiquing the single tier entry system so loved by officers. There was no response.

¹⁴¹ It may even be that fire service structures have an international perspective, which makes for an international family with similar understandings. There is a considerable support for this view from respondents to this research who have associated with firefighters from Arabia, Africa, Australia and Asia, and authors and authors (see Hart 1982; Laughlin 1986; Hall 1991; Howell 1994, 1996; Delson 1996; Richards 1996; Wilson 1997).

South Africa, they can go to the local firestation and they will receive help: a form of dividend for being a firefighter¹⁴².

2.4.2. Access bordering on trespass

This 'dividend' therefore is a real asset for the researcher who is an ex-firefighter. Firefighters whom I interviewed, and had never met before, revealed intimate details about their lives, because they expect me as an ex-firefighter to share understandings about dramaturgical loyalty¹⁴³. Access not only improved because I am an ex-firefighter, but also because of the topic of my thesis: masculinity. Male firefighters celebrate their masculinity in commonsense terms as their 'natural' skills and abilities. I remain convinced that even though they test themselves to 'prove' their 'calling', and exclude those 'other' they believe cannot do so, most firefighters do not consciously *consider* that their masculinity is a social phenomenon that is handed down amongst men (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Barrett 1996: 136). If they did, then firefighters are far too sophisticated a group to reveal to others (HMIFS 1999) or me, about their prejudices and the harassment they use to enforce their masculinity¹⁴⁴.

2.4.3. What can I expect?

Young (1991), a policeman, who similar to me took a degree and then returned¹⁴⁵, provides some insight as to how he hid his 'new' critical understandings and colluded with police culture to maintain access¹⁴⁶. I now recognise Young's dilemma, because I became acutely aware during my research of gatekeepers, who not only tested my bona fides to see which side of the equal opportunities debate I was on, but also to find out my 'real' intentions in the research (see Mies 1993: 80; Williams 1996: 81). Therefore, for most of my research I chose to act according to fire service cultural rules and in particular not to challenge sexism¹⁴⁷. Goffman's work brilliantly portrays how complex social interaction can be and how all manner of tests are set as pitfalls to test/destroy an image (see Goffman 1997a 1997c¹⁴⁸). I cannot overemphasise how skilled firefighters are at testing those around them

¹⁴² This draws on and extends Connell's (1995) definition to suggest that not only is patriarchal dividend available to men as reflected power, but that individual groups of patriarchs can also provide a dividend to those who are *automatically* accepted as complying with group norms: in this case that firefighters will help other firefighters.

¹⁴³ Zavella (1996: 141) suggests that feminists are not unfamiliar with this sharing of information and celebrate the reciprocal, sisterly, relations provided. However, between women this relationship occurs around marginalised rather than elite relations, but the outcomes are still the same; conformity to the rituals and tests implicit to the sisterhood/brotherhood allows access (see Finch 1993: 172-173). However, not only does access, trust and celebration provide me with rich narrative data, the very existence of this trust gives added weight to the concept of a fraternity of firefighters built on notions of a shared and celebrated masculinity.

¹⁴⁴ The invisible only remains invisible whilst it is hidden (see Young 1991: 61). Masculinity is an example of this dictate and if firefighters knew their masculinity is a social phenomenon, they would likely realise that any power masculinity provides can only remain whilst the social phenomenon remains invisible.

¹⁴⁵ Young was a serving police officer who following a three-year degree scholarship returned to the police to carry out PhD research and then produced his book *An inside job*. However, Young remained a police officer whilst he did his research and I did not.

¹⁴⁶ Young was a serving police officer, who following a three-year degree scholarship returned to the police to carry out PhD research. However, Young remained a police officer whilst he did his research and his recognition of police behaviour was problematic for him. For me the problem was not so great, because I had 'suffered' the disturbance of recognising the shortfalls associated with my 'life' in the fire service during my first degree. I was also outside of the culture and (apart from when I was researching) developing the skills to marginalise problematic areas from my old lifestyle.

¹⁴⁷ Late in the research I did challenge a senior academic at the Fire Service College about sexism and his sexist attitude is reported in the conclusion.

¹⁴⁸ Goffman (1997c) argues that image management is so practised that it appears as a 'natural' form of behaviour, especially when operating in known environments. However, behaviour is not natural and this becomes clearer when operating in an unfamiliar territory, especially when there is a need to be accepted/respected. We then take part in a complex process in which we 'feel' for the proper way to act. One way we do this is to watch our audience and use their reactions, almost as a mirror, to identify if we are presenting the correct image. Giddens (1979) suggest that as skilled,

(see all Chapters). Each time I met with firefighters they tested me and I realised that my response would influence my access, or even if I got access at all. On one visit to a firestation, I was subject to what I have labelled *the boob test*. This is a near perfect example of firefighters sexism, how they test each other and how they tested me.

2.4.4. The boob test

At one station a peer group leader passed round a picture of a topless woman for all to ‘admire’. Experiential knowledge alerted me that this was a test, to see if the insider status I claimed extended to supporting firefighters’ heterosexist and sexist agendas (see Chapter 5). Firefighters’ apparent innocent passing round of a picture was a test of where my loyalties lay in regard to equal opportunities. This should not have been unexpected, because I was making a claim to access on the basis of a shared *dividend* of having been a firefighter and they needed to know what *shared understandings* we had before deciding how much access I was to be given. In similar situations, many pro-feminists may react with disdain and fly feminist colours, but that would have risked exclusion (see Hsiung 1996: 132). My aim in doing my research was to be seen as an insider, so I used my experiential knowledge, indicated “dramaturgical loyalty” (Goffman 1959: 212¹⁴⁹), smiled and then handed on the picture. Like others (see Lal 1996: 196; Higate 1998), I suspended my ‘feminist’ approach and participated in a charade to keep insider access (see Hearn 1993: 45-47). Through this one act I recognised why so many researchers consider it necessary to carry out their own particular form of covert research. I am not comfortable with deceiving my subjects, but I am not naïve either.

2.4.5. Risking my new identity

However, there was a second crucial lesson I learned from the boob test, and this concerns my attempts to change my masculinity. When I chose not to confront the gawking eyes of the firefighters’ sexist test and looked at the picture of the women with the 52” bust, I recollected the ‘pleasure’ of sexism. Resembling a reformed smoker who accepts just one cigarette, that one incident could have damaged the tender shoots of my pro-feminist ambitions; for me an emptying thought. As I have already suggested I am much impressed with Hochschild’s notion, that “surface-acting” can develop into “deep-acting” (Hochschild 1983: 54) if an actor immerses in a role (see Goffman 1959: 252-253). In particular, I argue throughout this thesis this was how the fire service initially reinforced my childhood socialisation and completed my education as a patriarchal male. As an 18 year old I had first ‘surface-acted’ to conform to social pressures to be like other males around me (see Seidler 1977). Before that, I followed the boys reported in Prendergast and Forrest (1998) and went from shortie to ‘ardnut in the school playground. Then, when I joined the fire service, I willingly accepted and immersed myself into a role that then became a ‘natural to me’ way of life. As I gained status, my behaviour turned to ‘deep acting’ and when my turn came, I ‘persuaded’ probationers to join firefighters’ patriarchal hegemony. Currently in a reversal of the earlier process, I am consciously acting out a part with the intention of socialising myself towards pro-feminism. However, I have to be careful; nothing is set in concrete and I remain acutely aware of this.

2.4.6. Do the ends justify the means?

knowledgeable agents capable of reflexivity we can think for ourselves and reflect on the effects of our conversations (see Hochschild 1983).

¹⁴⁹ The notion of ‘dramaturgical loyalty’ involves members of a group staying loyal to their group understandings, by acting in a certain way to perpetuate them and not revealing to ‘others’ the extent of this act. Today and in context to this thesis, this is understood as the taken for granted understandings that exist between men on how they subordinate women (that pro-feminist auto-critique hopes to make visible). This behaviour closely relates to the ‘dramaturgical discipline/circumspection’ (Goffman 1959: 216-218) of following expected behaviour that is almost scripted of how a group portrays itself publicly. An example of this will be found in Chapter 3, where it will be explained how firefighters might provide a ‘heroic’ image to the public and portray humility to enhance their status.

I take no pride in the hypocrisy/acting when I put the research before my pro-feminist stance. I am also disturbed by the temptation sexism still appears to hold for me. However, I am convinced that if my research is going to achieve any of its pro-feminist aims, I must provide examples of firefighters' day-to-day actions, and hope they will follow my analysis and make a choice to change some of their negative behaviour¹⁵⁰. To do this I have to maintain access, and I realise that any attempt to challenge firefighters' views during the research could result in immediate exclusion by gatekeepers defending their hegemonic masculinity or provide less valid data. The fire service has all but avoided scrutiny to date, and I found access very difficult (see next section). The possibility of raising the consciousness of firefighters in a macro sense after this research is more important than an attempt to help the few I met within the research¹⁵¹. The need is to finish this thesis and work towards a publication. Then hopefully I can intervene more actively. It is clear I am not alone in this dilemma, because feminists have also collected data using some form of cover. Lal (1996) and Katz (1996) indicate that without a "*willingness to be untruthful for strategic reasons*" (Katz 1996: 172), they would not have achieved access. Abu-Lughod (1991: 161, 1993) followed a similar understanding by seeing herself as a "*halfie*" (half Palestinian and half American), who, in order to gain access, rotated between being a Palestinian woman in the field and a feminist academic out of it. Berik also used a similar approach when she adopted 'alien' gender norms to access a Turkish village (Berik 1996: 61). Mascarenhas-Keyes was particularly resourceful when she became a "*chameleon, multiple native*" (1987: 182), who changed her dress and persona according to the religious perspective of her Eastern informants. It appears that without passing, "*loyalty tests*" (Warren 1988: 37), access will reduce. I have, it appears, done what others have done and participated in a charade by remaining neutral whilst listening to sexist comments (see Collinson 1988; Hearn 1993: 45; Lal 1996: 196; Hsiung 1996: 32).

2.4.7. Access

My ability to gain access has not been the success story I thought it would be. I now realise that any help if my car broke down would come from firefighters not officers (see above). At the start of the research, my supervisor wrote to the Home Office for assistance and the reply refusing assistance took over six months. After the election of the Labour Government, I wrote direct to the Home Secretary (30-5-97) in an attempt to gain access to the Equal Opportunities working party of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. The letter was redirected to the same Home Office department that had kept me waiting before. The reply, after three months, suggested my attendance at the meeting was "*inappropriate*" (8-8-97). I also invested a considerable amount of time developing a relationship with two brigades that led me to believe I would gain access, before they withdrew offers of help. From one of these brigades I was unofficially informed that my use of the words pro-feminist and Marxist in my proposal had set alarm bells ringing and the second brigade suddenly discovered there was too much research going on at the time.

My experience with the Fire Service College (FSC) was equally as difficult¹⁵². After breaking down initial difficulties, my access was still restricted to the library. The FSC is in Gloucestershire and to obtain value from my visits I stayed overnight. FSC did not discourage this, probably because

¹⁵⁰ I am in the sense of Hearn (1994: 48) 'reaching out' to men who are hostile, in an attempt to provide them with sound reasons for recognising the deficits of patriarchy and the advantages of change

¹⁵¹ Wolf, (1996: 217) suggests that starting an action part of a project too early may result in the project floundering through access being withdrawn.

¹⁵² The FSC provides operational and technical training for 'all' officers. My access was actively discouraged: the Dean refused an interview; I was originally denied access to the classrooms, students and staff. This closure and anti-researcher stance is hardly compatible with the fire service claim that the FSC is the fire service's university. In fact, the FSC is in many ways not at all like a university, but more as I imagine Sandhurst to be. Uniforms are worn all day and 'discipline' is maintained during the seminars and at meals. Even in the evening, the way firefighters dress in the three bars at the college has a sense of 'mufti'. One further similarity with the military might be in regard to academic understandings. Dixon (1994: 157-162) notes that in the past, the military was an intellectual abyss, where intellectual activity was suppressed and discouraged and Doyle (1996) might be interpreted to follow Dixon, when he notes there is a preference for experiential skills in the fire service, as opposed to academic skills. Willis-Lee (1993b) also argues that fire service officers prefer to learn experientially.

the department that deals with accommodation has financial priorities, more interested in the revenue from my 12 visits, which ranged between two and four days, than the politics of exclusion. In one way the FSC's financial gain was my loss, because accommodation and travel was expensive and I am unfunded (I was at least more comfortable than an undergraduate student who was camping in a nearby field and came each day to the library). However, if FSC resistance to my visits was to deny me access, they forgot that by accommodating me in the staff and student blocks, and allowing me access to the bars and dining hall I had the opportunity to observe a side of the fire service not normally available to researchers. In particular, the opportunity to speak with officers and civilians 'out of hours', provided a very different view of the fire service than was obtained during the formal day. I exploited this opportunity as probably only someone with my understandings of the fire service could have done. As an ex-firefighter, I knew how to dress, how to talk and how to encourage conversations. However, I was always open about my reason for being at the college and about my research. At the start of every discussion/interview, I informed those I spoke to that the FSC was actively discouraging my research. This statement became almost a catalyst to encourage firefighters to speak with me, an anti tactic which suggests that firefighters enjoyed getting one over on their managers (see Chapter 5)¹⁵³. I did eventually 'persuade' two civilians to support me and then I gained the necessary missing element of my research, access to the classroom and to limited extent fireground training.

The attempts by the Home Office and fire service officers to limit my access suggests the fire service is reluctant to allow 'independent' academics to carry out research into the fire service, almost as if they are a closed organisation concerned about scrutiny. It is as if the fire service has something to hide and that being an 'old boy' made it more likely that I would find and reveal it. Without the support of some 'friends' in the fire service and my insider knowledge of how to gain access this thesis would have been different. However, so far all my arguments suggest that my status and critical insight as an ex-firefighter will improve the evidence I get from firefighters. Notwithstanding this 'advantage', I must not forget that firefighters, similar to the official structures in the fire service, might also be concerned about scrutiny. In particular, they may not wish to reveal to an ex-firefighter, who is supposed to have *shared understandings* with them, any concerns they have about those understandings. Sharing will have its limitations and in particular, as an insider, firefighters are unlikely to show me any signs of weakness that stranger-researchers might find¹⁵⁴.

2.5. INTERVIEWING FIREFIGHTERS

This section refers to some interview data from the research to suggest that firefighters are capable, quick thinkers and skilled in providing politically motivated, or 'right' answers/images: a skill they develop in the 'cut and thrust' of station life. What this section begins to establish is that whilst firefighters may innocently reveal delicate matters, and generally lack academic skills, they do not lack intelligence. To think otherwise is intellectual snobbery, which before writing this chapter could have led to me viewing 'from above' (see Mies 1993: 68). Viewing from above might then have led to me not recognising the skills firefighters develop to defend themselves from: first, senior officers, whom firefighters manipulate by reflecting back an image officers want to see (see Chapters 4 and 5; Goffman 1959, 1961, 1997c); second, the gaze of other firefighters policing their masculinity (see Chapters 3-5). Firefighters use these skills to bring their own agendas to interviews and build images for a researcher (as well as their senior officers, other firefighters and the public; see Chapters 1, 3, 4

¹⁵³ More than anything, I consider it was firefighters' desire to 'show' their officers that provided me with the access at these times.

¹⁵⁴ Research amongst firefighters regarding post-traumatic-stress-disorder by outside researchers found evidence I was unlikely to find. Firefighters admitted that whilst the fire service "is male orientated and macho. Firefighters, when talking privately, would admit that they would rarely show their feelings to their colleagues" (Elliott and Smith 1993: 40). They "never told anybody how they had felt over that incident" (McLeod and Cooper 1992: 17; see also Durkin 2000). Tixier y Vigil and Elsassner (1976) an insider and outsider respectively, found that Chicano women provided different answers to the same questions depending on who was asking the question (see also Hann 1987: 143-4; McKeganey and Bloor 1991).

and 5). I consider that whilst some of the data that follows could equally be introduced later in the thesis, it is appropriate in the methodology chapter because it gives a good insight into how firefighters might try to avoid scrutiny and manipulate what they reveal. It also contextualises my arguments in a 'hands-on' way for firefighters.

2.5.1. Firefighter's ability to talk

Throughout this thesis firefighters are shown as gregarious talkers, especially about *The Job* and by the conclusion it will be shown that firefighters' conversations are instrumental in the way they develop and police their masculinity. Chapters 4 and 5 will show that the policing element of this process is important to anyone researching in the fire service, because it means that firefighters are often cautious about what they say. In particular, Chapter 4 will suggest that firefighters' conversations take place within an informal hierarchy that the probationer must accept before they are taught their occupational skills. One rite of passage to acceptance in the hierarchy is that probationers must spend about six months listening to what peer group leaders say before they are allowed to participate in conversations (see Chapters 3 and 4). However, the probationer and all firefighters, soon learn to take care when participating in discussions. Any slip, particularly any chance revelation of weakness, however minor, can become an inroad that the watch may then exploit during a *windup*: a situation colloquially seen as *fire service humour* and a favourite pastime amongst firefighters (see Chapter 4).

Firefighters' behaviour at these times appears to be far from being humorous. What they identify as a laugh and a testing process, I identify as cultural policing (see Chapter 4; Mac an Ghaill 1996: 68). Firefighters work within what might be described as a Foucaultian panopticon (see Chapters 3-5; Sheridan 1980; Rabinow 1986). The watch, watch each other and themselves all the time. Firefighters rationalise their *windups* as a necessary process, in their life or death occupation, to ensure each team member is up to the task (see Chapters 3 and 5). However, the *windup* does not only enforce dictates necessary for firefighting and safety. Firefighters also police their masculinity in a wider hegemonic sense with their humour. Innocent conversations supported by the *windup* are the essence of firefighters informal hierarchy. In particular, conversations are the source of the understandings that firefighters will *fit in* with, and will identify those who might resist and require persuasion to conform (and to test researchers, see boob test above). To avoid the gaze of the watch, firefighters remain alert to hidden agendas in any conversation and are careful about what they say¹⁵⁵. 'Informal' cultural policing apart, firefighters' adroitness at avoiding/diverting 'the gaze' is also tested when senior officers visit the station. Chapter 5 indicates that were it not for firefighters very skilful manipulation of their senior officers, the uniformed bureaucracy of the fire service, where rank equates to right, might become an iron cage¹⁵⁶. However, this does not happen, because firefighters practice in providing 'correct' answers and mirroring back images is a useful resistance that protects them. This time not from their 'friends', but their 'enemies' the officers (see Goffman 1997c: 28).

2.5.2. The agency of the respondent: deceit

Firefighters develop skills to talk in a way that maintains their status, hides the truth and raises political agendas. This can often involve a careful over-emphasis to perpetuate their image of a *good firefighter* (see Chapter 3; Goffman 1959; Baigent 1996: 25), something less wary spectators (including researchers) may not expect¹⁵⁷: a process also recognised within the police (Finch 1993:

¹⁵⁵ Chapter 4 will also explain that fire service humour/the windup appears to be practiced to such an extent it almost creates a dynamic of its own with unpleasant consequences for most firefighters.

¹⁵⁶ See Baigent 1996: 8, 21-22, which discusses fire service discipline procedures that follow a hierarchal, Weberian, quasi military/legal pattern: a sledgehammer to crack a nut, but an unwieldy sledge hammer that often misses its target.

¹⁵⁷ Deceit is not the remit of firefighters; their officers (who were also firefighters once) may employ such tactics to avoid and challenge the public gaze and to give the impression they are in charge (see Chapter 5; comments on Salaman, 1986). It is possible to argue that the whole fire service uses politically motivated answers to provide an image that prevents/diverts the public gaze. The fire service is not the only (closed) group that 'challenge' the gaze. Gypsies are

184). To support this argument I shall now provide some data from a focus group to indicate how firefighters can manipulate a conversation to raise a politically motivated sexist point against female firefighters. We were talking at this point about female firefighters:

Ian: One of these women regularly has PMT and we were talking about it the other day, and I regularly look at the sick book.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 8 years' service, age 30¹⁵⁸).

However, insider knowledge identified what had occurred, leading to rich data of hidden patriarchal agendas that provided a 'chance' release of information to suggest PMT was a problem¹⁵⁹, a debate that then came back.

Ian: But the one thing I worry about, when my wife has her period she is a pain in the arse and you hear most fellers say 'it's this week again', and some women they reckon can like ..¹⁶⁰ when you read the papers, some people have attacked their husbands with knives, but the week after they're as good as gold .. the scenario I imagine is your going into a fire .. if your going in with a female .. I can say bird, because this ain't going nowhere is it? You are going into a fire with a bird and she's got PMT or she's got her period and like you .. it's just in the back of your mind.

This clearly was not an impromptu answer, but one flavoured with a covert hegemonic agenda. However, I recognised firefighters not so subtle attack on females¹⁶¹. The use of the word "bird" may also have been a test to identify where I stood on the equal opportunities front. Sexist agendas apart, I should expect firefighters to construct an image for me, they appear to do it for everyone else. Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5 argue that firefighters act a part for their colleagues, officers and the public. What I tried to do was to differentiate between when firefighters are 'surface-acting' in pursuit of a specific agenda and the 'deep-acting' that indicates their 'real' beliefs (see Hochschild 1983). Otherwise, the insider knowledge I claim above would be of little use.

My concern that firefighters would be simple subjects in the research reduced after this debate. Firefighters should be seen as more than capable of using their agency for political purposes and not as vulnerable as I *patronisingly* first thought. It appears that firefighters are well rehearsed in:

- avoiding the gaze;
- being alert to hidden agendas;
- saying what people want to hear;
- portraying an image people want to see;
- bringing their own agendas to any conversation.

My soul searching during this and other sections may be psychologically problematic, but by applying the pressure in the right place, on me, there have been positive outcomes. I now consider that firefighters practice what they will make visible and what to hide: from their peers, officers, the public *and me*. I will not be looking down at firefighters, but at them.

another group who are adept at diverting questions and providing confusing answers, but their reasons may be more understandable (see Oakley 1987: 63; Fonseca 2000; Hardy 2000).

¹⁵⁸ When a respondents name is mentioned this is changed to protect their anonymity.

¹⁵⁹ Howell (1994: 13) indicates that when firefighters were asked "if they felt that performance of a woman colleague during periods was a matter of concern 83% said that it was" and this is typical of the way that men use women's procreative physiology to discriminate against them (see Lorber 1994: 46-49).

¹⁶⁰ Key throughout the thesis .. pause, ... missing words.

¹⁶¹ Cheater (1987: 176) warns me of a respondent's ability to deceive and this ideal example of how pro-feminist auto-critique may improve the research, because as an ex-firefighter I could recognise the nuances and understandings amongst firefighters.

2.6. METHODOLOGY: PRODUCING RELEVANT RESEARCH FOR ACADEMICS AND FIREFIGHTERS

The earlier debate provides some insight to the specific character of the fire service as well as discussing problems I might experience as a researcher. Most of the theory so far has been from a feminist perspective and it is their methods I preferred for the research. I will now introduce grounded theory, which I used as a basic framework to collect and analyse data to complement my prime aim, a pro-feminist auto-critique of the fire service that will be: both, available to firefighters and be true to their commonsense understandings as rooted in the context of their daily lives, and be academically rigorous.

2.6.1. Grounded Theory

The work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) (coincidentally paralleling in time the increasing interest in feminist methods) was an attempt to develop contextual theory to explain problematic behaviour in a way that, “both laymen and sociologists can readily see how its predictions and explanations fit the realities of the situation” (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 98). Glaser and Strauss expect methodological development to occur as the research proceeds (see Glaser and Strauss 1967: 237; May 1986: 149; Strauss 1987: 8; Strauss and Corbin 1990: 179). I am sure there would be no surprises for them in the way I use their methodology, as a framework for organising and developing data that I collect using mainly feminist qualitative methods. What follows is close to a textbook explanation of grounded theory, but this should not suggest that my research, or any other research, is so straightforward or unproblematic.

2.6.2. A secret garden: a source of power that avoids the gaze

Traditionally most research starts with a scrutiny of the academic research that has gone before about the subject area. Of the fire service there is little to report in this regard. There is no major thesis on firefighters in the area in which I am working¹⁶², but the FSC library does provide an extensive source of ‘in-house’ dissertations written by students as a requirement to pass their course. It is more likely therefore, that these papers reflect a subjective view specifically for a tutor/examiner and provide only background information for this research. In academic terms the fire service is a ‘secret garden’ from which a powerful and high profile public group emerge in shiny red fire engines race to do their work, support their image, then return and shut the doors to retain their privacy: a group pro-feminist auto-critique might make visible¹⁶³.

At the start of my research, not having a store of literature on the fire service, I read widely about masculinity, sexism, racism and homophobia and to ‘kick start’ the research I used my experiential knowledge of the fire service to produce a relentless flow of ideas (hardly justifying the name hypotheses) about firefighters and their masculinity. It was not until this process was well underway and I was busy generating abstract hypotheses about firefighters that I ventured into the field to find any ‘new’ data. My early fieldwork was to:

- read whatever was relevant in the FSC library.
- conduct a series of interviews at the FSC,
- conduct three focus groups away from the college
- undertake some observations of firefighters both at the FSC and away from it.

At this time the skills I had developed as a firefighter for ‘thinking on my feet’ were most useful. I balanced all I had learnt from academia and the fire service alongside the data I was collecting in the field. This data was placed into NUD*IST/NVIVO and collated and analysed using grounded

¹⁶² This meant I did not have the problem foreseen by May (1986: 149) that researchers are frequently influenced by previous research.

¹⁶³ May (1986; also see Hearn 1994: 49-60) argues that powerful groups often avoid research and if the fire service is a secret garden, then I as a previous gardener may be able to reveal some of the ways firefighters cultivate their masculinity.

theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and Hearn's (1994) notion of pro-feminist auto-critique. This process led to me deciding that in the second phase of the research I should focus on:

- firefighter recruitment and training;
- firefighting in all its aspects;
- how the watch incorporate new members;
- fire service humour;
- firefighters' resistance to their officers.

The second phase of the research began by me accessing firefighters through networks at a mainly informal level to get interviews and observe them.

2.6.3. Doing grounded theory

Research along grounded lines then started in earnest. I analysed research findings as they came in, breaking up the data to classify each topic under a label: a code (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss, 1987: 20-25; Strauss and Corbin 1990: 183). For example, I put all the data about firefighting into one code: 'firefighting' and this led to my realising that 'all' firefighters were using the same term '*getting in*', so I created a code for this type of data: '*getting in*'. As the data within that code built up, I compared the incoming data with that already collected and I was able to hypothesise that: 'firefighters were always keen to fight fires, because they were *'humanitarians, intent on helping the public'*: a possible answer to the *why* part of my question on firefighting in the introductory chapter. My next hypothesis was to suggest that firefighters had a *professional ethos*: '*to provide an efficient service to help the public*'. These two hypotheses appeared to be a central finding to explain the code '*getting in*' and fitted very neatly with the public image of firefighters as an example of selfless proletarian masculinity: a job which commonsense notions suggest could only be done by males. These hypotheses were then tested against all the incoming data (constant comparative analysis; see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin 1986: 94; Strauss 1987: 23; Mc Neil 1990: 21) and eventually a stage arrived when incoming data reached saturation i.e. did not challenge the hypotheses that explained the data coded under the label "*getting in*." All roads, as it were, pointed to Rome and it would have been easy to write up and support a thesis along these lines. This would have been something the fire service would have enjoyed, because it fits with its public image.

However, what the fire service might have preferred did not occur, because as a sociologist I was looking further than the obvious. I continued to analyse the data and some incoming data that I put in the code "*getting in*" could not be explained by the current two hypotheses: *there appeared to be other possible reasons for why firefighters were 'getting in'*. I then revisited all the data in the code "*getting in*" and subdivided it according to a number of reasons that I could hypothesise that firefighters were *getting in*. Constant comparative analysis continued to test and develop what was now an increasingly large list of hypotheses for firefighters *getting in*. For me this system has worked to great effect as my original two hypotheses were joined by new hypotheses that suggest there are a number of reasons why firefighters are so keen to fight fires and the list of these appears in Chapter 3¹⁶⁴. Then I went on to make an analysis of the complicated dynamics that support firefighters' apparent keenness to always be *getting in* at fires. This analysis is a central finding of this thesis: a

¹⁶⁴ My previous experience as a firefighter had prepared me for this approach to data handling, as this is the sort of dynamic process used in putting out a fire. Chapter 3 will suggest that although firefighters would not explain it this way, they develop and agree hypotheses for firefighting at the station based on all the data they have accrued in the field (whilst firefighting). Then at subsequent fires firefighters adapt these hypotheses and make judgements according to the incoming data in a similar way to how researchers carry out constant comparative analysis. Chapter 3 will explain that firefighting requires a flexibility of thinking, in which all the incoming data (rate of spread of fire, heat, smoke, water supplies, safety of building, time left in cylinder, condition of your partner; even to questioning 'what is that falling on your head') is processed and updates the hypothesis/plan instantly as firefighters proceed through a building that is on fire. Then back at the station the watch will hold a '*post-mortem*' about the fire to see if their hypotheses need updating to take into account the information they have gained from the last fire. These hypotheses I call protocols (see Chapters 1, 3 and 5).

theory (see Corbin 1986: 98-99). I now argue that in parallel with the ‘obvious’ humanitarian motives that the public recognise when firefighters *get in* at a fire, firefighters seek several petty dividends (see Wright 1982¹⁶⁵; Chapters 3, 5 and 6). Whilst not wishing to reveal this early in the thesis too much about these dividends, it is sufficient to say that one dividend involves an adrenaline rush and that should not be surprising; a second involves firefighters seeking to ‘prove’ to themselves, their peers and the public that they are *good firefighters*.

2.7. WATCHING THE WATCH

My data is mostly qualitative; this takes a variety of forms from taped interviews, to the observations that I have recorded in my field book. This data has been fully transcribed then coded into NUD*IST/NVIVO later. This data, alongside my own experiential knowledge, forms the basis of my thesis. However, I have used some quantitative data and this has taken two forms: first a series of questionnaires; second, some official statistics, which I have manipulated in SPSS. What now follows is a summary of how I have collected my data.

2.8. QUALITATIVE DATA

2.8.1. Interviews with firefighters

My interviews with firefighters have been very casual and I have encouraged firefighters to talk freely. I have spoken as little as possible to reduce the very real possibility that firefighters might be influenced by what I said and then give me the evidence they consider I was looking for (discussed above). At the start of each interview, I have pointed out to firefighters that my thesis will reflect what they say and that I hope to overcome one-criticism firefighters commonly make, which is ‘that no one listens to them’. Firefighters have ‘proved’ to be very accommodating, lively and willing respondents and the norm was for me to turn on my tape recorder and ask one question, “tell me what it is like to be a firefighter” and they have taken over the interview. Occasionally I have asked further questions, to push the agenda on, or to develop points, but my involvement has been kept to a minimum. Those interviews I did not tape were recorded in my fieldbook.

2.8.2. Formal interviews

Uniformed personnel:

- 1 recruit in training (16 interviews at weekly intervals);
- 1 probationary firefighter (4 interviews at 3 monthly intervals);
- 6 focus groups with male firefighters;
- 8 senior FBU officials¹⁶⁶;
- 7 female firefighters;
- 38 male firefighters;
- 13 senior officers.

Civilians around the fire service

- 5 potential recruits;
- 13 civilians actually employed in the fire service.

¹⁶⁵ Wright (1982) argues that apart from economic dividends that there are other (petty) dividends associated with the prestige of being in charge, the power to control other workers and I will use this notion to look for non economic dividends which firefighters (and officers) might seek during the course of their employment.

¹⁶⁶ FBU officials were all once firefighters and some carryout a dual role as firefighters and FBU officials. This follows the same pattern and belief that provides officers through STEP that without an understanding of what it is like to fight a fire they cannot represent firefighters (see Chapters 1 and 5).

Some of these interviews are supported by repeat visits to the informants with a view to clearing up and developing points that were unclear.

2.8.3. Observations of the fire service

I have also spent a considerable time amongst firefighters during the research and this has been broken down into two types of observation. The formal observation, when, notebook in hand, I was amongst firefighters and they were acutely aware of why I was there. However, there were other times when I was amongst firefighters, sometimes directly related to the research, but not part of the formal process, and occasionally at social functions. At these times it was impossible to divorce myself from my research and when something of note occurred I wrote it down (sometimes as firefighters spoke to me and therefore formally recorded with their knowledge, and sometimes in the form of observations made on pieces of paper at the time or soon afterwards). These include:

- 12 visits made to *Fire Service College* to research and observe¹⁶⁷. These mostly involved a stay of 3 days and 2 nights and provided an opportunity to be amongst the fire service during classroom work, operational drills, social events, meal breaks and evenings in the bar.
- 5 *fire service conferences*, 3 as an observer and at 2 as both an observer and presenter: first, on *fitting in* (see Chapter 4); second, on officers' belief that they had *shared understandings* (see Chapters 1 and 5). Four of these conferences involved overnight stays and all provided an opportunity to continue my observation of the fire service.
- 1 *recruitment testing day*, which provided an opportunity to not only watch the selection process for recruits but to discuss with officers their selection methods (the fire service provided me with a video of this event).
- 1 recruit pass out parade and display.
- 8 observations of *watches* at firestations, covering all aspects of fire service life throughout the 24 hours.
- numerous social occasions that I attended (after my retirement and during my research) with fire service personnel that I had met during my career as a firefighter.

2.8.4. Less formal data collection

One statistic that is difficult to record is the large number of firefighters I have talked to whilst I have been carrying out the research. In particular, whilst at the FSC and on stations, I have often talked with firefighters and officers with my notebook in my hand recording the conversation. This has been mainly a fact-finding process, which has informed and verified my more formal data collection, but it has been extremely significant. During these casual conversations with firefighters, I have been able to check detail about specific points to update my knowledge; I have also used these conversations to test my hypotheses. This method of testing is actually worth recording as I am sure other researchers might benefit from my experience. As an example, I have a number of hypotheses in Chapter 3 to suggest that firefighters build their status and gain some dividend during firefighting, and on one occasion, whilst talking about my research, I suggested to a firefighter that it was my perception that firefighters enjoy the tough and adventurous status they are given for doing their work. He denied this, but when challenged he suggested that he enjoyed being a firefighter because, "what sort of job can you get paid for driving at 70 mph down the wrong side of Oxford Street and then jump off the appliance and kick down a door." The irony of what he had said did not miss him. I do not consider this part of my research is covert, or that I have exploited these informants. They have mostly been aware that I was researching amongst them and they have helped in ensuring my research is a close reflection of the fire service.

¹⁶⁷ In the earlier stages these visits were formally made to the library and observations/interviews took place informally. Later I was given more access and observations/observations were formally sanctioned.

2.9. QUANTITATIVE DATA

When the opportunity presented itself, respondents have completed a simple questionnaire. This was to allow a limited verification of what they said and to provide me with some detail of the individuals I was meeting. I also got 27 students at the FSC to complete the questionnaire and this allowed me to reach out to a further 15 brigades. These 73 questionnaires were never intended as a formal form of data collection. It may have been a mistake not to set up this questionnaire formally, but I did put the results into SPSS and it is safe to suggest that nothing from the questionnaires challenges any of my findings. However, I would not wish to make any claims about the veracity of these statistics, as their collection was unscientific and on occasions the data is based on different, but similar, questions collated under one heading. Some data I do claim as scientific and this relates to the data I have collated into SPSS from the LFB and from various referenced sources on:

- the amount of emergency calls the fire service attend;
- the breakdown by ethnicity and sex of firefighters;
- discipline cases in the fire service.

2.10. ANONYMITY

To protect the anonymity of my respondents I have given them new names and their brigades I identify by a number. I have not chosen to indicate their station or watch, because I am aware that some of their colleagues have known about their interviews and this detail may provide a clue to their identity. For senior officers, female firefighters and civilians, who are statistically less common in the fire service, I have provided the briefest of detail for the same reason. It is important to note that many firefighters were not in the least bit concerned about anonymity and were quite prepared (perhaps even wanted) for me to reveal their names.

2.11. MY PAID EMPLOYMENT

I also had the advantage of being a half-time lecturer on a Public and Emergency Services Course. This put me amongst 16-20 year olds who wish to join uniformed public service. This post also gave me the opportunity to spend a considerable time in residence (up to five days and nights on some occasions) with the police and a variety of wings of the army and navy, including specialist forces. Whilst I gave an undertaking that my research would not in anyway report on my employment, I do not consider it a betrayal to state that nothing during this period of employment would challenge anything my thesis suggests.

2.12. OMISSIONS

There are a number of omissions within this thesis related to harassment because of gender, homosexuality and 'colour/race/ethnicity'. As I have said earlier, I have not sought out evidence of sexual harassment in the fire service, because others have already done this (see Hearn and Parkin 1987, 1995: 74; Walby 1990: 52; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999). The treatment of many female firefighters has followed a similar course to the many women who cross the gender division at work. They have been harassed to show them that they have entered a male preserve and they are not welcome (see MacKinnon 1979; Ellis, 1988; Walby 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Morris and Nott 1991; Palmer 1992; Herbert 1994). Nor has this thesis specifically sought out homosexuality as a key issue. Only one firefighter identified themselves as gay and I have kept that confidence. However, it would be unwise to stereotype everyone as heterosexual¹⁶⁸. The FBU informally advises firefighters not to 'come out' unless they feel safe and this is not surprising in an organisation that polices sexual boundaries with the threat of not being actively heterosexual is to be a feminised 'other' (see Hollway

¹⁶⁸ Heterosexuality and homosexuality are all liable to the same arguments I make about masculinity, they involve social constructions (see Foucault 1979; Weeks 1981; Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1987).

1996: 28-30). At this moment, I consider research on how homosexuality might affect being a firefighter is better done by the active, but minority ‘*gay and lesbian support network*’ established within the FBU to support homosexuals (see FBU 2000). This is not because I am homophobic (I was before my academic education), but I consider this is a further topic that can build from the findings of this research¹⁶⁹. The same too can be said of colour, and I have only interviewed one black firefighter. However, these omissions are not in anyway evidence that I disagree with the view that the fire service is institutionally sexist, racist and homophobic (see Baigent 1996)¹⁷⁰.

In preparing this thesis, I have also had to make judgements about what to report. Each of the Chapters 3-5 might have formed a separate thesis (early drafts of four further chapters were put on hold: training; the Fire Service College; harassment; humour). At one stage I was torn between picking one area and developing it more fully, as opposed to what I have eventually done and analysed three areas: firefighting; *fitting in* on watches; class relations between firefighters and officers. This has meant spreading myself thinner than I might have wished. However, there is very little research on firefighters and I am taking this opportunity to provide a wide, although sometimes thinly developed view of the fire service. I could also have written more about my methodology, particularly how my subjectivity influences this thesis, but that would have meant missing out some evidence that may never be reported on. I hope other academics will build on this thesis; indeed, after reflection on what I have written and if I am going to be true to (pro-feminism and) my informants, I will immediately be seeking the funding to return to the field and probe again.

¹⁶⁹ In saying this I am not challenging the argument of Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987: 176) that homosexuality might provide a valuable starting point to think about masculinity at large. However, a spokesperson for the Gay and Lesbian Support Network suggests they are in contact with 200 firefighters and control room operatives of whom only 30 have ‘come out’ and about 15 are activists.

¹⁷⁰ The extent of this is clear by the sexist comments the Chief Inspector of Fire service in Scotland made in his annual report (HMCIFS 1998: 19), and by the Deputy Chief Officer of Manchester who suggested in an official speech to a group of recruits that he would “rather be gay than black” (Fire 1999: 99).

3. CHAPTER THREE: FIREFIGHTING: *GETTING IN*

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The Fire Service Act (1947) provides for the fire service to save life, protect property and render humanitarian services. However, firefighters do not need an act of parliament to define their work; they have a professional ethos, which encompasses these three tasks. Pushed hard for clarification, firefighters are likely to explain that firefighting involves them in a number of processes. These include first, donning Breathing Apparatus (BA), in order to be able to breathe in the poisonous smoke filled atmosphere. Second, entering the smoke filled building dragging their jet with them¹⁷¹ as they fulfil their third and main priority: to locate and rescue any trapped persons. Only after they are sure no one is in the building will they concentrate on firefighting. This involves getting as close as possible to the fire and then extinguishing it with the minimum amount of water possible. These processes firefighters would sum up as *getting in*.

3.1.1. An introduction to firefighting

What follows is a short piece of data, which may help to contextualise this chapter. Colin is explaining how firefighters deal with the rescue of a child at a fire:

Colin: We pulled up and it was just unbelievable. I mean there was fifty or so people in the street and the mother trying to *get in* and the smoke was billowing out of the house and her little boy was in there. And two crews turned up and we both *got in* there, one went in the front and one went in the back, and the first crew went up the stairs. And the stairs, that's where the fire was, they were burning through, so we got them [the other crew] up and then we stopped and we made sure the stairs, we bridged the stairs¹⁷², made our own staircase before we even went up, sort of thing. That's our own safety, at the end of the day if them stairs go then you've had it. (Brigade four, firefighter, six years' service, age 25). [My emphasis and insert].

DB: Did you find the child?

Colin: Yeah we got him out, he was alive, but he died three hours later: he was a bit of a mess.

This graphic description of a firefighter's experience in the small hours of the night provides an example of the highs and lows of a firefighter's work: *The Job*¹⁷³. The gathered crowd and the desperate exaltations of the grief stricken mother would further increase firefighter's already high adrenaline levels. Their first priority? *Getting in*. One crew immediately did this, climbing the burning staircase and trusting the second crew to follow an established protocol that would secure the stairs, making safe their route out of the building. The outcome was that the firefighters were successful in rescuing the child, but the child died. Nobody would blame the firefighters for the death

¹⁷¹ The term 'jet' relates to the water that comes out of the hose after the tap/control on the nozzle (branch) has been turned on. The term can also be used to describe the hose and branch and risk assessment apart the first decision firefighter take is to decide what to use. A 'jet', which is hose that comes in 25 metre lengths kept rolled up on the appliance and each length can be connected to the next (There are two sizes of hose, 45 mm and 25 mm known as a 'boys length' because it is smaller), or a hose-reel. Firefighters always take a 'jet' or 'reel' with them into a fire. This has two purposes; the obvious one is so that they can extinguish a fire when they find it. Less obvious is that in a smoke filled building you cannot see your hand in front of your face and backtracking along the hose provides firefighters with a way of finding their way out in an emergency.

¹⁷² Firefighters would do this by laying a ladder over the damaged stairs to ensure the stairs were safe in the event of the firefighters having to leave the building in a hurry. The golden rule of firefighting is that you always keep your means of escape safe ('open'), what firefighters will later refer to as protecting their "arse."

¹⁷³ "It takes a special kind of person to want to do this job. It is a job life saving, property-saving and life loving. It's a job of total satisfaction and incomparable frustration" (Hall 1991: 9).

of the child. Probably most of the crowd would marvel at the firefighters' skill, physical/mental strength and stoic discipline, recognising only the public status of firefighters as the heroic rescuer¹⁷⁴.

Having set the scene this chapter will now draw upon firefighters' accounts to consider the questions raised about firefighting in Chapter 1, which were:

how do firefighters develop the protocols and skills necessary for firefighting?

what does 'getting in' mean to firefighters?

why, given the apparent danger involved, do firefighters 'get in' at a fire?

Each of these questions are considered in turn in this chapter and (in the style of grounded theory) I will first start and then develop a hypothesis about each. In the conclusion the three hypotheses will again be considered and 'finalised'.

There are six further sections after this introduction. Section 2 focuses on the *how* of firefighting, and provides an overview of a typical fire service recruit-training programme, examines *how* the watch incorporate probationary firefighters up to a point where they become part of the hierarchy and share knowledge to plan their protocols for firefighting. Section 3 focuses on *what* it is like to fight a fire and uses explanations from firefighters to understand *what* it might be like to *get in* and from this comes the suggestion that fighting is a dangerous occupation that is made safer by the way firefighters develop their firefighting skills and protocols. Section 4 focuses on *why* firefighters *get in* and examines firefighters' explanations of their motivations at these times. Section 5 examines if firefighters actions when they *get in* might involve unnecessary risk-taking (a notion I return to in Chapter 5). Section 6 identifies two firefighters who do not fit with the image that other firefighters have given. One of these helps ground much of the analysis that has gone before, the other 'proves' that not all firefighters are heroes. Section 7 concludes the chapter, providing the developed hypotheses and an analysis. This includes a summary that suggests watches develop protocols for firefighting. These protocols support firefighters' professional ethos: to provide an efficient service to help the public. However, it is also argued that in the shadow of the professional ethos these protocols might have a difficult to separate relationship, with firefighters' imagery and the subjective public view that firefighters will risk their lives to rescue/help them. The analysis also considers if the way firefighters' organise firefighting might involve homosociality (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Cockburn 1991b; Chapters 1, 4-6).

3.2. HOW DO FIREFIGHTERS DEVELOP THE PROTOCOLS AND SKILLS NECESSARY FOR FIREFIGHTING?

3.2.1. The training centre

No study about the fire service would be complete without a reference to recruit training¹⁷⁵ and I collected a considerable amount of data from my fieldwork in the training environment. However, I will not produce a discrete chapter on training, preferring to introduce my findings at appropriate points in the thesis. I justify this approach because I consider that the training environment offers a false vision of the fire service and for the most part is a mechanical process to discipline the recruits and teach them the tools of their trade (see Howell 1994: 18, 1996: 27; O'Donnell 1995: 21; Chapter 4) in preparation for the next and crucial stage of their training at the station.

The typical recruit-training course lasts for 18 weeks and provides the recruit with a rudimentary knowledge of the tools needed to become a firefighter. Training involves:

- learning to obey orders and respect rank;
- correct wearing and preparation of uniform;
- improving fitness;

¹⁷⁴ The image of firefighters carrying out rescues is well recorded in classic pictures (Millais, 1885; Vigor, 1892) and in popular literature (see Cooper 1986; Delson 1992; Lloyd-Elliott 1992; Wallington and Holloway 1994).

¹⁷⁵ The LFB now have changed the title of 'recruit' to 'trainee' in order to avoid the military label the word recruit implies.

- gaining the basic skills necessary to test¹⁷⁶, maintain and use the ladders, hoses/jets, pumps and other equipment carried on fire appliances;
- learning search and rescue techniques;
- passing a two week course in BA;
- some simulated ‘hot fire’¹⁷⁷ training;
- understanding very basic firefighting science;
- understanding some very basic Fire Prevention;
- passing a first aid examination;
- an introduction to equal opportunities;
- passing weekly examinations and appraisals (recruits who do not meet the standard are likely to be ‘*back squadded*’ i.e. put back into the squad following their current squad).

The training environment is noisy and disciplined: each day starting with a formal parade¹⁷⁸; uniforms are maintained at military levels of smartness; instructors are called Sir/Ma’am; drills are performed at the shouted command of instructors, at the ‘double’¹⁷⁹ and by ‘numbers’¹⁸⁰. Recruits will more often also receive informal advice from instructors about fire service rituals, understandings and customs. Recruits are unlikely to forget this advice because it involves very real aspects about what it is to be a firefighter. These will be explained in this and subsequent chapters, and include:

- the need to ‘*fit in*’ and become part of the team;
- stories about firefighters who have not ‘*fitted in*’;
- the custom that probationers should look to experienced firefighters for guidance about *fitting in*;
- the expectation that probationers are likely to be involved in various rites of passage (generally surrounding proving themselves as trusted firefighters) before they are accepted at the station;
- the understanding that firefighting skills can only be learnt ‘on the job’ and that these skills are learnt from experienced firefighters;
- the importance of being labelled a ‘*good firefighter*’ and avoiding being seen as a ‘panicker’;
- stories surrounding the folklore of firefighting;
- the proud traditions, elite status and esprit de corps of the fire service.

Most of those interviewed about their training admit to early disorientation and confusion with this new way of life, which they clearly identify with the military, especially the regimentation and the ‘bullshit’ (see Dixon 1994).

Isaac: At training school it was a very disciplined job, everything had to be polished. ‘Yes sub, No sub, three bags full sub’.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 2.5 years’ service, age 25, in a focus group¹⁸¹).

Greg: I hated it absolutely hated it .. everything about it I hated. I hated the bullshit that went on, the unnecessary bullshit.

¹⁷⁶ All fire service equipment is subject to stringent tests (see Chapters 1 and 5).

¹⁷⁷ ‘Hot fire’ training involves firefighters training in a purpose designed building in which a controlled fire is burning. This may include training for ‘flashovers’, which could be described as a phenomenon that may occur if the combustible gases given off by materials being heated during a fire do not have enough oxygen to ignite, then suddenly reach a source of oxygen sufficient to allow their ignition. The explosion that follows is a ‘flashover’ or ‘backdraught’.

¹⁷⁸ There is evidence that formal parades might be replaced by a less formal roll call (see London Firefighter 2000: 26-27).

¹⁷⁹ The term to ‘double’ relates to ‘double quick time’, a military term that in the fire service means to run, depending on the circumstances this can mean as fast as you can or a trot (what might be currently called jogging).

¹⁸⁰ The Fire Service Drill Book (1987, replaced by the Fire service Training Manual 1994) lays down the precise way to use every piece of equipment in use in the fire service. This includes a detailed explanation of how members of the crew are to operate that piece of equipment. During initial training this makes using the equipment easier to understand, because each crewmember is given a number and then the task that number performs is laid down; hence drilling by numbers.

¹⁸¹ All extracts with firefighters are taken from one to one interviews except when I indicate thus.

(Brigade one. 8.5 years' service, age 33).

Terri: A shock, it was *very regimental* and I had no experience of that sort of thing.
(Female firefighter). [My emphasis].

Training is physically and mentally exhausting and to pass the weekly examinations recruits report they spend evenings and weekends revising¹⁸². This almost cuts them off from the outside world, and recruits will revise and socialise as a squad, which becomes a support group¹⁸³. For eighteen weeks they live, eat and sleep the fire service. Whatever the reason they gave for joining, which varies from simply wanting to be a firefighter, to job security, by the time they leave the training centre the majority have only one ambition; that is to become a '*good firefighter*' (explained later). The training environment has served its purpose. It has established a sense of belonging as well as ensuring the recruit has the basic skills and knowledge for the next stage, which will turn the training into reality.

3.2.2. The transition to the station

My data is very clear: the recruit joins the fire service as part of a junior squad in the training centre, is put in a uniform, has to run everywhere and learn to cope with military style discipline. By the time they pass out at a very formal jingoistic parade, they have learnt about fire service hierarchies: their status has risen from rock bottom as junior squad to a high as senior squad. Then *split from their squad* recruits go to the bottom of a new hierarchy, now, as a probationer at a station¹⁸⁴.

The probationers report that arriving at the station after the formality and rush of the training centre is like entering a different world. First, they will meet the watch-commander who will almost certainly confirm what the training instructor has said (above): that it is their duty to *fit in*; that they should listen to the advice of experienced firefighters. Meeting the watch for the first time may be a shock, because the apparently self-contained group may appear unwelcoming. The shock may increase, because after the way the probationer has learnt to act whilst amongst officers, the watch's informality with their officers is probably unexpected: most probationers admit to holding the watch in awe at this time, because the watch are 'real' firefighters and *the probationer is not*.

At the station, probationers will *immediately* 'ride' the appliance as an integral part of the team¹⁸⁵. Therefore, assimilation must be quick and watch-commanders should encourage this by

¹⁸² The volume of written material and the need to be able to write down the large amount of tests, procedures and technical knowledge that was given, put a considerable strain on the many firefighters whose skills before entering the fire service were mainly physical. The weekly written test, the 'highlight' of the week was not looked forward to and many firefighters look back on all this written (what firefighters would call academic) work as unnecessary in their hands-on job.

¹⁸³ The training centre might have many similarities with Foucaultian control, the recruit is under constant scrutiny, they must not let their squad down and the must achieve in the eyes of the instructors. Recruits are almost in a panopticon and during this short but significant spell recruits might put their free will on hold to get through the training (see Sheridan 1980; Rabinow 1986; Chapter 5).

¹⁸⁴ Depending on the brigade, probation can last from 12 to 24 months. Failure to reach the required standard can result in an extended probation, or employment being terminated. Whilst no actual statistics are available for how many of the 20 firefighters who had their employment terminated for "poor performance/efficiency" (HMCIFS 1999: 41) in the year 1998/9 some of these are probably recruits.

¹⁸⁵ There are no extra provisions made by managers for the probationer to be a 'bolt on extra' and have time to assimilate into the team. Recruits/probationers, could be involved in a fire in their first minute on duty. I have three examples of how 'bad' a practice this may be, where recruits during their first day on duty were given responsibilities they considered they were not capable of: one, when within one hour of arriving at a station a recruit was wearing BA at a fire; a second, where the recruit was left operating a pump; a third, where a recruit was controlling 10 BA wearers on a BA board (see Chapter 5 for BA boards and safety procedures).

incorporating the probationer into the team at drill¹⁸⁶. Drill will provide the whole watch with an opportunity to identify the probationer's strengths and weaknesses. It is likely that one of the first lessons a probationer learns during this drill is to slow down: a lesson the established hands will teach them. Speed is reserved for the real thing, but then it must be controlled and not mechanical: the probationer is about to learn a completely new approach to being a firefighter compared to the one that training centre taught. Three extracts follow, from: Ken a probationer; Barry, a watch-commander; Christian, a crew-commander. These respondents do not work together, nevertheless their accounts were very similar and typically represent firefighters' responses. From this evidence I conclude that much of what has been learnt at training centre will at best be marginalised:

Ken: Basically the training are saying 'you are learning the *correct* way and make sure you *keep it going like this*'. But then from *actual people in The Job* you find out you don't. You just *fit in* with them basically.
(Brigade three, probationary firefighter, seven months' experience, age 19). [My emphases].

Barry: All from training centre, all that really *went out of the window completely*. You had really start all over again. And that was without trying to *fit in* with the watch, yunnoo.
(Brigade one, temporary operational station officer, seven years' service, age 34). [My emphases].

Christian: You only learn so much at training school and at drills. It's *when you go outside, the proper part*, that you need the guys around you with the experience to show you what to do.
(Brigade one, leading firefighter 20 years' service, age 38). [My emphasis].

Ken as a probationer has been on a watch less than three months and he realises he must marginalise the training centre's 'best practice' and *fit in* with how the watch organise for firefighting (see Chapter 4 for a full explanation of *fitting in*). What is surprising is that Barry and Christian who, as officers, might reasonably be expected to discourage this, do not. Isaac, Fred and Perry confirm this view:

Isaac: I was told at training school, just to go to one of the older experienced blokes and follow him around and ask for advice.
(Brigade two, 2.5 years' service, age 25, in a focus group).

Fred: Eh .. it's the .. the older firemen. They were the ones who took you under their wing, in a way .. and they showed you the way through *The Job*; how to look after yourself.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 15 years' service, age 37).

Perry: Officers *think* they teach firefighters how to fight fires, firefighters *know* they have to teach firefighters how to, because they are the ones in the back of the machine with them.
(Senior FBU representative). [My emphases].

It cannot be overemphasised how much the fire service relies on experienced firefighters to teach probationers *The Job*. Isaac's original instructor encouraged him to seek out an experienced firefighter for advice on firefighting. Paradoxically Ken received contrary advice from recruit

¹⁸⁶ The word drill here relates to watch training sessions with fire service equipment. BO's instruct stations that drill should take place during every shift and a record of this is kept in the drill book. Evidence suggests drill records are falsified to make it appear firefighters drill when they do not (see Chapter 5), but when a probationer arrives the watch can expect to be drilled frequently, a further reason why the probationer is not always welcome by experienced firefighters.

instructors: that he was “learning the correct way” but he soon found out “from actual people in *The Job* ... you don’t.” It is clear that whilst recruit training provides firefighters with the ‘essentials’, this knowledge is overtaken by the advice probationers get from the ‘real’ firefighters at the station. Despite the massive bureaucracy, there is no formal process to shape how this works; it is not written down that firefighting will be taught in this way and experienced firefighters have no formal status in the official hierarchy. It is just informally understood and accepted *throughout the service* that *training is left to experienced firefighters*, “the ones in the back of the machine.”¹⁸⁷ This means the probationer has to rely on the experienced firefighter sharing knowledge, facilitates the marginalisation of (formal) best practice, and provides the experienced firefighter with authority over the probationer.

As the thesis unfolds, I will argue that the situation above underpins an informal hierarchy amongst firefighters, but first I shall start a hypothesis, which uses the arguments above, to answer the *how* of firefighting. Hypothesis 1:

Initial training teaches firefighters about the tools of their job, but once on a watch it is almost inevitable (and formally and informally accepted) that probationers must turn to experienced firefighters to learn about firefighting: The Job.

Having prepared such a hypothesis I am going to immediately challenge it and suggest that one way probationers might avoid the informal hierarchy would be to learn about firefighting from the wide range of Fire service Manuals¹⁸⁸. Firefighters do not think book learning can do this, as the following answers indicate:

Fred: No instantly, you don’t learn to be a fireman from that.
[My emphasis].

Sinclair: Like, most of the blokes have got experience don’t know what is in the book, when it comes to what’s on the fireground.
(Brigade one, leading firefighter, 23 years’ service, age 44, in a focus group).

Don: You can read a book, but how much of that is actually useful practically? Em, yeah, I mean you can read all the manuals till you can’t take anymore information in, but at the end of the day you learn from the guys around you.
(Brigade one, firefighter, eleven years’ service, age 33).

Pete: Books are for the exams I think, ain’t they? The practical side, is from the *men*, at the jobs or whatever it may be. You learn from watching and helping them.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 18 years’ service, age 43). [My emphasis].

Firefighters are clear; learning about firefighting is handed down from other firefighters, “the men.” Fred explains where:

Fred: On the back of the motor [fire appliance] basically. Bum on the seat. That’s where you learn it, out on the fireground¹⁸⁹. That’s where you learn your trade. ... To extinguish the fire you have got to *get in* there and do it. That’s the thing, it’s no good holding back, it can go up into the roof or spread to another room.
[My emphasis and insert].

¹⁸⁷ The officer sits in the front.

¹⁸⁸ The Home Office produce a wide range of literature about firefighting. Most common amongst these are the Manuals of Firemanship, formally named as such before females joined the fire service (Home Office 1981); these are the bible of the fire service.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Fireground’ is where the fire is being fought, as in ‘battleground’.

Fred uses some typical fire service language to reiterate what the others have said. He then indicates that to put out the fire you must *get in*: a term so synonymous with firefighting that it led to the naming of this chapter. Fred also explains that you must *get in* as quick as possible otherwise the fire will continue to spread. Alf speaks as if for all firefighters:

Alf: How to be a fireman? There is no training school on this earth that can teach you how to do that. They can teach you the basics¹⁹⁰ and then you have to apply those basics to learn how to do your job and the skills that you need to do *The Job*. *I'm still learning, 25 years' down the road, I'm still learning*.
(Brigade three, firefighter, 25 years' service, age 46). [My emphasis].

This chapter will develop Alf's view that learning to be a firefighter is experiential and ongoing to suggest it is also a reflexive process from which firefighters might develop protocols for firefighting (see Chapter 1). One protocol is that firefighters must always try to improve their firefighting skills, another is that firefighters must gel as a team and support each other. Jo explains:

Jo: I am still learning now. This morning I had a job. Yesterday I had a job. I lay in bed thinking what could I have done better, what did I do wrong, *could I have improved on what I did*, should I have been quicker, slower, lower, higher, faster whatever? Eh, so you come out of training school and you should be *backing someone up*¹⁹¹. You're part of a team; you need to be able to gel with anybody on that watch, be an efficient crew. Whatever you do and *as much as I rely on somebody else, they would be relying on me*.
(Female firefighter). [My emphases].

Jo's answer provides a considerable insight. Jo is reflecting on what she has done almost as if she is still at training centre and has to pass a test, but Jo has been a firefighter for a long time and should have no test to pass.

It became very clear that firefighters were of a similar view, that after recruit training provides the "basics", you mostly learn *The Job* alongside your peers: "bums on the seat"; "hands-on experience"; "no training school can teach you"; "part of a team"; "relying" were typical examples to explain how firefighters learn about firefighting. The fact that Alf is "still learning" adds to the considerations that Jo is approaching firefighting as an ongoing test. Using the data so far reviewed I am able to develop the earlier version of Hypothesis 1:

Initial training teaches firefighters about the tools of their job, but once on a watch it is almost inevitable (and formally and informally accepted) that probationers must turn to experienced firefighters to learn about firefighting: *The Job*.

By adding the following:

Experienced firefighters explain that the experiential learning process is ongoing and learnt on the job as part of a watch where trust between watch members is important. It might also be that

¹⁹⁰ 'Basics' refers to general handling of equipment and theoretical firefighting.

¹⁹¹ For safety reasons firefighters will never work alone in a fire, they will always work in a minimum twos. It is a protocol for the first person into the fire to take the jet and be known as 'number 1' (the team leader). The remainder of the crew are identified as 'backing them up'. Sometimes 'backing-up' is literal in the sense that without a second firefighter physically *backing-up* the 'jet-reaction' might knock them over. However, most fires are fought with hose-reels and more often backing-up means supporting the firefighter with the 'jet'. In this case the experienced firefighter holds the jet (and is number 1) and the probationer is backing-up (number 2). However, amongst experienced firefighters, unless an officer leads the team, the order is normally random: the first to get the jet is the leader; the 'later' arrival backs them up. Holding the jet is the prime job, almost a prize, because the firefighter who does this gets in first. Attempting to be number 1 might also increase the speed firefighters get off the appliance and get to the front door of the house that is alight.

individuals think reflexively off the job about how to improve their skills and develop protocols for firefighting, which they will continually test. These methods are one way the skills of firefighting develop and they are handed down to probationers as part of the skills necessary to be an experienced firefighter.

3.2.3. The ‘good firefighter’

I have used the term “experienced firefighter” to identify the firefighters who are not on probation from those who are. Status in firefighters’ informal hierarchy is greatly influenced by ‘time served’. As in the military (Morgan 1987), firefighters will make initial judgements about other firefighters by asking, “how long have you done?” However, whilst an important pointer, time served is not the only criterion and firefighters have to ‘prove’ to those they work with that they are a ‘good firefighter’: a label applied after peer group approval. Hart (1982: 239-240) provides the following definition:

The ‘good fireman’¹⁹², the emphasis is on the operational, active individual who can remain calm and sensible under pressure, and this is the dominant view of what a fireman’s identity involves. He is defined by the type of work he does, dangerous demanding, operational tasks rather than such non-operational features of the work as Fire Prevention and admin.

Are those traits to be found within my data?

Alf: I am there to do a job and I am trained to do that job and like anybody that's got a job, you want to do it to the best of your ability. *I would find i .. a .. a .. a humiliation; I would feel I was a failure if I didn't pursue my endeavour to the best of my abilities.* In other words I want to do my job the best I can. *Now if I get half-way up a flight of stairs and it just gets hot and I know it gets hot, I have experienced this .. and I turn round and go back and say ‘I can’t go back its too hot’.* I would be a *failure .. in my own mind.* It might be too hot for a human to survive in and I have been in some hot places when it wasn’t a decision we made, it just happened when we retreated¹⁹³. [My emphases].

It is my view that Alf is (or has been; see Chapter 4) a peer group leader with status in the informal hierarchy and he fits with Hart’s (1982: 239-240) definition: “the good fireman ... who can remain calm and sensible under pressure.” Importantly, in similar terms, that is what Alf has said in his two abstracts above. Alf is a firefighter who cannot give in, but must continue, regardless of the heat, to *get in*. When he does retreat it is almost as if by divine intervention, “it just happened.” Alf is a firefighter who will seek to improve his skills until he retires and these skills he will hand down to younger firefighters. These skills will include the knowledge that a ‘good firefighter’ will get as close as possible to the fire, regardless of the heat, before turning on the jet, otherwise you might cause ‘water-damage’ (a test Alf applies to himself).

To improve understanding of firefighters’ term ‘*getting in*’, it is important to explain the following. The most common medium for putting out fires is water. There are two reasons why water will put the fire out: first, by smothering (blanketing) the fire by displacing the oxygen needed to enable combustion to continue. Second, water will cool the material that is burning to below ignition temperature¹⁹⁴. Most people do not realise that when firefighters go into a building, they do not indiscriminately spray water everywhere in the hope of extinguishing the fire. Experienced

¹⁹² There were no women in the fire service when Hart carried out his research, but many firefighters still use the term.

¹⁹³ Alf’s acknowledgement that he can retreat is discussed later.

¹⁹⁴ There are some substances that react violently and explode when water is applied and others that will produce their own oxygen. These substances are rarely found and when they are special firefighting measures are adopted. Again rarely, fires occur in sensitive electrical products and if these are in isolated locations, such as a single computer that has caught fire, then a chemical firefighting medium may be used. However, if the computer is burning as part of a room that is alight, then the more likely course is to use water.

firefighters teach probationers that to put out a fire *efficiently*, they must overcome the heat and get right up to the fire before they ‘open’ their jet. Then the smothering and cooling effect will put the fire out; *the water used to fight the fire will turn to steam*¹⁹⁵. Excess water that does not turn to steam and damages buildings and their contents is recognised by firefighters as ‘*water-damage*’: a testimony to firefighters’ lack of skill at *overcoming the heat and danger*. On return from fires the firefighters will hold a ‘post-mortem’¹⁹⁶, to consider how ‘the job went’. During this reflexive practice, the amount of *water-damage* is an important consideration. It will indicate how skilfully the crews got in: if their *nerve held* and they overcome the heat to get close to fire before opening the jet, or if they *panicked* and ‘washed the building away’. This is why Alf refers (above) to how it would be a “*a humiliation*” to “*turn round*”, because it would be an admission to the watch that he could not overcome the heat and reach the fire. Alf appears to see firefighting as a personal challenge and he is sure to pass this understanding on to probationers. Whilst Alf does not serve with the firefighter whose extract is next, it is possible to see a similar influence at work.

Ashley: Not wanting to be seen by the one behind you [backing him up] as not being up to the task; firefighters who complain about fires being too hot are regarded as poor firefighters.
(Senior FBU representative). [My insert].

Ashley underwrites the idea that firefighting becomes a personal challenge, an essential test of a *good firefighter* and I have separated what was a single answer from Ashley as a way to indicate how firefighters are taught to *get in*:

Ashley (cont.): One of the first incidents I can remember going to was in a basement. Two blokes were sent in with a jet. Went in, got halfway down the stairs and thought ‘fuck me this is a bit hot’ come up .. told the guvnor ‘it’s too hot down there’ and basically [were] told ‘what the fuck are you talking about, you get back down there’. And they did, and managed to come out still safe and alive. And I think that was a powerful message to me, of how you’ll be regarded if you complain that things were too hot.
[My insert].

Sometimes on-the-job-training can be hard and Ashley provides some more insight to how expectations pass on in the fire service (see Alf above). It would have been safer to fill the basement up with water, but *water-damage* and good firefighting are not compatible. Overcoming the heat is just one of the hazards firefighters face and it is possible that another, which further strengthens their resolve to *get in*, is knowing colleagues are ‘*backing them up*’ (watching). The following comments are from a focus group, but after reading them alongside Ashley’s extract, it is necessary to question if firefighters’ reluctance to give in is purely because of their professional ethos:

Chris: I put it out and I don’t want to drench it. I am particularly pleased if I am on the branch and we put it out. I am pleased and it ain’t awash with water. If all there is a little bit of *steam*, that is where my *professional pride* comes out. In the way that *I don’t want to wash things away*. And put it out as quickly as possible and do as least damage and *it ain’t knee deep in water*.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 4.5 years’ service) [My emphases].

Bert: But when it comes to a call we know we are alright and we certainly wouldn’t put a jet through from the outside, we’ll leave that to the stations.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 11.5 years’ service, age 35).

¹⁹⁵ As the water turns to steam this requires what is termed as latent heat and the transfer of heat in this transformation is an additional factor in cooling the fire, what might be called an ‘*unintended consequence*’.

¹⁹⁶ This is my term, not firefighters’ and the reason I have chosen it will be explained later.

- Cuthbert: Certain watches have got a reputation for that.
(Brigade one, firefighter. 8 years' service, age 30, in a focus group).
- Sinclair: Washing jobs away [laughter].
(Brigade one, leading firefighter, 21 years' service, age 44).
- Bert: They are a joke though.

This focus group gives an example of firefighters' views on *water-damage*. *Good firefighters* will only 'wash away a building' from the outside when the 'job is lost' (the fire has won). Officers will normally make the decision to withdraw crews and fight the fire from outside, and at their post-mortems after a fire, firefighters frequently criticise officers for making this decision too early (see Chapters 1 and 5).

3.3.4. Sharing experiential knowledge

Post-mortems are one way that firefighters share their reflexive thoughts after a fire (see Jo above). Whilst Jo gave me a clue, it was not until Rays' explanation that follows, or more my interpretation of what he says, that the importance of post-mortems as a way of sharing experiential knowledge became clear:

- Ray: People tell stories, the old blokes tell you about the big jobs they have been to. Obviously, like round here *****¹⁹⁷ is the one that is always on everybody's mind, because it was this watch that were there. I wouldn't say that you so much learn stuff from the stories. The more you learn from the stories is peoples opinions on how things worked. *People are well opinionated on like, things that went wrong at incidents and how things should have been done* and by hindsight, you can say that about anything can't you? In any situation with hindsight you can say '*we should have done it like this; should have gone in like that*'. I think that is more, the storytelling is more about, like that side of it. Rather than learning from the stories of the past job, but *learning we should have done it like this* and in future, *the next time we get a job like this, we will do it like that*.
(Brigade one, firefighter, four years' service, age 24) [My emphases].

Ray indicates how firefighters reflect and critique their own and colleagues' actions at a fire. He is criticising the discussions that firefighters have based on hindsight and he may not entirely comprehend the process that is going on here. When firefighters critique the way they fought a fire, firefighters will include in the discussion experiential knowledge they obtained from their experience of previous fires and post-mortems. They may also include all the stories they hear from other sources¹⁹⁸. Hindsight and experiential knowledge might then influence the way the watch act next time they attend a similar incident. Watches may also test their ideas at formal drills and lectures, which then become not just a training exercise, but also a rehearsal: *a preparation for real emergencies*. From these reflexive practices and rehearsals, the watch will develop their *shared understandings* as part of their *protocols* for firefighting I spoke of earlier. For all the time I spent as a firefighter I did not recognise just how simply chatting about our experiences would help my watch to prepare for fires. Like Ray above, I did not recognise the importance of these discussions. I even had to choose the words for these processes, "post-mortems," and "protocols." These are not

¹⁹⁷ When there has been a large fire it generally gets named after the location, for example 'Kings Cross'. The name of this large fire is removed to retain the anonymity of the respondent.

¹⁹⁸ Throughout this thesis it will be suggested that storytelling is an important way that knowledge about how to behave as a firefighter is passed on (see Thurston 1966; Plummer 1995 cited in Thurston 1966).

firefighters' words; were they aware of such processes, then firefighters would undoubtedly have their own words for them.

Watch-commanders will inevitably be part of developing watch protocols and this might improve the opportunity for the watch, to recognise their commander (who is normally supervisory at a fire — stays outside) *as part of the team* that extinguish the fire. It can also provide an opportunity for watch-commanders to remain in touch (albeit verbally) with *getting in*. They may then continue to '*talk the walk*' and thereby maintain any respect they may have earned when they were firefighters. One further way a watch-commander can earn respect is to lead their crews personally at a large fire. However, these occasions are few (see Chapter 1; Appendix 10), but can be significant and remembered, because firefighters will often return to the stories about the (few) makeup fires they attend, *or they have heard about during post-mortems*. Firefighters may even pretend they were present at fires they did not attend, especially if the incident was a major one (Kings Cross)¹⁹⁹.

An important site for sharing knowledge is the Fire Service College (FSC), where most officers attend residential succession training (see Chapter 5). The concentration of so much experience under one roof is not wasted and knowledge spreads from/between:

- instructors and students in formal lessons²⁰⁰;
- instructor to instructor;
- the research projects and dissertations completed during courses;
- the library;
- through student networks that occur on the residential courses, especially in the bars.

Officers who attend FSC then take this knowledge back to their brigades and it passes up and down within that brigade. Despite firefighters' argument that they can only learn from other firefighters, it is clear that officers play a part in the way firefighters develop their protocols, and not only by acting as 'messengers' between firefighters in different brigades.

I now feel confident that I can provide a possible answer to the '*how*' part of firefighting by rewording the previous Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 now reads:

*Initial training teaches firefighters about the tools of their job, but once on a watch it is almost inevitable that probationers must turn to experienced firefighters to learn about firefighting: **The Job**. They will be taught that the most effective way of putting out a fire is to get in as **close** to the fire as possible, as **quickly** as possible **contingent with the danger** involved and then turn the water on. However, firefighters' **training never ends**, is both on and off the job, involving a continual round of **experiential learning** as watches build trust within the group, share and develop their collective knowledge to agree **protocols** for getting in **safely**. Watch officers are part of this process and act as a channel to share and discuss this knowledge up and down between their wider networks and the watch. The transfer of knowledge may be such that each cohort of firefighters has **access to 'all' the knowledge**, past and present about '**The Job**'.*

However, Hypothesis 1 is not yet complete and it will be further developed at the end of this chapter.

¹⁹⁹ During one interview with a woman at the Fire Service College it became clear to me that a story she was telling me about an officer she had met was untrue in that the fire he had boasted to her about had occurred before he joined the fire service.

²⁰⁰ Each course will comprise of a number of officers (students for the duration of the course), who will come from different brigades. This can also have an international perspective, as Moreton trains international students.

3.3. WHAT DOES ‘GETTING IN’ MEAN TO FIREFIGHTERS?

Now I shall build on the data so far reviewed in an attempt to consider *what* firefighting is like by asking firefighters to explain, ‘*what* does ‘*getting in* mean to firefighters?’ and by forming Hypothesis 2 from the answers they provide.

3.3.1. Tell me about ‘*The Job*’

The public image of firefighting is of firefighters working in burning buildings in sometimes dangerous conditions, made even more dangerous because fire is unpredictable. I asked Ken about his first experience of firefighting and he told me it was not like training:

Ken: I thought now *we did this in training and it’s not too bad, but then stuff started to fall on top of you*: em, I dunnoo plaster and bits of wood and stuff from the ceiling. It all started burning and dropping on top of us and I thought ‘Oh’. And that was a bit nerve racking, because, yunnoo, when you’re training nothing falls on you at all and it’s just one fire. ... And he said like, ‘hold on to me’ and went through and it was not what I had expected. I had been in houses and that [in training] but, they didn’t really have furniture in and they were empty with one fire. And this one, every room was on fire and you were tripping over stuff and it was very tight with stuff dropping onto you. Once you got into it you just switched on to what you were doing. But the first steps, as we were going in, I was a bit apprehensive. But he was alright, he was just coaching me, saying ‘we are going to do this now, keep low’ and all that sort of stuff. [My emphasis and insert].

This was Ken’s first ‘real’ fire and it was not like training, “stuff started to fall on top of you ... every room was on fire.” Ken appears to be concerned for his own safety, but you can also identify his faith in the experienced firefighter he is ‘backing-up’, a position from where he will be taught *The Job*. But Ken did not run away, all firefighters must overcome their fear and Ken is passing this test. Alex’s reaction to *getting in* is similar, but she has more experience than Ken and yet she still has to ‘prove’ she can take it:

Alex: It was absolutely pitch black and you couldn’t see a thing. Couldn’t see my hand in front of my face and I was in there with this other guy .. fumbling about. And yeah, I can feel it over here and I was giving it a squirt and suddenly the ceiling started coming down. It was only the plaster board and for that split second I thought ‘shit, run’²⁰¹ and then I thought of like, another part of me said, ‘no, no, don’t be stupid that’s not what you do’. It was like for that split second, I sort of jumped into it and then gathered my senses and I remember saying ‘we will retreat a little bit, have a look round, take cover’ and then you know, went into procedures. (Female firefighter).

Alex is describing a typical incident, (she is number 1 being backed-up by the rest of the crew): “pitch black ... fumbling about ... feel it ... give it a squirt ... ceiling started coming down ... shit, run” and then something prevents her from running. Alex’s experience, including I am sure all those discussions at the station, takes over’: “retreat a bit ... went into procedures.” Procedures are the words that Alex uses to describe what I call protocols: the understandings/skills that firefighters develop to compare the current incident with previous ones and to help them get the confidence not to run away. On this occasion protocols suggest she, “retreat a little bit,” then Alex explains how she assesses the situation and when she considers it safe to do so she moves forward to extinguish the

²⁰¹ The expression “shit” in this context, in common with other walks in life, probably relates to the possibility things are getting dangerous or going wrong. Firefighters often use the term shit as shorthand for having diarrhoea, something they relate to fear. For example they may say ‘I was shitting myself with fear’, which means they were scared.

fire²⁰². Assessing the situation is clearly an important factor regarding safety and Jo's extract gives an even more vivid description of what it is to *get in*:

Jo: *Leave my tally on machine .. em .. yeah .. or drop it on the floor outside the job*²⁰³. Started up²⁰⁴. The hosereel is hopefully there, if not I will grab the hosereel. *Assess before I go in*, I will think: 'that's the bedroom; that's at the front' and you will know that the fire's downstairs by the time you get to the front door. You will know where the fire is, *you just know*. So, and then you know how fierce it is. Whether the stairs are going to be gone [burnt through or in an imminent state of collapse], if it's just in the front room. If the doors shut, just *check the door* [handle] and open the door and go in and put it out. Assess everything as much as you can in the split second time that it .. you probably think, go back looking at the job, you had five minutes. *You had three seconds and you have taken in a zillion things*. And that's why when people say what do you do? You've done a million things and you don't realise you have done those million things.
(Female firefighter). [My emphases and inserts].

Jo starts her explanation by indicating she has replaced official BA procedure with a watch protocol (discussed in Chapter 5) and another protocol will ensure the hosereel will be ready at the front door. Jo's description is noteworthy, because it is how a *good firefighter* may describe *getting in*. By combining my experiential knowledge as an ex-firefighter and a researcher, I can identify similarities between Jo's methodology for firefighting and the grounded theorist's *constant comparative analysis* (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 28-30; Henwood and Pidgeon 1993: 22; see Chapter 2). Jo would be sifting, coding and analysing incoming data: the fierceness and visibility of the fire; temperature, state and travel of the smoke; the construction, layout and condition of the building, "a zillion things", *against all the knowledge* (data) she has gathered *since joining the fire service*. Jo was sure to, "check the door" handle for heat before slowly opening it, foot held against the door ready to kick it shut again if the fire is too fierce; check the stairs and floors with her front foot warily, weight on her back foot in case they are 'gone'.

It is possible now to start to hypothesise how I might answer the question 'what does 'getting in' mean to firefighters?' Hypothesis 2:

*Firefighting involves firefighters **getting into** a building where they might be little or no visibility, in hot and dangerous conditions. To do this safely firefighters will need to have confidence in their partner's and their own abilities to **keep a cool head, not panic** and to follow watch protocols for firefighting as they compare what they are experiencing at the fire, against **their prior knowledge**, to hypothesis how to get **safely** into a position close enough to the fire to turn the water on. If they do this successfully, they avoid 'water-damage'.*

²⁰² The "procedures" Alex refers to is likely to be the way that firefighters' act when in danger from falling masonry. They move closer to the wall or into a doorway, which is likely to be a safer part of the building should the ceiling collapse. From that safer position they will then judge how to proceed, following the example perhaps best explained by Jo (below).

²⁰³ The "tally" is a safety device, which BO's require the BA wearer to leave outside the building with the BA control officer. Jo has broken this procedure and followed what must be her watch protocol and dropped the tally in a prearranged place (see Chapter 5).

²⁰⁴ "Started up" refers to turning on the air supply to the BA set, which she is wearing and will allow her to breathe in the toxic atmosphere she is entering. There is an official method of starting up but I doubt that Jo follows this, she will save the two minutes this takes by carrying out her own safety check as she walks towards the fire.

3.4. WHY, GIVEN THE APPARENT DANGER INVOLVED, DO FIREFIGHTERS *GET IN* AT A FIRE?

This section will develop a hypothesis to assist in understanding ‘*why*, given the apparent danger involved, do firefighters *get in* at a fire? This will involve me first forming, then developing, Hypothesis 3.

3.4.1. Persons reported

There can be no more demanding situation in a firefighter’s career than to be at a fire where people are trapped. The fire service has its own terminology for these calls and a radio message will pass from the fireground to control, “make pumps four, ‘*persons reported*’.” The description of the fire at the start of this chapter is typical of a persons reported scenario and how firefighters’ protocols bought about a ‘successful’ rescue. At these times, firefighters will make every effort to *get in* and even a safety conscious FBU (1996: 53-54) recognise this:

Firefighters feel a moral obligation at certain incidents to act immediately where life is threatened and rescues are required. ... a snatch rescue.

The ‘snatch rescue’ could involve firefighters taking less time assessing the danger involved; they might even be prepared to risk their lives for the public. A focus group explains:

Keith: Half a dozen of these type of jobs where I’m thinking, ‘*I’m going to have trouble getting out of here*’. And you actually *found how good your partner is*. One thing what makes you carry on is *what you joined The Job for*. The excitement of that as opposed to anything else: it’s saving that someone, it’s at the back of your mind, *otherwise you wouldn’t be here*.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 15 years’ service, age 40) [My emphases].

Ian: I think you *would feel like a god amongst your fellers* actually, to be quite honest.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 8 years’ service, age 30) [My emphasis].

Keith: When I got back and *had a good chat* and you have been on a *high for weeks* afterwards, because we pulled one person out and done the business for them. I would say that’s what you *joined for*, it’s just *the excitement you can’t beat it*.
[My emphases].

Keith joined the fire service to *save lives* and that is why he *gets in*. Ian has never saved anyone, but is in awe of doing so. Another focus group adds to the debate: Guy is cautious not to glamorise the day to day firefighting, but like Keith he realises there is a dividend in life saving, which he might risk his life to achieve. For Cliff it is a matter of pride, he could not give in:

Guy: Someone going into a job just like what we do day to day is not a special person. But I would say for someone to go in and do that job knowing they *might not come out alive would take a special person* to do that and that’s where I see us as being special 1% of your career you might be special the other 99% you’re just a normal Joe Bloggs. But for that one moment, if you’re needed to do something, then that’s when you’re *special*.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 10 years’ service, age 37). [My emphases].

Cliff: It’s got to be *your pride*. It’s going through your mind there is someone in there and I am not going out of this house until I get them out. Whether they’re alive or dead I am in here to do a job. *I have got to do it*. I can’t walk out of that door down the bottom and say ‘sorry Guv I couldn’t do it’.

(Brigade two, firefighter, five years' service, age 27). [My emphases].

These extracts support the view, common amongst, the public that a firefighter is a hero who will risk *his* life to save others. This public esteem is a dividend for firefighters, available regardless of their individual motivation for *getting in*. When the time comes to hypothesise about why firefighters *get in* I must consider that the motivational factors for individual firefighters may include: a moral obligation; the reason why they joined the fire service; a matter of pride; the dividend (reward) they get for doing so.

3.4.2. Last resort

The public's only interest is not that firefighters will *get in* and save them, the public are also grateful to know that when it is 'only' their property that is alight, firefighters will also help them. Few members of the public have any experience of uncontrolled fire, and they will commonly say to firefighters, "I couldn't do your job." This statement suggests the public are scared of fire and it is not too partisan for me to suggest the public are right to be wary, because uncontrolled fire will destroy everything. The public's preconception is that only firefighters can stop a raging fire. Dominic explains:

Dominic: I think that deep down you know that the *firebrigade is the last resort*. There is no *one else is going to come along and do it*. That's why we are here. Eh, if something has gone wrong, then people turn to us to try and rescue a situation. Whether it be people, animals, property, whatever is at risk. They turn to us to try and retrieve as much as possible from that situation. We go in there knowing that we are the last one. If we fail then the whole thing fails.
(Brigade two, leading firefighter, 24 years' service, age 45). [My emphases].

Dominic knows if the fire service fails, "then the whole thing fails." Firefighters are the professionals, *the people who do whilst others look on* and who take pride in their ethos to always help the public the best way they can. Bert has a view:

Bert: We like to muck around and say we are from the old school and *we don't always do everything by the book* and that. But the one thing we do like to think is that we are very professional. So OK, this station may be a real bitch, sometimes falling down and we may not be the best crew like we like to think. But we like to think when it comes to a call, when we get there we are at least *professional*.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 11.5 years' service, age 35). [My emphases].

Bert's statement, "we don't always do everything by the book ... we are at least professional", has hidden meaning. In line with other professionals, he thinks he knows better than managers do (a trustee of the public's faith in him; see Hall 1968; Wright 1982; Lucio and MacKenzie 1999). Firefighters are people *who get things done* and he is more likely suggesting that his watch will break the rules to achieve their professional ethos (see Jo above)²⁰⁵. Firefighters might also consider if they were to stand around and not *get in* quickly, if at all, they might also lose public support.

At this stage, there may be some benefit in starting to form of categories that might help summarise the reasons firefighters provide for *getting in*. This will be done as a way of developing some understanding of the possible motivations behind why firefighters want to *get in* and not to suggest that firefighters will always behave in accordance with a category or any combination of categories given similar circumstance at a different time (see Giddens 1987). Hypothesis 3:

²⁰⁵ Chapters 1 and 5 compare firefighters with professionals, such as doctors, in that firefighters believe they know better than their bosses how to serve the public. As in the police (Reiner 1992: 107), firefighters appear to have their own 'ways and means act'; out of view of their officers they decide how fires are to be fought.

Getting in to fight a fire thus may involve a number of motivations for firefighters, including:

- a. *Humanitarian: at persons reported incidents firefighters might be prepared to go that bit further and risk their lives to save others.*
- b. *Professional Humanitarian: the fire service is a last resort, if the fire service gives up the situation is lost.*
- c. *Professional Pride: firefighting is a skill to be proud of and defended.*
- d. *Professional Cavalier: firefighters are professionals, who may not follow the rules when firefighting, but will get the job done to the best of their ability.*

3.4.3. Is there more to firefighting than helping the public?

To develop Hypothesis 3, especially the possibility that there might be other motivations for why firefighters *get into* a fire apart from helping the public, it is important to ask one question. In complex and dangerous situations why not, “shit, run” and then, “squirt” the water from the comparative safety outside? Surely, this is not just about preventing *water-damage*! When I questioned firefighters about this, the most common response was, “it’s my job” and this explanation fits with firefighters’ professional ethos. In my search for an explanation, Jo confirms what Fred has said earlier, that if she does not *get in* quickly the fire will spread, and Alex gets an adrenaline rush from the challenge of *getting in* and *she looks forward to firefighting*:

Jo: *I have got to get in and put the bloody thing out as fast as possible. Cos, this is getting too hot and if it is getting hotter, hotter and I have got to start putting water on something quickly. Yunnoo, it’s no good thinking .. no there is no way you could turn round and come out.. not at that stage. If you’re up there and you’ve got water, you have got to use it. And if you know it is in bedroom you just, I mean you obviously, you go in. If it’s getting hot you progress .. then you still go on and you still go on .. you just go in and you find the fire and you put it out.*
[My emphases].

Alex: What do I want to do? *I want to get it. I want to cool it down.* That is what I want to do. I want to find where the seat²⁰⁶ of fire is. *It’s a goal. ... It’s good fun. It’s exciting.* You get that *adrenaline* rush. You sort of see a flat and yes here we go. *We have got a goer²⁰⁷, excellent!* Let’s get stuck in there, let’s get dirty and whatever. *It’s good fun; I enjoy it.* You don’t want to wish it on anybody, but em, you sort of think *I could just do with a job tonight.* Just a little one; that will do. I just want to get stuck in there.
[My emphases].

The theme here could easily interpret as only suggesting that firefighters push on to get to the fire, because until they put water on the fire *it will continue to grow in size* increasing the damage and the *danger*. However, Jo and Alex²⁰⁸ might be indicating something more than they are just ‘doing their job’, it may be that beating the fire is a goal. Alex actually suggests she looks forward to firefighting, although she does not wish people to suffer. Alex’s view is typical and the paradox in firefighters’ general impatience to go to fires is interesting. At fires people will be suffering a loss and fire,

²⁰⁶ The actual ‘heart’ of the fire; where it is fiercest and firefighters must be close to this area if they are to avoid *water-damage* when they turn on their jet.

²⁰⁷ Alex uses the term ‘goer’, which has two meanings for a male firefighter: first, it relates to a fire that is burning out of control and will be exciting to fight; second, in common with many males, at least, it relates to a woman who is sexually active/exciting in bed.

²⁰⁸ Alex and Jo are from different Brigades.

because it is not entirely predictable, always presents a danger to firefighters. The last two accounts belong to female firefighters, but male firefighters Alf and Ashley have already suggested similar motivations. Colin is very clear, he will try and try again to beat the fire:

Colin: We couldn't see the fire and it was getting *hotter and hotter* and we went out and we had used a cylinder by then²⁰⁹. We put another one on our backs and *we went in again*. This time with a jet, as a team of four. ... got as far as the stairs. Kept putting water up²¹⁰, couldn't see the fire at all and it was just getting *hotter and hotter*. And eh, we came out and I saw our guvnor and I said 'we are going to have to go in above it and come down'. I said, 'it's just too hot to go up'. Somebody, pitched the ladder and *we went in through a window*, made our way through that room into a hallway, which was heavily smoked logged. Again no fire, no glow and that was when the roof exploded and we got evacuated out.
[My emphases].

Colin is determined to beat the fire, but he cannot get past the heat. He even tries to gain access from a higher floor, but then, "the roof exploded." Colin's explanation at times makes him appear almost foolhardy, as if he *could not admit* that the fire had beaten him, and his explanation is similar to Alf's earlier. Ted too describes a situation where he wanted to *get in* so much he gave up an opportunity to observe (in safety):

Ted: I was a runner first of all for main control, collecting information for the officers and that and I said to him, 'I have done it what shall I do'? And he said, 'if you leave that tabard on you can just sort of wander round and have a look and see what's going on'. And I said '*I want to wear BA*, I want to *get in* there'. And he said 'give us the tabard back then'. So I dumped that and I found a spare set ... and just queued up for BA to get inside.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 1.25 years' service, age 23) [My emphases].

Colin has put himself 'in danger' by *getting in* three times, Ted queues up to *get in* and Alex looks forward to fires. Firefighters have shown throughout my research that they prefer to serve on busy stations, they are achievers who want to fight fires and they even look forward to them. One interpretation of why this might be would be to hypothesise that Ted, Colin and many firefighters could be looking for danger at fires where the only lives that are risk are their own because they enjoy the adrenaline the body provides when they are in danger²¹¹. As a result of the data above, I add a further category (e) to Hypothesis 3:

- e. *Professional Adventurer: there may be more to firefighting than just instrumental reasons of pay and professional satisfaction, it could also be a way of raising adrenaline levels, almost a dangerous sport.*

3.4.4. Is there a link between 'persons reported' and other fires?

²⁰⁹ "Used a cylinder" means that they have used up the air in their BA set and have to go out and replace the cylinder.

²¹⁰ If a fire is very hot and firefighters cannot get near enough to it to reach it with their water, they will sometimes create a 'water curtain' by turning the nozzle control onto the spray mode, this forms a barrier between the heat and the crew. The use of the water curtain might be judged in any post-mortem as 'soft' and causing unnecessary *water-damage* or it might be judged as the right act. Colin might also have been spraying water indiscriminately in the hope of hitting the fire; I have no way of making a judgement on this.

²¹¹ The body 'naturally' produces adrenaline to provide the energy to help deal with a crisis. Adrenaline might also provide a thrill as in say a 'dangerous' sport, a 'dangerous' ride at a theme park or (promiscuous/risky) sexual activity.

Two extracts follow to develop Hypothesis 3. Ray innocently admits that helping the public may be secondary/additional to his own pleasure, but first Terri makes a statement that could lead to a considerable possibility, the suggestion that someone might be in the fire is an excuse for *getting in*:

Terri: You know there is .. someone might be in there.

Terri says, “You know there is” then pauses and corrects herself, “someone might be in there.” Terri’s hesitation and correction probably occurred because she recognised that I as an ex-firefighter might challenge what she was saying. Terri was probably going to say ‘someone was in there’ as her reason for *getting in*. But she would expect me to know this is an excuse firefighters use for *getting in*. Ray provides a similar suggestion:

Ray: You get the initial *adrenaline* rush and you find out it’s a job and you’re BA. To go in there you get a further surge of *adrenaline*. Yunnoo you want to *get in* there and do it. And then also at the *back of your mind* you are thinking ‘that is what you’re there for’ *as well*. I mean *there could be someone in there* and your actions could save their life. [My emphases].

When Ray says, “that is what you are there for *as well*” is he innocently hinting that helping the public may *almost be secondary*? His use of the word, “*adrenaline*” twice may indicate that seeking the adrenaline rush from the risk/excitement of firefighting may be as much a reason for *getting in* as “*there could be somebody in there*.”

3.4.5. Experiential knowledge provides a possible explanation

Firefighters are not the only public servants who enjoy risk. The police also enjoy the action side of their job (Graef 1989; Reiner 1992). Interestingly the police do not get the overwhelming public support that firefighters get when they go into action. Despite arguing that they are doing their job to help the public, many police actions are subject to adverse public scrutiny (Scarman 1981; Jefferson 1990; Northern 1995; Campbell 1999; Macpherson 1999). On the other hand, the public almost universally see firefighters’ help as positive, particularly when they rescue people (or fight large fires). Nationally firefighters rescue around 10 people a day from fires, but when this statistic is viewed locally, it equates to very few firefighters actually rescuing someone. I suggest that the public do not base their support for firefighters on statistics, but on their understandings that firefighters are prepared to rescue *them*, which in turn is provided by those firefighters who have performed heroic acts. Experiential knowledge provides some *very important* information as to how firefighters might be involved in *helping* the public to come to such a conclusion. I argue this because at most fires, firefighters know if anyone is trapped in the building before *getting in*. Yet they explain, first and foremost, that they *get in*, ‘because someone might be trapped’. Terri and Ray make a similar argument and I suggest that this could be a way of manipulating a situation to increase firefighters’ public-status: to make it look as if all firefighters are heroic rescuers²¹². In effect, this not only has the advantage of allowing all firefighters to appear as heroes, it also allows firefighters to ‘ignore’ safety procedures (see Chapter 5), just get on with their job and receive an adrenaline buzz. If this is so, could there be more to firefighting than just instrumental reasons of pay and professional satisfaction? Now it is time to reflect on hypotheses 1 and 2, and question whether firefighters might use their actions at a fire to test their protocols and as a test of themselves against their standards of a *good firefighter*: a test that might appear reckless if it was not obscured by firefighters acting as if someone was trapped when they *got in*²¹³.

²¹² This is of course similar to the way that patriarchal dividends are available to all males regardless of if they act in the way that provides the dividend (see Connell 1995).

²¹³ It may be that firefighters learn to do this from other firefighters: to obscure other purposes firefighters may have for *getting in*: a form of dramaturgical loyalty (Goffman 1956) to an image built up by generations of firefighters: an invisible understanding (outside of firefighters groups) that pro-feminist auto-critique aims to make visible.

3.4.6. Testing yourself and others/each other

Seidler (1997) argues that most males do not take their masculinity for granted, but constantly need to ‘prove’ to themselves and to others that they can achieve dominant masculine standards. Leaving aside at this stage the fact that some firefighters are female, it is possible that *getting in* might be seen by firefighters as a test of what might be *their masculine standard*: the ability to be a *good firefighter* — someone who can *get in*, beat the heat, smoke and danger and then put the fire out without causing *water-damage*. I asked Jo and Ken directly if they were testing themselves. Ken is not at all reticent and suggests that he is. Ken wants to beat the fire:

Ken: Yeah in a way, because every fire is different and *you just want to overcome it* and that. But it is just really *exciting* and yunnoo hardly, *everyone is outside watching* and you’re the ones who are inside doing it all. And the public and that see you go in and yunnoo. I don’t know whether it is just, I don’t know what the word I am looking for, makes me *feel good that everyone is watching* in a way.
[My emphases]

Ken is not only testing himself against the fire he recognises that “everyone is outside watching.” Jo is at first reluctant to accept she tests herself when she is firefighting, but then she is not sure:

Jo: I can’t say I was testing myself. I suppose you always want to *see if you can do it: can I take this heat; can I go a bit further*; am I going to put this out or am I going to have to go and get. I don’t think I have ever thought I am going to have to get out of here, I am going to have to go and get somebody else. I have never thought that, but not because I am testing myself, *but then I don’t know*. If I have something in mind *I need to do it*. If it’s running round the block I think I have *got to get to that lamppost*. I have got to get to it, you can stop when you get to the lamppost and it’s fine it’s alright. And in your head you’re telling yourself it’s OK to stop at, but who knows you’re telling yourself it’s OK to stop at that lamppost. You, nobody can hear you saying, ‘you’re great if you stop at that lamppost’. You think within yourself ‘you’re great’, but nobody else would think, ‘wow she just stopped at that lamppost, she is really great’. It’s, *I don’t know if it’s a test*.
[My emphases].

“See if you can do it ... take this heat ... go a bit further” are all statements that sound as if Jo is challenging herself whilst firefighting, in much the same way as she challenges herself to, “get to that lamppost.” This piece of data becomes more important with Jo’s recognition that there is no public acclaim from getting to the lamppost. But, when Jo is firefighting she has two audiences, *the public* and *her peers*. Roger as a probationer makes it very clear, he wants to go to fires so he can ‘prove’ to the watch that he can do *The Job*:

Roger: You want to go out²¹⁴ and do stuff and ‘prove’ yourself and that. Especially when you first come onto the watch. ... ‘prove’, you know, you get a reputation and that everyone says. They probe you and that .. and you want to show you can *fit in* and be part of the team and not be some sort of twat²¹⁵ that has .. just can’t do nothing.
(Brigade one, probationer, 1 year’s service, age 23). [My emphasis].

²¹⁴ ‘Go out’ is an expression for when firefighters get called to a fire, also known as ‘a shout’, ‘a call’, ‘when the bells go down’, ‘a job’.

²¹⁵ The use of the word “twat” is similar to the word ‘cunt’, an insult based on feminine anatomy (see Hearn and Parkin 1987, 1995; Dixon 1994; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 1996). I am reminded of a term that I heard front-line troops use about their officers and their ‘colleagues’ who do not actually come up to their standards: REMF, this stands for ‘rear echelon mother fuckers’.

Doing *The Job* well is the fundamental test for being *seen* as a *good firefighter*: to be able to *walk the talk* in the their own eyes, their peers and the public. Identifying that they are looking for public recognition is not something that firefighters regularly acknowledge, but Alex is not in anyway reluctant to do this:

Alex: It's a good feeling that people sort of like, people sort of like, 'yeah it's the firebrigade'. Women coming up [laughter], coming up to you and giving everybody a kiss or trying to and seeing me and [laughter] 'alright then'. Kids love it, everybody just, I don't think I have ever met anybody who dislikes firefighters. Unless they have been out with one that is [lots of laughter as I understood Alex's meaning that firefighters often exploit their imagery to gain sexual 'favours' from females²¹⁶].
[My inserts].

Two possible further motivations are emerging to add to Hypothesis 3. One is that firefighters may be treating the opportunity to *get in* as a test, through which they can 'prove' to a wide-ranging audience that they are *good firefighters*:

f. Testing: firefighters may be proving to the public, other firefighters and themselves that they 'fit in' with the image of a 'good firefighter' when they are getting in (a Foucaultian gaze).

The second possible motivation is that firefighters enjoy the publics' image of firefighting and *getting in* maintains that status:

g. status building: getting in may add to the publics' image of firefighting.

The last three additions to Hypothesis 3 might suggest firefighters take unnecessary risks when they *get in*: a possibility now investigated.

3.5. RISK TAKING

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are the lead agency on industrial safety and HSE (1984) acknowledges that firefighters would take risks to do their job. However, the HSE view has changed to a point where Improvement Notices place a legal requirement on brigades to improve safety procedures following accidents to firefighters (see Klein 1999: 13). In consequence, safety has become an important issue in the fire service, perhaps not so much because of the risk to firefighters, but to avoid Improvement Notices. The fire service has responded to the HSE (Robinson 1998) by issuing new rules and training officers/firefighters in Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA): a formal protocol that requires firefighters to carryout a risk assessment before *getting in*. Chapter 5 describes how this area is a site for resistance by firefighters who might see DRA as deskilling, but this chapter will now consider whether *getting in* involves risk taking. Two issues will emerge: first, how firefighters' skills might actually balance their actions on the safe side of recklessness; and second, the extent to which this balance might allow firefighters to increase the public perception that their job is dangerous.

3.5.1. Is *getting in* reckless?

This section will now ask if firefighters might be reckless when they *get in*, and/or are their actions a very skilful way of living up to an image? The safety conscious FBU (Mathews²¹⁷ 1999: 13) are clear:

I think that is indicative of exactly where the Service is. It surrounds itself in the male macho image of firefighters who can do anything. That we are all-singing, all-dancing SAS people, and that accidents and burns and injuries are par for the course. But they are not.

²¹⁶ Baigent (1996) indicates that firefighters often use females as pit-stops for their sexual egos (see Chapter 5).

²¹⁷ Dave Mathews was then the FBU National Officer with responsibility for Health and Safety.

A statement made by a principal officer with whom I was discussing risk supports the FBU suggestion that firefighters might not be thinking of their own safety when they *get in*:

Hamilton: They have bugles playing in the heads as they charge in.
(Principal officer).

In some ways the question of why firefighters *get in* is not unique and has been asked before, for example Delson (1996: 2) asks:

Are they adrenaline junkies ... or do they embody more wholesome traits, like fortitude, selflessness and commitment? ... Firefighters don't talk about bravery much ... After all they say, we are just doing our jobs.

This quote is from an ethnographic account of interviews with over 100 American firefighters. However, the book provides the image I have spoken of earlier, that of the 'reluctant' heroic firefighter: a difficult image to challenge, because the public appear intent on seeing firefighters as public heroes and firefighters may not want to abandon that image. The following two quotes concerning risk taking are from *Fire* (letters pages) in consecutive months. The first is from a senior officer (Jones 1997: 20) who was critiquing *getting in*:

The adrenaline, esprit de corps takes over to the extent of throwing caution to the wind.

The following month an operational Sub O. (Hodgens 1997: 11) replies:

The attraction of a Fire Service career for me – and I assume most of my colleagues – was the element of danger and risk involved. This does not mean I am suicidal, but that I take pride in doing a job that most people would never consider.

The view of Jones is very much on the lips of the FBU, HSE and officers (see Chapter 5), but Hodgens better represents what firefighters have told me.

3.5.2. Heroes, risk takers or adrenaline junkies?

Within my data I have some evidence that firefighters might be taking risks. Colin above may be one of these. Colin also told me about some over enthusiastic 'youngsters':

Colin: They are just rushing all the time.
(Brigade four, firefighter, six years' service, age 25).

DB: What are they trying to do?

Colin: I think they want to be as good as the people in front of them. ... They see role models that they have moulded themselves on in our watch and they want to be like them, so *much they are forgetting the small things that have made these people the good firefighters that they are.*
[My emphasis].

Colin is standing back from a situation more maturely than the younger firefighters whose actions he describes. It is possible that these firefighters are trying to imitate the older firefighters, but as yet have not been given all the information they need to see beyond the 'big picture'.

3.5.3. An 'older hand' on the tiller

It may be that younger firefighters might behave recklessly (as the FBU, Officers and Colin suggest) in the belief that their bravado will identify them as *good firefighters*, but older firefighters, whose attention they are seeking are unlikely to praise those who act impetuously and fail to assess a situation. One way that these youngsters might learn to slow down is through storytelling/post-mortems, where experienced firefighters often refer to firefighters who rush around as ‘panickers,’ ‘off head on cabbage’; or ‘headless chickens’. Once applied these labels will be difficult to remove and hearing stories of such labelling, might alone be enough to caution the impetuous probationer (see Chapters 4 and 5). Duke describes how he approaches a fire:

Duke: I am more conscious now of my safety, *the people around me*, and perhaps that comes with the experience. Spending that *extra second*, if you like, thinking what I am going to do. And also now, at the age of 51 coming 52, so many of the younger .. It’s like I am dealing with another generation .. but the times I do go in with somebody that is younger than my own children, if you like. That eh, at most incidents, I am thinking, ‘now hold on’. *Safety is uppermost in my mind, with regard to my own well being and who I might be in there with.*
(Brigade one, firefighter, 25 years’ service, age 51) [My emphasis].

Age and experience appear to temper how fast firefighters approach an incident. However, delay is not as most people would imagine it; firefighters do not have the luxury of time, beyond the “extra second”, to stop outside a fire and evaluate a series of plans. All the time they were planning the fire would be spreading, so they use their skills/experience to adapt watch protocols to the current situation as they *get in* (see Chapter 1, 5 and 6). Alf describes a typical scenario:

Alf: We are going to get two guys off the back of the fire engine wearing sets ready to go ... so we drag a reel off and we get them to the front door, get them in the place. ... While this is all going on *it takes a few seconds* .. there is always more than one officer, *that’s when the situation is assessed*. You gain knowledge from neighbours, from people outside and you can’t always take notice of everybody. Basically speaking, yeah, you have got to get into action straight away, but while all this is going on, *it’s simultaneous*. ... but you *could halt it as fast*. ... You get two blokes up the staircase and you then find something out and you have got to get them out quickly. ... The whole time you are firefighting, or you are in situations that are potentially hazardous, it is nice to know that *the guy outside* is looking after my arse. If anything is going to go wrong and *he is going to get me out of here because once you’re in, you don’t know the worst of it.*
[My emphasis].

Both Duke and Alf refer to *the extra seconds* a skilled firefighter puts into thinking about safety. It is easy to see the how Alf’s watch have developed protocols to gain extra time. These include: rigging in BA on route to the fire; getting the hosereel off immediately on arrival; assessing the situation on the move. Alf’s use of the word “officers” is ubiquitous, ‘everyone’ outside would be watching out for those inside. As well as watching out for each other, they are also ‘watching’ in a more Foucaultian sense to provide information for the post-mortem. Firefighters will be conscious of this gaze and might expect their watch to sanction them if they do not follow their protocols.

In a focus group, Pete indicates how firefighters make decisions based on the incoming evidence, rather than actually, “throwing caution to the wind” (Jones 1997).

Pete: You have gone into a building and you have suddenly thought, ‘hang about, I don’t really want to be here’. And you sort of hold fire a bit. And you’re in the doorway and you shouldn’t, there is no purpose in .. *tiles on the floor* and that is saying to you, ‘you shouldn’t be there’ init? ... but if somebody is reported you still have a little go.

There comes a point *you have got to know your limits*. Cos, you could cause problems with *other people*.
[My emphases].

There are judgements going on here. Pete's constant comparative analysis suggests caution, "tiles on the floor" could be a sign that the roof may be in danger of collapsing. Pete makes his own decision, he will go *just so far*. There is a fire service expression 'one hand for *The Job*, the other for yourself'²¹⁸. Simply translated this suggests firefighters should always look to their own personal safety whilst they are firefighting²¹⁹. This will not prevent Pete from having, "a little go" to rescue someone, but Pete has a responsibility to the, "other people", who are *backing him up*. Experiential knowledge suggests trust goes two ways: Pete, like Alf, trusts his colleagues (both with him in the fire and outside) will try to rescue him in an emergency, but he also recognises he should not abuse that trust by risk taking for no real purpose. As in the case of the probationers above, such understandings make it more likely that elder firefighters will rein in the recklessness of youth, because if probationers get into trouble then it is the elder firefighters outside who *will not have the option of judging a risk*, but be expected to take '*real*' risks to their own lives to rescue them. Proving you can '*fit in*' by *getting in* not only requires bravado, but also consideration for your colleagues and yourself.

Away from the focus group, I asked Pete about the 'new' idea of *dynamic risk assessment* that I learnt about at FSC (see Chapter 5). His answer is almost a denial that he knows about it, but what Pete does not recognise is that his earlier account indicates he (unconsciously) routinely practices such behaviour.

Pete: I haven't actually been trained that way. I am so used to *getting in* there and *getting involved* and you quite *enjoy getting in* there. It's in your mind you have got to put that fire out. Em *whether it's persons reported or not doesn't always matter*. You *seem to be programmed* to put that fire out and then sometimes you think what am I doing it's a bit dodgy here. I shouldn't be in this situation and you seem to know that, sense that and *you come back a bit*.
[My emphases].

Pete is a *good firefighter*, he wants to *get in*, regardless of whether the fire is 'persons reported' or not and this relates back to my earlier argument. He may not formally acknowledge dynamic risk assessment and he may believe he is, "programmed," *but he knows when to stop*. It is his decision to step back, as Alf and Alex did (noted earlier) and these are *learnt decisions* ones that make for *good firefighters*. *Getting in* may pay dividends, but Duke, Alf and Pete will use their experience and position in the informal hierarchy to temper the inexperience of youth: they will not award the label of a *good firefighter* to those who risk their lives unnecessarily. It is possible to suggest that rather than 'throwing caution to the wind' as Jones (1997) suggests, firefighters are involved in complicated and skilful acts when they *get in* at a fire. Firefighters may be far from reckless and as the list of motivations develops it may be possible to suggest that the adrenaline rush firefighters appear to seek, may not be so much a suicidal challenge, but rather a carefully planned adventure. It may even be that firefighters have found a way of complying with their professional ethos and at the same time *testing themselves against their masculine standards*: a consideration that may involve some addition to the end of Hypothesis 2 concerning the *why* of firefighting and this will be considered in the conclusion.

²¹⁸ According to Lloyd-Elliott (1992) the expression stems from the need to hang on to the fire appliance in earlier times when firefighters sat on the outside of an open appliance and rigged on route to the fire, using one hand to and the other to get dressed.

²¹⁹ As the firefighters at the start did by "*making safe the stairs*."

3.6. NOT 'FITTING IN'

There was one interesting example of a firefighter who may not *'fit in'*. His evidence is almost a corroboration of much of my argument that firefighters might encourage their public image:

Bob: No I don't, not so far as sort of a macho sort of buzz. I get a sort of buzz as far as *'oh good it breaking the monotony, oh good we can go out, I wonder what we are going to have'*. *I don't* get what I call a huge sort of adrenaline, if you like. Maybe I did sort of at first sort of month, but now I think, and I don't know whether or not that is to do with the fact that all the jobs that we have been on, none of them really. I have *never* sort of got to a job that's been yunnoo, a job.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 1.25 years' service) [My emphases].

Bob's words are suggesting some resistance to the norm. I make this argument particularly because, contrary to his argument here, Bob *had been to a large fire*. In another part of the interview he explains how, unlike Ted, he did not queue up to *get in*. He chose instead to help the pump operator. Is Bob 'different' to other firefighters?

Bob: I enjoy coming to work; I enjoy the shifts; I love working nights; I like the way we work. ... When I sort of started, I thought that it's *macho* and what not ... the only experiences I can go on from the time I have been on station, none of it has been particularly brave and macho. Em so I don't, I have *never* felt as I am some big brave macho type.
[My emphases]

Bob is uncompromisingly critical of firefighters image with the public.

Bob, cont.: *I sort of laugh at it with my girl friend now, yunnoo*. She sort of says, she, she, I mean her work colleagues and that, when they all sort of say, 'ah come on, you're a fireman, you're a fireman'. She just looks at them and thinks, 'what are you like', because *she knows obviously what the majority of this job entails*. And she looks and thinks, and I think, 'if they only knew what the majority of it was like'. Yeah I am not about to say there aren't some firemen that haven't done some incredibly brave things, but I haven't. ... *On nights, my other half compares me just to going round my mate's house. And eh sitting down and having a meal and watching telly and having a laugh*. Probably from *what I say to her* that is the impression she gets. Em, and, em, that is probably the impression I give her. Even when friends ask, I find myself, sort of, playing it down and I think to myself, 'why do I say that, *we are all going to be found out*'. And I think, *I dunnoo if there is this big fear that firemen are afraid of being found out*, because if this is the job, what I am doing? Yunnoo, *a lot of the time doing nothing*. Em, then the big myths, I still think that there is still *that myth out there* that people, *especially women*, how they regard firemen if you like. Now I am experiencing it, *it aint true*. I know I used, em, to sort of yunnoo, when I saw a fire engine go past and it was at the stage when I was applying, I sort of thought, '*Oh my God, I couldn't*'. Yunnoo, '*they must be brave, big and strong*'.
[My emphases].

Has Bob 'spilt the beans'? In many ways what Bob has said challenges some of the predominant images given by most firefighters: "*none of it has been particularly brave and macho ... if they only knew what the majority of it was like ... watching telly and having a laugh ... being found out ... myth out there, especially women*." Bob's extract supports the view that firefighters support, if not provide, much of the image that the public have of them. Bob may lack dramaturgical loyalty (that males/firefighters keep secrets; see Chapters 4-6). However, Bob did give the impression that one reason for him joining the fire service was to 'prove' himself, "I sort of thought, 'Oh my God, I

couldn't'. Yunnoo, 'they must be brave big and strong'." Bob might have 'proved' himself right and failed when he tested himself against the standard of a *good firefighter*. That might explain why he helps the pump operator rather than behaving like Ted and queuing up to *get in*. Bob has not left the fire service, but he may be destined for 'better things'. Having already passed his first promotion examination, Bob may choose to leave the firestation and become an officer (see Chapters 4 and 5). It is possible that Bob may not actually have 'the backbone' for firefighting, something firefighters do not like in their colleagues²²⁰. Dominic explains:

Dominic: There was a fellow on this watch a few years' ago, everybody thought he was a *big tough guy*. He had been in the military police. He left this job and went into the police in London to join a special unit to go out and beat up people who have a punch up. He was just a bully, but he had two BA jobs in the time he was on the watch and *he ran out of both of them*. This was the big tough guy who could do anything. (in a focus group) [My emphases].

DB: What did the watch do about that?

Dominic: He was .. mentioned to him that it was not the right thing to do.

Experiential knowledge suggests that at this stage Dominic decided not to fully explain what would have happened. "Mentioned it was not a good thing to do", probably could convert to mean something stronger. The, "tough guy" (Ricky) eventually resigned, but what happened to him in the meantime? Guy indicates he was marginalised.

Guy: He sat in the middle for the rest of his career.

It is important to relay some more experiential knowledge. At the start of each shift there is a roll call and two BA '*wearers*' are nominated for each appliance as the firefighters who *get in*. The third firefighter sits in the middle, is last off the appliance and will carry out the support duties *outside* the job: provide the water; run out the hose; be the BA control officer; *help the pump operator*. They are unlikely to *get in* and most firefighters 'jockey' not to be in the middle.

The same focus group provided some more information about how important it is to firefighters to be able to trust their colleagues. To reinforce their beliefs firefighters will often use '*fire service humour*', which can be debilitating for those on the receiving end (see Chapter 4). However, relaying scenarios to new recruits is another way, and this focus group 'invented' a scenario to explain their understandings to me of how they might react if a crew member gives up too early and causes the BA crew, who must stay together (see Chapters 1 and 5), to leave the fire:

Thomas: You would have to go with them, but you would feel rough about it. When you come out *you would certainly have a go at them*, confront them with it. In the extreme you would confront them in front of an officer. Whether they're a mate or not. (Brigade two, firefighter, 2.5 years' service, age 25, in a focus group). [My emphasis].

Thomas supports an earlier view by Jo, and Alex that fear must be contained. Fear spreading to panic is dangerous, because it can result in firefighters:

- running away, endangering themselves and the colleague/s they leave in the building;

²²⁰ Firefighters do not take kindly to colleagues who run away because they cannot overcome their fear (see Howell 1996). One of firefighters' prime rules is that firefighters never *get in* alone, they must always be in at least pairs and they must stay together. If circumstances are such that one of them thinks that they should withdraw from the fire, then the understanding is that they should both withdraw. However, withdrawing from a fire will have to be explained to the watch and the pressure to *get in* and stay in is considerable. As with Alf (above) firefighters consider it to be a potentially 'humiliating' experience if they withdraw.

- panicking and forgetting the protocols (“off head on cabbage ... headless chicken” above);
- not being prepared to *get in* to rescue a trapped colleague.

However, if a colleague gives in to their fear, they may also:

- betray firefighters’ professional ethos;
- damage the way the public view them;
- spoil firefighters’ ‘adventure’ when they *get in*.

The evidence here suggests that firefighters look forward to fires for several reasons. Apart from providing them with the opportunity to fulfil their professional ethos, a fire may also provide firefighters with the opportunity to test/increase their status, on the watch, in their community and personally. However, the analysis that follows will indicate that the explanation may be far more complex than suggested here already. It will also prepare the ground for the next chapter and for the final chapter, which will develop the analysis even further.

3.7. CONCLUSION

From the way firefighters talk, their overwhelming motivation for *getting in* is humanitarian/professional and this is taken into account in Hypotheses 1 and 2, and in the early development of Hypothesis 3. However, as the chapter unfolds there is an increasing suggestion that some firefighters are promoting personal agendas when they *get in* and this possibility helps in developing the latter categories of Hypothesis 3. Some motivations, are for personal gratification, almost a dividend individual firefighters get from firefighting such as adrenaline seeking. It is possible to see adrenaline-seeking from two perspectives. Firstly, it can be an immediate gratification for *getting in*. However, the dividend of adrenaline might also encourage firefighters to retain their enthusiasm to do a difficult and dangerous job for up to 30 years. The same view may apply to the dividend firefighters may get when they successfully test themselves against the standards of a *good firefighter*; this also provides a motivation to continue to do *a job that many rational people would not want to do, even once*. The possibility that firefighters are testing themselves may involve some adjustment to the suggestion, in Hypothesis 1, that firefighters are only testing their protocols for firefighting when they *get in*, and a slight adjustment to the ending of Hypothesis 2.

Viewing firefighters’ motivations as entirely personal does not account for the possibility that firefighters must work with and gain the acceptance of, the watch, and proving to yourself that you are a *good firefighter*, may ‘prove’ it to the watch (and the public) as well. In particular, the informal hierarchy on the watch will expect *good firefighters* to comply with protocols, overcome fear when confronted with danger and not endanger colleagues. It may be that all firefighters’ personal agendas are drawn and develop from factors, which they choose for themselves for their own purpose from those the watch provide. This has led to firefighters being able to share, plan and fill a vacuum left by officers (who no longer lead firefighters at fires; see Chapter 1). Firefighters’ preplanning is an ideal way to incorporate new firefighters and preserve group safety. This may involve firefighters giving up some free-will to the group; however, this thesis will show that many firefighters join the fire service with very clear understandings that they need to *fit in* with informal hierarchies because they expect dividends for doing so (but perhaps do not realise how much *fitting in* they will do; see Chapters 3-6).

3.7.1. Homosociality

This thesis will shortly provide evidence to suggest that firefighters’ informal hierarchy also replicates dominant masculine standards and patriarchal practices not entirely connected to firefighting. It may even be that recruits acceptance of these standards/practices might be a requirement before experienced firefighters are happy to share their firefighting skills with them. It must also be remembered that the fire service is an institutionally sexist organisation that prefers to exclude women

and will harass other groups they consider unsuitable to be firefighters: *either to exclude them, or force them to behave in an appropriate manner* (see Baigent 1996). Lipman-Blumen (1976, see also Cockburn 1991b: 189) would have little difficulty identifying these processes as homosocial, since they involve men passing on their social and physical resources to chosen men and in denying them to 'others'.

However, both Cockburn (1991b) and Lipman-Blumen (1976) see the possibility of this behaviour tipping over into homoerotic desire. Roper (1996) makes a very similar argument and is more persuasive about the possible homosexual implications in this behaviour, but I have my reservations as to if the desire male firefighters have for working together is in fact an erotic one²²¹. With this exception I wish to develop the views of both Lipman-Blumen (1976) and Cockburn (1991b) and use the working example of Cockburn (1991a): an account that describes how men composers actually exclude women *and men* who did not *conform to their standards*. These three texts provide some basis to suggest that many of the skills²²², which pass within a chosen/sponsored group of men, are not 'just' work skills, but skills men learn to support their hegemony (see Lorber 1994: 231; Kanter 1977: 181-6 above; see Chapters 4-6). Firefighters can behave like printers and other workers who may prefer the "orderly reproduction between generations [of men], where experiential learning is valued as a way of coming to know technique and values" (Strangleman and Roberts 1999: 63). But this might not *just* occur *to keep power amongst the patriarchy*. Firefighters might *also* prefer to pass on their skills to other men, because firefighters believe commonsense beliefs that only men can be masculine (see Connell 1995; HMCIFS, 1998; Chapter 1). If this is so then firefighters may also believe that only men can achieve the standards, which form part of the trust implicit in firefighters' skills. In particular, because lives are at stake when firefighters enter a burning building, they want to know their colleagues will not run away and leave them when confronted with danger. Therefore, being a firefighter and staying safe is not simply a matter of learning physical skills. It is equally a matter of ensuring that you can trust your colleagues and *to 'prove' to them that they can trust you*. The tests that Seidler (1997) suggests men constantly seek to pass to achieve and what I see as the "false monolith of what men are supposed to be" (Hearn 1996: 211) may have a very real meaning to firefighters whose life might depend on a colleague. This may

²²¹ Lipman-Blumen describes homosocial as, "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex. It is distinguished from 'homosexual' in that it does not *necessarily* involve (although it may under certain circumstances) an explicitly erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex. The basic premise of this homosocial view of sex roles suggests that men are attracted to, stimulated by, and interested in other men" (Lipman-Blumen 1976: 16). Cockburn (1991b) also uses the term homosocial and recognises the possibility of erotic motives in this behaviour. Roper, (1988, 1996) is also inclined to this view and recognises the emotional and sometimes erotic bonds between men. However, the way he sees men as preening their appearance, closely relates to how the military and to a certain extent the fire service, put an emphasis on appearance (see, Dixon 1994). When emotions do develop between men in uniform, I think that rather than because they appear enticing, it is because they are put together in dangerous situations: a time when they do not look so good (see Barker 1992, 1994, 1996; Holden 1998). One point in Roper's argument that I would challenge is his argument that "life at the sharp end" (1996: 214) has phallic connotations. Of course whilst this is always in the eye of the beholder, when firefighters say they are "at the sharp end," they mean where the firefighting is done and they might equally as easily say "at the cutting edge." I accept my interpretation is still liable to the critique I am showing dramaturgical loyalty to firefighters and arguing to suppress the possibility firefighters may have sexual desires/erotic motives towards other firefighters of the same sex, but I remain unconvinced this is so. It may be my closeness to firefighters might have hidden the possibility that some male firefighters physically attract other male firefighters, but I was looking for it and during my fieldwork I found no suggestions of erotic or homosexual behaviour between male firefighters. I realise that there are gay male and female firefighters. The one firefighter who admitted to their homosexuality during an interview, did not in anyway lead me to believe their sexuality was related to their being a firefighter. Rather it might be considered exactly the opposite applies and it is accepted that firefighters generally police sexual boundaries with the threat of not being actively heterosexual is to be less of a man: a feminised 'other' (see Hollway 1996: 28-30; see Chapter 5). This is not to deny in any way that firefighters were not involved in the physical contact and camaraderie/horseplay recognised by Lipman-Blumen, (1976; see Hearn and Parkin 1987: 137-139; Collinson 1988; Cockburn 1991b) and it may be that firefighters handle their fear of homosexuality by compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia. This is not to suggest that Firefighters do not have emotions, but I would argue that most firefighters do not aim these erotically towards members of their own sex, at least whilst at work.

²²² These might also be identified as a "*chain of ceremony*" (Goffman 1997c: 29).

then explain firefighters' preference to hang out with other males (see Roper 1996) and to find out if there are any Ricky's (see above).

Notwithstanding firefighters lack of erotic motive towards their own sex, I do believe that male firefighters prefer to work with people they see as like them. Therefore, the concept of homosociality might help us to understand the way that males in the fire service might wish to sponsor other males as opposed to females. It could be that male firefighters might prefer male recruits, because they expect them to have already started to learn the particular masculine understandings that firefighters informal hierarchies develop into protocols surrounding firefighting. Ignoring for the moment the hegemonic reasons why embodied masculine standards have developed over the centuries, it is important to recognise that some of those standards might be positive and very close to those that *good firefighters* require if they are to continue to fight fires as they currently do. In so much as Kanter (1977: 3) recognises that both Marx and Smith consider the job makes the person, it may be interesting if this thesis were to recognise that firefighters' masculine standards, so treasured by male firefighters, which may help to perpetuate men's hegemony, *are not limited to men*, but socially learnt and *available to women*. In particular, it has to be recognised that if firefighters' masculinity can be related to the way firefighters do their job, then the final chapter should consider how to describe the gender of those female firefighters who gain the human capital to be seen as *good firefighters*.

3.7.2. Heroes

Firefighters in popular literature (see Whalen 1980; Cooper 1986; Delson 1992; Lloyd-Elliott 1992; Wallington and Holloway 1994) are afforded a heroic imagery. However, it is a feature of this thesis that the firefighters I interviewed did not overtly boast about heroism. This reluctance was difficult to understand because the heroic status afforded to firefighters should be a dividend for their willingness to help the public in sometimes difficult and dangerous situations. I speculate that this may be a form of image manipulation (see Goffman 1997b), through which firefighters, denying their heroism, actually accentuate the image of the heroic firefighter. Experiential reflection reminds me that my peer group ridiculed any firefighter who boasted of their heroism: a lesson that pays dividends once individual firefighters recognise for themselves that shy heroes are more popular than a brash ones²²³. Not appearing brash though does not prevent firefighters from gaining a dividend by 'innocently' linking themselves with the rescues made by other firefighters. When firefighters' argue 'there may be someone in there' (and they know there is not), their suggestion serves as a reminder to the public that firefighters are selfless heroes: a form of dramaturgical loyalty that might also cover up the risk taking that firefighters are involved in when they *get in* just to test/prove their image (see Chapter 5). This may be an example of one more homosocial understanding that passes between generations of chosen firefighters. Hypothesis 1 will be amended to reflect this and the previous discussion.

3.7.3. The hypotheses

I now have a set of linked hypotheses, which might answer my questions about firefighting. First, in answer to the question, '*how* do firefighters develop the protocols and skills necessary for firefighting?', I suggest Hypothesis 1:

*Initial training teaches firefighters about the tools of their job, but once on a watch it is almost inevitable that probationers must turn to experienced firefighters to learn about firefighting: **The Job**. They will be taught that the most effective way of putting out a fire is to get in as **close** to the fire as possible, as **quickly** as possible **contingent with the danger** involved and then turn the water on. However, firefighters' **training never ends**, is both on and off the job, involving a*

²²³ This is a combination of dramaturgical discipline (Goffman 1959: 216), not over acting; and dramaturgical circumspection (Goffman 1959: 218), arranging in advance how to manage the show.

continual round of **experiential learning** as watches build trust within the group, share and develop their collective knowledge to agree **protocols** for getting in **safely**. Watch officers are part of this process and act as a channel to share and discuss this knowledge up and down between their wider networks and the watch. The transfer of knowledge may be such that each cohort of firefighters has **access to 'all' the knowledge**, past and present about 'The Job'. This sharing is a homosocial process and alongside the protocols for firefighting, the watch might pass up and down there are other protocols, some of which require firefighters to take part in a series of dramaturgical acts to 'prove' they are good firefighters.

In answer to the question 'what does getting in mean to firefighters?', I suggest Hypothesis 2 as amended:

*Firefighting involves firefighters **getting into** a building where they might be little or no visibility, in hot and dangerous conditions. To do this safely firefighters will need to have confidence in their partner's and their own abilities to **keep a cool head, not panic** and to follow watch protocols for firefighting as they compare what they are experiencing at the fire, against **their prior knowledge**, to hypothesise how to get **safely** into a position close enough to the fire to turn the water on. If they do this successfully, they not only avoid 'water-damage', they have also taken part in a test to 'prove' themselves against the standards of a **good firefighter**.*

In answer to the question 'why, given the apparent danger involved, do firefighters get in at a fire?', I suggest Hypothesis 3:

The majority of firefighters argue they are intent on getting in to beat the fire and this supports the professional ethos, but other testing and image building processes are at work at the same time. Getting in is not a reckless process, but skilled use of firefighters' understanding of the risks involved that have been discussed in hypotheses 1 and 2, to enable firefighters to balance their actions on the safe side of recklessness for what may be a range of other motivations:

- a. Humanitarian: at persons reported incidents firefighters might be prepared to go that bit further and risk their lives to save others.*
- b. Professional Humanitarian: the fire service is a last resort, if the fire service gives up the situation is lost.*
- c. Professional Pride: firefighting is a skill to be proud of and defended;*
- d. Professional Cavalier: firefighters are professionals, who may not follow the rules when firefighting, but will innovate to get the job done to the best of their ability.*
- e. Professional Adventurer: there may be more to firefighting than just instrumental reasons of pay and professional satisfaction, it could also be a way of raising adrenaline levels, almost a dangerous sport.*
- f. Testing: firefighters may be proving to the public, other firefighters and themselves that they 'fit in' with the image of a 'good firefighter' when they are getting in (a Foucaultian gaze).*
- g. Status building: getting in may adds to the public's image of firefighting.*

These three hypotheses do not explain the two firefighters who do not appear to *fit in*: Ricky left the fire service and whilst (Bob) might not be so happy to *get in* he has stayed. Bob's situation is yet to be understood and will be born in mind for the remaining chapters.

Looking back on what I have found, it might be that the way some firefighters *get in* is a test of not only of their ability to be seen as a *good firefighter* but also of their masculinity (see Seidler 1997). However, testing, because it adds an incentive for firefighters to save life and property, is positive for the public because it ensures that firefighters are always keen to go to fires and *get in*

when they get there. Testing is also positive for firefighters, because they know their colleagues share the same understandings as themselves, are also trying to pass the same test and are unlikely to let them down. However, if homosociality ‘forces’ firefighters into proving their masculinity by *getting in* faster and further than is necessary, then this creates some difficulties in seeing firefighters’ actions as entirely positive. Given the current lack of knowledge about the dynamics of what is happening here, trying to separate the way firefighters test themselves from their stated desire to help the public might have knock-on effects that upset the status quo: the ways in which generations of firefighters have spent time in preparing for a fire. In particular the way they fit their team together, which is not only desirable, but may be essential in such a potentially dangerous occupation. One important outcome of this process (whether it is to allow firefighters to ‘prove’ themselves or to support their professional ethos) is that firefighters share their experiential knowledge within their hierarchy and (innocently) develop protocols that improve their ability to firefight more efficiently (and safely).

Before moving on it is interesting to note that female firefighters are also testing themselves against the standards of a *good firefighter* (similar standards to the ones that may ‘prove’ firefighters’ masculinity). As a pre-cursor to my final analysis, it is important to recollect that earlier I argue that the way this behaviour develops is a form of homosociality, which involves firefighters passing on their skills to people like themselves — people with their understandings about testing against masculine standards. These types of gender solidarity are only generally understood as happening *exclusively* between men, or between women, as a group (see Lipman-Blumen 1976). That female firefighters appear to be participating in firefighters’ hierarchy, meeting the standards for firefighters’ masculinity and positively enjoy the experience, suggests they must be part of the homosocial process too. It also increases the question mark over how to describe female firefighters’ gender. Both these issues will be considered in the next chapter, which looks at firefighters relations at the station, and in subsequent chapters.

4. CHAPTER FOUR RELATIONS AT THE STATION: *FITTING IN*

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on firefighters' relations at the station and seeks to answer the question, 'how do firefighters organise their social relations at the station?'. The term '*fitting in*' will feature throughout because it is common currency in the fire service and everyone, from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire service to recruit firefighters, uses the term. Ted provides an example of how a firefighter might explain *fitting in*:

Ted: Like when we were new, until they think they can *trust* you, you are not going to be accepted. You are, but it takes time to *get in* and when they know they can trust you and you *fit in*.
(Brigade 1, firefighter, 1.25 years' service, age 23). [My emphases].

Ted's use of the word "get in" is unconnected to *getting in* at a fire, he is referring to how a probationer might 'get in' or '*fit in*' with the watch²²⁴. Ted's use of the word "trust," also has a slightly different meaning to the 'trust' that firefighters develop to ensure their colleagues have the same standards as them whilst firefighting, but it may be wrong to see it as unconnected. In previous chapters, I have hinted that apart from firefighting, firefighters may use their hierarchy to organise other agendas. '*Fitting in*' could be one of these agendas: a second way firefighters test for '*trust*', but this time not only about firefighting but equally as much about the taken for granted understandings that exist between men through which they organise *patriarchal relations* (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Willis 1977; Hartmann 1981; DiTomaso 1989: 88; Jackson 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Hearn 1994; Connell 1989, 1995; Collinson 1992, 1996; Office for Public Management 1996; Seidler 1997; Walby 1986, 1990, 1997; Grint 1998²²⁵). Firefighters do not publicly acknowledge that their relations are patriarchal, but neither do they acknowledge their informal hierarchy and I am unsure as to the extent to which they recognise it themselves. However, I am convinced that the notion of trust between firefighters extends to a point where there are understandings that they do not consciously reveal and they act to hide. Firefighters' hierarchy and agendas may be amongst these, and this chapter investigates what it means to '*fit in*' at a station, the extent of the involvement of firefighters' hierarchies in this process and looks for patriarchal agendas.

The chapter starts by suggesting that informal hierarchies come as no surprise to new recruits: their knowledge of such hierarchies has been part of their life in families and at school. School, as Prendergast and Forrest (1998; also see Willis 1977; Jackson 1990; Seidler 1997; Connell 2000) explain, is where boys (and girls) learn about hierarchies. For boys their hierarchy has a base: first, on age, then size; second, on the toughness that leaders in the group are able to portray. Prendergast and Forrest also suggest that although boys' hierarchies are embodied, proving your place in it rarely actually spills over into actual violence. Respect more often transfers through a series of messages and symbolic behaviours that younger boys learn from their peers. The outcome is that the alert younger boy recognises that older boys get respect from the younger boys and use this observation to his advantage. He will defer his gratification: first, accepting the hierarchy; then when his time comes by displaying measured aggression he gets respect (see Willis 1977; Jackson 1990; Seidler 1997). It is, of course, men's understanding of hierarchies that underpins a great many patriarchal and homosocial relations (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Segal 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Walby 1997). However, it is important to identify if when these homosocial relations occur, they do so to ensure firefighters *fit in* with fire related safety protocols *or other agendas*, in particular sexism.

²²⁴ Firefighters language can at times be confusing, they do not have precise meanings for words, in this case and the next, their words may almost require an in-house translator.

²²⁵ Chodorow (1978, 1994, 1997) points to fact that women, universally, are largely responsible for early child care will have much to do with the way men organise patriarchal relations.

To do this I am going to investigate: first, what are ‘the expectations and realities surrounding a probationer who arrives on the watch at the bottom of the hierarchy, even if they are an automatic member of the hierarchy, and then try to follow how a firefighter might climb the ‘rounds’ (as firefighters call the steps of their ladders). The emphasis of this chapter is that, despite sometimes being unhappy with the way the informal hierarchy operates, most firefighters appear to *fit in* with it, and importantly expect that by joining and climbing the hierarchy they will receive dividends for doing so. To explain how this may occur I again develop a series of hypotheses, which may help explain some patterns or stages of reaction by firefighters to the informal hierarchy. Three types of resistance emerge. The first, the most common form, appears almost a rite of passage through which firefighters test their status on each ‘round’ of the hierarchy. The second resistance involves leaving the watch, either on promotion or by transferring sideways into ‘staff’ (support departments). The third resistance is very rare and involves an individual not accepting the authority of the informal hierarchy despite the enormous pressure for them to do so.

4.2. THE GAZE OF EXPERIENCED FIREFIGHTERS

4.2.1. Watching

The previous chapter has shown that efficient watches will develop trust amongst themselves by establishing protocols for firefighting and then submitting to their own gaze and that of the watch to ‘prove’ they can be trusted not to let themselves and the watch down. Therefore, any newcomer to the watch might disrupt these protocols and endanger the team²²⁶. Dominic suggests everyone will be watching *him*:

Dominic: If a *bloke* joins a watch, obviously everyone is looking at *him*. Whether *he* has come from training school or another station/watch. Everyone is looking at *him* consciously, or not. They’re sussing out *his* good points, *his* bad points.
(Brigade 2, leading firefighter, 24 years’ service, age 45, in a focus group). [My emphases].

Dominic’s language suggests he does not even consider that any newcomer might be a woman. His reaction is a clear example of how male firefighters’ language marginalises women. Cockburn (1991a) suggests that women who join a predominantly male workforce, present a threat to the taken for granted trust that exists between males (see Kanter 1977: 208-242; Salaman 1986: 38; Cockburn 1991b). In the context that Cockburn uses trust, she refers to men believing that women will undo their comfortable social relationships/understandings, which have given order to their lives since at least their school days (see Prendergast and Forrest 1998 above). Male firefighters have more than ‘proved’ they will respond badly to women in these circumstances (see Hearn and Parkin 1987, 1995: 74; Walby 1990: 52; Howell 1994; Baigent 1996; Lee 1996; Richards 1996; Archer 1998; HMIFS 1999). However, there is a requirement to look past Dominic’s sexism, to consider how difficult this area is in an organisation where ‘trust’ is also about ‘safety’. As the example of Ricky (the ‘tough guy’ in Chapter 3) has shown, until tested, any newcomer might run out of the building, or present a similar threat to safety. Therefore, surveillance might identify if the newcomer presents a challenge to the protocols that all firefighters develop in relation to safety. However, it might also be that the watch will want to know if a recruit will support their taken for granted masculine understandings. More likely the watch’s gaze will be testing for both, because the links between the two understandings make them currently contingent on each other.

4.2.2. Advice

²²⁶ To an extent anyone who joins a watch (probationer, experienced firefighter, or officer), is treated similarly, but their experience will normally ensure they *fit in* easier than a probationer. Of course a new officer might become a new broom and try to change the watch, but most will have sufficient *common understandings* to ensure they at least settle in before trying to make any changes (see Chapter 1).

After the findings of Chapter 3 there can be little doubt that probationers should follow the advice of recruit-trainers and watch-commanders, and seek out an experienced firefighter to ‘teach them the ropes’. Duke explains the advice he might give, emphasising that the team already have rules for safety and that the probationer should not disrupt these. Probationers should listen and learn:

Duke: You are *not an individual*; you are coming in straight away to *be part of a team*: a team that hopefully know what they are doing with regard to, first of all, to *safety*. And you have got to come in and just *accept*, whatever *age you are*, however *clever you are*, that you have got to start and em, em, and absorb, *absorb that knowledge*.
(Brigade 1, firefighter, 25 years’ service, age 51). [My emphases].

Duke’s argument emphasises the importance of the informal hierarchy and regardless of their age or cleverness, the relative unimportance of the probationer. Duke might also be concerned that newcomers will try to interfere with current protocols. Christian is clearer, what the team do not need is for someone to try to change things:

Christian: Well it’s the tradition. They need to be able to *fit in* .. without being lairy and start *telling you .. how to do it*. If they have got a good idea, I listen, but I don’t like people who come along and tell me, yunnoo .. very loud and *trigger happy*²²⁷.
(Brigade 1, leading firefighter 20 years’ service, age 38). [My emphases].

Ian’s answer is even more direct:

Ian: Just keep your head down and keep your gob shut for a little while and see what happens.
(Brigade 2, firefighter, 8 years’ service, age 30, in a focus group).

It appears that the majority of experienced firefighters will expect probationers to conform with the way the watch organises. Forcing probationers to *fit in* is hardly conducive to equal opportunities, but given the expectation that probationers must immediately ‘ride’ to fires (see Chapter 3) it would be easy to justify Duke’s, Christian’s and Ian’s attitude as a temporary safety arrangement. However, Alf provides some indication that it is not only *safety* that probationers must *fit in* with, but also *social understandings*:

Alf: Now there is a guy I work with, he has just joined, he is nineteen, I was eighteen. I got these mirror images of me at eighteen and the way I had to behave. *I had to behave*. I wasn’t allowed to behave the way I wanted, *I just had to conform*. This young guy has come in and *he can sit around the table and have an opinion* with serving members, even the OIC²²⁸ ... He has only been out of training school six months ... I had been in *The Job* five years’ before I would have dared to make some of the utterances that he has.
(Brigade 3, firefighter, 25 years’ service, age 46). [My emphases].

Alf has a difficulty relating his probationary experience with that of the current probationer. Alf’s comments may be simply nostalgic (for times past when he believes recruits were more respectful) and he may have difficulty in accepting that the way the watch has organised will change over time (as has society). Alerted to some difference between expectation and outcome, I pursued this matter further by asking about watch organisation:

²²⁷ This use again of military language is similar to another fire service expression ‘shooting off your mouth’; both suggest speaking out inappropriately.

²²⁸ Officer in charge of the watch: the watch-commander.

Alf: I work on a watch strength of sixteen; if you take out the four officers, *they have to administer*, ... You are talking about twelve firefighters, we have female, ethnic minorities, two of. ... I am the longest serving firefighter ... there is another guy who has got four years' less than me and the rest go down from 15 years' to 10 to 5 to six months. ... I find that the *15 to 20 year intake resent the attitude that he has got far more than I do*. But, I am not so sure that is because I am 45 and they are 35 and they are still fiery and up for an argument. I suppose that when I was 35 I was the same ... let them argue it out, it's not that important. ... the five year blokes are well tuned in with the blokes who have only done two years' ... *so they gradually step into line with each other*. So there is always somebody on the watch that you have got a rapport with; you know there is somebody behind you; somebody in front of you. Somebody you can relate to or with, whether he has done a few years' more or a few years' less. And there are outspoken personalities who dig their heels in and not accept any change, they are becoming rarer, more often than not people gradually come to accept change and reform. *You know there is somebody behind you somebody in front of you*. [My emphases].

Alf suggests that officers "have to administer." He then explains how firefighters' informal hierarchy organises during officers' absence. His explanation provides a considerable insight on how the watch organise to "gradually step into line with each other" in an informal hierarchy linked to 'time served'. Such an arrangement allows experienced firefighters to provide an example for 'younger' firefighters to follow. However, Alf recognises that he may (currently) be handing down this responsibility to the next cohort who are "still fiery and up for an argument." This suggests that getting the watch to *fit in* may not always be so easy, or important to him as he nears retirement. These relationships, through which experienced firefighters police younger members behaviour, have previously been connected to firefighting (see Chapter 3). What Alf is talking about are relations at the station and Chapter 1 suggests that when the informal hierarchy and the watch-commander come to an 'arrangement' life at the station can be comfortable (see Chapter 5). This alone is an important motivator for maintaining firefighters' hierarchy, but time served also provides status in the hierarchy. Recognising this dividend can then become an important motivator to maintain the informal hierarchy, for both young and old (see Prendergast and Forrest 1998). It may also explain why Alf and the other experienced firefighters above have such strong views regarding probationers' behaviour. Probationers (or any other newcomer) can always be somewhat problematic in that they bring the possibility of resistance to the informal hierarchy. In addition, if they do not *fit in*, they may well threaten the whole process. Resistance might even threaten the way that firefighters develop their firefighting protocols. Nonetheless, "sussing out .. bad .. good points," cannot be merely seen in a safety context, although firefighters frequently speak as if it is. Firefighters' surveillance of newcomers might also be a concern that they will not *fit in* with their social arrangements (see Hochschild 1983²²⁹; Cockburn 1991a; Chapters 1, 3, 5 and 6).

4.2.3. *Fitting in*

Chapter 3 suggests that probationers arriving on a watch have expectations and perhaps a little trepidation about *fitting in*. I asked some firefighters who had recently experienced this situation about their thoughts at that time; Jack is clear about what is expected:

Jack: *Keep your head down .. and .. and be quiet* and what have you, and then gradually. Yunnoo like .. that .. yunnoo, you feel allowed to be yourself a bit more and more. (Brigade 1, probationary firefighter, 1 year's service, age 27). [My emphases].

Richard expresses a very similar understanding to Jack:

²²⁹ Hochschild (1983) indicates that historically the 'carrying' of gender work relations by the group, beyond the individual, shows how institutions are a site of gender perpetuation and creation.

Richard: I have been *biting my tongue* with a lot of it while I am on probation; I think it is a requirement. Em, you just take it and *say nothing*. One, I *don't want to make it worse for myself* and two, I think it is a bit of *respect for the blokes who have been in The Job longer than I have*. Em .. but eh .. after a while, especially after I have done my probation, finished that .. then ... maybe. If I think that something needs saying then I will probably say it, but at the moment I am quiet happy with, eh, quite happy with not saying anything. *There is a lot of stuff that is a bit unfair, but that is the way it is*. I would like to think I would like to treat someone slightly better than I would be treated myself. *Not that I have been badly treated*.
(Brigade 1, probationary firefighter, one year's service, age 26) [My emphases].

As with most the firefighters I interviewed, both Jack and Richard realise that the watch expects probationers to be 'seen and not heard'. One feature of the language that is common to firefighters, regardless of their brigade, is the use of the term "keep your head down." This metaphorical use of language originates in the military where such action was necessary to avoid snipers. However, the meaning is clear and Richard's comments provide some indication that he realises the potential the watch have to make life 'difficult' should he be, "trigger happy" and start telling the watch how to organise. Jack and Richard appear to understand that if they bide their time, they can ease their way into the hierarchy and their views will eventually count. Ken, in contrast to Jack and Richard, has had little experience of paid work. However, he also appears to hear a similar message and accepts his 'novice' status:

Ken: What they are saying is ... 'keep your nose, keep your head down, keep enthusiastic, ask questions and be busy'. And that, and *that is what I am doing* and I spoke to the leading firefighter who I am following everywhere. If we get called to a job I am going to be *backing him up*, always getting to go in. I was chatting to him and he says 'that, at the moment, I seem to have the right attitude; doing really well'.
(Brigade 3, probationary firefighter, seven months' experience, age 19). [My emphases].

Ken's relative youth is no barrier to his accessing knowledge about informal hierarchies and he accepts what is happening, apparently without resistance. Roger is in little doubt about how the watch expect him to behave and then suggests a reason for his compliance:

Roger: Kept me mouth shut, kept me *head down* sort of thing; tried to get on with my work and that and do what ever I was told .. the *senior* members and that. You have just got to *fit in* with them haven't you?

I asked Roger why he had to *fit in*.

Roger: Yeah, you have heard stories and that, of people who come in and mouth off and that and so.

DB: And what happens to them?

Roger: You never really shake that in The job, once you get known as a *tosser*²³⁰.
[My emphasis].

²³⁰ This derogatory term for men that masturbate, or women who do it for them is typical of language used by males to feminise and thus subordinate other males (see Jackson 1990; Lewis 1991; Dixon 1994) by suggesting they cannot get proper sex. The term 'wanker' might easily have been used and individual's attempts to avoid such negative labels are a powerful social process (see Goffman 1997a).

Roger may be explaining one example of what Richard describes as, “making it worse for myself”, when he suggests a watch may actually ‘enforce’ their hierarchy by threatening to attach the label, “a tosser” to anyone who does not keep their “head down” and “mouths off.” Chapter 3 has already suggested how a watch sanction the dangerous practice of panicking at fires by telling stories which compare *panickers* with *good firefighters*. ‘Tosser’ is a similar negative label, which the watch use to police their norms, in this case by cautioning probationers against trying to change the way things are. Not unnaturally, most firefighters attempt to avoid the negative labels and chase the positive ones. Despite Alf’s earlier comment that young firefighters talk out of turn, all the probationers I spoke to would understand Ian’s message: “keep your gob shut.” The data so far suggests all firefighters will respect the informal hierarchy: Richard’s and Jack’s respect is equivocal; Ken’s acceptance is automatic; Roger’s expectation is enforced. This respect for the social dictates of the watch hierarchy occurs without any *formal* requirement for recruits to do so: a similar arrangement to the process which makes probationary firefighters go to experienced firefighters for their knowledge about firefighting (see Chapter 3).

4.2.4. Previous experience

Probationers may already have some ideas about how to fit it from their experience during recruit training (see Chapter 3). However, I did not expect that the *potential* recruits Ken and Lee would have the insight they so clearly have:

Ken: Probably the same way as I did coming to college. I changed slightly .. just a bit, yunnoo, to *get in* with people. ... You don’t come and just, don’t go in straight away. I suppose once you have been there, you loosen up a bit more, you just become yourself. (Potential recruit to the fire service, age 17).

When I asked Ken who he thought would be in charge, his understanding was even more surprising:

Ken: Em .. responsibility lies with the officer, but then it’s the men. *I think its the men, cos they are sort of one.* If they don’t want to do something or they don’t agree with something, then there going to say .. make the officer’s life a misery if they don’t think he is right. But then it is going back to the rules. It is like the officer who is in charge, *it’s like the college*, sometimes the class can rule over the teacher. (My emphases).

Lee explains his understanding of how informal hierarchies reinforce their power:

Lee: Not bullying as such, but piss taking and all that sort of thing at the station. I don’t think it would be bullying, just a wind up like ... like everyone does at college. (Potential recruit to the fire service, age 17).

Before joining the fire service, potential applicants have some understanding that they may need to *fit in*. Their knowledge about the workings of informal hierarchies could indicate that they have been talking to the experienced firefighters (above), but they have not. More likely, their experience of work, family life and socialising, reinforces their recognition of the playground hierarchy²³¹. As Willis (1977) suggests, school often prepares working class boys for their life at work. Ken and Lee are examples of this and Ken, in particular, relates his experience of the big boys at school who control the playground and sometimes the classroom, to the ‘older’ hands at the firestation. Ken understands that a hierarchy based on legitimate authority (teacher/officer) can have anomalies when a powerful informal group confronts it: a process that provides order at school, may also apply in the firestation. The same might apply to Jack, Richard, and Roger; they all appear to recognise that as

²³¹ Canaan (1996) and Willis (1995) suggest that young men, especially those in the pub scene, will find ‘playground posturing’ may not be enough to reinforce their place in society and acts of violence may be needed to support their status.

probationary firefighters that they will need to first *fit in* by respecting ‘older’ hands; then they can start to climb the hierarchy. This recognition is just one of the understandings that develop between males, but it underpins their patriarchal relations and the understandings that develop from them (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Kanter 1977; Hartmann 1981; DiTomaso 1989: 88; Segal 1990; Jackson 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Hearn 1994; Collinson 1996; Seidler 1997; Grint 1998). The arguments of Chapter 3 suggest firefighters’ informal hierarchy facilitates protocols for safety on the fireground, but it is my view that these understandings have their origins in the much wider set of relationships between males.

4.2.5. Behaviour learnt at work

Collinson (1988, 1992; see also Cockburn 1991a) describes how in the engineering workshop the younger man’s respect for the older man’s skills establishes a hierarchy between them in the formal areas at work, and that this formal authority then transfers to an informal hierarchy, which consolidates its authority by the pranks that reinforce an apprentice’s inferior status. Then, informal secondary agendas, which include compulsory heterosexuality and feminising the office staff, to support what Collinson (1994: 33) calls “resistance through distance,” can become almost as important part of the apprenticeship as the formal one. I discuss this area extensively in Chapter 5 but it may be that male firefighters, engineers and printers have chosen their career because they recognise the long-term gain of joining an informal hierarchy. The process may even be two-way and where work is organised through informal hierarchies the employers may even be looking for people who will have such understandings: a self-fulfilling prophecy²³².

4.2.6. Some recruitment criteria

Throughout the whole of my research, despite making considerable noises to the contrary, the fire service appears to be an organisation that is looking for the type of person who might understand (even enjoy) masculine hierarchies. The LFCDA (2000), a pro-active equality employer, asks questions of prospective firefighters²³³:

- Have you worked as part of a close-knit team?
- Are you prepared for the demands of working in a disciplined uniformed service in which you will have to take orders from other people?

To answer any of these questions negatively will ensure that applicants do not get to the next phase, the physical tests. These physical tests should also follow strict equal opportunities guidelines, but despite the best of intentions this is not happening as my time spent observing physical tests in Brigade 5 (not LFCDA) indicates²³⁴. Two recruitment officers had very clear opinions:

Frank: Would like to look for people like us, [then with cynicism] but not allowed.
 (ADO).

²³² I will return to this subject in Chapter 5, but it may be that organisations, which seek to deskill employees might wish to break informal hierarchies by a “corporate colonisation” (see Strangleman and Roberts 1999: 51), which weeds out all those that keep the informal cultures alive, and employ people with no experience of informal hierarchies. It might be too much of a conspiracy theory to identify that equality (or health and safety) legislation may be one way of breaking firefighters’ hierarchy, but it has to be considered. If female firefighters, do in effect break firefighters solidarity, it may be that they will unwittingly help the employers, because then firefighters may not be so able to resist cuts in the fire service.

²³³ All application forms that I have seen ask similar questions to this.

²³⁴ During my visit I watched officers treat the one female applicant very differently to the male applicants. She was not picked on for wearing jewellery and the males were. She was given a lighter hose to run-out than the male applicants. Criticism was not levelled at her for not pulling her weight in the team exercises, as it was on the males (and she failed).

Duncan: [To be successful, recruits needed] intuition; teamwork and stickability; obeying and understanding orders.
(Station Officer).

Frank's 'nod and a wink answer' left me in no doubt that he would be looking "for people like us." When an application form for the fire service recognises that recruits are required who have, "worked as part of a close knit team", it is easy to see that even during the recruitment process that the fire service is looking for people who will *fit in*: males.

The data so far suggests that a number of factors may be in place before a probationer arrives at a station. These can lead to:

- recruits being picked who have experience of men's informal hierarchies;
- the recruitment process being self-fulfilling;
- the training centre preparing the recruit for firefighters' informal hierarchy by pointing out that only firefighters can teach them their job and that the group will sanction anyone who resists *fitting in* (see chapters 3, 5 and 6).
- the watch has an established hierarchy, with which probationers are expected to *fit in*.

4.2.7. The link to the operational

The evidence so far has been mostly related to how firefighters might *fit in* with and be chosen to *fit in* with, informal hierarchies at the station. There has been some suggestion that this process might link with firefighting protocols (and possible even masculine standards). The next extract relates to getting advice on operational skills and this will improve the insight that Chapter 3 provides about the (homosocial) way firefighters pass on their firefighting protocols. Ray explains that some experienced firefighters freely gave their knowledge and others expect to be asked:

Ray: Maybe they are not always forthcoming, as say you want, to [say] 'do this' like and 'this like that' and the end of the night you have to come up to them and say 'I am not sure what I am doing here' or 'should I be doing this or doing that'? You do get certain people who are willing to put themselves out to help yuh and others you have to sort of ask them.
(Brigade 1, firefighter, four years' service, age 24). [My insert].

I asked Ray why this was:

Ray: I think with a lot of people, they are *expecting* to be asked. It's probably from their point of view, it is a bit to do with you're *coming in as an outsider on to their sort of territory*. ... Then it shows you are willing to work for getting some knowledge, as opposed to sitting there and telling you everything and not getting anything back in return. *If you have got to go to them and ask them, it shows you respect them in the fact that they have been in longer than you.*
[My emphases].

Chapter 3 argues that probationers learn the skills they need to become firefighters from experienced firefighters and in doing so, it is self-evident that it is in the interest of experienced firefighters to share their skills, because this makes their work safer and it provides younger firefighters with a skill they might want to help defend (against officers attempts to deskill them, also see Chapter 5). Now Ray explains, that before he can access the skills of firefighting from experienced firefighters, he may have to show them respect. Ray's explanation might apply to a great deal of the data already reviewed and one explanation that fits with Ray's account, is that knowing the probationer needs their skills encourages experienced firefighters to first require them to 'bend the knee', before they can 'sit at the knee'. In this way respect afforded to *gain access* to firefighting skills, extends to an

acceptance by most probationers of the experienced firefighters' authority *per se*. Such a situation confirms the informal hierarchy and encourages the probationer to *fit in* with all the watch's norms (positive or negative). It may even be that officers reinforce the informal hierarchy, and increase its influence over probationers, by suggesting they should *fit in*.

Apart from Alf, it is common for the watch to expect the probationers to wait for about six months before starting to get a voice in the hierarchy. However, this is conditional and to gain some sense of order out of my data I will start to construct a numbered list of categories that may help identify the different reactions probationary firefighters might have to the hierarchy:

1. Accepters: Ken, Roger and Ray accept the hierarchy and both Ray and Roger provide some reason for why this is.
2. Conditional accepters: Richard indicates he is not entirely happy deferring to such social pressures, but has done nothing to resist publicly.

Jack provides evidence of a possible further reaction:

Jack: I just started sticking my head up a bit earlier ... You see what you can get away with and you take it from there. If they say to you 'you're getting a bit too, a bit too game'. (Brigade 1, probationary firefighter, 1 year's service, age 27).

Jack's resistance appears measured: a test to find out the extent of the boundaries laid down by the informal hierarchy for his behaviour. When senior members cautioned him for being too familiar, he accepted their authority. But this might not continue for much longer:

Jack: ... once the probation is over you can do what you like, but you don't want to start standing up to people *while you are in your probation*.
[My emphasis].

Jack's test indicates the possibility that not all probationers keep their resistance to the informal hierarchies private. Jack's example suggests a third reaction to the hierarchy:

3. Testers: Jack and the recruit mentioned by Alf, indicate how probationers might test the hierarchy.

4.2.8. Theoretical sampling for resistance

At this point in the data collection I wanted to find if any firefighters would openly and persistently resist informal hierarchies. Using my networks, I theoretically sampled (Glaser and Strauss 1967) for such firefighters. One firefighter was identified to me as not only resisting the informal hierarchy, but also as being harassed by peer group leaders for his resistance. I interviewed him about his experiences:

Colin: There are sheep and there are shepherds, or a shepherd. And a lot of people only see that way and anything that this person says is always right. And they have got to have their own minds and you get appreciated for it at the end of the day. If you have got your own mind and people realise that you don't mind standing out from the crowd, at the end of the day you will gain respect. It will take time, but you do gain respect at the end of the day.
(Brigade 4, firefighter, six years' service, age 25).

How did the 'shepherd(s)' operate?

Colin: Just overpowering .. it's hard to explain, 'come on lets do this' and it just rolls. Starts, it's like a snowball and it just gets bigger and bigger and you get caught up in it as it rolls and gets bigger. And that's the only way I can explain it in our watch.

Colin's description of probationers' behaviour, as like sheep following a leader, is common in the fire service. However, when officers use this language they are often being more derogatory, alluding to all firefighters as a mindless flock, as opposed to a bonded group. This can particularly apply when officers talk about the FBU's influence over firefighters:

Shaun: [Firefighters] are like a shoal of fish, they dart here and there²³⁵.
(BCC student). [My insert].

The context in which this officer makes his comment suggests that firefighters blindly follow the FBU (see Chapter 5). Despite being pejorative, these metaphors reinforce the informal hierarchy by promoting a view that individuals should conform/bond and that probationers should simply follow their leaders. The politics of what Shaun was saying will become more obvious in Chapter 5. Colin's 'goatish' behaviour view may be a reaction to the watch's refusal to accept his previous experience, *not a resistance to the informal hierarchy per se*. Colin is finding it difficult to accept that age or experience before joining the fire service counts for little on the watch: it is 'time served' that counts (see Morgan 1987):

Colin: It's been hard to start again, it means nothing to **** fire service what I done. I am back to square one again. I am the new boy. I was the new boy for a couple of years' at my first station in the Army. Well you know what its like²³⁶.

It was Colin's desire not to go through the process of earning respect again *in* the social hierarchy, rather than a resistance *to* the social hierarchy, which made him a subject of my theoretical sample. The firefighter who pointed Colin out to me had not realised that Colin has no problem in acknowledging the informal hierarchy in the civilian fire service. Colin's difficulties arise, because having served his time and presumably *fitted in* with the Army fire service, he does not consider that any move into a new hierarchy might involve a second set of humiliations. It appears that to 'real' firefighters Colin's time in the military fire service provides little kudos and he must start again.

Colin's resistance is similar to Jack's, a conditional resistance, unlikely to challenge the informal hierarchy; a test of his status made more difficult because of his previous experience in the Army Fire service. What follows from Colin and Jack suggests they 'fit' within category 3:

Colin: You have got to get on, there are no ifs or buts, you have got to get on with people and *if you don't fit in you have got to change your way*, or you're not going to *fit in*. But you can change your way to such an affect that you don't change completely, but you *change to please them*, but in your own mind *you're true to yourself*, if you see what I mean.
[My emphases].

Jack: I will always *fit in* because I have got to work with them, so. I don't mean it in that way, because I have got to work with them, *I wouldn't want to alienate myself*,

²³⁵ This extract was collected during a debate by the Brigade Command Course on the Grey Book dispute (see Chapter 1 and 5). These officers had a view, challenged by the data from the FBU in Chapter 5, that the FBU were able to blindly lead their members: to an extent they even supported a view widespread amongst officers in the fire service that there is strong element of radical politics influencing the leaders of the FBU. These officers took no account of the fact that members of the FBU actually vote to take part in their resistance to employers/officers when national disputes occur, or vote, as it were, in their informal hierarchies when the resistance is more local.

²³⁶ This is a rhetorical question: a situation that happened frequently as respondents accepted that as an ex-firefighter I had *joint understandings* with them.

because I think you have got to have on a watch, you have got to be *tight*. ... *I will just be myself*. I have no reason to want to be anyone else.
[My emphases].

Both Colin and Jack have indicated that they are not sheep; they are testing boundaries. They are accepting the existence of the informal hierarchy, but remain “true to yourself” by negotiating their place in the hierarchy²³⁷. Jack’s extracts suggest he decides to submit to the hierarchy, accepting that better things will come in the future: a form of deferred gratification. However, in the future, after the socialising effect of the watch, “doing what you like” and “staying true to yourself” are unlikely to have the same meaning.

4.2.9. The experienced firefighter

Most, but not all, the data collected supports to the point of saturation (see Glaser and Strauss 1967) the hypothesis that most firefighters (for a variety of reasons) are prepared to *fit in* with watch understandings. Some firefighters (like Jack and Colin) did appear to have a need to explain to me that they had their own minds and could resist watch norms if they wanted. This indicates they were reflexive enough to be aware of the processes going on around them. However, combining my observations, interviews and experiential knowledge provides a strong body of evidence to suggest that generally resistance is sporadic and more about establishing boundaries of where to *fit in*, rather than a challenge to the expectation that watch members should *fit in*. Therefore, I shall provide a category that the experienced firefighter might recognise:

4. Conformers: Christian, Dominic and Ian who ‘maintain’ the watch norms and *fit in*; expect others to *fit in* as well.

4.2.10. Retiring firefighters

During my fieldwork, it was possible for me to observe watch members ‘disappearing’ from communal areas/activities. These tended to be the older more established watch members, but could also include younger experienced firefighters. Alf in particular described how he is not so interested in the cut and thrust of communal behaviour and I would also locate Duke in this group. Retreating to the more isolated corners of the station, to read a book, or have a snooze, were perhaps better options than admitting they no longer wanted to ‘play’, or be sociable. This is not a stereotype for older firefighters, because sometimes they will ‘play’, and they will definitely involve themselves in developing protocols and the story telling discussed in Chapter 3; in particular in adding that almost essential nostalgic element that tradition gives to culture (see Strangleman 2000). The research has benefited from the experience of talking to some of these ‘elder statespeople’ and apart from some reluctance to get out of bed during the night for false alarms, or other ‘time wasting calls’²³⁸, there were no noticeable features about their behaviour or attitudes to suggest anything other than they were taking an opportunity to spend time alone, or slow down their life-style. Their ‘dedication to firefighters’ professional ethos was as much a paramount feature of their interviews as it was for ‘younger’ firefighters. ‘Older’ firefighters, of course, have less need to *fit in*, because they already have a firm grasp of how to fight fires. Disappearing so to speak, once you have earned your right to do so, is unlikely to threaten the hierarchy and is a dividend for time served. This suggests a fifth category:

²³⁷ Goffman’s work analyses how individuals operate to provide and create image and how in ‘total institutions’ the “indignities he or she must suffer from others, such as teasing, poking at negative attributes, and name-calling ... adopting a stance is compatible with their conception of self” (Goffman 1961: 23). The fire service may not rank as a total institution, but the process is somewhat similar.

²³⁸ These would be to false alarms or when the public call the fire service to help them with what firefighters might term as ‘not their job’; cats up trees would be an example. The police too have a view of what their job is and call some of the ‘softer’ community style policing “rubbish” (Reiner 1985: 95).

5. Retirers: Duke and Alf, once established on the watch some firefighters move away from mainstream social activities and this causes no problems in the informal hierarchy.

4.2.11. A first exception

There was one particular exception to the way that an established watch receive a probationer. This is when a female turns up instead of the male that Dominic (above) was expecting. Then firefighters are confused about how to behave:

Terri: It was awful actually, the first couple of weeks, ‘cos they hadn’t had a girly on this station. They were all *pussy footing around*, “don’t swear; don’t do this; don’t get undressed’. You know things like this, ‘Terri is about’ and then three or four weeks into it they all *realised I was one of them* and did the same as them, it was good. (Female firefighter). [My emphases].

DB: What did you feel would have happened if you hadn’t?

Terri: What if I didn’t *fit in* with them? *I’d been miserable*.
[My emphasis and insert].

Terri’s evidence could suggest firefighters can simply turn on and off their beliefs that probationers must *fit in*, but I think that would be an oversimplification. Terri may have been fortunate to meet a ‘sympathetic’ watch, but I consider that if the firefighters had not soon “realised she was one of them” their behaviour may have been different. “Pussyfooting around” was more likely an artificial environment that male firefighters probably could not sustain, and evidence suggests that soon the male firefighters would have been less understanding (IT 1995, 1996²³⁹; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999). Terri’s extract suggests her watch played a waiting game; as soon as they realised they could impose their will on Terri, they treated her just like any other probationer. Interestingly, it also appears that this was what Terri wanted, to become one of the boys and *fit in*. In Chapter 1 I suggest that females are making their own decisions (at least as much as male probationers) when they *fit in* and Terri’s reaction matches with previous findings (Baigent 1996), which suggest inclusion is what many female firefighters want most of all. However, that does not mean that the behaviour they ‘have’ to adopt and the treatment they receive is ideal, or their first choice. Two female firefighters explain:

Jayne: A long hard tough way of doing it. I don’t regret it now, but it should have been easier, a less outgoing person would have given up.
(Female firefighter).

Sue: Just get on with the job and *fit in* with your watch.
(Female firefighter).

These are complicated issues, but Jayne’s and Sue’s comments are not really different to Jack’s and Colin’s.

4.3. REAL RESISTANCE

During the research, despite my efforts at theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I have not met any firefighters who refuse outright to accept the authority of the informal hierarchy. However, during the interviews there were occasionally references made to support my view that such individuals exist, but this evidence was always secondhand; about others. I prefer to hear evidence

²³⁹ The fact the fire service appealed what was a such a blatant case of harassment might be seen as providing evidence to support the view that the fire service is institutionally racist (see also HMCIFS).

firsthand, especially when I am sampling for information about a politically charged area where an informant may be criticising a third party for challenging *their* group norms. I had to make a choice, whether to use the reported data about third parties, or not. Eventually I decided to do so, thus there were three examples of individuals who have resisted the hierarchy and have not *fitted in*. The evidence starts with a focus group in Brigade 2, consisting of firefighters from two stations discussing an individual that both groups knew²⁴⁰:

4.3.1. 'Tubby Taffy',²⁴¹

- Isaac: On my training course we had one guy out of twenty people who isn't a team member and it shows. He's been moved around. Now he's only been in two and a half years now, same as me, went to his watch they did not like him, so he got moved. (Brigade 2, firefighter, 2.5 years' service, age 25).
- Ian: He probably is on his way to wrecking another watch is he? (Brigade 2, firefighter, 8 years' service, age 30).
- Michael: Tubby Taffy. (Brigade 2, firefighter, 8 years' service, age 30).
- Keith: No comment, I had a barney with him last week. (Brigade 2, firefighter, 15 years' service, age 40).
- Isaac: Didn't fit at training school, he didn't fit at his station, obviously he doesn't fit at another station, he is isn't fit for the job.
- Ian: He came in thinking he was an officer and he doesn't *fit in*.

From their comments, you can sense the hostility these firefighters have for 'Tubby Taffy'. One reason for this was that he resisted their right to give him the nickname 'Taffy'. From my experience, I have no difficulty in imagining the treatment that 'Tubby Taffy' would receive in return for this resistance. The term 'tubby', in a fitness orientated world, is pejorative and 'Taffy' has overtones of institutional racism. Anti-racism, anti-harassment and equality training is so undeveloped/unsophisticated at most firestations that few in the fire service would probably even recognize that 'Taffy' could be a racist term (see Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999). Firefighters would more likely point to all those in the fire service who willingly accept such a nickname and this clouds the issue even more²⁴². However, Taffy did not accept the watch's nickname and (because he was a probationer) I would expect that most firefighters would view his behaviour as an outright challenge to their authority. Then the name-calling would increase in consequence, fuelling a spiralling circle of harassment that follows 'Tubby Taffy' from station to station. 'Tubby Taffy' is an example of how, "once you get known as a tosser", the name can stick.

4.3.2. 'Charlie',²⁴³

An example from Brigade 3 illustrates how a watch can create a circle of harassment around a firefighter who refuses to show deference:

²⁴⁰ It is important to note that this information was not the result of my search for 'deviant' firefighters and was innocently provided.

²⁴¹ 'Tubby Taffy' is a firefighter with 3 years' service, aged 33.

²⁴² Collinson (1992: 108) argues that taking the piss out of each other and the acceptance of nicknames is a sign that real men can laugh at themselves. Tubby Taffy is not prepared to accept this behaviour and those who do may just be supporting a hegemony that leads to a spiral of violence to those who will not.

²⁴³ Age 30, 1 year's service.

Ken: He is giving it all *mouth* and that he is the best at this and that and he was doing simple things wrong and they thought 'yeah'. They said to me 'he made the mistake, *he came in thinking he was the kid and he shouldn't have done*'. Em, because of that they really give it to him and anything. If you see a *spazz*²⁴⁴ or someone walking down the road, they say, 'oh look there is Charlie, *there is his wife*' and all this sort of stuff and he takes it now. He says stuff back, but they just give it back to him even more. He is not going to win.
[My emphases].

The evil and the depth of this abuse should require no explanation, except to illustrate how personal a watch are prepared to be about Charlie (and his wife) for resisting their authority. It is also an example of how an able-bodied group, *who might well collect money for disabled children*, are prepared to abuse the same children: to almost identify those, who are not part of the operational firefighters' environment and not privileged to share in firefighters able-bodiedness, (and Charlie) as an 'other'. Charlie is not in the same brigade as those earlier informants who warned that probationers should be 'seen and not heard', but I am convinced that if they saw it necessary to push a probationer back into line they would act in a similarly. Recently I have been informed that Charlie has gone the same way as many firefighters who do not *fit in*; he has changed stations. However, either his reputation went before him or he is just unable to *fit in*, because this informant (who is unaware that I know about Charlie's history) tells me he is still being harassed.

4.3.3. 'I am a mild man'

Brigade 1 has an example that provides an insight to how much a probationer can resist, but like 'Tubby Taffy' also 'chooses' to move on. Pete is a watch leader with the respect of other members of his watch and fits in with category 4 (conformer):

Pete: I am fairly norm, normally I am a mild man, but this kid [Arthur], he got me wound up and I had to have a word with the sub about this fella. Em, well, what I said to the sub was that 'I would stab him' [laughter]²⁴⁵. *He's moved on*. ... He was always, yunnoo, cocky, lairy, *know it all*, yunnoo.
(Brigade 1, firefighter, 18 years' experience, age 43). [My emphases and insert].

I was surprised at Pete's reaction and I asked what happened. Pete was clear, the whole watch ganged up against Arthur, but he did not give in:

Pete: No, he was just too lairy. He just, whatever you said he, yunnoo, 'I don't care', yunnoo and all this lark.

There clearly are some firefighters who do not want to *fit in* and will resist whatever the cost. From these three examples it is possible to suggest that there are some (however few) firefighters who actually resist the informal hierarchy, but they all share the same outcome, they move on:

²⁴⁴ 'Spazz' is a shortened term for 'spastic' (cerebral palsy sufferers), and one form of humour I heard on many stations prior to the research is to tell a story with actions about the group of spastics who are told if they can clap their hands they can have an ice-cream. When one eventually does this and is given an ice cream they miss their mouth and push the ice cream into their face. The way this story is then turned around on Charlie is a clear example of fire service humour used to inflict pain on those who fail to submit to the informal hierarchy. Once again, the use of language that would be totally inappropriate in many environments provides a good example of lack of equality training or its effectiveness and puts firefighters close to those dominant groups in the classroom who use similar language to label those with academic inadequacies as others (see Haywood and Mac an Ghail 1996: 56).

²⁴⁵ This is the only overt reference to violence that I found in during my research and I have no idea if it was real or not. It is so accepted within the fire service that firefighters do not fight, that I consider this was a metaphor to explain just how upset Pete was.

6. Resisters: firefighters who would openly and persistently resist informal hierarchies like Tubby Taffy, Charlie and Arthur. These firefighters may constantly move from watch to watch.

4.4. HUMOUR

The three examples of firefighters who have not *fitted in* and those whose *fitting in* has apparently been mostly to avoid the gaze of the watch, leads me to talk about fire service humour, and in particular, how firefighters use humour to police their norms (see Walby 1991; IT 1995; LFCDA 1995; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999). It was my intention to have a chapter on fire service humour, but there are not enough words available in this thesis to accommodate everything. Therefore, a whole chapter has been reduced to this small section, which focuses on how firefighters use the dark side of humour as a test of themselves and against deviant firefighters. I will take as given that sexist²⁴⁶/racist/disablist remarks/jokes are common on a firestation and that this is one-way in which firefighters point to 'their superiority' as white, able-bodied males. In common with other masculinity projects, fire service humour often appears to be about the social survival of the fittest (see Collinson 1992: 110), although I have a wealth of evidence to suggest that firefighters might romanticise their humour as just a laugh²⁴⁷, time filling²⁴⁸ or stress relieving²⁴⁹.

4.4.1. Humour in dangerous occupations

²⁴⁶ Sexist humour, innuendo and pin-ups/pornography has always been a fact of life on a firestation: '*a laugh*' (see Howell 1994). To a large extent this behaviour is now outlawed by management, but outlawing something in the fire service does not stop it happening. More often, when a female firefighter serves on a watch the viewing of sexually explicit material is likely to be covert, but not always. Female firefighters can acquiesce to or accept the presence of pornography. Even when 'hidden' most female firefighters are aware they are never far away from pornography on a firestation and the effects of this knowledge are almost as much a harassment as if it were visible. It may even be more of an harassment, because it is more difficult to challenge covert material than visible examples. As a visitor to a firestation I would not have expected to see such literature, but I cannot remember a visit I made when I did not manage to find some visible evidence of sexist material.

²⁴⁷ I attended a retirement function of a popular senior FBU official during the course of this research. The function was attended by several hundred firefighters and their families; a range of senior officers including The Chief; a FBU National Officer and several Executive Council members. During an entertaining speech lasting over one hour made by an officer he said, "Alfred was a good firefighter." Someone in the crowd called out "fireman" and the speaker replied, "thank you for that"; Alfred raised his hand in acknowledgement and the audience murmured in support. This was not the only example of sexism in the speeches and cameos played out to the receptive audience. One of the cameos involved an overt example of racism, where a blacked-up man ran onto the stage in grass skirt carrying a spear; another involved an ongoing joke at the expense of disabled wheel-chair users. The FBU National Officer was visibly 'squirming' and the occasion did not really provide him with a platform to speak out, but when his turn came he did make a reference to the difficulty he had speaking on such a platform.

²⁴⁸ Firefighters get bored at the firestation whilst they are waiting for calls. They will look for ways of filling these spaces by playing tricks on their colleagues. Many, like Rob later in this chapter, would describe firefighters' behaviour as childish at these times. Jokes are often spontaneous, but can also be part of a carefully laid plan: a windup involving contextual and repetitive humour that tests a firefighters' reactions, only funny at the time, such as touching someone's shoulder and making them look, or walking into a room and saying, 'he has got a big head hasn't he'. When someone replies 'who' saying 'humpty dumpy'.

²⁴⁹ Firestations are also at the cutting edge of black humour, and they will develop jokes to turn round tragedy. If someone loses their arm they will say he is [h]armless. By contextualising any tragedies, especially those involving loss of life, into another form, the watch can re-group to avoid the personal anguish such circumstances could create: a diversionary tactic which avoids facing the pain victims suffered by erecting a wall between them and the situation. Firefighters have the advantage they are not directly involved at a personnel level with work related tragedies, but they do witness these tragedies at close hand and they are caring people with families of their own. There is a whole body of evidence to support my view that firefighters use humour to control their emotions at incidents and break 'the ice' of silence that can descend after being involved in tragedy (Hassard 1985: 189; Wallington 1989: 177; Docherty 1991: 71; Hall 1991: 33; McLeod and Cooper 1992: 27; Delson 1996). Other professions use diversionary tactics as well. "Black humor, an appreciation for the absurd or the bizarre, allows nurses to detach from extremely stressful situations, survive emotionally, and continue to give good care. Such humor is often a source of embarrassment to the staff, in that it makes them question their own feelings of tenderness and caring. On the other hand, they all readily admit the humor permits them to survive and serves as a cohesive force in the unit during times of stress" (Hutchinson 1986: 201).

Humour in dangerous occupations can be explained as “*caustic wit and rudeness [that] is symptomatic of the close relations between the men*” (Pitt 1979: 38 cited in Collinson 1988). It has already been established that the firestation is not an area patrolled by managers and firefighters have the space to talk throughout the shift. This space allows firefighters’ informal hierarchy to use humour to colonise not only the breaks (see Goffman 1959; Linstead 1985 cited in Collinson 1988), but also most of the working day. I believe humour to be the enforcing arm of firefighters’ hierarchy, which firefighters use to bully those who do not follow the rules. ‘Motivated’ equal opportunities workers acknowledge this:

- Hilary: The vehicle for bullying is humour.
 (Senior civilian equality adviser).
- Chris: Firefighters join as nice people, yet to a greater or lesser extent this is lost in service.
 The organisation must knock it out of them.
 (Senior civilian equality adviser).
- Perry: ... wouldn’t be tolerated in most workplaces. Heavily influenced with racism heavily influenced with sexism. On some occasions it can be the most incredibly dry laconic humour you can ever get, which has always been true of people who every now and again face dangerous situations. But I think generally the undercurrent of humour has always been very internal; wouldn’t be the type of humour they would get away with indoors around their mum and dad, or their children.
 (Senior FBU representative).

These equality workers have no doubt that firefighters’ humour is not fun (see LFCDA 1995; FBU 1999a)

4.4.2. Teamwork and the windup

Most firefighters do not recognise their humour or horseplay as bullying. Most firefighters defend their humour by suggesting it is a means of testing each other. Chapter 3 has spoken of operational tests, but the windups, as firefighters call their attempts to get a reaction from their colleagues, are less covert and actually acknowledged as tests. At the start of this chapter we heard from Dominic about the watch’s gaze: a subject he returned to later in the focus group discussion:

- Dominic: Em, everyone has got to be looking at you. They have got to be testing you out in all different ways. And the bullying you mentioned earlier on, I would not call it bullying, but I would say *piss taking* and everything else *to see how you react*.
 (My emphases).
- Guy: That builds up the teamwork doesn’t it.
 (Brigade two, firefighter, 10 years’ service, age 37).
- Dominic: To find out how you react to a given situation. To find out if you can take it or whether you can’t.

Words, around firefighters, can become confusing, but it is clear to me that what I define as *bullying* is my current subjective view of my own behaviour when I was a firefighter, which I thought of as “piss taking” (also known as ‘humour/banter/windup’). Dominic and most firefighters are very clear, “piss taking” to see “how you react” is an *inclusive*, not an *exclusive*, process, which helps in teambuilding by involving everyone in testing each other. This testing process is common amongst males and designed to identify if another male has the necessary masculine understandings to ‘prove’

they can ‘take it’ (see Mac an Ghaill 1996: 68²⁵⁰). Simply put it is a test to see if the recipient has the *strength* to control their emotions and not ‘bite back’. Firefighters know that if they are woundup (react), they not only provide their colleagues with a laugh, they have also failed a test of their (masculine) reliability. They might crack under pressure and they will be seen as weak and irrational (feminine). It is difficult not to consider that females might feel completely excluded by such behaviour (see Collinson and Hearn 1994: 3²⁵¹; FBU 1999c). Humour though does not only wear down female firefighters and in the same focus group evidence of the strain their own humour causes, emerged:

- Cliff: You have just got to learn to live with it.
(Brigade two, firefighter, 5 year’s service, age 27).
- DB: Is it something that you enjoy?
- Cliff: Not all the time. No it can get to a stage when you are just fed up with it. I am sure we all get to that stage as well.
- Guy: Yeah you can do, but just like Cliff says, you just learn to live with it and adjust.
- Cliff: You need a break sometimes, like your four days off, after you come back you feel refreshed again.
- Guy: And you start all over again.
[My emphasis].

I visited these firefighters several times and they were a closely bonded watch, with very ‘good’ working relationships and mutual understandings. It may be possible that there were hidden undercurrents I did not find, but I do not believe so. It was this watch whose ‘boob test’ I passed (see Chapter 2) and they trusted me as much as any watch I observed. Had they not done so, it is unlikely that they would have been so open about how difficult the humour could become. Their explanations almost appear to suggest that their humour got out of control; that the watch had created a dynamic that was bigger than any individual. It is important to acknowledge this was not a group of probationers talking to me, but experienced firefighters.

Humour appears as a considerable ‘force’ behind firefighters’ informal hierarchy, which may have various positive outcomes for firefighters, but there have been a number of incidences when the informal hierarchy have acted to use horseplay/humour/testing as harassment. It is easy to see (but not defend) why ‘fire service humour’ is aimed abusively at certain groups (women, probationers and resisters): it is an attempt to drive them out or bring them into line. Not quite so obvious is the way firefighters use humour to patrol their hierarchy as a constant test of the masculine understanding that it is weak to be woundup. It may even be that the windup is a rite of passage for recruits to pass through, but a rite of passage that never actually ends; what others in the fire service might see as an initiation ceremony. This behaviour serves as a reminder (and example) to firefighters of how uncomfortable life can become if they were to challenge watch norms and draw the full gaze of the watch upon themselves. However, firefighters have not generally seen their humour as harassment, despite having a victim and an audience. They acknowledge that humour can be difficult to handle,

²⁵⁰“New members are teased incessantly and tested to see whether they are ‘man enough’ to take the insults couched in the humour of ‘piss taking’ and the embarrassment of highly explicit sexual references. Those who display a willingness to ‘give it and take it’ are accepted into the masculine subculture, while those who ‘snap’ have failed this particular test of manhood and are likely to be kept at a distance” (Mac an Ghaill 1996: 68; see Goffman 1959: 211; Hearn and Parkin 1987; Collinson and Collinson 1989: 95; Collinson 1992: 111).

²⁵¹“Within organizations, many men do not seem to recognise their actions as expressions of men’s power and male identity. Where men see humour, teasing, camaraderie and strength, women often perceive crude, specifically masculine aggression, competition, harassment, intimidation and misogyny” (Collinson and Hearn 1994: 3).

but many consider it an acceptable part of their working arrangements: a price they have to pay to be part of the team/watch. For the majority of firefighters, being part of the watch is integral to their work and while they may not fully recognise it, humour is actually a resource they use to ensure the watch adopt and comply with a variety of norms. It may be that notions of a dynamic that is out of control are not so misplaced and that many firefighters *fit in* then replicate the same ‘harassment’ on the next generation almost without thinking. This resource is learnt homosocially.

4.5. OFFICERS

4.5.1. Leaving the operational watch

As I said earlier, it is surprising that anyone resists the informal hierarchy in the fire service and overtly refuses to *fit in*. The examples above clearly indicate it is possible, but this may always involve the resister moving on at regular intervals, presumably as the pressure/humour from the watch becomes too much for them. However, there are other ways to avoid the informal hierarchy that do not involve direct resistance, including seeking promotion, or moving sideways away from a station to areas of work that the watch would call ‘non-op’²⁵². The explanations that follow are from officers who, having *shared* the experience of being a firefighter, might experience the pull, or push, of the watch.

Patrick explains that right from the start he did not enjoy being on a watch:

Patrick: I was quieter than most and I didn’t altogether like the practical jokes. I was never one really for practical jokes. Fortunately they never played too many on me. I didn’t like it, but I understand it’s part of the way of the firebrigade.
(Residential Officer attached to FP).

Patrick provides some data to support a view that humour on a firestation can be a form of harassment. I asked Patrick why he sought promotion:

Patrick: Well I think we all joined for the same sort of reason, *we all wanted to render assistance* to the people. Our clients as they like to call them these days, our customers. It was all very well, but in those days it was a matter of: clean the fire engine, wash it out, make sure the tyres are pumped up; clean the floors; do the cooking, which I never used to like anyway. Always seemed to make a mess of it for the watch and I don’t think they thought much of it anyway. So I wanted *some better job satisfaction*, so I looked at what the LFs²⁵³ were doing and found that that was a bit more interesting, a bit more demanding. So *I took promotion* and eh, enjoyed it.
[My emphases].

From Patrick’s answer it is possible to suggest he did not *fit in* on a firestation: he did not enjoy cleaning, cooking or the humour. However, he did want to “*render assistance*.” Rather than leave, Patrick chose promotion, spending 18 years’ serving in areas that avoid the informal hierarchy. This opportunity is available to any firefighter who might like to escape and still serve in a variety of ‘non-op’ jobs/promotions. Most officers would not be as honest as Patrick so I have formed a category for those who choose to leave the watch either as resistance or for promotion:

7. Careerists or Movers: Patrick who does not *fit in* with the watch, but still wants to ‘serve’ and resists by moving sideways. There are a variety of opportunities to escape the operational side of the fire service by moving to different spheres such as: administration, personnel, Fire Prevention, Communications, Research and Development, Training and Senior/Principal Management.

²⁵² ‘Non-op’ can be used broadly to apply to anyone in the service who is not actually ‘riding’ a fire appliance.

²⁵³ Leading firefighter, a JO (junior officer), increasingly called a crew-commander.

Patrick was not the only officer to explain his dislike for working on an operational watch. Rob (Fire Prevention Station Officer from Brigade Eight) told me that he considered firefighters behaved like “*animals*” at stations and changed “*from children into men when the bells actuated*.”²⁵⁴ Rob did not want to return to operational duties and his reference to children relates to firefighters’ ‘childish’ humour.

4.5.2. Careerists

Not all officers leave the station because they have difficulties with firefighters. The considerable opportunities for promotion (Flanagan 1998) can pull officers. Alistair’s view is a familiar one:

Alistair: The watch officer is the best job in the fire service.
 (BCC, student).

In an extended set of quotes, watch-commander Barry explains the type of quandary Alistair faced before he chose to leave the “best job in the fire service” for senior rank. Barry joined the fire service specifically to become an officer:

Barry: I really wanted somewhere I could progress through and that is really, what appealed in the firebrigade.
 (Brigade 1, Watch Officer, seven years’ service, age 34).

Barry also displayed very similar reactions to the informal hierarchy as many firefighters:

Barry: A bit of a shock, but you know the ropes. Get in, *head down* and em. I settled in quite well and I had a couple of *ups and downs* with certain people, certain things. I think I was quite lucky .. I think you are lucky when you come in a bit later in life and you have got a bit of experience behind you and you can adjust a bit more. You see the younger blokes, perhaps it takes a little bit longer.
 [My emphases].

Barry might be seen as passing through categories 1, 2, 3 and 4 of being a firefighter before choosing promotion. Barry had been an engineer, but he identified fire service humour as extreme:

Barry: Yeah, it’s eh .. the engineering trades a bit lairy, *but not as lairy as this job*. This job is totally unique.
 [My emphasis].

Barry’s quandary is that he joined to become an officer but he enjoys firefighting:

Barry: Yeah that’s the sort of *quandary* I am in with the promotion at the moment. Cos, once you take [further promotion], where I am, you sit in the one seat²⁵⁵, and you’ve got to detach yourself a certain amount. And you have got to take *one step back* and control the situation, *rather than be part of the situation*. And I still like sitting on the front of the pump, or in the back BA²⁵⁶. I have only been in *The Job* for seven years’ and *I still enjoy it*. Yunnnoo, that sort of .. *it’s not what I joined the job for, but once I joined The Job I really enjoy it*.
 [My emphasis].

²⁵⁴ These remarks were not tape recorded, but key words were recorded in my field book.

²⁵⁵ This indicates he is the officer in charge.

²⁵⁶ ‘*The back*’ is the position the firefighters occupy *en route* to the fire and the two outside riders wear BA and ‘*get into*’ the fire.

What Barry is saying here is that as a, '*rider officer*' he enjoys being part of the firefighting team, but he realises if he stays true to his original reason for joining and seeks further promotion, he will arrive at fires by car and then he will be, "one step back." Barry then went on to explain why he enjoys firefighting, which shows just how much his view accords with firefighters who do not choose promotion (see Chapter 3):

Barry: It's the text book answer, sense of achievement, pride and all those sorts of things. You actually really enjoy what you are doing, yunnoo, *you're there to help people and enjoy helping people*.
[My emphasis].

DB: And that's the reason that you enjoy it?

Barry: *Well there is also the other reason, the buzz, the thrill, yunnoo*. I have been a bit close to the wire a couple of times and eh I think it, actually when you have been in a couple of situations *where it gets a bit close to the wire*, it makes you appreciate life a little bit more.
[My emphases].

Barry 'enjoys' the "*buzz*", the realisation of what it is like to be in danger "*close to the wire*." However, Barry has a plan for his progression:

Barry: Eh I think once .. I would like to actually .. the ideal route is to do your ops [operational] bit and then *go sideways to Fire Safety*. I done five months in Fire Safety, not last year the year before and really enjoyed the job, but don't enjoy the nine day fortnight. But I think once I take the move, I perhaps put the going out and *riding machines a little bit behind me*. Em, get settled, do me bit where you actually take the responsibility on board and then I think I will *slide across quite happily* ... I would perhaps go across *to tech*²⁵⁷.
[My emphases and insert].

Barry realises that further promotion will involve him in moving away from the watch and working alone at a desk: a situation that will not only remove him from the action, but will probably make him an outcast (see Chapters 1, 5 and 6)²⁵⁸. Barry, after *fitting in* with a number of categories, is currently an example of a watch officer who must decide whether to stay in the best job in the fire service or move on. There are at least two possible options open to Barry, leading to hypotheses 8 and 9:

8. Reluctant Careerists: Torn between the watch and the desk: firefighters who join the fire service as a career intending to be promoted, but become acculturated/happy on a watch and do not leave.
9. Sympathetic Careerists: Barry and Shaun, who are prepared to leave their station to further their career, but their reluctance to do so may always make them sympathetic to the informal hierarchies operating on a station.

Now with nine categories that might explain the routes firefighters take within the informal hierarchy and how some move into the formal hierarchy, it is time to look for an analysis of what this thesis so far suggests about *fitting in*.

²⁵⁷ Technical services.

²⁵⁸ Hart recognises that many officers have "*a lack of interest in promotion outside of the operational*" (Hart 1982: 123).

4.6. LINKS BETWEEN *GETTING IN* AND *FITTING IN*

There is what appears as two ‘ubiquitous’ processes on watches, *getting in* and *fitting in*, and it may be helpful to summarise these at this stage. In its operational organisation the fire service applies well-trying and tested national standards and procedures, which ultimately focus on getting fire appliances to a fire. The firefighters who comprise that attendance, collectively adapt some of these procedures at watch level as part of their protocols, which they argue is the best way to support their professional ethos: to provide an efficient service to help the public. This mix of both formal and informal firefighting protocols may vary between watches, but are so similar that they enable firefighters to work together at large makeups (up to 50 pumps and beyond). However, arguments that firefighters’ professional ethos is the driving force behind their informal adaptations have been qualified by my suggestion that firefighters may not only be serving the public when they get in, but also a number of other agendas surrounding being a *good firefighter*.

4.6.1. At the station/fitting in

It also appears the formalised structure, of written orders, uniform, saluting, ‘yes sir/madam’ discipline learnt at training centre, is subject to an informal mix by firefighters’ hierarchy. This hierarchy also provides some order to ensure, as much as possible, that firefighters *fit in* with each other, ostensibly, so they can develop and adhere to their firefighting protocols. For probationers this can involve a period of adjustment, during which they must first show respect to experienced firefighters, then gradually they participate in the hierarchy and in the development of firefighting protocols. This process seems logical enough, if it was not for my suggestion that some firefighting activities are considerably influenced by firefighters’ attempts to maintain/test their ability to be seen as a *good firefighter* in their own, their peers’ and the public’s eye (see Chapter 3). If my argument is only partly true, then the informal hierarchy might be seen as reinforcing not only firefighting protocols, but masculine ones as well. Further complicating this issue is the way that firefighters might be developing their more personal agendas in the *shadow* of firefighting; making the two almost indiscernible from each other.

Whilst firefighters are always prepared for a fire, there will be many days, even on the busiest of stations, that there are no fires. This leaves a great deal of social space, both formal and informal, and firefighters’ hierarchy helps to organise this. During at least part of their stand-down time (Chapter 1) most watches will organise team games that improve their group ties and fitness. However, it is possible that after a period of obsessional sporting activity, a new activity may develop in ‘the wings’ as the next obsessional activity. Some watches have little interest in physical fitness at all, preferring instead sedentary group activities whenever possible. Group activities can also be paradoxical and one watch actually celebrated its diverse dynamics by suggesting that they were all individuals. On this watch, the peer group leaders were big muscular males who spent a considerable amount of time in the gym. Weightlifting is an individual sport and this would support their contentions about being individuals. However, the ‘whole’ watch were obsessional about their fitness activities: the ‘weak’ as well as the ‘strong’ were individuals *together*. One almost calculable sign of the diversity of how different watches develop relates to trade union activity. In Chapter 5 a senior FBU official considers some watches will be active trade unionists, others less so and it came as no surprise to find this might depend on if the peer group leader is a union activist or not.

Despite the whole shift being spent mostly in situations where firefighters can chat without restraint, meal breaks are normally important areas for ‘reaching out’ to the whole watch. I have observed many meal breaks and these provide a further example of how similar (even in its diversity), a watch can be. At one extreme, an interview I was involved in overran and the watch waited for the two of us before eating. At the other extreme, one watch had no communal system for preparing meals and each firefighter brought in their own food; some even ate in separate rooms from the

others²⁵⁹. However, as this thesis will continue to argue, while not all firefighters are social actors and some will stand aside or resist group norms, there *always* appears to be a *core group*, which provides the group dynamic that firefighters need to be effective in their work. This core group might be friends off duty as well as on, and some watches will socialise together off duty, playing sport and meeting off duty. Many firefighters work together in their ‘fiddle jobs’ and some firefighters even employ other firefighters (see Chapter 1). Charity work is also common amongst firefighters who use their public profile to good avail²⁶⁰.

4.6.2. Why is there so little resistance?

It appears that most firefighters enjoy firefighting, their informal hierarchy supports their professional ethos, sustains their social relationships and possibly other agendas. This thesis so far has shown (with some notable exceptions) that if you *fit in* with the informal hierarchy in this mainly white male workforce, life can be happy, stable and rewarding. But, as any visitor to a watch will quickly recognise, firefighters have very different characters and are inclined to be strong willed. Whilst one might expect personalities to be put on one side at operational incidents, it is surprising that they *fit in* so well at the station. The same too may be said of probationers who arrive at a station: they too *fit in* — a round peg in the right hole as it were. It could be argued that the informal hierarchies are so powerful that they not only subsume individual resistance, but they can also overcome individual firefighters’ will. I dispute this possibility; firefighters’ hierarchy is not a reified phenomenon, its existence is a joint act of will of the watch. I accept that firefighters may give up some agency to the group, but the watch is not a shoal of fish and it is difficult to understand why the group remains so harmonious. Consequently, I ask myself a further question: how do groups in such close proximity manage to sustain their harmony?

4.6.3. Self-selecting groups and transfers

I almost missed one explanation for why there is so little disagreement on a watch, because it was so obvious to me: firefighters form *self-selecting groups*²⁶¹ and can transfer almost at will between watches. Transferring allows firefighters who do not *fit in* on one watch to move on. Tubby Taffy, Arthur and Charlie have done this²⁶², although apparently they have not put their past behind them as successfully as the following example. This is taken from an article in *London Firefighter* (Jones 1999: 27) where a black female firefighter is asked, “what’s been your best/most memorable moment at work?” Her answer was “Joining Acton blue watch and leaving my old station behind.” Self-selection through transferring may also explain why different watches can have a professional ethos in common with ‘all’ firefighters *and* similar protocols for firefighting, and yet each watch can be individual and have different social relationships, interests and patterns of behaviour. It might even suggest that outside of the operational sphere each watch develops its own unique ‘personality’. This is not to reify the watch, but to suggest that a watch is likely to comprise of people who have ‘chosen’ to serve together because they have similar views and that this may become a circular process, in which ‘proving’ that you belong *fit in* becomes a self-perpetuating process.

4.6.4. The right to transfer

²⁵⁹ It may be that I missed the opportunity to find out something very important from this watch, but it was not possible to return and look again at the consequences of this behaviour.

²⁶⁰ In a sign of both their ability to collect money and the public’s trust of firefighters, one station spontaneously decided to collect for Children In Need and stood at the traffic lights outside their station. They took with them the buckets off the appliances and collected over £3000 from passing motorists in under three hours. Such was the trust that the public have in firefighters that *no one asked them what they were collecting for*.

²⁶¹ Grint (1998: 279) uses this term to explain how miners used to pick who they worked with underground.

²⁶² Collinson (1992: 93) points out that often workers are trapped in situations where they cannot move to other work to avoid conflict with people they do not like.

Transferring is a *Grey Book* condition of service²⁶³ and is usually a relatively easy process, which allows firefighters to transfer from watch to watch, station to station and brigade to brigade. Most brigades publish a transfer list at regular intervals and in essence, all a firefighter has to do is to find someone who has similar qualifications and they can then ‘mutually exchange’ stations. The process can become very sophisticated when direct transfers cannot be achieved and can involve a whole chain of firefighters moving to different watches. Officers, who may wish to ‘help’ an unhappy (and potentially disruptive) firefighter to transfer, can frequently facilitate these complicated transfers. Choosing the right watch to transfer to is also made easier by the way that when a watch experiences a temporary shortage of firefighters, that other stations fill that shortage on a shift-by-shift basis (by ‘ordering a firefighter on ‘outduty’ for the shift’). Outduties, as can be imagined, are not popular, because they can involve a firefighter being an outsider with an unfamiliar watch. However, the firefighter who is not happy on their watch can get some respite by volunteering for the outduty. Moreover, whilst on outduty the unhappy firefighter can take the opportunity to identify if the watch they are spending their outduty with, is one they might want to transfer to and if anyone there wants to transfer.

Firefighters do not only transfer when they are uncomfortable, they could transfer for a whole host of reasons. For example they:

- consider it is time for a change;
- consider they would like to work at a busier or quieter station;
- would like to live nearer to their work;
- have found a watch that displays similar interests to their own;
- wish to be stationed with their friends or their ‘fiddle job’ companions.

Leaving/transferring can be an important feature in maintaining watch harmony, because unhappy firefighters can ‘choose’ to join another watch, and this is an alternative to seeking promotion or leaving. Transferring can also prevent the abusive behaviour of a watch against someone who does not *fit in* from developing or even being recognised publicly. This can have a variety of impacts, not the least of which is that the watch can actually set out to force someone to transfer as may have happened to Arthur, Charlie and Tubby Taffy. Rather than interfering in this possible harassment, officers may even prefer to leave the informal hierarchy to organise watch relations. This sort of recognition by officers enhances the authority of the informal hierarchy and reduces the requirement for officers to manage difficult situations²⁶⁴.

4.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that most firefighters share an overwhelming desire to *fit in* with watch norms. The list of categories produced throughout this chapter is now updated to provide some guide to how firefighters experience *fitting in* on a watch.

Probationers:

1. Accepters: Ken, Roger and Ray accept the hierarchy and both Ray and Roger provide some reason for why this is.

²⁶³ Does not normally apply to probationers.

²⁶⁴ Officers could not arrange Charlie’s transfer against his wishes. Nor have officers the ability to transfer those firefighters who are harassing Charlie (as a summary punishment). There is an agreement with the FBU that all transfers have to be justified, just to prevent officers having vendettas against firefighters. The FBU argument is that if a firefighter is being difficult, officers should manage the situation, or use the disciplinary code. This is a typical example of how the discipline code works against officers rather than for them, because it is difficult to identify peer leaders as breaking the rules, when they organise the informal hierarchy. Organisations, trying to affect corporate colonisation by breaking the informal hierarchy are often seen to be moving on peer leaders (see Strangleman and Roberts 1999: 51). The FBU agreement effectively prevents this.

2. Conditional accepters: Richard indicates he is not entirely happy deferring to such social pressures, but has done nothing to resist publicly. This may be a similar reaction to that of the female firefighters, Terri, Jayne and Sue.
3. Testers: Jack and Colin indicate the first real signs of public resistance to the peer group's expectation, but this may more a testing of boundaries and almost a rite of passage.

Experienced firefighters:

4. Conformers: Pete, Dominic, Ian and Christian who 'maintain' the watch norms; *fit in* and expect others to *fit in* as well.
5. Retirers: Duke and Alf, who once established on the watch move away from mainstream social activities and this causes no problems in the informal hierarchy.
6. Resisters: Tubby Taffy, Charlie and Arthur who would openly and persistently resist informal hierarchies. These firefighters may constantly move from watch to watch.

Officers:

7. Careerists or Movers: Patrick and Rob, who do not *fit in* with the watch, still want to 'serve' and resist by moving sideways to different spheres of the fire service such as: Administration, Personnel, Fire Prevention, Communications, Research and Development, Training, Communications, Training and Personnel, or take promotion to senior rank. These firefighters may actually never have *fitted in* and may in part comprise of 'Resisters' above (and may not have *joint understandings* with firefighters about their professional ethos; see Chapter 5).
8. Reluctant careerists: who are torn between the watch and the desk. These include firefighters who join the fire service as a career intending to be promoted, but become acculturated/happy on a watch and do not want to leave.
9. Sympathetic careerists: Barry and Shaun, who are prepared to leave their station to further their career, but their reluctance to do so may always make them sympathetic to the informal hierarchies and family life at a station.

It may be that *fitting in* is not so much an outcome, but different stages or processes that firefighters might pass through that then lead to outcomes. First and foremost, the probationer has to *fit in* by accepting the informal hierarchy. Second, the probationer learns their work-related and social skills. At the same time firefighters have to *fit in* with the social behaviour on watches, which in any formal sense might not always be work-related. However, it should come as no surprise that the majority want and do *fit in*, because most people have a strong desire to either be part of, or at least not be excluded from a social group (see Morgan 1987: 48). In particular, this chapter recognises that most firefighters experience a considerable pull and push to *fit in*. Most of those who join *The Job* do so for a number of dividends. *Work* to a firefighter is not a four letter word (see Collinson 1992) and their desire to *fit in* pushes them towards firefighters' hierarchy, which pulls them into a circular process, that first encompasses each new member, and in turn those members become part of the process that makes (and polices) the hierarchies norms and then reaches out to the next cohort of firefighters.

My findings concerning 'the pull' are not surprising and this reflects in the overwhelming number of applications those 'others' *outside of the fire service* make to join when vacancies occur. However, the high retention rates suggest that firefighters are happy to stay and accept the 'the push' to *fit in* exerted by firefighters' informal hierarchy. This hierarchy is capable of exerting considerable influence over the probationer, because experienced firefighters control access to the skills needed to become a firefighter (see Chapter 3). However, in their role as gatekeeper the hierarchy also require the probationer to respect them before they will pass on these skills and in this way they appear to *fit in* successive cohorts of firefighters. *Fitting in* appears to be a dynamic few firefighters can avoid and most probationers are likely to suppress some of their own negative feelings to *fit in*: either by a conscious decision to do this, or because they are caught up in the, "snowball" (Colin above): a dynamic that watch leaders use to sweep away opposition and collect everybody together. One

possible outcome of joining the informal hierarchy for probationers is that their socialisation involves accepting the way the watch acts, and has the outcome that they start to act like them as they increasingly *fit in*; become part of the dynamic that form the watch norms and in turn persuade others to *fit in*.

Many probationary firefighters have shown their awareness of the *potential* of the informal hierarchy to make life difficult if they do not *fit in* and have done so without experiencing any harassment themselves. Supporting my analysis is further evidence from prospective recruits to indicate that at least some of those applying to join have an already existing expectation that they will need to *fit in* with informal hierarchies. There is also evidence to suggest that the fire service actually filters for recruits who have some awareness of masculine hierarchies/understandings. Until 1982, these gatekeeping practices managed to exclude females from becoming firefighters. However, this misogynist gatekeeping was successfully challenged, but led and continues to lead to serious consequences for female firefighters (Walby 1991; IT 1995; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999; Corby 1999). To some extent, the fire service may be moving from gatekeeper's outright refusal to accept female firefighters and thus the direct and vile harassment that males use to try and deny female firefighters access may be reducing. Evidence from Terri, Jayne and Sue, hardly varies from their male counterparts; both male and female firefighters want to *fit in*, but do not altogether enjoy the process (category 2). What may be different is that male firefighters probably have insider experience of male hierarchies before joining the fire service (see Willis 1979, 1995; Canaan 1996; Prendergast and Forest 1998). This experience may allow them to realise the benefits in terms of patriarchal dividend (see Connell 1995) if they "keep their heads down" and defer their gratification until they have fitted in. In particular, it may be that male firefighters are likely to see their treatment as a rite of passage and not as personal, or as harassment. However, for Terri at least, it was not her first time amongst male hierarchies and her words indicate she wanted the "pussyfooting around" to stop, so she could become "one of them." I prefer not to view Terri's behaviour as being forced, *but her own decision* (see Chapter 1). Terri and other female firefighters may be developing human capital (in line with prospective male firefighters) to enhance their career prospects in a male organisation: a further example to add to those Walby (1997) notes earlier (see Chapters 1 and 6).

What I call 'the push' to *fit in* could be seen as *homosociality* (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Cockburn 1991b; Roper 1996; Chapter 1) as particularly in the fire service 'gatekeepers' may have hidden agendas concerning: how firefighting should be done (see Chapter 3); who should be firefighters (see Chapters 1, 5 and 6); firefighters status/imagery (see Chapters 3 and 5) and a variety of localised watch norms. Much of the behaviour of the informal hierarchy in introducing and policing its complex homosocial practices of *fitting in* can also be formally labelled as harassment (see MacKinnon 1979; Walby 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Morris and Nott 1991; Palmer 1992; Herbert 1994). At least four examples of resistance have clearly been harassed (Tubby Taffy, Charlie, Arthur and Ricky/tough guy). These examples and the example of Patrick and Rob also indicate that not everybody *fits in*. Despite possible abusive attention being focused on them, some have survived outside of the informal hierarchy and two have made careers away from the watch: they have '*fitted in*' as Fire Safety Officers (it is also possible that Bob (Chapter 3 may find himself *led* to non-op duties). This thesis does not aim to develop an understanding of officers' needs or experiences. However, officers, in a similar way to female firefighters, bring evidence to the research to help in identifying how masculinity might develop socially in the fire service. Officers' evidence indicates how for some, promotion has been a means of escape from the group: they have almost been levered off the watch to pursue their *individual* objectives. Whilst some have almost taken promotion reluctantly, because they know they are giving up a job they enjoy, and sitting behind a desk may not be so glamorous, but it pays better and you are less likely to get injured. However, it is interesting to note that officers may leave a watch for two almost opposite reasons; those more interested in officers may wish to pursue this.

5. CHAPTER FIVE CLASS, HIERARCHIES, RESISTANCE AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters have examined two areas central to firefighters' work (and firefighters' gender construction) '*getting in*' and '*fitting in*'. These are contested sites where firefighters organise informal hierarchies in order to resist senior officers and adapt rules. However, this is not a complete view, and there might be more to discover about the *gap between firefighters and officers* by looking directly at firefighters' hierarchies, resistance and gender construction from a class perspective. This will occur in the main body of the chapter, but to prepare the ground I first intend to take a brief look at how the fire service is located in economic class terms. Then, I shall use class as a framework for a debate to understand firefighters' resistance to officers as a struggle over non-economic (petty) dividends (see Wright 1984).

5.1.2. Traditional class relations

In Marxist terms, the fire service has no obvious 'product' and therefore firefighters do not produce surplus-value for capital to exploit. As such, the fire service might not be part of dominant class relations and antagonisms at work, which simply put, are viewed as a conflict over how capital tries to exploit workers and take the surplus-value of their labour. A more complex perspective would describe capital and labour relationships as exploitative in three areas of control concerning: the product; the process; investments and profits, and from these come the basic antagonistic and contradictory relations that progressively separate the worker from their labour (see Braverman 1974; Wright 1982a). However, capitalists cannot ignore fire, as the Great Fire of London has shown (see Segars 1989; Chapter 1). Therefore, for capital, the fire service is a necessary evil: an extreme case of an unproductive industry that reduces capitals' profits (see Braverman 1974: 419; Cardechi 1983: 132). There are other publicly financed industries/services, with a similar location – health is one example. Whilst parts of the 'welfare' sector recently returned to private ownership, a large non-profit-making sector remains. Some of these services are tested against pseudo-markets and (under Conservatism and to a lesser degree under New Labour) have been increasingly subject to economic rationalisations. The fire service is one of these, and whilst cost has been a consideration since Massey Shaw's days (see Chapter 1), there is increased effort to elevate financial efficiency over service efficiency by cutting and deskilling the fire service. Nevertheless, with the exception of some areas in Denmark, I know of no examples of a public fire service being privatised²⁶⁵. However, it is possible to put firefighting on an economic base by theorising that the money capital saves when firefighters extinguish a fire is an economic product, capable of having a surplus-value that in turn is set against the cost of the fire service²⁶⁶. It is then possible to argue that capital might have a second

²⁶⁵ In Denmark there is an organisation called Falk. This private company organises a variety of activities such as breakdown services (like the AA), security (like Securicor) and particularly in the countryside, it organises the fire and ambulance service. When other countries were organising their welfare state activities through nationalisation, Denmark found it expedient to turn directly to the private sector for the fire service. Despite being private, the fire service in Denmark organises along the same lines as the UK. In the UK this does not always mean the fire service has to be run by the state. Capital already runs its own (private) fire service at chemical and petroleum plants, where an instant response is preferable to the longer time it takes for the local authority fire service to attend. Until recently Heathrow fire service was not part of the local authority system for exactly the same reason, but now the London Fire Brigade have built a station at the airport and taken over this responsibility. In the same way Kent Fire service provide a station specifically for the Channel Tunnel.

²⁶⁶ Chapter 1 argues the fire service was originally organised by capital to reduce the loss to fire insurance companies. Now it is a public service the links with capital may be less than clear, but still there. Capital contributes through business rates for the fire service, but this investment might be well spent, because if the fire service is efficient in service terms, then insurance premiums (which capital also pays) are kept low. Fire-insurance companies are also capitalist organisations, their profit is the balance between overheads such as fire losses and income from premiums. It is also important to note that if fires are not quickly and effectively put out and the building is severely damaged then that trader stops trading. Loss of life in a fire can also be viewed from a similar perspective, because when a worker dies their skills

reason for reducing the cost of the fire service. Either way officers who support/organise cost cutting and the deskilling of the fire service (or at least are seen by firefighters to be doing so by not publicly resisting change as police and military officers do) may then appear to represent capital and the antagonism between officers and firefighters can appear as a classic class struggle in which firefighters are resisting in defence of their class (against the bourgeoisie/officers): a class acting consciously *for itself* against exploitation (Giddens 1982: 163-164; Crompton 1998: 200; Grint 1998: 94).

However, this would take a considerable denial/rejection of officers' working class origins and it might be expected that officers who were themselves once firefighters should have *shared understandings* with firefighters about their professional ethos. It may be that officers whom are found actively *supporting* cuts in the fire service could be acting in false consciousness, but this is not my view. I prefer to look for more tangible reasons to explain the antagonism between firefighters and officers²⁶⁷, and it may be that officers are trying to change classes by achieving upward mobility or that there is some personal benefit for them in exploiting firefighters. For example, it may be that when officers are promoted and are deprived of their ability to *get in* at a fire, they get their thrills (and 'prove' their masculinity) from bossing firefighters around: a situation that capital is 'happy' to accept, because one way that officers 'prove' their power is to deskill firefighters and cut the fire service, and this coincides with capitals' prime aim. Dividends, such as the power to boss someone around that cause antagonism within a class (though not always directly associated with economic profit), might appear as *petty* dividends (see Wright 1982a: 113; Grint 1998: 148).

Given that there are likely to be gender dividends, which provide *economic* advantage for men (see Connell 1995), this chapter will focus directly on the antagonistic relations *within* the fire service over *petty dividends* (see Wright 1982). In so doing, it will be important to question if antagonism between officers and firefighters occurs, not to defend against capital per se, but as a defence of resources firefighters (and officers) use to acquire petty dividends (and this may tell us more about how firefighters construct their gender). Section 2, which follows immediately, provides a clear example of how relations between firefighters and officers might become antagonistic by examining single tier entry promotion (STEP) and its main dynamic *shared experience*. This firmly establishes that a gap forms between firefighters and officers who have different expectations of outcomes from *shared experience*. Section 3 focuses on how firefighters separate themselves from officers by creating a distance between firefighters' hands-on, blue-collar (masculine) skills and officers' white-collar (feminine) work. Section 4 investigates four key activities in the fire service where firefighters resist officers' attempts to 'prove' their authority: dynamic risk assessment; BA control; training; fire prevention. Section 5 examines some areas where firefighters might be seen to be unambiguously constructing their masculinity, for example firefighters' sexual adventures, their public status and prejudiced views on female firefighters. Section 6 is a brief examination of an official dispute between FBU and officers/employers, which suggests that the FBU provides an umbrella under which all firefighters can gather. The conclusion returns to the debates on petty dividends.

are lost to the company that employs them; if the death occurs at work this would normally involve some extra payment by insurance companies. Therefore, it is possible to suggest (however tenuously) that firefighters' professional ethos supports capital as well as the public.

²⁶⁷ If officers were really acting in false consciousness they would be more likely attempt to colonise firefighters professional ethos (see Strangleman and Roberts 1999: 51), and especially firefighters entrepreneurial skills to improve service at point of delivery. Currently, Post or Neo-Fordism/Total Quality Management/Human Resource Management encourages workers to participate in the their work process by involving them in decision making at the lowest possible level (almost as employed entrepreneurs). The employers' hope in doing this is that quality and production will improve continuously as a result and traditional workplace resistance, which occurred under rigid Taylorist systems of labour control will wither (see Farnham and Horton 1993; Maidment and Thompson 1993; Pollitt 1993; Grint 1998; Strangleman and Roberts 1999).

5.2. THE OFFICERS

5.2.1. Single tier entry promotion (STEP)

Every officer starts his or her career as a firefighter. Starting at the bottom does not appear to influence the financial efficiency of the fire service because the Audit Commission (1995) accepts that Chief Officers successfully control budgets of £1.474 billion (HMCIFS 1999). However, successfully managing budgets is not the whole story. The fire service is required by government to be an equal opportunities employer (Straw 2000; see also Bucke 1994). The extreme way STEP restricts promotion to an internal labour market (ILM) and locks the workforce to their employment (see Burawoy 1979), may reduce the cost of training, facilitate close evaluation of promotion candidates and normally gets workplace approval²⁶⁸. However, taken to the degree that it is in the fire service, where all officers must serve their time as firefighters and receive their training in-house, STEP isolates the fire service from outside influences, particularly in the management field²⁶⁹. The experience officers gain as firefighters is also likely to influence their future decisions; this might not have the outcome that firefighters would always like, although it operates to perpetuate the status quo, particularly in respect to masculinity and homogeneity (see Young 1991; Reiner 1992; Office for Public Management 1996; Owen 1996; Corby 1999: 98-99). The fire service has already been shown to screen for masculine understandings by recruiting a predominantly *working class* male, able-bodied, white and heterosexual workforce: a situation where employing the stereotype only 'proves' the stereotype (see Chapters 1 and 4); it should come as no surprise that fire service promotion can involve patronage²⁷⁰. Chris, an equal opportunities adviser to the fire service, explains:

Chris: The Fire Service recruits from a narrow band of people, unlike the police and army. This is good for equality in that everyone gets a fair crack of the whip: no elite group or class provides the officers, as each person has a chance to achieve full potential. But can be bad in regard to patronage.
(Senior civilian equality adviser).

The narrow band the fire service recruits from is *white, male, able-bodied and working class*. Patronage negatively affects equal opportunities (see Kanter 1977; MacKinnon 1979; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b), in the fire service restricts the promotion of "boat rockers" (Hart 1982: 159) who might challenge tradition and/or the abilities of current officers (see Dixon 1994²⁷¹) and can lead to the 'Peter Principle' (see Peter 1968; Buck 1997; Young 1991; Dixon 1994). Not unexpectedly, I found no officers who would argue against STEP²⁷². The Dean of the FSC justifies the fire service view:

The fire service is a vocation ... motivated more by a sense of public service than by monetary awards ... Graduate entrants could never fully participate in the professional ethos of the British Fire Service because this ethos is founded on the *shared experience of having been a firefighter*.
(Willis-Lee 1993a: 11-2). [My emphasis].

²⁶⁸ The 'whole' fire service support STEP (see Ord 1993; CFBAC 1994; Manuel 1999; Smith 1998; Thornton 1999).

²⁶⁹ It may be that STEP is a questionable 'genuine occupational requirement' (see Lewis 1992: 36; Palmer 1992: 72), because it not only prevents suitably trained managers from joining the fire service at the appropriate level, it also denies access to people at those levels, who cannot meet the fire service's medical standards and could never successfully apply for a job as a firefighter.

²⁷⁰ Flanagan (1998), argues that 83% of Chief Officers admit to helping 'suitable' candidates.

²⁷¹ Dixon (1994) suggests that in the military, where he considers many officers have lacked intellectual abilities, officers restrict and stop the promotion of entrepreneurial officers who might be intellectually free thinking enough to challenge the system. Such a criticism might well apply to the fire service where officers often see critique as a personal criticism of them because they are responsible for the system.

²⁷² There are at least three reasons for this. First, it would allow outside managers to compete with them for their jobs. Second, outsiders with entrepreneurial/academic skills might challenge current officers way of organising the fire service as they did in the health service (see Lucio and MacKenzie 1999: 158-161). Third, if officers were to criticise the 'meritocratic' system, especially those who went before them, then they would be criticising in effect themselves, or at least the system that they would argue chose them.

Willis-Lee argues against graduate entrant level, suggesting instead the importance placed on officers' "shared experience" of the fire service's *raison d'être* – the saving of life, the suppression of fire and the rendering of humanitarian services (the product of firefighters' labour). Officers will also have a, "shared experience" of having *fitted in, or at least having worked on a watch* (see Chapters 1, 3 and 4).

5.2.2. Principal officers' view

The Fire Service College trains most officers in the fire service and I gained access to two consecutive Brigade Command Courses (BCC), which train potential Chief Officers²⁷³ (see FSC 1999). This was an excellent opportunity to mix with those selected to lead the fire service in the future. I shadowed them in formal sessions, at meals, in the bar, at a 'landing party'²⁷⁴ and playing golf (rather, they played golf and I followed them round: an excellent situation in which to meet people and gather data). The selection process for the BCC is competitive and appears to be uncompromising:

Chief Officer: The BCC cannot get enough good students for next year so has been cut back from two [courses] a year to one.
(All details withheld). [My insert].

There is no compromise on standards of entry for the BCC and if promotion remains limited to STEP, then it is clear that there will not be enough trained officers to fill the expected vacancies:

Alistair: Not enough courses *to provide all principal officers that will be needed in the future*: 387 applied for this course, short listed to 59, 11 selected.
(BCC student). [My emphasis].

The fire service's current inability to provide suitable candidates to run two BCC's a year places a question mark over who fills the vacancies that still exist when all those judged to be suitable have been promoted. Given the limitations of STEP, in the future (and perhaps now), untrained (and by inference unsuitable) officers may fill the vacancies for principal officers.

5.2.3. The BCC view

My access to those chosen to lead the fire service in the future provides an opportunity to investigate Willis-Lee's (1993) claim that officers had "*shared experience*" with firefighters. I did this in the awareness that when people who are part of a *shared experience/understanding* (especially a class grouping) move away and adopt different value, this can be a site of conflict (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; see Collinson 1992, 1994; Hearn 1994). However, the majority view amongst officers confirms Willis-Lee's argument. Officers are convinced (or at least they tried to convince me) that without experiential knowledge of being a firefighter they could not do their job. Moreover, they also considered that they could update their *shared understandings* by attending fires and talking to firefighters. However, Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that firefighters might have something to hide from officers and it would be reasonable to expect that this might influence the discussions between firefighters and officers. In reply to a question about this situation, Arnold's answer was simple:

Arnold: Certainly when I was a firefighter even the Divisional Commander coming to the station would be an event. And we would be up and polishing things and making sure the appliance was together and all the usual *bullshit* sort of stuff. I think a lot of that

²⁷³ Currently this is the only course that the Home Office funds at the FSC, presumably because the Home Office has an interest in providing *suitable* principal officers.

²⁷⁴ 'Landing parties' are not so much parties, but an in-house name for when students at FSC meet for late night drinking and socialising at the end of their accommodation corridors.

has gone now anyway. *Certainly, when I go on a station I wouldn't expect firefighters to be anything like we were when a senior officer came. ... Now when I go on a firestation I tell everybody before I go and we sit down and have a cup of tea out of uniform .. relaxed dress anyway and we sit round and have a cup of tea*²⁷⁵. (BCC student). [My emphases].

Despite admitting the “bullshit” he provided for senior officers when he was a firefighter, Arnold does not believe firefighters will bullshit him. This presumption by officers that they were still ‘in touch’ was a common response, and only one officer challenges this possibility:

Alan: People at my rank like to think they are. You go on stations, not to try and be part of it, *but you let them know you were once part of it*, but you get the impression that *they are not suffering you*. You get the impression that *‘he really doesn't know what it's like any more’*. And *I don't think I do* to be honest with you. ... I get the impression that *they tell you what they think you want to hear* and they *show you what they think you want to see*. (BCC student). [My emphases].

Alan's minority view, suggesting that he expects firefighters to only show him what they judge he wants to see, might paradoxically imply he is in touch²⁷⁶. Alan's colleagues, though, appear to suffer the same deception they effected on senior officers when they were firefighters. It may be implicit in Alan's extract, but I will make it clear by adding that firefighters are only likely to show senior officers what they judge is safe to show them. Firefighters are also sufficiently mischievous to flaunt their disrespect for officers and deliberately provide them with information just to *wind them up*. The failure of officers to recognise this probability *in the way I believe Alan has*, provides the evidence to suggest how out of touch officers might actually be. Officers' almost omnipotent self-belief in their ability to remain in touch, is the other half of an argument firefighters make time after time: ‘Officers always believe that they have the ability to succeed where others have failed’.

5.2.4. The view from the station: “all piss and importance”

It would be unreasonable not to expect some resistance from firefighters to their officers. However, I was not prepared for firefighters' vehemence, or the degree to which they would support Alan's view. Christian explains just how inept senior officers might be at using *shared understandings* to relate to firefighters:

Christian: The Deputy Chief comes down for a chat and I had a particular thing that I wasn't happy about. And perhaps because I didn't put it over to him correctly he snubbed me; cut me down yunnoo; shot me down in flames²⁷⁷. And *at the end of it I thought I have wasted my time there*. (Brigade one, leading firefighter 20 years' service, age 38). [My emphasis].

The view that officers did not like criticism, or were not listening is a common one. Pete, Fred and Patrick have a similar view to Christian:

Pete: You get a lot of them just don't listen. They don't want to know you. They are actually talking to yuh and you know that when you talk back they are not actually listening to yuh, yunnoo [laughter] ... *He just didn't want to know, all piss and*

²⁷⁵ Presumably this is similar to a ‘hats off’ meeting.

²⁷⁶ It is interesting to note, after my earlier comments on ‘boat rockers’, that Alan's promotion had stalled a number of years ago and his place on this prestigious course is seen by him as an opportunity to revitalise his career. I recognise in Alan something of the entrepreneur: an officer who traditional officers might think would rock the boat.

²⁷⁷ This is a reference to the way that aeroplanes were shot down, as for example in the war.

importance, you know what I mean ... you soon suss them out and you don't want to talk to them because you know it is *a waste of time; not listening*.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 18 years' experience, age 43). [My emphases and insert].

Fred: I don't know quite what it is when they get the white-shirt²⁷⁸ on em. They loose touch with what the motors²⁷⁹ are all about, what being a fireman's all about.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 15 years' service, age 37).

Patrick: They seem to have missed the point somehow. They have moved up the ranks and sometimes they don't always remember their roots, where they were, *their job to the public*.
(Residential Fire Prevention Officer). [My emphasis].

Firefighters' argue that when officers don the "white-shirt" and dismissively show a lack of interest about what firefighters have to say about *The Job*, that officers have lost touch with "their roots ... their job to the public." Rather than increasing understanding, officers' *shared experience* appears to be creating a distance between them and firefighters. It is almost as if the officers appear to 'know better' now they have a (middle class) white-shirt and that all they were part of before, when they were (working class) firefighters, is no longer relevant.

5.2.5. Respect

In Chapter 3, I suggested that senior officers were liable to lose respect during '*post mortems*'. This effect can increase, if, after a makeup, a senior officer holds a collective debrief of the crews that attended the fire. According to one officer²⁸⁰, these debriefs frequently reduce to a point where the firefighters and officers are involved in 'mud-slinging' exercises. Senior officers then presumably disappoint firefighters by not respecting their views, which given their so called *joint understandings* firefighters still expect officers to do. More than that, officers' attitude on these occasions is almost bound to be seen by firefighters as breaking the *joint understanding* (which supports the whole notion of STEP) *that firefighting is a hands-on skill and cannot be understood by people outside* (a place where senior officers inevitably are). Officers having betrayed that understanding, it is only a short step for firefighters to start to think that officers are no longer interested in (what firefighters believe to be) a further *joint understanding*, firefighters' professional ethos: *to provide an efficient service to help the public* (see Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Chapters 1 and 3).

The evidence suggests that *shared experience* (Willis-Lee 1993a) might not improve the understanding between officers and firefighters, but damage it. It might even be that some senior officers are deliberately distancing themselves from their past location and understandings as firefighters, 'proving' as it were their '*calling*' (and firefighters' belief) by changing (classes). Some officers can recognise that they have lost the trust of firefighters:

Alistair: The relationship between firefighters and officers is all right up to Station Officers, who they trusted, but above that they hate them. ... Firefighters told Docherty²⁸¹ that the most stressful period of their service was not when they were at fires, but when senior officers lined them up and questioned them²⁸².

²⁷⁸ This is not a metaphorical use of language as in class structures but a reality. All ranks up to and including sub officers wear blue shirts and station officers and above have white shirts: a similar division exists with fire helmets with blue shirted workers having yellow helmets and white shirted officers have white helmets.

²⁷⁹ 'The motors' as Fred describes them are the fire appliances, but his use of this phrase is probably better described by the work the appliances do and in my estimation he might just as easily used the words '*The Job*'.

²⁸⁰ This officer was a student on the Brigade Command Course and all details are withheld.

²⁸¹ This comment relates to a research project on stress in the fire service, Docherty (1991).

²⁸² When senior officers visit stations, firefighters often 'parade' in a line, where they stand at attention as the senior officer walks along the line asking firefighters technical questions.

(BCC student).

Alistair provides evidence to suggest that there is a point when *shared understanding* might divide officers and firefighters: the point when an officer *leaves the watch* (possibly even their class) on promotion to senior officer. Alistair's second statement requires some explanation, because it may be difficult to understand why answering questions can be more stressful to firefighters than firefighting. An explanation may also help to reveal the formal organisation of relations between firefighters and senior officers, which can often result in officers taking token actions to 'prove' they are in control (see Howell 1996).

Formal procedures allow visiting senior officers to require firefighters to *line up at attention*. Officers can then pass down the line asking technical questions and firefighters must post-script their answers with "Sir"²⁸³. Firefighters dislike this demeaning situation and may suffer additional stress because firefighters' own emphasis that their job is hands-on marginalises the acquisition of technical knowledge (see Doyle 1996; Chapters 3 and 4). Firefighters therefore realise that senior officers have the ability to belittle them if the officer asks a technical question which they cannot answer.

5.2.6. A telling example

Proving your place in the hierarchy does not only occur between firefighters on watches. Officers 'prove' their place too. Justin (a civilian student at university who has firefighters on his course) explains:

Justin: If there is an officer in the room and there is an ordinary firefighter they will act as subordinates. And they will go with the pecking order in the way they talk sometimes. We have witnessed one subordinate officer, or ordinary firefighter, putting his point forward. And the officer [who was also a student] wasn't happy with what he was saying and they stepped outside, argument wise and they were both having a go. And in the end *the subordinate had to back down. The simple fact the officer said 'I am an Officer'*.
(Civilian student). [My emphasis and insert].

Justin provides further evidence of the distance officers are creating between themselves and firefighters. If firefighters must acknowledge senior officer's 'superiority' in a 'civilian' *university*, then a serious question mark must be cast over Arnold's belief that a cup of tea can overcome the distance between him and firefighters²⁸⁴. Given that firefighters actions in such formal settings appear to be in contradiction with the findings of Chapters 1, 3 and 4 (that firefighters almost appear to ignore their senior officers' rules), the bullshit theory might be truer than Arnold would care to believe. It might easily explain firefighters' paradoxical behaviour, as firefighters acting a part (bullshitting) when senior officers are present²⁸⁵ (just as Arnold did when he was a firefighter). Significantly, the recent Thematic Review on equality (HMIFS 1999) could be an example of how firefighters might act when a senior officer visits. It is possible to suggest that the findings of what really amounted to a series of one hour visits to a number of stations by *principal* officers gave a new meaning to 'hit and run research' (see Chapter 2); I would not be surprised to find that firefighters exaggerated the situation just to windup senior officers²⁸⁶.

²⁸³ There are currently no operational female senior officers.

²⁸⁴ In effect the cup of tea approach is similar to the 'soft soap' approach of new managerialism (see Collinson 1992: 50), but hardly likely to break down this might of right approach just reported, nor the fact that firefighters (above) know that rather than valuing criticism it is seen as personal (see Dixon 1994: 207).

²⁸⁵ Formal visits to a firestation by senior officers are not frequent and given the shift system some firefighters might not see a senior officer for years.

²⁸⁶ Researchers will always have difficulty getting 'honest' data, but when high ranking fire service officers carry out research amongst firefighters (especially when they only spend an hour with them, arrive in official cars and lack research training) they are vulnerable to all the difficulties returning researchers might experience (see Jackson 1987; Wolf 1996).

5.3. CREATING A DISTANCE

Grint (1998: 221) suggests manual labour is a site where proletarian masculinity, “aggression, domination and physical strength — is embodied in many notions of trade union power and working class resistance.” However, the decline in the industries where proletarian masculinity is celebrated (see Braverman 1974; Cockburn 1991a; Strangleman 1998; Blum, 2000:) might have reduced one important site where males claim their natural advantage over females (see Connell 1995), were it not for some industries (almost tokens by comparison with previous times), which keep alive the celebration of men’s physical skills. In these industries, men claim their (working class) embodied work separates them from women and distances them from other men (middle class office workers and managers) who participate in ‘subordinate feminine labour’ (see Lipman-Blumen 1979; Hochschild 1983; Collinson 1988, 1992; Game and Pringle 1984; Pringle 1989). Collinson (1994: 33) continues the argument:

[Engineers] elevate the ‘practical’ and ‘commonsense’ knowledge that they believed was a condition and consequence of manual labour over the more abstract and theoretical forms of knowledge found in the middle-class world of white-collar work and management. ... an unproductive ‘paper chase’ and ‘pen pushing’ that had little or no relevance to the important realities of manufacturing heavy vehicles. ... The few manual workers who had been promoted were dismissed as ‘yes men’ for having sacrificed their independence, autonomy, even their manhood in hierarchical conformity. It was widely believed that ‘*Blokes are made to change*’ once they were promoted.

[My emphasis and insert].

The fire service is another organisation requiring the hands-on technical skills of engineers and where ‘blokes might change [class] on promotion’. Firefighters can still claim the patriarchal dividends from the ‘best’ images of proletarian masculinity (see Whalen 1980; Cooper 1986; Lloyd-Elliott 1992; Wallington and Holloway 1994; Chapter 3) and they are also resisting the economic rationalisations and deskilling (see Cameron 1999a 1999b 1999c 1999d 1999e; FBU 1999a 1999b; Gilchrist 1999), which has decimated British industry (see Braverman 1974) and public service (see Maidment and Thompson 1993; Hutton 1995; Jenkins 1995). But does this separate firefighters from their officers? Despite the challenge to Willis-Lee’s (1993a) notion of *shared experience*, firefighters still expect that officers should (and would) have this experience. Colin explains:

Colin: They have got to know what it’s like to appreciate .. you can’t send someone into a burning factory, because you can’t appreciate what they [firefighters] are going to be dealing with inside it if they [officers] have never ever done it.
[My inserts].

Colin is arguing that without the *shared experience* of knowing what it is like to be in a fire that officers would not have the skills to control firefighting operations (see Willis-Lee 1993a). Alf adds to a description he gave in Chapter 3 of the qualities of a *good firefighter*:

Alf: What I would call a good fireman is somebody that knows how to do his job on the fireground and provide a good service to the public: a good fire officer who can fill out all the *paperwork* and do all the other bits and pieces, to me *isn’t a good fireman*.
[My emphases].

Alf supports Colin’s and Willis-Lee’s argument by arguing a good fireman is someone with *shared experience*. His extract also suggests he is distancing good firemen from good officers who can only do the “paperwork” and lack firefighters’ *shared understandings* of firefighting: officers without experiential skills who might order firefighters to do the wrong thing. Duke provides an example:

Duke: I was on the ALP²⁸⁷ ... The officers that were there screaming, ‘get it up, put it up, get your jacks down, what are you doing?’ ... It was a situation of you couldn’t do that.

Duke then explained how he refused, on grounds of safety, to comply with the officer’s orders. The first sentence of Duke’s next extract expresses a view that supports Willis-Lee (1993a), but the remainder of the extract might not get his approval:

Duke: I would still say that experience still counts for so much in this job. Rather than somebody who has risen through the ranks fairly *quickly because they have been able to absorb knowledge*. ... Anyone that is *academically* ... the *exam process* ... *it’s a piece of piss* to them.
[My emphases].

Despite not passing any exams, Duke is very senior in the informal hierarchy. His answer elevates his own importance and he distances himself from those *academic* officers who may not have had time to gather *shared experience*. The focus group that follows provides a powerful argument from some experienced firefighters:

Pete: You hope that the bloke sitting in front there has got a little bit of experience and what have yuh. The good ones, the ones that come through and uses yuh .. that’s a good JO²⁸⁸. *He uses people and uses their brains, rather than saying you will do this right and wrong*. He has got to be a bit careful, take a little bit of advice at times and they’ll do right won’t they?
[My emphasis].

Norman: Yeah.
(Brigade one, firefighter, 21 year’s service, age 41, in a focus group).

Pete: But there are some coming through the system in the last few years that really and truly are, as far as firefighting goes, *they have read it in a book, but aint done it*.
[My emphases].

Firefighters expect that *shared experience* will result in ‘good’ officers who understand ‘*The Job*’, respect firefighters’ ability to *pass up* knowledge and have the *hands-on* experience to *lead* firefighters *safely* when they *get in*. In a faint whiff of nostalgia Pete refers to what is happening now, as opposed to in the past, by drawing attention to what is becoming a recurring theme amongst firefighter, the *academic* knowledge of officers who have not ‘served time’ as a firefighter and no longer have the (shared) experience to lead at fires. The discussion continued in this theme until Carl’s summing up:

Carl: It’s like the bloke from training school init? Come into the brigade and went up to the training centre and eh he was sitting there and saying, ‘oh yeah my days on the station are gone now I am a manager. I am going to go to the fire safety’ and do this, that and whatever. I thought he had done like fucking fifteen years or so, you know what I mean? And I found out he had done three or four, whatever. *He weren’t qualified*.
[My emphasis].

Shared experience to these firefighters means time spent firefighting and this officer’s attempt to create an illusion that he had served his time (talk the walk) did not work. Colin too raises what

²⁸⁷ Arial Ladder Platform, a self-supporting platform that can extend to over 100 feet.

²⁸⁸ Junior officer.

became an almost mandatory subtext about ‘academia’, which to firefighters can apply to *anything that is not ‘hands-on’*:

Colin: The only way to gain experience is through doing years and doing *The Job*. That’s the only way and rushing people is not the way. I don’t think especially with graduates as well .. I mean they look at .. it’s obvious that they want these people to get through. The people with slightly a bit more up top. *They may not be great with their hands or a good firefighter*, but up top, they have got all the brain power and you could see them *pushing them people* through.
[My emphases].

There can be no doubt, that firefighters have little regard for officers who cannot do *The Job*. One extract from another focus group probably sums up ‘all’ firefighters’ views:

Ian: Yeah there *all degree’d up or O levels this*. There are the sort of people who *go straight through the ranks* and become a leading fireman after two years. And they’re *OK in the office, but they’re shit on the fireground*. And it’s the blokes who have done a couple of years that are covering their arses. And then these people are *getting put through the ranks* and going higher and higher: *promote the wankers out of the way*. (Brigade 2, firefighter, 8 years’ service, age 30). [My emphases].

This focus group were very direct; academic officers who lack *shared experience*, might risk firefighters lives, particularly if they ignore firefighters’ expertise. Firefighters answer is to create a distance: “*promote the wankers out of the way*.”

Firefighters’ uncompromising view of some officers as academics, follows an argument in Chapter 1 that senior officers no longer get sufficient operational experience, consequently are out of touch and may lack the experience to provide safe leadership at those few makeups they attend. Alf provides an example:

Alf: People who I would rather not work alongside and I hate to have to say this .. em .. most of those have ended up as senior officers [laughter]. Cos they don’t actually have to do it ... *they have bent over backwards to get promoted so they don’t actually have to be on the fireground* ... they are now our hierarchy [laughter].
[My emphasis and insert].

Alf is distancing himself from those officers that use promotion to escape from firefighting: officers who may also comprise the ‘Careerists or Movers’ category in Chapter 4 and leave the operational watch as quickly as possible. Liam calls them ‘flyers’:

Liam: Those ADO’s or DO’s don’t know a lot. Just sit in offices and read a lot ... Flyer, right place, right time ... some might have experience, some jump experience, go to FP. (Brigade seven, Leading firefighter, 5 years’ service, age 38).

There is no doubt that despite arguments about *shared understandings*, there is a distance between what officers may or may not have been when they were firefighters and what they are now (they have left the class of firefighters). You do not even have to be a firefighter to recognise this as Hilary explains:

Hilary: No senior officer can talk to firefighters. In reality they *can’t talk the role*. (Senior civilian equality worker) [My emphasis].

Firefighters are busy creating a distance between themselves and officers, and firefighters’ perception that officers cannot ‘*walk the talk*’ becomes real in its consequences (see Thomas 1909).

5.3.1. Paperwork

Closely associated with the ‘prized model’ of working class hands-on proletarian masculinity is the argument that paperwork is somehow not proper work (see Collinson 1994). Firefighters’ characteristic dislike for paperwork and academia widens the distance between them and their officers. When I asked Terri if she was interested in promotion, her answer provides a clear link between respect, operational experience and firefighters’ views on office work:

Terri: [T]o get the respect you need, I think you have got to have that operational experience. ... I wouldn’t want to be really shoved into some office somewhere and forgotten about, yunnoo [laughter] and vegetate there.
[My emphasis and inserts].

Terri argues that the embodied activity of the vital and alert notion of *getting in*, which firefighters use as a benchmark, is in powerful contrast to the paperwork of officers. Firefighters appear to be busy distancing themselves from the many officers for whom they have no respect and consequently do not trust. Officers whose promotion is based on academic prowess, rather than shared experience: a belief firefighters support by associating officers with pen-pushers and firefighters own clear view that promotion should only be available after a considerable *shared experience*. Their argument shifts from a belief in *shared understandings* to suggest that ‘academic’ officers were never ‘real’ firefighters (like them) anyway and just passed through the rank (class) of firefighter on route to ‘better’ things. Keith provides an explicit example of firefighters’ view of academic officers:

Keith: You get one of these young upstarts, *these boys coming along* and the only reason why they’re there is through *exams*; through *paper work*. ... He cannot *fit into* a team. ... So *he is going up on his academic side, from office to office to office*. Occasionally he gets thrown back into operational and *he finds out he can’t do* and he strives harder and *goes back into his office*.
(Brigade 2, firefighter, 15 years’ service, age 40, in a focus group). [My emphases].

Keith’s lack of respect for officers is obvious. He uses two of the worse insults that a firefighter can make about a ‘colleague’: accusing him of not being able to do *The Job* and hiding in the office. Such a statement might paraphrase firefighters’ and indeed Collinson’s (1994) argument about the distance between the ‘workers’ and the academic pen-pushers they do not trust.

5.3.2. Would you take promotion?

The view that men “*sacrifice their manhood ... change once they were promoted*” (Collinson 1994: 33) might not get Young’s (1991) support, because he argues that masculinity is a central feature of police promotion. However, masculinity comes in many forms (Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Hearn 1994; Connell 1995) and, as I argue in the introduction, has no fixed meaning (except through the eye of the speaker/interpreter; see Thomas 1909; Giddens 1979; Kondo 1990). In Collinson’s case, the eyes belong to engineers; in Young’s case police officers; and in my case firefighters. On the sliding scale of “what is masculinity?” it might be safe to talk of a (working class) proletarian masculinity that celebrates physical deeds and a (middle class) white-collar masculinity that celebrates managerial authority. The police position on this scale is somewhat ambiguous, their masculinity involves ‘proving’ they are in charge, sometimes physically, but more often involves a physical presence, which supports a psychological approach²⁸⁹. Despite the distance between the physical and psychological, Neale (1995, cited in Collinson and Hearn 1996: 3; see also Collinson *et al* 1990) provides some metaphors that *bridge the gap*.

Captains of industry consistently presented ‘heroic’ images...depicted and portrayed themselves as ‘hard men’ virile swashbuckling and flamboyant entrepreneurs

²⁸⁹ This suggestion may be interesting to follow up in further research.

It appears that even those sitting behind a desk might want to imagine themselves ‘as if’ they were achieving an embodied masculinity, thereby supporting and placing themselves within the commonsense understandings on gender divisions (see Connell 1995). This might give some sense of understanding senior officers as trying to create an illusion that they are both proletarian firefighters and tough managers/officers. From firefighters’ perspective this could appear that officers are trying to ‘steal’ firefighters’ proletarian imagery *and* sit behind a desk with it: a role firefighters have already feminised²⁹⁰; something that firefighters (and the engineer above) must inevitably deny if they are to preserve their (subjective) working class masculinity.

As part of a powerful hierarchy (one function of which may be to conservatively defend their class), the way firefighters’ distance themselves from officers could be influential in persuading some firefighters not to seek promotion. To search for evidence that this might happen, I used my experiential knowledge as an ex-firefighter to judge that the following two firefighters had the mental ability to become officers. They both denied any interest in being officers:

Jack: Not at the moment no. I have done my part-one for the Lf’s²⁹¹, but em probably just because you do .. you do it because you do. It’s the way the system works, if you do it you don’t have to do your qualified’s²⁹². People tend to, em, people just expect you do it really. I thought everyone was doing it, so I just did it. Although it’s nice to *have the ticket there if you want to have it in the future .. but at the moment I want to be going into jobs. I don’t want to be standing outside.* (Brigade one, probationary firefighter, 1 year’s service, age 27). [My emphasis].

Richard: When I first joined the brigade I thought I would, yunnoo. I would like promotion, use my degree, get on with it. But at this present moment in time *I am quite happy to do what I am doing.* ... I just want to *get the exams under my belt.* ... I am quite happy as I am and I think it is necessary to get the experience before .. *I really need to get the experience myself,* to know what I am *sending people into* before I actually send them in. (Brigade one, probationary firefighter, one years’ service, age 26) [My emphases].

Jack and Richard enjoy the hands-on ‘*getting in*’ of firefighting. Despite a structural arrangement that encourages exam taking, nothing during their interviews led me to believe they were currently seeking promotion. Whilst attitudes can change, these two potential officers were more interested in achieving the accolade of being a *good firefighter* than becoming officers. It is also possible that these two firefighters recognise that their entrepreneurial skills (might only be free) would be restricted and even work against them if they followed the promotion trail (see Dixon 1994; Baigent 1996).

5.3.3. Senior officers’ views

²⁹⁰ Collinson (1992: 36 citing Gray 1987) acknowledges that by acting to feminise the males in charge of them and to promote their own physical skills, male workers actually conform to the loutish way that managers see them (see Rob’s reference to firefighters as “animals” in Chapter 4).

²⁹¹ The “part-one of the Lf’s”, is a reference to the first part of the statutory examination for the leading firefighter rank. This is a written examination and the part two is a practical examination.

²⁹² After four years service, firefighters can take a practical examination to ‘prove’ they are qualified (in some brigades this is almost a formality and others a more recognised procedure; there are no reported failures). This qualification is currently worth £1731 per year (2000/2001). Passing the Lf’s examination provides an exemption from this process and this might encourage firefighters to then look to get the actual rank (colonising them). However, this does not mean that firefighters will necessarily begin to conform to the rules and bureaucracy within the fire service, which could undermine the informal hierarchy. Those I interviewed who were showing an interest in promotion were mostly only interested in operational ranks (up to and including watch-commander), which allows them to keep their hands-on skills as a firefighter, remain on the watch and continue to resist senior officers.

My findings suggest that there is a considerable distance between the orthodoxy of what firefighters think an officer should do/be and the reality. Officers, on their part, may wish to create a distance in some areas, but they still believe they are *good firefighters* and Chapter 1 provides evidence of how officers may elevate their role outside the fire above that of firefighters who have *got in*. Over the many examples of such attitudes, which senior officers showed me, I have chosen a civilian (with more opportunity to talk to principal officers than I was ever going to get) to represent their view:

Clio: I deal quite regularly with the Chief's and the ACO's. That's the sort of level I tend to deal with, not so much the junior officers because of the job I do. When they're socialising they also say, 'yeah I was at this .. I came on the scene and I was dying to *get in there*'. ... They all still want to have those hoses and put the fire out²⁹³.
(Civilian worker).

5.3.4. Conclusion

The evidence in this section does not support Willis-lee's (1993) view that *shared experience* binds firefighters and officers together. Officers lose the respect of firefighters when they leave the station (their class) to take senior desk bound command: a position that firefighters feminise and distance themselves from. However, without questioning firefighters apparent deference to visiting senior officers firefighters' resistance might be obscured. At this time, firefighters' actions are difficult to reconcile with the powerful group that they appear to be in the rest of the thesis. After the 'game' officers start by their 'us and them' behaviour (lining up firefighters and drawing rank at university) is unmasked, it is easy to see firefighters' deference on these occasions as partly an act. In Weberian terms, it is possible that firefighters metaphorically keep dusted a Weberian iron cage of bureaucracy which they jump into when an officer visits. This is what firefighters would call a windup (see Chapter 4), because they are mirroring back to senior officers a reflection that senior officers want to see: a reflection that 'proves' officers' superiority *and officers have believed it*. In answer to any question about who is managing the fire service, it must be considered that firefighters may be as much managing their officers, as the other way around. This may be an extreme example of 'image management' by a group who are supposed to be subordinate (see Goffman 1959, 1961, 1997c). However, officers do not seem to recognise what is happening and argue they are in control so convincingly that they appear to believe their own argument: a situation that becomes real in its consequences (see Thomas 1909; Janowitz 1966: 301). Or that is how I put it as a sociologist; as a firefighter I would have suggested *bullshit baffles brains*²⁹⁴!

To help understand why firefighters are able to resist their officers I have drawn from the notion of resistance through distance (Collinson 1994). Firefighters' arguments largely echo the views that proletarian workers have about office workers (Connell 1989, 1995; Collinson 1994). One particular example of this relates to officers behaviour on the fireground, an area where there is supposed to be *shared understanding*. However, there is little *shared understanding* in the way that firefighters vehemently distance themselves from those officers who they define as academic and who they do not trust at fires. This vehemence might be explained by seeing officers as denying their class roots (see Hollway and Jefferson 2000) and be in part caused by the orthodoxy that firefighters and officers share common understandings about their professional ethos (that officers presumably held before being promoted), which firefighters believe officers are now denying. Again, following Thomas

²⁹³ This view is born out by others, "every officer has an ordinary fireman inside him somewhere" (Hart 1982: 164).

²⁹⁴ At these times firefighters might well be seen by Goffman (Lemert and Branaman 1997; see also Ditton 1980), as skilled interactionists who pit their wits against the observation powers of officers (see Hassard 1985: 180). In slightly different terms to the way it is reported elsewhere in this chapter, firefighters might call this a successful windup. The way officers have reacted to believe what firefighters have shown them, might not be a traditional success in the way firefighters seek to get a reaction from their colleagues, but the intention to get a reaction is the same (made all the funnier when an officer does not realise it).

(1909), once distance is acknowledged by firefighters, the consequences for officers, especially in the way firefighters stereotype outcomes, can become ‘real’.

5.4. WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Foucault argues that in the military “the machine required can be constructed” (Rabinow 1986: 179). Any visitor to a fire service training centre might be forgiven for believing that during recruit firefighter training, firefighters are almost machines in the course of construction. But, this is a false picture of the fire service (although it may not appear so to the recruits in training) and as Chapters 3 and 4 suggest, once firefighters (the machines) are free of the training centre, its influence is replaced as probationers become actively involved with firefighters’ informal hierarchy. This does not mean that firefighters will forget the lessons of basic training, but they will learn a new approach to how things are done. Their new peers (the experienced firefighters) will also teach them that when confronted by visiting officers set on proving their importance, a firefighter might find it expedient to massage an officer’s ego by reflecting back the image that officers want to see. For firefighters, possible humbling situations (firefighters lining up above) can then be reconciled against the end gain that once officers have had their egos massaged, they will leave the station and might not return for years. Firefighters can also laugh amongst themselves at how they have woundup the officer.

5.4.1. How the watch organise

However, one other group are present and witness firefighters’ behaviour towards senior officers, the watch-commanders. They are in an ambiguous situation, they work day-to-day with firefighters and they must operate (at least appear to) within the formal hierarchy: a delicate negotiation. The successful watch-commander also requires two contrasting management styles — on the fireground, they must be directive (authoritarian) and at the station, they must be able to participate and work with the firefighters (see Davies 1980: 52). Alternating, at a moments notice, between these two worlds and styles of management cannot be easy, nor can most officers expect to be experts in both styles. The following extract from Graham (1992: 18; see also LFCDA 1995; Baigent 1996) does not surprise me in the least:

Many leaders often emerge who are not junior officers and indeed their leadership is sometimes so strong it can overwhelm the weaker junior officer and management becomes almost a competitive issue.

When I was a watch-commander *I thought at the time I was in charge*, but I know realise that running the watch was rarely “a competitive issue”, which I subjectively viewed myself as winning, but more-often a compromise in which I might well have been a lesser partner. Alf explains:

Alf I think some of the decisions of the general running of the watch are *negotiable*, i.e. if a watch-commander requires you to act in a certain way all day every day and the whole watch disagree with that, you call a meeting and you say sorry Guv, but we don't like this. We don't want to get up at 0900 and polish fire engines till 1345, we think that is too much. We don't mind polishing the fire engines, we're quite prepared .. we know they have got to be cleaned up .. how about if we just do it every other day until 1130'. *And then you strike a good compromise and you then build a working relationship*, as far as that goes. Yes you have a watch-commander but *his role is negotiable*. We are not tin soldiers; we are human beings; we have opinions and we are all entitled to voice them.
[My emphases].

In an organisation with formal/written rules, Alf is describing the informal compromise between the watch and *their* officers²⁹⁵. Firefighters can often work together for decades and experiential knowledge suggests that there will very often be flashpoints. These are more common when a new watch officer arrives, but in a group so socialised to *fitting in*, boundaries will generally be negotiated. There is a fire service expression, ‘don’t wash your dirty linen in public’ and firefighters were not always so ready to explain problems within the watch, nor the negotiations that sorted them out:

Ted: It would be behind closed doors anyway.
(Ted, Brigade one, firefighter, 1.25 years’ service, age 23).

However, unlike the BCC student above, I did not just pop in for a cup of tea with firefighters during my research. I spent time with them and eventually I gained a considerable amount of data from firefighters about the informal negotiation at stations. Watch-commanders were not so accessible, nor prepared to trust me. Only one watch-commander admitted to the watch organising so democratically. However, any officer caught negotiating the rules would be subject to censure, or worse and I am not at all surprised by their silence. Accepting that watch-commanders were unlikely to provide evidence of compromise in a direct form, I used my experiential knowledge to look at a number of key sites and to explore whether firefighters were resisting specific BO’s with their watch-commander’s complicity.

5.4.2. Dynamic risk assessment (DRA)

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have followed up their concerns about safety in the fire service by issuing several ‘Notices’²⁹⁶. The fire service response relates to improving management of firefighters (see Robinson 1998) and during my observations at the Fire Service College (FSC), I found that this was being done by training watch-commanders to implement DRA. By attending a lecture on DRA I found this ‘new’ safety feature requires watch-commanders to balance firefighters’ safety against the potential risk, before allowing firefighters to *get in*. The teaching includes the possibility that officers might have to prevent firefighters from *getting in* if officers judged the risk too high. This appears to conflict with the findings of Chapter 3 and firefighters’ response to DRA might provide an early ‘barometer’ to firefighters’ resistance, and watch officers’ complicity in this. Given that this ‘rational’ intervention by officers has FBU support (Mathews 1997), during a break in the lecture, I asked a group of officers, from a variety of brigades, about what impact the lecture had on them. Their answers were immediate; all suggest a considerable resistance to DRA and I quickly scribbled these answers in my fieldbook:

- it’s one thing talking about it in the classroom situation. On the fireground the last thing on your mind is a court of law;
- anoraks (a new word describing officers who did not have any idea of the real world, as these watch-commanders see it, of firefighting);
- the hardest thing of all is to stop the crew;
- the crew rig in B.A. on route to a persons reported, they are already breathing air before they get off;
- if you tried to stop them they would push you out of the way.

There were clearly concerns amongst these watch-commanders, if not outright resistance to the whole notion of DRA. If these concerns influence watch-commanders behaviour more than the training they

²⁹⁵ It may be that the close affiliation the fire service has with the navy could be important here. There were some surprisingly liberal regimes in the 18th century navy, where officers sometimes took a vote before entering into a battle (Grint 1998: 53). Nelson’s decision to break the rules by using his blind eye is perhaps the most celebrated act of disobedience in the British military and naval traditions may contrast considerably with the army whose blind obedience led to the carnage at Balaclava.

²⁹⁶ A HSE ‘Notice’ requires that immediate action is taken to improve safety in specific areas. This is a considerable rebuke by an agency whose powers were first resisted by the fire service, but now have to be recognised. The ambiguities of this have been discussed earlier (see footnote in Chapter 1)

are being given, then DRA might not improve the management of firefighters. Therefore, I looked to see if DRA is an area of compromise and negotiation between firefighters and their officers, or if firefighters listen to their union. Jasper suggests not:

Jasper: I would have thought no. It's [DRA] very much a thing now isn't it, where as perhaps twenty years ago it wasn't? No I don't.
(Brigade one, Leading Firefighter, 29 years' service, age 52). [My insert]

DB: You rely on other things?

Jasper: Yeah, perhaps *thirty years' worth*.
[My emphasis].

Jasper's reliance on his thirty years experience is a confirmation of how important experiential knowledge (and their own protocols) is to firefighters (see Chapter 3). I asked Pete where his dynamic risk assessment card was²⁹⁷:

Pete: *I think it is in my locker*²⁹⁸. It is something that we are all supposed to be aware of. Everybody seems to have done in a roundabout way in the past. It's written down now, it's on paper.
[My emphasis].

There seems to be no escaping the confidence that firefighters have in their own abilities. They are quite certain they have already taken into account what officers have now written down²⁹⁹. Arnold suggests that despite being a principal officer, some *joint understandings* remain:

Arnold: Whatever label is put on it [DRA], we have always gone about it in the same way: getting off the machine; sizing things up; making assessments; deploying. ... *The attitude was we are here to do a job, get in and put it out. ... and get back to the station.*
[My emphases and insert].

Arnold's *shared experience* leads to him unwittingly supporting Pete and Jasper who have their own protocols for carrying out a DRA. Significantly, Arnold's *shared experience* could mean he is a sympathetic careerist (see Chapter 4, category 9) and this could prevent him from 'chasing up' watch officers to ensure that they *manage* the way firefighters *get in*. It is interesting to note that Arnold also remembers how important it is to firefighters to get back 'on the run'.

5.4.3. Officers' caution

However, it would be naive to believe that DRA is not having some impact on firefighters and there is evidence in Chapter 3 that this might result in some conflict with officers over *getting in*. Firefighters also argue that DRA has made officers more cautious and that this might also result in them being withdrawn from fires too early. Carl's point of view might have real consequences regarding fire damage:

Carl: The JO's are definitely more cautious now ... So much more careful, they will withdraw you when you think everything is fine. ... It can be very frustrating, very frustrating. ... If you can get into a building and get stuck in, you can perhaps stop it.

²⁹⁷ The risk assessment card is a check list that brigades are increasingly supplying to firefighters so that they might carry out their own check of safety features before they *get in*.

²⁹⁸ It should actually be in his fire tunic pocket on the appliance, so he can follow the check list on arrival at a fire.

²⁹⁹ The way firefighters take into account their safety at fires is through their protocols (see Chapter 3).

As a fire in one room might spread to the whole top floor if you fight it from the outside.

(Served in two brigades, firefighter, 6 years' service, age 24).

Could it be that Carl's frustration is because officers are ignoring his skills? Jo is clearly angry about how officers ignore her experience:

Jo: Frustration ... they have seen a crack and I know they are only taking our safety into their consideration, but sometimes *you wonder if they are taking our knowledge and our perception and our experience and abilities .. expertise into account*. Quite often *you just stand with jets and you see the whole place go*.
(Female firefighter). [My emphases].

Once crews are withdrawn, the fire can only be fought from outside and this effectively results in the loss of the building³⁰⁰. Chapter 1 explains that these situations might be difficult to assess: officers might be too safety conscious; firefighters might be anti-officer. It may even be that by relying on officers to withdraw them, as opposed to making their own decision to withdraw, firefighters can shift the blame for the loss of a building to the officers. Then firefighters do not have to *admit to being beaten* by the fire; their image, at least in their own eyes and for those within earshot of their criticisms of officers, is not tarnished. It appears that despite DRA being a safety issue, firefighters will still resist *being managed by* BO's, the FBU or the HSE regarding *getting in*. Nothing, it appears, will prevent firefighters from helping the public, or improving their own status.

5.4.4. BA Control

There are strict rules that lay down how BA Control should operate³⁰¹. However, Jo's evidence in Chapter 3 suggests that firefighters will break BA rules and there is nothing in what follows to suggest that her case is unique. Ken is fresh from the training environment and should be expected to have high standards:

Ken: Put the stuff [BA] on, checked each other over and then the entry control bloke, he came and took the tallies and read them. ... *It wasn't so correct as it is in training .. em .. because he didn't have the board and that all set up*.
(Brigade three, probationary firefighter, 8 months' experience, age 19). [My emphasis and insert].

I interviewed Ken every week during his recruit training and he frequently relayed to me how the instructors had warned him that once on the station he should resist any attempts by the watch to compromise the very high standards of BA safety he was learning. This situation was of considerable interest to me, because I was aware that the watch would likely compromise BA safety standards and this would test his resolve, and that his reaction would provide important evidence about the authority of the watch hierarchy. Despite my pushing him in this area, Ken was adamant, *he would not compromise BA safety procedures*. However, at his first 'real' BA incident, he did compromise *and is still doing so*. I was not at all surprised that Ken

³⁰⁰ Not to be pursued in this thesis, if safety measures increase fire losses then capitalists may well have views on this.

³⁰¹ These rules are set in a joint committee at the Home Office with the responsibility to set national safety standards that Brigades then adopt in their BO's. In this case how to monitor BA wearers at a fire by ensuring that before firefighters enter a building they must be 'checked over' by a BA control officer who will detach their tally from the BA set, record on this tally how much air is contained in the BA set and the time the BA wearer enters the building. This tally is then placed in the BA board and a record of the BA crew's location is recorded alongside the tally. The BA control officer then calculates how long the BA crew's air will last and the time by which they must be out of the building. If the firefighters do not come out by this time then various emergency procedures are implemented. At larger incidents two BA wearers (known as the emergency crew) are kept back from firefighting with the BA control to be deployed specifically for rescue in these types of circumstances.

‘failed’, because throughout my fieldwork it became clear that if following formal safety procedures would delay *getting in when firefighters’ protocols indicate it was safe to do so*, firefighters would *get in* (see Chapter 3). BA is just another area where firefighters informally establish watch protocols that supersede BO’s, as they do for anything else associated with firefighting. At serious fires, where firefighters perceive a ‘real’ risk, their protocols will follow official procedures. At less serious incidents, firefighters will compromise and manoeuvre round BO’s that slow them down. Their protocols will ensure that BA tallies are *somewhere safe*, like the drivers boots, before they enter the building³⁰². Meanwhile, the person appointed as BA officer will be helping the crew to get the equipment necessary for the firefighters to enter the building, only once this is done will they set up the BA control according to BO’s. Even a FBU official acknowledges bending the rules:

Chris: We had got it worked out, we put the tally in the board, we are systematic about it; our tallies stay outside³⁰³. *We don’t go through the whole procedure.*
(Senior FBU representative). [My emphasis].

No firefighters I spoke with said that they follow formal BA procedures on house fires and initial calls to some larger incidents. Once a fire had been ‘*made-up*’ and/or the danger increased, firefighters did not need to be ‘forced’ to follow BA procedures: they make that decision for themselves.

5.4.5. ‘Drilling’³⁰⁴

Most BO’s instruct firefighters to train every day. It is not unusual for the types of drill and the minimum time to be spent on them to be written in BO’s; each firefighter generally has a training record, which watch officers and firefighters sign to record the drill they have done. However, during a formal inspection, HMIFS (1996, section 5.38)³⁰⁵ found that:

[Training was] just completing a paper record and then watches do as they wish in an unstructured and unmonitored way when they feel it necessary to train.

I set out to find if there was evidence to support what HMIFS had found. Jo confirmed she did not drill every day and then she turned her answer into a complaint about senior officers:

Jo: No we don’t. I think *there are too many of them* that are paid to come up with *fantastic ideas* .. that aren’t realistic. That don’t take into consideration station life .. how busy a station may or may not be .. em .. and *a lot of the senior officers are the people who didn’t stay on the station very long and didn’t do a good job in the first place.*
[My emphases].

³⁰² To avoid this situation there have been attempts to provide a simpler BA control board, which firefighters might put their tallies in. Whilst these had been issued in one brigade I visited they had been withdrawn because of disputes over the clock on the board.

³⁰³ In the past shortages of personnel meant that only the driver was free to do the BA control, but they were also required to work the pump, provide the water and any other equipment. BA control was often neglected through expediency and making sure your tallies were outside was a first step to safety. Currently it is standard practise for a BA control officer to be nominated at role call. However, as in the past, firefighters are hard pressed at the initial stages of a fire and this duty may be left until after the ‘important’ things have been done. The designated BA control officer will then collect up the tallies and put them in the board.

³⁰⁴ ‘Drilling’ or ‘drills’ are firefighters’ colloquialism for the formal drill period, when firefighters practise/rehearse for fires.

³⁰⁵ The HMIFS routinely inspect each brigade. As Chapter 1 suggests, this inspection started out as an audit of the provisions of the 1947 Fire Service Act, but now looks at how efficiently Government money is being spent, if safety procedures are being followed and more recently equality requirements: a public report is produced.

Jo's comment about there being too many senior officers is a very common response by firefighters and her suggestion that senior officers might not be very *good firefighters* confirms in an innocent way the views of earlier informants. I asked Jo if the station complies with the, "fantastic ideas," she complains about:

Jo: *Maybe for a day or two until the thing goes away* [laughter]. If they think they are going to be checked on for the first month then they will do it for the first month, but as soon as everyone .. it will hopefully disappear.
[My emphasis and insert].

Jo explains quite clearly how much firefighters might manoeuvre a situation to give the impression to senior officers that they are in charge (see above). I asked Jo what she did when 'one bell' rang.

Jo: There is an initial 'oh my god what are we doing .. should we be doing this right now'. But there is an initial .. ah .. is this right, is that right, have we filled the log books out³⁰⁶, have we done the role boards³⁰⁷?

Jo, provides evidence of how firefighters operate a mental check to ensure the officers will find what they want to see: a station run in accordance with *their orders*. I asked Jo about Drill Records and her 'tongue in cheek' answer suggests watch officers' complicity in watch resistance by completing a "paper exercise" (HMIFS above) to 'prove' firefighters complete their drill requirements:

Jo: I haven't signed in two years .. but I have done thousand of hours of drills.

The amount of drill a watch undertake can vary, but I was surprised to learn how little drill Ken had done, in view of the fact he had only been on the station six days:

Ken: The Watch Officer has taken me outside and got me to work the pump and the lightweight portable pump and build a dam and things like. ... The whole sort of watch hasn't done a proper drill. (Brigade three, probationary firefighter, five months' experience, age 19).

One month later:

Ken: They have said to me '*if you want to* we'll just come outside and do it,' ... They get me to do it once a week, or once a tour I mean, *or once every two tours*. They are quite good.
[My emphases].

Ken and Jo do not work together, nor are they in the brigade that drew the HMIFS's comments above. Resistance to drill might be very widespread and a FBU safety adviser links deaths in service with some disparaging remarks about American firefighters:

Reginald: Americans are proud of their role of honour³⁰⁸. 'Rescue One'³⁰⁹, said 'when you do 7000 calls a year, then you don't need to train'.

³⁰⁶ There is a record of each piece of fire service equipment, which records if the appropriate test has been done. Many Brigades also still retain a Log Book, which is a written record of everything that happens during the day.

³⁰⁷ One safety feature is that the crew of an appliance should have their names entered on a role board, which is kept on an appliance. This is done in case the crew attend an incident and the building collapses. Then any rescue crews will have a record of how many crewmembers there were on the appliance. Crewmembers frequently change appliances during the day and the change *should* be recorded on the role board and in the Log Book.

³⁰⁸ This is the list of names of firefighters who have died at fires. In the USA (with a population of around 200 million) one firefighter is killed on duty every three days (Laughlin 1986: v11). The actual statistic for the period 1990-1999 is

It might not only be US firefighters that are reluctant to train.

5.4.6. Fire Prevention (FP)/Community Fire Safety (CFS)

Government's instruction to the fire service to shift their emphasis from suppression (firefighting) to prevention (HMCIFS 2000: 26; O'Brien 2000), is supported by the FBU and has been blocked by institutionalised resistance at firefighter level (Sweeney 1999). Both Hart (1982) and Howell (1994) acknowledge that firefighters resist FP by claiming it is not their job³¹⁰. In testing for this possibility, I was fortunate to meet with Lionel, a *very* senior Local Government Association (LGA) official:

Lionel: The employers recognise that attempts to increase the amount of FP work firefighters are prepared to do is *not* an institutional issue where you tell the Chief Officer what needs to be done and it happens. Employers are aware of the difficulties with firefighters' cultural resistance and that the bulk of firefighters joined the fire service to fight fires. Nevertheless, they are trying to persuade firefighters to intervene and help prevent fires rather than carrying out the *dangerous* work they joined to do. (LGA official). [My emphases].

Lionel suggests the employers are aware that firefighters, "joined the fire service to fight fires" and their preference for the physical work of firefighting above mundane FP work. Senior officers are very aware of this difficulty:

Adam: To think you can click your fingers and turn everybody into a community safety officer is all bollocks. Some people will get into that, because it can be a natural tendency to want to teach and pass on information. But from a personnel perspective, when some of my colleagues get all upset about 'how the blokes don't care, they only want to bash around on ladders and everything else', my reaction to that is *what do we expect, that is what they, we joined for*. (BCC student) [My emphasis].

Albert: Questionnaire [from his survey] indicated that firefighters were not interested in FP. When questions were asked in general terms they thought it was a good idea, but as the questions became more pointed: are you prepared to spend 50% of your time doing FP then they were anti. *200 years of tradition came whacking off the paper*: hundreds of years of heroic acts, selflessness came into play. They *don't get the excitement ...* firefighters say '*you are moving the goalposts*, not the job I joined to do'. (BCC student). [My emphases].

Firefighters 'prove' the officers' suggestion:

Roger: The way I look at it you know you come into *The Job* ... sort of you expect to go out³¹¹ sort of thing. Really, that is what it is all about, innit, at the end of the day? I know it's also about Fire Safety and everything as well, *you don't want people to get hurt* .. it's going to happen *anyway*. So you might as well be there to .. to try and

961 firefighters killed on duty (National Fire Data Center online). According to statistics supplied by the FBU, in the UK (with a population around 50 million) between January 1990 and April 1999 22 firefighters have been killed at operational incidents. There were 1.8 million fires in the USA in 1999 for a loss of 112 firefighters' lives, six times more fires than England and Wales where there were no firefighter deaths.

³⁰⁹ The world famous New York fire crew.

³¹⁰ There is evidence in trade journals that Fire Prevention work is being undertaken by firefighters, but my fieldwork suggests that, at least in the areas I researched, the subject is at best marginalised. It may be that FP is being packaged under a new term Community Fire Safety, and being done in a more interactive manner with firefighters being encouraged to mix in the community. This in effect may change their public profile (discussed later).

³¹¹ 'Go out' is what firefighters say when they respond to an emergency call.

counteract it or whatever. *It's like sort of playing for a premiership side and being on the bench all the time innit?*

(Brigade one, probationer, 1 year's service, age 23). [My emphases].

Terri: *It's not what I have trained to do, sit behind a desk and do that. Yunnoo, sit behind a desk and all the paper work. I want to be out there doing the manual work, doing, yunnoo getting on the appliances I suppose you see the public in Fire Safety but it is not my sort of scene. I mean I will do it for the stint, if I have got to, but.*
[My emphases]

It could not be clearer, supporting their views expressed in Chapter 3, firefighters just want to be firefighting; not doing paperwork, despite understanding how FP/CFS benefits the public. Colin explains:

Colin: Statistics show they save more lives than we do. At the end of the day you have really got to want to do it. Some people say it's a stepping stone up the ladder .. you can go in there for a year and you come out as a sub officer or station officer or something. There is that element to it and some people want to do it. I mean I joined with a lad who wants to do FP. I don't know if he'll change his mind. I mean he's quite an academic anyway.
(Brigade four, firefighter, two years' service, four years' service in the army fire service, age 25). [My emphases].

For Colin FP is done by someone else, "*academics*" who as Terri suggests, "sit behind a desk." Only one firefighter, Alex, was positive about doing FP:

Alex: I think they go well together, because you learn from both. If we don't have FP .. people have come up to me and said 'do you know what I should do about this installation'? ... because I have done FP or what ever, I can say 'yes', or 'I know a man who can'. It is usually *a man* who can. [laughter].
(Female firefighter). [My emphasis].

With the exception of Alex, my research suggests that firefighters feminise FP, supporting the view that firefighters can and do resist the FBU's, Government's, employers' and officers' demands for their involvement in FP (see Hart 1982; Howell 1994; Sweeney 1999). There was no evidence to suggest firefighters' fear that FP could reduce the need for firefighters, nor that they are against FP *per se*. Firefighters' resistance to FP appears to challenge their arguments about '*always wanting to help the public*' and *that they join the fire service to 'save life'* and I ask a question: is firefighters' reluctance to carryout FP because it does not involve any possibility of firefighters being seen as proletarian heroes in the image of *Saved* (Millais, 1855)? I will return to this question in Chapter 6, but before I do it is necessary to consider if firefighters' resistance to FP might be bound up in their relationship with the public. In talking with officers from the fire prevention branch of the fire service, it is clear that in enforcing FP legislation in industry they meet considerable resistance: a thorn in the side of capital rather than an asset³¹². Firefighters involvement in FP may result in them having a similar conflict with the public, who might soon lose their appreciation of firefighters if FP becomes an intrusion into the privacy of the home³¹³.

³¹² FP officers can and do maintain fire safety legislation in industrial, commercial, retail and entertainment premises. The requirement that employers provide adequate means of escape from fire, provide firefighting equipment and staff training, can be expensive and can limit the use of a commercial premise. FP officers have the authority to shut a premise if the owners refuse to comply with their requirements and Capital does not welcome such 'unnecessary' expense, or intrusion.

³¹³ In the USSR, FP departments were part of the KGB.

5.4.7. Conclusion

This section has shown that despite fire service claims that they are a disciplined service, the reality is somewhat different. Officers might find it surprising, but in four areas where officers legislate to make firefighters' job safer (DRA; BAC; training; FP), firefighters are successfully resisting their authority. Importantly firefighters' resistance almost has to have the acquiescence of watch-commanders and often goes against the best intents of the FBU. It appears as if firefighters are acting conservatively (as if a class in itself) to protect the way their job is currently being done and the dividends they get from doing it that way.

5.5. MASCULINITY

5.5.1. It's a man's job

Kanter (1977) might easily explain the solidarity and trust that firefighters develop as a trust that males develop with *people like themselves* (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; DiTomaso 1989: 88; Office for Public Management 1996; Owen 1996; Seidler 1997; Corby 1999: 98-99; Rutherford 1999: 120). Research in the fire service suggests that to firefighters, "people like themselves" are those who embrace firefighters' proletarian masculinity (see LFCDA 1995; Baigent 1996; Richards 1996; Howell 1996; HMIFS 99). This section will now focus directly on three further areas, which might be crucial to firefighters' masculinity and its dividends: firefighters' sexualised imagery; firefighters' public status; female firefighters.

5.5.2. Sexual adventures

Over recent years, firefighters have become male pin-ups. The pictures are explicit and support fire service institutional sexism by portraying the fire service as a male world and firemen as sexually available (see Carroll 1999; Appendix 13). However, these are male pin-ups and firefighters' portrayal is not submissive as is a super-model (see Chapter 1). The image that stares back from these pictures unashamedly portrays raw power, sexuality and proletarian masculinity. Much to most firefighters' disgust they are also a gay icon³¹⁴.

Experiential knowledge suggests that firefighters are aware that there is something about their work that makes them attractive to women. I have successfully exploited this dividend when I was a firefighter and fieldwork at FSC suggests firefighters' visits to local bars and nightclubs are a celebrated feature of 'village' life³¹⁵. Susie explains:

Susie: Well there's 'The Bugs', a lot of people go there just to be picked up. ... They come from miles around. Evesham women come into 'The Bugs'.
(Civilian employee).

It appears that male firefighters not only go out looking for sex, but that women who want a sexual adventure might go looking for firefighters. Firefighters' behaviour in a local pub is an example:

Maggie: I really play up to some of the comments they make .. asking me out or making comments. ... I would have to say too that I have been out with a couple of them.
(Female bartender).

At the FSC I was told of a standing joke between two females:

Vic: Yeah firemen, they are all ten years younger than they actually are; no, they are not married; yes, they are looking for the perfect relationship [laughter]. ... I have eavesdropped on some of their little chat up lines that have gone on .. places like the

³¹⁴ Firefighters also feature in Gay magazines (Gay Times 1998).

³¹⁵ The Bell, Marilyn's and The Bugs (named after the Ugly Bugs Ball) are all examples of these.

Bell and Marilyn's that is. What they are saying and it's so funny. It's like *they are getting into the stereotype of this is what is expected of me*. (Civilian employee). [My emphasis].

Getting into the stereotype or not, there can be no doubt that firefighters trade on their sexualised imagery. Colin adds to this view:

Colin: Firemen they are always seen by the women as bloody heroes and you drive round it's unbelievable. ... In the summer the women just go mad. I think you are expected to ... to just go out and just shag women and stuff like that.

Promiscuity, like firefighting can be an adventurous activity³¹⁶ and the fire service even have a section that answers, "calls and letters from heartbroken women trying to track down firefighter 'lotharios'" (Webb 1998: 26-27; see Alex Chapter 3).

During my attendance at various sociological conferences, I frequently talk with feminists about my study. Their reactions to 'firemen', as they inevitably call firefighters, conjures a fondness tinged with sexual and heroic imagery that at times has been more than surprising. I expected female sociologists would be more aware of how their words could be interpreted, especially how they stereotyped firefighters as male and how their 'fondness' might be analysed as contributing to or even part of the hegemony that subordinates women.

5.5.3. Special people

Apart from those women hurt by firefighters promiscuity, there is little evidence of any public criticism of firefighters. Even when The Home Office held a news conference to publicise male harassment of female firefighters, the report (HMIFS 1999) only received one day's attention in the newspapers (Wilson 1999) and politicians sprang to support firefighters (see Tebbitt 1999, reproduced in Appendix 14). Given also that aware female sociologists pay such tributes to firefighters, ignoring, but presumably not unaware of the way that male firefighters treat women, then the public probably prefer the Tebbitt (1999) view that supports the commonsense cultural understandings about masculinity, which this thesis is challenging. Firefighters appear to hold a special place with the public, a view not only recognised by Lionel (above):

Hilary: The problem of fire service is that firefighters are God-like characters, held in such public esteem. Unlike the police, firefighters do not have to court public opinion. (Senior civilian equality advisor)

In many ways, the fire service is a similar organisation to the police, but there are also distinct defaults in the public's eyes: police' unpopularity is as legendary as firefighters' popularity. But if people see firefighters as, "God-like," firefighters don't recognise this status — or do they? The response below by a focus group is typical and might be interpreted as another example of firefighters' false modesty (see Chapter 3):

Ian: Not really. I don't see myself as more special than my friends, even though they say 'fucking hell Ian I don't know how you do that'. (Brigade two, firefighter, 8 years' service, age 30 in a focus group).

Unidentified: You get that all the time don't you?

³¹⁶ According to Kimmel (1990: 108), "Sex is about danger, risk, excitement [masculine]; safety is about softness, security, comfort [feminine]" (My inserts).

This was the majority view that firefighters ignore the imagery, but after the evidence of Chapter 3, I would challenge this view. Trevor's 'honesty' is unusual:

Trevor: You *want people to look at you* and think your doing a good job and that, 'look at him he is a fireman'. It is, it's a respected job innit? You want people to feel well of yuh, so yeah, I suppose it's what I believe. I like doing it, but then *I like what people think about me because I do it*.
(Brigade one, probationary firefighter, 1 year's service, age 27). [My emphases].

DB: Do you see yourself as a hero?

Trevor: Yeah, I suppose if I am honest.

As in Chapter 3, it is possible to argue that the reluctant hero is a more acceptable form than the one that Trevor portrays. I am also sure if Millais' hero could talk, he would say 'I am only doing my job.' Justin sums up my recollections of firefighters, which is more in line with the imagery on the pin-up calendars:

Justin: You can feel the testosterone as soon as you walk into the room.

Justin suggests he found that the firefighters he met emphasised the heroic physical nature of firefighters' work and what he saw as their heterosexuality. Such images may be of interest to some female sociologists, but could create difficulties for women who choose to become firefighters. My previous research and that of many others (Devine 1993; LFCDA 1995; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999) supports the view that women are discouraged from being firefighters. Whilst I will not repeat such arguments in detail, the next subsection does provide some idea of the difficulties that women might experience in the fire service.

5.5.4. Female firefighters

The first fulltime, female firefighter joined the fire service in 1982 and females currently comprise less than 1% of firefighters. Following several wake-up calls from the FBU over 15 years, HMIFS (1999) appears as the last straw to persuade the Home Secretary to act to improve this situation. He now requires that by 2009 15% of firefighters should be female. However, 60% of female firefighters are concerned that positive action might cause repercussions (LFCDA 1995: 14; Baigent 1996; see also Cockburn 1991: 216; Faludi 1992). One form of repercussion is for male firefighters to voice their concerns about women's physical abilities. Richards (1996: 114) found that whilst male firefighters are easily able to maintain their fitness levels, they have concerns about the difficulties females have in staying fit. In consequence, female firefighters may have to 'prove' themselves more frequently than male firefighters (see Devine 1993; O'Donnell 1995: 46; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999). Physical strength has often been central to the gendered division of labour (Kimmel 1987; Cockburn 1991a; Lorber 1994; Connell 1995) and if any feature of male firefighters' hostility has prominence, it is in this area. Keeping fit apart, many male firefighters are concerned that females will not have the strength to do *The Job*³¹⁷. Male firefighters have the notion that physical standards have been lowered to allow women to join and already it is folklore that instructors are forced to retain sub-standard females (LFCDA 1995; CCC 2000). I received several accounts of how females were 'helped' in training and despite my scepticism, my informants perceive the 'facts' as real: *standards have been lowered*. Bert is under no illusions about the importance of strength:

³¹⁷ Wollstonecraft (1994) was aware that unless women exercised their physical bodies as well as their brains they were going to contribute to their own subordination. One group of women who were not discouraged from developing their physical bodies were Afro-Americans and firefighters have clearly not heard of Sojourner Truth. "Look at me! Look at my arm! ... I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me- and ain't I a woman?" (Hooks 1981, 160).

Bert: If you take the top ten physical people who apply for *The Job* the women wouldn't would they? To be honest the strongest women can't compete with us physically. (Brigade one, firefighter, 11.5 years' service, age 35, in a focus group).

Firefighters appear to elevate physical strength above all the other attributes a firefighter needs. It would be easy to follow this male agenda if I did not realise that whilst firefighters have to be strong, strength is relative as firefighters, *are part of a team*³¹⁸.

5.5.5. Female 'irrationality'

The view that females are irrational is a further commonsense notion that males develop to subordinate females. As reported in Chapter 2, Ian has no doubts:

Ian: The scenario I imagine is your going into a fire ... with a bird [female] and she's got PMT, or she's got her period and like you .. it's just in the back of your mind. [My insert].

I was tempted to ignore the evidence (above) from males who complain about female firefighters, because their knowledge was anecdotal. None of them actually work with female firefighters. However, I am glad I ignored this temptation, because from firefighters own words it is easy to see how the range of convincing stereotypes that firefighters develop about females can and have become folklore. *None of the men who actually work with female firefighters* made any complaints about them. Nor did their acceptance of female firefighters appear to repeat the 'yes but our female is special approach' found in the Washington Police (Frieze, *et al.* 1978: 281) or in commerce (Rutherford 1999: 117). Nor are female firefighters marginalised into women's work, as they can be in the police (see Young 1991; Fielding 1994). If anything female firefighters are put right into the thick of firefighting; *they are passing the test*.

5.5.6. Where are we now?

In a closer look at masculinity, firefighters are given the status as: 'a man's man'; a hero (see Whalen 1980; Cooper 1986; Lloyd-Elliott 1992; Wallington and Holloway 1994) and a public protector with a powerful sexual dividend. In line with the sort of behaviour one expects from those who marginalise women, firefighters make a work environment 'where females might not flourish' (see Cockburn 1991b) and harass women that join the fire service (see FBU 1985, 1991; (see Hearn and Parkin 1987, 1995: 74; Walby 1990: 52; Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999) almost as a gender class of men (see Hearn 1994). However, my fieldwork suggests that *firefighters who do not work with females* subscribe to folklore based on somewhat dated, but nonetheless powerful, stereotypes about women's weakness and irrationality. Such a testimony is discounted by the *experiential* knowledge of firefighters who *do work with females*; they have not raised any concerns. This raises a question, which might need to be answered elsewhere, about who is harassing female firefighters, because there is considerable evidence from a chat line I subscribe to (fairness@egroups.com) that the harassment of female (and many other) firefighters continues (see Baigent 1996; HMI 1999). The FBU's and employers' attempt to improve recruitment of female firefighters is now targeted through a high-powered committee (EOTG 2000a, 2000b, 2000c) and this might improve female recruitment. However, firefighters' resistance will not be easy to overcome, all the more so because as the evidence above suggests it is more to do with firefighters' perceptions than any reality that can be addressed. The only people who seem convinced that females can do *The Job* are the few men who work with them

³¹⁸ However, it must be remembered that the norm is for firefighters to work in pairs when they *get in* and in the event of one crewmember being injured it is realistically expected that the other team member should be strong enough to drag their partner away from danger.

and their union. Once again, this points to how it is hands-on experience that counts for firefighters, not what they read, or what the employer, or their union tells them.

5.6. THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION (FBU) AND CLASS

The FBU is a very left wing union that continues to use traditional militancy including strike-action to protect firefighters from the worst ravages of neo-liberal efficiencies and Taylorist deskilling (see Segars 1989, Bailey 1992; Darlington 1996, 1998). It is important to recognise that these efficiencies are *determined by economics*, not *public service factors* and FBU resistance is not just about jobs, but also a defence of firefighters' professional ethos: to provide an efficient service to help the public³¹⁹. Currently the FBU resist every attempt to cut the fire service and employers' agendas to elevate economics above public service issues have not been as successful as in other industries³²⁰. The FBU have innovatively turned the tables on the (economic) notions behind Best Value, by persuading the public to react against politicians who attempt to cut their fire service (see Lucio and MacKenzie 1999: 168-169; Price 1999). Nor have firefighters been drawn into believing the soft soap approach of officers who try to paternally appear as if acting in firefighters best interest during attempts to cut the fire service. One bad example anywhere in a brigade, such as lining up firefighters to question them, is enough to distance firefighters from their officers and a reminder of the 'them and us' (class) divide.

5.6.1. Smash and Grab

During my research the aptly named 'Smash and Grab (or 'Grey Book') dispute' started and this was another attempt to rationalise the fire service (see Cameron 1999a 1999b 1999c 1999d 1999e; FBU 1999a 1999b; Gilchrist 1999), which further increased class solidarity amongst firefighters. Whilst my interest is more in firefighters' informal resistance, 'Smash and Grab' provides an opportunity to look at an area that might provide clues as to how firefighters organise themselves and mobilise public support. At the BCC a very senior LGA officer comments about this dispute:

Lionel: The union is able to mobilise public support and the employers always start off streets behind in any public dispute.
[LGA official].

Lionel points out that employers acknowledge public support for firefighters, but the discussion that followed was very one sided and the BCC were in general agreement that the dispute was to be a watershed in the fire service. "Perhaps the last one" one officer commented. Another officer suggested, "the employers shouldn't back away." There can be no doubt that these officers *wanted* to curb the FBU's resistance to cuts and deskilling. Whilst the LGA may be acting to support capitalists, it is more likely that senior officers vehemence in following this lead is in defence of their petty dividend (to be able to order firefighters about): a situation that the FBU frustrates by providing an umbrella for resistance.

FBU literature, the four national FBU representatives I spoke with and Segars (1989; see Bailey 1992; Darlington 1998), confirm a view that the FBU is a class-conscious organisation that defends their members' jobs and retains a high quality fire service for the public. However, I question, how is

³¹⁹ In reacting to protect the public so to speak, the FBU is using its right, given by the government when the fire service was returned to local authorities, to be an organisation with authority on technical questions within the fire service (see Segars 1989: 342). This is similar to how other professional bodies act as if to protect the public.

³²⁰ Similar circumstances applied in the railways when Beeching and Reid cut *the service* to save money, but the rail unions were less successful in resisting the cuts (Strangleman 1998, 1999). It might be that the current failure of the railways to maintain safety and services is as a direct consequence of the Beeching and Reid cuts. Had the rail unions, for instance, successfully motivated the public, then perhaps the cuts might not have been made and rail safety would not be such an issue and roads less congested.

it that where the railway unions failed (Strangleman 1998), the FBU have been successful? I asked Ashley if a Vanguard might be leading the FBU:

Ashley: Not a Vanguard, wider than a Vanguard. I think possibly 20-25% feel that way. There is another 25% of the other extreme who are purely selfish and don't give a fuck for anybody. It's the 50% in the middle who see it with that small 'c'[onservative] (Senior FBU representative). [My insert].

Ashley's response provides some suggestion of how solid the FBU is. Whilst 25% of the members might be selfish and 50% conservative, they are all able to find common cause with the 'Vanguard' to fight the employers. In what might appear a somewhat light-hearted approach to class issues, Ken perhaps speaks for many of those who Daniel did not identify as a Vanguard, when he describes an FBU march he attended:

Ken: We just went in the morning straight from work and we stood outside for a little bit and *did a bit of yelling* and all that stuff, which was quite good. And then we *ended up in the pub* afterwards. It was a *really good day*. [My emphases].

Throughout this thesis, I have reported how firefighters manage to find common cause in their work. Their reasons might vary, but there is something about being a firefighter that binds firefighters together. Beneath Ken's light-hearted approach, he has a sense of belonging, what Grint (1998: 221) calls a coming together of masculinity, and militancy in proletarian masculinity. Perhaps it is better to suggest that firefighters' resistance is successful (where the Rail unions failed), because they are able to encompass, under one umbrella, the different types of class awareness that Giddens (1982: 163-164) recognises: those who have revolutionary consciousness and are acting against capital; those who are aware of other classes and who act conservatively to protect their job, and add to this public support³²¹. What this means for firefighters' masculinity will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.7. CONCLUSION

It is clear that firefighters have considerable control over what might be seen as *the means of production* in the fire service. These I see as their product (firefighting), the resources for their product (the amount of firefighters and equipment) and how their labour is used (the way they carryout firefighting and resist other types of work). However, I will not quantify firefighters' resistance in macro economic terms, but rather as a resistance to protect the many varied petty dividends they gain from doing *The Job* their way. Officers it appears attempt to gain their dividends from 'controlling' firefighters and in both cases, it may be argued that resistance is antagonistic, because both groups may be trying to access a central petty dividend associated with who controls the fire service. That central dividend has much to do with how each might achieve their masculinity³²².

5.7.1. Officers' petty dividend

³²¹ The outcome to the dispute was that FBU mobilised their members, the public and prepared for strike. The Government intervened and an enquiry was set up, presumably to avoid the political ramifications a strike in the fire service might have on voters, and the role that public support for firefighters took in the government's decision not to confront firefighters should not be underestimated. Despite clear suggestions that the government were going to outlaw strikes in the fire service (Milne 1999), in the end the government probably recognised that firefighters would stick together and that as Lionel (above) might have advised them, there are no votes to be won in taking on public heroes. That report is now complete (and both sides have accepted the findings, see Burchill 2000) and cuts are avoided *for the moment*. However, the 'Smash and Grab' dispute has not really ended, because it probably never will, and a successful strike ballot has just (30-4-01) forced the Berkshire Fire Authority to back down over cuts in the service.

³²² In these circumstances where two groups of workers are in antagonistic relations with each other, they are acting conservatively (without in this case revolutionary consciousness) to protect their interests; they are seen to be acting as a class *in itself* (see Giddens 1982: 163-164; Crompton 1998: 200; Grint 1998: 94).

My thesis is not primarily about officers and the evidence that they provide originates from my interest in firefighters' resistance. Therefore, officers' evidence might be incidental to this thesis, were it not to point to the possibility that whilst officers gain no economic benefit from any surplus-value that capital may take from firefighters, they do collect other organisational assets (petty dividends) in the form of their *given* right to lead firefighters. Therefore, officers might also be constructing *their* masculinity at work and seek to 'prove' it in a number of ways³²³. This may include ordering firefighters around, cutting the fire service, deskilling firefighters, implementing FP/CFS and paradoxically supporting equal opportunities. Further research would be necessary before making a substantive argument that officers are actually constructing their masculinity in this process, but the suggestion is that this might be happening.

5.7.2. Firefighters' petty dividend

This chapter provides evidence to suggest that firefighters' hierarchies (originally seen as the way firefighters organise to defend their skills and any other agendas concerning masculinity) can also be seen in *class* terms as how firefighters organise to build a gap between themselves and officers. In particular, firefighters organise their hierarchies to resist their officers' attempts to deskill and cut the fire service. To act as it were, alongside, and in addition to (sometimes even in opposition to) the FBU³²⁴, to protect *The Job* and what appear to be *joint understandings* amongst firefighters. Firefighters' resistance to cuts provides them with considerable control over the resources required to run the fire service (see Chapter 1; Segars 1989; Bailey 1992; Darlington 1998). However, any dividend that firefighters' gain from their resistance, will only apply whilst firefighters are able to control the workplace in such a way that they continue to construct their masculinity in its present form. If, for example, officers deskill firefighters, then firefighters' dividend will inevitably reduce and the whole process of how firefighters construct their masculinity might be endangered³²⁵.

One reason why firefighters are able to resist their officers is because they have *shared understandings* that bind them together: a form of dynamic homogeneity of purpose that makes sense to them. Part of the reason why firefighters' actions are so successful stems from their ability to support their professional ethos and at the same time construct their masculinity. This is a process that may rely on homosociality and harassment/bullying to construct, conserve and police their masculinity: a dynamic that, in turn, will only be successful whilst they preserve their professional ethos by successfully resisting officers over petty dividends³²⁶ and capital over the resources required for firefighting. My analysis is that the antagonism over petty dividends is central to the social construction of firefighters' masculinity.

³²³ The notion of given authority (*dieu et mon droit*) might extend to such an extent that fire service officers actually believe it is true; almost as if they are seeking to 'prove' they are infallible: as a Calvinist might want to 'prove' their 'calling' (see Weber 1971).

³²⁴ This is not to reify the FBU, but in many ways revolutionary activists (see Giddens 1982: 163-164) in the fire service act as a Vanguard to ensure the FBU provides the organisation to focus firefighters' discontent.

³²⁵ When a worker has this amount of control in the workplace, they may be technocrats (see Wright 1982; Lucio and MacKenzie 1999), similar to independent artisans operating within capitalist organisations. Workers who are still operating as: "residual islands of petty-bourgeoisie relations of production ... they maintain the work process of the independent artisan" (Wright 1982: 127). However, before they gain this classification they must have "some control both over what is produced (minimal economic ownership) as well as how it is produced (minimal possession)" (Wright 1982: 128). It is common to see this control as exerted by professionals, such as doctors, accountants, lawyers (Lucio and MacKenzie 1999: 158-161), but this does not exclude manual workers from being seen in this way. Although since the 1970's, the decline of industry (and the unions) the groups of manual workers who might previously be seen as having control over their labour have diminished.

³²⁶ It may be necessary to repeat my view that saving life gives firefighters a psychological (petty) dividend. This is similar to the personal dividends firefighters get when they fight fires; complete 'dangerous' work; help people in distress. This dividend might also involve the status surrounding being *seen* as a *good firefighter*. Public praise might also be another dividend and the same way that patriarchal dividends extend to all males (see Connell 1995) all firefighters gain from the bravery of some firefighters. Cutting the fire service and deskilling would alienate firefighters from this dividend, their work and their masculinity and therefore this as much as any other reason might explain why firefighters' resistance is so powerful.

Firefighters' resistance might not only be about petty dividends directly associated with the fire service. If firefighters' masculinity contributes to dividends provided to all males from "[m]ass culture generally assum[ing that] there is a fixed, true masculinity ... inherent in a man's body" (Connell 1995: 45; see Chapter 1), then firefighters' resistance returns to an economic base, because it can then be seen as supporting the gender division of labour and capital. However, still unresolved is the question of how we describe the gender of those female firefighters who challenge outright the commonsense notion above *and* the gender division of labour, by acting in a similar manner to their male colleagues at work: a situation that will be addressed in the final chapter.

6. CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In this conclusion I will concentrate on the four questions I set at the start of the thesis, but first I wish to remind the reader that this thesis has a political motive to assist the fire service with its difficulties over equal opportunities. One chief officer who spoke to me about harassment perhaps best describes these difficulties. He said, “*I know it’s wrong but I can’t stop it, how do I do this?*” This was an extremely powerful man and yet there was real sense of inevitability in his eyes. I recognise this rhetorical question for what it then was: unanswerable. No written or verbal instructions, specialist training, tribunals, or Official Enquiries have changed, in general terms, the way women are seen and treated by the British Fire Service, and that chief officer knew this. Therefore, in my research I chose to take a different perspective view, focus on firefighters’ *day-to-day* behaviour in order to produce a *reflexive view* of firefighters’ *actions* looking for the *unacknowledged conditions* and *unintended consequences* of these actions (see Giddens 1979: 56), rather than searching for high profile cases of harassment, which are easy to find but do little to suggest a way forward. Therefore, all the time I have been reporting what firefighters have told me, I do so in a way that any firefighter might recognise as happening on their firestation. However, I add an important element to this account— that of pro-feminist auto-critique to suggest some ‘invisible’ conditions and consequences of firefighters’ words and actions.

This has led to an account, which aligns with those who do not see structural restraints in a system as physical restraints, but as social constructions that the participants constitute and react to on a day-to-day basis (see Giddens 1979). As an example, firefighters’ informal hierarchy may appear to control firefighters, but it is a social structure (with no formal authority) and if probationary firefighters wanted to, they could resist it. However, few do and because the watch actually constitutes the hierarchy and the probationer wishes to join and impress them, they *fit in*. Chapter 4 provides evidence of how some do resist and there are repercussions for this behaviour: clearly if firefighters do not come into line they may be denied access to firefighters’ hierarchy *and* the skills of firefighting. They might also be subject to the worst excesses of firefighters’ humour. For most, resistance was unlikely, because it seems that before they join probationers already understand they must *fit in*, possibly as part of a far wider cultural understanding of what acceptance in such a fundamentally male occupation requires. As I have already argued, before university I celebrated, sought after and tested myself against the attributes of working class, patriarchal masculinity. My whole life appears as a precursor for the next stage as I moved from boy, to youth, to (patriarchal) firefighter as I believed and followed commonsense understandings about masculinity. I now accept this was a choice, but – if *I was to become/remain a firefighter* – I recognise that the choice was limited to my acting as others around me acted. This resulted in my choosing to *fit in* with firefighters’ hierarchy, and then, importantly, for me to climb the rounds of the hierarchy and play an increasing part in organising how the hierarchy operated. Then of course, having climbed my way to the top of firefighters’ hierarchy, if I was to get the dividends I expected, it was in my interests to ensure that those below me followed suit. I believe that without the benefit of a ‘late’ education that I would not have the tools to recognise the negative side of my behaviour, and I would still be celebrating patriarchal masculinity and not critiquing it.

Now I shall look closer at the areas I suggested I would investigate at the start of the thesis and the questions I raised. These are:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Firefighting: | <p><i>how</i> do firefighters develop the protocols and skills necessary for firefighting?</p> <p><i>what</i> does ‘<i>getting in</i>’ mean to firefighters?</p> <p><i>why</i>, given the apparent danger involved, do firefighters ‘<i>get in</i>’ at a fire?</p> |
| Relations at the station: | <p>how do firefighters organise their social relations at the station?</p> |

Class:	can the dynamic between class, hierarchies and resistance help explain how firefighters construct their masculinity?
Gender:	how do firefighters construct their masculinity and what does this tell us about gender debates?

To each of these areas I devote a section, but my overall findings suggest that all three areas are closely connected and therefore each section will reflect this view. Then at the end of the chapter I will reflect on the research and the research process overall. Throughout I intend to both summarise some findings already analysed within each chapter and to continue the analysis to aid the debate I hope will continue after this thesis has been completed.

6.2. FIREFIGHTING

6.2.1. Outcomes from firefighting

I consider that firefighters' *professional ethos*: 'to provide an efficient service to help the public', and their *raison d'être* – the saving of life; the suppression of fire and the rendering of humanitarian services – provides a powerful argument for why firefighters fight fires. It suggests that firefighters have a sense of honour, which they fulfil by doing a good job for the public. Firefighting allows firefighters to:

- do their best for the public whilst firefighting;
- undertake meaningful employment, providing pay and security;
- get job satisfaction and status;
- know best how to do a job and do it that way;
- have a central and agreed purpose (to *get in*);
- collect dividends in the form of an adrenaline buzz and self-satisfaction;
- form bonds with their colleagues and develop norms and values (although this sometimes has to be enforced);
- belong to a group that will help them form opinions and understand the world.

Firefighters have developed a style for firefighting, which they call '*getting in*'. While I agree that *getting in* involves a risk, I would suggest that in reality firefighters' professionalism significantly limits the risk involved.

Firefighters are professionals in their own terms and that they learn their skills experientially. There is no better example of this than the way firefighters prepare in advance for decision making at fires. At the fire firefighters rarely have the luxury of standing back to form a plan, because while they do so the fire will likely increase in intensity and the situation they are planning for will change. Therefore, to assist them to react successfully, firefighters have to plan before an incident for whatever eventuality may confront them. On successful watches, this includes the post-incident sharing of knowledge amongst the peer group and self-criticism in 'post-mortems' around the mess table. Through this process the combined knowledge of the watch, both past and current, is passed around in the form of story telling and critical reflection³²⁷. Then when the team go into action they have a basis of *shared understandings* about how each other will react and when they are confronted by an unfamiliar or familiar incident they use experiential knowledge to react accordingly: firefighters rely on their experience to almost 'throw-up' an answer.

If I were to stop my analysis at this point I might satisfy any readers who are firefighters. But I would not be happy myself. My research suggests that firefighters are not just selfless public minded citizens simply going about their work to the best of their ability. As I have shown there is evidence

³²⁷ This includes knowledge gained as the watch-officers share their knowledge with other officers and throughout the whole network of the fire service and back down again to the watch: the effect being that firefighters have access to all the knowledge about firefighting (once they can access firefighters' hierarchies).

that firefighters' protocols not only help them to fight fires more efficiently for the public, but are also about individual status as a *good firefighter* (someone who can get into a fire and overcome the danger involved). If these two outcomes do not clash, it might be that firefighters' service to the public is improved. However, if status presentation is important, even to the extent that it became the prime motivator for some of the decisions made at fires, it could endanger the team at a fire. This effect might be doubly negative if the source of knowledge (that the firefighter making the decision draws on) is itself a consequence of some other firefighter 'talking the walk' (and seeking to raise their profile round the mess table by making up stories to 'prove' through their words rather than actions they can pass the test) of a *good firefighter*.

I have considerable admiration for how firefighters resist many of the cuts officers would wish to make to their service. While firefighters are acting again as professionals, by generally knowing what is best for their service and fighting for it, it is also possible to see firefighters' resistance to the cuts in a less positive light. If those cuts went through then this would have a serious affect on the way firefighters construct their masculinity. Without the ability to 'prove' themselves *good firefighters*, firefighters would not be able to create an 'other' out of those who do not, cannot, or are prevented (sometimes by firefighters) from fighting fires. In creating this 'other' (the people who cannot fight fires), firefighters can then see themselves as those who *can fight fires*: 'special people' with the ability to do what 'others' cannot. Firefighters then take a subjective view of themselves as an object they admire³²⁸; that they believe their peer group and the public admire and then test themselves against this view. It is within this process of *subjective self-objectification* that firefighters form their masculinity. However, I do not think this is something new, but a way that firefighters historically 'prove' themselves to be *good firefighters*: a learnt behaviour passed down homosocially by one cohort of firefighters to those selected to be the next. I am not suggesting that firefighters' masculinity is reified, or in anyway pre-given in a biological sense; firefighters' are active subjects in this process. This may not apply to all firefighters, and it is clear that some firefighters do not develop their individual view of a *good firefighter* in circumstances they would choose. However, those that do join the hierarchy (which sets the standards that they will effectively test themselves against), reflexively view themselves as objects to see if they have achieved these standards from their own perspective, fellow firefighters and the community they serve³²⁹.

6.2.2. Serving the community

The community firefighters serve is essential to this whole process, because it is not only vital for firefighters to fulfil the image that the public expects, but to also ensure this image is also a public expectation: a circular process that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of mirrored images (see Goffman 1997b, 1997c). In this respect it is interesting to note that the basis for public support of firefighters is closely associated with firefighters' claim that they are in the fire service to save life: a claim potential firefighters make even before joining the fire service. However, some of the evidence firefighters have given during this research does not exactly accord with the notion of firefighters as only selfless individuals acting to protect their community and this evidence enables me to pose and answer three questions. First, 'why do firefighters think they know more than their officers and break the official rules laid down for firefighting?' The immediate answer is, that it is firefighters who arrive at fires, gain access to the building, rescue any trapped persons and put out the fire, so probably it is firefighters who know best how to do this, and *if officers do not listen to firefighters it is almost inevitable they will fight fires their own way*. This would be firefighters' argument (although not officers³³⁰) and again, because of the public support firefighters get for their view, it is difficult to see further than this analysis. But, there is evidence in this thesis that suggests, that by firefighting in a

³²⁸ This view might be seen as narcissistic (not directly in the psychological sense), but more as a form of being able to be proud of oneself (see Collinson 1992).

³²⁹ This recognition owes much to Collinson (1992)

³³⁰ Chapter 1 indicates that by studying statistics, rather than officers' stories, it is possible to see that officers do not attend many fires at all. Indeed, most firefighters do not attend that many fires per year and only get 'experience' after a considerable period of service.

particular way firefighters not only help the public, they also ‘prove’ and test their ability as a *good firefighter* (and gain considerable personal dividend from achieving this accolade).

The second question is, ‘why are firefighters prepared to strike against the cuts their officers might impose and leave the public exposed to even greater risks of fire?’ One answer to this question is another question, ‘how do firefighters stop the cuts to their service if officers are determined to implement them?’ However, there is a paradox in firefighters’ actions when they strike to protect *The Job*: on the one hand, they are protecting their professional ethos; on the other hand, they are working against it. Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that firefighters are not only protecting the community and their professional ethos when they resist cuts. An argument has been developing throughout this thesis that there are fundamental links between the way firefighters do *The Job*, firefighters’ own perceptions of themselves as *good firefighters* and firefighters’ masculinity. Therefore, if firefighters did not in the last event strike to prevent their officers from cutting and deskilling the fire service, they may no longer have access to the way they currently test and ‘prove’ their masculinity.

I will shortly return to the question of how firefighters define their masculinity, but there is one area where there can be little doubt that firefighters are acting against public interest and that is when they resist fire prevention (FP) duties. Consequently, the third question is mostly rhetorical. ‘If, as firefighters argue, they follow their professional ethos, the prime outcome of which is to save life and prevent damage from fires, then why do firefighters resist FP, which would undoubtedly stop fires, limit the damage that occurs when a fire starts *and save lives*?’ The paradoxes within a situation where a confessed *life-saver* is prepared to risk their life to do so on one occasion (at fires), but not on another (by carrying out FP/CFS) are worth examining, because firefighters’ resistance may explain where firefighters’ priorities lie: to the community, or to their sense of self (subjectivity) and their masculinity. The reply is to use an argument firefighters make before they join the fire service and throughout their careers, ‘*that firefighters’ prime motivation for joining the fire service is to save life*’, and to this statement the findings of this thesis add, ‘*but this is conditional and firefighters only want to save life at ‘the sharp end’, when saving life involves the actual rescue of members of the public*’. By being reactive to fire, firefighters create their public profile; they are seen to be doing their job and to be heroes. Firefighters’ public status, then in turn, supports one of the ways firefighters reflexively view themselves as objects in the eyes of the ‘others’ that say “I couldn’t do your job” (a view of themselves that Chapter 3 suggests firefighters might actually provide for public consumption in the first place). It appears that FP does not fit in with the way that firefighters want to be seen and despite their claims that they want to help the community, firefighters are not enthusiastic about shifting their emphasis from fire suppression to fire prevention. In this regard firefighters *do not want to always help the public by saving them from fire* (the same might be said when firefighters go on strike). Firefighters prefer to be seen to be firefighting; despite the possibility that much of their time is spent *standing-by* waiting for fires, firefighters are not enthusiastic about using this time for FP. Evidence suggests at least three possible reasons for this and they are explained under the subheadings below.

Spoiling *The Job*: a chance to ‘prove’ masculinity

The first is obvious; FP could become so successful that firefighters would eventually do themselves out of a job. I have heard firefighters argue that ‘FP is spoiling *The Job*’, in effect they argue that the fire prevention departments’ involvement in commercial and industrial premises is preventing many of the fires: ‘good jobs’ that firefighters used to attend, enjoy and at the same time use as a means of ‘proving’ themselves as *good firefighters* by passing the tests they have set themselves, which in turn is one of the tests of their masculinity. Therefore, by firefighters own admission it is possible to suggest that firefighters who do not cooperate with the implementation of FP, must be aware that they could be helping the public by doing this work and that they are prioritising their pleasures above helping the community³³¹.

³³¹ Were firefighters to be ‘forced’ to undertake FP, then capital would have found another way to exploit firefighters’ labour, because FP gets more value out of firefighters’ labour and capital could save more money if FP reduces fire losses.

Paperwork

The second reason why firefighters say they dislike FP is because of the paperwork. Firefighters despise paperwork; anything not hands-on (academic) they feminise and this is one reason why firefighters distance themselves from their officers: officers do paperwork (see Chapter 5). In an industry where the further up the promotion ladder you go the more time that you spend behind a desk, firefighters' views largely echo those views that proletarian workers have about office workers (see Collinson 1992, 1994). However, firefighters emphasise this distinction to distance themselves from those officers who claim a *shared experience*. Indeed, when officers sitting behind a desk claim that *they too* are firefighters, this can create a situation whereby firefighters may need to distance themselves even more from such non-proletarian labour to protect their status³³². Therefore, firefighters are unlikely to want to be associated with anything resembling paper or academic work that might contaminate their hands-on physical skills in the way they assume it has for their officers.

The firefighter as the public's friend

There is also one other explanation and this relates to firefighters' status with the public. As argued above, the public are important in providing an 'other', against which firefighters can construct their masculinity and then support their status as popular heroes. If firefighters were to be involved in FP then their relationship with the public could change, because what might start out as firefighters helping the public to prevent fires, could easily change into firefighters intruding into people's lives and into their homes: a form of policing and a statutory duty firefighters might not want. In particular, firefighters might resist this duty because alienating the public will inevitably affect the way the public help firefighters to construct their masculinity. If firefighters lost their popularity, the public might not be so easy to convince that firefighters are heroes for doing a job the public cannot. This would then reduce firefighters' ability to reflexively view themselves as objects; an 'other' in the eyes of the public. Alienating the public could also reduce the support they give firefighters in resisting cuts in the fire service. The public might even support those cuts, in the belief that FP is reducing the amount of fires and firefighters are not as necessary (a view capitalists might take). Public support may be a crucial constituent in the cocktail that the FBU mix to resist cuts (see Chapter 5). Its loss might well mean that that firefighters' industrial strength relied solely on themselves (as will be discussed more extensively in a later section) and it might be that officers could:

- cut the fire service;
- reduce job security;
- reducing firefighters' control in the workplace;
- deskilling firefighters;
- enforce safety procedures.

Officers' influence would then increase in direct proportion to how much control firefighters lost. For firefighters, the consequences would then be that their informal hierarchies would be less likely to be able to function as they did and the manner in which firefighters develop their masculinity would be under threat.

Throughout the evidence suggests that firefighters consistently juggle their professional ethos against and with more personal agendas and the evidence suggests that firefighters' agendas to help the community are more often mutually inclusive with constructing their masculinity. However, firefighters' resistance to FP/CFS tells us a lot about what might happen if helping the public goes against firefighters' long term view of how they 'prove' their masculinity. It helps to explain much of the evidence firefighters have provided, particularly why in resisting safety procedures, it appears that firefighters act against their own interest, because they increase the risks to their own lives. In my

³³² Contrary to public perception and the view that officers would wish others to see, officers no longer lead firefighters at a fire and firefighters have filled the gap by developing their own dynamic decision-making process. Technology in the form of BA has effectively deskilled officers and empowered firefighters (see Chapter 1).

view beneath this apparent paradox there lies a deeper agenda and this involves the ways that firefighters construct their masculinity by setting themselves apart from 'other' males. This they do by protecting their standards for entry and by maintaining an 'other' out of those who cannot (or whom firefighters will not allow to) achieve their standards. However, there are problems with this view, because whilst a current cohort of firefighters may set themselves standards for their masculinity, this does not mean that the next cohort will accept them. Nor does this view account for why 'all' firefighters appear to have the same standards. The next section will consider these issues.

6.3. FITTING IN

The way firefighters' explain their actions during firefighting appear as if they are status-building and this includes the possibility that firefighters may be trying to act as Millais or Vigor portray a fireman. To an extent, firefighters' status-building might be advantageous for the public, because it ensures that firefighters are always keen to carry out their duty. However, as this thesis has shown, it might also mean that firefighters differentiate between those who can and those who cannot do *The Job*, leading to firefighters stereotyping whom they would like to work with and to exclude: 'others' (males who have no wish to test themselves against firefighters' standards, non-whites, females and homosexuals). However, firefighters appear to remain selective and even after their selection process for entry to the fire service they develop standards for a *good firefighter* and ensure that new recruits *fit in* with these standards. These standards, especially how firefighters agree their protocols for firefighting, serve firefighters (and the community) well by reducing the risks to firefighters when they undertake (potentially) dangerous work. I refer to firefighting as potentially dangerous, because, whilst something unforeseen may go wrong, as long as firefighters are able to *agree and comply with their protocols for firefighting they can balance the risk element on the safe side of danger*. It is not surprising under these circumstances that firefighters prefer to work alongside those that *they believe* will be able to obtain and share their standards, namely white, working class, able-bodied, fit and heterosexual males.

I see firefighters constructing themselves and their informal hierarchy by their own actions (in 'cahoots' with others of a like mind). In so doing firefighters *fit in* with their own standards because it makes sense to do so and were the majority of firefighters to accept this system did not work it would inevitably collapse. That is not to preclude the possibility that charismatic leaders keep the system very much alive, and that some of these have negative agendas and are able to bully those in the hierarchy to join with them in forcing newcomers into those agendas. This possibility apart, it is clear that *whilst firefighting involves 'getting in' as it currently does*, there is a need for those in the hierarchy to ensure they can trust each other to follow their protocols.

Such a system inevitably has to deal with those who will not *fit in* with firefighters' protocols for firefighting and it is not surprising that firefighters have found ways to exclude or marginalise them to positions where they do not need to be trusted. Such a position might be outside of the building during a fire and Chapter 3 has shown that 'deviant firefighters', such as Ricky, were put in the middle seat to achieve this effect. It is also interesting that 'outside' is also the location that officers now have at a fire. Experienced firefighters, by keeping back their skills until they believe they can trust those that they pass them to, may *also* be seen as insuring the process is a *selection*, which only allows those they identify as 'the fittest' to get the skills needed to be firefighters. It is for this reason that I suggest firefighters' exclusionary practices are homosocial³³³. Firefighters' socialisation prior to joining adds to a belief in the fire service that men are more likely to testing themselves against the sort of standards (which form an important part of firefighters protocols for firefighting) that firefighters need if they are to *get in* safely, and both provide (for the public) and 'prove' (to themselves and their peers) their masculinity in the process.

³³³ Not because they have any erotic desire to work alongside men as others might suggest (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Cockburn 1991b; Roper 1996).

Such is the way that firefighters learn to rely on expected behaviour within their watch, that any change, however small, is liable to upset firefighters' safety at fires. Change might also upset their status, their reference group and their masculinity, and in consequence firefighters' first reaction is to resist change. To give an example, firefighters have resisted changes to their uniform³³⁴ and before each change is accepted it has been resisted, tested, complained about, adapted, tested and so on until firefighters are convinced it will do the job. The same applies to why experienced firefighters are sceptical about probationers. Probationers or indeed any newcomer has to be tried and tested before they are accepted. Similar to a new pair of boots, probationers have to be moulded so they fit and do not restrict the way firefighters do *The Job*. However, resisting change is not always beneficial, but if firefighters are going to accept change they have to be convinced of the need to do so, *not just be ordered to change*. This thesis might help firefighters to accept one change that they still appear reluctant to accept, that females can become firefighters. It may be that male firefighters' resistance to female firefighters might not only be about men protecting their masculinity. Mixed in amongst the reasons one might find is the belief amongst firefighters that *only men* can have the commonsense understandings needed to attain the standards necessary to be a firefighter. By investigating firefighters it has been shown that not only do firefighters set and test themselves against their standards for a *good firefighters*, which in turn provides an important element of their masculinity, but that *these standards are not intrinsically male at all*. They are standards achieved by *an act of will*; standards that likeminded women can and do achieve as well.

I would for a moment like to refer to my own experiences before university. As an academic, I now recognise that if I was to return to the fire service I would be consciously joining a male conspiracy if I continued to deny women's right to join the fire service on the basis that they could not do *The Job*. However, if I reflect back to the times that I was a firefighter, I cannot recall hearing any argument other than the commonsense view, which suggests, "Mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity ... inherent in a man's body" (Connell 1995: 45). The outcome for women is that firefighters' thoughts can and do easily turn into actions to make women feel unwelcome and exclude them from the fire service. The subsequent absence of women then becomes 'proof' that females cannot be firefighters. If today's firefighters have the same understandings that I had then, they are unlikely to have the resources to recognise their own bias, but this is not to say the resources are not available, because the FBU and the employers are constantly trying to update firefighters' views on equal opportunities. However, making the resources available does not mean that firefighters have or will use them.

³³⁴ When I joined the fire service, my uniform was very similar to the one my Victorian predecessors had worn. It was black, making it difficult for me to be seen in the dark. The helmet, was made of cork and this would protect me from falling water and to a limited extent falling debris, but there was no protection for my eyes. My tunic was made of wool and whilst wool does not readily burn, it does absorb water: a wet tunic is heavy, cold and will also freeze, the water will also turn to steam and scald the wearer if it gets very hot. My leggings were plastic and because they did not cover my bottom it got wet. The leggings also had to be smart and I had to polish them with flammable boot polish. My boots were made of leather and these too were polished to make them shine, but the polish did not stop them leaking and my feet got wet. On my belt I had a belt-line, which had to be white, so I scrubbed it with scouring powder and the inside went rotten (but it looked smart). We were not allowed to wear gloves and no torches were issued. My uniform was not practical, but like those worn by the military it provided the right image).

As firefighters we laughed at the uniforms that insurance firefighters wore, because they were impractical (see Appendix 2). In the same way I am sure future generations will laugh at the uniform I was issued with in 1962 and was still wearing in 1980. On reflection, I remember that my comrades and I resisted the change to dry, warm and safer uniforms: partly, because they spoilt our status; partly, because change is not easily accepted in the fire service. Any piece of new equipment has to be rigorously field-tested first. New helmets in particular were one item that improved safety, but changed the image firefighters had of themselves and firefighters resisted these. As they did the wearing of gloves, this might have stopped the injuries to firefighters' hands, but they stopped you being able to feel what you were touching: to wear gloves was also soft/feminine. The move to wearing BA at all incidents was resisted by old hands, because it removed the test of being a smoke-eater (see Chapter 1). Now firefighters have a space age uniform, but despite the field tests, which 'prove' firefighters will be much safer, drier and warmer, they still complain; particularly that it spoils their status. It almost seems that the ritual is that every new piece of equipment has to be tested, complained about, adapted, tested complained about and eventually when firefighters are convinced it works it is accepted.

Currently I see firefighters dividing between three groups (although this is not an either/or and is contextual on the situation at the time): first, those whose beliefs have not moved far from the commonsense view; second, those who realise the hegemony at work, consciously marginalise the feminist critique and the efforts of the FBU and employees; third, the minority of firefighters who publicly support female firefighters. These first two groups are then partly responsible for why there are fewer female firefighters than might be expected, because they make convincing arguments that: 'The introduction of females into the fire service has *reduced standards and made The Job soft*' and that '*female's 'natural' femininity is a source of danger* to the men who work alongside them'. Current debates more often pass both possibilities off as a classic malestream excuse. However, there may be a lack of sophistication in this approach, because it conflates the two groups of 'doubters' when trying to affect change, rather than looking at them as two separate groups. My own auto-critique provides a useful clue here; in an unreconstructed organisation like the fire service, it is necessary to convince those male firefighters who actually believe the commonsense arguments about strength and irrationality that these arguments are flawed. Firefighting, *as it is currently practiced*, can be a life and death job. Firefighters have to know their colleagues can be trusted to follow their understandings and the informal but sophisticated tests within their working arrangements provide this knowledge (see Seidler 1997). In this context it could be argued that the first group of firefighters above are not so much rejecting equal opportunities, rather they actively choosing homosociality and will only pass on their skills to those that their socialisation leads them to believe can be trusted to support them: other men. However, it is possible that homosociality does not only need to be about men preferring to work with men *per se*. It could equally be a way of ensuring a preference to work with people who can achieve firefighters' understandings/protocols/masculinity. To date, commonsense notions, which underwrite traditional gender divisions of labour, have assumed this understanding/masculinity is essentially male³³⁵. Now I argue (and to a limited extent have demonstrated) that the way firefighters 'prove' their masculinity whilst firefighting, might not be a male preserve: *female firefighters are doing it as well*. This information needs to be made available to firefighters in a way that they can understand. They are unlikely to just take the word of their employers, or academia: they need some proof that their hands-on approach to life and their primary reference group can recognise.

Once this information is made available to firefighters, they will then have a choice. They can join with the second group above who consciously continue to resist the obvious, that females can learn to be firefighters. Better, perhaps they accept that their masculinity is a social attribute and that firefighters' informal hierarchies are able to teach women as well as men how to be firefighters. Then female firefighters can be treated with no less suspicion than any other recruit and be freely taught the major *and positive attributes* that they see as the skills that constitute firefighters' masculinity. The less positive attributes, which firefighters might try to impose on each other can then become a focus for research aimed at making further change possible. Indeed female firefighters are already doing this, because whilst they are accepting the way firefighters fight fires, *their networks are actively discouraging the negative behaviour of their male counterparts*³³⁶.

³³⁵ Whilst not wishing to widen this debate at this stage, it would be wrong not to comment on the landmark refusal by the European Courts to refuse an appeal to allow women to become Royal Marines. In my opinion this decision was based on the very situation of men *believing* women cannot adopt their standards in regards to masculinity and how when it came to national security the possibility of upsetting the men and consequently risking national security, it was more important to deny women equal opportunities. The court ruled that as the Royal Marines were the, "point of the arrow head ... intended to be the first line of attack. ... The exclusion of women from service in special combat units such as the Royal Marines may be justified under Article 2(2) of Council Directive 76/207/EEC of 9 February 1976 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, by reason of the nature of the activities in question and the context in which they are carried out" (European Court 1999).

³³⁶ In particular, women's networks in the fire service are actively discouraging all three of what are possibly the most significant negative aspects of firefighters masculinity, their institutional sexism, racism and homophobia. It may be that these networks are consciousness raising groups attempting to raise women's understandings, but some women resist joining them (see Andrews 2000).

6.4. CLASS

The fire service is an unwanted expense for capital, but in an advanced capitalist society capital cannot do without a fire service. Firefighters' work is therefore secure and even more so since local authorities have replaced the insurance companies who previously ran the fire service. However, the local authorities are in somewhat of a contradictory situation in relation to the cost of the fire service: on the one hand, the electorate appear to want to retain the fire service in its current model and on the other hand capital would like to reduce the cost. Similar divisions exist within the fire service, with senior officers appearing to support the view of capital, and firefighters following and setting the electorates' view. However, officers are not so much representing capital when they try to cut and deskill the fire service, rather that they see this as an opportunity to 'prove' their masculinity by confirming they can control firefighters (antagonism between masculinities). Firefighters are resisting these moves by officers and I am more certain that for firefighters, this resistance is necessary if they are to be able to continue to 'prove' their masculinity. In particular, I recognise that firefighting, especially the way it is currently done, is central to firefighters achieving what they recognise as their masculinity (and a (petty) dividend that firefighters get for being *recognised* by themselves, their peers and the public as *good firefighters*). I have already described how this reflexive process works, but in class terms, when officers try to cut the fire service, firefighters' resistance is not just about financial utility or even job stability. It may also be about the dividend of firefighters' masculinity. Were officers able to cut what firefighters call *The Job* firefighters' whole sense of being might be at stake. Therefore this as much as any other reason might explain the strength of firefighters' resistance to their officers. In so much as it is possible for me to theorise about firefighters in class terms, I see firefighters' acting through their informal hierarchies as if they were a class who are defending conservatively against officers, who may themselves be seen as another class intent on gaining dividends from controlling the same area: these relations might be called antagonistic.

Firefighters' informal hierarchies are not new; they existed long before I joined the fire service. However, in earlier times firefighters' hierarchies have worked more closely alongside (colonised within) the formal structures of the fire service. More recently an increasing awareness, brought about by frustration at their conditions of service, provided firefighters with the initiative to flex their industrial muscle³³⁷. As a result the FBU demanded and got during the 1960's:

- better pay and a reduction in hours;
- brigades brought up to their staffing establishment;
- a radical change in their working arrangements, particularly the reduction in their cleaning duties;
- their duties to be seen in a more professional light, especially by the introduction of FP.

During these disputes relations between senior officers and firefighters soured. Possibly firefighters became more aware that alleged *joint understandings* between them and officers (see Chapter 5) were not joint at all, and that officers had their own agendas, *which all the time officers were serving by allowing firefighters to believe they shared their understandings*. Whatever the reason, firefighters increasingly withdrew the respect they had previously *given* to senior officers. As resistance became more entrenched, firefighters increased their demands for a safer fire service and senior officers once again opposed firefighters. The FBU again made demands and got from the 1970's onwards:

- an increase in crew sizes;
- the increasing provision and use of BA;
- improved uniforms for firefighting.

³³⁷ Firefighters, in fact became part of the dynamic industrial unrest from the 1960's: a time when workers increasingly industrialised until the Callaghan government focused on curbing the power of the trade unions and in particular 'reforming' public services. What followed became known as 'the year of strife' and this saw many public services, including firefighters take part in strikes, and prepared the ground for the Thatcher government in 1979 and the neo liberal revolution, which saw public services unions decline.

As we saw in Chapter 1, not all firefighters were happy at the increasing use of BA, because one way that firefighters 'prove' themselves was through their ability to be seen as 'smoke-eaters'. However, this resistance only lasted until those firefighters found that BA actually increased their ability to *get into* a fire and provided another way to 'prove' their masculinity, and were able to join with those firefighters who supported the health and safety reasons for wearing BA. The increased use of BA had two further outcomes, which again reduced firefighters respect for officers because:

- officers (who could not wear BA and stay in control of the fire) had to stay outside;
- lacking officers' 'expertise' inside the building, firefighters had to reskill and organise their own safety protocols.

Nevertheless it is still difficult to fully understand why firefighters and senior officers found themselves on opposite sides of the industrial fence during the firefighters' strike of 1978-9, but they did and now there seems no going back. Firefighters and senior officers are currently in an almost permanent state of conflict over a wide range of issues in the fire service³³⁸. It is possible to see this conflict in classic class terms as officers (suffering false consciousness and trying to reduce the cost to capital in the belief that this improves the service to the public, but at the same time it might be argued that *whilst* capitals' and officers' interests are both being served by officers attempting to control firefighters, officers and capital exist in a marriage of convenience (see Hartmann 1981).

For whatever reason, firefighters militancy exists very much in an environment whereby firefighters increasingly organise to 'save' *The Job* from their senior officers who attempt to reduce the cost of the fire service. Compared with other industries firefighters have been successful; the fire service remains more or less intact and there have been no compulsory redundancies. To date firefighters' job security may be the reason why they have not gone the way of those engineers who have had to look outside of their work for their masculinity, or by setting themselves apart in competition with their work colleagues (Collinson 1992: 181-182) and forgot their main task was a collective resistance to capital (see Burawoy 1979: 67). Firefighters have maintained their status collectively and it is important to note that the decision by their union to insist that every firefighter can do every job and that no extra pay is available for 'qualifications' has served firefighters well. Firefighters were *flexible specialists* (before the term was used by Piore and Sabel 1984), a community of (almost) equals who cooperate to 'produce the goods' and firefighters' *requirement* that they share their skills (after an initial selection) helps maintain firefighters' safety and improves their service. If there is any competition amongst firefighters, it is a competition to include everyone: to ensure everyone has the protocols necessary to be a *good firefighter* and become a safe working colleague³³⁹. This has given them the solidarity to stay together (fight capital) and currently firefighters are so secure in their job and confident about their masculinity that they do not blame the system, or lack of education for their position (see Collinson 1992). It sometimes appears that to firefighters a formal education is actually a disadvantage, and this is shown by the way firefighters denigrate their 'academic' officers and elevate their hands-on working class masculinity: a masculinity they celebrate with their colleagues and also with the tacit approval of most of the community they serve. In fact, it is almost essential that 'others' recognise firefighters' masculinity for it to be successful.

Firefighters' resistance emerges as the combined will of a collective of individual firefighters who are constructing their masculinity at work (both past and present). Fire service culture and *joint understandings* appear larger than that of any individual constituent. My suggestion is that firefighters' resistance to management is only successful because they have public support and a

³³⁸ It is interesting but the level at which this conflict takes place is currently unpredictable. In some brigades all senior officers support all measures to subordinate firefighters, but in others only principal officers will be found supporting attempts to cut the fire service. The same might be said about deskilling support may be mixed varying between those measures with a clear health and safety content and those designed just to 'prove' who is in charge.

³³⁹ It may well be a worthwhile lever for change if the FBU were to point out that if male firefighters do not soon accept that women are part and parcel of their hierarchy that they may well get into the sort of competition that causes labour to take its eye off of capital.

common cause (and the dangers of how FP might damage this have already been raised). This allows firefighters to resist locally as a watch and nationally as firefighters. In this way, it is possible to see firefighters conservatively protecting themselves as a class *in itself*. It must not be forgotten that they are facilitated in doing this by the Vanguard of firefighters who act with revolutionary class consciousness and act as a class *for itself* (see Giddens 1982; Segars 1989; Crompton 1998; Grint 1998) to provide the umbrella of the FBU for all firefighters' resistance. However, the price of freedom from managers' iron cage, may the acceptance of another iron cage, as the individual is 'forced to *fit in*' with other individuals, albeit (and specifically) their own peer group.

Whilst it is possible to argue that firefighters are improving the product/service the public receive by their resistance, firefighters' resistance as not a 'compliance' in the terms Collinson (1992) argues about 'commodified forms of labour'. Firefighters may appear to be legitimising the official hierarchy, but when they do (finding it expedient to suffer the humiliation of publicly doffing the cap), they do so in the knowledge that they can marginalise officers' influence when out of sight. In behaving this way firefighters avoid the vicious circle of elite control, where managers turn workers resistance into a company asset by colonising informal cultures into formal ones (see Strangleman and Roberts 1999). It may be that once again firefighters are going in a different direction to the rest of the community³⁴⁰, because up until the 1960's any informal culture firefighters had appears to have been colonised by the fire service tradition (see Chapter 1). This might explain why firefighters' conditions were so bad, because they *were caught in a vicious circle of control* (see Collinson, 1992). However, that colonisation required firefighters and officers to have *joint understandings*, mainly about their professional ethos: to provide an *efficient* service for the public. When firefighters became aware that officers were breaking that ethos (by attempting to deskill and cut the fire service in direct opposition to firefighters' attempts to improve their service and their own conditions), the scales might not have fallen from most firefighters' eyes³⁴¹, but they became sufficiently angry to break with tradition and to kick-start their resistance³⁴². From that point on the relations between firefighters and officers became increasingly antagonistic as firefighters became increasingly aware how much they (and the public) were being exploited. It is even possible to argue that *currently* firefighters' operating through their informal hierarchy may have turned everything upside down by *effectively colonising official structures* to maintain an efficient fire service at point of delivery (which both the public and firefighters argue for). Interestingly, in being able to protect *The Job*, firefighters are also protecting the way they form their masculinity and the 'others' that help them to do this (with all that this might mean for firefighters and the public).

Firefighters' job security has not just happened; firefighters have made it happen by organising through the FBU. But that is not the whole story, because many public service workers have organised in a similar way and not had firefighters' success. I consider that one reason for this is that government have not felt they will achieve sufficient financial savings (when balanced against the cost to them in votes that they might lose) to make it worthwhile taking on this popular group of workers³⁴³. It may be that the FBU leadership and class conscious militant members act as a Vanguard, which mixes the cocktail of public support and firefighters militancy, *but* when the public recognise the firefighter as a hero who rescues them from fire, they do so because it is firefighters who have supported this image. This is an outcome of one of the three ways that firefighters construct their masculinity, as objects in the eyes of themselves, their colleagues and *the public*.

³⁴⁰ I would like to refer back to something I said earlier: "This ability is what firefighters believe sets them apart, even as special, from the 'others' who run out of the buildings they go into."

³⁴¹ And revealed to firefighters what was their real relationships with officers as representatives of capital and encouraged the revolutionary consciousness necessary for all firefighters to organise publicly as a class in itself, to generating the committed social relations through which change could be realised.

³⁴² Giddens (1979: 6) understands that even the weakest actors in a relationship are capable of resistance. This notion is not new and Goffman (1961) had shown that some of the weakest members of our society can and do resist total control. It may be that firefighters were in a similar relationship with their officers because of the military discipline in the fire service.

³⁴³ It has to be remembered that firefighters operate in all areas of the country and might be expected to gather the same level of support 'everywhere'. They are not a group of workers who gather support in an industrial heartland.

Therefore, firefighters' active development of their own status with the public has dividends in the construction of firefighters' masculinity *and* in protecting firefighters' ability to retain control over how they do this. In this context, it is also necessary to explain why those firefighters without revolutionary class-consciousness are so prepared to stand under the FBU umbrella. Firefighters' masculinity and the watch that helps them achieve/provide their masculinity, is integral to their understandings of themselves and the world, and that part and parcel of this process is the way that firefighters test themselves as an object who can achieve what the 'others' (the public and perhaps even officers³⁴⁴) cannot, the standards of a *good firefighter*, which in turn leads to the public seeing firefighters as heroes. If firefighters were not to protect the environment that allows them to do this, and gave the officers free reign to deskill and cut the fire service, firefighters would risk losing the very source of their way of knowing the world and themselves³⁴⁵.

One point to highlight is that much of firefighters' resistance may not be as *deviant* as the officers would suggest. Firefighters' successful resistance may have been born out of a need to defend firefighting from those forces that sought to change the fire service from the publicly accepted model of efficiency, which believes that firefighters should be *service effective*, rather than *cost effective*. Such a view might also explain why firefighters ignore so called safety procedures that might curb their *getting in*, and which in turn might increase the risk because the fire gets bigger³⁴⁶. This might be a circle it is impossible to square with both firefighters and the public who each want the fire to be beaten and what commonsense might suggest is a possible taking of risks for no real purpose. There are unresolved dynamics here, which may link a variety of issues and may be currently irresolvable, because a variety of explanations may apply. One central question raised from this whole thesis is, 'why is it that 'all' firefighters behave so similarly in resisting the structures that would control how the fire service operates?' Despite working in isolated patriarchal islands of resistance, firefighters overcome their officers' rules and even though their union provides an impetus for unity, the paradox is that much of the unity the FBU provides is in the way firefighters resist its policies on safety and equality. Class bonding may be one reason for this, but this may be because they are a class of men as much as any other explanation.

6.5. GENDER

6.5.1. Dividends

³⁴⁴ It may be helpful if I were to repeat an argument made in part in this chapter and throughout this thesis. Firefighters might define others, as those who cannot do *The Job*, to include the officers who have left their ranks and given up their joint understandings about professional ethos. Before the new requirement to wear BA at all incidents, officers *led* firefighters when they *got in* at fires (see Chapters 1, 3 and 5). This gave officers' respect and authority, since firefighters relied on officers' skills, as good firefighters, to protect them. Officers now have a *management* role outside of fires and this has two effects. First, officers no longer have the opportunity to 'prove' to firefighters, by leading them into a fire that they have the embodied experiential expertise to be considered *good firefighters*: officers have been deskilled. Second, firefighters have re-skilled as a consequence, have developed their own expertise when *getting in* and no longer have to rely on officers. The result, firefighters marginalise officers as desk-workers who do the paperwork and in so doing they create a distance between their masculine and officers' feminine work. Having done this, firefighters can then be quick to draw conclusions about firefighters *who do* and officers *who look on* and take the credit. Antagonism and separations may exist now not only over officers' authority, but also over if officers are firefighters at all. In consequence, firefighters' resistance might increase against their officers to resist officers taking some of firefighters' acclaim (and status) and sit behind a desk with it.

³⁴⁵ It may be that the exceptional retention rates amongst white males in the fire service (see Chapter 1) are because having created an 'other' out of those who are not firefighting, firefighters are almost afraid to leave the watch for fear of losing the way they subjectively see themselves.

³⁴⁶ This raises the possibility (that will not be followed up by this thesis) that whilst the HSE might appear to help the working class whilst they are at work, they might also contribute to their deskilling. This could be particularly true for firefighters if ultimately the skill of *getting in* is stopped and replaced by firefighters standing outside a building squirting water through the windows. The public might also lose from such a change as the recipients of a service not so much geared to protecting them or their property, but 'over' mindful of firefighters' safety.

The way Firefighters socially construct their masculinity provides several dividends. Chapter 3 argues that firefighting and *in particular getting in*, might give firefighters at least two psychological dividends: an adrenaline boost and a chance to 'prove' to their colleagues, the public and themselves they are worthy of the title, *good firefighter*. In particular, because firefighters follow commonsense views that suggest masculinity can only be male, firefighters' masculinity would inevitably be damaged, in their terms, if females were shown to be doing their work (thus possibly *feminising* it). In such a situation male firefighters are inevitably driven to resist officers' attempts to implement equal opportunities; act against female firefighters by harassing them and making them unwelcome (see Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999).

Hartmann (1981) argues that because both capital and men exploit women that both relationships are antagonistic³⁴⁷. However, I do not pursue or support the view, here, that firefighters are using harassment to maintain the economic and cultural advantage that underpins patriarchy (see MacKinnon 1977; Hochschild 1983, 1989; Walby 1988, 1990, 1997; Segal 1990; Connell 1989, 1995; Cockburn 1991a; Collinson and Hearn 1996)³⁴⁸. In this thesis, I prefer to identify firefighters' action against women as conservative, an attempt to preserve *their* masculinity, which they closely associate with the commonsense notion that masculinity must be male. However, I do recognise that because the fire service is a site that still celebrates/reproduces traditional forms of proletarian masculinity, that firefighters help to support the commonsense cultural assumption of an essential link between men and masculinity, which in turn leads to the hegemony of men's superiority (see Connell 1995). Firefighters do this by providing and perpetuating the understanding that they are the men who protect: almost Weberian patriarchs (see Runciman 1978: 226) who use their socially developed skills as if they were 'natural' attributes to look after 'others' (women, children and weaker men). Firefighters are in effect the White Knights that defend the 'others' against the Red Devil: *fire*. This ability is what firefighters believe sets them apart, even as special, from the 'others' who run out of the buildings they go into. The others who *like officers* stand outside and observe at a fire, help them to define their masculinity.

6.5.2. Challenging (essentialist) commonsense views about masculinity

Sociologists, particularly feminists, argue that there is nothing essential about masculinity or the gender division of labour. Rather it is a collection of normative standards historically and contextually socially reproduced amongst men to perpetuate their hegemony (see Lipman-Blumen 1976; Kanter 1977; Willis 1977; DiTomaso 1989: 88; Jackson 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b; Hearn 1994; Collinson 1996; Office for Public Management 1996; Seidler 1997; Grint 1998). The way men learn how to do this starts in the home and develops at school (see Prendergast and Forrest 1998) and by the time they go to work they have learnt about masculine hierarchies. I argue that some of those who enjoy that process, especially when it involves physically proving yourself, in the playground,

³⁴⁷ Engels, (1973: 29-46) argues that this subordination would end once the *real* dispute with capital is over. This approach to gender class relations elevates material relations with Capital as if it were the sole cause of gender conflict: a pure abstraction that pays no attention to the possibility that feminism is a class in antagonistic relations with males, who must also then be a gender class in opposition to both capital and patriarchy, and the view that patriarchy may pre-date capitalism (see Hartmann: 1981; Walby 1986; Coole 1993: 19, 29-30). This leaves a gender class of men (Hearn 1994: 48) who might also be acting to conserve other (not so economic) patriarchal dividends: a dispute that might not end at 'The Revolution' or in any post-capitalist society.

³⁴⁸ I would in no way wish to imply that I deny that male firefighters might harass female firefighters to maintain economic advantage for their sex. Nor would I deny that if Hartmann's (1981) argument were married with Wright (1984) that most males do not gain a petty dividend from the way they organise the gender hierarchy within capital relations (see Connell 1995; Chapter 1); amongst themselves. It is just that I wish to focus on other reasons for why male firefighters might harass females. I have already implied in the text that it might be possible to equate the relationship between officers and firefighters in very similar terms to the way that Hartmann (1981) has. Firefighters would then be seen in place of females and officers might then be seen as males who act in exploitative terms alongside capital.

during sport and in the pub (see Willis 1979 and 1996; Connell 1995; Canaan 1996; Prendergast and Forest 1998), are the people who apply successfully to become firefighters³⁴⁹.

Up until 1982, the fire service took for granted that women did not have the standards to be a firefighter and none were employed. Then in 1982, as a bolt out of the blue, women challenged commonsense understanding and the first fulltime female firefighter was employed. Male firefighters reacted with harassment to make females unwelcome, and this has been successful because almost 20 years later there are only 258 wholetime female firefighters – 0.7% of the 33,949 establishment. One reason for the male rejection of female firefighters might be that male firefighters are concerned women might not have the necessary informal male understandings that firefighters develop into their protocols for safety³⁵⁰. To a degree, this can be true: a case where the stereotype ‘proves’ the stereotype, because women who have not been given the opportunity to achieve physical skills, or manoeuvre in male hierarchies are being denied the human capital to become firefighters.

I contend that this situation is not only changing, but that it has changed³⁵¹. Until recently, I lectured on an FE/HE course to prepare youths to join uniformed emergency service and the military. I undertook not to carry out research amongst them, but I do not consider I have broken that trust by reporting how acutely aware I am that many of the female students who are studying on this course and have set their sights on becoming firefighters, police officers and joining the military, are showing exactly the same understandings about embodied hierarchies as the male students. In this context, it may be they are developing human capital (see Walby 1997), in the form of the embodied physical skills and by operating in the male hierarchies in college, to prepare themselves for entry into careers in the emergency services and the military. In particular, it is clear to me that these students have been encouraged to (and are prepared to) confront tests of their physical and psychological strength and to realise that when they get hurt they do not cry.

6.5.3. Risk taking

There is a literature, which suggests that one-way men ‘prove’ their masculinity is to take risks and young working class males are group at highest risk dying in road accidents or from homicide (Scambler, and Higgs 1999). In the pub or the street, men, particularly young men, take risks when they are violent to other men. However, they calculate this risk by picking on men they judge they can beat (see Willis 1995 p.114; Canaan 1996)³⁵². This is a particular skill, that males might develop to appear to be random, but is actually calculated to provide success. Firefighters might appear as a group who have almost perfected this process in a far less negative way. This thesis suggests they ‘prove’ their masculinity by being seen to take risks when they fight fires, but they calculate this risk, *which they know they can beat*, and the closer they get to the wire the more adrenaline they obtain³⁵³,

³⁴⁹ Men who were uncomfortable with embodied masculinity are unlikely to apply to join the fire service; if they do they are likely to be rejected (see Chapters 3-5). It may even be possible that men who are less physical go into white-collar jobs and develop other forms of masculinity (see Collinson and Hearn 1996), and it would be worthy of further research in the fire service to establish if officers might almost sit between these two groups. They may have been comfortable enough with embodied hierarchies to seek real status as an embodied male, but having gained entry to the fire service might have found they were not exactly suited to it and not wishing to give in (and trapped by the ILM), may have sought out promotion and this situation may apply to Bob (see Chapters 4 and 5).

³⁵⁰ I cannot emphasise enough my concern that I might be misunderstood to be ignoring the important hegemonic reasons why male firefighters would want to exclude women. I am not emphasising these because it is necessary to try and move this debate on to a situation that might explain to men why their actions are so unnecessary and in turn damage their outlooks on the world.

³⁵¹ To an extent, my argument challenges what Prendergast and Forrest (1998) found in the playground they studied. It might even be that they did not look for such a possibility, or more likely that their female subjects did not at that age show any interest in joining boys’ hierarchies.

³⁵² In turn this might explain why males: rape females; abuse children; assault their wives who they see as weaker. In a similar way harassment and bullying at work is always done by people who believe they are stronger than those they violate (see MacKinnon 1979; Walby 1990; Cockburn 1991a, 1991b).

³⁵³ According to Stoller (1975, 1991, cited in Butt and Hearn 1998: 203-227) “‘thrill’ always involves the making safe of anxiety-provoking events through playing with them ... That which is threatening may also be exciting.”

and the more they fit with their subjective reflection of themselves as objects of respect in their own, their peers' and the public eye. In the same way it should not be surprising that male firefighters get a buzz from risk taking promiscuity, which appears to be a further proof of masculinity³⁵⁴.

6.5.4. The inconsistency of masculinity

In Chapter 1, I supported a theme raised by Hearn (1994, 1996) and reiterated by Connell (1995: 67) that despite the celebration of manual labour being an important part of proletarian masculinity, there is no objective consistency to masculinity. Contextually, I accept that most men will *construct* their individual masculinity according to a cultural understanding: a false monolith/normative standard of what men are supposed to be. At the start of my research I set out to question how this understanding and my occupation as a firefighter influenced my gender. I had no doubts that masculinity was a social application that had many forms and for each of these I might expect to find a social reason for their existence and not a biological one (see Rabinow 1986: 4). Therefore, when the research started I had a good idea of where I wanted it to go, but at that stage, I was not exactly breaking new ground, many had been there before me. However, my research was in a new area and by using pro-feminist auto-critique to study how firefighters construct their masculinity, my particular aim was to help the fire service with its equal opportunities difficulties.

I also anticipated that as firefighting might be considered a high profile 'male' job, which contextually supports the false monolith of masculinity and that if I could 'prove' how social these attributes were to firefighters, I might challenge the essentialist link that commonsense views apply to masculinity and to firefighters. In so doing, I was also hoping to subvert a patriarchal hegemony that provides a dividend for men; in particular, I hoped to challenge one patriarchal dividend, the sequential traditional gender division of labour (see Collinson 1988; Kimmel 1987; Cockburn 1991a; Lorber 1994; Connell 1995), which in turn supports the view that firefighters are male.

I had been doing my research for four years when Lorber (2000) suggested a degendering movement amongst feminists and my research was beginning to suggest it might be possible to use the high profile public figure of the firefighter to deconstruct masculinity. To build on earlier arguments: we all make choices and take down the barriers that provide, "a structural, historical context that shaped options and their motivation to choose one option over another" (Gerson 1986: 116). I hope this research provides some tools to help to do this, because I consider I have shown that people of a like mind (regardless of their sex) who set out to become *good firefighters* construct the main elements of *firefighters' masculinity*. The other elements are more a local construction, peculiar almost to the watch on which a firefighter serves and throughout the country each watch will have its own 'agreed' way of *fitting in* with these. Some watches will require a high commitment to fitness, others might look to extreme forms of heterosexuality and sexism and sit up all night watching porn videos, others will have a strong connection to the union and some will be avid fund raisers; as I said earlier 'after a period of obsessional ... activity, a new activity may develop in 'the wings' as the next obsessional activity'.

Whilst I said at the start of this thesis I have no belief in masculinity as pre-given, I did recognise that firefighters might find it difficult to understand life without such a word. Although a sociologist's view, I suggest that to firefighters their masculinity is:

*Firefighters' masculinity is a social construction and has a central feature that firefighters achieve by passing the test of being seen as a **good firefighter**. The standards for this test are set by the watch in the form of 'universal' protocols for firefighting and individually each firefighter has their own subjective interpretation of what these standards are, and when they **get in** at a fire*

³⁵⁴ It seems that many men who should not have to 'prove' anything to anyone still need to take risks in this way. One might wonder, if it had not been made so public, how (Clinton) the most powerful man in the world in 1999 got his excitement (see Harris 1995; Hearn 1999; Norman 1999)

*they set out to achieve them in their own, their watch's and the public's eyes. The other elements are a more local construction, variable and peculiar almost to the watch on which a firefighter serves, and throughout the country each watch will have its own 'agreed' way of **fitting in** with these. Those who firefighters see as failing to achieve these standards then become an 'other', someone who firefighters marginalise and judge themselves against. This combination is what firefighters call their masculinity.*

6.5.5. A way forward

One, if not the most, negative feature attributed to masculinity is that it creates a hierarchy that subordinates females and valorises attributes that perpetuate violence. These hierarchies underpin masculinity and the commonsense understandings that only men could be masculine, leading to the *current* understanding of homosociality, as a way in which *men* perpetuate the gender division of labour. However, some of the evidence from this thesis suggests that it may not be possible to carry out firefighting *as it is currently done* without firefighters' informal hierarchies. Therefore whilst I have no intention of arguing that the critique of masculinity should cease, it is possible that feminists and pro-feminists have become so intent on critique, that they ignore some positive outcomes of some men's behaviour, and the reality that (for whatever reason) women often turn to men (employed in male jobs) for protection/help. The firefighter is a case in point and no amount of bad press has been able to topple their status with the public *and even feminist sociologists*. What has been missed, is that firefighters protect *everybody from fire*, not only damsels in distress, but also 'other' *men* who need help. It is firefighters' ability to help the public and the fact that even now the fire service is predominantly male that allows firefighters to provide an image of masculinity.

My qualitative methodology, which was in part adopted to convey firefighters' views and experiences in a way that would make sense to them has brought to light some unexpected data on female firefighters. As I note in Chapter 3 female firefighters describe their job and how they firefight in almost identical terms to male firefighters, generally on most issues their voices cannot be told apart. This suggests that women see themselves as firefighters as effectively and in the same terms as men. This came as a complete surprise to me, and from this evidence I suggest that female firefighters too are achieving the masculine standards that I set out to find amongst male firefighters. This leads me to pose some questions for future research. The first question is, 'what do we call the gender of women who are *good firefighters* and therefore achieve the attributes central to how firefighters construct their masculinity?' This leads to a second (if it is possible to avoid getting tied up in debates about other features not so central to firefighters' masculinity), to ask a second question, 'if a women adopts (positive) masculine traits, is this necessarily negative?' It also has to be considered that, if in reply, feminists were to argue that female firefighters were being forced to adopt firefighters' masculinity, then they may be ignoring the possibility that female firefighters might be using their own agency *fit in* with (and become part of) firefighters hierarchies. This could then lead to feminists marginalising female firefighters as deviant, in a similar way that men do when they say a woman "has balls" or to help men make these female trailblazers *invisible*.

6.6. REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH

Reflecting back on the research process, I will start by it was just like firefighting in that it was enjoyable, frustrating at times and hard, it was very hard, much harder than firefighting. It provided a challenge and as a man I am used to testing myself against challenges. Unsurprisingly, *so too are women*; it is just that men do not always recognise this. I have found that capturing data at source, from the lips of firefighters a most enlightening process. When I returned home with the tapes in my pocket, I did not realise how much information they held. I thought that collecting data was a simple *academic process*; one I had to 'get through' on the way to my PhD. I did not really understand at the start of the research what 'academic process' meant, as I do now. Before transcribing the tapes, I played them in my car in very much the same way as people listen to music. I can still now hear some of the voices and what firefighters told me is the story I have related. However, I have also been sceptical and subjected what I have been told to the gaze of pro-feminist auto-critique. This has been a rewarding experience and it is my view that this thesis does actually make visible some of the invisible aspects of men's power, that Hearn (1994) asks for.

Throughout the data collection process and in handling the data afterwards, grounded theory has been an incredible friend; it is my view that Glaser and Strauss (1967) was written specifically to enable me to produce a thesis that both academics and firefighters can understand! My informants voices have a central place and to make the thesis available to firefighters, I have tried to arrange the text to make much of what I would have said in my words, available in firefighters' words. I hope that firefighters do not see this as some academic trick, but rather a genuine attempt to provide them with information through a medium they might empathise with and understand. I am trying, as it were, to capture firefighters' hands-on approach, because I recognise that they are more likely to accept the main findings of this thesis if they can relate them to *their world as they know it*. I want firefighters to feel comfortable reading this thesis and if they find my findings difficult, I hope they will not only see academic writing and cast the thesis aside, but that they will be able to see what *they said* and maybe think again.

There is another reason why I have prioritised firefighters own understandings. The fire service does not have much time for academia or independent researchers. In particular, the fire service does not have much time for sociology. This I understand as a dislike for the theoretical in an organisation so geared to hands-on problems and immediate answers that it has difficulty in recognising that 'firefighting' approaches are not always the best fix. It is sad too that no one has recognised that the way firefighters *prepare* for fires by sharing knowledge and developing protocols, *is indeed a theoretical approach*. Proof of how ill-advised the fire service might be about sociology might be taken from the fact that despite a long-term commitment to equal opportunities and proclamations that their culture must change, they have little understanding of how they might do this. To be even more contentious, I might suggest that the fire service does not really understand its own culture at all. *But I would say that wouldn't I*, because I am a sociologist carrying out independent research on the fire service.

My experience during this research has not been one of being welcomed back as an old boy, which I undoubtedly am. Access has not been made easy, and I had extensive communication with two brigades, including several meetings and one eventually refused me access, because of the, "large amount of research going on in the brigade." The letters and meetings with the second brigade eventually dried up and having found other ways of getting my data I let the matter drop. On the positive side, some doors have been opened to aid my research and as ever, firefighters have been more than willing to talk to me. But in the main the structures of the fire service have not been welcoming. The Home Office equal opportunities department have ignored letters from my supervisor and when sometimes their replies arrived, often after three months, they have given little if

any assistance³⁵⁵. Currently I am trying to negotiate a copy of the latest report on leadership and I have just returned from a meeting with HMCIFS Meldrum³⁵⁶. We got on so well that I am chastened by my earlier remarks, but sadly it was all too late and whilst much more might have been done if our understanding had been found earlier, I do have the opportunity to say my research is in effect ‘independent’.

However, what the fire service is good at is creating an image to court public support. One of these images is the public profile of the heroic (male) rescuer, sometimes covert, but often overt, like the male pinup calendar of firefighters on sale at the Fire Service College in December 2000 (see Appendix 13). These pictures portray such sexually provocative poses as to leave little doubt that the fire service is a place where women might expect to be made welcome for sexual encounters, but not as work colleagues³⁵⁷. It is this face of the fire service that has to change. No longer is it right, if it ever was, for a public body to display (and sell) such institutional sexism as part of its culture. But how is the fire service to change if it restricts access to, or even fails to reply adequately to independent researchers? Strangely, the answer lies in an area ostensibly far away from the fire service, *feminism*. If it had not been for those female firefighters who had challenged the male domination in the fire service and the assistance they got from ‘others’ outside of the fire service, then it may be that the fire service could remain a closed male order.

In what is almost a repeat of the happenings in the wider world, it has taken politically-inspired women to challenge male domination. Early female firefighters were not willing feminists and they were reluctant to cry foul when they were harassed. However, harassment is so much a way of life in the fire service that men were never going to stop it. In the end, the excesses against females became so great that a female firefighter found her way into the public eye (see Hearn and Parkin 1987, 1995: 74; Walby 1990: 52) and at an industrial tribunal £200,000, the largest compensation package for sexual harassment at that time, was awarded to Tanya Clayton, (Graves 1995; IT 1995; Veash 1997). From that point on the fire service tried to take note, not I suggest because harassment was wrong, but because the expense of not doing so might be too great! In the round, it has cost the fire service much more than that. There have been (funded) enquiries and research in abundance, and they all point to a deviant culture that has to change. However, these enquiries have taken their evidence from officers and sometimes female firefighters; on the few occasions they have listened to male firefighters I believe they were often deceived. *No one stayed long enough to hear an in depth story*, no one has looked beyond the surface and no one has looked past the image the fire service portrays of itself³⁵⁸.

³⁵⁵ Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Fire service were very keen to get my original dissertation (Baigent 1996), so much so I was asked to email it so that an inspector could read it over the weekend. The inspector did not acknowledge receipt, nor have the courtesy to comment on its contents. When I asked for some reciprocal assistance in the form of a complimentary copy of the inspectorates report on equality (HMIFS 1999, costing £30), there were none available, despite 1000 copies being prepared for the press launch, and I heard an inspector say in the background “Oh it’s him again.”

³⁵⁶ Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Fire service, the most senior fire service officer and in line responsible to the Home Secretary.

³⁵⁷ I challenged a senior academic at the FSC about this and he not only defended their sale, but also indicated that he had bought some for his daughter-in-law.

³⁵⁸ In this respect the current enquiry on leadership (HMIFS 2001) has come about due to a recommendation of (HMIFS 1999), which was about the failure of the fire service to implement equal opportunities. HMIFS (2001) was published on 1st of May and I could not obtain an advanced copy. I have read it and I feel confident that I can continue with my decision to print this thesis on the 2nd of May without alteration and without denying anything to my research. In many ways our two documents are complimentary, HMIFS (2001) found that: there was a gap between officers and firefighters understandings about service delivery; that a top down command structure might not provide the public with best value; that promotion procedures needed to be rethought, and this includes accelerated promotion and that candidates might be sought from outside the fire service for senior ranks. Perhaps the most salient view of the report would be to suggest that although it has not been put in specific terms, the fire service has recognised that it has failed to colonise firefighters’ culture and is seeking new ways to do so. The report comes very close to understanding what is wrong, but may be insufficient in detail to explain why it is wrong and this could affect any changes that might come about. However, whilst the report suggests improved management as a way of improving delivery (and equality) it is easy to see that one suggestion within the report regarding an increase in CFS is one way that cultures might merge if firefighters can be persuaded to take on this work in the long term.

The failure to implement equality at work is a real indictment of a service proud of its traditions of uniformed hierarchical discipline and unswerving humanitarian public service for the common good. This failure is made worse because all other official fire service structures, The Home Office, The Fire Service College and The Fire Brigades Union have an agenda to provide an equality workplace. Such a dedicated culture, an almost perfect example of a legal/rational Weberian hierarchy, should make it easy for senior officers to control firefighters, but they cannot³⁵⁹. This means that it is necessary to question why and one answer might suggest that the fire service is, in effect, a victim of its own propaganda. The officers who perpetuate the belief they are in charge of a disciplined workforce, may actually know this to be untrue, but it is not in their interest to reveal this possibility. To do so could threaten current management structures, and highlight the failures of a leadership who can only remain leaders whilst they and the rest of the world believe their story. Effectively the fire service may be failing to own up to its problems. This is why I say the fire service does not favour independent sociologists, because they may point to a failure in a system whereby officers try to stop harassment *by ordering it to stop* in the full knowledge that to a large extent their orders will be ignored.

The fire service makes great play of acknowledging its institutional sexism and blames 'the culture' (HMIFS 1999), but has little understanding of that culture and those 'unacknowledged conditions' and 'unintended consequences' in firefighters' actions, which cause institutional sexism. This shows a considerable neglect of the resources available to the fire service, especially from sociologists (who might look beyond a belief in bureaucratic authoritarianism to find out why the fire service fails to incorporate firefighters' culture in its own). Weber's (Runciman 1978: 229) argument that charismatic leadership only has authority whilst it retains support may provide a clue that the fire service might wish to follow. Since the 1960's firefighters' resistance to officers has increased, this is in part because they are less accepting of officers' rational authority, but this may have come about because of a decline in officers' opportunities to achieve charismatic authority. It is clear that officers lost charismatic authority as firefighters became aware of three things (in no particular order): first, officers were breaking with *joint understandings* about efficiency; second, officers resisted firefighters' attempts at improving conditions; third, officers were no longer able to *get in* with firefighters. Even worse for officers was the fact that their declining charismatic leadership was countered by firefighters' peer group leaders who increasingly gained charismatic leadership and are now effectively custodians of firefighters' professional ethos and possibly more. This subject in particular needs further research.

6.7. THOUGHTS ABOUT FURTHER RESEARCH

Looking at further possibilities for future research, it is clear that my deliberations about the gender label for a female firefighter who passes the test as a *good firefighter* needs further investigation. This might involve looking at those range of jobs, from blue-collar to white-collar, through which men might describe their masculinity and then to identify if in the same environment women develop a similar human capital to the one that fits with men's descriptions (see Walby 1997).

There are at least two further areas in the fire service that could benefit from more research. The first concerns the relationship between firefighters and officers and how this relationship forms into a resistance through which firefighters (and possibly officers) are competing to 'prove' their masculinity *in the same area*. This research should have at least two aims: first, to stop what is a damaging dispute and wasted effort over who controls the fire service and second, *it should look at*

³⁵⁹ There is an interesting similarity here with research provided whilst with the army. The Army claims to be part of the most disciplined force in the world and yet those soldiers who were in charge of my students on one stay with the army, 'proved' to be nothing but a bunch of drunken, sexist, hooligans and I had to intervene to stop them abusing the girls and boys in their charge. In a more public statement of the armies sexism and lack of control the Officer Commanding the guards base at Catterick publicly warned his soldiers about risking sex with two women in the town who 'had aids' (BBC Newsnight 16-12-97): shades of the way the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 (see Mort 1987), which suggested sailors could not be controlled but women could.

what the public wants, what they are prepared to pay for and then look for ways to achieve this.

Such research should be guided by findings here that it can be tempting to follow what officers' think (because officers will make believe they hold power in the fire service) and consider that firefighters provide another version and also key players in what is happening. In fire service terms, researchers may even have to think the unthinkable (of officers) that much of what firefighters are doing is right and that their struggle with officers might occur because officers' interests are less in serving the public (who despite any arguments to the contrary is the primary stake holder in the fire service) more about serving themselves. Equally as unthinkable, it might be that research should consider whether single tier entry promotion is any longer relevant to managing the fire service.

The fire service will also benefit from further research to try and further identify the negative and positive attributes associated with how firefighters construct, perpetuate and police their masculinity. It is no good just telling men who are doing a good job for the public that they are wrong about the way they form their masculinity. It is necessary for research to find how to reduce the negative factors in this process without disturbing the positive ones. This is a task that calls for careful attention, sensitive awareness of the complexity and paradoxes involved, because if taking away the negative points were to result in more people dying in fires, or firefighters' humanitarian calling being broken, then the ends might not justify the means.

Such research might easily be paralleled by research in the police, who at this distance I would firmly associate with many of the findings in this thesis³⁶⁰. In particular, my findings regarding firefighters' informal hierarchies (primary reference groups), which provides understandings on how *The Job* is done, how to resist officers *and* a source of their views of the world could equally apply to the police. Where others have been convinced the police have a problem with their *cop/canteen culture* (Macpherson 1999) I take the view that 'culture' is just a word like masculinity, convenient to use, but so contextual to the individual or the 'in' group that it forms a drifting smoke screen that is impossible to pin down³⁶¹. It is interesting that, like firefighters, the police also see their work as *The Job*: a job that they, as professionals, know how best to do. I am very aware that when a police recruit leaves Hendon they are vulnerable in exactly the same way as the new firefighter probationer. They meet the '*men*' (who they are in awe of), who will teach them *The Job* and tell them that they must forget much of what they have learnt. The police even have a name for the way they teach new recruits, they call it 'puppy walking'. The new, and vulnerable, recruit is aware that if they do not comply with whatever canteen/cop culture means to the person with the 'lead' (and puppy walking them), they will not get the information they need to become police officers, or at least most believe that is so. As Macpherson (1999) argues, police racism affects the police's ability to do their work, but all the efforts and all the money spent has not stopped police racism. Might it be that that research in the police could benefit from looking to see if the dynamics between firefighters and officers (that this thesis has found) might transfer to the way policing is organised? It could be that the interaction between masculinity, public service ethos and homosociality may be such, that whilst officers might create an illusion of being in charge, they may be involved in a struggle of similar proportions to that in the fire service. This might have similar outcomes, as constables and officers, both appearing intent on providing a good service, may also be constructing their masculinity at the same time. And, as in the fire service, it may be that constables have a far greater degree of control of how *The Job* is done than otherwise recognised.

³⁶⁰ One way forward might be research aimed at finding if the education of potential recruits for all uniformed public services at a much earlier stage, amongst Public and Emergency Service courses in FE and HE, could improve equal opportunities. Researching here might provide some advantage of understanding more about the general aspirations and qualities of both young men and young women that attract them to such work before they begin more specialist training on the job in whatever service they ultimately choose. Research should also consider if it is possible to attract a wider section of the community to education linked to public services than currently apply to the uniformed services. It may also be that by a specific partnership at an educational level, in which uniformed public servants actually mentor students the learning curve might be two-way.

³⁶¹ It is my view that Macpherson's account of cop/canteen culture took the view that it was a simple form of behaviour that actually took place in the canteen and took little account of how powerful a group the experienced constables were in the police: it is my view that a similar situation exists in the fire service (see McCollin 1999).

6.8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Traditionally the fire service has always been a male group, who lived and worked (and have always been aware that they sometimes died) together. Firefighters are individuals and as such they construct their individual masculinities, but because it would be a monumental task to look at all of these, this thesis has sought out the dominant features of what I call 'firefighters' masculinity': the masculinity, which 'all' firefighters might follow. From what firefighters have told me it is clear that firefighters socially reproduce the main attributes of their masculinity alongside the tests for how their informal hierarchy, defines a *good firefighter*: someone who can *get in* at a fire whilst 'others' outside look on.

With what is a strange sense of irony in this predominantly male group, firefighters have told me that living on a watch is like living in a family and the requirement to *fit in* with their hierarchy on the station is a recognised feature of fire service working arrangements; especially because it is at the station where firefighters form their protocols for firefighting and decide who can be a *good firefighter*. Having established this possibility it is just a short leap to establishing that being together on the watch provides a sense of security to firefighters, and that their informal hierarchy becomes a primary reference group through which they understand the outside world.

Thus in many respects, the fire service is a closed organisation and in no particular order, *central findings of this thesis* conclude that the fire service:

- provides, with some reservations about FP/CFS, an excellent service to the primary stakeholder, the public;
- restricts entry to those who show working class masculine standards, particularly the requirement to be hands-on, fit, strong and able-bodied and a preparedness to 'prove' and test themselves against those standards;
- is racist, sexist and homophobic in favour of white, heterosexual males (see Baigent 1996; HMIFS 1999);
- maintains patriarchal traditions and in particular male hierarchies;
- promotes from within its own organisation;
- remains secure employment, so firefighters can go to work 'knowing' that they do not face job insecurity or redundancy;
- provides employment, which firefighters form an attachment to, enjoy and stick with until they are liable for a pension;
- provides employment that firefighters consider to be worthwhile and they construct a work ethic that they defend (on their and the public's behalf) against their officers and employers who seem intent on cutting the service;
- is a public body with considerable public profile and support;
- is a symbol (an overt icon) of masculinity at work;
- provides firefighters with a way of knowing the world (the watch, in particular, becomes a primary reference group);
- allows firefighters to form their subjective view of the standards of a good firefighter/masculinity at work, by being an active subject in setting standards for how their work is done, then testing themselves against these standards and reflexively look at themselves as objects that achieve these standards.

Nothing in this thesis can fully portray the closeness between groups of firefighters as they congregate and develop their primary reference group and how work, talk and play are so synonymous that work (including firefighting) can then become almost a social event to be looked forward to. But this is not so for the public, they are frightened of fire and the fact that firefighters '*go into buildings as everyone else is running out*' adds to the view that firefighters might see themselves as a 'special people' who the public turn to in case of emergency. In affect, firefighters act out at work how they subjectively judge they expect to be seen, by themselves, their peer group and the public. In so doing

they set themselves apart from the 'others' who cannot meet their expectations. It is these 'special people' that this thesis has studied, a group of 'special' men and women.

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APPENDIX ONE: ESTABLISHMENTS 1998-2000 adapted from HMCIFS, 2000; 2001;FBU, 2000a

1998-1999	Establish	Actual	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Other
FCDA's								
Manchester	2170	2135	2134	1	2119	12	3	1
London	5972	5973	5905	68	5710	168	18	77
Mersyside	1487	1457	1453	4	1450	2	1	4
S Yorksire	914	907	901	6	894	9	0	4
Tyne Wear	992	994	993	1	993	0	0	1
W Midlands	2067	2060	2052	8	1972	43	24	21
WYorkshire	1736	1723	1717	6	1712	7	4	0
TOTAL	15338	15249	15155	94	14850	241	50	108
FA England								
Avon	668	651	643	8	645	6	0	0
Beds/Luton	315	315	307	8	306	5	1	3
Buckingham	315	305	300	5	301	4	0	0
Cambridge	269	263	259	4	256	3	0	4
Cheshire	618	624	623	1	621	3	0	0
Cleveland	615	603	603	0	601	0	2	0
Cornwall	181	183	182	1	182	0	0	1
Durham/Darl	406	399	398	1	397	2	0	0
Cumbria	279	277	275	2	276	1	0	0
Derbyshire	481	472	463	9	467	3	2	0
Devon	558	558	552	6	555	2	1	0
Dorset	292	296	295	1	295	0	0	1
East Sussex	435	431	424	7	428	0	2	1
Essex	920	914	912	2	911	2	1	0
Glouc	227	227	223	4	224	2	0	1
Hampshire	754	766	764	2	764	2	0	0
HereWorcs.	358	350	346	4	348	2	0	0
Herts	589	557	553	4	551	1	0	5
Humberside	710	700	696	4	700	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	61	61	60	1	61	0	0	0
IslesScilly	9	9	9	0	9	0	0	0
Kent	952	938	937	1	934	2	1	1
Lancashire	1007	1007	1001	6	1003	3	1	0
Leicester	497	488	484	4	479	4	5	0
Lincolnshire	193	192	191	1	190	2	0	0
Norfolk	286	282	280	2	278	4	0	0
NYorkshire	362	364	357	7	363	0	0	1
Northamps	297	293	290	3	293	0	0	0
Northumberl	203	199	198	1	199	0	0	0
Nottingham	578	586	579	7	579	2	3	2
Oxfordshire	235	233	231	2	233	0	0	0
R Berkshire	427	416	415	1	409	2	2	3
Shropshire	203	201	199	2	201	0	0	0
Somerset	174	176	176	0	176	0	0	0
Stafford	494	489	480	9	480	7	0	2
Suffolk	259	256	253	3	256	0	0	0
Surrey	729	692	678	14	689	2	1	0
Warwick	294	291	287	4	287	3	1	0
W Sussex	394	395	384	11	395	0	0	0
Wiltshire	212	210	207	3	208	2	0	0
TOTAL	16856	16669	16514	155	16550	71	23	25
FA- WALES								
M & W Wales	505	496	493	3	495	1	0	0
North Wales	284	284	282	2	284	0	0	0
South Wales	966	958	954	4	953	2	1	2
TOTAL	1755	1738	1729	9	1732	3	1	2
G TOTAL	33949	33656	33398	258	33132	315	74	135
% females	0.7665795	% male	99.233420	%non white	1.1558117	% white	98.844188	

1999-2000	Establish	Actual	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Other
FCDAs								
Manchester	2155	2071	2070	1	2055	12	3	1
London	5682	5754	5687	67	5496	167	19	72
Mersyside	1420	1420	1415	5	1413	4	1	2
S Yorkshire	917	919	908	11	905	9	1	4
Tyne Wear	1007	1017	1013	4	1015	1	0	1
W Midlands	2025	2034	2023	11	1968	41	4	21
W Yorkshire	1698	1680	1674	6	1669	7	2	2
TOTAL	14904	14895	14790	105	14521	241	30	103
FA England								
Avon	668	661	653	8	654	6	0	1
Beds/Luton	315	305	298	7	297	4	1	3
Buckingham	313	307	302	5	303	4	0	0
Cambridge	269	263	259	4	256	3	0	4
Cheshire	617	632	632	0	628	2	1	1
Cleveland	615	589	588	1	584	1	4	0
Cornwall	181	182	181	1	181	0	0	1
Durham/Darl	406	402	399	3	400	2	0	0
Cumbria	277	277	275	2	277	0	0	0
Derbyshire	481	479	467	12	474	3	2	0
Devon	555	561	554	7	559	2	0	0
Dorset	292	294	293	1	293	0	0	1
East Sussex	427	424	416	8	420	1	2	1
Essex	919	923	920	3	920	2	1	0
Glouc	229	224	220	4	220	2	0	2
Hampshire	756	768	764	4	765	2	1	0
HereWorcs.	358	353	348	5	350	3	0	0
Herts	576	581	576	5	575	1	0	5
Humberside	710	711	707	4	704	2	1	4
Isle of Wight	61	60	59	1	60	0	0	0
IslesScilly	9	9	9	0	9	0	0	0
Kent	952	942	941	1	939	2	1	0
Lancashire	1013	1008	1002	6	1004	3	1	0
Leicester	497	495	491	4	487	4	4	0
Lincolnshire	193	193	191	2	191	2	0	0
Norfolk	296	298	295	3	294	4	0	0
NYorkshire	362	349	343	6	348	0	1	0
Northamps	297	295	292	3	292	0	0	4
Northumberl	205	205	202	3	204	0	0	1
Nottingham	578	581	576	5	573	4	1	0
Oxfordshire	235	235	233	2	235	0	0	0
R Berkshire	427	409	408	1	403	2	2	2
Shropshire	203	197	195	2	197	0	0	0
Somerset	179	175	175	0	174	0	0	1
Stafford	493	480	473	7	473	6	0	1
Suffolk	256	249	246	3	249	0	0	0
Surrey	710	706	692	14	672	4	0	0
Warwick	294	289	285	4	283	5	1	0
W Sussex	399	394	379	15	393	0	0	
Wiltshire	216	215	212	3	212	3	0	0
TOTAL	16839	16720	16551	169	16552	79	24	33
FA- WALES								
M & W Wales	501	495	493	2	494	1	0	0
North Wales	289	284	281	3	284	0	0	0
South Wales	966	975	969	6	970	3	2	0
TOTAL	1756	1754	1743	11	1748	4	2	0
G TOTAL	33499*	33369	33084	285	32821*	324	56	136
% females	0.86%	% male	99.1	% non white	1.57	% white	98.43	=

* in the stats produced by HMCIFS report 1999/2000 these two figures are different

Despite two years having elapsed since the Minister for State for the Fire Service set targets for minority ethnic* and female recruitment**, the progress is slow. Compared with the year 1998-1999 this year's figures show that out of a total establishment of 33499 uniformed firefighters in England and Wales: black recruitment, **increased** by 9; women's recruitment, **increased** by 27. The statistics indicate that Asian recruitment, **decreased** by 18 (although after checking with a very helpful Robert Scholfield at the government statistical office it appears the statistics for Asian's employed is incorrect. The total Asians employed as fulltime firefighters in 1999 should have read 53 not 74). It is interesting to also note that the totals for 2000 are different for the total employed in the ethnicity statistics and gender statistics.

To achieve Ministerial targets for recruitment of female firefighters on today's establishment of 33499 there will have to be just over 5000 female firefighters. This will mean that over 4700 female firefighters will have to be recruited, trained and in service by the year 2009.

* Home Office (1999) *Race Equality—The Home Secretaries Employment Targets*, London: Home Office.

** Home Office (2000) *Fire Service Circular 1/2000*, unpublished internal memorandum.

ADDENDUM

To provide a more up-to-date view the statistics for 2003 are now added. The year 2003 was a target year for Straw's (1999) 'targets'; at this time it was hoped the fire service would employ 3% women. Readers can judge for themselves how successful this has been.

NUMBER OF WHOLETIME STAFF IN POST ON 31 MARCH 2003, BY ETHNICITY AND GENDER as issued by ODPM	White British	Irish	Other white	White & Black Caribbean	White & Black African	White & Asian	Other Mixed	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Other Asian	Caribbean	African	Other Black	Chinese	Other	Don't Know	Total	Female	% Female	% White British	% don't know
Avon	620	1	9	2	2							4	1					639	10	1.6	97.0	0.0
Bedfordshire & Luton	308	1		5			1	1				3						319	11	3.4	96.6	0.0
Buckinghamshire	325		1									3	1					330	7	2.1	98.5	0.0
Cambridgeshire	209	1	6	3	1	2	1				1		1			1	47	273	6	2.2	76.6	17.2
Cheshire	618							1				1		2		1		623	6	1.0	99.2	0.0
Cleveland	581				1				3				1					586	3	0.5	99.1	0.0
Cornwall	191						1											192	2	1.0	99.5	0.0
County Durham & Darlington	405											1		1				407	5	1.2	99.5	0.0
Cumbria	274																	274	6	2.2	100.0	0.0
Derbyshire	461							1			1			3	1			467	14	3.0	98.7	0.0
Devon	563													2				565	11	1.9	99.6	0.0
Dorset	300	1							1							2		304	5	1.6	98.7	0.0
East Sussex	408		6	1		3					2	1					2	423	10	2.4	96.5	0.5
Essex	924		2	2		2	2	1	1			1	1	1				937	15	1.6	98.6	0.0
Gloucestershire	222	1						1				3		4		2		233	17	7.3	95.3	0.0
Greater Manchester	1,910	9	32	3	1	3		2	2		2	12	3	4	1		155	2,139	13	0.6	89.3	7.2
Hampshire	797							1				1						799	10	1.3	99.7	0.0
Hereford & Worcester	343	1	2	1		1						2				1		351	12	3.4	97.7	0.0
Hertfordshire	536	1	3				6							2			16	564	7	1.2	95.0	2.8
Humberside	706	2	4	1	2	2	1					1		2				721	10	1.4	97.9	0.0
Isle Of Wight	60		1															61	1	1.6	98.4	0.0
Isles Of Scilly	10																	10		0.0	100.0	0.0
Kent	872		3			1		1			3	2					56	938	9	1.0	93.0	6.0
Lancashire	1,005										1	2						1,008	13	1.3	99.7	0.0
Leicestershire	467		1		1			4				3		2				478	3	0.6	97.7	0.0
Lincolnshire	187		1	1	1		1					1						192	4	2.1	97.4	0.0
London	4,511	88	546	29	17	14	40	21	3	1	9	149	21	41	1	47	220	5,758	123	2.1	78.3	3.8
Merseyside	1,328	1									1		1	6	2	3		1,342	15	1.1	99.0	0.0
Mid & West Wales	496	1		1														498	8	1.6	99.6	0.0
Norfolk	15											1	2				270	288	3	1.0	5.2	93.8
North Wales	297																	297	4	1.3	100.0	0.0
North Yorkshire	95	1	4				1										250	351	9	2.6	27.1	71.2
Northamptonshire	202	4	2	1	1		1					1		1			94	307	3	1.0	65.8	30.6
Northumberland	204	5																209	6	2.9	97.6	0.0
Nottinghamshire	578		3					3			2	1		2				589	9	1.5	98.1	0.0
Oxfordshire	232					1												233	4	1.7	99.6	0.0
Royal Berkshire	409		10			1					2		1	1		3	9	436	4	0.9	93.8	2.1
Shropshire	207	2	3	1								1		1		1		216	7	3.2	95.8	0.0
Somerset	180													1				181	2	1.1	99.4	0.0
South Wales	963							1	1			3				1		969	6	0.6	99.4	0.0
South Yorkshire	888	5	3	3	1	1						7		1	1	4		914	20	2.2	97.2	0.0
Staffordshire	452	4	1	5		2	2						2	1	2			471	15	3.2	96.0	0.0
Suffolk	197											1					52	250	8	3.2	78.8	20.8
Surrey	705							1				3		1				710	17	2.4	99.3	0.0
Tyne & Wear	993						3				2			1				999	12	1.2	99.4	0.0
Warwickshire	266							4	1			8						279	8	2.9	95.3	0.0
West Midlands	1,747	12	124	1	1	1	1	5	1		1	44	2	9		22		1,971	27	1.4	88.6	0.0
West Sussex	332																63	395	16	4.1	84.1	15.9
West Yorkshire	1,649		1	5	1	4		3	7		2	4		2				1,678	24	1.4	98.3	0.0
Wiltshire	216						1					4						221	7	3.2	97.7	0.0
Total	30,464	141	768	65	30	38	62	51	20	1	29	268	36	92	8	88	1,234	33,395	567	1.7	91.2	3.7

APPENDIX TWO UNIFORMS

On the day that fire-insurance premiums were due there was a parade of firefighters in the City of London. The distinctive uniform, more there to advertise individual companies, was totally inappropriate for firefighting (see Segars 1989). Dixon (1994) would understand about inappropriate uniforms that were designed more to flatter the organisations and to create an image, than to be practical (see Strangleman 1997).



APPENDIX THREE: RISK ATTENDENCES

- - 1. A risk: Three pumps will attend this category two to arrive within 5 minutes and the third within 8. Typically, this area will have a concentration of large buildings such as hotels, offices, factories or shops.
 - 2. B risk: Two pumps will attend this category, one to arrive within 5 minutes and the second within 8. Typically, this area will be similar to A risk, but less concentrated.
 - 3. C risk: One pump should attend within 8-10 minutes. However, although not required to do so most brigades send two pumps to all fires in buildings. Typically, this area is urban housing where most lives are lost in fires.
 - 4.
 - 5. D risk: One pump should arrive within 20 minutes. As above most Brigades but not all will send two appliances to fire-calls in buildings. Typically, this area will be sparse rural but can include small villages.
 - 6.
- Special risk: In areas considered to be of high risk, such as hospitals, large industrial plants, and airports then brigades may provide a special attendance, which may include special appliances such as turntable ladders, hydraulic platforms, emergency tenders, foam tenders or fireboats

APPENDIX FOUR: DISCIPLINE

According to the HMCIFS (1999: 38), in the year up to 31-3-99, 410 cases were investigated under the Fire service Discipline Regulations and 242 were not proceeded with or were dismissed.

	1997/8	1998/9
Dismissal	21	18
Required to resign	1	8
Reduction in rank	15	15
Stoppage of pay	48	42
Reprimand	58	62
Caution	44	55
Total some cases involved more than one award.	187	200

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APPENDIX FIVE: STATISTICS FOR NATIONAL CALLS

YEAR	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1998% of emergency calls	1998% of all calls
Total calls	988914	1148812	1060845	991435	900287		
Fires	398012	516157	444863	397569	344761	68.57080916	38.29
Road traffic accidents	28871	31810	32170	34263	34823	6.926077159	3.86
Special services not road traffic accidents	134265	153975	152690	129368	123197	24.50311368	13.68
False alarms	427766	446870	430034	430235	397506		44.15
Total fires and special services	590902	632655	614894	593866	555526	100	100
Breakdown for Fires	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1998%	
Fires involving property or casualties	165447	169978	175267	171188	169688	49.21902419	
New fires	4428	5151	4502	4583	4489	1.302061428	
Chimney	18106	15862	18291	13952	11810	3.425561476	
Small fires such as grass and rubbish	210031	325166	246803	207846	158774	46.0533529	
Total fires	398012	516157	444863	397569	344761	100	
Fatalities	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1998%	
Dwellings	385	460	454	455	407	75.93283582	
Other buildings	36	41	28	27	27	5.037313433	
Road vehicles	72	77	59	75	59	11.00746269	
Other locations	42	49	47	48	43	8.02238806	
Total fatalities in fires	535	627	588	605	536	100	
Rescues							
By fire service	3419	3624	3835	3964	3896	57.90725327	
By people other than firefighters	2683	2549	2586	2756	2832	42.09274673	
Total people rescued in fires	6102	6173	6420	6720	6728	100	
Special Services							
Road Traffic Accidents	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1998%	
People rescued	7215	7429	8091	8249	8823	25.33670275	
Not involving rescue of people	21656	24381	24079	26014	26000	74.66329725	
Total road traffic accidents	28871	31810	32170	34263	34823	100	
Special Services (not RTA)	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1998%	
Spills and leaks	12060	14035	13623	14068	13679	11.10335479	
Water removal/provision	13411	18182	15149	13631	13759	11.16829144	
Effecting an entry	26195	27172	27510	15887	14871	12.07091082	
Lift	23233	24648	23289	24241	23889	19.39089426	
Making safe	4037	3764	4504	7643	4379	3.554469671	
Animal rescue	6031	6934	6510	6624	6242	5.066681819	
Standby or precautionary for hazards	2153	2256	2384	2277	1961	1.59175954	
Other	47145	56984	59721	44997	44417		
Breakdown of other for 98/9							
Brigade not required					15561	12.63098939	
Provision of advice					6961	5.650299926	
Rescue/release of people					8839	7.174687695	
Removal of objects from people					4382	3.556904795	
Assisting police investigations					2032	1.649390813	
Industrial accidents people trapped/injured					324	0.262993417	
First Aid					1731	1.405066682	
Aircraft accidents					386	0.313319318	
Railway accidents					95	0.077112267	
Recovery of objects					550	0.446439443	
Suicide					706	0.573065903	
Farming accidents					83	0.06737177	
Sports activity accident					77	0.062501522	
Others unspecified					2690	2.183494728	
Total for special services not road traffic accidents	134265	153975	152690	129368	123197	100	
Total for road traffic accidents	28871	31810	32170	34263	34823		
Total for all special services	163136	185785	184860	163631	158020		

Statistics produced from HMCIFS, 1999; Home Office 1999b. All fire statistics are for calendar year. All special service incidents are for financial year.

APPENDIX SIX: LONDON CALLS

Fig 1

Call type							new system	
	1996/7	%	1997/8	%	1998/9	%	1999/00	%
Primary fire (inside building)	20418	10.7166476	20216	11.9959	19822	12.3338	22088	12.6532
Secondary fire (in the open)	32279	16.94204466	26183	15.5367	21199	13.1906	27170	15.5644
Chimney fire	154	0.080828863	101	0.05993	96	0.05973	92	0.05270
False alarm – automatic	33891	17.78812341	40593	24.0875	43272	26.9251	47976	27.4833
False alarm - good intent	21894	11.49134501	18603	11.0388	15698	9.76778	14113	8.08471
False alarm - malicious	15879	8.334295582	13817	8.19888	12995	8.08589	12534	7.18017
Special Service	65813	34.54279206	48344	28.6868	47162	29.3456	50089	28.6937
Flood call**	198	0.103922824	666	0.39519	468	0.29120	502	0.28757
TOTAL CALLS***	190526	100	168523	100	160712	100	174564	100

Fig 2

					1998/9		1999/00	
Fire deaths					78		77	
Fire injuries					1777		1626	
Fire rescues					685		239	

details for deaths, injuries and rescues
only available for financial years 1998/9
and 1999/2000

LFB percentile stations: for all emergencies; for all fires.

Fig 3

LFB ALL EMERGENCY CALLS PERCENTILES*, yellow highlight indicates the average calls a firefighter might attend													
FINANCIAL YEAR		96-97 all calls			97-98 all calls			98-99 all calls			99-00 all calls		
STATIONS*	Valid	111			111			111			111		
	Missing	3			3			3			3		
	Mean	1696			1495			1425			1547		
				Firefighter			Firefighter			Firefighter			Firefighter
Percentiles	1	189	Biggin Hill	47	200	Biggin Hill	50	171	Biggin Hill	42	166	Biggin Hill	41
	25	1121	Woodford	280	968	Bexley	242	979	Surbington	244	1017	Eltham	254
	50	1694	Croydon	423	1402	Stanmore	350	1352	Barking	338	1468	Bow	367
	75	2090	Hornsey	522	1896	Hornsey	474	1753	Shoreditch	438	1943	Enfield	485
	100	3747	Soho	936	3697	Soho	924	3696	Soho	924	3954	Soho	988

Fig 4

LFB FDR1 FIRE CALLS PERCENTILES*; yellow highlight indicates the average calls a firefighter might attend													
FINANCIAL YEAR		96-97 fire calls			97-98 fire calls			98-99 fire calls			99-00 fire calls		
STATIONS*	Valid	111			111			111			111		
	Missing	3			3			3			3		
	Mean	182			180			177			198		
				Firefighter			Firefighter			Firefighter			Firefighter
Percentiles	1	48	Biggin Hill	12	46	Biggin Hill	12	40	Biggin Hill	10	50	Biggin Hill	12
	25	122	Westminster	30	125	Addington	31	130	Wallington	32	138	Addington	34
	50	172	Woodside	43	166	Lewisham	41	164	Lewisham	41	182	Hornchurch	45
	75	236	Norbury	59	232	Stanmore	58	224	Mitcham	56	257	Hammersmith	64
	100	373	Tottenham	93	400	Southall	100	391	Tottenham	97	431	Tottenham	107

* Not including Barbican, Shooters Hill and Heathrow.

Applies only to calls on stations ground; this does not include calls when one station provides part of the attendance for another stations calls,

e.g. if a one pump station gets a fire call the second pump for the attendance comes from the next nearest station and this is not get recorded in the statistics

The figure for firefighter relates to the annual amount of fire calls divided by 4 (because the calls are shared between 4 watches)

Stats provided by LFB; placed into SPSS and correlated; and worked in Excell to produce charts.

LFB PERCENTILE STATIONS ALL EMERGENCY CALLS FOR FINANCIAL YEARS 1996/00																														
		All emergencies 1996/7	All emergencies 1997/8	All emergencies 1998/9	All emergencies 1999/00	Fires 1996/7	Fires 1997/8	Fires 1998/9	Fires 1999/00	Secondary fires 1996/7	Secondary fires 1997/8	Secondary fires 1998/9	Secondary fires 1999/00	Chimney 1996/7	Chimney 1997/8	Chimney 1998/9	Chimney 1999/00	Special Service 1996/7	Special Service 1997/8	Special Service 1998/9	Special Service 1999/00	Floods 1999/00	4 pump fire	6 pump fire	8 pump fire	10 pump fire	12 pump fire	15 pump fire	Total	
E42	BIGGIN HILL	189	200	171	166	49	45	44	48	39	52	39	37	4	4	2	2	50	60	47	47	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	0
F35	WOODFORD	1121	655	592	742	111	104	122	121	495	197	96	164	.	1	1	.	246	164	142	209	1	5	1	.	.	.	.	.	6
H37	WALLINGTON	1037	862	789	856	163	134	130	150	223	169	109	150	3	.	.	1	259	202	190	194	.	5	.	.	.	.	.	.	5
H26	ADDINGTON	1042	866	725	924	138	125	121	138	320	301	203	344	2	3	1	1	306	230	168	194	2	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	2
F39	HORNCHURCH	1001	890	864	990	133	119	145	182	324	259	190	236	2	1	4	4	225	196	218	226	.	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
E30	ELTHAM	825	643	888	1017	108	127	157	184	182	144	226	287	.	.	.	.	216	147	193	214	1	6	.	.	1	.	.	.	7
H28	WOODSIDE	1252	964	1023	1047	172	164	147	200	220	181	148	205	1	.	1	.	487	325	407	294	.	3	.	.	1	.	.	.	4
E28	BEXLEY	966	968	958	1131	158	159	139	156	285	210	238	294	2	.	.	1	191	202	196	235	5	2	2	.	.	.	.	.	4
H39	SURBITON	1151	1103	979	1160	130	122	126	142	159	125	107	137	1	2	.	2	254	231	190	239	39	2	1	.	.	.	.	.	3
E21	LEWISHAM	1576	1395	1324	1297	156	166	164	153	257	194	114	123	1	1	.	.	520	370	370	362	6	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
G22	STANMORE	1562	1402	1403	1334	210	232	185	168	189	157	144	146	.	1	1	1	464	314	283	335	5	4	1	.	.	.	.	.	5
F27	BOW	1450	1362	1384	1468	138	157	163	171	329	283	250	305	.	.	.	.	656	595	599	638	3	6	.	.	.	.	.	.	6
H36	MITCHAM	1610	1378	1211	1511	228	208	224	271	412	327	237	471	2	2	.	1	411	323	289	312	1	5	.	.	.	.	.	.	5
H32	NORBURY	1913	1695	1389	1530	236	235	237	297	360	325	229	310	1	1	.	2	649	532	452	443	2	7	.	.	.	.	.	.	7
F43	BARKING	1810	1590	1352	1651	257	222	247	306	438	405	339	490	.	.	.	.	584	543	419	369	1	7	1	1	.	.	.	.	9
H31	CROYDON	1694	1636	1566	1702	228	234	222	243	261	201	128	186	2	.	2	2	532	430	448	442	2	10	1	.	.	.	.	.	11
A32	HORNSEY	2090	1896	1849	1863	247	295	298	293	178	184	189	192	4	1	.	2	799	506	482	500	2	5	1	1	.	.	.	.	7
F24	SHOREDITCH	1385	1289	1753	1942	113	114	140	156	181	185	174	226	3	1	.	.	663	546	765	780	2	10	1	.	.	.	.	1	12
A35	ENFIELD	1966	1898	1662	1943	271	247	286	300	475	298	188	312	2	1	2	2	434	332	316	408	.	5	1	.	.	.	.	.	6
A25	WESTMINSTER	2064	1970	1879	1987	122	110	128	127	137	97	108	122	1	1	.	.	722	643	580	694	4	4	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
G24	SOUTHALL	2206	2152	2160	2131	306	400	372	392	375	301	278	264	2	.	.	.	606	387	388	395	1	6	2	1	.	.	.	1	10
G36	HAMMERSMITH	2799	2436	2308	2348	291	262	238	257	217	197	157	178	1	.	1	1	1154	809	767	789	4	2	.	.	.	.	.	.	2
A33	TOTTENHAM	3330	2778	2745	2891	373	372	391	431	586	417	289	440	2	2	2	2	1264	787	829	800	4	10	.	.	.	.	.	.	10
A24	SOHO	3747	3697	3696	3954	226	237	247	203	253	212	177	200	1	.	.	.	814	756	763	826	6	11	.	.	.	.	.	.	11

		AFA 1996/7	AFA 1997/8	AFA 1998/9	AFA 1999/00	FA good intent 1996/7	FA good intent 1997/8	FA good intent 1998/9	FA good intent 1999/00	FA Malicious 1996/7	FA Malicious 1997/8	FA Malicious 1998/9	FA Malicious 1999/00
E42	BIGGIN HILL	19	13	9	15	24	25	25	13	4	3	5	4
F35	WOODFORD	98	84	126	128	116	83	83	84	55	30	22	36
H37	WALLINGTON	183	178	208	241	127	98	98	74	79	65	54	46
H26	ADDINGTON	62	54	70	103	80	74	74	68	134	77	88	76
F39	HORNCHURCH	115	142	152	226	119	108	108	89	83	68	47	27
E30	ELTHAM	92	81	131	113	81	78	78	112	146	75	103	107
H28	WOODSIDE	137	92	130	135	139	96	96	114	96	83	94	99
E28	BEXLEY	84	170	176	281	184	135	135	97	62	61	74	67
H39	SURBITON	392	451	418	469	148	95	95	102	67	68	43	69
E21	LEWISHAM	209	331	428	378	246	102	102	101	187	182	146	180
G22	STANMORE	317	405	460	453	280	171	171	117	102	100	159	114
F27	BOW	107	122	186	198	119	80	80	70	101	117	106	86
H36	MITCHAM	161	233	212	229	184	107	107	113	212	156	142	114
H32	NORBURY	199	218	198	216	218	136	136	148	250	203	137	114
F43	BARKING	116	97	96	139	168	117	117	176	247	171	134	171
H31	CROYDON	333	477	539	566	211	149	149	159	127	86	78	104
A32	HORNSEY	419	501	404	507	244	194	194	149	199	195	282	220
F24	SHOREDITCH	238	247	457	503	96	129	129	172	91	89	88	105
A35	ENFIELD	305	635	502	582	297	234	234	190	182	137	134	149
A25	WESTMINSTER	762	833	816	845	196	150	150	119	124	115	97	80
G24	SOUTHALL	339	405	664	681	318	228	228	192	260	349	230	207
G36	HAMMERSMITH	694	727	756	754	261	207	207	229	181	183	182	140
A33	TOTTENHAM	274	452	582	667	440	295	295	253	391	353	357	298
A24	SOHO	1442	1726	1853	2338	769	497	497	245	242	189	159	142

LFB Make-ups

Fig 6

LFB: Makeup incidents (including Special Services) for financial years 1995-99							
Amount of pumps	4	6	8	10	12	15-20	Total
1995/6	492	66	16	9	2	4	589
1996/7	516	89	13	3	3	9	633
1997/8	507	72	13	11	1	5	609
1998/9	505	57	8	6	2	3	581

264 senior officers share these makeups (88 are station commanders: operational ADO)

Fig 7

Breakdown of makeups (including Special Services) for financial year 1998-9 for all LFB stations								
Amount of pumps		4	6	8	10	12	15-20	Total
Station								
A21	PADDINGTON	13	2	.	1	1	.	17
A22	MANCHESTER SQUARE	4	2	.	.	.	.	6
A23	EUSTON	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
A24	SOHO	11	.	.	.	.	.	11
A25	WESTMINSTER	4	.	.	.	.	.	4
A26	KNIGHTSBRIDGE	2	.	1	.	.	.	3
A27	CLERKENWELL	6	1	.	.	.	.	7
A28	DOWGATE	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
A28	BARBICAN	.	.	.	.	.	.	0
A30	ISLINGTON	2	1	.	.	.	.	3
A31	HOLLOWAY	8	.	.	.	.	.	8
A32	HORNSEY	5	1	1	.	.	.	7
A33	TOTTENHAM	10	.	.	.	.	.	10
A34	EDMONTON	6	.	.	.	.	.	6
A35	ENFIELD	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
A36	SOUTHGATE	6	1	.	.	.	.	7
A37	BARNET	.	.	.	.	.	.	0
A38	MILL HILL	8	.	.	.	.	.	8
A39	FINCHLEY	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
A40	HENDON	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
A41	WEST HAMPSTEAD	2	1	1	.	.	.	4
A42	BELSIZE	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
A43	KENTISH TOWN	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
E21	LEWISHAM	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
E22	GREENWICH	1	1	.	.	.	.	2
E23	EAST GREENWICH	5	2	.	.	.	.	7
E24	WOOLWICH	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
E25	PLUMSTEAD	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
E26	SHOOTERS HILL	.	.	.	.	.	.	0
E27	ERITH	6	2	.	.	.	.	8
E28	BEXLEY	2	2	.	.	.	.	4
E29	LEE GREEN	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
E30	ELTHAM	6	.	.	1	.	.	7

E31	FOREST HILL	7	.	.	.	.	.	7
E32	DOWNHAM	5	.	.	.	.	.	5
E33	SOUTHWARK	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
E34	DOCKHEAD	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
E35	OLD KENT ROAD	2	.	.	.	.	1	3
E36	DEPTFORD	5	.	.	.	.	.	5
E37	PECKHAM	7	.	.	1	.	.	8
E38	NEW CROSS	4	1	.	.	.	.	5
E39	BROMLEY	1	1	.	.	.	.	2
E40	SIDCUP	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
E41	ORPINGTON	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
E42	BIGGIN HILL	.	.	.	.	.	.	0
E43	BECKENHAM	6	.	.	.	.	.	6
F21	STRATFORD	11	.	.	.	1	.	12
F22	POPLAR	7	1	.	.	.	.	8
F23	MILLWALL	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
F24	SHOREDITCH	10	1	.	.	.	1	12
F25	SHADWELL	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
F26	BETHNAL GREEN	6	.	.	.	.	.	6
F27	BOW	6	.	.	.	.	.	6
F28	HOMERTON	7	1	.	.	.	.	8
F29	LEYTON	7	1	.	.	.	.	8
F30	LEYTONSTONE	4	.	.	.	.	.	4
F31	KINGSLAND	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
F32	STOKE NEWINGTON	6	1	.	.	.	.	7
F33	WHITECHAPEL	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
F34	CHINGFORD	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
F35	WOODFORD	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
F36	WALTHAMSTOW	8	1	.	.	.	.	9
F37	HAINAULT	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
F38	ROMFORD	3	2	.	.	.	.	5
F39	HORNCHURCH	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
F40	WENNINGTON	4	.	.	.	.	.	4
F41	DAGENHAM	10	3	.	.	.	.	13
F42	ILFORD	10	.	.	.	.	.	10
F43	BARKING	7	1	1	.	.	.	9
F44	EAST HAM	7	.	.	1	.	.	8
F45	PLAISTOW	9	1	.	.	.	.	10
F46	SILVERTOWN	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
G21	HARROW	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
G22	STANMORE	4	1	.	.	.	.	5
G23	HILLINGDON	2	1	.	.	.	.	3
G24	SOUTHALL	6	2	1	.	.	1	10
G25	EALING	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
G26	ACTON	3	1	.	.	.	.	4
G27	NORTH KENSINGTON	5	1	.	.	.	.	6
G28	WILLESDEN	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
G29	PARK ROYAL	1	.	.	.	.	.	1
G30	WEMBLEY	5	.	.	.	.	.	5
G31	NORTHOLT	4	.	.	.	.	.	4

G32	RUISLIP	3	1	.	.	.	.	4
G33	KENSINGTON	5	2	.	.	.	.	7
G34	CHELSEA	3	2	.	.	.	.	5
G35	FULHAM	4	.	.	.	.	.	4
G36	HAMMERSMITH	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
G37	CHISWICK	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
G38	HESTON	9	.	1	.	.	.	10
G39	FELTHAM	6	.	.	.	.	.	6
G40	HAYES	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
G56	HEATHROW	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
H21	CLAPHAM	6	6
H22	LAMBETH	3	1	4
H24	BRIXTON	11	1	12
H25	WEST NORWOOD	7	7
H26	ADDINGTON	1	1	2

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H27	BATTERSEA	4	2	6
H28	WOODSIDE	3	.	.	1	.	.	4
H29	PURLEY	0
H31	CROYDON	10	1	11
H32	NORBURY	7	7
H33	WANDSWORTH	2	1	1	.	.	.	4
H34	WIMBLEDON	4	.	.	1	.	.	5
H35	TOOTING	7	.	.	.	.	.	7
H36	MITCHAM	5	.	.	.	.	.	5
H37	WALLINGTON	5	.	.	.	.	.	5
H38	SUTTON	9	.	.	.	.	.	9
H39	SURBITON	2	1	.	.	.	.	3
H40	NEW MALDEN	3	.	.	.	.	.	3
H41	KINGSTON	2	.	.	.	.	.	2
H42	RICHMOND	.	.	1	.	.	.	1
H43	TWICKENHAM	2	.	.	.	.	.	2

Statistics produced from those provided by London Fire Brigade

APPENDIX SEVEN: ARTISTIC IMPRESSIONS



Vigor (1892)



Millais (1855)

12. IMAGES OF FIREFIGHTERS

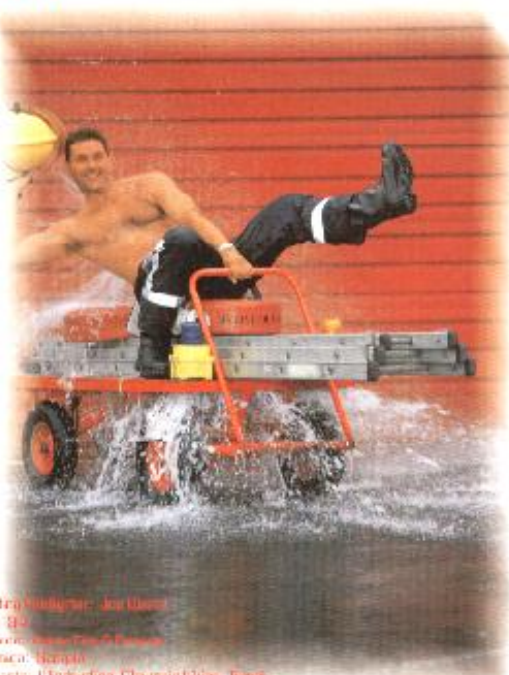
JUNE



Firefighter: **Paul Roberts**
 Page: 26
 Design: **David Wilson Fire Images**
 Services: **none**
 interests: **Pragm, Psychology, Gender**

www.firefighters.co.uk

MAY



Leading firefighter: **Jon Mason**
 Page: 24
 Design: **David Wilson Fire Images**
 Services: **none**
 interests: **Childhood, Photography, Travel**

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W	2
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M	21
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S	26
S	27
M	28
T	29
W	30
T	31

DECEMBER




Firefighter: **Paul Roberts**
 Page: 26
 Design: **David Wilson Fire Images**
 Services: **none**
 interests: **Childhood, Photography, Travel**

www.firefighters.co.uk

JANUARY

RESCUE



Firefighter: **Markus Koper**
 Page: 27
 Design: **David Wilson Fire Images**
 Services: **none**
 interests: **Childhood, Photography, Travel**

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(UK firefighter publications 2001)



Gay News, November 1998.

APPENDIX NINE: TEBBIT

I HAVE good reason to be grateful to the fire service. Whenever I have needed them, they have been there. Fire officers risked their lives to save mine, and those of my wife and other victims of the IRA/Sinn Fein bombing at Brighton. When my car caught fire, when my house caught fire, the Fire Brigade was there. They were prompt, they were efficient. They were full of kindness and humanity. Sad to say, there are complaints by the- bucket-load about the police, but happily very few against our fire services. Indeed a Home Office report stresses its high standards and the public's high regard.

But in this lunatic, politically correct world, to do a tough job well and to satisfy the public is not enough to avoid a barrage of snide criticism, sneers and jeers and threats from a Government department notorious for its failures on crime, immigration, protection of children and the management of prisons. The firefighters are condemned, not for failing to put out fires but for a failure to 'come to terms with homosexuality and 'sexist' behaviour.

The men on the fire engine told the Home Office they liked the 'militaristic' structure, the regimental ethos, the action-man image and the spirit of service. The creepy, weak-kneed, pen-pushing, hermaphrodite officials say all that is junk and Mr Mike O'Brien, a Home Office Minister who would probably have difficulty in extinguishing the candles on a birthday cake, says: "It is time the Fire Service began to understand that society is changing and it is time it began changing, too".

For goodness sake, not many public services are doing their jobs as well as the Fire Service. Because society is changing for the worse why should the Fire Service have to follow suit? The Minister says it should be representative of the community it serves. Balderdash - to put it mildly. When I was trying to control a fire in my house I did not ask the firemen men why they had not got a disabled, lesbian, single mother with them. All I cared about was whether they could put out the fire. Clearly, the Minister thinks I am barmy. His priority is a politically correct fire service. If he is ever buried alive in the rubble of a building or his house goes up in flames, he might change his mind.

In a rational world the firemen's union would support its members. Not these days. Andy Gilchrist, national officer of the Fire Brigades Union, said: "If there is anyone in the - Fire Service who does not want to turn this report into action they should get out of the way now". Well chaps, you know why you pay this creature's salary - so that when you need help he can kick you in the teeth. Tebbit 1999.

Addendum 2005

Fire Services Act (2004)

The fire service was involved in a further round of industrial action in 2002 when the FBU lodged a pay claim (Seifert and Sibley 2005), which quickly turned to strike action, when the employers refused to pay the 40% the FBU were demanding. At this stage government stepped in to establish an 'independent' enquiry (Bain 2002). The FBU did not take part in this enquiry because they claimed it was not independent and Professor Burchill, the then independent chair of the National Joint Council (NJC) supports this view (Burchill 2004). Nonetheless almost as bystanders the FBU watched as a white paper (ODPM 2003) and a new Fire Services Act (HMG 2004) changed the (formal) face of what was now to be called the Fire and Rescue Service.

Despite the way that government railroaded through change the FBU negotiated a substantial pay rise although there were many conditions attached. Most of these conditions related to the new role of the renamed fire and rescue service to become a modernised organisation that would start to focus more on prevention than suppression. The government had perhaps waited a long time for this opportunity to modernise the fire service and their actions indicate that when government concentrate on an area it is possible to achieve considerable change. However many of the transformational changes (Burke 2002) that were expected stalled when government's gaze moved to more important issues - something that may well have been predicted given the complex nature of fire service cultures and the ability of the FBU to mount resistance.

Nonetheless the change in the fire service is considerable. There is a new rank structure that emphasises the role of those who lead as managers rather than officers. Each fire authority has to provide a Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) for how their fire service will be organised taking into account the framework set by government (ODPM 2006). Fire services then take part in a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in which they are audited for success (Audit Commission 2005; Audit Commission 2007). Eager to get a high score in their CPA each fire service is now subject to an ongoing modernisation programme using performance indicators, performance management, Integrated Personal Development Systems (IPDS) (ODPM 2005) and a whole lot more.