Symbolism or inclusion? A study of operational women, women leaders, gender targets and gender equality, 2000 to 2017 in the Fire & Rescue Service in England

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study has been to understand the context of gender and inclusion within the FRS. Given the paradoxical position of a predominately male culture resistant of women, low employee numbers of operational women but women successfully securing leadership roles, the investigation has considered the culture of the FRS and the experiences of operational women firefighters and senior women leaders. A further consideration has been the role of FRS gender targets, and its impact upon gender equality.

Through a series of interviews with FRS strategic leaders, senior women, and decision makers across England, the study has sought to build a framework of understanding of gender relationships, and gender equality within the FRS. In conducting focus groups with male firefighters from three FRSs, and two focus groups with women firefighters from across England, the experience of gender and cultural processes within the FRS have been investigated. Using an integrative lens of the layers of reflexivity, positionality and realist constructionism, analysis has considered wider issues of FRS culture, gender equality and how gendered norms are established and upheld. The experiences of women and my own reflexive experience within the FRS have been considered as knowledge. The findings isolate the primary FRS integration and socialisation process of the watch and establish it as a systemic vehicle of embedding patriarchal norms. In positioning cultural normalities within the watch hegemonic masculinities are evidenced in this study which rely on relationship alliances between men for the dominance and subjugation of women, creating exclusions based on gender and maintaining gender stratifications. The findings establish that gender targets have not been understood as a means of cultural change, and have not been an appropriate means of cultural change where resistance to women is strong. Resistance to women appears to be a historically maintained cultural specificity with a real time legacy within the FRS.

Four key constructs have emerged as mechanisms through which gendered norms are embedded and enforced within FRS organisations: women as outsiders; a prevalent narrative of incompetent women; a patriarchal social order; and a culture of masculinity. The notion of gender-neutrality does not exist within FRS culture or its arrangements, instead this study

has unearthed a highly gendered organisation for which matters of gender equality for operational women remain questionable.

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GLOSSARY

BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CEDA	Committee for Economic Development of Australia
CFOA	Chief Fire Officer's Association
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
EOTG	Equal Opportunities Task Group
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
FBU	Fire Brigade's Union
FRS	Fire & Rescue Service
FRSEF	Fire & Rescue Service Equality Framework
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
GED	Gender Equality Duty
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
HMICFRS	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
LFB	London Fire Brigade
LGA	Local Government Association
LGBTQQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning
LibDem	Liberal Democrat Party
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NFCC	National Fire Chief's Council
NWFS	Networking Women in the Fire Service
Path-ology	Patterns, processes, development and consequences; a departure or deviation from a normal condition; pathology of thought, belief and behaviour passed through culture or generation
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
WFS	Women in the Fire Service

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextual background

For the most part, the culture of the Fire and Rescue Service in England (FRS) has been of little interest to the public, and has been kept well from public view. The ideal of the FRS as the silent hero of all communities, responding and rescuing when needed is a commonly accepted normality. However, reviews into behaviours within the FRS in England, past and present, have deemed it guilty of bullying, harassment, lacking strong leadership and resistant to diversity. The reported lack of diversity within the FRS in England appears to be an unchanging story, with most FRS's reporting operational firefighter numbers between 95% - 97% as white male. The stereotype has long been accepted of a firefighter who is depicted and reified as a fireman, heroic and inherently masculine. However, within the 3%-5% of non-white-men are women who have been appointed as operational firefighters, and in some cases directly appointed into senior leadership roles traditionally occupied by operational personnel.

In 1999, following a nationwide Thematic Review inspection of FRSs across the United Kingdom, targets were given to the Fire Sector for the first time to address both gender and race disparity within its organisations. The thematic inspection centred on issues of equality and fairness, and concluded that the FRS was guilty of being institutionally sexist, racist and homophobic. The Thematic Review (Home Office, 1999a) also concluded that the leadership and governance of equality was weak, with systemic failures concerning gender and race equality evident. The gender target to increase the number of operational women was set at 15%, and each FRS was also required to annually report on the number of women within the top 5% of earners within the organisation. From numbers of just under 2% for women in 1999, almost two decades later, the FRS now nationally reports an average of 5% of its operational workforce to be women. Needless to say, the climb of less than 4% over a period of 18 years is woeful. Although there are no reported figures reflecting managerial or leadership positions by gender, there is much media and internal FRS reference to the few women in positions of seniority rendering them highly visible.

The FRS is one of a number of public sector bodies that have been given gender targets but has been outperformed by the Police and the Armed Forces who show measurable improvements in the diversity of their workforce. Although assumptive, it is logical to think that there is something different happening that is inherent within FRS governance, culture or organisational progress that keeps diversity numbers as low as they are.

An important factor expressed by the Thematic Review inspection team, which I will keep as an underlying line of enquiry throughout this study, is that the FRS as a body resists the notion of operational women. They reported a strong resistance to women being recruited to, and occupying operational (uniformed) roles. Speaking specifically about women fire-fighters, the inspecting body concluded:

"that there is a need for major change in the culture of a service that is so strongly opposed to women being able to join the uniformed section and perform operational duties...the limiting factor is simply the lack of willingness of male dominated, macho culture to accept this self-evident fact" (Home Office, 1999a p.66).

Considering the lack of progression towards the gender targets, resistance to women would seem to provide a conclusive answer to questions of why so little change. However, the variable to this, which underlines the purpose of this study, is that today, even in their low numbers, women still appear to be occupying both managerial and leadership positions within FRS. This seems to be an important factor. Given that FRS culture is reported to be so resistant of women, with evidence of little increase of operational women overall, why do women still appear to be navigating systemic processes towards successful leadership appointments? Does an anomaly exist? This alone presents adequate reason to explore gender equality within the FRS. Fundamentally there is a question of whether the gender targets have positively affected or impacted gender equality within FRS culture. The experience of gender equality itself, told by women within the FRS is an important consideration of any change. By centralising the experience of firefighters and senior leaders who are women within the FRS in England, I will explore the experience and process of gender, and its impact on FRS culture. I will further investigate where gender resistance shows itself, and whether it has affected the ability for women to lead effectively. Lastly, this study will

consider whether improvements in gender equality, and wider FRS culture have occurred as a result of the gender targets.

1.2 The Fire & Rescue Service in England

Little has been made publicly about the Fire & Rescue Service's (FRS) lack of diversity and pursuant complexities until recently, when Prime Minister Teresa May and the Right Honourable Brandon Lewis MP specifically addressed the need for the FRS to change culturally and in its employment makeup and practices (Fire Minister's Speech to Reform, 2017). Their focus on the FRS appears largely due to the Service's unwillingness to modernise and reflect itself as a public service. Importantly, the central government narrative directed at the FRS specifically highlights the lack of progress in the diversity of its employees despite the introduction of gender and race targets in 2000 (Equal Opportunities Task Group, 2000; 2001a; 2001b).

Since its' inception in 1947 the Fire Service in the United Kingdom has largely been left to self-govern and shape itself where diversity issues are concerned. Despite landmark findings on inequality, ineffectual leadership and significant cultural deficits within Fire Service bodies across Great Britain they have somehow managed, as a public body, to retain a cloak of invisibility. Published at the same time as the emergence of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Home Office, 1999b) for the Police force, Her Majesty's Thematic Inspection into Equality and Fairness in the British Fire Service resulted in key recommendations from the Home Office, creating the first set of targets for women in 1999 regarding their recruitment, retention, and progression (Home Office, 1999a; Equal Opportunities Task Group, 2000; 2001a; 2001b). The report highlighted the militaristic, hierarchal management traditions, a recruitment history of single-tier entry, and strong documented opposition to women being employed in operational roles. As a result of the introduction of targets, individual FRSs have been required to work to a performance framework demonstrating work undertaken to increase numbers of women in operational roles and management positions (Audit Commission, 2008a; 2008b).

The organisation of FRS personnel

To contextualise the discussion concerning gender I will briefly discuss how the FRS in England is commonly organised, and the historical and cultural specificity of the FRS where women are concerned. All FRS are organised by a role structure which replaces the historical rank structure. These mainly are based on a single tier entry recruitment process for operational fire-fighter personnel. The recruitment process involves a competence-based application, physical and practical tests, written tests and interview.

The role structure begins at firefighter who are usually all station based. At station crews (teams of firefighters) are grouped into watches of which there are four: white, green, red and blue. For full-time (wholetime) stations the four watches cover day and night shifts and mainly work on a basis of a four-shift system of two days, two nights and then rest days. The crew manager is a supervisory role with responsibility for a team on each watch, and the watch manager has responsibility for teams of firefighters on a watch, and may have responsibility for an entire watch. The middle manager role of Station Manager is responsible for all of the watch teams, and their activities on a particular station(s). The Group Manager role is responsible, amongst other duties, for the personnel and activities of a group of stations in a particular geographic location. The strategic posts of Area Manager, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Chief Fire Officer are mainly concerned with the governance and arrangements of the Fire Service meeting its legal duties, and personnel being appropriate trained, placed and delivering its services. At middle manager levels and above, wider roles which account for all aspects of running a FRS are mainly occupied by operational personnel. Exceptions usually include professionally qualified roles such as human resources, procurement etc. Where stations are crewed part-time (retained), although the role structure to watch manager remains the same, the hours are committed to by firefighters who work and live in the geographical area of the station and attend the station for emergency call out (Local Government Association & Greston Associates, 2017).

These arrangements have historically emerged from a highly male workforce, where decisions concerning recruitment arrangements (for example essential criteria of chest expansion of 40 inches), hierarchal management and team structures (watches) have been made by men. Firefighters were routinely recruited from the navy or building trades, and prior to formal fire

brigade arrangements emerged from volunteers and police-fireman operating in the 19th Century (Greater Manchester Fire Service Museum, undated). Having worked in the FRS for twelve years I have spoken with officers who had been recruited through being approached on the street, being asked to lift and carry an existing firefighter up three flights of stairs, and offered a job on that basis! Although the history of FRS refers to women being part of the Fire Service during the war in reality the first wholetime female firefighter was employed in the UK in 1982; almost forty years post its 1940s organisation (ibid).

What happens to the premise of the historically male, patriarchal, working class/militarised structural development of the FRS when women are introduced into such a framework? Somewhere the status quo of white masculinity has been interrupted. Reports introduced below would suggest women have been introduced to their detriment, suggesting cultures which defines them as 'other'.

Numbers of operational women

In contextualising the structural fit of operational women in the FRS, it is helpful to look at actual numbers to understand the scale of the under representation of women in operational roles. Workforce monitoring data varies between FRS, but referencing the data of the largest FRS, and a smaller Service can give an idea of operational personnel statistics by gender (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, 2017; Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service, 2017). London Fire Brigades statistical reports show that operational women make up 7% of operational staff, with FRS support staff representing 46.8% of their staff group, and control staff (emergency call handlers) making up 76.9% of their staff group (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, 2017, appendix 1). They report a decrease in the percentage of operational women by reason of an increase of overall numbers in the operational workforce (p. 93-94). The variation in the numbers of women by employee group is significant. It is clear that in both control (emergency call handlers) and support (backroom and professional) staff employee groups the balance of women is high and appear to be reflective of roles which lend themselves to administrative, operative or backroom staff duties. There appears to be no alarming or significant differential. However, there is something important about a variation in number which would reflect numbers of less than 10% within the operational firefighter role, where female staffing numbers in other areas of the organisation

are nearer 80 and 50%. The percentages of women by employee group in LFB do not suggest an organisation which is resistant to or excluding of women. It does however suggest an organisation where the existing invariable of firefighter employee composition may strongly be linked to gender.

Interestingly numbers are not dissimilar for a smaller FRS organisation whose reported total number of operational women was 2.81%, whilst 51% of control operatives and 73% of FRS staff were women (Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service, 2017). These low report of numbers for operational women as shown in Appendix 1 is representative of other FRSs across England, and not far removed (in either direction) from the national average which sits at around 4% in real terms. Figure 1 below illustrates an example of the employee composition by percentage and number of women over a period of 3 years. In considering the women in leadership positions within the organisations, the numbers represented as high earners show LFB, as higher the average for the sector and above their Fire Authority target levels (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, 2017 p.92). For FRS staff and control operative staff groups shows 43.9% and 55% respectively of women as top earners. The staff group number of 55% represents the direct appointment to professional roles, such as planning, procurement, HR.

From the figure there is a clear indication that the FRS operates within a framework of marked gender disparity which sets the context for operational women in the organisation. Whilst women are employed and given the capacity to manage professional functions, their low numbers in operational firefighting, positions men to inevitably dominate leadership roles. The dominance of male presence over women has significance, when viewed in terms of cultural norms and decision making. It also re-emphasizes the need to understand whether the narrative of women moving into leadership spaces is accurate, and their associated experiences of this. Employee composition appears to be reflective of a non-diverse culture, with its distribution of power mainly with men at all levels (Townley, 1993).

Figure 1 London Fire Brigade, 2016/17 Workforce Composition of Operational Staff

			WORKFORCE COMPOSITION - OPERATIONAL STAFF - ETHNICITY, GENDER, DISABILITY & SEXUAL ORIENTATION													
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YEAR END 2014/15	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YEAR END 2015/16	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YEAR END 2016/17
SM 19i	Workforce composition - operational staff - **women**	%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.5%	**6.5%**	6.6%	6.7%	6.8%	6.8%	**6.8%**	6.8%	6.9%	6.9%	7.0%	**7.0%**
		number	331	329	328	331		327	326	329	330		327	327	326	327	
SM 19ii	Workforce composition - operational staff - **BME staff**	%	12.3%	12.3%	12.3%	12.2%	**12.2%**	12.3%	12.5%	12.6%	12.6%	**12.6%**	12.6%	12.7%	12.8%	13.0%	**13.0%**
		number	639	632	626	619		613	608	610	608		601	603	600	609	
SM 19iii	Workforce composition - operational staff - **disabled staff**	%	2.7%	2.8%	2.9%	3.0%	**3.0%**	3.1%	3.2%	3.2%	3.2%	**3.2%**	3.3%	3.5%	3.7%	3.8%	**3.8%**
		number	141	142	147	151		152	154	153	153		156	168	174	180	
SM 19iv	Workforce composition - operational staff - **LBG staff**	%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	3.6%	**3.6%**	3.6%	3.7%	3.6%	3.7%	**3.7%**	3.7%	3.8%	3.9%	3.9%	**3.9%**
		number	186	185	184	185		180	178	176	178		177	182	184	185	
	Workforce - operational staff	number	5210	5152	5108	5076	**5076**	4970	4880	4852	4825	**4825**	4784	4761	4704	4656	**4656**

The employee numbers and distribution by gender is an important factor in understanding the context of operation women within the FRS as the difference for women firefighters appears stark and has been for some time. It may also suggest that whilst leadership positions may be filled by women, the operational arm of the organisation, which underpins the cultural premise and largest employee group within FRS has low numbers, but those women attain very senior positions. This raises more questions than answers at this point, presenting a counter argument to reports of resistance to women, as suggested further in this chapter.

Impact

Questions naturally arise which concern women's experience within FRS culture: the systemic day to day organisational arrangements of the FRS which may favour male bias, and the emotive and cultural response from a predominately male workforce.

Until recent years most FRSs operated with sleeping dorms which saw most women firefighters, as lone women, sharing sleeping and changing spaces with the men that they worked with. This also often extended to limited or non-existent toilet or shower facilities for women firefighters. Structurally and systemically the FRS was not organised to think of gender difference. This was outlined as a FRS leadership failing in the Thematic Review report (Home Office, 1999a).

Woodfield (2016) joins other writers in her exploration of the achievement of skills status in the workplace examining women leaders in the FRS, argues that there is a non-neutral positionality to workplace skill which relegates the status of women as less valuable (Mead, 1949; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; Phillips & Taylor, 1980). The basic judgement of women is mediated through "a matrix of socio-political assumptions about the embodied nature of the worker" rather than the work undertaken (Woodfield, 2016 p. 238). This position which assumes that women lack the necessary skill parity needed for the workplace, suggests a place of deficit for women, which precedes them. Layering this with the historically specific cultural context of implicit and explicit FRS organisational arrangements through successions of white masculinity underline the need for further exploration of how operational women experience the FRS environment.

Resistance to women

Baigent, a 30-year career fire-fighter and academic has explored the resistance to gender highlighted in the MacPherson Report, and suggests decades of resistance to women in the FRS (Baigent, 2001; Baigent 2008; Baigent & O'Connor, 2008a; 2008b; Home Office, 1999a). It cannot be ignored that central government itself characterised the FRS as "sexist, racist and homophobic". The description of the dominant watch culture was "macho" and "laddish," (Wright, 2008). It further found that the sexual harassment of women was commonplace (Home Office, 1999a). Writing more recently, Baigent illustrates the early resistances with regard to gender, outlining that the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1984, "compelled" the FRS to employ their first woman (Baigent, 2016 p. 177). Examples are given of high levels of harassment for women fire-fighters coupled with a persistent folklore of incompetence, which has made for a revolving door of recruitment (Hearn and Parkin, 1995; Walby, 2000).

From the insider perspective, issues of fitting in within the FRS, and the demonstration of being a good firefighter are argued to be closely aligned to masculinity (Baigent, 2001). Some writers on FRS culture, including Baigent have considered the existence of gender resistance which previously had not been explored, touching on masculinity. However, the matter of masculinity appears to present itself in more complex ways when exploring women's fit. Also what appears to exist is the matter of women's sexuality and its proximity to masculinity (Wright, 2008). With issues of male as the embodiment of the worker as the norm established, writers, such as Wright (2008) and Chetkovich (1997) suggest that women's fit within the FRS can also be dependent upon the type of male relationship. It is something that suggests centralisation around male feelings of comfort, and the premise of a form of pervasive and insidious sexism where the women they work with are either sexualised or given lad status. In Wright's research which explores shifting the boundaries between masculinity and femininity in the FRS, a lesbian firefighter says "I believe that it's a lot easier [now] for a female to be in the job, especially if they are gay. I don't think it's any easier for a woman to be in the job if they are straight. It just seems to be that one aspect of gay life that straight white males still have their little fantasy going on, but know that lesbians are not a threat to them" (Wright, 2008 p. 109). The idea that women are othered in the way that keeps a sexist masculinity central to cultural acceptance is concerning and telling. "In this environment where conventional notions of masculinity are highly valued, that lesbians who are happy to

be identified with masculine traits may experience some benefits compared to heterosexual women." (Wright, 2008, p. 107). The research also revealed that lesbian women firefighters who identified or assimilated to particular forms of male or masculinised behaviours, suggested it was easier for them to fit with the culture of the watch than their female firefighter peers who were not gay.

Baigent gave the definition of the 20th century firefighter (Baigent, 2001). It is suggested that it occupied specific and powerful intersections of gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity being the "white working-class masculine man, physically fit and physically orientated, heterosexual as well as frequently sexualised…altruistic and heroic" (Woodfield 2016, p. 239). It is important in this study to understand what masculinity means to firefighting and what impact this has had on women, and their experience of FRS culture.

Historically, it would seem that investigative reports into gender equality have highlighted a FRS environment which at best is resistant to women, and at worse one of hostility and bullying. A 1994 Home Office Review is illustrative of this. The review, which included 9 FRS (Brigades as they were then known) suggested 4 out of 9 women were reported to have experienced sustained verbal hostility. The report raised concerns regarding the FRS as an environment that actively resisted employees who held difference.

"A number of issues will have to be addressed…to…assure potential women and ethnic minority fire-fighters that they will be able to work in a prejudice free environment" (Burke, 1994 p.4).

Although the review provides details of the variety of approaches to diversity issues within all nine FRSs across the UK, what seems to emerge is the degree to which minority employees experience hostility as a reflection of senior management commitment to inclusion. The Home Office review highlights the unequal treatment of women in the FRS, and clearly indicated the need for the Crown's inspection of the Fire Service into equality. (Chetkovich, 1997 p.36; Yoder and Aniakudo, 1997; Baigent, 1996). Consequently, the raft of reports that followed in light of inspections and reviews from 1999 until the mid 2000's, were damning in their outline of the lack of diversity within the FRS and lack of leadership regarding change (Home Office, 1999a; Equal Opportunities Task Group 2000; 2001a; 2002b; Bain, 2002). Accepting the academic view of fire-fighter culture being reified as masculine (Ness, 2012),

the culture was reported, at that time, to be one that was excluding of difference with particular reference given to the fire-fighter role which rendered gender invisible (Home Office, 1999a p.23).

The Thematic Inspection outcomes appeared to create a tipping point for the Government in their approach to the FRS with regards to matters of equality and diversity (Home Office, 1999a). The conclusions pointed to a need to review leadership and cultural issues across the board, and take specific steps in a wide range of areas, to improve the practices attaching to equality and fairness (Home Office, 1999a p.7). The findings also highlighted the lack of significant training in improving understanding of the need for diversity. Again, the culture of the FRS was brought to account, citing lack of leadership in matters of equality.

The action plans produced by the Home Office in response to the Thematic Inspection, entitled Towards Diversity I and II (Equal Opportunities Task Group 2000; 2001a; 2002b) focused on statements of values and commitment to diversity by the leadership of the FRS. The plans also included gender-targets (15%) and targets to increase the number of people from ethnic minority (3%).

Prescription for change

The period of interest for this study dates back to 1999 to date, covering the period of the Thematic Inspection into the FRS, gender targets and the national trajectory of gender equality within the FRS.

As well as recommend targets the Thematic Review into Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service "Founding a Cultural Equality" (Home Office, 1999a) outlined steps necessary for cultural change and specific areas of change in the area of gender equality. At the point of the inspection it concluded that the experiences of women in the FRS rendered the sector *"*institutionally sexist" (Home Office, 1999a p*.* 68). The conclusions and recommendations detailed particular areas for improvement in terms of the treatment of women as well as gender equity. This prescription for change was intended to work in tandem with the then gender targets to address inequality.

It is fundamental that when considering the impact of the gender targets and associated changes in the experience of gender equality within the FRS, that the following areas from the Thematic Review are referred to measure change in its most basic sense:

"Culture. Closed watch work regime is the prime contributor to the need to fit in. It's effect on the single tier entry officers it breeds is to ensure continued acceptance of its characteristics without question…[culture] should change to allow women to be valued for the contribution they can make to the job"

"Roster staff to duty requirements…may produce unjustifiable, indirect discrimination against women"

"Facilities…can be as simple as providing uniform items suitable for the shape or size of women"

"Women joining. Limiting factor is simply the lack of willingness of a male dominated macho culture…"

"Myths. Women who wish to join failing to meet requirements of the job"

"Leadership. We have concluded that in the main, only lip service has been given to these needs…proper arrangements…for women in the service" (Home Office, 1999a p. 66-68)

The changes outlined two decades ago are integral to the process of an inclusive culture and straddle areas of culture, leadership, policy, recruitment and commitment.

They were labelled then as an "immediate issue" to be prioritised by the FRS. Since that time there have been a widening of the agenda regarding gender equality, with reiterations of the recommendations outlined by the Inspectorate. With sufficient time passed, and no recent review to reference concerning gender in the FRS, my consideration is whether the experience of the participant women, FRSs or strategic information will offer any evidence of change or improvement in gender equality.

This research will be conducted primarily by considering with operational women firefighters and senior women leaders their experience of gender equality. I will also consider the cultural context of the FRS by speaking with firefighters who are men, decision makers within the FRS and their strategic leaders. Thinking about women's experiences of gender, against the formal and informal processes of, and arrangements for gender equality will help to synthesis

how it is understood, and what if any improvements have occurred since the gender targets were introduced.

Modernisation of the British Fire Service

Central government demands for a modernisation of the FRS, saw a very public and acrimonious industrial action between the Fire Brigade's Union and central Government brought about by the 2004 Fire Service Act (Fire & Rescue Services Act, 2004, *Part 1*; Burchill, 2004). The Act demanded workforce development that was viewed differently, and that the traditional heroic role of the Fire-fighter meet the demands of a changing society. The move was towards more preventative work, and less reactive response or fire-based duties, which challenged the very core of the hero-based, gendered fire-fighter role (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004a; Fire & Rescue Services Act, *Part 2; Part 3*). The significance is that many FRS have used the changes to the fire-fighter role which steps away from operational duties to support the argument for a more diverse workforce. The proposed changes in role led to the introduction of new fire-fighter role-based selection tests, and a competency-led personal development system. These changes initiated by central government, were in part strategies to widen the net for the recruitment and retention of women and people from diverse backgrounds. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister further commissioned a report into the medical and occupational evidence for recruitment and retention in the FRS, finally formalising job analysis and FRS roles (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004a; 2004b; Metcalfe, Rolfe, Stevens & Weale, 2005). In doing so, amongst other findings, they provided evidence towards the elimination of discriminatory recruitment and employment practices, consolidating data against policies, criterion or practices which directly discriminated against women and people with disabilities.

Despite framework changes in Governance for FRS, the introduction of the Fire & Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018 (Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004, *part 3*; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008; Local Government Association, 2008) and the Fire & Rescue Service Equality Standard (Local Government Association & Chief Fire Officer's Association, 2009) progress against the gender targets for women have significantly fallen short. The incentivised offering of capital budget increases for stretch targets were also introduced under these measures which saw participating FRSs, increasing

BME targets to working population percentages and the target for operational women increase to 18% (Murphy & Greenhalgh, 2018). To date, no FRS has reached the original target of 15% for operational women, or indeed the stretch target of 18%. Numbers have pivoted for many years around 4% nationally, and more recently it appears 5% due to the overall numbers of firefighters reducing across England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013/14; 2014-15; 2016-17).

However, even with reports of significantly low numbers, an anomaly appears to exist, which would seem to contradict a resistance to women. The anomaly is that women still manage to occupy leadership positions within FRSs, from that of Chief Executive Officer/Chief Fire Officer to Heads of Service. The dire findings of report after report with regard to sexism and resistance to women lead to questions regarding the ability of women to achieve such positions despite such a hostile environment. The exploration of possible improvements in gender equality will include any wider affects upon culture, and consequently women's promotional prospects. I would suggest that the imposition of targets have encouraged a culture of improved gender equality enabling women to achieve leadership positions. This would suggest a progressive, changing FRS which has moved beyond the tokenism of women leaders in order to reach its goal of gender equality. Opposition to this would present the Fire Sector steeped in masculine and militaristic traditions. Should this be the case and such norms exist, could it be that gender tokenism masquerades as inclusion and leadership appointment occurs despite the environment, not because of it?

More recent central government reviews of specific FRSs, suggest a FRS culture in which little has changed. Within the past three years there have been two high profile reviews of FRSs, whose outcomes have specifically considered FRS culture, creating lessons learnt for the sector. The cultural review into Essex Fire & Rescue Service deemed it not fit for 21st Century, with reports of fire-fighter suicides and an embedded culture of harassment and bullying. The report outlined that:

"The organisational culture in ECFRS is toxic. There is dangerous and pervasive bullying and intimidation and this may place employees and the communities that they serve at risk." (Lucas, 2015 p.5).

A Statutory Inspection of Avon Fire & Rescue Service (House of Commons, 2017) talked of failings in "the leadership and culture" of the organisation and that the Fire Authority needed to "address equality issues with great vigour" (2017, p.10).

It is acknowledged that the experience of Essex County FRS, or Avon FRS may not be widespread cultural behaviour of the FRS, but they are recent examples of scrutinised FRS culture. There is a question of whether these examples are indicators of current FRS culture along with further damning media examples of FRSs still resistant to the modernisation agenda, and gender equality. With this context it is appropriate to explore wider FRS culture as a means of understanding it as a normative environment. Exploration of the past and present experience of women and men across FRSs in England will provide a means of drawing upon the cultural reality for the basis of this research.

Little, if anything, from central government exists with regard to the impact of the gender targets and any associated improvements in gender equality within the FRS in England. This makes it problematic when attempting to offer any detail concerning the experience of gender, and the impact of gender policy to the daily work lives of women in the FRS. Government reviews, to date, suggest the experience of operational women to be one that suggests a culture which highly resists women and culturally excludes them (Woodfield, 2016). Specific FRS cultural research relating to women explores issues of tokenism, gender identity and exclusion (Perrott, 2016; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1997). To date I have not been successful in finding any Government review which involves the experience of senior women in the FRS in England or gender targets. However, what literature does exist evidences structural and systemic resistances which illustrate a historical premise for the systemic exclusion of women (Baigent, 2001; 2008; Home Office, 1999a; Equal Opportunities Task Group, 2000; 2001a; 2002b; Bain, 2002; Lucas & Baxter, 2012; House of Commons, 2017). It is from this position, mindful of such tensions, that I will discuss gender targets for the FRS.

1.3 The Fire Service and Gender Targets

Gender targets to increase the number of operational women and women appointed to senior roles within the Fire & Rescue Service in the UK has been a contentious issue within the Fire Sector (Home Office 1999a; Equal Opportunities Task Group, 2001a). Although

voluntary in theory, the audit processes of central government ensured that evidence of activity towards progressing the targets became a measurement of individual Service outcome. Further, national league tables were used to show individual FRS progress against the framework. By the levy of outcome related improvement, central Government has hoped to achieve both cultural change and an increase in the number of women in management positions (Audit Commission, 2008a; 2008b).

In 2010 following a change of government, annual audits to monitor gender target progress were withdrawn. However, FRSs have had the freedom to continue to engage in peer audit processes through the Local Government Association. The central government approach is that there has been an ongoing expectation for FRSs to work towards diversifying its employee groups, and to eliminate cultures of harassment and bullying associated with the Fire Sector (Audit Commission, 2002; Home Office, 2016b). It would also appear from the data that FRSs directly link recruitment freezes and the halt of capital programmes to resolve dignity, privacy and gender separate spaces, to the austerity measures imposed upon them by central government. Brandon Lewis, in outlining Fire Sector reform does not acknowledge austerity as a reason for lack of progress citing the unwillingness of the FRS to change (Fire Minister's Speech to Reform, 2017).

Whilst slow progress across the sector may point to real challenges in attracting and successfully recruiting women, it does not readily satisfy the question of why only the Fire sector is failing against its targets. As Fig. 2a and Fig. 2b below illustrate there are no spikes, or significant differences in individual FRS progress, only incremental percentile differences up to 4% at most. The stark reality of the FRS lack of progress on gender parity charted from 2002 to 2016 makes for sober reading. It is too simplistic to blame lack of interest from women when the police and armed forces have made significant changes within a highly political, and socially hostile climate. Appendix 1 illustrates the number of women by role against the number of men in FRS across England.

As outlined in Appendix 1, in the previous year's reporting period to March 2015, there were FRSs reporting figures as low as 2% operational women, to the exception of the highest reported numbers being in the region of 7%. Most FRS report the number of operational

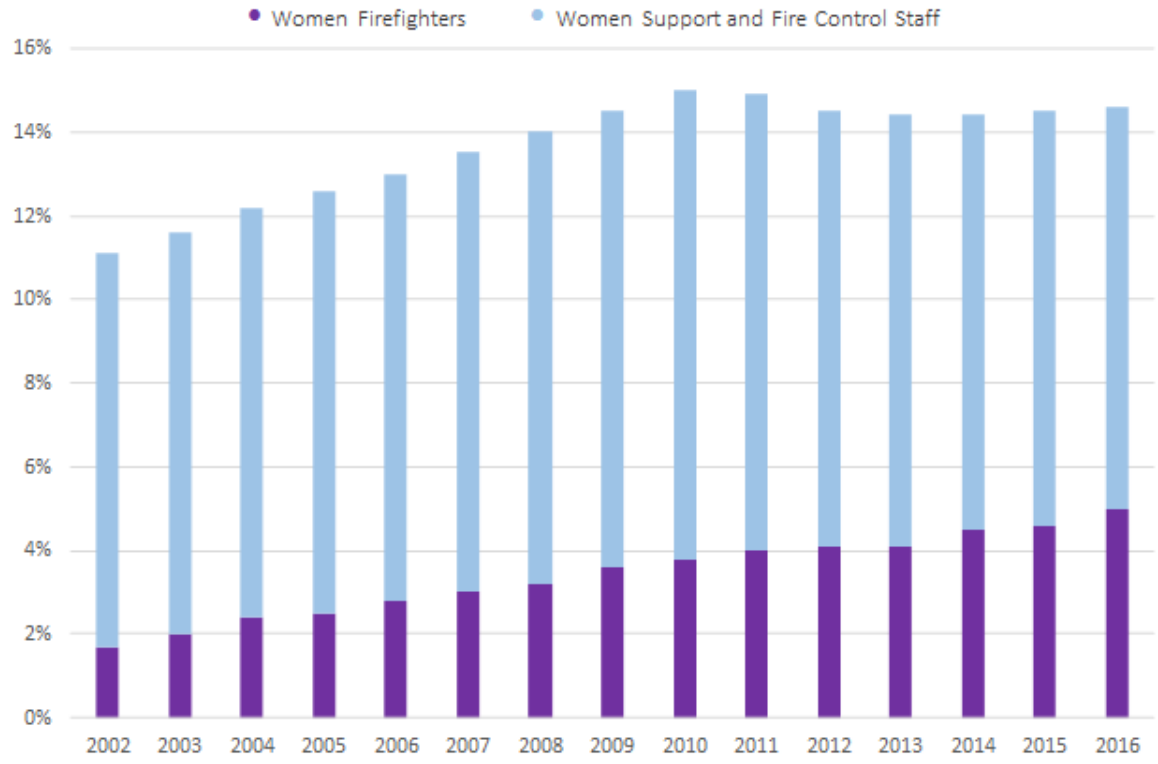
women between 3% to 5%. The size or geographical location of the organisation did not seem to make much of a difference to progress against the targets. In the event that there are no obvious answers to the question of why so little progress, attention must be turned to the FRS leadership and vision for gender equality.

Below, Fig. 2a and Fig. 2b visually illustrate how little has changed in the number of operational women across England. Although the growth as shown looks like a steady incline of progression, the higher numbers shown in the later years merely show the proportion of women to men as increased, due to the reducing number of FRS staff as a whole.

Figure 2a and 2b Operational Firefighter Statistics by Gender 2015/16

Despite increases in more recent years, the figure in 2016 (14.6%) is yet to reach the peak of 15.1% from 2010

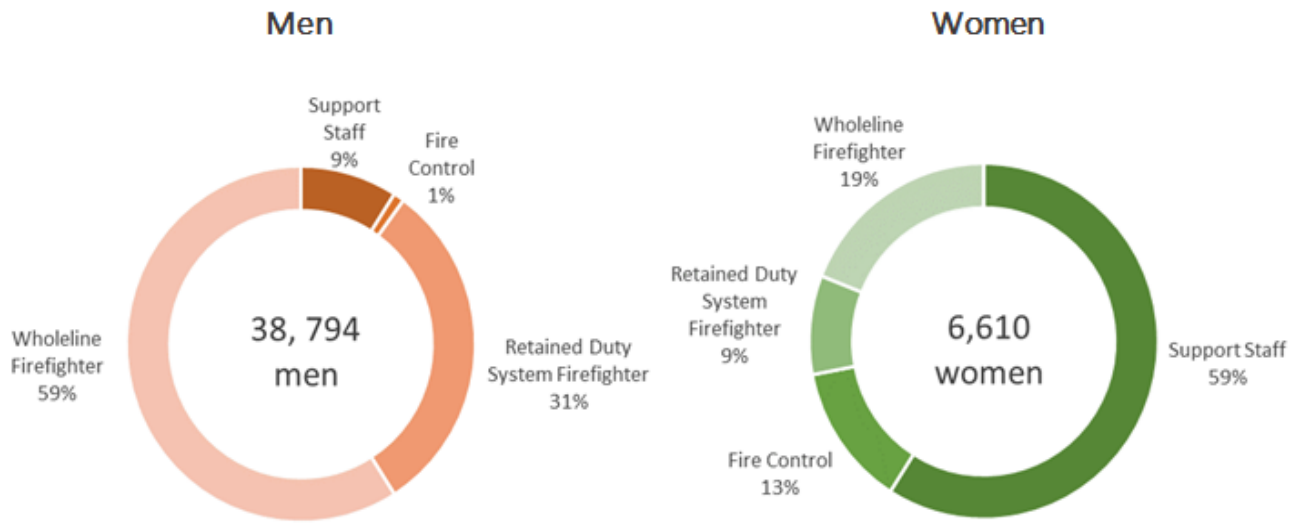
Figure 2a: Proportion of all staff employed by FRSs that are women in England, 2002 to 2016



Source: FIRE STATISTICS TABLE 1103

Of the 38,800 men employed by FRSs, 90% were firefighters in 2016. In contrast, 28% of the 6,600 women FRS employees were firefighters. The most common roles for women

Figure 2b: Gender of staff employed by FRSs, by role in 2016, England



Source: FIRE STATISTICS TABLE 1103

(Source: Department of Communities and Local Government, 2016-17)

Since 2010 little has been published by central government which discusses any change in the experiences of women on a national level, systemic improvements in gender equality or wider cultural change within Fire Service organisations (Fire Minister's Speech to Reform, 2017). This lack of information reflects the omission of individual FRSs, FRS strategic bodies, and central government to articulate or realize the priority of gender equality.

The juxtaposition of women in leadership positions, despite lack of progress against the targets, and history of gender resistance presents an interesting platform from which to explore two areas. The first is the inclusion of women to the extent of them operating and leading with a validity equal to their male colleagues. The second consideration, is one that explores what changes have occurred within FRS culture with its reports of high resistance to women. The question therefore must be asked, do gender targets have a place in this?

Progress against the gender targets

In 2015, the FRS in England reported that only 4.5% of its operational workforce were women of which only 3.2% occupied whole-time (full-time) positions (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014-15 p.8). Given the position that the percentile increase for gender over the ten-year period between 2004 to 2014 has only been 2.1%, an untenable position for the FRS as a public body exists. Add to this the inclusion of targets for FRSs to increase the number of operational women to 15% and to report the number of the top 5% of earners by gender, the picture becomes more bleak. Recent Home Office reporting of *Fire and Rescue Authorities Operational Statistics Bulletin for England*, shows the number of operational women as increased from 4.5% to 5% (Home Office, 2016a p. 4). However, the Home Office have been quick to assert that the percentile increase is a proportional increase which is not due to a rise in the number of women that are employed by FRSs but that the number of men have reduced (Home Office, 2016a).

Comparatively, the police who had also been under scrutiny in terms of increasing the number of women police staff, report the numbers of female officers as being five times the number of female fire-fighters (Fire Minister's Speech to Reform, 2017). The notion of representative bureaucracy is the practice which argues that the profile of the workforce should reflect the composition of the general working population (Peters, von Maravić, & Schröler, 2015). This presents a disparaging and confusing picture for the FRS, as research suggests that public service organisations have become progressively more diverse and representative of women and minority groups, with the ideology of representative bureaucracy as a measurable objective and outcome (Andrews, Ashworth & Meier, 2014 p. 279; Andrews and Ashworth, 2015; Shelton, 2006).

Notably, the statistical analysis for Fire was more detailed in 2016 than it has ever been, no doubt due to the heightened scrutiny and significant concern announced by Prime Minister May outlined in the Thomas Review as concerns the FRS lack of diversity (Home Office, 2016b). Figures show that of the 38,800 men employed by FRSs, 90 per cent are firefighters, whilst in contrast, only 28 per cent of the 6,600 women FRS employees were firefighters (Home Office, 2016a p.7). The numbers do help to bring the differences to life, and create areas for closer attention. The dominance of men within the FRS has been directly linked through the

discussed reports, to the fire-fighter role and the masculine bias that it has held historically. There is an associated, embedded issue which has impacted the occupation of leadership roles by women. Highlighted within the reports is the practice of single tier entry systems where all operational roles stem from the firefighter role. In practice this means that the greater proportion of the managerial roles (supervisory Crew Manager to Chief Fire Officer) are appointed from within the firefighter pool, following a strict hierarchal process. In more recent years some FRSs have opted to appoint more strategic, senior roles in a more generic way, allowing for non-operational applicants to apply. However, the tradition has created the cultural normality that most senior management posts are occupied by operational men in the majority of FRSs in England. Unfortunately, no official data is collected of managerial role by gender, and although there are no central government figures which outline the managerial placement operational women, individual FRS information, and my personal knowledge of FRSs, suggest operational women managers at varying levels across England.

Finally, it is important to consider that for the past 40 years the FRS, as a public body, could have used lawful measures such as positive action to support recruitment and retention practices for women. By way of explanation, without the need for targets, the use of positive action introduced within legislation as a measure to tackle both the disadvantage and under-representation of women and people from Black and Ethnic Minority (B&EM) backgrounds with regard to employment and training has been available to the FRS (Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 (Repealed); Race Relations Act, 1976 (Repealed)). It may be that the FRS needed to right its own wrongs as past recruitment criteria appeared to exclude all potential applications in favour of white, British men. Applicants needed to be "over 19 and under 31 years of age, at least 5 feet 5 inches tall, not less than 37 inches in chest measurement and able to read well and write legibly. They also had to be British subjects of pure British decent." (Bailey, 1991 p.4).

FRS have had the opportunity to target and give access to recruitment information to potential applicants, who are women or people from Black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, provided that in the previous twelve months the organization had been underrepresented in either category within employment (Waddington & Bell, 2001). The liberal approach to equal opportunities theory, has argued in favour of positive action, in that

it acknowledges discrimination as a systemic problem and presents a historical legacy of discrimination for disadvantage groups (Johns, MacBride-Stewart, Powell & Green, 2014). In doing so positive action creates a challenge by seeking to remedy the effects of past discriminated or embedded discrimination. The burden is, therefore, removed from individuals and remains with the organisation. Through the use of training, experience or skill-acquisition, the assumption is that once the effects of past discrimination are "levelled" the outcome of equality within the process is achieved (Johns et al, 2014, p.99); often the term levelling the playing field is used when referring to positive action. Although this approach to addressing inequality through policy and practice has its critics, it has also created resistance from those not offered the same support, who are not covered by legislation (Castilla & Bernard, 2010).

A tension exists for FRSs between the public sector narrative of employee body reflecting the communities they serve, the acceptance of the gender targets and the service's continued lack of diversity. The data would suggest something is wrong, and questions concerning inclusion need to be asked of FRS culture.

Fire Brigade's Union

Finally, the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) who celebrated its centenary year in 2018, has a strong history in representing and organising operational employee groups in the FRS (Moore, Wright, Taylor & Wrack, 2018). The suggestion is that the FBU have largely had equality and diversity as its focus since the 1980s , and has been a leader within the framework of the FRS to push for cultural change and inclusive employment practices. The FBU in make-up is structurally large and politically active across the British FRS with local, divisional and national domains from firefighter to Chief Fire Officer representation. It talks of camaraderie, brotherhood and sisterhood underpinning a collectivism approach. And although it has had its own struggles – as its membership and branch officials were made up of FRS operational staff, some of whom resisted diversity – had introduced Fairness at Work representatives in 1997, and had national sub-committees in place engaging in work to improvement physical and cultural environments for women. An example of this is the "All Different, All Equal" policy where FBU members who were responsible for acts of harassment or bullying were no longer entitled to union representation (Fire Brigade Union, 1997).

The women's section of the FBU was developed through the self-organisation of women supported by the union. The suggestion is that this occurred during a period of wider political activism and debate concerning the empowerment of marginalised groups. However such sectionalisation raised questions of radicalism and divisiveness. Work was led within the membership to acknowledge the need of sections within the union which supported minority groups and did not weaken the class-base solidarity that the FBU had enjoyed. The first women's school (conference) took place in 1992 attended by 24 women and was supported by the FBU National officials and by 1998 the structures were set in place to elect the National Women's Advisory Committee and hold the first FBU National Women's Conference. This created the subtext for wider political change within the FBU itself with women, B&AME and LGBT+ members being elected as Executive Council members as representatives of their organised member groups (Parker, 2005; Fire Brigade Union, 2011). The 2008 and 2009 FBU annual general meetings reported on the unacceptable incidences of harassment and bullying against women and firefighters from BME backgrounds, setting up reporting and support phone help lines (Fire Brigade Union, 2008; 2009).

Women have been found to be twice as likely to take union positions and become politically active than their male counterparts. The suggestion is that many women have initially engaged in terms of needing help with "maternity, grievance, bully and harassment" (Moore et al, 2018) and then decided to give something back. It would seem that the FBU has provided structural and individual support to operational women, and their national narrative is that of ally (Local Government Association, 2017b).

The gender target debate

The fundamental question in exploring the gender targets in the Fire Sector is what difference have they made in terms of women's experiences and to the wider FRS culture? Whilst there appears to be a quietness concerning a review of the gender targets within the sector, the debate surrounding gender targets in the private and educational sector has been revitalised Cranfield University School of Management, 2007; 2015; 16; Davies, 2011; 2013; 2015; McKinsey, 2007; 2016). This debate has primarily concerned itself with the representation of women at higher levels. Gender equality at the highest levels appears to be a European endeavour, with gender targets or quotas firmly planted in the centre of the debate. There

is the question of whether critical mass through the successful increase in numbers at the top of an organisation equates to a likelihood of gender equality. This seems to be the suggestion by central government for the FRS.

More widely, a body of research has grown exploring the inequalities between men and women which creates barriers to progression for women through gender targets (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013; Bevan & Hood, 2004; Hood, 2006; Terjesen, Sealy & Singh, 2009; Ranconteur Media, 2010; Lewis, Simpson & Sealy, 2010; Ford, 2011; McCann & Wheeler, 2011; Cranfield University School of Management, 2015; 2016;). Although public sector organisations such as the FRS, Police and Armed forces have mandates for gender increase levied upon them, it appears that research is sharpening its tools against recent private sector experience, leaving the lessons of the public sector unexplored (Fire Minister's Speech to Reform, 2017; National Statistics, 2018). The case for improvements in gender equality through voluntary target encouragement is currently being heralded by the UK government as an example of what is possible without the use of quotas. The highly publicised first Women on Boards Report conducted by Lord Davies outlined that in 2010 only 12% of all the directors of the FTSE 100 were women. At that time Lord Davies made recommendations that of 25% of each FTSE 100 and 250 non-executive director board memberships should be women, and Chairmen were asked to set aspirational targets within 6 months of his initial Report being published (Davies, 2011). By 2013 a review suggested that in the previous 18 months the numbers had moved to 17% female membership and then increased quickly to 20% (Davies, 2013). By the October 2015 Lord Davies's closing report read that the 2015 target had been surpassed with 26.1% of women on Boards, with a recommendation of a renewed target of 33% of women on FTSE 350 Boards by 2020 (Davies, 2015; Cranfield University School of Management, 2016). It is difficult to know if the ultimate goal has been the visibility of women in senior places or of gender equality; maybe they are viewed as being the same thing. Seen as one of the greatest achievements of the last few years, the Minister for Government Equalities Office, stated that the question is no longer about why women's representation is so important, but about how business can make diversity a reality (Cranfield University School of Management, 2016). It appears the assumption has been made that the increase in the number of women appointed is synonymous with gender equality. Whilst it must be celebrated that there are no longer any all-male Boards on FTSE 100 companies,

when in 2009 at least a quarter of all FTSE 100 Boards had no women members (Villiers, 2010 p.535) there are still questions that need to be asked about what constitutes gender equality, and indeed what difference has been made? Given the example of the FRS where the sector reviews report vehement resistance to women, the inquiry is about cultural improvement, and why targets were the chosen method of change. Therefore, when the numbers of women are increased through activities related to reaching the target, is the question of gender equality quietened or satisfied? I would argue that there is a need for demonstrable evidence of improvement in gender equality policy, practice and women's experience of such improvements, to answer this question. There would be difficulty in assuming that increased numbers of women equate to improved gender equality (Women in Mining UK & PWC, 2013). It may appear naïve, therefore, at such an early stage of the women on boards story, to suggest the heralding in of a new era of increasing gender diversity is tantamount to gender equality without wider evidence of how gender equality has been impacted for all concerned. Nevertheless, the achievement appears to be progressive, consistent and suggestive of the long awaited will for change concerning gender equality at the highest levels. However, the 'Female 'FTSE Board Report: Taking Stock of Where We Are' produced by Cranfield University School of Management (2016), shows a more detailed picture of the progress toward gender equality through targets of the Boards, exposing different truths. The report outlines that the figure of 26.1% women membership on the FTSE 100 Boards, represented an average across all of the Boards, whereas the target had actually been set for 25% membership of women on each Board. In truth only 55 of the 100 Boards had either met or exceeded the target of 25%. Further, reporting of the appointment to Board membership itself is an interesting one. Progress towards reaching the 25% target has needed the new appointment of 33% of women to Boards, with a Board turnover rate of 14.5% to accommodate this. Although the turnover rates over four of the five-year period had been consistent there was a drop in the last year of the target, which might suggest a possible stagnation or plateauing of progress.

Within the UK it appears the way forward for gender equality favours encouragement and voluntary, sustainable steps towards change, distancing itself from the demands of a quota-based approach. Distinction of the definitions of targets and quotas are outlined in the Cranfield University report, which help support an understanding of the arguments put forward for targets over quotas. Targets are defined as

"voluntary aspiration identified and pursued by organisations without regulatory sanctions imposed by the state"; the assumption attached to it suggests that the targets
"rely on the assumption that you need to change behaviours and organisational processes in order to change the number and culture"
(Cranfield University School of Management, 2016 p.45).
Quotas, in contrast, are defined as a
"fixed percentage or number imposed by the state to ensure representation of women, time bound with sanctions' which 'rely on the assumption that you need to change the numbers and ensure critical mass, in order to eventually change the culture" (ibid).
The assumption of resistance that sits alongside the levying of gender targets or quotas suggests the element of an ancestral or historical male dominance to it. This may be true in that it is certainly wise to consider masculinity within the context of construction of gender within organisations. Targets here are heralded as voluntary, but for the FRS to change the work towards targets was mandatory; is there a difference? The emergent issue is the imposition of gender targets within a cultural context of resistance to women. The strong possibility of a cultural response which pushes resistance below the surface, creating cultural tensions and equality deficits for both the men and women therefore exists. The rationale that borders this argument is as complex as it is challenging to deliberate, and so needs careful consideration.

In closing, the applicability of the use of gender targets in the Fire Service is worthy of exploration if consideration is given to the assumptions from which they are introduced, as the outcome has been less than desired. The discussion of targets in terms of their involuntary status respond to the need for change, but do not appear to account for any back lash that may occur in terms of cultural change or management of such changes. What has not been clear until recently is the central government's view on what has been deemed as acceptable progress. To all intents and purposes, the view expressed by Prime Minster May and her colleagues now suggest the Fire Sector's catastrophic failure in meeting diversity targets.

The relationship between low numbers of operational women within the FRS, the fact that women do occupy senior positions and how gender-targets have impacted gender equality and organisational culture are the key lines of enquiry for this body of research. The

underlying question of how women occupy positions of seniority and traditionally male-occupied roles, equitably, with the backdrop of reported male resistance, and the coerced steps of organisational gender target regimes is a fundamental one.

It is my aim through the breadth of this study to consider what, if any difference, the targets have made to gender equality, not just in terms of increasing numbers or critical mass, but also concerning how both men and women experience the culture and employment practices within the FRS.

1.4 The aim and objectives of the study

As discussed, there are complexities within the Fire Sector concerning gender parity. This study's aim is concerned with understanding the context in which gender operates for operational firefighters and its pursuant leadership structure within the FRS, exploring the experience of women and their placement within it. Accepting the FRS as a predominately male culture resistant of women, low employee numbers of operational women, and therefore the importance associated with women successfully securing leadership roles, this thesis seeks to understand the paradox of gender equality, issues of inclusion within the FRS culture. A key consideration, is the role of gender targets imposed upon the Fire Sector in 2000 and their impact upon wider gender equality in FRSs.

The research objectives of this study are:

1. A critical review of literature relating to gender, patriarchy and critical realism as a premise to evaluate FRS culture.
2. To explore the social interplay of gender within operational firefighter culture, and its wider impact upon FRS organisational gender equality.
3. To critically analyse the extent to which FRS culture is gendered, considering its gender processes, the use of gender targets, and how this relates to experiences of inequity for women.
4. To develop a methodological approach which will broaden understanding of how processes that cause and enable gender processes, systemic inequality and patriarchal structures continue to exist.

Following the literature review an in-depth study of FRS participants will be conducted to provide a rich picture of the lived experience of culture and gender processes for women in the FRS.

1.5 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 Introduction and contextual background

The introductory chapter outlined the organisation and structure of the FRS, presenting the context that women were introduced and operate in. It raises tensions between Central Government and FRS organisations concerning the FRS diversity profile. By introducing key milestones such the Bain Report, I illustrate the *stuck-ness* and persistence of issues such as harassment, bullying and lack of diversity within, and the Thematic Review into Equality and Fairness which led to gender targets. Through discussion of the wider, associated matter of the modernisation of the FRS, I introduce the FRS as a public body with governance responsibilities concerning the use of legislative measures such as positive action remedies for the underrepresentation of women. I discuss the role of the Fire Brigade's Union as an ally to embedding equality in the FRS.

Finally, progression towards the gender targets is discussed introducing the private sector gender target debate, and theoretical arguments which indicate links between gender targets and cultural change.

Chapter one positions the study to explore the following key areas:

1. FRS inadequate performance in increasing numbers of operational women versus women's management and leadership appointments contradicting Government reviews suggesting strong resistance to women;
2. Whether targets have made a difference to gender equality and/or wider FRS culture.

Chapter 2 Review of Existing Literature

Chapter two consists of two parts, the review of existing literature concerning patriarchy and gender.

I introduce the theoretical basis for the study by exploring the notion of patriarchy, as it concerns male power and the suppression of women. In discussing patriarchy as a tool for the analysis of systems of domination, the chapter discussion explores it as a conceptual tool

which is closely related to the notion of gender order. I build an argument which positions patriarchy as a strong institutional and cultural possibility for the FRS, and as such a necessary theoretical cornerstone in understanding gender processes within the FRS. I also acknowledge the choice of patriarchy as a foundation in preference to later theories of gender and masculinities.

I explore the notion of gender as a concept, that is, what is meant by gender, its layered significance in terms of its construct, and its power and relationship within the context of organisations. I also consider gender equality legislation, its specific provisions for public sector organisations, and the FRS, under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The chapter then looks in particular at the practice of gender mainstreaming under the Gender Equality Duty and the tension that exists to create gender equality outcomes using current practice. I argue that the issue of tension between policy and practice again is linked to a patriarchal system which places men in decision making positions, and in which women's needs are overlooked, suggesting the systematic exclusion of women with the FRS.

Chapter 3 Methodology

I begin this chapter by outlining decisions concerning my methodological approach, and my need to build a methodological lens through which to consider the issues of gender and patriarchy within the FRS. Reflexive reasoning concerning my proximity to this research drawing on my work experience, my marginal positioning within feminism, and personal insights as a Black woman, who has held senior posts within the FRS are considered. I outline the personal challenge of blending my beliefs into an acceptable and established, homogenously-shaped paradigmatic whole. I argue for the consideration of wider concepts of reality which view experiences as knowledge. Critical realism is introduced to explore the notion that a deeper sense of reality exists suggesting a sense of ontological depth to what is known. In applying the basic theoretical principles of critical realism I argue towards a deeper investigation of FRS culture, which helps to identify the processes which create and perpetuate patriarchy and in turn, gender inequity.

I have chosen to centrally position the voices of women using qualitative methodology, and in so doing will use their experience as knowledge. As such I acknowledge the wider social

constructs concerning gender, which present a fundamental anchor in the historical culture of the FRS. I discuss the integration of theory and positionality as methodological lens. I combine my reflexive Black radical feminist positioning and the influence of translocational positionality, together with the perspective of realist constructionism. I argue that in using this combined approach to identify the mechanisms which create and uphold prevalent behaviour and language norms within FRS culture, I will be better placed to understand the processes that cause and enable gender processes, systemic inequalities and patriarchal structures.

Lastly, the chapter presents the qualitative approach to methodology and methods, including ethics, project approval and research design. The outline of coding and analysis of the data introduces the first stage of thematic coding, and the second stage of using the theoretical premise of realist constructionism known as *norm circles,* which I offer as gendered norm circles using women's standpoint to further interrogate the data.

Chapter 4 The research findings, and analysis

The findings and analysis are reported in two stages. The first stage presents data generated from the focus groups, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews. The themes and codes were developed using inductive methods to reduce the data to produce key findings. Positioning the voices of women I have used the narrative text supported by excerpts of data, drawing conclusions as necessary in analysis of the data findings The findings cover areas such as integration into the FRS, watch culture, fit and assimilation, women's competence, gender targets, recruitment and promotion.

The second stage provides contextual information through a brief desktop review of gender mainstreaming in the FRS. I review the gender mainstreaming framework introduced to the FRS in 2008, alongside the central government position on the strategic progress of gender equality. As concerns context of the gender targets I present the strategic intention for gender equality, as outlined through position statements made by the FRS umbrella organisations – the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Using the integrative lens, I discuss the key data findings. The concept of the *norm circle* is used to isolate behaviours and discourse which underline culture firstly within the watch, which is then argued as the premise for wider FRS culture. I argue four key cultural constructs, developed and sustained through the *norm circles* which serve to dominate women and establish a social order which detriments operational women and women who occupy roles traditionally held by officers. I argue that these constructs are enabled and enforced by a membership of operational men and officers through the socialisation processes established within the watch system.

Chapter 6 Conclusion, contribution to knowledge and future work

In acknowledgement of the problematization of women as an emergent finding, I begin this section by outlining a change in the focus of the study from considering the leadership of women within the FRS, to exploring the context and issue of gender within the FRS culture. Although women occupy roles as Chief Fire Officers, directors and senior leaders, it would appear that operational women are abstracted as a group within the wider governance of the sector, with matters simply being related to numerical gender targets. This I argue is in keeping with the constructions of masculinity which appear to be core to the culture of the FRS.

I conclude that the watch system, which is labelled as closed and excluding of difference is innately opposed to a culture of inclusion. It remains, in the main, unchanged and the primary source of integration, socialisation and cultural environment for the majority of operational firefighters. I discuss the watch in its current iteration as not fit for the purpose of establishing gender equality, or a culture of inclusion. I discuss the incompatibility of gender targets with the gendered nature of the FRS cultural environment which continues to be resistant to operational women. The conclusions raises the challenge of the FRS continuing to operate within a framework of gender mainstreaming, when its structures, governance and cultural framework require a gender-specific, auditable mandatory system of change. I conclude that future work should include the exploration of dismantling dominant discourses, and behaviour through alternatives to the watch system amongst other things.

The contribution to theory outlines that there are 4 key constructions which underpin FRS culture as it relates to operational women, and senior women occupying roles traditionally held by male firefighters and officers. The constructions are: women as outsiders to culture; women as incompetent; the patriarchal social order; and masculinity. I argue the constructions to be both historical and present day.

For the contribution to methodology I present an integrative methodological lens, combining reflexivity and realist constructionism. I argue that the integrative methodical lens is an interdependent process which helps to decipher the mechanisms of patriarchy, supporting our understanding of the extent to which the FRS is gendered. Step one introduces the notion of reflexivity which creates the capacity to manage data, its complexities and contradictions through the reflexive process of personal, empirical and theoretical positioning. Step two is realist constructionism which brings together critical realism and social construction in a way that allows a closer interrogation of language, discourse and culture through gendered norm circles. In using this as an integrative process of consideration I am able to add a layer of exploration to the data which may support understanding how patriarchal behaviours and discourse become sustained within the culture of an organisation.

The contribution argues the use of standpoint feminism and reflexive positionality against the layers of realist constructionism to create a process of gendered norm circles to identify and understand the mechanisms that develop and embed highly patriarchal cultures that are resistant to gender equality. In using this approach I am also able to consider the complexities and contradictions of the behaviours of women, which would ordinarily be considered as masculinized or assimilative to a masculine culture. In linking the complexities and contradictions to patriarchal processes using the integrative method, I am able to hold a space for all of the women's experiences to be identified and explored within the same continuum of understanding regardless of feminist positioning. This supports the ideal that women's oppression is not homogenously experienced or understood, and therefore the complexity of women responses need careful understanding.

For the contribution to practice I offer two areas:

I argue the English FRS watch system is a process of induction, integration and provides a catalyst of social structures for interactions between operational personnel. As such it creates, enables and enforces the dominant patriarchal culture of the FRS. The watch system is a closed alliant process which allows little capacity for individual agency as the collective (male) membership of the watch act as a group. Coercive hierarchal socialisation processes establish the watch as a means of perpetuating complex cultural normative behaviour.

Finally, I argue that gender targets are not suited to an environment, such as the FRS, which has displayed high resistance to women occupying operational roles. Gender targets struggle to affect culture when that culture is entrenched in polarised gender positions and highly resistant towards women.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical constructs of patriarchy and gender. The organisational history of a white male dominated FRS alone is an insufficient driver for the literary focus. However when contextualised with inexplicably low numbers of operational women firefighters (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013/14; 2014-15; 2016-17; Home Office, 2016a) the prevalence and types of discrimination reported against women (Baigent, 2001; 2008; Baigent & O'Connor, 2008a; 2008b; Bain, 2002), low retention numbers and the historical accounts of the development of the self-organisation of women to champion change (Moore et al, 2018 p.221-223; Chetkovitch, 1997; Moore & Kleiner, 2001), questions arise concerning the presence and organisation of patriarchy as an implicit cultural normality within the FRS. As such central tenets of discussion include the place of women (Sinclair, 2014), women's experiences and the how the FRS organises itself in terms of gender, cognisant of their public sector duty and gender targets (Home Office, 1999a; Equal Opportunities Task Group, 2001a; 2001b; Equality Act, 2010 *s 149*; Equal Opportunities Commission, 1998; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006; 2010; Conley & Page 2010; Clayton-Hathway, 2013).

I open this chapter with a review of the theory of patriarchy and its clear associations with the history of the FRS. I will consider the assumptions in grounding my theoretical argument in the tenets of patriarchy exploring the progression towards theories of gender and masculinities within organisations. I will consider patriarchy, exploring its foundation as a springboard to the wider theoretical principles of gender and hegemonic masculinities.

I will consider gender within organisations and the prescriptive structure often present concerning gender structures and systemic gender social orders which operate to the detriment of women. Finally, as the FRS is a public body, I will explore legislation, specifically the Gender Equality Duty (The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice, 2007) and Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act *s149*, 2010) designed to promote equality across the public sector.

2.1 Patriarchy

In various reviews of the Fire Service it has often been described as patriarchal in view of its predominantly dominant male, masculine existence. There appears to be a lack of any significant evidence to support any rebuttal of this assumptive description of the FRS (Burke, 1994; Baigent, 2001; 2008; Bain, 2002). Acknowledging the sheer dominance of male employees by their ratio to women and the FRS historical militaristic roots, I have chosen to explore patriarchy (Hopton, 1999). As such, it seems logical to explore the cultural normality of the FRS by considering its past and present structures, behaviours and actions, in seeking to understand the role that gender plays within the FRS environment. My motivation therefore to consider the context of gender against the framework of patriarchy forms an important part of this study.

The concept of patriarchy has been used within the women's movement to analyse what sits beneath women's oppression (Beechey, 1979). The challenge of the discursive narrative surrounding hierarchy attempts to question the basis of, and raise questions concerning the settled concepts of patriarchy (ibid). Radical, revolutionary and Marxist feminist discourse vigorously shaped the political and contextual narrative regarding patriarchal theory. The theory of patriarchy attempts to go beyond the experiences and manifestations of women's oppression and moves towards the formulation of theory which understands the basis of subordination (Beechey, 1979; Davies, McGreggor, Pringle & Giddings, 2018). The theory suggests that generally patriarchy refers not only to the domination of women by men but the power relations by which men dominate women (Beechey, 1979.).

The history and development of the concept of Patriarchy within feminist thought appears to be a long one, seeing early feminists such as Virginia Woolf and Fabian Women's Group cited, as well as anti-Marxist sociologist Weber (Weber, 1968). It is suggested that feminist discourse has attempted to provide a critical assessment of the use of patriarchy to understand and explain "feelings of oppression and subordination" with the intention to "transform feelings of rebellion into a political practice and theory" (Beechey, 1979 p.66). Other writers suggest origins of patriarchy can be found in writings by Aristotle who refers to the passive female, the female as the mutilated male, as Learner articulates "the courage of

man is shown in commanding of a women in obeying" (Sultana, 2011 p 4). Suffice to say the underlying principles of men being born to dominate and women to be subordinate stand throughout traditionalist thought (ibid). Millett's (1977) narrative of institutional subordination where "men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress", "through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men" presents a powerful ideology widening the discussion to systemic and systematic oppression (Millett 1977, p35; Mitchell, 1971; Jagger & Rosenberg, 1984; Walby, 1990).

Patriarchy's organisation into two broad categories has supported its conceptual understanding: the male domination of the woman, and the older man's domination of the younger man (Beechey, 1979). It is suggested that this position has generalized the conception of power relations between women and men, and assumptions have been challenged with regard to the existence of patriarchal relations through different historical remits and societies.

The discourse has create room for challenge where building an argument for patriarchy without explanation or exploration of how, where and why such relationships have occurred has grown (Beechey, 1979). This has become a foundational stance for this study. It is not enough to establish that patriarchy exists within the FRS. The inquiry needs to explore how, where and why patriarchal relationships have occurred, and what if any impact they have on gender relationships and processes within the FRS.

Marxist feminist literature introduces another key element of importance within patriarchy (and the FRS) which is the kinship system of power (male) and consequence (female) (Mitchell, 1974) "the relationship between the symbolic power held by men within the systems and the consequences of this power for the inferiorized psychology of woman" (Beechey 1979, p.66). In exploring women's experiences in the FRS it will be foundational to consider the impact of male arrangements within the organisation and whether systemic decisions and functions favour men above women. In terms of women's experiences, although there is acknowledgement of a Marxist view of patriarchy that intercedes for intersectionality (that is that people are not people in isolation, referring to dynamics of race, class etc.) the analysis

of patriarchy is offered with omissions where forms of male domination (and female subordination) remain unexplained (Beechey, 1979). This raises the importance in this study to understand how patriarchy is sustained and perpetuated, situating women's experiences centrally as knowledge and a referencing of understanding the impact of such arrangements.

The offer on patriarchy is that its theory should be seen as historically specific, with exploration of the forms of patriarchy that exist within particular contexts in this study should be a central discussion (Beechey, 1979 p.67). In essence the argument is for a patriarchy that is both contextually (environmental) and historically dependant. In a similar way, it is suggested that the presence of patriarchy within social institutions differ and should be investigated as such. It is this positioning that is important to the inquiry of patriarchy within the FRS. It will be interesting to see, as the British Fire & Rescue Service is made up of 47 different organisations, where and how patriarchy shows itself, the context in which it gains traction, and the type of historical specificity that emerges.

It is important, with the hierarchical, militaristic pathology of the FRS, its semi-uninterrupted male cultural history (the number of operational women has only moved from 1% to 5% in 20 years) that the concept of patriarchy be considered. The hierarchal, top down history of command and control as well as the tie in of a 30-year career average for firefighters, the concept and effects of patriarchy as understood through older-man-younger-man and male-to-female-subordination is appropriate to explore.

A robust definition of patriarchy that rejects determinism is suggested to be the system of domination which advocates that men as a group dominate women as a group (Walby, 1990 p.3*).* It suggests the framework of patriarchy enables men to remain the "main beneficiaries of the subordination of women" (ibid, p.3). This approach, unlike Marxist feminism, argues that patriarchy is not a result of alternative systems of social inequality but is pervasive, standing alone to affect every area of life. This view of patriarchy has resonated for me, in much the same way as my experience of race. Invariably I am often asked the question of what is it like to be Black in England, with the ensuing conversation being led towards systems of social inequality. However, should you ask a similar question of what it is like to be white in England, many would struggle to see the relevance of the question. Being white in England

is the expected, baseline position of an English person, where little thought needs to be given to their position, whilst the issue of race can affect every area of life for someone who is not. Patriarchy, like racism, is offered as a pervasive and ominous form of oppression.

Criticisms of patriarchy as an analysis of gender domination argue an essentialism and biological reductionism of the experiences of men and women which universalize their experiences. The criticism cites feminists such as Daly (2005) suggesting that positioning patriarchy in this way limits or inhibits the ability to analyse historical change. Earlier writers also take this view where they argue in direct opposition to Walby and others arguing
"the concept of patriarchy as a system is premised on a social reproduction framework explicable as self-perpetuating – either as a totality or as a substructure of main structures" (Pollert, 1996 p.640 cited in Gottfried, 1998). Pollert's assertion is that this type of theorizing perpetuates abstract structuralism and in so doing omits "the dynamic tension between agency and structure" (ibid). The argument further extends to the suggesting that some theory wrongly elevates patriarchy to an autonomous system, negating the independent but complexly interlaced irreducible social relationships of class and gender. It appears, however, to negate the power and legacy of such the associated impact upon agency and structure. It is a cautionary view which helps to heighten how the use of the conceptual use patriarchy as an analysis of gender process must be carefully used – keeping women's experiences centralized.

The notion of gender order which links the discourse of power and the conceptual tool of patriarchy (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015) is an interesting area of exploration when thinking about the organisational structure of the FRS. Again, the notion of the "structural determinism" of patriarchy is argued, suggesting an objective reality is presented that does not reflect historical and cultural specificity (2015 p. 192).

So the question arises, what form of inquiry will address patriarchal biases, or even show its existence? The challenge of this question has helped me think about the how to consider the gender experience in ways that take account of cultural reality, it's history and specificity. It has prompted thought which supports the development of a conceptual framework enabling the emergence of knowledge. This opens the discussion that women's everyday experiences

maybe “no less contaminated by patriarchal notions than are theories” (Walby, 1990 p. 18; 2013). The suggestion that systemic enquiry (organisations) and theoretical development are advocated, so they can bring light to the nature of patriarchal dynamics or relationships (Walby, 1990). This also hopes to address the idea of objective reductionism. By building a methodical lens that will include the analysis of patriarchy, I will seek in my methodological approach, to both theoretically, and through emerging knowledge, identify how gender inequality is established and perpetuated, in its various forms. By centralizing the experience of women in the interrogation of how patriarchy exists and its affects, I will seek to create a platform of knowledge from which to explore the cultural norms of the FRS concerning gender equality.

There is a recurring question that exists concerning patriarchy which fundamentally challenges its necessity or relevance. It is acknowledged that modern day feminism finds itself in something of a crisis against the backdrop of the fluidity of activism in the 20th Century and argues that patriarchy is still with us (Ortner, 2014; Messerschmidt & Bridges, 2017; Enloe, 2017; Amussen, 2018). This creates a bridge of understanding and relevance of patriarchy for today. Creating the context of the relationship of the feminist journey of placing woman and then gender into discourse with the cultural division of male/female elements within societies, patriarchy is positioned as the larger formation of power. This stance builds on the earlier discussion, which links the significance of patriarchy to where in the world we find ourselves, naming it “a near global phenomenon” (Ortner, 2014 p.531). This echoes the sentiment of power infusion of patriarchy that Foucault subscribes to (Foucault, 1994). The view that patriarchy plays the part of an “invisible but highly damaging role in contemporary social life” suggests a firm but polarised position of patriarchal power (ibid). It presents a strong advocacy of the persistence of patriarchy in terms of the organisation of power that shapes the major institutions of 21st Century capitalism. Widening the discussion to consider the dimension of intersectionality, a macro-version concept of intersectionality can be drawn on to explore the intertwining of patriarchy with other forms of dominance and power where power(s) cut across each other, cross fertilize themselves and amplify each another (Ortner, 2014; Crenshaw 1991; Acker, 2012). Therefore, the issue of power within patriarchy is a fundamental line of inquiry.

Patriarchy as a theoretical springboard to gender and masculinities

It is argued that the reconceptualization of the subordinate women can occur where the position of male power and dominance are considered. As such the logical premise then is to consider that social theory is therefore flawed (Acker, 1989). Acker suggests that in recognising that patriarchy can provide the identification and focus of a theoretical object, a subsequent rationale and development of thinking concerning the subordination of women by men should follow (Acker, 1989). The argument is that if the structure of the prolific, dominant position of men is understood, it can also be dismantled. The politic of emancipation would suggest that if the structure of dominance is dismantled, something else can be built which can enable the realistic liberation of women. With regard to this phenomenon, the use of patriarchy as a framework to analyse systemic male power, can "give voice to the previously silenced, as well as increase understanding of their oppression" (ibid). There are, however, criticisms in considering the effectiveness patriarchy as a framework or systemic form of domination. Radical feminists suggest patriarchy produces a universalism of women which is rejected by wider feminism. It is argued that "notions of difference" (Waller in Waller & Marcos, 2005) are limited to categories produced and perpetuated by "the logocentric blanket" described as a system of binary oppositions in which one term is privileged as the norm and the other is subordinated as…well…the…"other" (Johnson, 1994 viii-x) The argument continues that ""White" academic feminism…has, in fact been criticised for at least the past three decades for its tendency to domesticate difference, to see as its mission the choreographing of heterogeneous phenomena into something like the unified field theory sought by Western physics" (Lorde 1984 p. 114-123 cited in Waller & Marcos, 2005; Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, xxxiii; hooks 1981; 1984).

Patriarchy being seen as "trans-cultural", "trans-historical" and "universal", that is, that women everywhere were being oppressed by men in the same if not similar ways is seen as problematic (Acker, 1989 p. 237). In other words, the biological essentialism that this type of patriarchy put forward, suggested a limiting of women's lives, reinforcing the notion of the universal woman – and for that matter, the universal man (Beechey, 1979; Acker, 1989). However the realities of women's lives in a globalized environment suggest something different. Islamic feminism demonstrates the role young Muslim women play as

"intercultural mediators". Silvestri offers the Muslim headscarf as an example where Western countries may view it as a tool of female oppression, many young Muslim women choose to wear the veil, calling themselves European Muslim (Silvestri, 2009 cited in Pasamonik, 2016). The suggestion is that the emancipatory element of the integrative power of the veil which enables Muslim women to occupy public spaces is neither appreciated or accepted by European Governments or indeed its communities.

Several observations are made with regard to patriarchy which inform my theoretical choice. Firstly, feminist research suggests too little is known about women's experience of oppression, their histories and their experiences (Acker, 1989; Smith, 1987). Where little is known, assumptions are often made. Secondly, the complexity of how patriarchy consciously or unconsciously affects institutions and every aspect of daily life should be acknowledged (Acker, 1989). An important point for this study is that women can be abstracted within both mainstream and feminist research (Sinclair, 2014), which can result in a remoteness which fails to frame them appropriately within the research. This can too often lead to conclusions of gender neutrality or failures to connect with the realities of women's experiences of subordination or oppression. Lastly is the consideration of how gender neutrality is positioned and invariably based on the assumption of the male experience. This reasoning suggests that outcomes often point to highly gendered concepts/frameworks which preserve male dominance, but also obscure the importance of women's experiences (Acker, 1989 p.237). Empirical and theoretical research has widened knowledge regarding women, their situations, historical impact and associated processes of gender inequality, their subordination and social order (Hartsock, 1983; Pateman, 1986; Acker, 1989; Connell, 1998). Consistent government reports concerning gender within the FRS suggest continuing systemic forms of domination of women, which have upheld the structural arrangements of male dominance within the FRS, adversely affecting women's inclusion. As such the notion of the patriarchal lineage of FRS culture must be considered against women's voices in order for the dominant positioning of men to be adequately understood. The offering of patriarchy as a theoretical stance attributes "women's domination by men either to nature or social necessity rather than to social structural processes, unequal power, or exploitation" (Acker, 1989 p. 235). It is argued that the concept of patriarchy offered a focus for this critique.

It is from this foundational position that the ensuing conceptual shift from patriarchy to gender can be explored where gender is seen as the "theoretical object" (Acker, 1989 p. 238), that is Acker suggests "From asking about how the subordination of women is produced, maintained, and changed we move to questions about how gender is involved in processes and structures that previously have been conceived as having nothing to do with gender" (p. 238; Smith, 2008).

Gender brings into the discussion the differentiations in the structural, relational and symbolic for men and women. Wider research on gender which explores masculinities, not only discuss the subordination of women but also the types of power that men wield over men deepening the understanding of patriarchal structures (Connell, 1998). From the standpoint and assumption that all social relations are gendered, new questions can be asked of institutions and structures. (Acker, 1989) In this light, patriarchy has been argued as too limiting a tool for analysis based on tensions of universalism and essentialism. However, Beechey (1979, p. 97) suggests its criticality:
"if it is to be abandoned, it is essential that we find some more satisfactory way of conceptualising male domination and female subordination." Enloe's view "Patriarchy. How passé. How yesterday" (2017, p.15) gives way to helpful thinking "Patriarchy is everyday sexism, but is more than everyday sexism…Patriarchy enforces misogyny…produces gender inequality…is a system…sustainable" (2017, p.16). It is argued that gender alone lacks the "critical-political sharpness" of patriarchy, which in the move to gender analysis alone may weaken the connections between political issues and theoretical analysis (Acker, 1989 p.239-240). Mindful of the additional platform to question that gender brings, my conclusion is that patriarchy is not a theoretical principal to be abandoned as it presents strong systemic, institutional and cultural arguments from which to consider gender within the FRS.

The culture of the FRS is a peculiar one for which the notion of patriarchy can easily be assumed and conclusions drawn based on little but the structure of male dominance alone. Given the context of patriarchy, consideration will also be given to understanding ensuing iterations of masculinities, in particular hegemonic masculinities. The theory suggests the denigration of other men as well as the subjugation of women serve as constructions which "exclude and include, that intimidate and exploit" widening our understanding of dominance

(Lorber, 1998 p. 427). In her work on masculinities, Connell suggests semiotic approaches that move the notion away from personality-based definitions of masculinity, and offers a definition of masculinity "through a system of symbolic difference in which masculine and feminine places are contrasted...The phallus is master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack" (Connell, 2005, p.70). The use of this definition is suggested as one that is effective in cultural analysis, thinking of masculinity as a process through which gender relationships are conducted. It is not enough to observe gender relationships as merely masculine (men) and feminine (women), but explore the fact that realities exist that enable patriarchy in ways that we have not considered (Scott-Samuel, Crawshaw & Oakley, 2015). Although there are many definitions of masculinity from normative theories which offer what men "ought" to be, to the essentialist argument which looks to define the "core of the masculine" (Connell, 2005 p. 68). As such, I have developed clarity that the exploration in my study is specifically with regard to enabling further understanding of the established male relationships and culture normalities into which women have entered.

In conclusion, moving forward I will use Ortner's (2014) definition of patriarchy as a structure. As a woman with significant experience of working as a senior manager in the Fire Service, it holds much resonance. It will be helpful to consider this definition when discussing the findings of this study.

"Patriarchy is a "structure" in the technical sense; it is a set of relations between relations. It is organized around three dyads and their many kinds of interaction: (1) the relationship between a patriarchal figure of some sort and other men; (2) the many homosocial but heterosexual relationships among the men themselves; and (3) the relationships between men and women. In the most classic form of the patriarchal structure, there is a leader who both rewards and punishes the men; there is a body of men who compete among themselves for status and power within the group and in the eyes of the leader; and there are relationships and non-relationships with women, who are either excluded from the group, or included on condition of being subordinated and controlled." (Ortner, 2014, p.535).

An illustration of how patriarchal organisation is mobilised, points to an active masculinity: "in the service of producing…aggressive masculinity...endemic to the male group" (Ortner, 2014 p.534). Military examples are given which highlight that the exclusion of women tends to be more absolute, with the boundaries between men and women, masculine and feminine

being more heavily patrolled. This standpoint is powerful, positional and evocative, and holds to a very masculine-centric core, which associates heavily with top-down, hierarchal male dominated organisations. It is of interest, however, that whilst this is offered as a structure, the writer is quick to relegate the formation of patriarchy as old, describing its journey from father-like power to the complexities of multiple arrangements of gender power (Ortner 2014, p. 534). As I reflect on the structure and make-up of the FRS in England, the three areas of patriarchy, must be explored as it concerns gender culture and the impact of gender relations (Parkin & Maddocks, 1993): the symbol or core constituent of patriarchy that exists between men, the homosocial relationship that exists between men (that leaves women out), and the relationships between men and women.

Neo-patriarchy

There is a theoretical perspective of patriarchy which, in my mind, questions the intention of the state, and in doing so challenges central Government for allowing such an appalling lack of progress to continue as long as it has within the FRS. It challenges the leadership and national Fire Sector bodies for its apathy in accepting a status quo approach to gender equality progress. Equality legislation exists with the view of quelling disparity which successive governments have supported to varying degrees. Neo-patriarchy is presented as the acceptable face of capitalism recognising the necessity of the equality narrative but which in practice continues the highly gendered labour processes based on patriarchal divide (Campbell, 2014 p. 13). This theoretical stance adds another layer to understanding the multifaceted nature of patriarchy. A helpful illustration is found through a discussion on neo-patriarchy when looking at Nigerian politics (defined as a "modern patriarchy") by Omojola and Yartey (2016). They offer a description of male dominance within politics which advocates that women's empowerment is not overtly opposed. They argue the viewpoint that feminism has not worked, and that men continue to hold resources and power, as well as controlling epistemic and cultural structures perpetuating dominant narratives. The two variants argued are the "passive and active" elements of neo-patriarchy (p.83) (Fleschenberg & Bari, 2015). The suggestion is that passivity encourages women's empowerment at the same time as continuing to support the positioning (power) and full participation of men within the Nigerian political environment due to women's lack of capacity. The neo-patriarch argues for women's visibility whilst also continuing to resource and energise the perpetuation

of men in positions of power continuing the cycle of patriarchy. This is helpful in conceptualising the disconnect between the FRS lack of progress as a body, and central government's year on year inaction in this regard. Whilst this version of patriarchy remains under developed, it presents an alternative voice which can speak to the realities of the externally driven gender equality demands of organisations that are not ready or willing for change. This helps to understand the ways in which patriarchy shows itself, and the intricacies of wider governing relationships which allow this to happen.

The Whitehall directive for change of the underrepresentation of minority groups in the firefighting and improved leadership behaviours is a journey that became formalised almost twenty years ago. The Thematic Review into Equality and Fairness within the Fire Service (Home Office, 1999a) mimicked the timing of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry within the Police Force (Home Office, 1999b). Yet, the trajectory of measurable improvements for change have appeared to yield different results. Neo-patriarchy presents an interesting platform from which to consider how women have historically fitted in to the FRS. It further suggests an abdication of leadership by central government regarding the lack of any significant progress within the FRS: they too have a hand in the accountability of the FRS lack of commitment, which public castigation of the FRS cannot evade.

Presenting the FRS as a patriarchal organisation based on its history, the context of gender and predominance of men and male culture, I believe is sufficiently plausible as an initial approach. Whilst it is evident that men have dominated the organisational space of the FRS for many decades, what is not clear is the set of conditions and generalised features of women's experiences within it, at varying levels.

It is my conclusion that the need to acknowledge (and investigate) the historical alliance and tradition of patriarchy and the power relationships between women and men within the FRS (Jenkins, 1998) is imperative within this study.

2.2 Gender

In this section I aim to explore what is meant by gender, its significance in terms of its construct, and the power associated with the gender order. Although explored in the

methodology chapter, the criticality of feminist thinking is a necessary consideration of the political and social journey of women. It is, therefore, right to acknowledge that gender theory does not stand alone and is framed by the wider intersected writings of feminist theory.

The work of Sinclair (2014) argues for the scrutiny of the systematic (sustained yet routinized) way in which women are discriminated against and demeaned because they are women (p.17; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). The absence of women within the historical makeup of the FRS in England is heavily documented with annual reporting of the low numbers of operational women fire-fighters throughout the United Kingdom (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013/14; 2014-2015; 2016-17; Home Office, 2016a). In this regard Sinclair (2013a; 2013b; 2014) helps to synthesise areas of significance. The argument offered is that when women are absent assumptions are made, which usually allows for the systematic and continual discrimination of women. Operational women make up a very small percentage of overall numbers of the headcount of FRS operational personnel overall, with a seemingly growing but disproportionate number of women are found at leadership levels. The absence of women from the FRS although gender targets have been present for 18 years, offers a platform for interrogation which has yet to be grappled with to any significant degree. There may be a scope between the absence of women and bringing women into view, for helpful information to emerge, which offers a unique story of gender equality within the FRS (Rosener, 1990).

My aim, in this study is to bring "women into view – both empirically and theoretically – directly challenging what had long been assumed because of leaving women out" (Anderson, 2005, p. 437; Porter, 1987). The lack of data concerning women's experience within the FRS can only support the aims of this study which are to centralise the experiences of women in order to make sense of how gender operates within the FRS, and its impact on women's equality.

I acknowledge that within the remit of defining gender a number of debates emerge that would warrant discussion, but may widen the focus of this chapter to a point of unwieldiness. With this in mind I will deliberately narrow the discussion to the areas which will support understanding of how gender processes work, and therefore impact of gender biases.

Conceptualising gender

"As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change" (Lorde, 1984a p.2; Coltrane, 2010).

Gender research has, over the years, been both complex and far reaching. Gender research has both spanned decades and a multiplicity of positions. From a feminist standpoint the words of Audre Lorde (1984a; 1984b; 1988) acknowledge the internal segregation that has occurred through the structuration of gender (Giddens, 1984; 2009; Huffman, Cohen & Pearlman, 2010). Understanding gender as a process is explored in terms of the issues of the cultural construction of gender, which argues that the distinction between the category of sex and gender are more of a theoretical exercise than existent (Butler, 1990). A fundamental question is asked of gender, whether it is what one is said to have, or a person is said to be? In referencing Beauvoir, one response suggests that gender only appears to have relevance if it is the categorisation of the feminine (Butler, 1990). The position suggests the masculine gender and the universal person are conflated, and therefore only define women by their difference.

The grouping of the socio-cultural understanding of gender (Andersen, 2005) helpfully creates a conceptualisation of gender as an accomplished activity (Zimmerman & West, 1987), institution (Acker, 1992; Lorber, 1998; Martin, 2003), and the axis of stratification (Andersen & Collins, 2013) – much of which I will explore briefly. There is argument which suggests that the differences between the genders are less pervasive than research would have us believe, and that social context and individual learning capacities affect, influence and even change the experience of how feminine and masculine behaviours are identified (Lott, 1990).

The issue of divisiveness concerns gender distinctions (Lorber, 1994). The distinctions provide the ingredients to produce structured gender inequality (1994, p.292). Lorber's work is in the company of writers, such as Acker (1992, in Sharfitz, Ott & Yang), who talk of the persistence of male advantage, Joan Scott (1986) who argues that gender is a pervasive symbol of power, and Zimmerman & West (1987) who describes gender as the manual of procedure of the masculine and feminine. However, in *"Paradoxes of Gender"* (Lorber, 1994) there is a step away from the tendency of feminist writing to push the concept of gender

towards a patriarchal understanding, rather offering a more general definition. The term gender is offered in that it "encompasses all social relations that separate people into differentiated gender statuses" (Lorber,1994 p.3; Kennelly, Merz & Lorber, 2001). However, much like patriarchy, the suggestion is that it is all pervasive, everywhere and at the basis of every process. A wider but positional understanding of the term is presented, which explores and questions the inevitability of gender as an institution:

"gender as an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself" (Giampetro-Meyer, 1994 p. 131).

The ever-complex nature of theorizing gender has itself created confusions. A comprehensive definition of gender as an achieved status constructed through psychological, cultural and social means was robustly offered (Zimmerman & West, 1987), only a decade later, for the authors to talk of the confusion arising from their articulation of the meaning of gender. The relationship between biological and cultural processes, they conclude, needed to be reflexive (Zimmerman & West, 1987). Concluding that gender is heavily affected by institutional processes, it is cited as being

"the socially guided shaping of expectations, behaviours, actions and achievements and further away from individual unfettered expressions of 'gender'…" (1987 p.126). Zimmerman and West's work seems to recognise the pervasive and consistent role of the institution in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and acceptable normalities for men and women. They conceptualise gender as being produced in daily situations, and the notion of the gender role blighting or obscuring our view of this. So rather, we are distracted by what we assume gender is, and possibly miss the ways that gender is created, or can become, manifest. When exploring the traditional FRS, it is described as falling into a category of work with "arguably the most entrenched gender segregation" where the "ideal type of worker is culturally reified as masculine and superior to women" (Ness, 2012 p. 62; Thurnell-Read & Parker, 2008; Wright, Eaton & Skagerberg, 2015). Research which considered gender and the achievement of skilled status in the workplace - with its focus on women leaders in the Fire Service (Woodfield, 2016), settled on the notion that

"when an occupation is male-dominated and the occupational profile masculine…there is a further challenge by the context-specific, socio-political construct of men as the ideal type of worker and women as the 'wrong' sex" (Hatmaker 2012 p.383). With women viewed as the wrong sex because of the context of the FRS and the politics of gender, it begs the question of what real chance women have for equality within such an environment. Clearly the concept of sex role can support our understanding the historical journey of FRS culture. An important note is the notion of the mobilisation of masculinities when thinking about an organisational profile of predominantly men. Yancey suggests the mobilisation of masculinities are practices wherein two or more men jointly bring to bear…masculinity" (Yancey, 2001 p.558 cited in Martin, 2003). The suggestion is that women experience deep discouragement, negative feelings of exhaustion, being othered, feeling different and excluded. Essentially the gendered practices having the potential effect of women doubting their own competence. The argument is that gender should be viewed as a practice, a "system of action", institutionalised but also dynamic, emergent local and variable (Martin, 2003 p.351; Ladele, 2010). In identifying the ways in which gendered processes are created or become manifest, I will be able to explore the enforcing nature of how inequity is produced and sustained within FRS culture.

It is of particular interest that Zimmerman & West talk of gender by way of individuals organizing their activities to "reflect and express gender", and in like fashion are predisposed to view the behaviour of others in a similar way (1987 p.287). I am curious about the extent to which this view of gender may exist within Fire Service circles, and what the expression of gender may have meant for both women and men.

Gender and organisations

Building on the notion of patriarchy is organizational gender theory, which problematizes the prescribed gender structure of organisations, not the women within them. It is here that I acknowledge the feminist position of subordinating power residing mainly with men which oppresses and subjugates women. From this place it is helpful to consider the experience of women within organisations, as the FRS is a public sector organisation. There is an argument which strongly advocates towards a theory of gendered organisations (Acker, 1990; Schien, Mueller, Lituchy & Lui, 1996; Sanghera, 2012;). As discussed, the assertion is that whilst

feminists recognize the significant presence of male dominance in hierarchal organisations, the given narrative is that organizational structures are gender neutral. The argument against such an approach, is that the "universal disembodied worker" does not exist, and that gendered nature of organisations assume a worker position based on men (Acker, 1990 p. 139). A Public Administration paper about women in the UK, cites that most public sector organizations are gendered since they are predominately managed by men. It argued that the structural power and decision-making were such that they were historically the domain of men (Miller & McTavish, 2011; Fawcett Society, 2013; Razzu, 2014). They use a range of earlier gender research findings to support their position, giving examples of male participation in all areas and forms of political and social life (ibid; Acker 1992 in Shafritz et al). The absence of feminist perspective is argued, together with dominant masculine norms, cultural practices and belief systems, which mean that the issue of gendered relations continues to establish itself within the context of power and bureaucracy. The argument therefore follows that policy is affected, as well as decision making embedded in a gender structure that biases and rewards men. The narrative suggests the omission by mainstream writers to include the impact of marginalization by gender within organisations,
"Organisations themselves institutionalise definitions of femininity and masculinity, arrange gender hierarchies, construct gendered cultures, and define gender-appropriate jobs." (Connell, 2012 p. 1; Pettigrew, 1979).

It may be the case that the FRS reviews suggest that the FRS have organized themselves around a masculine form of hierarchy, and constructed gender structures that resist women taking on the firefighter role. However, there are questions of whether the institution itself is undergoing a slow but sure transformation that realigns definitions of femininity and masculinity as the sector reforms under central government dictate. My research question, *'symbolism or inclusion? A study of operational women, women leaders, gender targets and gender equality, 2000 to 2017 in the Fire & Rescue Service in England'* is motivated by whether the FRS has understood its own organisational DNA enough to consider the true impact of patriarchy upon how it arranges itself in terms of gender.

In the wider public sector there is an acknowledgment of the disparaging number of women in senior positions, proportionate to the number of women employed (Halford and Leonard,

2001; Brownell, 1994; Connell, 1985; Collinson and Hearn, 1995). The FRS, for operational women, appears to presents an alternative – which also presents as an anomaly. This suggests something tangible may be occurring in terms of gender equality within FRSs that may not be recognized, acknowledged or heralded as good practice. However, it also appears out of step with its reported cultural and systemic framework. It suggests an interesting yet surprising juxtaposition.

Gender inequality within the public sector has been well rehearsed within research (Mills and Tancred, 1992; Alvesson and Billing, 1997). The issues seem mainly to pivot around the structural, institutional, and cultural disadvantages which occur for women (Flood and Pease, 2005; Fineman, 2009; Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2011). The literature presents strong arguments regarding the disparity of women and men within leadership, and discusses the place and impact of an organisation's historical context upon such arrangements. It also proposes a pathology of inequity for gender relations within the public sector (Lewis, Simpson & Sealy, 2010; Johns, 2013; Davies, 2013).

Although attention has been given within literature to gender inequality within the public sector little exists for women in the Fire Sector. Subscribing to the ideology that power and decision remain in the domain of men (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013; Committee for Economic Development Australia, 2013; Bevan & Hood, 2004), attention again has turned to the notion of masculinities within the public sector. The body of work that has emerged on men's involvement in the gender relations of workplaces and organisations has grown significantly, building on insights into men and masculinities, and organizational theory (Flood and Pease, 2005; Moller, 2005). Collinson and Hearn (1996a) discuss the power relationships between men and women, and how significant management discourses, male traditions and practice impact women. It is also suggested that the discourse concerning masculinities within management can also provide a layer of understanding as concerns widely acceptable organizational behaviours, and power relations (Jenkins, 1998; Hearn, Holter, Scambor & White; 2014). Equally concerning, but not yet extrapolated in this discussion is the apparent incongruence between government's accountability for the behaviour and outcomes of the public sector concerning gender equity.

The variable of power

In '*The Diary Project: revealing the gendered organization'*, a feminist critique of organization theory, it argues for gender as a stratification of power recognised as an integral part of organizational structure rather than the add on function that it usually turns out to be (Plowman, 2010 p. 28). The introduction into the gendered nature of organizations suggests that despite the variations of numbers or organisational balances of women to men, the structure and function are often shaped by gender. This, it is argued, determines patterns of access and control over power and resources. Referring directly to the FRS, this position proposes, that in order to define its gendered nature, the gendered substructure of the FRS must be engaged with, or, in other words, the deep subculture (beliefs, values, norms, practice which define culture) must be explored (Rao and Kelleher, 2003; Rao, Sandler, Kelleher and Miller, 2015).

Viewing power in a macro context, research reviewed aspects of the mechanisms of power, as well as the complexity of its technologies and strength (Foucault, 1994; Ahonen, Tierari, Meriläinen, & Pullen, 2014). Arguing a concept of modality an offer of particular types of power is positioned, such as sovereign, judicial, and pastor powers, which show themselves in terms of the structure and social organisation of institutions (Ahonen et al, 2014). In understanding this, connections can be made between understanding power as a modality, its conceptualisation and the contexts in which it operates (Nealon, 2008; Veyne, 2010). The context of power should be present when raising questions of domination and insubordination, with a clear view that power structures have a relationship with individual experiences of oppression (Ahonen et al 2014 p.264). Recognition of day to day operations and processes, which translate to normative behaviours and occur at macro levels, essentially reflect the structure of organisations. It is within these structures that women operate.

Discourse which argues the strength of gender as a social structure, aligns itself with the narrative of modalities of power, social organization, and institution (Risman, 2004). The well-rehearsed debate that is offered that gender is *"done"* in every social interaction, reaffirms that we are socialized into a patriarchal world (Bem, 1993; Risman, 2009).

Finally, Acker (1992 in Shafritz et al) identifies four sets of processes which define the gendered organisation:

1. ordinary organisational practices which produce gendered hierarchies in jobs, work divisions and wage differentials;
2. sexist and gender stereotypical symbols and images which perpetuate a form of consciousness that rarely questions underlying gender practices;
3. inter-personal interactions between women and men, women and women, men and men which endorse patterns of domination and subordination; and
4. how individuals adapt to fit the expectations of a gendered organisation.

In using this definition reference can be made to the issue of context for understanding gender norms within an organisation (Plowman, 2010). The view is that the processes cannot be separated from what occurs on a macro level within societies. It further suggests that through these processes the continuance of advantage as well as disadvantage occur. Lastly, issues of control and power (whether actual or perceived) can be discussed as the patterns that create the divisions and distinctions of male and female, as well as the masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990). Though yet to be challenged through data collection, is there a question of the gender assumption of male bias, which has become the integral fabric of FRS organisational construction, because it is so overwhelmingly male? I am interested in Acker's use of this as a basis to begin theoretical exploration (1990 p.139). The discussion names inherent cultural aspects of organizational ways of being, that invisibly continue the cycle of inequality such as rules, procedure, and hierarchy (Stainback, Kleiner and Skaggs, 2016). It is evident through this work on gendering organizational theory that much theoretical debate has occurred, referring to the endless reorganization of gender and permutations of male power, or in other words the steadfastness of male advantage (p. 34). Although organisations may seem to operate free of gender bias, it can be argued that culturally they actually reflect "longstanding distinctions between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and power and domination in ways that aid the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequality" (Stainback et al, 2016 p.110).

This position is not concerned with understanding the persistence of gender-based inequality within the workplace (unlike Acker), but seeks to explain how change can occur. It considers

identifying the conditions that might support the "undoing" of gendered process within organisations, dismantling regimes of inequality, even where the appearance of gender-neutral is present (Stainback et al, 2016 p. 130). Organizations are argued as the one place in which definitions of gender are created, sustained and reproduced, and importantly, commonly understood. The theoretical underpinning of gender and organisations by Kanter (1977; 1993), Ferguson (1984), Feldberg & Glenn (1979) and MacKinnon (1979; 1989), offer both empirical and theoretical investigations of organizational structure and process (Acker, 1992 p. 140).

It is important to find a way to identify the gender processes existent within the FRS, and in so doing understand their impact on FRS culture and women within it. There is a story that exists below the surface as to why the gender statistics are so disproportionate, when the organizational processes and structures may not be dissimilar to other uniformed services.

In conclusion, gender – the cornerstone of this research – remains a mix of complexities which must be understood in context. The notion that FRS is a highly gendered organisation, must be considered within the context of its history of masculinity, the constructions of gender within its history, and what exists now in terms of legacy. It is important that the impact of gender processes upon the day to day existence of women within the culture FRS is explored and understood as it relates to gender equality.

I began this chapter by trying to briefly unpack a basic understanding of what gender is, only to find that notionally, gender only really appears to exist to categorise and distinguish women as separate. The research suggests that gender is the patterning of difference and domination which distinguishes between women and men and that favours men. Its inherent nature has meant its embeddedness structurally within social, cultural and political processes. I further find that where gender and organisations are concerned, gender processes can be established as a means of creating and continuing advantage and disadvantage. With the added component of power, it is defined as an institution to which most expressions of gender are predisposed for others to follow.

Accepting that gender structures exist, I am interested to understand the means of identifying how they are practically and systematically created or upheld. In the case of the FRS, my interest not only lies with how gender processes become systematic, but also how the legacy of historical gender processes (which should be outdated) can continue to strongly impact gender equality.

Matters of equality, diversity and inclusion have long been a part of ongoing organizational tensions and top down debate for change in the modernization of the British FRS (Home Office, 2016b). It would appear that the institutional, systematic exclusion of women, people with disabilities, from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (BAME), and who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) has been well documented over the past two decades at least, through government office reviews, inspections and peer led scrutiny (Burke, 1994; Home Office, 1999a; Baigent, 2001; Bain, 2002; Audit Commission, 2002; 2008b; Department for Communities and Local Government 2013/14; 2014-15; 2016-17). Whilst the FRS may show extremes in terms of the lack of diversity in employee groups, it is one of many public service bodies who have struggled to fully grasp the challenges of equality legislation.

It is with this context that within this section of the chapter that I will seek to briefly look at the wider aspects of equality legislation. With a specific focus on Sex Discrimination laws I will explore the associated approach of gender mainstreaming, concluding the chapter by considering the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010 s 149).

I will begin with an outline of the Gender Equality Duty in order to create the context for a discussion regarding the FRS as a public body, with legal responsibilities.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully discuss the development of equality legislation in the UK, to specifically explore the gender equality duty to understand what has been required of public sector organisations. This will also help to develop a view on how the FRS is positioned.

The Gender Equality Duty

With the raft of embedded sex discrimination legislation (Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 (Repealed), the Equal Pay Act 1970, Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) Regulations, 2005), one would presume that the nature of the experience of women in the workplace has changed exponentially with the passage of time. The notion that women's growing participation in the workplace would alone redress inequity for women is in itself a naivety, with barriers to equality being deeply seated in issues of power (Beveridge, Nott & Stephen, 2017). It is arguable that the dominance of men in the fabric of government has continued to produce both legislation and policy in which women are perceived as men perceive them, rather than the realities of their live being acknowledged and centralised (MacKinnon, 1989).

The argument is offered that the root causes of inequality for women are not tackled through legislation or policy where outcomes point to equal treatment and that the equality narrative suggests that men and women receive equal treatment (OECD, 2008; Beveridge et al, 2017). The inference then is that men become the standard for equal treatment that women are measured against, which is problematic in itself. The argument suggests a complexity that sits beneath regulation "discrimination is much more than illogical decision- making. It is a complex mix of gendered assumptions, which permeate society" (ibid p. 388).

The context for the Gender Equality Duty (The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice, 2007) within the FRS is the Thematic Inspection into Equality and Fairness in the FRS (Home Office, 1999a; Equal Opportunities Task Group, 2001a; 2001b). The report outlined that in 1999, of the 48,000 uniformed staff, just under 1% were women, showing a slightly higher figure for black men, reported alongside a culture of bullying and harassment and ferocious resistance to diversity within the workplace. Whilst I have introduced these findings previously in the introductory chapter, it is important here to outline the classifications of the FRS a public body (or local authority). FRSs can, and do, operate as stand-alone Fire Authorities with the same types of devolved responsibilities as local authorities. The model of a Combined Fire Authority gives respective Fire Authorities the responsibility of providing governance arrangements for a combination of local authorities within the unitary geographical boundary. In 1996 this became a reality for many FRSs. The final type of Fire Authority body is simply where the FRS operates under the governance framework of a local authority. With this in

mind the suggestion is that FRS may have dropped out of view where it comes to governance and accountability, with only the FRS (and its accountable bodies) being interested in its performance regarding gender, and the wider issues of equality. A world away from the average 65% female makeup of the public sector employee base in England, numbers that are nearer zero on a nought to ten scale within a public sector body, demand exploration beyond the obvious (House of Commons, 2019). There remains a strong public equational perception that fire trucks + white men = Fire Service, which for better or for worse seems to lessen the degree to which the governance of the Fire Service is held to account by the public. However, there is an imperative attached to thinking through the FRS as a grouping of organisations with the same accountabilities, governance principles and responsibilities as all public sector bodies. This fact, for many reasons, has appeared to have dropped out of sight from a Fire Service leadership and accountability, happy to accept the status quo of a public body that was neither diverse or accepting of difference, especially women (Home Office, 1999a p. 23; Bain, 2002 p.25, 33,85; Baigent 2001, 2008).

In 2005, as a result of changes to European Union Equality Laws, a number of changes were made to the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 (Repealed) (known as the Employment Equality (Sex Regulations) 2005), with particular regard to harassment at work, pregnancy discrimination, as well as refining the definition of indirect discrimination (Department of Trade and Industry, 2005). In 2006 all Equality and Human Rights responsibilities were brought together under the accountability of one single body under the Equality Act, 2006. The Equality Act 2006, not only established the Commission for Equality and Human Rights replacing all previously presiding commissions (Equal Opportunities Commission, Disabilities Rights Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality), but also outlined the six legal equality strands of operation within it. These strands were specifically age, gender, disability, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. The Act also conferred a duty upon public authorities, for the first time, to promote equality of opportunity between women and men (The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice, 2007), and to eliminate discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007; Branney, 2012; Conley & Page, 2010; 2014). This brought gender in line with the existing public authority positive duty levied within race and disability legislation to promote equality of opportunity, not merely to respond to incidences of discrimination. The existing race equality

duty was borne out of the recommendations of the Mapherson Report into the structural and systemic response to the death of a Black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, by the Metropolitan Police (Home Office, 1999b). This left a marked effect on the future of legislation within the UK, moving public bodies towards heightened and transparent governance and accountability arrangements. The move towards the extension of the gender duties for all public bodies across the United Kingdom, under the Equality Act (2006) was one, it is suggested, of many of the tools and legislative checklists that were brought about to combat gender inequality (O'cinneide, 2005, p. 91; David & Guerrina, 2013).

Hailed as the "biggest change in sex equality legislation in 30 years since the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act itself", the Gender Equality Duty (GED) (The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice, 2007) was heralded by some, as a move away from reactive anti-discriminatory laws, towards an outcome focused positive duty (Fredman, 2001; Fredman and Spencer, 2006 p. 1; Fredman, 2006; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006; House of Commons Select Committee, 2013). In other words, public sector bodies were now expected to be clear about their intentions on how to both eliminate discriminatory practices and behaviours. They were to promote equality through planning and policy activities showing measurable outcomes, which were monitored. Indications of indolent patterns of inequality between men and women continued to be referenced despite localized achievements (Conley & Page 2010 p. 322). The notion of the GED, described as non-passive in its intention, provided that it was no longer enough for public sector bodies to simply take a compliant approach. Instead they were having to grapple with the how, why and what of policy and practice, publishing details of what they are doing to actively promote equality (Fredman, 2014).

The aims of the GED intended to combat intention and unintentional policy outcomes,

"The duty is intended to address the fact that, despite 30 years of individual legal rights to sex equality, there is still widespread discrimination – sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional – and persistent gender inequality. Policies and practices that seem neutral can have a significantly different effect on women and on men, often contributing to greater gender inequality and poor policy outcomes. Individual legal rights have not been enough by themselves to change this." (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006 p. 7).

There is a primary criticism of the GED, in that the framework for gender equality was founded fundamentally in a gender segregated civil service. The central dilemma voiced back to Whitehall was that the framework's development, and its ultimate formulation involved senior management. The civil service was known to be disproportionately represented with senior positions being held by men (Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman, 1981; Larson & Coe, 1999; Page and Jenkins, 2005; Thomas & Davies, 2005; Pederson & Hartley, 2008; Miller & McTavish, 2009). Essentially, the argument is one of oxymoron where

"…arguably the lack of women in the senior echelons of the civil service negates the representation of women in the formulation of public policy" (Fredman & Spencer, 2006).

Fundamental to this discussion is the conceptual premise of acknowledging policies as gendering practices (Page, 2009; Bacchi, 1999 in Bacchi, 2017). Offering the conceptualisation of policies as potentially gendering practices accepts the platform of the non-neutral categorisation of "men" and "women" but assume them as the "sites of political debate" [the quotation marks around "women" and "men" used to signify the assumption] (Bacchi, 2017 p.20; Bacchi, 2009 in Bacchi, 2017). If we accept the position that policy plays a central role in the organisation of society, we can also argue and that men and women in the organisation of society within such policy are categorised in ways that inherently produce inequality. It is argued that at the core of how policies are developed and analysed, questions should be asked of how the policy is potentially gendering and how it can encourage the production of behaviours and characteristics conventionally associated with…"women" and "men". This then raises the issue of the accepted practice of reference to considering the "effect" that a policy may have on people and their lives without consideration of how policies constitute who we are in terms of gender (Bacchi, 2017 p.21; Page, 2009). The suggestion then is the way that we look at gender and policy is fundamentally flawed, with the omission occurring at a foundational macro level. The example is given of the issue of lack of adequately funded childcare places which have a detrimental effect on women at work. The omission is that the thinking suggests consideration of the fundamental policy practice which continues to assume women as carers, linking to the non-neutrality of the politicised categorisation of "men" and "women". This, it is argued, continues to ongoing shaping of gendered processes and practices (Chia, 1996 in Bacchi, 2017).

Given, that the majority of gatekeepers for gender equality policy and practice, as well as deciding what qualifies as gender equity are men, is it reasonable to suggest a strong connection between the lack improved outcomes for women and patriarchal arrangements? There is a wide body of research exploring why, despite legislator and regulatory rigor for gender equality, true disparity still exists between men and women in the workplace (Mitchell, 1971; Zellner, 1972; Millett, 1977; Beechey, 1979; Hartman, 1979; Squires, 2005; Conley and Page, 2010; McDonough and Harrison, 2013). Given the legislative context of moving from anti-discriminatory practice to gender focused planning, it is an appropriate juncture to pause to answer this question. This discussion is as wide as it is contentious. The inextricable link between power, social structure and gender is prevalent where matters of legislation, employment responsibilities and organizational management exist. A pattern and path-ology of gender inequality within public administration based on feminist theory is presented, which is a profoundly persuasive argument (Vanzant, 2011; Miller & McTavish, 2011). This assertion is further underwritten with examples of the over-dominance of male participation in all forms of socio-political life (Acker, 1992; Miller & McTavish, 2009; Miller & McTavish, 2011). The research goes on to question how gender shows itself within the field of public administration in the UK. Aiming to show impact through the absence of feminist perspective, masculine normalities are framed within the context of prevalent practices and dominant belief systems. This further embeds gender disparity in terms of power and decision making.

The significant inference is made that even academic contributions made by women are heavily biased towards the masculine suggesting that our reference to learning (and how we learn) is also highly gendered (Miller and McTavish, 2011; Korac-Kadabadse & Korac-Kadabadse, 1998). It is easy to see how such path-ology can be argued with compulsion across all disciplines, raising more questions regarding the historical context of gender relations and power. The case for understanding the concept of hegemonic masculinity in this context is an essential variable, as matters of discrimination are rendered invisible or pushed underground by virtue of their subtly (Sang, Dainty & Ison, 2014). Examples include experiences of glass ceiling, and pipeline blockages to progression which remain unconquerable for most women (Powell, 1999; Myerson & Fletcher, 1999; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia & Vannerman, 2001; Connell et al 2005; Benschop, Brink, Doorewaard & Leenders, 2013; Johns, 2013). Whilst I can only hint at the magnitude and complexity of the argument

as regards the realities of gendered power relations, the discourse is overwhelming. The idea of the structural legacy of inequity presents a bleak future for women, as it has occurred in the wake of legislative and regulatory activity. So what of now, where gender equality is deemed at its best? Perhaps an alternative lens is needed. Were gender understood and worked with from the perspective of the organisational, and structural disposition of women's experiences, we may have the start of a useful conversation.

Gender Mainstreaming

The centralisation of gender within the policy process is what is commonly expressed as the purpose of *Gender Mainstreaming (GM).* One definition outlines it as the

"reorganisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that the gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels" (Council of Europe 2004, p. 12).

McGauran further outlines the intended purpose to be that

"Such analysis of mainstream policies from a gender perspective allows inequalities that are indirectly caused or supported by mainstream policies to be made visible and be addressed, with the goal of altering systemic inequalities to support a more equal society for women and men." (McGauran, 2009 p. 216)

It is suggested that the aims of GM were to fundamentally alter mainstream institutions so that women and men could have equally beneficial outcomes. The possibility of this is questionable when considering arguments concerning the lack of gender neutrality within institutions and the politicised categorisation of men and women (Butler, 1992; Chia, 1996 in Bacchi, 2017). The notion of equality takes on a subjective quality in favour of men, it would seem. There is an acknowledgement, however, that the goal of altering systemic inequalities, or even evidencing the (intended) transformational nature of GM, was more complex than the definition or intention would suggest (Rees, 2005). Literature had placed GM as a political strategy, which was developed and accepted as a policy approach rather than a theoretical concept (Daly, 2005). It is suggested that GM as a theoretical concept, similar to the GED, intended to institutionalise equality, and embed gender sensitive practices and normal decision making into the structures and processes of the working environment (Daly, 2005 p.435). It is suggested that "other reforms sought only to slot women into existing

organisations, while mainstreaming sets out to change the character of those organisations" (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010 p. 43; 2012). In the public sector climate, it was believed that gender equality maintained an elusive quality. Thus an importance was attached to the narrative that an effective form of GM would require a broader, more holistic conceptualisation of the macro structures in which it operated. It is further suggested that one of the key motivations for GM was in part the frustration that "any efforts on behalf of women" were separate from mainstream decision-making seats of power, and located in specialised institutional units (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010 p. 42; 2012). As such it is suggested that any directives from such departments could be ignored.

An early GM practice approach, described as integrationalist, was used, which essentially tackled the process of GM within already existing frameworks, models or structures. The integrationalist approach was widely used by public sector organisations as it was less disruptive to ongoing policy and practice arrangements. This hybrid form of GM, as a process, reported less than favourable outcomes for gender equality, due to lack of fit between the policy implementation process required for true GM, and the ways policies are usually developed and implemented in the public sector (McGauran, 2009p. 215). From a policy implementation stance of round pegs in square holes, it was argued that using the process of GM as an additional layer applied to what already existed, directly contradicted the notion of gender-centric thinking and analysis. This, it was believed actually had a detrimental effect on gender equality, and kept future thinking of gender policy within existing paradigms and practices (Beveridge, Nott & Stephen, 2000; Beveridge and Nott, 2002; Walby, 2005). The review is cited as presenting evidence from the examination of policy areas from the European Commission, with the damning conclusion that "the EU has generally adopted an integrationalist approach to gender mainstreaming" (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2011, p. 452; McGauran, 2009). There are unresolved questions of whether the failure to grasp an adequate approach to GM implementation was a response to the hierarchal structure of the public sector, or if a simple lack of will to work from a position of gender-centrality existed. What is apparent, is that the approach to GM implementation seems to have fallen woefully short of its original intention.

Given the potentially transformative nature of GM, analysis has been undertaken to explore why it has not been implemented in a transformative way (McGauran, 2009). Identified are a number of key top down factors leading to successful policy implementation, naming key policy objectives, clear lines of authority, good communications between various groups, and sufficient resources. Analysis of GM implementation discovered lack of clarity on the GM objectives, strongly contributing to weak implementation of them (Daly, 2005; Hankivsky, 2005). The research identified the effect of inadequate resources for GM implementation, and other contributing factors such as wavering political support and weak systems of accountability for it (McGauran, 2009 p.217; Squires & Wickham-Jones 2004; Women & Equality Unit, 2004; Moser and Moser, 2005; Teghtsoonian and Chappell, 2008). Analysis also cited variable factors such as bottom up issues, for example the negative influence between employees towards the work of implementation.

As transformative as the policy approach of GM appeared to be, the fundamental understanding of how GM should be implemented appears to generally have been missed. Could it be that the link between masculinity and organisational power has been so ubiquitous that the best that can be hoped for is something far removed from the notion of transformation? It may be a naïve premise or even political policy presumption to suggest that the overriding structure of how every day practices, processes and "patterned regularity of interaction" would not having a bearing upon the success of a policy approach as deep cutting as GM proposed to be (Willmott, 1981 p.470; Hatch, 1997 p. 180). As unpretentious as it may appear, the regular and repeated interactions are seen as foundation of social order, and further create a structure for leadership from these interactions (Uhl-Bien, 2006 p. 670, 671; Page, 2003). Uhl-Bien offers that it is in the space of interactions, not leadership that social structure evolves continuing the prevalent narrative (Fletcher, 1998). In some ways this appears to mimic the FRS experience of an imposed structure of gender equality within a resistant workforce, raising issues of cultural leader and followership (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio & Johnson, 2011). It will be an interesting finding if patterned regularity of interactions can be identified as gendered processes which directly link to the women's experiences of equality within the FRS.

Worldwide debates about whether GM has improved the advancement of women's equality or worked against add to this narrative. Studies of European Union mainstreaming policies have raised the concern that GM can serve to "silence women", removing gender from the political agenda (Guerrina, 2003 p.104 in Bacchi & Eveline, 2010; Page, 2009; David & Guerrina, 2013). Reports of dedicated women's equality units, services and policies being disbanded and diminished in the name of mainstreaming within government bodies are not unusual (Woodward 2001; Teghtsoonian, 2003b in Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). It is suggested that this, together with the significant under-resourcing of the mainstreaming agenda is itself a devolvement of responsibility without the means of counter-balancing its effect (Ramsay, 1995 in Bacchi, 2010). It would appear that without resourcing and the associated power, accountability for women's equality may again have been neatly, but decisively, relegated.

The complexities of how GM has manifested itself, and also competes against a highly gendered policy development norm cannot be underestimated (Page & Jenkins, 2005). Unsurprisingly, examples suggest that public sector organisations were able only to achieve symbolic results without fundamental changes to policy and practice outcomes due to its approach to GM.

The developing discussion aimed to place the needs of women and men at the heart of the thinking process naming it as a

"strategy for making concerns and experiences of women as well as men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres" (Lee-Gosselin, Briere and Ann, 2012 p. 469). Part of the complexity in placing the needs of women at the heart of decision-making is in what underlies the structural beliefs regarding men and women. It is the way in which men and women are located differently in the public and private spheres of society (Pateman, 1987 in Phillips). The complexity, it is suggested, is the underlying

"complicated reality" that women are naturally subject to men and their "proper" place is in the private, domestic sphere (Pateman, 1987 p.105 in Beveridge, Nott & Stephen, 2000). So the challenge exists concerning the involvement of women in all spheres of decision making as a premise to GM.

It is argued that the case for GM rests on the "insights" into the building blocks of a liberal democratic state which are citizenship, representation and equality (Beveridge, Nott & Stephen, 2000 p.286). Should we accept that these concepts, which are familiar to most, are "neither neutral or impartial in the way that they operate" (ibid), we can accept that women as a group suffer or impacted proportionately in all three areas. The notion of the inclusion and participation of women, suggested as key features of citizenship, are highly dependent upon individual agency, autonomy and access to resources. This can be problematic for women and therefore pivotal to the realisation of such aspiration. It is an inevitability that policy design, implementation, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of policy change are not felt to be achievable, consistent or sustainable outcomes of GM. It is here that the brief consideration of activation of neoliberalism is introduced, as the pursuits of neoliberalism appear to stand opposite to success of the process and outcome of GM.

Neoliberalism is said to be seen as the return and specific element of the liberal tradition, that is economic liberalism (Thorsen & Lie, 2006). Economic liberalism is essentially the belief that the state desists from intervention in the economy, primarily devolving responsibility to the individual to participate in a free and self-regulating market. The impact for the equality agenda is that the state's local devolvement of its responsibilities has negatively affected the delivery of services, policy and practice. The argument is that if Governments merely manage and do not involve themselves in the delivery of services, and development of policy the outcomes can be individualist despite outline commitments group equity (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). The suggestion is that GM has been well received within neoliberalist regimes is because the under-resourced, less-powerful voice for women remains subservient to its wider policy and economic agendas posing no real threat, as suggested in neo-patriarchal offerings. The 2010 central government devolvement of responsibility to local government authorities, including Fire Authorities, creates a nexus between the poor outcomes of GM and intention and outcome as regard equality and inclusion on a wider scale. The neoliberal approach to local devolvement reads like a redaction of accountability for inequality. With quangos, such as the Audit Commission (responsible to monitoring progress on equality) being removed whilst advising that each local authority understood what was best for their communities. This approach fails to recognise both the structural and systemic inequalities of gender.

Connecting the reflections on neoliberalism with viewing GM as a structural, strategic framing of policy is concerning, as it appears the deficit of GM can be repeated within the neo-liberal framework (Bacchi and Eveline (2010). Whilst key issues for structural change have often been omitted, within GM without being addressed, tactical issues were dealt with as the focus of policy measurement and review. Within this practice, the challenge was overriding prevalent protocol as the focus remained in the wrong place, with the output and not with changing outcomes.

In Bacchi's (2017) research a crucial layer is raised regarding specificity of the categorisation of men and women in policy. It offers that in theory the thinking that policies are gendering practices is reliant upon acknowledgment of the Foucauldian conceptualisation of policy as discourse (Bacchi 2017). The reference to discourse is not with regard to language and communication but again raises the more macro, fundamental premise of cause, rather than symptom. Discourse is referred to in terms of the knowledge through which we are ruled. In other words the reference to discourse in this context is what we accept as truth (Potter, 1996). So in considering policies as gendering practices a more critical and focussed reflection of the knowledge (discursive practice) within policies which categorise "men" and "women" becomes a possibility. Rather than focus on the effect of policy, it suggests an identification and acknowledgment of practices which categorise men and women. This can help to create understanding on how policy and therefore practice is developed, versus primarily considering its effects.

Certainly, for women disadvantage and the multi-layered nature of oppression may mean that the outcomes of equality need to manifest differently for men and women, so that historical inequity can be addressed. The systematic decoupling of equality and difference, as suggested here, appears to support an academic exercise rather than the hard-hitting realities of where oppression and discrimination can place women. Benschop & Verloo (2006) suggests the decoupling of equality and difference is solidly based on the rhetorical dichotomy of men and women. Herein lies the problem. Within the framework of public governance, the integration of power held by men in a process that can empower or disadvantage women, the approach to oppression becomes the important factor.

The Gender Equality Duty (The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice, 2007) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010, s149) were positioned as the key implementation instruments for GM within the UK. Page presents an interesting argument regarding the nature of "business-driven efficiencies", and "the moral case for women's equality" (Page, 2011 p319; Webb, 1997; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006). This work takes the equality debate beyond the normal compliance discussion, commonly associated with the public sector, catapulting it into the realm of the business imperative, and the right thing to do. Introduced are the issues, as well as the tensions, of organisational priority versus the progression of gender equality. The position further questions the hindrance of GM's transformative power when economic business interests' conflict with feminist goals (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). The debate outlines tensions on a number levels, not least the more challenging matters of the relationship between GM and other complex inequalities. Touching on matters such as the intersection of race and class, the questions of how to position gender equality and mainstream issues, as well as the on-going questions of what constitutes gender equality are raised (Walby 2005). This reasoning reflects the intricate densities of how gender is understood, and translated into tangible policy. Discussions which involve the longitudinal impact of GM processes when applied as intended, potentially bringing long term sustainable improvements to gender equality, lead to a wider conversation. The assertion is that when GM is applied as a gender-centric means of policy development and implementation, which overrides and challenges existing policy making frameworks, it has the potential to affect, impact and progress gender equality over time (Committee for Economic Development Australia, 2013). It is necessary for the policy approach to be coupled with appropriate resourcing, leadership and monitoring arrangements. One of the key messages from field study is that GM and subsequent policy development has been left to front line practitioners, who have struggled to understand the wider organisational context too much to be effective. The result has left practitioners isolated within their own processes, with experiences of their leaders abdicating their responsibilities toward the gender agenda, as well as organisational governance of it (Page, 2011).

In conclusion, the heavy weight of debate which recognises GM as an academic exercise far removed from its gender-centric intentions cannot be ignored. The strong suggestion is that the purpose and intention of GM and the diffused practice itself, appear to bear little

resemblance to each other. The question raised by of what is being mainstreamed when mainstreaming gender (Eveline, Bacchi & Binns, 2009; Eveline & Bacchi, 2005; Bacchi & Eveline, 2010; 2012) has gained traction to the extent that now it is not clear whether gender equality itself within the public sector is even understood. The argument that women's difference continues to sustain the male norm is a worrying discussion in the light of journey of equality legislation, and equality duty levied upon public sector organisations (Mackinnon 1989). The concept of doing gender within the public sector has long been an academic exercise potentially obscuring thinking to how gender equality is actually created. Connecting the distraction of what we assume gender to be, with the lack of attention towards daily manifestations, policy and practice operations of gender processes are key stumbling blocks to creating an environment where gender equality can be planned for (Deutsch, 2007; Zimmerman, 1987; Stainback, Kleiner and Skaggs, 2016).

The Public Sector Equality Duty

Currently equality legislation within Great Britain is built upon decades of UK discrimination law, European case law and European Union Regulations and Articles. The harmonisation of legislation known as the Equality Act, came into force on 1 October 2010. This fundamental piece of legislation brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. Combined, they make up an Act with the provisional legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all.

The Act, in its spirit, intended to simplify, strengthen and harmonise current legislation and provide Britain with comprehensive discrimination law that protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society.

The nine key pieces of legislation that have merged are namely:

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003

- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2006, Part 2
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

The 2010 Act created a broader Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), encompassing all of the existing Commission for Equality and Human Rights individual equality strands towards new categories of "protected characteristics", of which gender/sex is specifically outlined in the Act (Branney, 2012 p.122; Equality Act, 2010 s 149).

The Act, though in its intention was meant to unify and simplify 40 years of piecemeal legislation, was also criticized for not bringing with it some protections (within the Sex Discrimination Act model). As a result, failed to fulfil its promise to unify key pieces of legal premise (Hand, 2015 p. 216). This suggests a hierarchy of protections, from which – tongue in cheek - only the fittest survived, but in reality did not fully recognize the seminal work of the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act (Hand, 2015).

The Equality Duty (Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2014b) as outlined by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (EHRC), was developed in order to harmonise the pre-existing individual equality duties (race, gender and disability) and to extend it across the protected characteristics. The Protected Characteristics are named as gender, race, disability, sex and sexual orientation, age, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015). The Equality Duty known now as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Equality Act, 2010 s 149), is a general equality duty which applies to public authorities, as listed or specified by the duty.

The PSED consists of a general equality duty, which is supported by specific duties, which in turn are imposed by secondary legislation. The EHRC (the monitoring body) provide that the Public Sector must, in meeting the general equality duty, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general equality duty, the Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low. (Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2014a p. 5,6)

It is clearly outlined that the broad purpose of the equality duty is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities. Equality in policy making should consider how systemic decision making can affect different groups in different ways. Effectively its intention was to challenge the ways in which poor decision making had the potential to impede improved equality outcomes for protected groups.

"The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected into the design of policies and the delivery of services, including internal policies, and for these issues to be kept under review." (Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2014b)

It was hoped that the legislation as it stands had learnt the lessons of the past inadequacies of not only the law, but its interpretation by public sector organisations, lifting the burden of

bureaucracy and obligation. The view offered is that alongside legal accountability, individual public sector organisations have the ability to shape their decisions, practices and policies towards the best outcome eliminating all forms of disadvantage, and promoting equality of opportunity. Unsure if this supported the gender targets, or added to its work, it is clear that the remit of the Equality Act, has taken the responsibility from merely the elimination of discrimination to the promotion of equality across all areas of protected characteristics. Without the numbers to quantify, and slightly playing devil's advocate, I am curious as to how wider equality outcomes have changed through the legislation, when marked against the progress towards the gender targets and gender equality for women as a clearly mapped structural change.

It would be remiss to create a perspective of equality law that fails to acknowledge the significant challenges arising from introducing gender or sex discrimination legislation which is the central focus of this chapter, as well as set the context for which the PSED operates. Specifically, as it relates to the law, the harmonization of all the equality strands to the one Duty with protected characteristics has been criticized for weakening individual areas of law as it replaced the individual duties of race, gender and disability. Within the wider scope of the PSED the Gender Duty is technically no longer a legal instrument, but it is practically useful in organizational thinking for the specificities of gender equality in meeting the general duty.

The importance of this area of exploration is the legal and public sector context for the Fire and Rescue Service as it too has been subject to, and benefited from the provisions of equality legislation and public sector equality duty framework, up to and during the life of the gender targets levied upon it.

The Public Sector

Research has placed disparity in leadership between men and women down to organizational structure and culture, management behaviour, perceptual and capability issues. As such academic discourse has grown in areas such as the glass-ceiling phenomenon where women are unable to break through to senior management, skilling-up women to move through the pipeline of organizations, as well as unpacking gender bias within the organizational context.

The view is offered that the structural perspective on gender can only hold true if there is an acceptance that gender, in and of itself, is a structure that is deeply embedded in society (Risman 2004, p432). Questions remain as to whether the public sector has understood the DNA of their own organisations enough to consider the true impact of gender upon their hierarchies, cultures and distribution of labour. The acknowledgment of the divide in labour between men and women, as well as the disparaging number of women in senior positions, proportionate to the number of women employed, are chronicles that are both damning, but well researched (Halford and Leonard, 2001; Brownell, 1994; Connell, 1985; Collinson and Hearn, 1996a). Gender inequality within the public sector has been well rehearsed within literature, which talks to the disadvantages structurally, institutionally, and culturally to women (Mills & Tancred, 1992; Mills, Tancred & Korabik 1993; Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Flood and Pease, 2005; UN Women's National Committee, 2012; Johns, 2013; Davies, 2013).

Attention is also given to the way gender inequality is played out within the setting of the public sector, holding to the strong narrative of the disadvantages existing for women in their journey to leadership. The literature holds to the ideology of male power and much is made of the prevalence of the legacy of male decision-making structures and practices (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013; Committee for Economic Development Australia, 2013). Writings that have examined the notion of masculinities and management also bring a layer of understanding as concerns behaviours, and power relations (Jenkins, 1998). The power relationships between men and women, is discussed, and how significant management discourses, traditions and practices impact on women (Collinson and Hearn, 1996a). The juxtaposition suggests the coexisting issue of the continued subordination of women within organisations which continues to be overlooked, as well as the dominant gender-specific management discourses that remain impervious to the very management that they are attempting to investigate (Jenkins, 1998). Whilst much of the literature gives accounts of male experience, research barely touches on issues of the "conspicuous interrelationships between management and men" (Whitehead 2002 p.129; O'Neill, 2015). The omission in mainstream organizational, management and leadership research, and association between men, power, and authority at work is exposed (Flood and Pease, 2005; Collinson and Hearn 1996a). However, the body of work that has emerged on men's involvement in the gender relations of workplaces and organisations has grown significantly, building on insights into men and masculinities, and

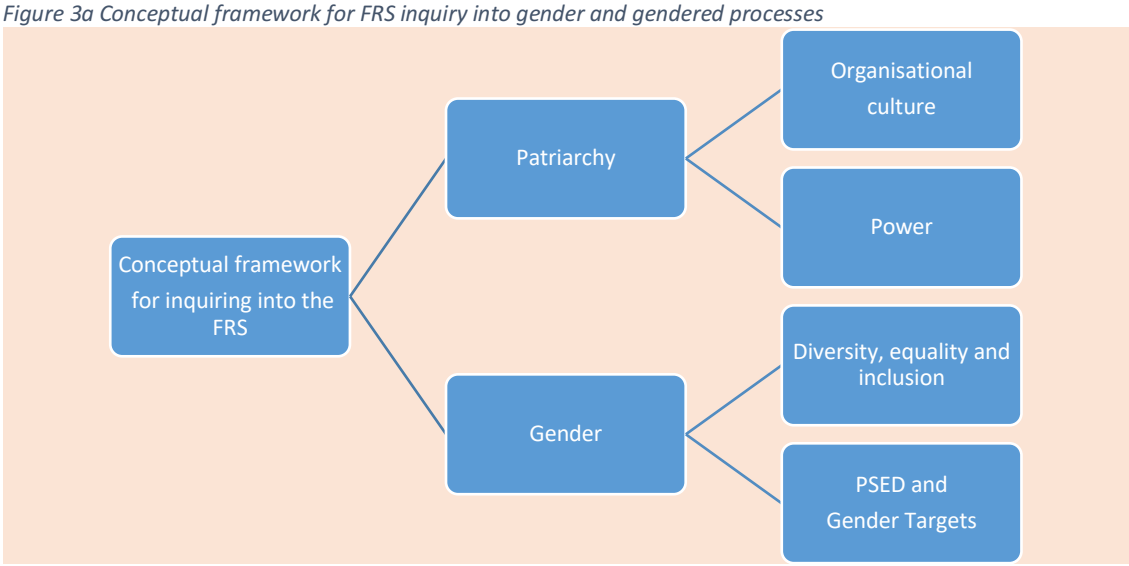
organizational theory (Flood and Pease, 2005). It isn't difficult to re-establish the point that there is a clear need for the acknowledgement of the historical alliance to, and tradition of, power relationships to men within the patriarchal setting of the public sector (Jenkins, 1998).

However, whilst the argument of systemic oppression and individual burden for women working within patriarchal systems is one well made, it is also an argument that also paints a picture of a hopeless environment in which women can do nothing but assimilate to the dominance of patriarchal cultural norms. Nevertheless, women have been an integral historical presence within the public sector (Audit Commission, 2008a; 2008b). Administration of the public sector has acknowledged the patriarchal nature of its historical context in terms of gender inequality for women (Audit Commission 2002; 2008a; 2008b). As earlier discussed, much exists in the way of both legislation and organizational responsibility with regard to gender. The concern remains, that whilst large numbers of women make up employee headcounts, in particular in public sector, the numbers of women occupying senior, leadership, or management board roles continue to be low (Martell, Parker, Emrich & Crawford, 1998; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2008; Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Alimo-Metalfe, 2007; Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010; Committee for Economic Development Australia, 2013). In addition to this, there is an inextricable link to the debate about the merit and outcomes of gender mainstreaming, and the role it plays in advocating the rights of women (Page, Grisoni & Jarvis, 2007; Rees, 2005; Eveline and Bacchi, 2005; Gatens, 2010).

In this chapter I have explored the notion of patriarchy as a system of domination enabling men to remain the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women, its pervasiveness touching all aspects of life. In accepting the view that the gender order equals the equation of power plus patriarchy, I have also accepted the notion that the nature of patriarchy is insidious and invisible with the potential to affect or contaminate theory and women's experiences. As such I am unwilling to abandon its importance in favour of later theories of gender and masculinities, but establish it as a platform from which to view them (Bennett, 2006). In exploring gender, gender structuring and its production, I have discussed how gender, patriarchy and power operates within organisations. Specifically considering the public sector, I have discussed the legislation which governs the arrangements of the FRS, as

well as its knowledge of its responsibilities towards women. Bringing together the complexity of the discussion of individual but converging areas of literature, fig 3a (below) outlines conceptually how together they create a framework from which I am able to continue my inquiry of gender within the FRS. The two areas of patriarchy and gender create a platform from which key issues of organisational culture, power, equality, diversity and inclusion, the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010 s 149), and gender targets within the FRS can be explored (Watkins, 2013). In discussing the literature in this way, I am able to focus on the FRS as a public sector organisation which has intimate knowledge of gender difference, cultural resistance to women, the impact of gender inequality, and responsibilities which include women in all aspects of FRS culture. The literature review has confirmed the need to identify the processes of patriarchy that exist within the FRS and how the FRS enables gender inequality through cultural norms.

Figure 3a Conceptual framework for FRS inquiry into gender and gendered processes



The next chapter focuses on the methodological approach taken in this study. I outline why I have chosen to develop a methodological lens through which to consider issues of gender and patriarchy within the FRS. I present the chosen methods of inquiry in exploration of the context of gender and FRS culture.

Within my methodology I will be outlining how I will approach:

1. Exploration of the social interplay of gender within operational firefighter culture, and its wider impact upon FRS organisational gender equality.
2. Critical analysis of the extent to which FRS culture is gendered, considering its gender processes, the use of gender targets, and how this relates to experiences of inequity for women; and
3. How to develop a methodological approach which will broaden understanding of how processes that cause and enable gender processes, systemic inequality and patriarchal structures continue to exist.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The most challenging area of this study has been exploring the methodological lens through which to consider women in gendered organisations that will both serve the data, and carefully explore issues of culture and experience. The challenge has been mainly rooted in two things: my proximity to the data, and my experiences of feminism. Given my positioning within feminism, my intention is to extend beyond its boundaries to examine my research topic, and as a result have searched for other critical lenses.

The uniqueness of my proximity to the FRS has influenced my positionality to the data. Having worked within the cultural framework of the FRS specifically with the remit for diversity work for twelve years, I have been drawn to its cultural center. The cultural center being, its' decisions, behaviours, omissions, policies, its tensions concerning how to respond to demands for change versus its historical beliefs and way of doing things. My own experience is one of being the only Black woman of seniority within my FRS, and region. My work, over my final six-year tenure also supported the strategic direction of equality work for FRS's in the United Kingdom. So, this positioning of being a Black, professional, non-operational, nationally engaged senior woman in the Fire Sector in England, suggests an experiential reflexive lens. Having been on the inside of the FRS also presents a strong start point for exploring what to unpack theoretically, and practically, focusing on helpful areas of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My second challenge is that although I acknowledge and hold to the tenets of feminism, I choose to locate myself with more radical feminist arguments which recognize the intersections of difference. Reflexivity concerning my own marginal positioning has been in response to my experiences of mainstream feminist literature, which has tended towards the universal and not reflected my own experience of womanhood as a woman with intersections of race, gender and class. As a young Black woman, I struggled to find voice in mainstream feminism (Lawson, 2003; Hannam; 2013; Donovan, 2012; Dotson, 2015). Decades on, I accept that differing experiences and commonalities of womanhood are not adequately understood, reflected, acknowledged or explained, even in mainstream feminism (Acker,

2008). Lorde suggests that mainstream feminism creates the mythical norm, which homogenizes and marginalizes the varying experiences of oppression that exist for women with difference (Lorde, 1984a; 1984b). As such the layers of race, cultural heritage and ethnic difference, being first generation British of Jamaican diaspora create an intersection for me against my gender, as a researcher, and so warrant inclusion. Being able to locate my experience of marginalization of women by women with intersections of difference within a wider framework of theoretical thinking – even in academia - has been important. It has become a helpful way of understanding how power can be systematic and disabling versus absolute and defeating (Willer, Youngreen & Troyer, 2012). The implicit narrative of belonging or sisterhood within feminism which should allow for points of reference has been an explicit challenge for me. There is a nexus for sensemaking that may have cruciality within the methodology (Weick, 1995; Grisoni & Beeby, 2007; Ching, Martinson & Wong, 2012; Maitlis, Vogus & Lawrence, 2013). The notion of translocational positionality widens this perspective by suggesting that the places in which we do not feel that we belong are in and of themselves an important form of certainty (Anthias, 2002a; 2002b; 2009). Translocational positionality argues the complexity of the nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations, such as gender, ethnicity, class, and racialization. It acknowledges the contradictions that can occur as a result of their interplay. Translocation breaks open the singular location or position by constructing positionalities which are mindful of the complexity of power involved (Anthias, 2002a, p.287). It allows exploration where a multidimensionality of position and location occurs, accounting for the complexities of being an insider and outsider simultaneously. Thus, it recognizes different dimensions of power and hierarchal difference of being Black and a woman (Anthias, 1992; 1998; 2002a; 2006; 2009).

I am particularly interested in the notion of contradiction in terms of the experience of gender within a patriarchal system. Although challenging, these areas of discourse have included frameworks and paradigms of emancipation, which have enabled a strengthening of my point of view, and therefore my experience (Hull, Bell-Scott & Smith 1982; Hill-Collins, 2000; Anthias, 2009; Hill-Collins, 2015; Kristie, 2015). It has also raised the notion of challenging knowledge as it is offered, and with it, interrogating reality as it presents itself. This offers an imperative concerning the merits of taking a mainstream view of what is not mainstream. As such I have

widened my viewpoint on what constitutes knowledge and taken for granted reality, considering my own reflexive positionality within the methodological lens, women's experiences and the challenge concerning what is known.

Critical realism – which is described as distinguishing between the world and our experience of it, as well as between what it sees as real, empirical and actual (Sayer, 2000a) advocates the notion that everyday experiences can give insight to the mechanisms which uphold oppression, and can be carefully considered alongside feminist thought (Brown, 2007; Broussine in Broussine, 2008; Wight, 2012).

Within the literature review a picture has been presented that patriarchal structures and gender constructions have created detriment for women. I hope to build a methodological approach that will help to lift the cultural carpet within the FRS, considering women's experiences of gender as knowledge, and uncover any systemic mechanisms of oppression that might exist (Clark & Hoggett, 2009).

3.2 Integrative methodological lens: Reflexive realist constructionism

Reflexivity, marginality and positionality

A clear view on the unique nature of the position of the researcher with the researched is offered which advocates the feminist researcher's argument that when women research women, they

"Have a shared insider understanding of the experiences of those they are researching even if, at the same time, there are ways in which their position as researchers may give them asymmetrical access to resources and social capital" (Hammond and Wellington 2013, p.77)

I am aware that positionality can present a challenging line for feminist researchers to navigate. In reflexively considering my motivation for this research, I am able to bring my assumptions and epistemological perspectives to the fore.

The framing of my reflexivity

I have foundational reasons for wanting to conduct this research. The first is a personal motivation from years of working across sectors, where the necessities and nuances of the

development of equality practice appear to be frustrated, and misunderstood. My second reason is to understand and unravel what effects patriarchy may have upon gender equality in the FRS, and in so doing isolate the processes that enable and perpetuate it. Consideration of critical realism further in this chapter, as a philosophical approach, may provide the scope to do this. Importantly the criticality and integrity of my self-explanation is in experiencing the FRS as a Black woman who has held senior responsibility (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001).

The work of feminist author, Margaret Page (2011) is demonstrative of the frustrations in understanding the context of gender equality within the framework of public sector organisational settings. Her study outlines the experience and struggle of equality professionals to translate the values-based discussion of gender equity into tangible outcomes for their organisations (Kloosterman, Benning & Fyles, 2012). It is my experience, that this is framed against the frustrations of lack of resources and leadership accountability (Heifetz & Linksy, 2004; Orazi, Turrini & Valotti, 2013) discussed in my section on gender mainstreaming, render outcomes - that do not begin, or indeed end with gender equality: "it is this vulnerability of structure to practice that makes us agents of history" (Connell, 1987 p. 95; Maharaj, 1995; Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff & Virk, 2007).

My self-explanation in considering where women are placed within the FRS, raises my experience of difference in the FRS, with the intersections of race and gender positioning me outside of the norm. Within hours of arriving at the FRS, the highest serving (and only Black operational middle manager at the time) warns me against the incongruence of racial acceptance displayed by management. He stated the pleasure they took in hearing him respond to and use his caller name-sign, Zulu. The writing "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", (hooks[1] in Harding, 2004) informs and reflects the assumptions, my values and prejudices in the development of this study. The discussion of the politics of location as a radical standpoint, perspective and position, creates a strong platform from which to reflexively manage who I am in this study. I raise the familiarity of occupying what can only be described as a marginal space in all areas of life as a Black woman but within the

[1] bell hooks name is not capitalised. The author decision not to capitalize her name was to place focus on her work rather than her name,

specificity of the FRS the experience has been a more polarised one. The marginal space is, described as standing not quite on the outside but not on the inside either creates the vantage point of being on the margin. The vantage point, of the margin, I am able to use reflexively as one of opportunity. The position of the reflexive vantage point enables me to be able to recognise oppression, whilst the women are still very much part of, and integral to, the operation of what may be an oppressive organisation or system. My desire to flip the power differential has begun with my own acceptance of the position of being an outsider. My experience has included operating within the scrutiny of others with the knowing that I have had to work on the outside (experiencing the separation) thus creating the insider/outsider positioning. This is significant reflexive information as it raises the power of the oppressed woman having innate knowledge that the margin location is equally as valid as being in the centre.

Understanding how oppression affects women and can also occur manifestly important in the reflexivity of my personal positionality to the data. Intersectional paradigms, such as offered by Davis (1981), Crenshaw (1991), Lorde (1984a; 1984b) and Hill-Collins (2000) have deepened my understanding of marginalization (Coles, 2009). The narrative highlights the danger of the homogeneous lens of interpretation within feminism, and offers an understanding of oppression which can be conceptually traded across all areas of feminism in the emancipation of women's experiences. It is this position that has adjusted my lens philosophically from accepting the viewpoint of reality as offered from a vantage point which does not consider experience as knowledge, and has led me to study this current phenomenon.

The seminal, mainstream feminist writing of Betty Friedan (2010 [1963]) introduced the pervasiveness of societal norms upon women, and as such brought an unapologetic positioning to her exploration of the ways that oppressions show themselves. The contribution of feminism presented (Acker, 1990) bucks mainstream theorists where it suggests that sociologists had no interest in issues of power held by men until feminism itself emerged pointing out the problematic nature of the obvious! My stance is that male domination in FRS has only been given cursory attention, "leaving analytical explorations as a glaring omission" (Acker, 1990 p. 140).

There is no one emerging narrative that creates a framework of understanding of the feminist ideology, stand-point or view. This in itself appears to be a metaphor for the complex and deeply apparent differences of women's inequality, and an insight into feminism's own struggle against universalism:

"…the political assumption that there must be a universal bias for feminism …often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernable in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination" (Butler, 1990 p.5; Budgeon, 2013). The suggestion is that we seek to understand exactly how the category of woman is both produced and restrained by the very powers through which emancipation is sought (Kandujoti, 1988). The confusing spiral of feminist discourse which appears to muddle issues of feminist method, methodology and epistemologies is addressed (Clegg, 1985; Connolly, Segal, Barrett, Campbell, Phillips, Weir & Wilson 1986; Stanley and Wise, 1990). Referencing the work of Harding (2009), the suggested method as the technique or specific research practice, for example, interviews or focus groups. Methodology is said to be the perspective or broad theoretical framework informing research, and may not have its own demands for a particular research method. Finally, epistemology, the theory of knowledge, responds to questions of

"who can be a 'knower', what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge, and what the relationship is between knowing and being (that is between epistemology and ontology)" (Stanley and Wise, 1990, p. 26).

There is a preoccupation with method in feminist research which potentially obscures the feminist research process. However, the need for one distinctive feminist method, is refuted by Harding, (1986) who asks the question of what makes some feminist-inspired research so powerful? (1986, p. 106). The question invites an alternative point of view, construction of ideas and ways to make sense of what knowledge can be. Referring to the prescriptive use of a narrow range of methods and unquestioned androcentric assumptions used by social scientists, the argument is against a set of methods, methodological and epistemological limitations being used to understand women and the nature of their lives (Bryman, 2004). Instead there is encouragement for:

"feminist empiricism [which] seeks to account for androcentric bias, women as knowers and more objective but politically guided inquiry while retaining as much of the tradition of epistemology of science" (Harding, 1986 p.116).

Centralizing women's voices

The epistemological and ethical position of standpoint feminist methodology creates a space for research outcomes which begins with the examination of women's experiences and ultimately presents a view of the FRS in terms of the experience of gender equality. It has the potential to present a less distorted view of the social world or cultural reality (Harding, 2004). Although acknowledging the breadth of feminist standpoint theories, which are as contentious as they are radical, it is suggested that they present knowledge that is extracted from the commitment of feminists to the exploration of women's experiences (ibid). Standpoint is also viewed as an achievement, and not an abstract stance,

"To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see natural and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women's social experiences instead of from the partial and perverse perspective available from the 'ruling gender' experience" (Harding 1987, p.185 in Stanley and Wise, 1990).

Standpoint theory derives from feminist critical theory exploring the relationship between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding, 2004). Standpoint theories argue the validity of the social world as an enabler of observation, explaining patterns and relationships between social power and the production of knowledge claims (Harding, p. 257; Crasnow, 2009). They offer a start point which stems from the lives of the marginalised, often invisible to the majority:

"beginning in those determinate, objective locations in any social order will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives" (p.128).

It is clear that the knowledge or knowing is seen to lie with women, and where the opportunity is given for the location of particular voices, learning may be unearthed.

Standpoint theory is also argued to be an interpretative framework which commits to explaining how knowledge remains pivotal to maintaining and changing inequitable power systems (Hill-Collins in Harding 2004, p.247). Delayering the notion of standpoint points to understanding "historically shared, group-based experiences" (ibid). Thereby she makes the point that group realities surpass individual experiences. It is argued that where groups of individuals share positions that are common between them within hierarchal power relationships, it often follows that they will also share common experiences within the same power relations. Having such a unique shared perspective can lead to members of such groups, located in similar social locations having a predisposition to interpret their experiences in similar ways (Hill-Collins in Harding 2004, p. 249).

"standpoints are cognitive-emotional-political achievements, crafted out of located social-historical-bodily-experience – itself always constituted through fraught non-innocent, discursive, material, collective practices" (Harraway, 1997 p.304). This appears to go beyond the notion of the collective voice, indicating a power dynamic existent between the marginalised and the majority, which remains unseen knowledge due to the nature of the relationship, and only unearthed through the specificity of standpoint.

In the chapter Feminisms and Qualitative Research at and Into the Millennium, the notion of the conceptualisation of the "essentialized, universalized woman" is introduced, who when using the theoretical lens of standpoint, essentially disappears, reappearing as "a situated woman with experiences and knowledge specific to her" (Olesen, 1998 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p. 343). This stance opposes the problematization of women that often exists, but instead, problematizes the world in which women exist (Smith, 1997). It argues instead that women should not be objectified by the researcher, but use of thinking and inquiry can be developed in support of knowledge creation. The notion of substantiated knowledge which has its roots in the emancipatory thinking of bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins seeks another type of epistemology, moving feminist discourse away from universalism towards its real alternative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Sallee & Flood, 2012; Hill-Collins, 2012; 2015). This, can form an essential building block of inquiry into gender processes within the FRS.

There are controversies of feminist standpoint epistemology that originate outside standpoint theory, with tensions from feminism itself, arguing essentialist ontology is

androcentric (Hekman, 1997, Harding, 1987b; Hartsock 1983, 1987; Smith, 1987; 1997; Hartsock, 1997). My perspective in this regard is indeed a limited one. Whilst agreeing with the principles presented by feminist standpoint epistemology which uplifts the notion of knowledge through lived experience, I do not accept its finality, or its representation as a holistic methodological approach. I am however interested in the potential tension that if feminist standpoint exists, then alternative standpoints become viable possibilities (Harding, 1991; Harding 2009). This viewpoint problematizes the truth claims of feminist standpoint as a successor science (successor science settling on the premise or existence of true reality, and the methods of science as the means to establish it).

Women's knowing as the basis of knowledge

It is suggested that "truth is located within particular communities at particular times and used indexically to represent their condition" (Gergen & Gergen, 2003 p. 587*).* The hierarchy of knowledge within feminism appears to be one that limits understanding, and works to upkeep marginalisation within its own framework. My own experience of pulling from the margins of feminist writing is developed primarily from my constant disputation with mainstream feminist writings, and its non-reflection of my lived-experience as a Black woman. Notwithstanding, the point well-made by Harding, that each standpoint within the framework of feminism has epistemological validity because each has an ontological validity that is founded in contextually grounded truths (Harding, 1986). Whilst researchers do not deny their own life experience as an important resource, they should also understand that "other, different (and sometimes oppositional) women's lives provide such a resource" (Harding, 2004 p. 128). It is my intention within the study to explore the women's knowing as a basis of knowledge. I do intend to manage issues of androcentrism by reflexively exploring the data with translocational positionality as a basic tenet of the methodological lens. The exploration of FRS culture adds a dimension to the study that requires an understanding of the deeper structure of a highly gendered substructure of an organisation, and also raises the question of where knowledge can be found (Acker, 1992; Rao et al, 2015). Therefore, this study situates itself within the tradition of feminist knowledge building (Tickner, 2005).

It is suggested that there is a peculiarity within the feminist methodological approach that sees the inequalities that exist between men and women as "the most fundamental divide in

society", with the view of exposing marginalization between the sexes wherever it manifests (Hammond and Wellington, 2013 p.77). The suggestion is that the purpose of the methodology is to give voice to how oppressive practice becomes normalized, consequentially and systematically oppressing and marginalizing women. This position explores feminist methodological concerns of a commitment to change, with the researcher wanting their outcomes to serve the interests of women (ibid, p.77).

As well as arguing the strength of feminist theory, the choice of substantive feminist theory must have consequences for appropriate research methods (p.113). Returning to answer her own question, Harding suggests the most influential feminist research enables the researcher to look critically at *all gender*, and *all* research that takes women's experiences and generates it as evidence (Harding 1997 p. 122);

"reflexive concern with gender as all-pervasive; consciousness-raising as a 'way of seeing' and a 'methodological tool'; challenging' objectivity' as refusing to treat it as separate from subjectivity and refusing to see experience as 'unscientific; a concern with ethics and in particular not treating women as research objects" (Cook and Fonow, 1986 in Stanley, 1990 p. 38; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The notion of oppression is complex, and is an important factor in this study, as is the ideology that supports what we understand to be both socialization and how social structures are created. My caution and concern are that the political stance of mainstream feminism can homogenize the complexity of women's experience. Exploration in this way also presents the opportunity to consider how the social structures are created within the FRS which enable or denigrate gender equality.

Thinking specifically about the focus of this study, the paradigms of critical realism and social constructionism can be argued as a pairing even though some may view them as contradictory to each other. I will argue that it is this pairing which will create clarity to further explore how gender processes are embedded and perpetuated within culture, and in doing so develop the integrative methodological approach. I will present the argument that critical realism can, together with social constructionism support an interrogation of truths that will help further understand how gender is organised within the culture of the Fire Sector. I will first outline the fundamental tenets of both social construction and critical realism.

Critical Realism and Social Constructionism: an opportunity for deeper understanding

Realist Constructionism is made up of a combination of critical realism and social constructionism. Each approach will be considered individually followed by discussion of how they might be combined**.**

Many assumptions have been made over the years with regard to the FRS and gender, about its culture and about women's place within it. Even in considering patriarchy and gender within the previous chapter the assumptive positions about male domination and female subordination have emerged. The reported view is that women are not welcome in the FRS if their role is an operational firefighter, and that numbers of women are low for this reason and many others. Thinking about analysing the data viewed simply through the lens of gender, patriarchy and feminism I believe requires additional perspective to balance challenges of determinism. Further, in understanding the cultural history of the Fire Sector, the behaviours, decisions and archetypes, an investigation that reaches beneath the surface of what is seen, becomes an imperative to understanding gender processes.

Critical realism is described as distinguishing between the world and our experience of it, as well as between what it sees as real, empirical and actual (Sayer, 2000a). Sayer suggests, the *empirical* is the "domain of experience" which exists whether the real or actual are known (Sayer, 2000a p.12). The assertion is that although our ability to observe a phenomenon may make us more confident about our belief in its existence, its existence does not depend upon our observability. As a perspective, the positionality that all reality is not observable or known is both seductive and plausible, as well as helpful in introducing the notion that unobservable entities can give way to observable effects (ibid). This exploration of what is, supports the analysis of what we view as culture and its effects, and positions the discussion to include what mechanisms sit beneath causal powers and their activations. Therefore:

"…a crucial implication of this ontology is the recognition of the possibility that powers may exist unexercised, and hence that what has happened or been known to have happened does not exhaust what could happen or have happened." (Sayer, 2000a p. 12).

Although critical realism is seen as complex, it is suggested that there are key elements which make it distinguishable as a methodological approach. The suggestion is it has explicit rooting

in ontology which is the study of the way that the world is, aligning it with the challenge of what constitutes knowledge and the standpoint of women's epistemologies (Harding, 1991; Holmwood, 2001; Hay, 2005; Fleetwood in Alder, Du, Gay, Morgan & Reed, 2014). It is also said that the characteristics of critical realism ontologies are "stratified, emergent and transformational entities, relations and processes" (Fleetwood et al, 2014, p. 182). It is described as the endorsement of stratified social ontology, "with different emergent properties and powers pertaining to different levels of cultural reality" (Archer and Elder-Vass, 2011, p.96).

The other substantial claim is that critical realism offers the interpretation and evaluation of empirical realist and idealist ontologies. This is significant as it is Fleetwood's belief that the type of postmodernism he describes (in which he includes social construction) has its roots in the ontology of idealism (in Alder, Du, Gay, Morgan & Reed 2014). He suggests that this type of idealism offers a social world that could not exist without being independently observed or socially constructed.

Another position distances the argument from both positivist and empirical stances regarding causality, (Elder-Vass, 2010a; 2010b) arguing for a version of critical realism which advocates that all events are produced by causal powers, interacting in multiple ways, and include powers which can be attributed to both individual people and social structures (Bhaskar, 1975; Archer, 1995). Causal powers are argued to be *"emergent properties"* (Elder-Vass, 2012a p. 6). Powers are described as emergent in as much as they would not exist if the individual or constituent parts concerned were not organised into a particular or certain "whole" (Elder-Vass 2010b, chapter 2). Emergent causal powers of social structures are also presented as "not usually ontologically dependent" upon the activities of the previous generations rather than the current agents and their activities (Archer, 1995 p.169). Much debate continues within critical realism as to what is accepted as social structures and therefore how causal powers emerge. Wahlberg (2014) strongly disputes the Elder-Vass theorem of the causal process, and outlines that social structures have neither causal powers nor indeed exist (p. 774). He suggests that strong emergence cannot be explained by Elder-Vass, and asserts that the "parts to whole" explanation is "weak emergence". Accepting that social powers can be attributed to individuals being organised and interrelating in particular ways, he questions

the need by Elder-Vass to hypothesise with social objects as they relate to causal powers, when he reduces them only to human individual activation. In contrast Elder-Vass is seen to offer a "persuasive rendition of structure" with an expression of realism which offers a social structure itself as an emergent property of transformation (Creswell, Karimova and Brock, 2013 p. 31; Coutrot, 2011). The Elder-Vass approach has drawn criticism labelling it as *softer approach* to realism that enables collaborations with other sociological approaches. It is this softer approach, however, which allows critical realism to be integrated with social constructionism, which suggests a platform for understanding how potentially oppressive human interactions or behaviours occur. The Elder-Vass approach to emergence has been acknowledged although accepted to varying degrees within the tradition of critical realism (Archer and Elder-Vass, 2011 p. 112). For the purposes of this study I choose to accept and use Elder-Vass's principle of emergent properties and definitions of causal powers developed from the works of Bhaskar (1998). Building the discussion of causal power, it is argued that for an entity to be real, it must have causal efficacy. In other words, the entity must have an effect on behaviour, or make a difference (Fleetwood 2005, p. 199).

Causation

The matter of causation is a fundamental one within critical realism, and its features are significant when critically applying critical realism to data analysis. The result of what happens once the causal powers are activated is dependent upon other conditions or factors (Sayer, 2000a). Where people are concerned it is often the case that the social processes are dependent not only on an individual's interpretation of what has occurred, but also includes things that are unintended, go unnoticed, or remain unacknowledged. Causation, then, is not applied in a way that supports a quantitative gathering of data to suggest regularities. Causation hopes to push the investigator towards identifying the causal mechanisms themselves, as well as how they work and what the possible processes of activation could be.

Objectivity

In exploring the integration of critical realism and feminist methodologies, a perspective is raised which creates a reflexive challenge in completing this study (Parr, 2015). Although social practice is concept dependent and socially constituted for critical realism, it is argued that the social world does not reflect the concepts upon which it is dependent. The challenge

is the assessment of the *"objectivity"* of differing social constructions (Parr, 2015 p. 196). It is suggested that objectivity is referent to how practically adequate varying accounts are. This, in turn, frees the dependence upon, what is described as, a discourse-based knowledge allowing distinction between successful and unsuccessful references. The result is reliably produced knowledge which can be used for explanation and information (Sayer, 2000a).

I am of a mind that as a stand-alone philosophical approach there are many criticisms that can be levied in terms of the visibility of the causal linked to reality. However, I am attracted by the concept of object reality, which can create a balance in what may otherwise be viewed as a highly subjective research approach. I am clear that despite the challenge that critical realism offers, through its abstraction of philosophical argument, it can provide a means of interrogating taken for granted notions of what is seen and thus may provide a secondary lens to the data findings. Sayer (2000a) talks about a falsity concerning a privileged access to knowledge that realism is purported to have. It argues a position which questions what we accept as truth, knowledge or reality. The defence of and proposition for critical realism is that there is a fallibility to our knowledge or beliefs which demands a wariness of accepting uncomplicated or corresponding concepts of truth (ibid). The argument is that ontology influences epistemology, determining methodology which pushes us towards a theoretical outlook and an ultimate outcome (Fleetwood in Alder, Du, Gay, Morgan & Reed, 2014).

Filling the gaps

Finally and fundamentally, there is tension that exists in terms of locating critical realism with feminist theory (Peter, 2003a; 2003b). There have long been frustrations concerning the addition of women and gender to existing bodies of social science knowledge (Harding, 1991). The underpinning tensions concern two main issues: the conceptual schemes and dominant (male) notions of objectivity which are argued as "too weak and too distorted to identify or eliminate sexist and androcentric assumptions and beliefs" (Harding, 1991 p.106; Kemp, 2005) and a feminist perspective (which developed critical theories of sexism and androcentrism) regarded by social scientists as political, versus, reasoned and observed; not accepted as knowledge. Essentially, as with most mainstream scientific theories, the absence of women and the dominance of men has underpinned the legitimacy of accepted knowledge. With attempts by mainstream science to provide pure descriptions and explanations of the

underlying causal tendencies and regularities in nature, women and socially and legitimated knowledge have been constructed "in opposition to each other" (ibid).

In illustration of this the critique of Sayer on writings of gender and critical realism by Holmwood (Sayer, 2000b; Holmwood, 2001) debates the fundamental rejection by Sayer, a critical realist, of feminist research regarding the gendered nature of organisations. Sayer (2000b) argues that much of the feminist research on the gendered nature of organisations – bureaucracy and market – confuses an association of gender and organisational forms with a stronger claim that they are "intrinsically gendered" (Holmwood, 2001 p. 947; Ely, 1994; Ely & Myerson, 2000; Ely & Padavic, 2007). Whilst Sayer accepts that feminist research shows empirically that organisations are gendered he suggests that they are considered as "abstract realist models", and that organisations are "identity blind" (ibid) (). Sayer continues by saying that causal powers should be understood in their pure forms. In understanding the way in which the entities are conceptualised they should then not be confused with the "issue" of the actual occurrence of effects attributed to their causal mechanisms (Holmwood, 2001 p.947). In other words he suggests that feminist research engenders this type of confusion through "associated thinking…analysis which attaches significance to empirical associations according to their persuasiveness rather than…their necessity …which is resistant to abstraction in social science" (Sayer, 2000b p.708). Holmwood outlines the significance of Sayer directing "associational thinking" against feminist research, as it can be applied to research that is not feminist in orientation but feminists have criticised its "masculine orientation to theory" (ibid). The significance however, is that whilst accepting sociological research and the empirical significance of gender has been demonstrated (neither does he deny empirical regularities evidenced in feminist research) he does argue that fundamental and underlying theoretical premises remain unaffected by the knowledge offered through the research evidence.

Holmwood's refute is to what Sayer calls associational thinking, which is offered as a form of empiricism that fails to recognise the distinction between the real and actual. He offers that the very reason for abstraction thinking is to identify the real structures by abstracting them from the dependent conjunctions that hide their operation. The argument is that movement beyond the contingent conjunctions can only serve to "reconstruct theoretical understanding

and provide accounts of explanatory mechanisms" (Holmwood, 2001, p. 949). The very point being that in keeping feminist theory and critical realism as non-exchangeable, conversive theories, the very mechanisms that uphold gender inequality remains intact.

In thinking about feminist epistemology or the theory of knowledge within the context of critical realism, the concern is not in why men hold the beliefs they do, or the ways in which they come to hold them, the concern is with "whether we are justified in claiming knowledge…?" (Hamlyn, 1967 p. 8-9 in Harding 1991 p.107; Brister, 2009). The underlying tension is simple. It appears to lie with the issue that when "uncontroversial evidence" is presented in support of non-feminist claims the evidence and claims remain uncontroversial. When the same evidence is presented to support feminist claims the "uncontroversial becomes controversial" (Harding, 1991 p. 108). The question at this stage of finding a way of interrogating a culture where male dominance is viewed as an integral part of organisational life begs whether facts should be seen as impersonal, objective, and value free. This is a core question and echoes Harding's sentiments concerning what constitutes the nature of objectivity, and whether the researcher should be dispassionate or socially invisible, as well as who and what is being research in the pursuit of knowledge? The notion of the "situated character" of all knowledge claims has been used to challenge positivist and empiricist assumptions of an uncomplicated relationship between reality and knowledge, and sits at the heart of this approach The connection to feminist standpoint theory which "foregrounds how embodying a subordinate identity can be an asset in processes of disclosing the nature of oppressive structures" is undeniable and is central to postpositivist realism, and suggests an exchange between feminist standpoint theory and critical realism which can help close the gap on what constitutes knowledge, and what knowledge has been identified (Harding, 1991; Harraway, 1997; Gunnarson, Dy & van Ingen, 2016 p 434.).

The means to impact the start point for research – that women's lives have been devalued and neglected erroneously, using this as the generators for and against knowledge claims – can create an opportunity using critical realism and stand-pointing women's lives to identify the mechanisms of dominance that exist for women in the FRS. "If human activity is structured and fundamentally opposing ways for two different groups (such as men and women) one can expect that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the other and in

systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse" (Hartsock, 1987 p.285). My interest lies firmly in identifying and unearthing the mechanisms which uphold culture and gender processes, and connecting the standpoint of women's lives and experiences as knowledge in identifying such mechanisms, and in turn situating the empirical data that emerges within such mechanisms.

Despite the challenge that critical realism is masculine in its nature as a field (male dominance) and in the issues that it has focussed on, occupying a marginal role in feminist debate, it still has thematic alignments with feminism, namely they are "inherently critical-emancipatory" (Gunnarson et al, 2016 p.433). It appears that work has begun to refine conversations between feminist theory, gender studies and critical realism which encourages work on the theorization of the mechanisms of male dominance. This study presents an opportunity for research which pushes critical realism to consider epistemological issues, as most of the influential contributions towards feminist theory has centred around epistemological concerns, namely the exploration and investigation of "malestream notions of objectivity and scientific truth" (Gunnarson et al, 2016 p. 434). "Never had women been given a voice of authority in stating their own conclusion or anyone else's in asserting how such conditions should be changed. Never was what counts as general social knowledge generated by asking questions from the perspective of women's lives" (ibid).
Critical realism can work with the transformative tenets of standpoint theory to create something different which counts as general social knowledge.

Critical realism may then (unwillingly) be of value when exploring competing theories in explanation of the social world (Lopez and Potter, 2005). As such, my use of critical realism will be in tandem with other theories as an aid to further critique the data collected by exploring "the questions put to reality, and the manner in which this is done" (ibid, p.7). Although his paper considers a perspective of organisation culture from critical realist positioning, it fundamentally acknowledges the risk of ontological ambiguity. This perspective has facilitated my personal reflexivity in making the connections necessary in consideration of realities that may exist, my positionality concerning my approach to the data, and in thinking about how cultural realities are being serviced or maintained (Cox, Le-Trent-Jones, Voronov, Weir & Elgar, 2009).

Social Constructionism

In considering how realities or beliefs are developed, it is appropriate to consider the theoretical perspective of social constructionism, as it has become a central premise of theoretical thinking within gender studies. I aim, through discussion to synthesise the discomfort of tensions that emerge, building an argument towards its necessity within the methodological framework.

The seminal work that lay the foundation of challenge concerning what was understood as "reality" was developed by Berger and Luckmann in 1966. It was suggested that the understanding of reality, was based on a history and lineage of philosophical inquiry of reality which they defined as:

"a quality pertaining to phenomena as being independent of our own volition (we cannot wish them away)" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966 in Gergen, 1985a p. 13).

Reality offered as observable and object fact, fixed in what is known, and beyond our ability or capacity to change is challenged by this approach. Berger and Luckmann offered an alternative philosophical debate to realist arguments, by suggesting that the foundations of knowledge are not fixed but created by every day social interactions, including language and institutional frameworks. Knowledge and reality are continually created by way of specific agglomerations or groupings of reality that pertain to specific contexts (p. 14). The underpinning concept of how we experience the world is at the heart of social constructionism. Authors such as Gergen (1985a; 1985b; 2001; 2009; 2015) Gergen and Gergen (2003), and Burr (1995a; 2015) refined what is commonly understood as social constructionism. Known as the common thread to disciplines such as critical and discursive psychologies, deconstructivism, post-modernism and discourse analysis, social constructionism creates a theoretical orientation or platform that offers an alternative critical perspective of how we view the world (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Burr 2015 p.1).

Finally, and most fundamentally, social constructionism as a baseline urges suspicion where assumptions exist about how the world appears to be, leaning towards an interrogation or challenge of perceived reality (Burr 2015, p. 3). The interrogation of reality is an exciting prospect as the underside of the concept points towards a changeable, malleable reality that is capable of emancipation. There is also an adept framing of how reality is understood by

adding the variable in his definition of an active, future element. It talks of how understanding of reality might exist, should we be aware of it, and creatively intend to affect how we experience it (Gergen, 2015).

"[Social constructionism] has given voice to range of new topics, such as the social construction of personal identities; the role of power in the social making of meanings; rhetoric and narrative in establishing sciences; the centrality of everyday activities; remembering and forgetting as socially constituted activities; reflexivity in method and theorizing. The common thread underlying all these topics is a concern with the processes by which human abilities, experiences, common-sense and scientific knowledge are both produced in, and reproduce, human communities" (Shotter and Gergen in Deetz, 1994; McDougall, 2013).

It is further described in terms of having an element of a liberatory springboard, giving an alternative view of reconstructing truth on the basis that it supports and facilitates us in our realities and does not debilitate us (Burr, 1995b in Parker, 1998). In this regard Burr talks about social constructionism as offering the same message of emancipation on a wider social scale including social categories of oppression such as race and gender as examples (p. 13).

Importantly, when looking at reality as a constructed entity, it requires a denial of what is known by us as concerns our perception of reality. The question then is raised about how truth is settled upon, as Burr suggests, and how altering perspectives are decided upon.

When offered as a constructionist critique, constructionism has appealed to groups whose voices have been silenced or marginalised by more traditional approaches within science, academia and theoretical authorities (Gergen, 2001). It is suggested that constructionist argument has created a more balance narrative, opening the debate to include wider political and moral critique. There is a strong acknowledgement that issues of power are integral in thinking through structure and how it is created; without which the approach is unstable.

Bringing social construction and critical realism together

Social constructionism is often seen as theoretically incompatible with a critical realist approach to the social world, and more aligned to an anti-realist ontology of the social world (Elder-Vass, 2012c; Gergen, 2001; Shotter, 1993). However, recent developments by Dave Elder-Vass (2010c, 2012a; 2012c) offers an alternative perspective. The position advocates the compatibility of realism with moderate forms of social construction, which present stronger ontological arguments. These arguments support the exploration of culture, and social realities (Elder-Vass, 2010b; 2012c; Creswell et al, 2013; Gorski, 2013).

As a foundational element of his critical realist position, it is offered that specific groups of people have social structural power, overriding the abstracted notion of social structure traditionally offered by critical realists (Elder-Vass, 2010b). This theoretical standpoint argues that the most tenable version of critical realism can be consistent with the most tenable version of social construction (2012a). The approach encourages critical realists to consider social constructionism as a sense-making vehicle in understanding the roles that discourse, language and culture play within the social world. Elder-Vass names it realist constructionism. It is argued that a baseline of sense-making can be explored through understanding questions of reality which interrogate what processes are operating, how they exist and how indeed they can be causally influential (ibid).

Can critical realism and social constructivism can fit together? Although critical realism is concerned with the philosophical view that there is an "independent" world, seeking to unearth "those deeper lying mechanism which are taken to generate empirical phenomena" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009 p. 40). Is there a gender reality within a cultural setting like the FRS, which sits beneath the surface, and if so, what are the deeper mechanisms which can be explored to generate a knowledge?

Whilst constructionism is linked to criticisms of essentialism, there is a counter, balancing, argument central to the ideology of critical realism. The notion is the real has "causal effect", in that behavior is affected and something different ensues (ibid). Where critical realism adds to, and builds on the notion of structure, it also argues that ideas and discourses account for reality and as such bring with them the possibility of causal effects (Bhaskar, 1998). Whilst

social structure is often used to make explicit, causal mechanisms such as power and resources, exploring causality helps the researcher to focus on what the nature of the issue might be. The focus is on the "nature" or "object" at hand with questions of "what an object is, and the things it can do by virtue of its nature" (Danermark, Esktrom, Jakobsen & Karrison, 2002 p.55). In effect the philosophy itself suggests that the research process is a way of continually digging into the depth of the reality(ies) that may be present (Collier, 1994; Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson & Norrie, 1998).

It is argued that there is a diffusible line between social constructionism and critical realism, with strong divisions only being visible between mainly moderate and radical variants of both camps (Delanty, 2005). It is from this premise that I will consider realist constructionism as a means of analysis and discussion as offered by Elder-Vass.

Discourse, language and culture as casual processes

Social constructionism is most often linked to an anti-realist ontology of the social world in the sense that it privileges language, discourse and culture as the source of social constructions (Elder-Vass 2010a). This perception of the world is often in opposition of a Bhaskar, realist, view which claims the social world is open to "causal explanations", that social structures are "causally powerful", and that the real (material) world extends beyond us and even acts upon us (Archer et al, 1998; Elder-Vass 2012c, p.5). Critical realists uphold that social structures are causally efficacious and therefore real (Wahlberg, 2014 p. 779). In keeping with conceptualisations of the social world, much debate also exists within critical realism concerning social structure. In opposition to Bhaskar's position on social structure is the argument that social structures cannot have causal powers as they are "conceptual abstractions rather than concrete realities" (Kaidesoja, 2015 p. 367). However, it attempts to position social structures in a practical way which supports the exploration of the specificity of interactivity between individuals and social processes. The argument proposes that causal powers should not be ascribed to abstract structures that appear to create a distinction from "interacting human beings and their concrete social systems (including the concrete social processes and mechanisms that bring about and sustain the unequal distributions of resources in a society" (ibid). This provides an appropriate and useful clarification in the

sense-making process. So, at its best social constructionism offers a vantage point of the world which is reflective of the belief that how we experience the world

"is not equal to or does not necessitate how the world is understood" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966 in Gergen, 1985a p. 14). Its critique of taken for granted knowledge and understanding of ourselves and the world, is fundamental, as is its critical stance that conventional knowledge is based on unbiased and objective observation of the social world. Opposing the positivist view that the world can be understood by observation, social construction assumes a historical and cultural specificity to reality.

The potential value of social constructionism is realised when linked explicitly to a realist ontology of the social world. The finding is the irreducibility of the social and natural world of language and meaning (Lopez and Potter, 2005 p.5; Elder-Vass, 2012a). Key to a social constructionist argument is the role of construction in culture, language and discourse. The link often made between the interpretative traditions used by social constructionism in this regard, does not align itself to causal explanations. Critical realism is open to the sense-making of language, culture and discourse and the need for its interpretation, but offers caveats for their inclusion in causal accounts. Consequently, this inclusion opens up the potential for seeing social constructionism as a real causal process, or indeed a grouping of such processes (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 9). Here the intersections of social constructionism and critical realism meet towards a realist social constructionism, positioning language, culture and discourse as potential causal powers in themselves, and as products of interacting causal powers. Advocating caution, Elder-Vass presents realist constructionism in that it serves to distinguish viable constructionist claims that offer compatibility with plausible accounts of causal processes, and those that do not. This stance is developed from the initial view of Bhaskar (1998 [1979]) who questioned the incompatibility or conflict purported to exist between realism and constructionism. In holding that structures are concept dependent and therefore linking the interpretative to structural questions, the steps towards a realist constructionism are presented (ibid). A number of critical realist writers argue realism's compatibility with *"moderate"* forms of social constructionism but reject anti-realist versions of constructionism (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 8).

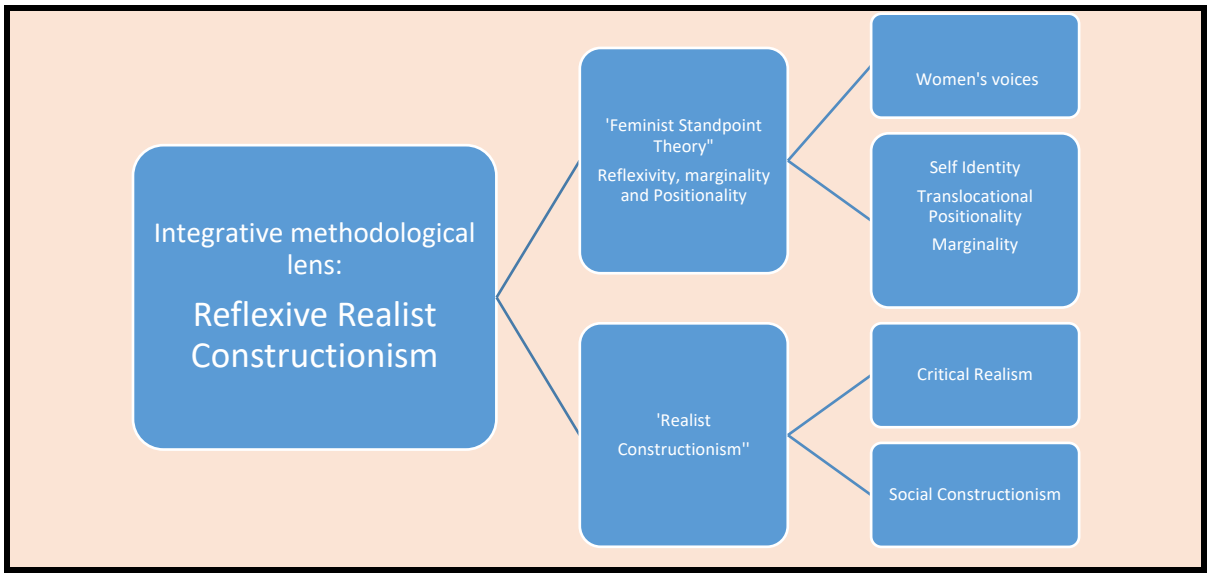
Realist Constructionism

In considering the integration of social construction and critical realism, two areas of significance are raised (Elder-Vass, 2012c). The first is discourse, and the second is the 'subject', or agency. As we will be discussing discourse later in the chapter, it is appropriate that we consider how and where it sits within this theoretical premise. His corner stone is post-modern discourse, which many realists accept as compatible with realism. Although often having a radical constructionist interpretation, Elder-Vass contends that Foucault's work has a strong sense towards discourse that shapes the world in a way that could be seen as causal (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 9; Foucault, 2002 [1969]). He also advocates Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as the most coherent and comprehensive approach to the analysis of the nature of discourse in literature. Aligned to constructionist approach to discourse is the criticism levied towards Foucauldian questioning of the mechanisms responsible for the effects for discourse, and the lack of clarity where individual contribution is concerned. The theoretical limits of the areas structure and agency are raised as they constitute a central focal point for critical realists in their approach to the social world (Archer, 1995; Popper, 1983; Elder-Vass, 2012c). The proposal is the "*re-use"* of Foucault's work in the development of a realist theory of discourse to include structure and agency informed by the ontological baseline of causality (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 8). Defining discourse as statements and discursive formations, the view is that a statement can be taken to be the meaning of a sentence, although Elder-Vass cautions Foucault's resistance to any such notion. The concept offered by Foucault places focus on how such statements are regulated in the period in which they were produced. Elder-Vass, however, believes how they are understood and interpreted are significant for the process of regulation versus Foucault's primary interest in the regulation itself. "*What"* is said is regulated, meaning the content of the statement is of interest, rather than the statement itself being viewed as a linguistic phenomenon. A position that pushes the *"how*" of what is regulated as well as having an interest in the type of the language we would use to express such statements is the important element for this study (2012c, p. 9). The focus by Foucault is in the discursive rules that govern what can and cannot be said. So, in brief, Foucault argues that discourse consists of a combination of statements that are made, and the rules that govern those statements. The question then posed is, what is the relationship between the statements and the rules, and how can the rules produce the effect of regulating the statements that are produced (Elder-Vass, 2012c). In essence, the discourse

itself has the potential to affect the production of further discourse, but the "how" of this remains unclear. The assertion is about the difference that discourse makes to the social world, but "stops short of explaining how" (2012c, p.9; Jussim, 2017).

Realist constructionism, as a layer of the methodological lens brings together critical realism and social construction in a way that allows a closer interrogation of language, discourse and culture. This approach seeks not just to identify the occurrence of beliefs and behaviours, but how they become manifest and are perpetuated. Figure 3b illustrates how the integrative lens works together. The first layer of the lens creates the capacity to manage and contextualise the data and its contradictions through the reflexive process of personal, empirical, and theoretical positionality. It is from this premise that this layer of the methodological lens will in using realist constructionism interrogate the notion of patriarchy, specifically concerned with how it embeds and reproduces itself, and whether women occupy a contentious role within its culture. I also aim to investigate the tensions and paradoxes that exist for women in the FRS.

Figure 3b Integrative methodological lens: Reflexive Realist Constructionism



3.3 Methodological approach

Why qualitative methods?

In building a methodological lens which seeks to interrogate gender processes, patriarchy, and culture, I have chosen to use qualitative research methods (Morley, 1996 in Morley & Walsh, 1996). Qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to seek strategies of empirical inquiry that connect lived experience, social constructs of reality, situational context, and the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. xi; 2003 p. 13). The ability to explore historically, interactionally and structurally are the features of qualitative research that appear to be an appropriate fit when beginning an inquiry into the culture and gender processes which exist within the FRS (Mills & Mills, 2000). In considering the centralisation of women's experiences qualitative methods can provide both answers to questions and insight to the perception, feeling and experiences of study participants (Ivey, 2012 p.319). In using the interview guide's use of open-ended topics, I will be positioned to support the participants' ability to share their perception. This can offer the link between not only the questions being answered but the extrapolation of feelings and experiences of both men and women in the consideration of issues of gender and wider cultural experiences. In approaching issues of culture, preservation of the context for the data instead of eliminating such information as *"extraneous variables"* is important (Ivey, 2012 p.311-318). The responses and perceptions shared are said to be as important as having the question answered. The need within this study for "more in-depth understanding of naturalistic settings" which can raise the imperative to understand context, and its associated complexities is fundamental (Shortell, 1999 in Sofaer, 2002 p.329). The legitimacy which accompanies this aspect of qualitative research is a crucial element of my chosen approach (Cassell and Symon, 2015 p. 7-8).

In centralising operational women's experiences as knowledge, Creswell's recommendation of using "thick description to tell compelling stories" (2018 p.140) is completely seductive. It offers a measured approach to gaining insight into the culture of the FRS, which to this point remains relatively obscure. Interviews and focus groups in their integrity of the history of qualitative methods, therefore offer an appropriate approach to gaining this type of knowledge.

There is a notion of three postures underlying qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). It suggests qualitative research should be "theory-driven…concept-driven… and…reform-focused" with the underlying purpose of the research being political (1998, p.58-59). Feminist research is cited as an example (Harding, 1987b; DeVault, 1990; McDowell, 1992; Tickner, 2005; Harding & Norberg, 2005) with its ability to challenge historical academic research is argued, with its dominant portrayal of the male perspective which excludes women's perspectives, experience and contribution. This approach reinforces the notion of the theoretical lens or perspective for critical analysis and methodological choice. It is described as the "women's or gender perspective being applied to a variety of social phenomena" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000 p.209), providing for the promotion and promulgation of women's interests. Given the variations and conflict within feminism and my position within this, the following apply: understanding gender in all social relations, institutions and processes; problematizing gender relations, exploring associations with conditions of dominance and inequality. Finally, viewing gender relations as socially constructed, that is, they are the consequence of "socio-cultural and historical conditions" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009 p.210).

Finally, the link between reflexivity and data will form a fundamental layer of the integrated methodological lens. The practice of the researcher demonstrating their own positioning and personal proximity to the data adds a rhetorical element or force to what is being researched (Gergen and Gergen, 2003; Behar, 1996; Kiesinger, 1998). In addition to this my belief is that my positioning and personal proximity are unique and therefore add a layer of reflexivity which should not be extrapolated from the complexity of the data. This has implications upon the process of design, collection and analysis of data.

"I still believe that my primary obligation as a social scientist is to tell the stories of the people I have studied. But I also find that the accounts they tell have been constructed through dialogue that my respondents create in conjunction with me" (Hertz, 1997 in Gergen and Gergen 2003, p. 379*).* To address this point, I have framed the criticality of the self-examination of my own values, experience, prejudice, assumption, and my proximity as a Black senior leader within the FRS, as a process within the framework of the research design, data collection and data analysis as a key reflexive process (Koch and Harrington, 1998; Hand, 2003).

My choice of methodological lens through which the issues of gender and patriarchy can be viewed will create a triangulated method of inquiry that can give further insight into forms of androcentric bias and the ways in which they can be produced and reproduced (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, Dicenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014; English & Irving, 2008) (Figure 3c). Androcentrism is the practice of placing the masculine as a centralized world view, thereby marginalizing the feminine. This approach widens consideration of competing and convergent realities, as well as the necessity to interrogate data in a mindful way which seeks to extricate sexist and androcentric bias within it.

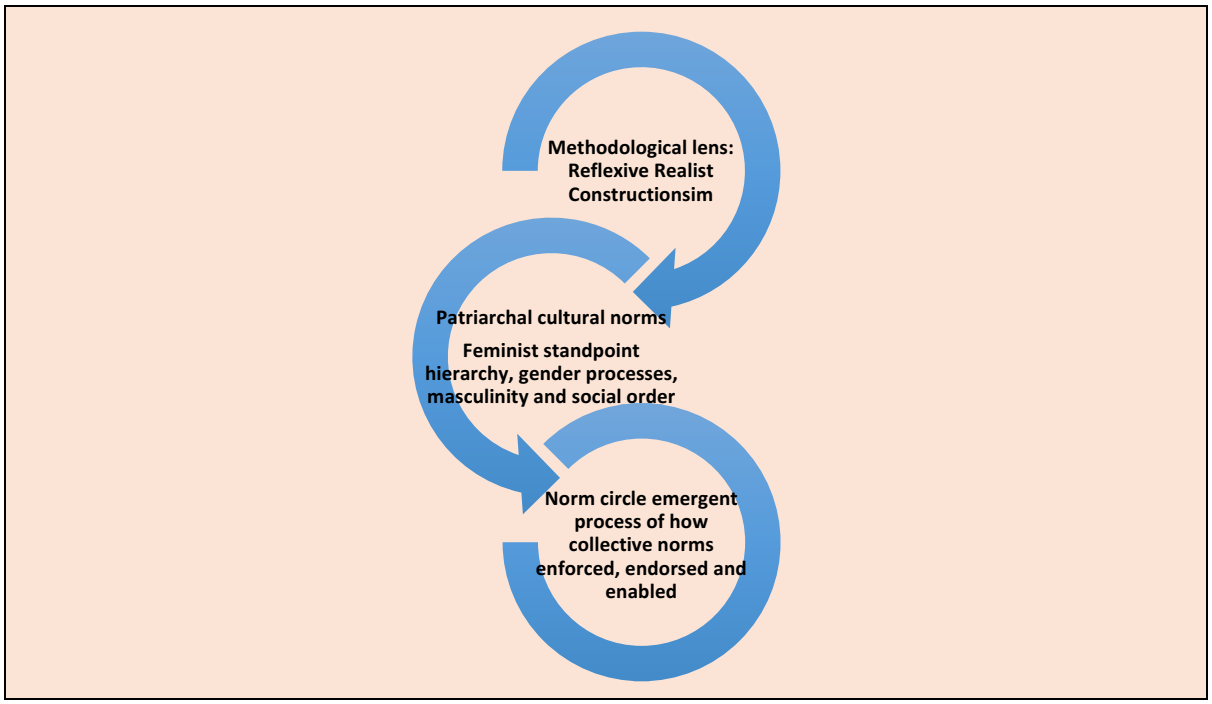


Figure 3c The relationship between the integrated methodical lens, the cultural patterns of patriarchy, gendered norm circles and processes

It is my argument that the integrative methodical lens will allow more clarity in the discussion of what enables patriarchy to be embedded and upheld within FRS culture. My ensuing argument, through discussion with the data and the conceptual framework, which will allow discussion towards how and why gender inequalities through patriarchy are created and perpetuated.

3.4 Methods

Research Strategy

The data was collected in three forms: in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, for reasons of depth of understanding, knowledge building, sense-making and positioning experiences of culture.

"it is ultimately the researcher who decides how and when to utilize these [qualitative] methods. Qualitative inquiry is a uniquely personal and involved activity. If we hope to understand how people choose to express themselves in everyday life, we must come to terms with our own reason for studying them and with the intellectual traditions that are embedded in these methods" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Rakow's exploration of qualitative research suggests that the qualitative researcher uses tools and deploys strategies within the context that the use of any particular chosen method should carry an explanation (2011, p.218).

Interviews

I have chosen the qualitative interview with the goal of viewing the research aims and objectives from the vantage point of the interviewee, and to understand how this perspective has been gained. Interviews are a key method of collecting data, where, as the interviewer, I can question of participants (Polit and Hungler, 1991). Questions which focus on the person's experiences and in doing so provide data which is rich and detailed exploring phenomenon that had previously remained unknown, will be my chosen approach (Morse, 1991; Appleton, 1995).

I have chosen to conduct interviews with three sets of people within this study using two different interview methods. As the work of this study aims to centralise the voices of women coupled with the low numbers of senior women within the FRS, I have chosen to conduct in-depth interviews with them. Primarily, the intention is to fully understand the context in which they operate as women within a patriarchal system, and the cultural impact in terms of their individual experiences as women. There is a separate interest which is to understand any differences which occur in terms of senior women who have be inducted and promoted within the single tier entry process and women who have been directly appointed.

The qualitative interviews are undertaken with the aim of fulfilling this wider sense of purpose, and shaped in the following way

"a low degree of structure imposed by the interviewer; a preponderance of open questions; a focus of 'specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee' rather than abstractions and general opinions." (Cassell & Symon 2015, p.14-15; Marshall & Rossman, 1984; Marshall, 2011). Examples of the types of questions which guided the interviews can be found in Appendix 9. I have also taken this approach with the Chief Inspector for Fire responsible for the Thematic Review (Home Office, 1999a), and the introduction of the gender and race targets. His in-depth interview is used in terms of a reflexive conversation which initially sets the context of where the FRS was pre-gender targets. Being able to draw on context, historical specificity and FRS cultural experience in this way, I deem to be valuable to the data captured within this study. Accordingly using interviews to search for meaning, stands opposite to the approach of testing hypotheses and controlling variables from the standpoint of objectivity (Fortune, Reid & Miller, 2013).

The second interview type I have chosen are semi-structured interviews. I have chosen to use this method with the strategic leaders and decision makers to gain perceptions, historical accounts of personal and organisational explanations of gender, its relationships and processes within the FRS.

"a study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants; individual perceptions of processes within a social unit are to be studied prospectively, using a series of interviews"; and where "individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed" *(*Cassell & Symon, 2015 p. 16-17*).*

The option of using semi structured interviews is in order to ensure specific issues of policy, decision making, organisational arrangements are covered within the question and answer process. However, maintaining the semi-structured approach also allows the participant some latitude in terms of offering contextual or wider information which may inform the discussion. The process of exploring narratives and personal stories through the use of semi-structured and in-depth interviews is offered as a viable means of data collection, when open, direct questioning is used (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Whiting, 2008).

Focus Groups

There are a number of reasons underpinning my choice to use focus groups. It has been established that the numbers of women are low within FRS. As such there is a balance to be made between ensuring anonymity, as well the time and cost involved in individually agreeing to meet women from across England. Using focus groups with the women firefighters is based on the premise that the role of firefighter is a unique one set within a unique environment, very different from mainstream occupations. The use of focus groups is a cost-effective way of exploring attitudes and experiences of participants who fit contextual profiles (Krueger, 1998; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001; Sofaer, 2002). This approach is built upon where the merit and the value of group opinion derived from focus groups is discussed, and is developed to encourage active participation among participants (Kitzinger, 1994; Nielsen, 2011; Ivey, 2012). Bringing operational women together who have not worked together or even know each other may support the notion of developing a space for them to share their experience, whether similar or different. A key driver for focus groups is to promote self-disclosure among participants with a view to finding out what they believe, feel or have experienced (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Such self-disclosure is likely when participants are situated with others that they perceive to be similar to themselves. It is upon this same premise, but with differing reasons, that I am opting to hold focus groups with operational men within FRSs. Holding focus groups with operational men within their own environment I believe may allay initial fear or suspicion as concerns the research aims. Responding to questions in groups may also support the likelihood of self-disclosure, even with contentious issues. Although greater in number, the male firefighter focus group is an efficient means of meeting with a number of men and accessing a range of perspectives and views whilst minimising the potential for self-consciousness in terms of the subject matter. In my experience of working experience with male firefighters, although they may appear initially resistant, their own experience of working in groups may support the focus group process. Importantly it appears to be the most direct, non-challenging way of finding out what they believe in terms of gender within the FRS, according to “their hierarchy of importance.” using “their language, their concepts” and “their framework for understanding the world” (Kitzinger, 1994). Further the importance of understanding the shared culture, and difference through interaction is an essential means of exploring agreement and disagreement without any attempt to force consensus (Twenge, 1997). The focus group is

aimed towards exploring their personal experiences, and their perception of culture, exploring what is normal for the group and seeing how knowledge and ideas develop and generate within their context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). With minimal input from the researcher the conversation is owned by the group, and so they tend to reveal information based on their perceptions of the people that they are with (Krueger and Casey 2015; Madriz, 2003; Hennick, 2014).

Cited characteristics that distinguish focus group discussions from other qualitative methods are:

- Focus groups typically consist of 6 to 8 participants
- Participants are preselected and have similar backgrounds or shared experiences related to the research issues (e.g., experience of an illness, multiple birth, divorce, and so forth).
- The discussion is focused on a specific topic or limited number of issues, to allow sufficient time to discuss each issue in detail.
- The aim is not to reach consensus on the issues discussed, but to uncover a range of perspectives and experiences.
- Discussion between participants is essential to gather the type of data unique to this method of data collection.
- The group is led by a trained moderator who facilitates the discussion to gain breadth and depth from participants' responses.
- Questions asked by the moderator are carefully designed to stimulate discussion, and moderators are trained to effectively probe group participants to identify a broad range of views. (Hennick, 2014 p. 2)

Project approval

In accordance with the Oxford Brookes, University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) regulations, I submitted an application for approval of a project involving human participants on 18th February 2016: UREC Registration No: 160987

Conditional approval was granted by UREC. The concerns included:

- The need for UREC to receive permissions for access to participants from FRSs prior to the collection of data;
- Maintaining anonymity of senior women in light of low numbers;
- To make explicit the logistical arrangements for the female firefighters focus groups, as participants were being brought together from around the UK
- Lack of detail regarding the scope of the study and perspective participant groups within the participant information sheet, which might affect the appeal of the study
- The need to include the signposting of external support for participants in order that my researcher role was not compromised or conflicted.

A three-week period was given by UREC for these concerns to be satisfied. Submission of an email was provided by my Director of Studies on 18th March to UREC outlining. The email included a full outline of amendments that had been made to the documents outlined, in accordance with UREC's concerns, further supported with quantitative data sets regarding numbers of operational/senior women. Full approval was granted to the Director of Studies, by letter on 3rd May by UREC with the provision that the letters of permission were forwarded to the Committee as soon as they were received.

Although verbal/email permissions were given by Chief Fire Officers in the early stages of contact, changes in personnel and availability resulted in time delays in receiving formal written permissions from Hampshire FRS on 17 February 2017, and London Fire Brigade on 16th February 2017.

Participant involvement process

Prior to involvement in the study, once accessed, all participants were given a participant information sheet which outlined the following: the scope of the study, the individuals or group being asked to participate, confidentiality and the option to withdraw, and finally, the voluntary nature of the study. The information sheet also included details of the research team, and Oxford Brookes' Ethics team together with contact information.

Once a participant had decided to be included in the study, they were asked to complete consent forms, which were sent ahead by email, and signed and returned by email or in person.

All participants were advised both verbally and through participant information that their contribution would be de-identified and that all reasonable steps would be taken to maintain their anonymity.

Data collection

Figure 4 Research participants table

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS		
Focus Groups	**In-depth Interview**	**Semi-structured interview**
Operational Women *12 women firefighters* *England: separate FRS* *Role: supervisory to middle manager* *2 focus groups.* *Length of service: 15 – 30 years* *Independent contact, networks, snowballing method* *Spoke and recruited at Women's conference* *Focus Group: held at neutral venue sourced by member of the group* *Length of focus groups: average 90 minutes*	***Senior Women*** *8 senior women* *England: from 7 separate FRS* *Role: upper middle manager to CEO* *Breakdown:* *6 operationally qualified* *3 direct appointments.* *Length of service 10 – 30 years* *Contact independent of FRS, networks, snowballing method* *Interviews: Skype, face to face* *Length of interview: average 60 minutes*	***Decision Makers*** *5 decision makers (women) across FRS (A) and (B).* *FRS (A) 1 operational and 1 professionally appointed women;* *FRS (B) 3 professionally appointed women.* *Length of Service 2 – 22 years* *FRS chose individuals for interview* *Interviews: Skype, telephone* *Length of interview: average 60 minutes*
Operational Men *25 male firefighters (including 3 supervisory and 2 middle managers)* *3 focus groups.* *Single focus group conducted in FRS (A),(B) and (C).* *Length of service 6 weeks – 23 years* *Participants self-selected within FRS group framework* *Length of focus groups: average 90 minutes*	***Reflexive Conversation*** *Former Chief Inspector of Fire and Chief Fire Officer (man)* *Length of Service 30 years FRS* *Contacted by email and agreed interview* *Length of conversation 3.5 hours*	***Strategic Leaders*** *2 strategic leaders (men)* *National Fire Chief's Council and individual FRS operational strategic leaders* *Length of service over 25 years* *Contacted direct by email, and through recommendation; agreed interview* *Length of interview: average 60 minute*
Participants interviewed were from 13 FRSs across England		

Fire Service involvement

Three FRS were involved for purposes of focus groups but two for interviews with decision makers. FRS (A) is a large metropolitan Service, whose geographical risk is primarily urban. FRS (B) is a small to mid-size Service whose geographical risk is primarily rural with urban areas. FRS (C) is a mid-size service whose geographic risk is primarily urban with rural areas. All three Services have been deemed to be progressive and committed to issues of equality, inclusion and diversity. The FRS involvement is specifically for the engagement of focus groups with male firefighters, interviews with decision makers, and access to organisational data with regards to progress on data equality. FRS (C) was recruited when challenges regarding focus group attendance emerged in FRS (B).

Decision makers

Fire Service (A) and Fire Service (B) agreed to provide decision/policy makers to be interviewed for this study. The decision makers chosen were said to have responsibility for policy in terms of its development or implementation as concerns gender equality. All five were women. Areas of management HR, performance management, strategy, data, planning and risk management. Both FRSs were asked to nominate the decision makers to be interviewed, however, their knowledge appeared to be more generalist than specialist. The one exception was Decision Maker 2 in FRS (A) who talked cogently about differential impact and preferential treatment. The decision makers spoke on behalf of FRS (A) and FRS (B). They will be referred to as Decision Maker 1 (FRS A), Decision Maker 2 (FRS A), Decision Maker 1 (FRS B) Decision Maker 2 (FRS B) and Decision Maker 3 (FRS B).

Most of the decision makers, on questioning, appeared to have a lack of in-depth knowledge concerning the gender equality agenda, Equality Framework documents for the sector, as well as the gender equality journey of their FRS. Decision Maker 2 (FRS A) is a senior operational woman, and offered her personal experiences and changes she had seen, not by way of particular policy development, implementation or practice measures.

Women

Sample size has been a concern since the inception of the study, due to the low numbers of operational and senior women within FRSs in England. An early decision to access women participants by means other than their respective FRS organisations was made. As such initial contact was made through national employee networking bodies, and snowballing sampling techniques employed, where women recommended other women to be involved in the study.

Operational women's Focus group

The actual figures (figure 4) reflect challenges concerning accessing women. Station based fire-fighters opted out of attendance as they felt they would have to give an account for the leave request, which they believed could have an adverse impact upon their anonymity.
The support of the national women's network, Women in the Fire Service enabled a strong access gateway to women through their invitation to me to address the Women's conference to speak and recruit women, and through snowballing techniques in local FRS networks. I was unsuccessful in my engagement with the Fire Brigade Union's Women's National executive, despite several attempts.

Logistically, two operational women fire-fighters focus groups were conducted at a neutral venue, although linked to the Fire Sector, which would not pose a risk to their confidentiality as it was a training centre. Most women either took leave, or sought and were given special leave from a female officer in their FRS.

In-depth interviews with senior women

The involvement of women was approached differently to the other participants which centralised their anonymity, organisational position and access in terms of how and where they participated. The women were recruited to the study through a medium of direct contact by email, referral through formal and informal networks.

Reflexive conversation

As discussed in 3.4 an interview was conducted with a former Chief Inspector of Fire from Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Prior to taking up the role of Chief Inspector (CI), he was a Chief Fire Officer with 30 years of service in the FRS. As Chief Inspector he had commissioned Her

Majesty's first inspection into Equality and Fairness in the Fire & Rescue Service in England and Wales in 1999 (Home Office, 1999) from which the gender targets emanated.
The interview covered the context of his relationship with the FRS and extent of his role as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector; the experience and specificity of the inspection; the Thematic Review as concerns women, culture, leadership, and gender targets.

All participant's names have been changed in this study to preserve their identity. The discussion themes included their integration into the FRS; FRS culture and leadership; and, operational women firefighters and gender targets.

Desk Top Review

In compliance with the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010 Fire Authorities (who are a public sector organisation) must publish, at least annually, information on its employees to demonstrate its compliance with the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010, s149. The information a public authority publishes must include, in particular, information relating to persons who share a relevant protected characteristic; in this case gender. However, due to the fragmentation and inconsistency within FRSs concerning specific planning, monitoring and reporting of equality outcomes for gender a meaningful desk top review was not possible within the FRSs chosen (Warren & Karner, 2010). As such I have conducted a review of the strategy and framework process of the Fire Sector in the public domain.

Coding and analysis

Once the data was gathered and transcripts of the conversations made, I initially developed themes and codes by using the inductive methods developed by Dreyfus in 1990 (Boyatzis, 1998). The chosen instrument presented both a method and analysis brief for the coding and theming of data. Once data collection was complete, a series of steps were taken which: a) reduce the raw information; b) identify themes within subsamples; c) compares themes across subsamples; d) creates a code; e) determined the reliability of a code (Boyatzis, 1998 p. 67-98). Although it may appear to be a basic approach to coding data, it actually provided a helpful means of creating distinctive categories, and synthesising the meaning of the

information collected, as well as keeping the process data-driven. The inductive nature of the approach supported the process of emergent themes, and delayering of information that at first glance appeared to be of a similar nature (Stirling, 2001). An important consideration in the detail of the data coding was the additional caution to view created lists of characteristics deemed important to the thematic codes (Boyatzis, 1998 p.97). The analysis techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), Morse and Field (1996) and others support the approach of data reduction using narrative text supported by excerpts of data, data display and drawing conclusion of such data (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland 1971; Marshall and Rossman, 1984; Holley & Colyar, 2012).).

As part of the analysis I transcribed the recorded interviews myself, and in doing so started to become familiar with the data by way of first touch. I initially approached the data in two ways, what is the key information emerging from women, and what is the data saying about the context of the culture – what is considered normal day to day activity. As there were many interviews and focus group conversations to work with, some words, phrases and sentiments were either repeated across participant groups, or sounded initially remarkable or noteworthy. So for example words and experiences of operational women were repeated across both focus groups, and in particular two of the operational senior women were given gender based swear words as names. The use of the word tired or exhaustion cut across all participant women. The decision makers from both FRS used phrases such as “we must reflect the communities we serve” in response to questions to targets, or another example is the lack of information to a particular question across the different services. There were initial questions that I would put to the emergent data – what is this speaking to? What is this telling me about the culture or normal activity being spoken of? This supported the initial stages of grouping developing themes, or making connections between issues raised. Other examples are key words that were used frequently which on further investigation had deeper and shared meaning within the groups or across the FRS organisations, such as “old hands”, “watch culture”. At points where I was able to collect data specifically around the key issue raised, I could review the questions that I was asking of the data by reviewing it against the research objectives. Some discussions would open lines of enquiry for me as a researcher which on further exploration would have given little to the study, or would help me to further question the data. So for example, a phrase used by one the women firefighters “You’ll never get the chance to be the little grey man that sits in the corner will you. That little spotlight

you got attached to your head the day you joined up – it won't go out" opened up a line of enquiry of the women's data concerning visibility. An example of data which although relevant, was outside the scope of the study, was the intersection of race within operational personnel. So whilst there were Black male firefighters in the participant group, there were no women, which is a line of enquiry of its own, raising issues beyond inclusion possibly. An example of data supporting further interrogation of data is that of language. In listening to the transcripts I found that most of the participants used the word "females" when referring to the operational women, yet when talking of male firefighters they would be called by their name, the guys, men or the label firefighter would be used. One set of firefighters (men) kept referring to their colleagues as firemen, which open my curiosity to further scrutinise the gender based or polarising language being used. This supported my thinking in a more focussed way about the role that discourse/language appear to hold within FRS culture.

All interviews once typed were uploaded into NVivo with early themes emergent through the transcription process, inputted manually myself. So for example in creating parent categories (nodes) of "a bridge called my back" (the responsibilities participant women felt about the lack of basic gender equal arrangements), behaviour (accounts of watch behaviour towards women and men) credibility (reflected discussions by the women as having to prove themselves as credible firefighters and team members). I was able to run word association checks across all participant groups, as well as cross reference conversations. From the parent node, for example, of credibility, I was able to connect the narrative of the women's competence offered by the men. This I cross referenced with other groups of data for further interrogated for deeper and more focused connections (see Appendix 11). Examples include references to women's recruitment, positive action and how FRS teams would no longer be fit for purpose because of skills drain borne of women's lack of strength.

The main body of data which supported the use of the issues raised by the women of their experience led the data connection in terms of the cultural context of the supporting data. So for example the women highlighted that the only way they were able to move out of the oppression of the watch environment was by promotion as little movement in or out of watches naturally occur. To understand this more, pulling the data of the men's experience of the watch, its behaviours and organisation gave important context to the type of

environment that women were placed into. The main issues raised by the women were watch culture, their integration and visibility, not fitting in and the structural inequality of the FRS. It were these issues that informed the body of the data findings.

This has been my first stage approach to the analysis of this data within the findings chapter. Also, reflexivity has been an essential part of the study in all areas of the process, impacting the data collection and analysis process also.

Reflexivity

My initial challenge in the approach to the research began with questions of what is the research process that I am in, and how am I influencing it? In mapping the implications of my reflexivity in this study my primary focus has been that of subjectivity: how do my own values, experience, prejudice and assumptions show themselves? Although accepting Harding's writing about not being the dispassionate researcher (see page 94) issues of the legitimacy of my proximity to the data have presented opportunities to consider my values, experiences and assumptions against the data as it emerges, assessing what knowledge I can contribute as a woman with an intimate history in the FRS, with intersections of race and class.

Exploring my response to the question of if developed an objectivity to the study, how would the study best be served, supported my questions of proximity. Harding (1986) suggests that science rests on a set of socially, politically and historically produced notions of dualisms – objectivity/subjectivity, rationality/irrationality. Weight and preference is given to the notions of objectivity and rationality because they are linked directly to privilege or masculinity. It is those beliefs that create critiques that legitimise the basis to work with subjectivity or against it. (p.106; Lazard and McAvoy, 2017). It is at this point that I allow the process of subjectivity to be named and support the reflexive contribution to this study. My concerns regarding service and alienation from any potential study outcomes were also directly linked to the underlying notion of gender and privilege, but also remnants of my psychological relationship with the FRS. My reflexivity in this regard is that the experience of male dominance is unquantifiable and has the potential to bleed legacy into unexpected places; my research position included. As such I held an awareness of the women's emotional journeys and the possibility of my being emotionally mobilised by their experiences.

There are particular points where the it has been necessary to map the implications of my assumptions, think through the possibilities of my location to the data, and identify any limitations that might exist. In mapping the implications of my assumptions I found the opportunity for learning. I will give three examples of instances with three separate women as they illustrate both my reflexive process in terms of exploring translocated positionalities but also with regards to assumption and my own marginality and experience of oppression within the FRS.

In discussing my first in-depth interview with Zara, a senior operational woman with my supervisor she asked me what I noticed. What I had noticed was an acute sense incongruence – not with Zara, but an element of what was being presented. Zara was recounting significant examples of what she called laddish behaviour but her words, choice of phrases and use of crude swear words (describing one firefighter as a dog with two dicks) appeared to be mimicking the behaviour. She had repeated a number of times during the interview that her hope was that women could come to work and be themselves but her language appeared to belie that. My initial reaction was that she was institutionalised, and completely unaware her deportment. Further exploration could locate her as survivor, deliberately navigating the environment using male tools and advocating way for others women to be able to do what she could not. The more informative reflexive question was what does a woman's behaviour or language look or sound like? The notion of the constructions and categorisations of woman have created constraints in which the potential to judge and oppress become very real tools. My own intersections of gender and class have had a silent but underpinning, palpable presence in this study, but is also an intersection for a number of the women in this study. The possibility that Zara was opening up the reality her FRS context through her language is a possibility not to be missed. An early place of understanding is that there appears to be no place for assumption in the consideration of gender norms within the environment of the FRS.

Sheila is the only operationally qualified directly appointed woman in the participant pool. Throughout her interview she definitively and consistently minimised issues of gender, reframing the questions being asked or choosing not to answer them. She concluded that concerns for gender inequality in the FRS were currently unjustifiable, that there were bigger

fish to fry. Having been a senior Black woman in the FRS my reaction was one of disappointment. My value response leaned towards the Sheila's possible lack of understanding of what marginality may feel like. My overriding question in leaving the interview was why did Sheila so forcefully want gender to be invisible in our discussion? As a senior woman during my twelve-year tenure of the FRS I held an awareness of the difference in the environment between operational spaces and professional spaces. My experience was that if I was unhappy with what was being said and done in my professional space that I was equipped to challenge it (in part because of my seniority, in part because of my experience) but importantly I could exit that space. My awareness that operational women occupied a particular space daily with the same people unable to leave created a level of understanding that I did not know or understand in their experience.

hooks introduced the notion of the margin with the strong imagery of the racial segregation of the south in America. She was reminded daily of shops she could not enter, restaurants she could not eat in, buses that she could not ride although a citizen. The margin is defined as a place of occupation "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (hooks, 1984 preface). In thinking about how marginality manifests itself for women adds another layer of understanding in understanding women's experiences in the FRS. My experience of operational women is that they exist in physical and cultural boundaries separate to profession and non-operational staff; Sheila's unwillingness to acknowledge gender outside her own experience as a senior leader felt obstructive. My reflexive question at this point was, what was I feeling at the time of the interview? My feelings were frustration, and lack of integrity as a leader on Sheila's part. Was she doing what FRS leadership has been accused of doing (see chapter 1) in failing to account for whether women were able to work in a "prejudice free environment" (Burke, 1994)?

In acknowledging my response I also have to accept that Sheila's experience as a directly appointed, technically trained leader is not a common one. In all of the interviews she is the only leader that chose not to speak about her gender experience in any significant way. What influence might this have on my findings? It made her interview more significant as I looked at what has been said, and not said, in greater detail. She talked significantly about her competence and her fit into the organisation. I also reviewed the other interview transcripts in a careful way paying close attention to where incongruence or contradictions seemed to occur. What was the possible translocation in this instance? Was it easier or safer to be a

successful leader who is a woman not to raise issues of gender? Her position is not gender-neutral. She is saying that there are no significant concerns with gender equality. The feeling I was left with was one of negating what may be a cultural reality for women. Worse still, it may be an indicator of wilful leadership blindness concerning the legacies of hegemonic masculinities and patriarchal structures. In this instance, and in weighing the data against my working experience, it would be incongruent to remain dispassionate. In locating a position for herself in gaining technical proficiency in answer to questions of her own operational technical credibility, is it viable to suggest that opening up issues of gender could put her on the outside of her peer group? Even when exploring possibilities of translocation, the gravity of a senior woman leader saying that the issue of gender is a non-issue for the FRS is a concerning position to take as it is weighted with power and made on behalf of all of the women within the organisation that are represented by default.

Finally, Trudy is operational senior leader who throughout her career suggested that she stayed under the radar, and didn't get involved in gender issues. Her decision as a leader to openly support gender equality issues, felt incongruent or cowardly in light of the operational women's experiences shared. Whilst the majority of the examples given by the women were historical, they also talked about their current contexts, the impact and some of the challenges that they continue to face. Within such a polarised environment, legacy and experiential reality are very much linked to the cultural normality and internalised behaviours of both men and women. The challenge is that Trudy, on some level understood that within the context of the watch, the aversion to female characteristics was not because they are detrimental, but purely because they are not male. The anti-locution of gender identity and fit, promulgated through the watch processes and dominant and prevailing discourse appear to derive from such a premise. Most of the operational women in the focus group suggest that the culture defining them as women has placed them on the outside. In critical self-explanation of my response to Trudy supporting gender issues as a leader, creates challenges in locking into the experiential realities of oppression that some operational women have faced. It is it much like being in a boat stranded in the middle of the ocean shouting how to do swim strokes to the person drowning from inside the boat. The awareness of my advocacy on behalf of the women again has taken me through the reflexive question cycle. I began with what was I feeling at the time of the interview, but ended with what are my assumptions?

It was from this specific assumption of too little too late that the issue of how women are located within their environment – and questions of 'is this assimilation' or 'is this survival' became a very pertinent in the analysis of the findings, leading to considering the theory of translocational positionality. My personal role has always been advocacy, articulating the silenced and marginalised voice. My realisation is that all of the voices of participant should be heard, where the process of hearing, understanding and locating them, can be the transformative power of this study.

This has led to questioning how can gendered behaviour in women manifest itself when experiencing a gendered norm circle?

My final example links to such behaviours, but references two of the male firefighters who decided to leave Focus Group B. The particular behaviour of one, clenched fists, chair turned facing out of the circle led me to remind him that his attendance was voluntary. He chose to leave, as did one of his colleagues when the offer was extended to the wider group. The choice to not participate was as important to the interactions of the group as the ones that did not leave had much to say. The exit of the two firefighters helped me to listen more intensively to what was being said. It was in this focus group that the men referred to themselves as firemen, a manager talked about the degradation of skills of teams because of women firefighters. The other talked about women and Black people not wanting to join the FRS. The firefighter who walked out had been explicit about working with women firefighters, and having little issue with them. It made me question whether the walk out was about the research or the incongruence of the managers the men were with.

It is of significance that during the course of this study stories have surfaced into the public domain illustrating pockets of degrading behaviours towards women by their male colleagues, despite the narrative that its existence has all but dissipated. Wider media coverage across the country has lifted the lid on hidden cultural behaviours within the FRS. A number of the operational women involved in the study contacted me to see if I had seen either reviews or media coverage. There was a relief that some truths concerning harassing and bullying behaviours were now in the public domain. In May 2017, the treatment of two West Midlands women firefighters made headline news when it was reported that their firefighter colleagues in a coordinated attack had filled the women's fire-boots with excrement at separate stations on the same day (Mail Online, 2017). In the same year two fire fighters from a local fire service

committing suicide within 10 days of each other for reasons unknown; this is coupled with the unsettling and damning outcome of a central government review of that same FRS. The review reported a lack of governance, and a culture of harassment and bullying at senior levels of the organisation amongst other things, with the Chief Fire Officer and (female) Deputy Chief Fire Officer being suspended from duty. This report regrettably follows in the footsteps of an equally damning review of Essex Fire & Rescue Service in 2015 where levels of harassment and bullying were heavily criticised, and with the leadership of the organisation being reviewed by the government (House of Commons, 2017; Lucas, 2015). Lastly, in recent weeks, excerpts of a scathing social media campaign, targeted and scapegoated, two women officers (by name) for the alleged inappropriate recruitment and promotion of women; a governance issue with seemingly individual employee consequences.

My own insider experience of the environment, against hearing polarised experiences of women within the cultural and structural framework of the FRS from the outside has enabled sobering, and supportive thinking within this reflective element of the study. At times it has been much like holding my breath under water. With saturation of data, and the process of being drawn back into the centre through the data, the reflexive process has enabled my ability to step back to the margins to identify through the standpoint of the women's experiences, what is occurring creating points of knowledge for understanding the mechanisms of the gendered norm circles. Translocational positioning has been a supportive means of making sense of women's behaviours, which initially read as contradictions, but when explored can be reflexively understood as responses to patriarchal oppression.

Although some examples of reflexivity and positionality are given here, the process was used throughout analysis of findings, to underpin and support discussion. It has created, through the women's voices a vantage point of how to consider marginality. It has also created a vantage point from which to interrogate the data through the realist constructionism approach of norm circles, to further interrogate the findings to build knowledge, and seek to understand the processes of gender within the FRS.

Essential to exploration of the data findings, is how women may have been abstracted within FRSs through processes of patriarchy. Patriarchy, when considered through the experiences

and histories of women can provide substantial knowledge of gender processes. Consideration of realist constructionist tools of identifying the processes of how patriarchy can be created and enabled may bring new understanding to FRS culture. As such part of the integrative methodical lens, I will introduce the notion of the norm circle (the theoretical premise for realist constructionism below) as a means of second stage analyses of the data findings within the discussion chapter. The concept of realist construction does hold theoretical tension within critical realism itself. However, it is the coalition between Foucauldian discourse and realist social ontology (discursive constructionism) which provides a strong premise for meaningful analysis of FRS culture.

Considering cultural norms: Realist Constructionist Norm circles

It is argued that discursive rules can be described as norms in the sense that there are norms about what we should write, think, say. As such we should consider them in the sense of all other norms, and so apply explanations to them in the same way as we do with any normative social institution. The concept of the norm circle is introduced on this basis (Elder-Vass, 2010b chapter 6). The norm circle is defined as a group of people who are *"endorsing and enforcing a specific norm"* (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 11; Elder-Vass, 2015a). The idea is that the norm circle is itself a social entity with causal power. Every norm has a group (norm circle) which stands behind it (endorsing and enforcing), critiquing and punishing individuals who fail to observe the norm and rewarding those who actually observe it. The behaviour that sanctions, critiques and punishes is said to influence individuals exposed to it towards *"dispositions"* of conformity to the norm. Such dispositions amount to tendencies which can, like all causal powers, be frustrated by the multiplicity of "countervailing" powers that can present themselves:

"Thus, the norm circle, a social entity with an emergent causal power arising from a process of interaction between its members, operates through its members to exercise that causal power: the power to create a tendency for affected individuals to conform to the norm concerned" (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 11).

It illustrates how discursive rules and norm circles can be linked through their operation in more general terms. The result is that discursive rules can have causal impact on individuals as a result of a discursive norm circle. An illustrative example is given within academia. Given the context of an academic journal, discursive rules are set which explicitly explain what

should and should not be said within the journal, with the rules being causally effective as they are upheld by a group of people, i.e., editors, peer reviewers or the like. This group is said to be committed to enforcing the discursive rules and in so doing possess the power to sanction writers in support of said rules (Elder-Vass, 2012a). It is this link that Elder-Vass suggests produces a coalescence between the discourse work of Foucault and realist social ontology. Here lies the strength of his argument as it is suggested that it is the causal processes and mechanisms that make it possible for discursive rules to affect us. It is the groups that are committed to the rules that enforce them and importantly, individuals are inclined to conform or act in conformity to the rules due to the pressure from the discursive norm circle. The group pressure deepens their tendency to "*develop dispositions"* to comply with the rules but the tendency to act in conformity to the rules is usually influenced or affected by other causal powers at play (Elder-Vass, 2012a p. 153). So, it is argued, that general conformity with the rules is gained because the social force that is behind the rules has strength. Again, the rules can be contravened or changed because other social forces will also be apparent which has the capacity also to influence behaviours. This type of "discursive constructionism" Elder-Vass argues offers compatibility with a realist ontology and more importantly offers a stronger, clearer theoretical premise from which to begin (Elder-Vass, 2015b). A counter argument raises the contentiousness of structure and agency when considering the place of the individual (Archer, 1995). In defence of norm circle theory, the following response applies

"… the problem of the relationship between individual and society was the central sociological problem from the beginning. The vexatious task of understanding the linkage between "structure and agency" will always retain this centrality because it derives from what society intrinsically is." (p. 1).

Finally, under the umbrella of realist constructionism, the significance of the role of the subject, as well as discursive power itself is introduced (Elder-Vass, 2012a; 2012c). Raising the notion that subjectivity is constructed and the associations made with regard to its inauthenticity or compromise, the option is towards a moderate realist constructionism where subject is compatible with the element of autonomy by "individual human agents" (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 12). As the notion of subject is used to refer to a diversity of individual human aspects, the following principles are accepted. Individuals are capable of reflection and choice; authorised subjects exist who are recognised as being authorised to make, non-

trivial decisions. The latter refers specifically to the feminist debate which recognises the notion of subjectivity being driven by the denial of status to women. A wider tension is asserted, where agency, the political subject and the free-floating mind, are suggested as illusionary ideologies (Elder-Vass, 2012a). It argues the underlying scepticisms of agentic subjectivity, and outlines Butler's argument where she questions the existence of a subject outside of discourse (Butler, 1990 p. 202). This argument suggests that people exercise a performative role in terms of discourse, i.e., occupying the site or position of subject whilst undertaking discursive acts (Butler, 1992), Elder-Vass reads (or redefines) as the authorised subject. He responds to the theoretical difference by suggesting Butler's approach to subject restricts or denies individual reflexivity or indeed autonomy. This restriction eliminates the power and the opportunity of individuals to change the very discourse that they are situated and embedded within. This is hugely powerful when thinking through the transformational element of this study. The argument is that "…realists, the subject is more than a position in discourse" which further reinforces the realist stance of reflection and choice (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 14; Archer, 2003; Shilling, 2005). Individuals are independently positioned from any discursive act because of the constant dynamic of the emergent capabilities of reflexivity and choice. Although the influence of prior related acts is acknowledged. Is the differential of power at best a defining factor and at worse influential when thinking about reflexion and choice terms of human agency and emergent capabilities? The inference is that we have the power individually to affect cultural normalities. The notion of the subject (men and women) – reflexive with the ability to choose – is practically conjoined with the concept of norm circle and acknowledges that individuals, their reflection and associated choice. So individuals "are influenced by the discursive pressures exerted on us by the discursive norm circles that form an important part of our social context, we develop new or subtly altered dispositions, including dispositions to exert normative pressures ourselves." (Elder-Vass, 2012c p. 14; Elder-Vass, 2015b).

Norm circles are described as ontologically rigorous in addressing the sociological problematic of structure and agency (Creswell et al, 2013 p. 33). So, whilst preserving the agency of individuals, the emergent properties of social structure itself focuses on the change possible through identifying the practices and customs of individuals and groups. There does, however, appear to be divisions amongst realists as concerns the purity of Elder-Vass's approach to

structure and agency, Wahlberg suggesting that Elder-Vass "*cannot have his cake and eat it"* in his discussion of singular and pluralist entities (Wahlberg, 2014, p. 779; Kegan & King, 2007; Porpora, 2007; Sawyer, 2005; Porpora, 2013 in Archer). The interplay between individual agency and the prevalent culture is appropriate to consider here. This introduces the notion of the morphogenetic cycle. The morphogenetic cycle is an approach which analyses culture as a cycle of interaction between socio-cultural interaction (interactions and sharing of ideas between individuals) and the Cultural System (knowledge or ideas available to us at any given time). It is argued that in the objective moment individuals are influenced by the existing cultural context, that is, the cultural system. The subjective moment is the point that the individual chooses to act, independently, which produces a 'socio-cultural' interaction that is influenced by the cultural system, but again (like downward influence) reproduces or transforms the culture or system (Archer 1995, p. 179).

Certain omissions or blind-spots are said to exist with the critical realism approach which limit its ability to stand alone in answering certain questions regarding culture (Hodgson, 2011). The approach is said to denote structural change but fails to outline how individuals are changed; and with it how structures evolve with no parallel explanation of the resultant changes to individuals or groups (p. 105). As concerns culture itself Hodgson argues that there is no adequate explanation that exists within the theoretical stance taken by Bhaskar (1998) and Archer (1995) concerning the causes of individual beliefs. There is little to suggest how individuals acquire or change their beliefs, preferences or purpose by way of explanation or reasoning. Norm circle theory goes some way to redress this.

Gendered norm circles

In using the participant women's standpoint as knowledge we have the opportunity to understand how the norms circles can be gendered. Revisiting Harding's view that standpoint "foregrounds how embodying a subordinate identity can be an asset in processes of disclosing the nature of oppressive structures" can strengthen the inquiry (see p.94). Supported by the conceptual premise that gender as a process is produced in daily situations suggests that the gendered norm circle provides a means of isolating and identifying – through women's standpoint – the focus for how gender is created or may become manifest, and how oppressive structures can embed themselves (see p.50; p.94). Accepting the principle that

discursive rules have a causal impact on individuals, the notion that groups who are committed to rules, enforce them creates learning for us when using the cultural "lives" or experiences of women as knowledge. Being able to unpack and identify gendered discursive rules that have a causal impact on individuals as a result of the discursive norm circle creates transformational learning, and can connect with the view that in the space of interactions, social structure evolves (Uhl-Bien, see p.66), opening up macro as well as micro gender inequality oppressions and aggressions. Using situated knowledge to underpin the identification of gendered discursive rules, may give clearer information of impact, that is how the structuration of gender occurs which separates people into differentiated gender structures (see p.50). It can also support further understanding of how the interactions and ordinary practices within Acker's definition of gendered organisations create the blue print for the patterning of dominance and subordination (see p.55). In this way the gendered norm circle can be a powerful identifier of how prevalent narratives, structures and mechanisms are endorsed and enforced. The intersectional claims of social situations, identities or practices together with a range of intersectional power relations coming from different vantage points, informed through women's experience is fundamental in supporting the notion of the gendered norm circle (see p.94). Identifying the gendered norm circle will establish the rule which either implicitly or explicitly outlines what is acceptable based on a gendered framework, activity, behaviours, discourse – and that rule(s) being causally effective and upheld by a group of people. Establishing the gendered norm circle will allow an in-depth focus on gender dominance and seek to evidence the basic causal mechanisms of patriarchy.

In this chapter I have introduced an integrative methodological lens through which to consider women within a gendered organisation, and how patriarchal processes may be established and perpetuated. I have layered reflexivity, marginality and positionality together with realist constructionism as a means of understanding the cultural patterns of patriarchy. I have discussed my methodological approach which has included the qualitative methods of focus groups and interviews, and outlined the ethical considerations, data collection and coding and analysis processes. Finally, I have explained the realist constructionist approach of norm circles, and offered the notion of the gendered norm circle to support the inquiry of how patriarchy is continually upheld and embedded within FRS culture.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS and ANALYSIS

These findings are reported in two stages, the first stage in line with my chosen methodology, looks at the data generated from the focus group, in-depth and semi-structured interviews undertaken. The second stage, being the contextual information found through a limited desktop review of the gender mainstreaming intentions and outcomes for the Fire Sector.

As outlined in 3.4. of the methodology chapter, the approach I will use for producing findings and analysis is the technique which provides data reduction using narrative text supported by excerpts of data, and draws conclusions from the reduced data (Knafl and Howard, 1984). The outcome of the findings and data analysis will present emergent or descriptive themes which form the basis of my discussion chapter. These themes will be further explored using the integrative methodical lens within discussion chapter 5 of this study.

4.2 Focus Group and interview findings

The profile of the participants is presented as separate groups namely: operational men, operational women, senior women, decision makers and strategic leaders. For the purpose of the findings, the senior women are reported as a dual category group, namely operational women and those who have occupied direct-entry roles. Having outlined the participant profile, I will explore the findings by key themes that have emerged across all groups which fall into four categories: integration and acceptance; watch culture; systemic gender equality and gender targets.

Decision makers

Decision makers spanned two FRS organisations, and the number decided upon was purely in terms of triangulation and management of data. Each decision maker held strategic or policy implementation responsibility for gender equality. All decision makers interviewed were women, with one out of the five holding an operational role at senior level. All four other women were from 'professional' or 'support' services, depending on which term the organisation used. The roles covered areas such as human resources, risk and project management, audit responsibilities, strategy and inclusion, performance management, planning and business continuity.

Operational Men's focus group A, B and C

In total, 25 operational firefighters took part in the focus groups in 3 separate FRS organisations.

In FRS (A) the longest serving member of the group has been a firefighter for 28 years, with the majority of the other firefighters' service ranging from between 10-17 years. They had one new firefighter who had completed firefighter training and had been in role just 8 weeks prior to the focus group. The group held visible ethnic minority difference, as well as one of the group being an openly gay man. One of the men talked about applying to multiple FRSs before he was successful, one talked of responding to a recruitment drive and two talked about their attraction to the FRS as a result of a positive action campaign.

I will refer to this group as Focus group A.

The majority of the men in FRS (B) were recruited in the 1990s. The men had service of 24, 23, 22, 19 and 10 years, with one of the men having served on the same station for 23 years. All men in this focus group appeared to be white and of British origin, two of which were from a military back ground. I will refer to this group as Focus Group B. Three participants who stayed for the duration of the focus group. The two other firefighters who decided to leave as it was clear that they did not wish to be involved in the study to at once the focus group started.

In FRS (C) five of the men had between 22 and 28 years of operational service, one had 20 years, two had 18 years and the least amount of service was 14 years. Of the 9 firefighters, a third said that they had served on the same station for considerable time periods of 19 years, 22 and 23 years. Five of the men said they had always wanted to join the FRS and so pursued it as a career choice, two of the men were ex-military, one had responded to an advert. All of the men in the group appeared to be white and of British origin. This group will be referred to as Focus group C.

It is not clear how many of the men across all three focus groups had been stationed with women firefighters but not all of them had. The main themes that emerged from their

discussions were women integrating into the FRS, their competence and perceptions of differential treatment.

Senior women in-depth interviews

Eight women who held senior leadership posts were interviewed individually. Six of the women were operationally qualified, and three were direct appointments to role. Two of the five operational women who applied using the single tier entry system, heard of the firefighting role through a friend, two of the women responded to positive action advertisements and one applied through a public sector course. Of the direct appointments, one of the women joined the FRS in a lesser role and had over the years been promoted to more senior positions, but joined her last FRS by way of direct appointment. The second responded to an advert from her FRSs; and the third senior woman was seconded to the FRS organisation from the local authority, subsequently competing for a senior role through normal recruitment processes.

Five of the women were recruited as firefighters and have, in line with the single tier entry process, been promoted through the ranks.

The women's experiences found some commonalities but also varied. For the emergent theme of integration, I have grouped the responses by categorising the experience of operational women and directly appointed women separately, as their working environments are accepted as being different. For the themes of promotion, mentoring support and women's leadership I report the findings as one group.

The foundational difference for the five operational women from the directly appointed senior women is that they were recruited as firefighters and so have been socialised and culturally integrated into their FRS through the watch-based system. All five attended the Fire Service training college, and all five have spent at least 8 years at station level in watch-based teams. As their tenures within the FRS range from 16 to 29 years, all have spent a considerable period of their careers as firefighters, and subsequently officers and leaders. The women's names are Wilma, Zara, Trudy, Maria and Cassie.

Operational women's focus group

Although the recruitment of women to this study was sent to all levels of operational women, all of the women recruited were ranked officers holding a management role. The initial response for participation in the focus group was an equal split between ranked officers, and operational firefighters. There is an indicator as to why all focus group attendees were ranked officers. Three women firefighters who had applied to attend the focus group, withdrew on the basis that they did not want their FRSs to know about their attendance. As they were station based operational firefighters they outlined that their involvement may have presented challenges for them. Further, as an operational firefighter based at a station, they specified that they could not ask for special leave or time off without having to give an account for why. Other operational women firefighters advised that dates were not suitable, or failed to respond when further contact was made.

Twelve women in total attended the focus groups which were held on two consecutive days, at a neutral location not affiliated to any one individual FRS. The women were from FRSs across England. I will refer to the focus groups as Women's focus group 1 and Women's focus group 2. Women's focus group 1 (fg1) consisted of Connie, Betsy, Stacey, Beverley, Gaby, Abby, Doreen and Susie.

Women's focus group 2 (fg2) was made up of Edie, Daisy, Fay and Camilla.

In both focus groups the women either held supervisory or middle management roles.

Both focus group discussions, unlike the male groups, felt very impassioned as well as emotive for majority of the sessions. Many of the women in recalling their accounts, and for some who were discussing current issues, found resonance of their stories in the other women.

For the women's focus groups as an icebreaker, they were split into two groups and asked to create a picture of how gender was represented in the FRS, which they then fed back to all of us.

(Appendix 8; Fig 5). Discussing their pictures, the predominant themes that emerged include the following five areas. Firstly, that women remained on the outside of the organisation. They had a sense that women were token and were not really accepted. The women that were on the inside had usually assimilated to predominant culture and were unhappy. Secondly, their voices were not heard, i.e. that men choose not to listen, as well as the women

being tired of speaking. Third that women, in any area of success were viewed as being helped, especially through positive action. They outline a certainty concerning succession of men either through recruitment or promotion, perpetuating cultural bias through the process of informal and formal male support:

"there is always people behind them. Always someone coming through. So, you're just getting the same" (Betsy, Fg1).

The fifth point concerns the wellbeing and success of women in that women were just surviving and could not be their authentic selves.

Stronger, reoccurring emergent themes of visibility, cultural assimilation and resilience were discussed, with continual references made to historical experiences. Betsy (fg1) started by talking about how proud they had been because all of the women's toilets had been locked and the women issued with keys, when the realisation hit them that the organisation should be managing the misuse of the toilets not them. This began a discussion about the inappropriate use of the women's spaces.

Connie says

"we had someone masturbating in our toilet, as in 'get out of here' and I went to the officer in charge and said, it's just not right, this is – there are all the other rooms – I had to justify why he shouldn't masturbate at work (in the workplace) (laughs)…yes we are not in time travel in the 70s I forget, so I have to explain that, and then we had the same thing locking…but they didn't once consider addressing why was a man coming into a female toilet leaving his semen so we would feel intimidated or whatever by it, or getting a thrill out of it".(Fg1)

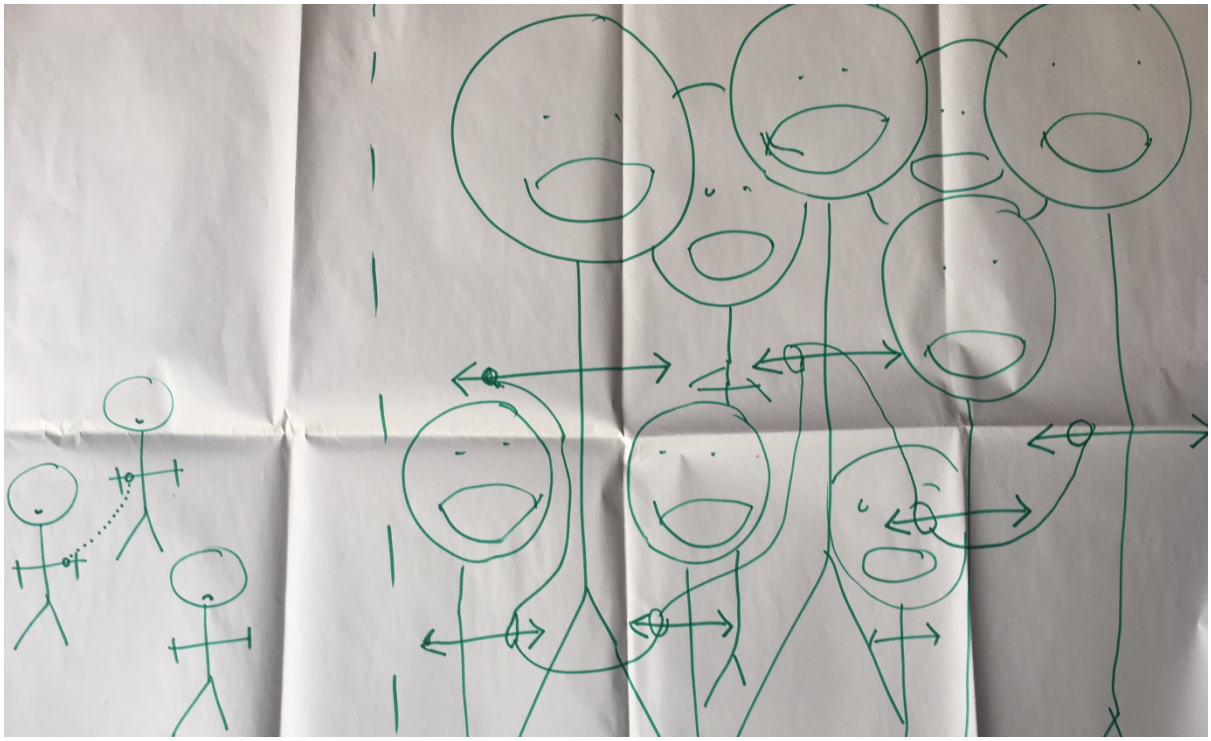
The reference to experiences appeared to be reference points to the past and indicators of continuing behaviour throughout their careers.

The illustration (Fig. 5) drawn by women's focus group 1 gave a powerful and emotive reference to how they felt about gender, and their FRS experience. I have chosen this illustration, although four were completed (appendix 8), to indicate the complexity of how the women speak of their gender experience within the FRS. The women were asked as an icebreaker to discuss their experience of the fire service and illustrate it for two reasons. Not all of the women knew each other, as they were from FRS around England. The second reason was that I wanted them, at an early stage of the focus group to begin to understand and

articulate basic common experiences of being a woman in the FRS. I hoped that the drawings would enable their own consensus of understanding before articulating their gender experiences with me as the researcher.

In contrast did not ask the men to do this in their focus groups as they were an established working groups who knew each other. My experience of working with men in the FRS alluded to value being placed with time served. To establish trust and help to contextualise the questions of gender, the discussions began with their time in the job, how and why they joined.

Figure 5 Focus Group 1 women firefighters illustration of gender in the FRS



The women explain the picture in the following way. The depiction of men is on the right. They have big, disproportionate, open mouths, which are smiling. All of the men are stood shoulder to shoulder and are all linked to each other. There are men in the background, waiting to take the spaces of the men in the foreground. There is a broken line between the women and the men which places women on the outside of the organisation. The women are depicted on the left who also they look like men. However, they are tiny in comparison to the men and have barely visible mouths and no eyes. Two women have a dotted line to each other, having made their own alliance (which is why the line is dotted) and are smiling.

The third woman is standing nearer to the men away from the women, and is shown as having an unhappy face.

It is important to say that the questions asked of the women required the sharing of their experiences that for some had been repressed for years, and others were just finding voice to. The process of them talking about their individual journeys with their peers, for some of the women found a powerful commonality, but also unlocked the fact that a percentage were still very much on the battle continuum currently experiencing turmoil within their FRSs. This in turn seemed to provide the opportunity for reflexivity, which for some may have been previously supressed. When sharing a recent experience, Connie, a watch manager of almost 20 years' experience said

"…even last week I was nearly pushed out of the fire service, yet again…at what point does somebody give a stuff? Stop giving it that [gestures with her hands a talking mouth], and does that [points to her ears] because there are no ears on your picture there, not a single pair of ears" (fg1).

The illustration powerfully offers areas of systemic equality and functional processes for men to find alliance, belonging, engagement and succession. It offers no such representation of systemic processes for women. Although it may be argued that this is the perspective of women, it is the experience of women that is being synthesised as an area of knowledge. The depiction of disassociation, otherness and exclusion that is made is stark, and appears to straddle areas of identification, belonging and cultural alliance.

Early days - integration

All of the participant operational women talked about assimilating to the dominant culture. Their language was very different to the men but shared some similarities such as fitting in and loss of individuality. As well as discussing the changes women underwent to fit in the environment, they also raised the changes in their male colleagues' behaviours , marked and noticeable changes. Daisy illustrates the change in relationship with her training school colleague following his placement at watch

"he kept saying to me 'oh you'd be great on my watch, they'd love you, you should try and come over to my watch' and something must have happened… because the next time we met up…suddenly I was shit, he thinks that women shouldn't be in the job ra-ra, and I was like 'hold

on a minute, at training school you thought I was…the dog's bollocks…you wanted me on your watch and now all of a sudden I'm shit and he was like 'well I never saw you the fire ground, I only saw you at training school' (Fg2).

Watches are the principal means of integration into the Fire Service, and for most firefighters will be their only experience of fire service culture. Watch culture is the name referred to by all the study participants referring to a prevalent set of behaviours and acceptable code of conduct established within the watch (team), enough to dominate how the watch operates. Whenever the participants reference watch culture they spoke of discriminatory, harassing and bullying behaviour.

"So red watch on the station can be absolutely fine, white watch on a station can be absolute nightmare and that, the absolute strength of that is the leadership...the leadership doesn't only have to come from the watch manager or the crew manager, the leadership comes from the fire fighters as well. [if] the leadership is weak…[it] allows for an inappropriate culture which then new people joining that team with any sort of difference or hidden differences they aren't able to come to work and be themselves which a real sadness to me." (Strategic leader)

Both focus groups talked about the ratio of women to men and the maleness of the culture, and it's prevalence at watch level. All of the women spoke of their awareness of the narrative that women were not welcome in the "job" at early points in their career, but were not aware of this when they joined the FRS.

The women describe their assimilation and integration to watch culture. There was a consensus about the variability of watch culture, and that if they were placed within a good watch that they were lucky.

"I would encourage women to join but I would be mindful of where women were placed…because the culture can be so strong" (Betsy, Fg1).

Discussion of integration primarily pivoted around the women's shared historical accounts of watch life which involved some form of sustained bullying or inappropriate behaviour towards them because of their gender. Their accounts spanned stories of chino-graphed

marked through of the 'WO' on the WOMAN's toilet so that it read MAN, through to physical assaults.

"it was horrendous. I had one fire fighter that took every opportunity to grab my bum, grab my boobs ..every time I got on the fire engine he did it, if we went out on a fire call.. he would wait round corners for me…the Sub Officer Watch Manager used to call me 'Toxic' that was my nickname 'Toxic'… they used to do drills where they would lower me down the pole shaft head first in a parachute knot and leave me dangling till the blood vessels burst in my face and my eyes" (Zara, transcript).

Stacey laughed at own her naivety when placed on her first station and given the job of mess manager (fg1). Most talked about not wanting to be seen as different, and the consequences of doing what was necessary in order to accommodate that. Susie started the session by saying very little. When asked how she integrated into her watch she responded by outlining that she loved her job, and got on well with her watch and loved working with her crew. As the conversations developed Susie talked about her current battle with keeping her emotions in check at work, describing her current colleagues as *"animals"* (fg1). In her group they agreed that their colleagues acted differently to most work environments

"It's a place of work with big red doors where they run amok like it's a playground. It's a workplace…" "It's because they are allowed to treat it like it's a home…it's unacceptable behaviour… is accepted as the norm" (Susie, fg1).

They discussed how the cultural bias was reflective of male comfort and how it manifested in unprofessional behaviour. Daisy recalls

"on my first day the mess manager took me aside on my own…he said 'what you fucking doing here, we don't want you, you're nothing but a little bitch' and was just shouting in my face and he said 'and what you going to do about it' and he'd look over his shoulder to make sure there was nobody else there…and then he said 'oh, do you want a cup of tea?'" Daisy (Fg 2).

"So my third watch, on my third station when I went for promotion, I did not feel safe, because the watch were a bunch of animals. It was my first rank of promotion that I had, I was the junior officer of the watch. I used to lock myself in my room – it was a separate room that junior officers had. I was so anxious about what they might come and do to me during the night because they were a bunch of assholes." (Wilma, transcript)

Although the directly appointed women were recruited by and integrated with senior managers outside of the watch scenario, some of their accounts bear significant similarities. All three senior women were recruited having strong professional portfolio of experience prior their FRS appointments. The names of the directly appointed senior women are Claire, Christine and Sheila.

Claire, described her appointment as politically hostile, outlining leadership opposition to the appointment of a non-operational senior manager. She talked of being harassed and bullied by leadership and key stakeholders with it being
"a fairly angry and aggressive environment to be in" for the first few months of her tenure. She describes receiving 6 grievances within a 24-month period from senior officers, calling the environment *"toxic"* (Claire, Transcript).
Christine, a long-term employee of the FRS, described the double glass ceiling that existed for her in successfully progressing through all of the ranks of her non-operational recruitment structure, and then moving over to compete within the operational assessment promotional structure. She talked of decades of good, progressive service with her first FRS employer, but joining a "*highly toxic culture"* when directly appointed to her senior position in her second FRS (transcript). She describes being excluded, feeling exposed and not accepted because of her gender as well as her direct appointment.

Sheila was head-hunted following a period of secondment to a FRS organisation. She felt that the challenge of her being directly appointed to a senior role was a greater challenge than her being a woman in the FRS. When she was appointed to her senior position, the highest-ranking operational woman within her FRS was a supervisory officer. She talks of being welcomed but had an awareness of varied responses to her appointment.

For most, gendered behaviour manifested as either protective father or abusive man. Sheila recounts helpful support given at the early stages of her appointment
"*you are going to seriously challenge everybody's own level of confidence because of the other skill sets that you bring and if you prove that you can do this operationally and break the dark barrier, the mythical thing that is the fire sector he said there will be people that will hate you for it. He said just know that and my suggestion is that the first piece of PPE you get is a steel*

tray and you ram it down the back of your jumper (laughs). And I thanked him for it." (transcript).

However, Edie said outlined her different experiences with different watches

*"my training squad was fantastic, I felt really top of my game, I felt like, 100% confident go to station…bit of a different sort of culture, but you kind of like, stick in there…women's group…just kept me going long enough to then move to another station, and I joined that station and I thought, this is what it's like, a bunch of really old guys, you'd think the last bastion of maleness in the brigade, and they welcomed me…I could be myself, I could joke, I could have a laugh. And it wasn't about being one of the lads, it was actually being able to be myself and be a woman, be different and just be myself."(*Fg 2)

So here the issue these cultural norms are taught and perpetuated is raised. Camilla was the exception and strongly disagreed, being proud that she came through "*old school probation*", which she felt gave her credibility with her male colleagues (Fg 2).

Recalling historical experiences two of the senior operational women recounted similar accounts. Zara and Wilma talked extensively about historical discriminatory and bullying behaviours towards them by their watches, managers and other firefighter personnel. Similar to Doreen in fg1, Zara was told by a fellow station officer when deployed to an emergency response incident to *"fuck off my fire ground"* (Zara transcript). Although both women talked about experiencing good and bad watches, both cited historical behaviours that were criminal, dangerous, violent, sexually inappropriate, and discriminatory. Wilma also discussed the extreme demands made of her at training school to neutralise the appearance of her gender; cut her hair or fail training school.

Many of the women across the focus groups and in-depth interviews talked of being given nicknames

"I had one guy when I was on the watch for the first two years he only called me 'the cunt' … why is that word so powerful…his justification…well I call other guys pricks. No, no, no, I said you are calling me 'the cunt', you don't call them 'the prick" (Connie, Fg1).

"my sub officer at the time, my watch manager, was really, really supportive but there was one guy on the watch, he just wouldn't accept me…He simply referred to me as "the bird". One time he put a memo in to the station commander…he said he found it degrading having

to get changed next to a woman. Because my locker just happened to be next to his."(Maria, transcript)

Although Trudy (senior woman), described early experiences of urine in her fire boots, and deciding not to report it, Edie (Fg 2), after 15 years of being in the FRS and believing that she was accepted by her watch, found that one of her watch colleagues had urinated in her fire boots. Edie actually went off sick as it affected her mental wellbeing. Their discussion suggested the names and behaviours were used as weapons, as control, and to exclude them.

There were contrasting responses in terms of women being placed with other women. Most operational worked on their own, with another woman appointed to the same station but different watch . The women talked of the definitive and controlling way their watches kept them from other women.

"I had met Sarah…who I used to see at incidents, who I used to run away from. I used to think 'oh my god she's looking at me…' 'o god run away just try and hide in the locker'. Then when I got back to station, they (the watch) would be like 'did you talk to her, what did you say, did you tell her about us' and I would be like 'no I didn't talk to her, I didn't say anything, I didn't make eye contact, please, please'. And that went on for several years… I had an awful time at my station. Absolutely awful." (Betsy, Fg1).

"…I wasn't allowed to speak to anybody on the fire ground, I must remain with them. I must not share my experience with anybody else. I was not allowed to go out on detached duties...so it took nine months for me to be allowed to speak to anybody on the fire ground, and even then, it was only brief...then they allowed me to go on detached duty…they were ringing up quite often through the night and just checking up on me." (Daisy, Fg 2).

Whilst Cassie voiced her unhappiness with being placed with an experienced woman firefighter for support, Connie says that she didn't work with another woman firefighter for 10 years. Cassie did not feel that pairing her with a woman firefighter was necessary, and opens the conversation about gender and her role. Issues of systematic isolation was a prominent discussion for most of the operational women, who were geographically isolated from other operational women due to low numbers. Four out of the twelve women had

worked with another woman, or placed on the same station as another operational woman at some time during their career.

Both Cassie and Trudy share experiences without notable difficulties attributed to gender.
"staying under the radar has been deliberate…What I never wanted was my success was attributable to my gender. It was all about me proving firstly to myself and then to others that actually I was more than credible at doing the job." (Cassie, transcript)

There appears to be a definite cultural boundary of gender for all participant operational women who have come through the single tier entry watch process. The component of gender merges with a system of dominance. However, where a hierarchy established through coercion with assimilation is the normative response, the specificity of how masculinity is manifested is the consideration. The term hegemonic masculinity is helpful in that it articulates the base position of patriarchy, or in other words, guarantees the dominant position of men, subordinating masculinities and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995 p.77). This appears to be operative throughout all of the participant experiences so far. This presents the scope to think about micro-level processes that allow a group to secure and maintain dominance through means other than force, introducing concepts such as cultural consent, absolute marginalization, and dominant gender narratives as outlined (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846).

All of the operational women discussed either inadequate or no female facilities at station level, or at the Fire Service training college during their integration. Women across all operational participant groups have campaigned for better facilities through their work within networking groups and their local union. All talked of macro-level systemic inequalities for women that have gotten better over time such as uniform, policy and practice, dignity issues and facilities.
"I had a BA facemask didn't fit because it was too big, and then they found one that did fit and then I was told not to make a fuss because you know…(laughs), didn't want to make a fuss" (Stacey, Fg1)
"I literally started banging on about uniform separate facilities for women and we've actually got separate dorms for women. Aww but the fuss that we went through for all of that…you

get tired and you have to take a step back – even your own gender saying we don't want separate dorms. We want to be in with the blokes, no! Actually It's not the right thing to do you know." (Connie, Fg1)

The men describe the integration into the watch more in terms of hierarchy and power bringing into the data findings a specific dimension of the expectations of behaviours and their manifestations. Their descriptions of the watches offered different experiences to the women "traditional…decent", "a good mix", "exciting". One firefighter said he loved the hierarchy, and being "bottom of the rung" was part of it (Focus group A, B, C).

Across focus groups the term old school behaviour is the descriptor of types of associative coercive controlling behaviours displayed within the watch.

One description given, which gives insight into the phenomenon

"a very old school attitude…and you really had to conform to that. The watch believed that was the way you know things were done and you had to basically go with that"

"let's see how much it takes to break them in" (men's focus group A).

Their experiences spoke to pecking order, and knowing their place. Conformity to expectation and manifestation of behaviours shows an association with the word "attitude" (men's focus group C). The word appears to be used interchangeably to mean a cultural demand but also resisting conformity. Attitude was discussed in a number of ways, for example "knowing your place" where demeaning tasks were still seen as justifiable rites of passage.

There were a number of firefighters who described their integration as "absolute turmoil" and "almost bullying". One talked specifically about not being a "yes sir, no sir type of probationer" not adhering to the informal hierarchy of the watch, and consequently "struggled" during his probationary period. One of the firefighters said that his challenge stemmed from the fact he was from outside of the geographical area, and described his watch's behaviour towards him as "nasty" but then rescinded it.

All firefighters across the 3 focus groups agreed that negative, bullying or targeted treatment associated to probationary status could change or desist for three main reasons.

The first was on the basis that another firefighter (probationer or otherwise) would be assigned the bottom of rung role. Secondly, that they had earned their place through their performance at an operational incidence where casualties were involved.

“One thing that could help, one thing that did help is if you got involved in a decent job… drag somebody out of a job whatever or being proactive you’d be at the front, you got like a tick, bit of recognition and the heat would come off” (men’s focus group A).
Or lastly that the behaviours became so bad that the individual left, disciplinary action was taken or the watch decided locally that the behaviours had gone too far.

Old-hands or old-school firefighters were seen as the dominant members of the watch who determined newer firefighters’ integration into, and experience of, the group. Notably it was not necessary for the old hands to hold positional power to hold the power of the watch. Across all three of the men’s focus groups examples were given of firefighters on probation coerced into the social order: bringing officers tea in bed, fetching and carrying, and being held on the outside of the group. Others talked about the physical assaults that would occur but were called practical jokes.

Focus group (A) and (C) discussed reactions to their non-conformity of the hierarchical system of the watch. The point was made that when they resisted or fought back, their situation would worsen. They discussed the notion of not helping themselves, or not being flexible. In other words, they suggested that they were in some way responsible for the bad behaviour towards them continuing. They described having their enthusiasm for the job “smashed” out of them due to the watch dynamics and enforced codes of behaviours. Included in this was banter and discriminatory behaviours. This was supported by group (A) descriptions of how individual opinions or contributions were seen as unsolicited, and therefore unwelcome. They described challenges concerning self-expression resulting in firefighter resignations and contemplations of suicide. They discussed being warned at Training School to ignore any instructions from their watch at an operational incident, that went against what they were being taught, as it might save their life. They indicated the training instructors’ awareness of hierarchy and normative practices at watch level which were not based in operational preparedness. The firefighters cited examples of colleagues who had died or been seriously injured in operational incidents, and linked it to the lack of competence of the old hands, and the requirement for newer firefighters to conform to their instruction. They describe ongoing operational fire ground hierarchy that says when I say jump, you jump.

What the men appear to describe across all three groups is an integration into a traditional collective or group setting designed to strip away individualism through task-based coercion and hierarchy-based force. It is logical to settle on the notion of a collective as the examples given are indicative of the taking away of individual status through the alliance of the group. The types of behaviours they describe are highly masculine, and designed to demean and dominate. Although the men refer to the 'old hands' they importantly describe a language of conformity where bullying, coercion and targeted treatment is upheld by the wider collective, that is the watch.

"you get herd mentality, because we are sort of intelligent animals I think (laughs). So you get that herd mentality and regardless of rank or role you get a pecking order established and you get a leader, ring leader in something or you might have two one or two but generally it's down to one." (men's focus group C).

The men talk about the watch as an entity outside of themselves, however, their silence or their activity within the group appears to provide a level of complicity enough to allow its continuance. They provide illustrations of the consequential treatment of those who do not conform in full view of the watch, which may indeed act as a deterrent to others

"the watch was expecting… they could more or less mold him into the way they wanted and it just wasn't happening cos this guy come and he went … "I'm not having it"…He was a manager came into this new job and then they were like "nah let's just start him afresh you work to our rules" he was like "no I'm not, I'm not having that", he lasted about two years and left."

"bang, you end up somewhere that changes your life to the point where you know fire fighters have been on the brink of committing suicide because watches have done" (men's focus group A).

An interesting account given by Christine as a directly appointed senior leader is her account of being bullied, her colleagues knowing, but choosing a form of complicity

"he wanted to know from the Deputy Chief why the Chief was bullying me …the Deputy wanted to be the Chief when the Chief retired which he did become…you know they came in the office and would ask if you're alright… 'what you gonna say' well 'no I'm not' well I did actually a few times then they get uncomfortable because they don't know how to deal with it, they don't know what to do, you put them in a difficult position"

Whilst the men attribute the behaviours to the old school dominant characters, of which they would suggest that there may be one or two on the watch, it is evident that the behaviours were upheld by the collective, whether through fear, respect or agreement. Although possible, it is difficult to accept that in a group of ten or more men, that one person could weld power in the ways that they describe if others within the group did not either condone or engage with it. It would be difficult for this to be a repeated and acknowledged pattern of behaviours across FRSs and across decades as described by most if not all of the participants of this study. Possibly the reference to the old school behaviour is a simpler way of the men distancing themselves or others from the accountability for such behaviours.

Hierarchy and power are used, in their descriptions, as integrative tools, where being assigned nicknames, earning the right to speak, withstanding ill-treatment, forfeiting knowledge, and ultimately conforming to the will of the collective was described as standard. The start point of integration described by most of the men was that of exclusion, being on the outside with the only route to inclusion being limited only to appropriate time served, heroic operational performance at an operational incident, and the collective or external decision that bullying behaviours had gone too far. The descriptions of group sleeping, eating and dignity arrangements only support the capacity for the collective to create local arrangements conducive to isolation and dominance. It is difficult to conclude what type of man would integrate well into this systemic process of the watch system as they describe it, as even the most militarised of the participants shared their struggle with conformity. A strong outcome described was that the conformity required was not based in skill acquisition, adeptness of task or role but in unquestioning compliance.

It is here that the experience of some of the directly appointed women starts to make sense. Two of the three directly appointed women spoke extensively about being bullied and harassed as a result of their direct appointment, but also they believe that the behaviours occurred in the way that they did, because they were women. Their examples of discriminatory and bullying experiences show sure signs of outgroup, which marginalised and kept them firmly on the outside of the leadership teams. Their professional background was negated, their skills minimised and unused until the senior management team encountered

incidences where they themselves lacked the skill to do the job. Importantly, linking the notion of hierarchy, time served, and earning your place, directly appointed women can also be perceived as taking roles traditionally only occupied through the single tier promotion system, namely by men. The experience of Christine and Claire read in similar way to the men in terms of conformity or consequence, with examples of hierarchal stratifications attempted by their colleagues.

"I was very close at one point to leaving and claiming constructive dismissal on the grounds of bullying harassment and particularly given the attitude and behaviour of my Chairman who in one meeting shook his walking stick at me in a kind of threatening aggressive (laughs) manner and said you know 'if it takes till the day I die I'll have you outta here" (Claire, transcript)

The second factor is illustrated through Christine's experience. She advises in her first FRS, she was able to rise through the ranks, and eventually compete successfully across operational and non-operational structures towards very senior leadership positions. It was in her second FRS that her direct appointment caused her detriment

"whilst I know there are some other Fire Services are particularly bad, I really hadn't appreciated how toxic XXXX FRS was" "you know my word I mean they didn't say 'you're rubbish Christine' but by their actions rubbished my beliefs and my leadership style." (Christine, transcript).

The watch as an independent but integrative entity within FRS culture is a primary experience for all operational personnel. It is true that the men in this study also cited the watch in terms of the primary means of navigating FRS, and also talked of its pervasiveness as an entity of socialisation. It does also, at this early stage appear that there is a link between how men are integrated into watches, and organisational behaviours.

Assimilation

The women discussed fitting in and the challenges they experienced or witnessed with this. They described operational women compromising themselves through inappropriate behaviour, or denying their gender membership or identity in order to fit in. Although the

women did not describe it as assimilation to the environment, their examples strongly illustrated it.

*"I would wear really bagging clothes around station if I was off duty…I actually was trying to fit in, and not make anyone know that I was a woman, although it was perfectly obvious."(*Beverley, Fg1).

"I described myself as being a fireman rather than a firefighter. One of the lads, because I actually wanted to be recognised for being able to do a good job. Rather than being a woman in the fire service." (Maria, transcript)

"I've seen a lot throughout my career, that a lot of women have lost their identity of being a woman. They don't want to be classed as being a woman" (Betsy, Fg1).

The wider discussion concerned the wilful stepping away from different aspects of their own gender identities at varying points in their careers, linked directly to their perceived position and status within the male environment. Camila however, offered a firm position on gender identity, which translated to her disassociation with femininity and any type of sisterhood,

"I'm the least person to use my gender…my role has nothing to do with me being female". (Camilla, Fg2).

She also talked about the pleasure she got from the public when they saw she was a woman in charge. Her neutral gender position appeared to be one that was internal only to the FRS organisation, and suggests a definite response to navigating the environment. Three of the senior women, all operational, also offered this standpoint.

All of the women talked about women's assimilation to the environment, and the women to women judgement of behaviours which were simply symptoms of assimilation

"It really hurts to see women like that…you have to be careful not to turn on other women because all they've done is try to survive…and some of them have done things that make you want to sob…they are just trying to survive" (Connie, fg1).

The extent of the assimilation can be harrowing. Zara recounts of her colleagues what is known as first woman second woman syndrome**.**

"So the first women gets on the watch and establishes herself by whatever means she can. And sometimes not by being herself. And then when the second woman comes along she doesn't want a second woman on the watch because it's my watch, my boys. And also she's

behaved in a certain way and the second woman comes along and doesn't behave like it. And this poor woman, comes on to the watch with the other woman already there. And the first woman had compromised herself on a number of different levels and tolerated behaviours that the second woman – who was older – who had been through the print and was nobody's fool, didn't want to do. And then got told you're a miserable bitch, why don't you behave like she does. We don't want you here she's fun you're not. This woman sat there telling me, and she said she was going to leave because she didn't want to come to work to be treated that way. She did leave eventually, although I tried to persuade her not to…This other woman used to do things like bring written pornography in on nights and read it to the watch at bedtime. So of course you imagine the second woman, really didn't want to have anything to do with it." (Zara, transcript).

Operational and directly appointed women, with the exception of Camilla (Fg2), and Sheila specifically discussed the collective blind eye of their male operational colleagues to discriminatory behaviours towards them. One talked of a manager

"who was really old school he didn't really do anything to intervene but he quite enjoyed me fighting back at times and I could tell that it was his funny way of being supportive and later on it said really nice things about me but I thought it was a bit late." (Fay, Fg 2).

The women acknowledged their own actions and that of other operational women assimilating to the dominant culture or compromising their personal values to fit in. Some talked about their perception and treatment of other women. They shared examples of their own compromise and how some operational women would not engage with other women; and the importance of recognising assimilative behaviour in other women and not ostracising it. A contrasting view, also offered by two senior operational managers,

"a couple of females who asked that they wanted to wear makeup and that being a discussion that had, which I was just mortified at and then have the station officer say to you are you happy about the decision about the make-up, I was like look, if it's alright with you I don't want to wear make-up, that's not why I'm here" (Camilla, Fg2).

Both groups talked about how coercion to be one of the lads was a daily pervasive demand of the culture where the norm and expectation was having to perform like a man:

"being a woman and being a good female operational member of staff, is not enough, so you have to be, you're one of the lads, you're only accepted if you're one of the lads" (Fay, Fg 2).

The significance of this statement is that it presents a contradiction. Most of the women also discussed that regardless of what they did that they would not fit into the culture.

"…tired of trying to survive on the fire station…compromising…could do that for say 5, 7years but after that time do you know what, you aint gonna fit in and then you just sort of become yourself" (Betsy, Fg1).

"I was never one of the lads and it was very clear from my mighty sort of personality, apart from the second station where I was, and I had a cracking time, it was excellent, and I probably only now, 10-12 years later, probably experiencing something similar in the role I'm in now. So I think yeah it's been a challenge" (Edie, Fg2).

"I think, I never felt I wanted to fit in, I never fit, and so I'd end up headbutting it all the time …they were the people who kept me going, but there were so many who'd just want me to fit in and I just couldn't, so I never fitted in, I never did, the anger came from thinking 'this can't be happening again, who dares to do this to me' you know in such an underhand, anonymous really horrible way and I thought that's it - stuff them." (Daisy, Fg2)

It would appear that the more gender neutral they become, the less challenge some would encounter. The de-identifying or disassociation of gender supports the ease of the women navigating the environment. One of the senior women referred to it as staying beneath the radar. However, some of the accounts shared by the women constitute bullying coercive tactics, designed to systematically strip them of their outward feminine appearances, and any associations with other women. This disassociation suggests a clear example of male power exerted to create a social order which systematically places women at the bottom. Where women failed to assimilate, their gender could then be used derisively, with demeaning names assigned to them at the very least. However, there are also examples of unwarranted behaviours occurring where women assimilated also. Women who strongly challenged this status or appeared to fight for gender equity are the ones within the focus groups who spoke of the worst forms of harassment, bullying or discrimination on the grounds of their gender. One of the findings suggest a preference or tolerance of women who performed as men; where staying under the radar, or becoming gender invisible created the benefit of them not being targeted, or more at ease with the collective of the watch.

The women talk of integration by way of accepted demonstrations of systemic discrimination, inappropriate treatment by their male colleagues, or the realisation that women were not

welcome in the FRS. There was agreement (excepting Sheila, Trudy and Camilla) that gender affected their experience of, and employment status as, operational women and directly appointed women. They made the link to issues of confidence, depletion of energy and the realisation of the inappropriate nature of their differential treatment. There was a strong theme concerning erosion of their confidence, not only in their role, but as women.

"*everybody was willing me to fail rather than willing me to succeed"* (Claire, transcript).

"I know all about imposter syndrome and as a woman you're going to get found out and what are you doing in that job because you really shouldn't be there" (Zara, transcript)

"I had to pay for the nursery to open early as my husband starts work early because of his shifts. So the nursery used to have to open at seven for me. I used to take her to nursery and sit with her as I was on call." (Wilma, transcript).

They discussed how the problematizing of women was normalised, as was the historical prevalence of bad behaviour towards them. They raise the complicity by managers in allowing it. Examples were given of how disciplinary issues concerning inappropriate behaviours towards them were usually managed by moving the woman, leaving the perpetrator to continue within that same watch environment. Daisy spoke of the bias nature of investigations concerning women's grievances,

"there's probably very real evidence that she has been bullied but they find no case to answer…now we've got this individual who cannot be placed.." (Fg2).

It is an important factor that the woman is moved. It is important that if the bad behaviour represents the collective group, or are condoned by the group, then it may be that the individual firefighter(s). In truth, whether he is moved or not may have minimal effect. The behaviour towards the woman may change, but the outcome of feeling intimidated, degraded or ostracised may continue. The collective thoughts and behaviours of the watch could be a foundational factor in terms of how the watch is experienced. Whilst an individual within the watch may carry out behaviours that are deemed as discriminatory or bullying, accounts of how a watch regulates itself suggests that the watch as a collective group allows the scenario to play out with minimal interruption. Another significant view is that the organisational socialisation processes creates expected or rehearsed outcomes

"the culture grows these people and their whole way of managing...is based upon…how they've always seen people with difference being treated" (Stacey, Fg1).

The theme of personal "survival" is raised by the women as acknowledgement of the ubiquitous nature of the cultural environment over time. The use of the word '*survival*' emerged many times, as did the notion of being exhausted and tired (Fg1),

"By the 7 year mark the exhaustion has set in…'cause you've gone to battle every-day." (Betsy).

Connie talked of the ongoing impact of being a woman in FRS culture

"the women who now say they've had enough, it's not that moment, it's the history…you can just feel you're carrying around bags and bags of crap". (Fg1)

"so women… spend a lot of time trying to prove that they are as good as men. And I spent a lot of time and effort doing that, and it has been… exhausting...that has had a real impact on my energy levels… which is probably part of the reason why my career has plateaued… I have had to put so much energy into this…to portray what I thought I should be." (Trudy, transcript)

Importantly, four of the women shared their current experiences of direct, indirect discrimination, targeting and processes that could be deemed as constructive dismissal.

Connie's manager when reviewing her flexible working arrangements said

"you're not a square peg in a round hole, you're a bloody octopus'… And he suggested I work in MacDonalds". (Fg1)

Four of the women, gave opposite accounts, with descriptions of becoming thick skinned, or giving as good as they got in terms of behaviour towards them, describing giving quite masculine, aggressive behaviour which they returned to their male colleagues. So why do they not whistle blow or report their colleagues? Three of the women across both groups specifically stated that there was no safe means to whistle blow within their organisations. They also pointed out that they had no senior operational women within their organisations that they could go to.

The examples describe elements of coercive control where the women's resolve appears to be slowly and steadily eroded to the point where some do not report harassment or challenge unreasonable practices. Connie described currently fighting not to lose her job because of her FRS refusal to extend her flexible working pattern, suggesting that she send her son to nursery. Why don't the women in these circumstances just leave? It does appear that the women learn to manage the environment, but at personal emotional cost. Where you have women using words like exhausted, or surviving or giving descriptors of carrying a load illustrating their navigation of FRS culture, you have to question whether they in truth have

experienced the FRS as an equal opportunities employer where gender equality is concerned. Why is gender equality and managing difference not central to FRS priorities? The women discuss basic needs such as consultation, systematic support, development processes, meritocratic arrangements, gender-appropriate uniform, and physical spaces which are used as women only spaces (not just described as such). These are all issues raised twenty years ago in the Thematic Review outlined in the opening chapter of this study. The illustration of women with no mouths to speak and men with no ears to hear becomes a potently powerful message for the leaders within the sector.

The decision makers suggested a good picture of men culturally. The suggestion was that harassing and bullying behaviours towards women were in the main, historical. They advocated that younger firefighters had been socialised differently prior to joining the FRS, and so would not tolerate behaviours of the past.

"I don't get the sense that there is a strong large group of staff who are very misogynistic, very racist, very homophobic…and I reckon that's a really small percentage" (FRS A).

Although there was some acknowledgement that women may be treated differently, there was more of an inclination towards how people interacted with each other,

"I know it sounds a bit silly, but a lot of work has been done around how men behave, and women behave, it's about understanding other people's perspectives." (ibid).

A disconnection appears when considering the impact that historic culture could still be having, or the fact that station-based women still referred to the men as animals. Cassie's view that the FRS was a microcosm of society, with no significant difference to most organisations in terms of gender, was in tandem with that of the decision makers, as a senior leader. It is of interest that discriminatory, bullying behaviour towards women is argued away, and in some ways justified. There appears to be a very narrow view of what gender discrimination is, and how systemic inequality shows itself. It could very well be a management narrative. The narrative that rationalises discriminatory or bullying behaviours as a reflective of society appears well rehearsed within FRS circles, absolving the FRS as a body from obvious organisational consequences. It is challenging to accept this version of FRS justification over indirect and direct discriminatory practices. The experience of senior manager Trudy was that in the first eight years of her career she was promoted from firefighter to upper middle manager. In her third FRS organisation Trudy spent the next eight

years on the same grade, although gaining promotion for a short period of secondment with another organisation. She eventually gained her next promotion on leaving that FRS. Her male counterparts, however, gained promotion around her, and even those below her were promoted above her. This was also true of the only other operational female middle manager in her FRS. They were both stagnated for the same period of time, although competing in promotional assessment processes without success. Both have since gained promotion by leaving their FRS.

None of the decision makers discuss the reality of the bullying or harassment of women. The experience of the participant women, however is different. In recent years, two of the directly appointed women cited being bullied by their leaders or members of the leadership body. The operational women appeared less likely to be bullied at senior levels, with accounts of differential, bullying or inappropriate treatment stopping once they reached upper middle manager roles. This would align with the accounts of the women from focus group 1 and 2 who still suffer detriment as a direct result of their gender, and all occupy roles from supervisory to lower middle manager. The senior women who experienced challenges because of their gender cited incongruence in leadership and lack of integrity at all differing levels of their organisation. Two women also talked about wider issues of organisational resistance and accusations of tokenism following their senior appointments. Zara, gives an example of the incongruent leadership with regard to gender inclusion, and graphically describes navigating the resistance to women lying just beneath the surface.

"*but it was always down to who was your boss…and I worked for some people who you know I could tell they tolerated me…but I should never really be there you know – 'I've got nothing against women in the Fire Service but…'- then been promoted…a couple of times, but the old Chief as much as he said you know he was big into equalities, lying git"* (transcript).

She talked about conformity to masculinity being a pervasive element of the culture, describing gender equality like doing *"doggy paddle to try to get to the other side*".

The difference with gender

It was noticeable that the term used for women by all of the men across three focus groups were primarily 'females'. There is a definite language used when it concerns women. At times they would use "female firefighters", "girls" or "ladies". As the term female is not used

predominately in everyday language, it felt odd and significant to hear its use so prevalently. It appeared to be used in a way that categorised and created otherness, as they did not talk about males or male firefighters. In Focus group (B) the men would refer to themselves and other men as “firemen”, when the inclusive, accepted term is firefighter. As the organisations themselves were very clear on the inclusivity of language it would seem that the term fireman was being used as an excluding term, or it was a label that these men in particular were not prepared to give up. This also occurred in Focus group (C) by one firefighter who suggested that too much was made of acknowledging difference, and that diversity categorisation was divisive.

With specific reference to women fitting in to FRS life a crew manager suggested that certain people (women and people from BME backgrounds) were “predisposed not to fit” also, the non-acceptability of saying that women won’t fit. He talked about the consequences for them “They become isolated don’t they. I can think of a few people who have probably become isolated over the years. “ (men’s focus group A).

Is there an implicit group acceptance that women do not fit and cannot fit? The disturbing question is whether this is accepted across FRS circles, and if so, how did it become so? This sentiment was supported across the groups (men and women) who inferred that only a certain type of woman was suitable for the job. In a broader sense, the groups talked about difference, which also seemed interchangeable throughout their discussion to mean ‘fit’. This presupposes that organisational fit is synonymous with sameness. So who does fit, and what does sameness mean? The data suggests that most men, regardless of background are made to adhere to a model of behaviour which is stipulated by the group. It may well be that whether someone fits or does not fit is not actually the issue but more that the collective behaviour is directed towards establishing individual allegiance and adherence to the group norm.

The operational women raised the challenge of fitting into an asexual/sexual mould in the workplace which was determined by their male colleagues.

“you had to be attractive enough to not get taken the piss out of because of the way you looked, but not attractive enough to stand out and be classed as a dolly bird, you had to be in

that narrow middle of the road female space and it was quite a narrow space to feel like you needed to fit into, and I don't feel like I need to fit into that anymore." (Fay, Fg2)

The women agreed that professionally they were not recognised as women, but during watch banter their male colleagues would overstep sexual boundaries. This is illustrated through men's Focus group (A) discussion. They discussed the unacceptability of a woman firefighter's wearing short skirt, low cut top, knee high boots, and lots of makeup when visiting the station, with the caveat that women needed to make life easy for themselves. They saw makeup as inappropriate, and saw the woman's refusal to conform to the requests of management not to wear it, as her not being the right person for the job. They again make the inadvertent link that women firefighters were different to ordinary women, actually framing women as asexual in role. It is also a stance that some of the women (operational and senior) have taken also. Whether this distinction makes it easier for the men to navigate their work space with women, for women to navigate the workspace with the men, or supports the men's ability to disassociate women firefighters from their femininity is difficult to know. It is also important to reference the notion that gay women are more accepted in the space when thinking about how the men reframe their ideal of sexual acceptability of heterosexual women. It may well be that for the men a woman's gay identity frames as a neutral entity which does not present a challenge to their psyche in the same way. However, Daisy who did identify as gay talked about men squaring up to her as though she were a man, and their aggression being common currency towards her. Examples given by participant women ranged from the challenges of male colleagues watching pornography on station to their own internalisation of masculinity. They raise a strong presence of coercion towards female gender disassociation for operational women firefighters within FRS culture. There are definite demonstrations of the reframing of operational women by operational men where they become de-identified as women. This doesn't appear to translate to their being accepted as men. It does however categorise the women as other than, which appears to be predicated upon notions of masculinity. It is also apparent that for some women being considered more male could be advantageous

"because being one of the lads is just a brilliant thing, it's the best thing you can be, but sometimes I want to remind them that I have a vagina" (Fay, Fg2).

The opposing position emerged for women as sexual objects, which strengthens the argument that when women are made to be gender neutral men are supported in their need to navigate the environment appropriately. Examples were given where men would place bets on who would have sex with the women firefighters first. Other examples include Stacey, a middle manager who was recently mentored by a married senior manager in preparation for her promotional process. He asked for a sexual favour prior to the assessment process, which she rejected; he presided over the promotion/assessment process. She was not successful in the promotional process. Her resultant angst centred around whether she simply failed or she was failed due to her unwillingness to have sex with her boss.

A gendered FRS?

The women's accounts would suggest that FRS culture has not allowed a position of neutrality when it comes to gender. They describe the watch as the cultural environment where this is learned. Resultantly, from the point of view of the single tier entry process (and average careers of 30 years) it is arguable that once firefighters become officers, and operate outside of the actual watch formation at station level. They create, replicate or sustain watch environments wherever they work with the FRS. As such, notwithstanding the officer status of the women, the accounts of discriminatory or excluding behaviour continuing into their middle manager careers holds as a viable piece of knowledge. Therefore, for some women assimilation and gender proximity (association/identity) are inextricably linked. All have been asked in various ways to demonstrate an allegiance to masculinity. The cultural demand suggests a choice of standing in their femininity and managing its impact, or becoming gender neutralised based on how radicalised to masculinity the watch is. The results have included women's isolation from other women, or managing the negative impact of their perceived or actual alliance to other women. Whilst I am not suggesting that all operational women are stuck in dysfunctional gender relationships within their watches, it is a significant enough experience shared by the operational women across their careers, that it can be further explored. One factor that has emerged strongly is that gender within the FRS is a heavily loaded concept, which inherently and traditionally has reified the masculine, subordinating other masculinities and women which threaten the hierarchal structure. Within the hierarchy, women are below men. The tension now exists where operational women have been part of FRSs for over 30 years and yet gender does not appear to be a systemic element of the

organisational structure, or culture although some changes to accommodate women have been made. The cultural changes seem more reflective of the women's ability to navigate and challenge the collective norm, than systemic embedded improvements driven by FRS leadership. Whilst women may no longer endure daily face to face unprovoked attacks, their description of exclusion is subtle. They give examples of indirect discrimination and inclusive mentoring and role opportunities afforded to men through established homosocial relationships encouraged by informal and systemic preference arrangements.

The issue of how the women grapple with gender proximity can be viewed as a symptom and outcome of the social organisation of gender within the FRS. The wider examples of firefighter integration, the collective masculine mind-set, and coercion to abandon, or silence individual views in favour of the group voice, offers a line of enquiry for understanding social order. The watch, as a structural, collective arrangement begins to offer insight into how such informal processes are developed and organised. The treatment of women in relation to men, gives further insight into gender status within the social order. Questions of how behaviours are perpetuated, modified or created, for both men and women, and how practice and policy becomes fixed, appear to transcend the individual, and are more reflective of the collective mind. Issues of power and social order clearly exist for operational women affecting their ability to execute their role.

Visibility and competence

The visibility of women has emerged as an important factor which has effectively kept them outside of the collective group of the watch, discussions included being highly visible when recruited, in role, and during promotion assessments

"*you'll never get the chance to be the little grey man that sits in the corner will you? That little spotlight got attached to your head the day you joined up – it won't go"* (Connie, Fg1) .

Both groups discussed how FRS kept women highly visible, giving examples of internal marketing campaigns where they were poster girls for the Service, and badly managed accelerated management programmes for underrepresented groups, fuelling division within the organisation. They talked about their visibility in terms of competence, and how gender became the factor when mistakes were made, or learning was needed,

"when I started at the fire service that I took on two jobs. One was to be a good fire-fighter and I really wanted to be a good fire-fighter. But the other job, which I actually found a lot tougher was to be a woman fire-fighter. And I felt like I had two job descriptions to meet" (Connie, fg1).

There was an agreement between some of the operational women that they constantly needed to prove themselves as competent firefighters even after being in role for decades.

It may be that visibility as a term could be traded for the notion of outgroup. Where a group of people are kept on the outside or on the margin of a community they can be seen by all, but mutual vision is neither a right or reciprocated. The idea of keeping women visible or on the outside, is that the membership of the group then has the right to decide how the women interact with the group, whilst maintaining overall control. So whilst it appears that most of the operational women strive to avoid visibility, it seems that they remain visible or on the outside of the group simply by virtue of being women. In the main they are referred to differently, engaged with differently, the narrative about them in terms of their competence and abilities generally remain different. Women's visibility in the FRS may serve FRS culture in that it can support keeping women on the outside. There were two of the women, in this study however, who saw their gender as an advantage. For one senior manager, she was clear that as the only woman in the room most of the time, and that as networking was key to her role, to be remembered or to stand out could only add value for her.

Women's competence was discussed across the male focus groups, with the narrative centring on the following themes: women not being physically not capable of executing the firefighter role in its entirety (focus group B, C); and women firefighters being more mentally and physically capable than most women (focus group (A) but not as capable as men. They also talked of a fear attached to women's competence, which they believe to be founded in male firefighter insecurity

"that she is fitter than me, she's stronger than me and she's more competent than me" (focus group A).

The fear they described appeared to be directly linked to the notion of hyper masculinity, where a women's ability to carry out the role to the same degree as a man was in fact emasculating. The matter of women's competence was a reoccurring conversation, where strength and skill were discussed as automatically inferior to their male colleagues. Directly

related to this notion the perceived long-term detriment caused a skills deficit and compromised teams due to the presence of women, was discussed (focus group C). The watch manager described women as not being equally as skilled as their colleagues, giving the example of compromises in strength etc. The prevalent narrative about women by men centred around their weakness or incompetence. There was an all-round acknowledgement of the expectation that women will fail. The difficulty with accepting this argument is that earlier in the discussion the same watch manager talked about a functional process that the FRS had brought online which essentially signed off firefighter competence in terms of key skills. At no time during the discussion did he argue that operational women were failing to be signed off, or were not meeting such criteria. No other participants within this study either suggested, or offered any evidence in this regard. It would appear that the default position is that women have to prove their credibility and competence in a way that men would not. Interestingly, when the men referred to the old school characters, they referred to them as having little operational skill but ruling the watch. They also described being told by their watch colleagues to disregard what they had to been taught in training school, in preference of what the watch would tell them. So it would appear that skill was not a pre-requisite to fitting in or being included. So where then has the narrative of lack of skill or incompetence for women come from?

The notion of an anti-locution process which embeds the incompetence of women firefighters as an acceptable narrative must be considered. Women's incompetence and weakness has become an accepted and prevalent discourse across FRSs. Whilst it should be acknowledged that in some cases some FRSs have inappropriately recruited women who were not suited to role in a bid to meet the targets, there appears to be a wider narrative of women's incompetence which serves to create a starting position for all operational women firefighters. The base position offered is that all operational women are incompetent until proven otherwise. Women are not offered the same inclusion criteria as men, where time served equals competence and operational preparedness. It is another form of collective exclusion, assigning hierarchal status and ultimately the non-acceptance of women as firefighters.

The associated issue of directly appointed women's competence, which seems crucial to the discussion of inclusion, is also linked to the notion of technical proficiency as suggested by the

men. It too is wrapped up in operational time in service, masculinity and peer acceptance. All of these individual elements point to a collectively agreed acceptance of hierarchy and social order. Sheila's reluctance to talk about gender, but willingness to talk about technical proficiency and competence may be a product of patriarchal acceptability within FRS circles. The definitions of competence, leadership, and inclusion seem to have been internally shaped by the collective mind of the watch, and passed on by way of a type of generational baton – to which gender appears strongly attached. As simple as this may sound, the predominant language of FRS culture, watch iterations, and assimilation to hierarchy suggest a complexity of processes which enable and perpetuate a legacy of hegemonic masculinity. Being sector competent or technically proficient as a leadership requisite within a single tier entry system is understandable, but with it carries the hallmarks of an insular patriarchal legacy, with little scope for change. Most participants described a masculine shaped version of competence having no bearing on technical ability, but enforced through the watch process. It is concerning that although arrangements for gender equality have been in place since 2000 (at the very least) the legacy of such embedded beliefs still have significant reach and show themselves at a leadership level. It would appear that the presence of women in leadership roles continue to interfere with the notion of this historical paradigm of masculinity. More specifically, the data would suggest that operational women are more likely to be accepted by their peers on the basis of their technical proficiency and leadership skills when appointed to senior positions, than directly appointed women without technical proficiency.

Pursuing promotion to influence cultural change – operational women

Changing the culture, or escaping bad behaviour at watch level were the key motivating factors for seeking promotion discussed by all of the women (with one exception).

" *I'd vowed that I would never let women go through the rubbish that I did erm and certainly as years progressed and the higher up I've got… it's so much was easier and to be able to say to women "you don't have to take this"* (Zara, transcript).

This was true of most of the women who talked about staying despite their treatment and not letting the perpetrators win. Edie, when she returned from sick leave following her colleagues filling her fire boots with urine, was motivated to again apply for promotion so that she could create an environment of respect with her teams. Importantly, both senior and operational women remain undeterred in terms of their service and their ability to impact

change. Focus group one talk about their role in effecting change through lobbying, taking on additional gender activism roles or creating informal networks of support for and with other operational women firefighters. They even discuss the informal inter-FRS support between women that has developed through their attendance at Women in the Fire Service events. So for some their response to resisting or surviving FRS culture is to attempt to control or influence a part of the environment towards improvement. Interestingly, when decision makers were asked questions regarding the experiences of women most of them talked around their own experiences, with no response to the systemic representation of most women, in particular operational women. It is not difficult to link this approach to a worrying statement made by Sheila as a senior leader, where she says *"we've got bigger things to tackle actually"* (transcript).

The responses of the decision makers suggest that gap between their knowledge and the experience of operational women is too wide for them to base a critique of gender equality upon it. Where gender equality is not adequately understood, the nuances of how inequity is embedded and perpetuated potentially remain untouched and unchallenged. The impact is a distinct lack of knowledge and planning to address the specificities of gender equity, or create strategies for inclusion. An example is where the decision makers in FRS B talk about not having any operational women in management roles, but recently directly appointing a woman into a senior operational role, and recruiting a lower middle manager from another FRS. Although addressing an immediate issue of women in any management tier, it opens questions of the organisational culture where operational women are not either seeking or successful at promotion.

Somewhere within FRS culture the message of change concerning gender equity, has become a burden which has in the main remain unshouldered. As a consequence, this has been passed on to operational women. The result of this is that most change – whether it is the enforcement of men not using women's toilets, or that women have uniform that is cut to fit women's bodies – has happened as a result of individual or collective lobbying by women within FRS organisations. Such lobbying has drawn alliances from the Women's section of the FBU, in addition to the wider FBU organising where the voice of some men have joined with women towards change (Woodfield, 2016). Women that are prepared to speak out have created an umbrella for other operational women who, due to the culture cannot or will not

speak out for gender equality as a means of survival. Some women, as demonstrated within these focus groups, actively speak out against gender equality, negating its necessity and minimising its power. This stance is understandable within a cultural norm where masculinity is the baseline and the vehicle of ascendancy. This too has an effect on the cultural acceptance of masculine dominance. Operational women's agency in terms of change and social influence appears to be a strong factor and an underlying lever in their movement towards impacting culture, which includes the choice of pursuing promotion.

Where the women discuss environments, which perpetuate discriminatory or bullying behaviour, they cite this as their sole motivation for continuing to seek promotion. They link this to their experience of a FRS socialisation process which changes liberal, rational men into firefighters who assimilate to a narrative which regurgitates bigotry, and insular points of view. The challenge is that these men become managers, who become leaders creating the probability of a virtuous circle of both inadvertent and conscious discrimination. In this way it may be that the collective thought and action which become the cultural norms are in the main protected. Maria and Trudy described being motivated to learn about other aspects of the FRS and widen their roles, with Cassie wanting to fulfilling her own personal and professional challenges. The two most senior operational women interviewed said that they had never had a career plan, or saw themselves pursuing the roles that they have achieved. They both advised that once in role they realised that they were competent enough to apply for the next one, and compete against their male counterparts.

Women from both focus groups also talk about delaying their promotional prospects by elongating their time in role aimed at proving their competence to their male colleagues, and reinforcing the notion of their credibility when applying for new posts

*"So I'm now a station manager, I'm wearing a white shirt with 3 pips on it's a secondment and I have been made up temporarily. And I feel I am wearing this whole fake uniform and that I don't actually deserve it. Did I get this job because I'm a woman, I'm not sure? I'm now wearing this uniform that puts me a rank above what I am. I'm completely fake."(*Doreen, Fg1).

They offered examples of failing assessment processes or promotion as a good thing, as it indicated that they were not recipients of preferential treatment. This is a powerful example

of how the women internalise the effects of the subjugating anti-locution which narrates a version of women's incompetence and is integral to the language of the FRS culture.

Gender-legacy

There is a gender-legacy that is carried by both men and women within the FRS that does not serve women or gender equality. The gender-legacy is made up of the prevalent behaviours, language, beliefs and cultural norms that have been perpetuated concerning gender status and have been circulating within the tradition and heritage of the FRS for decades. I find it hard to fathom, through the data set, how the imposition of gender targets can erase what has been learnt, practiced and bequeathed through watch arrangements. My question is, when both women and men are socialised in the ways described, what happens to that reality when they are told to do something different. It is that unoccupied space, between what they have experienced and the expectations of a gender-equal workspace, that I would like to describe as the gender-legacy. It is the beliefs and behaviours that women and men carry with them throughout their career based on their early (and for some, ongoing) experiences. As there appears little space for gender neutrality, what of the male allies to gender equality? Where do they feature within culture and how is their voice heard? Finally, where do the beliefs, narratives and cultural norms concerning women go, whether willingly or unwilling carried and upheld, when a higher demand for gender equality is levied upon FRS culture?

Focus group 1 discussed the impact of the narrative of incompetent women, describing the internal view of themselves as incompetent and weak. An example includes Abby describing herself as pathetic in her response to her emotional reaction to the cultural environment. Betsy's answer to Abby countered that it was only by talking to other operational women that the notion of a culturally oppressive environment not their own weakness became clearer. Abby described the "crumbling person" that she thought herself to be, but through discussion acknowledged that it was the watch environment that had broken her. Betsy in discussing the pervasive nature of the watch environment outlines

"*your confidence goes…because you were this really strong person…and now…you can't even take on asking for a cup of tea"* (fg1).

Equal status

The initial description of gender equality given by all decision makers was similar. They described the need for a workforce that reflected the community, as well as equal treatment and equitable rights. The difference in operational staff and professionally appointed staff was also viewed as an important issue as it distinguished between working groups, the dominant of the two being operational employees. Each saw their FRS as being progressive and moving towards change in terms of gender equality. One decision maker, before being corrected by her colleague said

"That's not to say that there are quite a few bits that are not as you would want them but… for me I don't feel that gender equality is an issue within FRS B" (Decision maker 1, FRS B).

Sheila's observation as a senior leader was surprising, and appeared supportive of the men's position

"The first approach with respect to equalities and diversity and PCC-ness I think was overladen"

"And you know that clumsiness is sometimes the issue, not the fact that they are prejudice they are just clumsy. And don't think actually…"

"even chucking in the odd swearword and demonstrate that you can get down and dirty with the lads. You know whatever it takes." (Sheila, transcript).

From the operational women's standpoint Connie's quote articulated the frustration they spoke of and the many ways in which they have been silenced

"*I think we got on this crusade about a bit of equality, and I think it's not enough – I want equal status (absolutely). I want equal status, I want to go and choose some uniform that fits without having to go on a special 'we'll pay for it, you research the country until you find your uniform', it's just, it's not equality. We've been apologising for so long; can we just have a bit of equality? It's like now I want equal status now…"* (Fg1)

Operational women as an employee group are strategically invisible, with little policy importance attached to their difference. Now time-embedded within the organisation, and without evidence of adverse monitoring information, they appear strategically insignificant in planning terms.

"I find it really hard, as a lot of the decisions about how women, what women need in the first place in the service are made by men. And they are made without consultation with women." (Connie, Fg1).

The decision makers across both services offered no forward planning projection for operational discussed or linked to the gender targets. The lack of engagement with operational women appears to concur with the general disconnection from the central leadership described by the male firefighters, and the difficulties operational women discussed concerning leadership support.

For most of the operational women the relationship between not fitting in, organisational isolation and the internalisation of the dominant narrative have resulted in a high level of weariness and the continuing struggle to prove their competence. Most felt that they did not have equal status to their male colleagues, nor any sense of entitlement. Four of all participant women spoke positively of their experiences, three of which were lesbian. Linking women's fit and acceptance dependent on the type of male relationship they have, Zara suggested that heterosexuality for women in the FRS was more problematic than being lesbian. She suggested that gay women were accepted more readily than straight women firefighters; three of the senior operational women within this study are gay. It again raises the issues of exploring the shifting boundaries of the masculine and feminine within the context of the FRS, and its impact.

Gaby talked of being head-hunted for most of the roles that she occupied, Doreen in essence had taken her power back, and Camilla spoke of feeling accepted by her watch and being very happy in her role as their manager. Betsy advocated that it was only in accepting and understanding that she did not fit because she is a woman, that she now can have agency in her relationship with FRS culture and empower others. It appeared to be different for senior women however. There were varied responses to the question of whether they felt that had equal power or leadership influence to their male colleagues. As operational personnel Wilma and Zara felt that it was when they reached lower tier of senior management roles that they felt as though they were treated equally in terms of their sphere of influence and had gained their colleague's confidence in their ability to lead. Both women had confidence in their own abilities to lead, and gain acceptance into their leadership teams. Cassie says that she has not experience inequality in her management or leadership roles since occupying a supervisory role. Maria felt that in her current role, although at times has felt resistance from colleagues, believed that her leadership capacity has not been hampered because she is a

woman. Trudy talked of feeling equal to her colleagues in her first two FRS organisations, but that her capacity as a leader was blocked and her career plateaued within the third organisation because it had no vision or displays of strong aspirational leadership. Claire stated that she could never have (or would like to assume) equal leadership status to her operational colleagues due to their operational competence. Christine stated that in her first FRS she felt that she had equal leadership status to her colleagues, but her direct appointment at a neighbouring FRS, she says that she was never accepted, or held equal positional power to her male operational colleagues.

Poor recruitment practices

Within the focus groups the women link poor recruitment processes with the ill treatment of women, and the notion of their incompetence. Daisy and Camilla outlined that positive action and recruitment/selection processes were managed badly in their FRS's, and were perceived to favour women.

"I think this year this now we're trying to do it in the right way but we've got to unpick a lot of wrongs, in people's minds, who are actually quite right in some instances" (Camilla, Fg2).

However concerning monitoring data none of the decision makers referred to the number of operational women employed by their FRS, or had knowledge of the numbers which is the foundation of any recruitment or positive action measures.

All of the women across both groups advocated that positive action processes in recruitment and promotion – good or bad – were linked by FRS staff to the competence of women. All had experienced inappropriately managed processes, and some had been involved in positive action initiatives that had worked well.

One of the decision makers questioned the FRS congruence concerning their stated intent in increasing numbers of operational women

"I think all the intent is right, they say the right things and they write the right things, we want to represent the communities and that sort of thing but I wonder… if we say it but don't really believe it. Do you know what I mean? You sort of talk to people and they say, well you are never going to get women in that's never gonna happen so why you going to try that? So you sort of think, there is something about us saying it but holding ourselves back at the same time… not investing in the actions that might bring results" (FRS B).

In Women's focus group 2 there was a conversation concerning how women made it difficult for other women. The discussion ranged from women who were not competent accepting roles that they were not equipped for, to the acceptance of help and favours from men which fed into the narrative that all women were not capable at succeeding operationally and managerially. There was a distinct conversation about competence where some of the women felt that operational women who had been helped and were not operationally competent had brought bullying behaviour on themselves. Daisy talked about why she felt some women were targeted

"perhaps some of the lasses…they were a little more victimised because they felt a victim to start with possibly" (Fg2).

Fay talked positively of the positive action measures she accessed in readiness for promotion *"certainly for me I felt a key point in my life was when I started going for promotion was I felt I had the whole bunch of very strong women behind me supporting me, so it wasn't just about a leg-up, it was just about having that sort of confidence and support, thinking 'I can do this'* (Fg2).

A pervasive narrative was discussed where issues such as women's competence and preferential treatment in recruitment were regular topics of discussion and strongly held beliefs. The women offered mixed feelings about targets, but linked them strongly again to the story of women's competence. They suggested a FRS narrative that did not see women's success as fair

"if you've got a firefighter that says women shouldn't be in the job, and they say that openly, or you've only got promoted because you're a woman, if they say that openly, you deal with it, don't you? It's not about being ruthless, you deal with it, but if they're saying that same rhetoric every day, or every opportunity they're given, then there's some underpinning issues there" (Camilla, Fg2)

They felt women are deemed incompetent until proven otherwise. They talked about a consequence of this was that they were staying longer in rank than necessary, as it was important for them to be seen as competent in role (Fg1; Fg2).

Systemic inequality for the senior women is demonstrated through their discussions of the senior management appointment system. They linked being sponsored for gold command

(senior) positions with the willingness of the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) for them to be in post, inferring that the structural gateway for women's appointments was the CFO. Christine and Claire both described the lack of scrutiny and challenge at Fire Authority level, concluding that the *"Chief Fire Officer is the glass ceiling for women"* (transcript).

The stark reality of her statement suggests subjective internal structures potentially damaging to women's ability to compete in a fair way. The gateway for internal development in this regard lies with the CFO, who is usually advised by his senior management team regarding the performance and suitability of staff. Even accepting an element of subjectivity in appointments, the development opportunities rely on nominations for training placements.

Decision Maker 2 (FRS B) outlined that fewer opportunities for women to progress existed as there are "fewer senior jobs". She suggested that promoting women was not the issue, but the problem was the recruitment of women firefighters. When asked how many operational women occupied senior roles in her organisation, the answer was none but they had temporarily co-opted a professionally appointed woman into a role traditionally occupied by operational personnel, (together with all of the benefits afforded to technically qualified FRS personnel). With the promotion of operational women to senior positions not occurring through systemic process, shouldn't the organisation be questioning why? In adopting such a challenging position, why haven't they reconsidered planning for the development and promotion of their operational women?

Regarding professional, non-operation women there was a distinct difference in discussion. In FRS (B) decision makers reported a healthy balance of male/female in senior positions. The senior roles were occupied by operational men and non-operational, professionally appointed women. One of the decision makers further suggested that if there were not enough senior roles to aspire to, professional service employees should leave, and FRS roles should be arranged around uniformed (operationally qualified) posts, regardless of whether the firefighter technical proficiency was necessary. In FRS (A) decision makers described a mix of operational and non-operational women that occupied senior positions. It would appear that the resistance to women within the strategic framework of the FRS is a far-reaching phenomenon for operational women, but appears out of the sight-line of decision makers; and may even include them.

These are linked to the culturally implicit informal-to-formal mentoring structure in place for male firefighters and officers; of which women remain on the margins of, reflecting the homosocial nature of relationships within the FRS. The women's discussion concerning promotion prospects reflect the cultural dynamic of Russian roulette, reliant on having a *"good Chief"* or supportive Fire Authority. They also discuss "pecking order", "boys club" and "masonic lodge" involvement, suggesting social order in the same way as the operational women in the watch experience (Christine; Claire, transcript). For Christine and Claire their experience of marginalisation is muddied by the fact that they have been appointed to roles that are traditionally ring-fenced for firefighter personnel, and are unknown. The unknowingness is about stranger danger, as reported in cultural reviews, their non-operational status, their gender and the fear of a non-fire-person to be successful in leading a FRS without technical knowledge. As such, regardless of the women's skill level or experience the activity directed towards them to discredit them or relieve them of their duties appear to be displays of hegemonic masculine power.

Gender targets

Concerning gender targets, none of the decision makers had any in-depth knowledge about the gender targets, although there appeared to be a clear narrative against the chasing of numbers. They discussed the low numbers and the struggle to attract women to operational roles.

"I can't remember what it [target] was…and we could never do it". They talked of things going off the boil once the "targets were removed" and therefore "concentrating on other things" (Decision maker, FRS B).

They spoke of a renewed focus on equality since the Fire Reform and the central government mandate to increase employee diversity. However, quoting one decision maker's view that "diversity has been put up the agenda for about a year or so since the new [Fire] minister came in" suggests organisational reaction to political will, rather than its own vision.

Decision makers FRS (B) stated their move away from targeting women to the FRS to address the underrepresentation of operational women firefighters, but instead were creating a discussion about what type of person is needed for the firefighter role. Decision makers FRS (A) said that the organisation's decision to withdraw equality resources, and "mainstream"

its responsibilities is one, that in hindsight, it now sees as premature. In talking about "mainstreaming" Decision Maker 1 (FRS A) is actually referring to a neutralized, generic approach to work that has no specificity to any one particular strand of equality; one of the critiques of mainstreaming equality. The suggestion was that mainstreaming equalities was not related to austerity necessarily, but that

"it [equality and diversity] became harder to justify…in terms of resourcing" (Decision maker, FRS A). They planned to take a holistic approach to equality. Talking of the progressiveness of their organisation concerning equalities, they concluded that the targets did not make a difference.

The wider discussions about targets by the participant women were varied. In terms of commitment to the equalities agenda, some of the women felt that the gender targets were too easily dropped as a result in changes introduced by the coalition government. This coupled with austerity measures had the immediate but lasting result of equalities work back tracking.

Claire, referenced the low numbers of operational women at every level of the FRS, with little success in increasing operational numbers over the last 20 years. She linked the higher proportion of women in professional support roles within the FRS, with the low numbers of operation women. Her conclusion was that the operational roles (including management roles) were protected for men. In comparing the police force and the FRS, she raises structural or cultural concerns that inhibit gender diversity within the FRS, as the police have increased numbers of women exponentially in the same time period.

Zara suggested that they helped

"*what don't get measured don't get done in any public sector so the targets focus people's minds you know it made them carry out positive action and you know we did see an increase in the number of women and BME applicants*" (transcript).

There were varied feelings about the viability of targets. Although preceding gender targets at the time of their recruitment, three of the five operational women said that if they had not seen the phrase "we are particularly interested in applicants who are women and ethnic minorities" that they would not have applied to the FRS. Trudy offered that leadership, targets and the management of diversity are inextricably linked, and women are not involved in the

development of positive action processes. Alternatively, Sheila suggests gender targets are divisive and unhelpful, and are used in ways to persecute women. Trudy said the arguments against the use of positive action/targets are used as an excuse

"*to create further barriers between the minorities and majorities within the workforce".* It is unsurprising that the operational men referenced the unfairness of positive action in operation, citing their perception of unscrupulous recruitment practices of their organisations to get women in. They also complained of not being involved or consulted. Of the women that discussed gender targets all were agreed that the resource of positive action needed to be a continual commitment, not simply in front of recruitment campaigns as it usually is used. The men's focus groups were varied, with three of the men in one group saying that they were recruited through positive action measures. However although the statements appear non-opposing, the men were very much against it in this group,

"Surely in this day and age you can promote all you want in any single industry…if a person doesn't want to do that job, you can promote it as much as you want, …there is nothing you can do about it. In my mind, for want of a better phrase, you are just flogging a dead horse." (men's focus group B)

"If someone wants to join the fire service they want to join the fire service you know. … I'm sure if a female wanted to be a nurse she'll be a nurse, and it's the same if a female wants to be a fire fighter she'll be a firefighter… What more should you have to do…" (men's focus Group B).

The overriding narrative regarding gender targets is that they are unnecessary and divisive. Very little attention has been paid to the intended outcome of gender targets, which is to change or impact the culture of an organisation towards improved gender equality.

"… I think what we found, and we've always been keen to be diverse but if I'm honest all around the country when they removed those targets it sort of went off the boil a bit and we started concentrating on other things." (decision maker, FRS B)

With all participants the focus fell to the use of positive action, and its impact rather than being able to extrapolate the varying aspects of using targets towards meaningful change. Targets are very much seen in isolation, and have been interpreted and planned for solely around an increase in the number of women. Issues of gender equality therefore seem compartmentalized and viewed as a separate entity. There was no analysis offered

concerning the targets, with any arguments offered which were concerned with wider outcomes, or learning. No monitoring information was offered other than growth in applications, and successful recruitment numbers.

The discussion linking preferential treatment to the perception of women's inability to be independently successful, is another example of the prevalent discursive narrative within FRS culture, linked to targets. With such embedded, dominant narratives there is an inevitability to the overwhelming negative responses to gender targets, which fail to account for the wider issues of inclusion. It is disheartening that such an insular view of the targets has been taken, but in light of the anti-locution of women as described, it is not surprising. Following decades of the anti-locution of women within watch practices, management tolerances and inequitable policy/practice processes, how can the FRS consider gender equality in a way that can disrupt and eradicate such legacies?

The antecedent assumption that male resistance sits alongside the levying of gender quotas, is a forceful underlying tone. An organisational strategy, as one decision maker suggested, views the resourcing of equality of opportunity in its governance arrangements as harder to justify. This is the demonstration of an organisation that does not understand its responsibilities as a public sector body. What partners with this is a wider, organisational resistance that cuts across employee groups, from leadership, to decision makers to operational women and is reflective of the cultural language and ultimately the cultural bias towards white masculinity. The story has been one which attempts to neutralize the gender deficit, and argues towards only the suggestion of inclusivity by talking about the role, and not who should fit it.

Since my interviews with the decision makers, the push of inclusivity by the Local Government Association (2017b) has rendered such approaches as insufficient. Where coercion to change exists, as previously experienced and now renewed by the LGA, the resistance to targets may remain unrequited; but might they find protection in a more acceptable narrative offered by the FRS? With an organisational history and legacy of hyper-masculinity, the subversion that may follow can potentially push any resistance further below the surface, deepening cultural tensions for both the men and women. It is concerning that at a time where FRSs had

effectively eradicated their equality and diversity agendas, and neutralized the need to target women, they are now aspiring to work to a target of achieving 30%. Their current status has minimally moved them from where they were 20 years ago. The rationale that borders the argument of gender targets, its use and effectiveness as an agent of change is as complex as it is challenging to deliberate.

Desk top review: gender mainstreaming

I began this desk top review by attempting to consider the gender mainstreaming information from each of the participating FRSs in this study. It quickly became apparent that information such as policy documentation, strategy frameworks, and outcome reports were fragmented and without consistency. Consequently I have used examples of a metropolitan and small to medium size FRS employee data information to contextual gender in the FRS in my opening chapter. I will consider instead the national FRS strategic intent and framework as concerns mainstreaming gender within its FRS bodies in England.

Equality and Diversity Strategy for FRS 2008-2018

On a national Fire Sector level it would appear that the ten-year Equality and Diversity Strategy for FRS 2008 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008) has been the equality mainstreaming policy for FRSs. This is a document developed in consultation with the FRS but published by central government. Contained within the document are the provision of clear categorisations for individual FRSs of what should occur at a national level, in partnership with government departments and key stakeholders. Clear about their commitment to keeping issues of equality high on the FRS national agenda, Chief Fire Officer's Association or National Fire Chief's Committee, at the time of data collection, make no mention of any modification to the strategy or altered trajectory of progress on either website. Testimony, and individual FRS policy outline a clear move away from the 10-year Equality and Diversity FRS Strategy, with work stopping in earnest and resources redirected to more mainstream projects. This appears to be of significance as I can find no strategic acknowledgement, statement, or an alternative offering of policy change in this regard until the Revised Draft FRS Equality Framework document in 2017 (Local Government Association,

2017a) and the LGA document referred to, published this year in 2018 (Local Government Association, 2017b) .

The original FRS Equality Framework (Local Government Association, 2008; Local Government Association & Chief Fire Officers Association, 2009) (FRSEF)had been based on the Equality Framework for local government, but developed to match the challenges of the FRS, tracking measurable improvements in areas of leadership, governance, policy and accountability. The FRSEF was disseminated to all FRS's across England in 2008 supporting the 10-year strategy for growth in policy and practice areas. The process appeared to support FRS organisations to follow and adapt to the needs of their own particular governance model, and was practical in its guidance of how changes in equality outcomes could be achieved. The "*Journey to Excellence*" (2008) document sets out the format that would support a FRS from *"understanding what equality is*" (a "*developing*" FRS) to "*developing better outcomes*" (an "*achieving*" FRS) to "*making a difference*" (an "*excellent*" FRS) (Improvement and Development Agency, 2007; 2009). Each set area would outline a set of criteria to meet, from which evidence would be produced for audit purposes. Each FRS would be awarded "developing", "achieving" and "excellent" based on their ability to demonstrate their work.
The provision of the toolkit document seems to highlight the extensive nature of the Equality Framework for Fire & Rescue Services giving a step guide to achieving demonstrable outcomes in each area of improvement. For example it demonstrates how an individual FRS can show improvement in the diversity of applicants for employment, development or promotion has been achieved; or how monitoring analysis has supported actions to address adverse employment trends in workforce monitoring. These outputs and outcomes are not in the employ of central government, but remain firmly in the accountability of the FRS as the employer (Improvement and Development Agency, 2007; 2009). Whilst it is understood that a change of government may have impacted the pace of expected outcomes for FRS, the blue print had already been agreed, and detail given as to how change could be achieved.

However the strategy refers to women primarily in terms of recruitment where the intention is that FRS have a long-term commitment to change the composition of their organisations with a renewed target of 15% for women. It intended that 5 years from the strategy development that of all recruitment intakes of operational personnel, 15% should be women

(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008). The Government suggested the quantitative targets would be an indicator of FRS performance against the specific employment targets. The notable area of cultural change within the strategy is that "levels of retention and progression for employees from all backgrounds, and between men and women, are comparable" (p. 7). The document is more generic in its terminology and reflects a public sector view of equality which is reflective of all strands.

There is little local information between 2008 and 2016 regarding FRS progress against targets, as it would appear FRSs halted recruitment, and no information is found on a national scale. FRS appears to have interpreted the withdrawal of annual auditing for progress on equalities by the government, as an opportunity to opt out of the agenda, and as such have seemed to abandoned work on both gender and race targets. There is no reference to progression or retention work on the CFOA or NFCC website with regard to pathways for operational women within FRS organisations, or a national strategy of such.

In 2017 it would seem that the national debate with regard to generic equalities has resurfaced with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Home Office releasing a document on inclusion. The renewed interest in the trajectory of inclusion has been communicated widely by the both organisations, and have published a new draft revised FRS Equality Framework (Local Government Association & National Fire Chiefs Council, 2017).
"The LGA and the Home Office want to see a change in the culture of the fire service so that workforces reflect the community they serve, ensuring they continue to challenge and eradicate any form of bullying and harassment and all staff feel able to come to work and reach their full potential in the organisation". (Local Government Association, 2017b p. 2).
This appears to follow the Minister for Fire's speech regarding the sector's lack of progress on diversity (Fire Minister's Speech to Reform, 2017).

The capacity for peer review has remained throughout 2008-2018, and as such has provided a pathway for measurable improvement in equality and diversity governance. It does seem, however, with no nationally published equality mainstreaming outcomes reports since the strategy was written; in contrast to Scotland who publish year on year mainstreaming equality outcome reports by sector and by FRS. It would appear that many FRSs had in the years

following 2008 opted to diminish or close down of equality departments and withdrawal of resourcing, in response to the central government change of priority.

Regarding the way forward the draft revised 2017 Framework outlines its intention to revive the accountability for inclusion is evident. It has opted to take a generic approach to equality using the tools of the past to address adverse impact. Taking retention and promotion as an example, the document as a headline states the criterion

"All staff have an equal opportunity to develop and progress within the organisation and positive action measures are being used to address under- representation."

(Local Government Association & National Fire Chiefs Council, 2017).

Although the intention for all staff to develop and progress is stated clearly, considering the extent of the numerical disproportion of women, it is a context that suggests a genericism that may not serve the intention. Looking at this from the viewpoint that the dissemination of power within the FRS and its leadership is disproportionally male, such genericism may not recognise the fact that women's needs in the workplace are different from men, or its adequacy to address it. To illustrate the point, below the criterion are descriptors for the retention and progression of under-represented employees. In light of what has been said the descriptors can appear innocuous, showing little aggression towards the inequity of gender, an endemic problem across the sector. The descriptors do, however, encourage the FRS to collect and monitor data and staff satisfaction levels to find patterns of differential treatment. Unfortunately, considering the culture of the organisation, it does appear unlikely that individual employees are likely to self-select to provide information that may further exclude them from their watches, or work groups.

The revision of the FRSEF has condensed the evidence or metrics for the criterion to two simple outcomes, the first of which may be helpful. It asks, do FRS's show:

"Progression at each level – not necessarily vertically through the organisation.

Staff survey results indicate staff in all areas and at all levels feel they have opportunities to progress their careers" (ibid).

The descriptors do outline problems of lack of transparency in processes, seeking out barriers to progression, installing talent spotting and progression planning for example. The challenge may be the homogenous approach to people diversity, leaning towards a non-

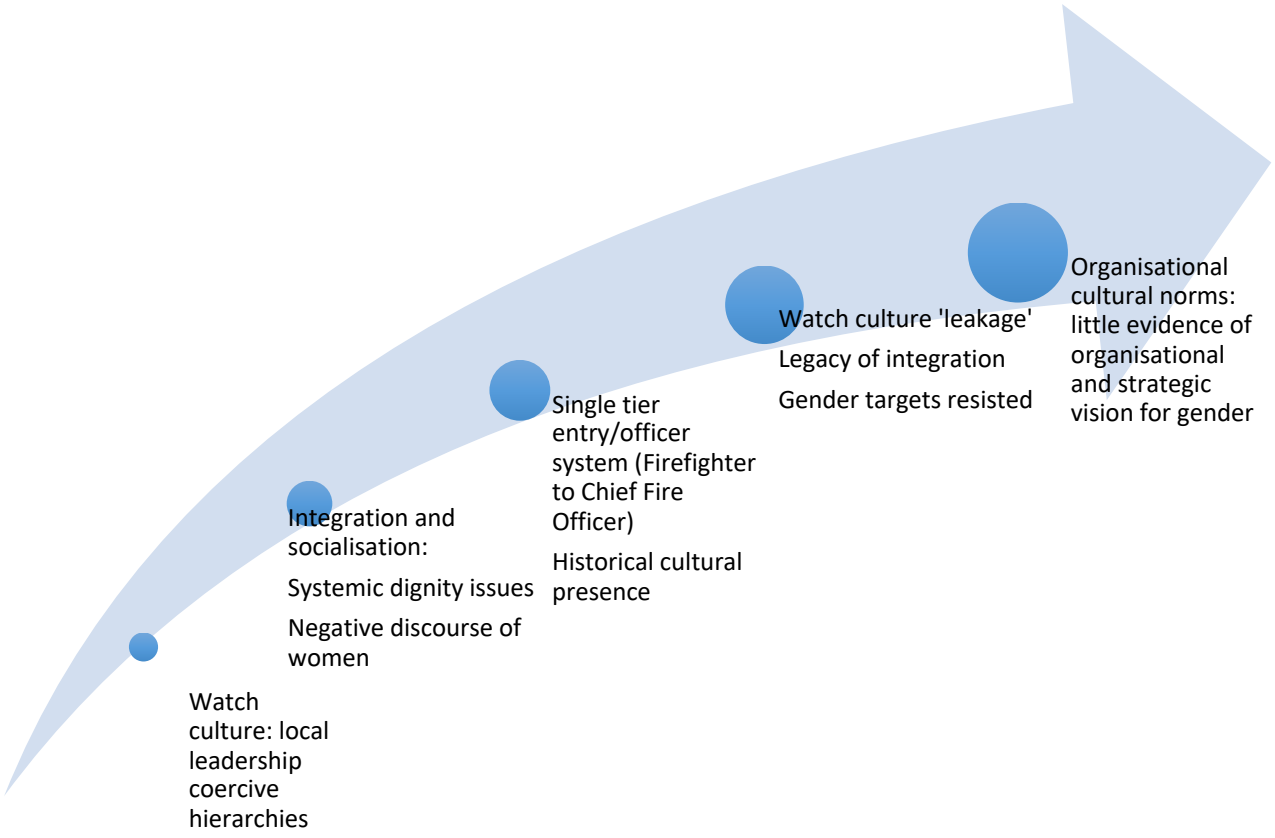
offensive more generalist way of getting the information that they need. It presents a highly pared down version of what existed previously, which may be reflective of the FRS journey.

In addition to Fire Service Reform the Local Government Association (LGA) has set up an Inclusive Fire Services Group to progress the *"inclusion agenda"* (Local Government Association, 2017b). Producing a report entitled "An Inclusive Fire Service. Recruitment and Inclusion" (ibid) they published a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the FRS. The report discusses its goal of FRSs reflecting the communities that they serve, naming Fire Vision to increase the target of operational women firefighters to 30% by 2024/25. They suggest that with FRSs now beginning to recruit again following 5 years of non-recruitment that this is a challenging but achievable task. They suggest outcomes of the LGA MoU include conducting 2 fire leadership courses, and a masterclass on inclusion for Fire Authority members – these are not gender protected or gender specific.

4.4 Summary of findings

In summary of the findings, Fig 6. below illustrates the complexity of the participant testimonies, FRS policy, history and culture, all impacting upon the gender experience within the FRS. The arrow illustrates how the layering of decisions, behaviours, cultural norms influence the process and experience of gender equality. The arrow represents not only the layering of processes but also the experiences within the male and female focus groups, and the senior women's interviews, which present a base of knowledge of how processes that enable gender equality or inhibit its improvement are seen. The illustration shows how often taken for granted modes of operation interact to create bodies of knowledge or layers of behaviours and activities which amount to cultural norms or accepted ways of being.

Figure 6 The layering of decisions, behaviour and cultural norms influencing the process and experience of gender equality in FRS



The findings have laid a foundation from which I have grouped the data thematically which will form the basis for the next chapter.

Assimilation to watch culture

The watch experience has had a fundamental impact on all of the firefighters that have participated in this study, and has outlined how hierarchy is established. For most FRSs, the leaders have come through the single tier entry system and therefore have been integrated and developed through this same watch system. It is also clear, however, that due to the single tier entry process, the watch *collective* or group think transcends the scope of the watch, and is replicated in other team-based settings. Two of the three directly appointed women, similar to the operational women describe discrimination and bullying treatment which is reflective of the experiences of operational women. (See Appendix 10. The impact of watch culture).

There appears to be an acceptance that watch culture can be detrimental to the experience of a firefighter. Although there is a general move towards local leadership, decision makers and leaders fail to formally acknowledge the impact that watch culture can have.
The experiences shared by a number of the women suggest that experiences within watches and teams currently show, and have shown, differential treatment towards them. This treatment has been identified as individual, collective and systematic resulting in prolonged negative effects for some women, significantly impacting their ability to perform and maintain normal levels of energy.

The impact of the watch process, as a means of socialisation and its impact upon employee integration and cultural norms, are not fully understood by non-operational personnel in policy making positions. As such, the establishment and perpetuation of cultural norms appear to continue, unabated. The watch as a model of how teams should work is left primarily to self-govern and evolve. It has long been established that watch culture lends itself to bullying, harassment and discriminatory behaviour.

Integration

The historical integration process of single tier entry operational personnel is described as significantly hyper-masculine, with rigid social orders in keeping with hegemonic masculinity. The experience of integration and the acceptance of operational women firefighters, although in different settings to directly appointed senior women, is not dissimilar; and the experience of integration, acceptance and development of operational women appears to be detrimentally different to the experience of most operational men. Most operational women discussed being on the outside, with the sense of not belonging in the FRS. Most experienced daily challenges but talked about the legacy and weight of the gender equality difference which impacted them detrimentally, leading to exhaustion with the culture. There was a consensus that gender equality although better was not greatly improved.

Structural gender equality

Most of the operational women experienced systemic inequalities at the point of joining the fire service, which has continued to a greater or lesser extent during their careers. The majority of the operational women reported experiencing direct discrimination because of their gender. Most of the women made conscious decisions not to leave the organisation for their own sense of wellbeing rather than being supported through their difficulties by the organisation. There was no evidence of a strategic vision or pathway for operational women within the Fire Sector, in terms of development, support and mentorship towards either promotion or leadership.

With the move towards a more neutralised version of inclusion outlined by the two FRSs, improving gender equality in terms of strategic planning appears to be lacking. Although FRS (A) recognised that equalities work had not been embedded sufficiently FRS (A) and (B) talked of the challenges being based in attracting the right kind of individual to the firefighter role (not gender) employee interactions, and equipping managers to lead locally (i.e. in the watch setting).

The mass withdrawal from the equalities agenda by the Fire Sector following the change of government, resulted in most FRSs abandoning work on the gender targets and improvements in gender equality. The central government Fire Reform is based on the lack

of change that is apparent within the Fire Sector in terms of diversity and culture. The question regarding the lack of commitment or will for cultural change within the FRS appears to be a valid one.

Gender targets

Although the overriding narrative regarding the targets were that they were unobtainable, there is little evidence of a FRS narrative for cultural change based on the gender targets. Further, there is little evidence of continued work towards gender equality since the apparent abandonment of the targets. There is evidence of positive action initiatives which precede recruitment, seeking to increase the number of women who apply to FRS. However, there is also a lack of understanding of positive action, and a continued resistance of the need for it. Two women from the same FRS talk of a positive action fast track management training for operational women but suggest it was ill-prepared and badly received within their organisation.

Areas for fundamental change were recommended by the Thematic Review (Home Office, 1999) to improve gender equality and the experience of operational women. The new gender target of 30% women has seen a renewed commitment by the National Fire Chief's Council to the issue of inclusion. The Local Government Association have agreed a memorandum of understanding with the NFCC and other key stakeholders which outline a vision for inclusion which includes monitoring data more closely for differential impact.

Chapter 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by reflecting on the extent to which the initial aim and objectives of this study have been answered. Through the methodological approach taken, I have been able, through interview and discussion, to investigate the experience of and arrangements for gender equality for women in the FRS. Fundamental systemic resistors to gender equality have been identified which appear to have existed historically, but which also directly impact the extent to which women continue to experience gender inequality. By centralising women's voices, I have been able to investigate the experience of gender equality as knowledge, and as a sense making process in understanding FRS culture. Watch culture as a catalyst for wider FRS culture has also strongly emerged, with the detailed experiences of the participants supporting the delayering of gendering processes. Using the integrative methodological lens, I have explored how gendered processes are embedded and upheld. I have considered and balanced the complexities and contradictions where power, identity and role occupation emerge for participant women. In investigating the impact of gender targets for the sector, I have been able to consider any evidence of cultural change and improved gender equality suggested from the data. Finally, I have considered the strategic direction for gender as positioned within the FRS since the targets were imposed, and looked at the gender data of participant FRS for local impact.

In this chapter I extrapolate the findings to answer the research aims more fully, and use the four key themes from the findings chapter to structure my discussion and analysis of the data. I will begin by considering the watch, its processes and its role in establishing wider cultural FRS norms. I will consider how gendered norms are endorsed and enforced by the watch as collective entities, questioning what is being constructed by them, and therefore what is operating. Finally, I consider the impact of the constructed discourses and behaviours on gender equality and wider gender processes.

5.2 Assimilation to watch culture

The data from the operational male firefighter focus groups serve to lay the foundation of how individual and group behaviour is shaped and perpetuated by watch culture. There is an

inextricable link between permitted watch behaviours and leadership which allows the cultural premise of the watch to survive and embed itself, unabated. In this section I explore how individual behaviours are influenced by membership of the group (the watch) which enable and enforce the notion of dominant constructions (beliefs) for enactment by gendered norm circles; and their links to wider organisational influences. Exploring the watch in this way also creates understanding for how gender equality can be understood within this environment, together with the mechanisms enforcing and endorsing how gendered processes are established.

The hereditary pattern of watch culture is cited as a negative thread by most participants in this study. There is an acknowledgement that the blueprint of a watch as an operative team can be the springboard for innovation, creativity and productivity. However, the term watch culture as outlined the findings is used and understood within FRS circles as an opposing force to that. The ideology of hegemony, which considers one form of masculinity as "exalted culturally" above others appears to be a strong feature of the watch (Connell, 2005 p. 77). The concept refers to the cultural dynamic in which a leading position is claimed and sustained by one group within a social setting.

The natural response to this is a patriarchal one. There must exist within such a grouping, those that are dominant and those placed into the status of subordinate. As discussed hegemony is likely to occur where a relationship between a cultural ideal and institutional power is sought, notwithstanding underlying arguments of firefighter FRS induction which requires the initial neutralisation of previous skills and knowledge. By single-tier entry, without need of formal qualification and where a prevalence of working class or military background exists, how power relationships are built and sustained becomes a palpable question.

It is argued that the military have the highest levels on display of what is described as "corporate" masculinity (Connell, 2005). Here, patriarchy provides the route to understanding the type of masculinity that has with it the question of how unaffected the organisations remain to change, from either "feminist women or dissenting men" (ibid). The view being offered is that hegemony relates to a cultural dominance, which creates and enables specific

gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men within its framework. The framework of re-constitutive downward causation raises the issue that institutions have the power to fundamentally mould the behaviours and dispositions of individuals by acting on their habits, thoughts and actions (Kaidesoja, 2007; Archer, 1995; Hodgson, 2002 2003, 2006; 2007; Elder-Vass, 2012b). The data suggests that the mould or the disposition of individuals is towards a version of masculinity which has been initiated and established at watch level. The further and more fundamental suggestion is that particularly gendered behaviours have been moulded which suggest a dominance and unacceptability of operational women within the framework of the watch. The watch is cited as the only means of cultural integration, socialisation and association for operational personnel. The watch is presented as a top down structure, within which positions are assigned, roles are given based on a fireman prototype, with the social structure of the environment overriding individual agency.

Looking at the watch as an allied entity, the narrative is changed towards one of a social entity which suggests collective responsibility when applied to the objective moment of the morphogenetic cycle (Elder-Vass, 2010c; Archer & Elder-Vass, 2011). The norm circle interplays with individual agency. In Zara's example where she was tied to the pole shaft until her eyes burst blood vessels, the group committed this act; I say the group as she referred to "they" (p.139). Such behaviour appears reflective of a patriarchal system of dominance and male authority. Can the behaviour be seen as gendered? It was an expression of the personal interaction of women with men on that watch – she was the only woman, and this behaviour did not happen to anyone else. Her everyday experience was that she had been named and was being called "toxic" by the officer in charge, she endured physical sexual assaults by her colleague, and she was physically held and tied against her will to the pole shaft on more than one occasion. She was not welcome there. They had created patterns of dominance and subordination where Zara was being aggressively subordinated. They had produced their own gender hierarchy (Acker, see p. 56). Having concluded that the behaviours are gendered, we should apply the gendered norm circle to identify what is happening. Zara's account provides evidence of her separation from them, by them. She refers to the event as one that was reoccurring. It was an activity. There was a joint commitment of the men to the discursive rule, which they enforced at different times in

different ways by mutual agreement. As a result of their actions, there was a causal (physical and emotional) effect on Zara. The men's commitment to enable particular normative behaviours or institutions to continue to maintain the status quo of the dominant environment.

It would appear from the perspective of the collective social entity that the expectation of the joint agreement of the men is demonstrated through direct and associated behaviours. So whether it was holding her upside-down, tying her up or simply leaving her there against her will, and doing nothing to help, such behaviours would be seen as agreement therefore not attracting sanction or punishment. There were no demonstrations by the group of individual agency. In other words, the cycle of interaction between the men and the cultural system of knowledge and ideas was strong enough to influence them to remain true to the existing cultural context. This would suggest that any deviation from the group would manifest as a non-endorsement or enforcement of the norm within the gendered norm circle creating an expectation of and platform for sanction.

It is important to understand where and how interdependence and solidarity between men occurs which establishes and perpetuates the unnoticed domination over women (Beechey, 1979; Walby 1990). The work in this regard suggests that understanding men's placement within patriarchy and the social construction of their situations as relative to other men, in order to further understand its impact upon the women concerned is vital. Examples include the defence of coerced hierarchy and how teams are established talked about in focus group C, where making the tea and calling officers 'Sir' was demonstration of the construction and maintenance of the patriarchal order. The argument was for the continued methods used by the "old hands" to ensure hierarchy was established and kept. The firefighter described positionality through menial, degrading tasks ensuring that firefighters have an assimilative attitude, or as the realist constructionism layering suggests, commit to the normative behaviour of the norm circle.

Legacy behaviours

As my discussion is beginning to infer, the watch does not act alone, and its behaviours are not isolated to its physical dislocation from wider FRS management structures. It must be

reiterated that the firefighter/officer single-tier entry structure advocates that fundamental FRS cultural norms are established at watch level. Stacey's perspective that managers are grown through watch culture seems to have traction here. The accounts of the women and other participant groups suggest an interplay and connectedness between FRS leadership (at varying levels) and watch behaviours. The top-down notion of causation or influence may exist linking both the watch and leadership environments; bringing together the leadership creating an abstract notion of rogue watches, the concealed voice (behaviours) of the FRS and continued gender inequity (Appendix 10).

The idea is that the social entity of the gendered norm circle acts through its parts. In so doing, it is argued that the circles are "downwardly causing" the behaviour "of the part they act through" (Elder-Vass, 2012b p. 88). Zara outlined that her supervisory officer called her toxic, Connie said that her work contract was almost terminated due to issues of childcare after working for the organisation for over 20 years, Claire talked about all of the grievances put in against her by her management team and the threat from her Chair to get her out of her post, and Daisy talked about her supervising officer threatening her. All examples of management behaviours. The management relationship is significant between the men, which connects with the notion of gendered organisations and the structure of patriarchy, where significance lies with the homosocial relationships and interactions that are occurring between the men, and secondly there is significance found in the relationship or interactions between the men and the women. The top down approach can be considered in two ways. The operational participants suggests that the watch is an entity of its own, managed by itself, and self-contained. The strategic leader suggested that within the watch the prevalent cultural influence does not necessarily lie with the officer in charge – which suggests a patriarchal character who rewards or punishes the men (Ortner, 2014 see p.46). However in the examples given the protagonist has invariably been the officer in charge of the watch. The watch, in the instance of Zara acts out the set of behaviours and beliefs thought to be consistent with being a member of that watch. The leader of the watch is then downwardly causing behaviours by their own part in the process. The second way of starting to conceptualise downward causation in the context of the FRS is endemically, through the integration and culturally normative processes that all firefighters go through, gender resistant processes are evident, and leak through every structural layer of the organisation.

Again, focus turns to the single tier officer system which funnels out managers from the same socialised and normative process as all other operational personnel.

Although cited as the main protagonist of a coercive, hierarchal process of integration and socialisation, the watch as a continuing entity, appears to serve some purpose for the leadership of the FRS. The watch model as an organisational tool has generationally encouraged behaviours which enforce hierarchy, and a legacy of masculinized power. Despite its being critiqued by central government for its' creating cultural deficit, it remains the primary model used. The inference that I have drawn in Appendix 10 is that the watch serves the purpose of public leadership disassociation from or concealment of particular behaviours that are actually organisational behaviours or norms. In other words, the watch become the scapegoat of unacceptability within the FRS.

Interestingly the distinction between senior operational women and their male peer group once they get to upper middle management appears to mirror watch acceptance described by the men's focus group (see p.138). The men say that valour or proficiency at operational incidents created a mark of acceptance for them. It would seem that for operational women, proficiency at a particular level of management is the demarcation of acceptance (see p.162). For directly appointed women however, their experience of non-acceptance, being out-grouped is reminiscent of the experiences offered by operational women on watches.

The notion presented of gendered norms being upheld through endorsement and enforcement by the gendered norm circle, presents an organisational misnomer by the leadership in their approach to watch culture. Helpfully the variable that any one social event can be influenced by multiple (sometimes conflicting) norm circles, and social entities creates further understanding (Elder-Vass 2010b). This layering introduces the inadequacy of attempting find a solution to one element of the problem, when in fact the problem is a multi-faceted one. The view that discriminatory behaviours and decisions are much more than illogical decision making but a complex mix of gendered assumptions can focus thinking on the breadth of gendered tacit ideology grown within the framework of watch culture (see p. 66 Beveridge & Nott). It offers a framework which also suggests the co-determination of

social structure and individual agency, so that even where structural pressures exist for an individual, that person retains the power and capacity to make choices (Elder-Vass, 2012a).

The capacity for individual agency within the framework of watch culture appears to be one the fundamental challenges identified by the gendered norm circle. The gendered nature of norm circles identifying patterns of dominance, stratifications of gender status, and patterns of expectations of social processes of behaviour towards and in regards to women appears manifest within watch culture and into operational management structures. The culture has historically, and continues presently to resist women through gendered norm circle processes entrenched through watch and wider culture. The watch acts as a premise and platform for FRS culture.

5.3 Integration

I turn now to explore the integration processes of the watch to understand what prevalent beliefs have been constructed, and how gendered norm circles are enabled. It is established that the watch functions as a hierarchal group from which a dominant gender stratification and cultural positioning operates (see p. 63). It is clear from the women's accounts that stratification and separation from the men occurs in terms of narrative, behaviours, gender expectations and decisions that gendered norm circles are enacted at across all areas of FRS culture. In illustration I offer the examples of Edie's fire boots being urinated in after 15 years in the job and with a watch in which she felt established in, Zara as a manager being told by another manager to "fuck off my fire ground", Connie being called "the cunt" for almost two years, and Stacey in a recent promotional process being asked for sexual favours from her mentor. There are two main areas of exploration here: the collective group and what it constructs. The questions which emerge strongly from the data are how the collective group is established and maintained, what it constructs concerning gender equality, and how such constructions become cultural norms. The notion of the arrangements of gender hierarchies and constructed gender cultures (see Chapter 2) in turn create constructions of who are allowed to integrate or be included, and who cannot. This appears to have foundations far deeper than workplace disparity between men and women (see p. 48) suggesting a stronghold of hegemonic masculinity which through its structures of integration implicitly works to preserve patriarchy. Weighing the saturation of legislation, employment

responsibilities, public sector auditing and gender targets (see Chapter 2) that the FRS have had with regards to gender equality, against the inequitable experiences women firefighters and leaders presents an unacceptable imbalance.

The study data provides examples of both integration and disconnection in the cultural experiences of the participants. Such complexities and contradictions will be discussed, and can be further understood through the discussion of patriarchy as well as the reflexivity provided through translocational positionality. I argue that within gender alone (without intersections) there are locations and dislocations which occur in response to the strength of patriarchy, and the convolutions of highly gendered environments. They manifest as complexities or contradictions of pro-gender behaviours or alliances that have been viewed as assimilative to men or in opposition to gender equality.

The personal accounts of how operational men and women introduce their historical integration into the FRS is powerful and central to understanding how cultural normalities are ensued, embedded and create legacies through the single tier officer system of leadership. The strength of the women's testimonies which I have italicised because they are pivotal areas of learning, has been such that I have located them as positioning experiences. In seeking to explore the nuances of hierarchy and social order through hegemonic masculinities, it has also been important to understand cultural context through the men's experiences.

Watch integration practices have been illustrative of an established collective, self-governing body into which new firefighters are placed, or existing firefighters are transferred into. It is also firmly acknowledged by leadership and decision makers that watch culture is something that can evade long-arm management. In other words, they can be a law unto themselves The firefighters offer two prevalent narratives. The first is the free admission that most (both men and women) experienced unwarranted behaviours aimed at degrading them. The second which split the participants, was whether they were bullied or not. For most women the answer was 'yes' but for most men it was no. The oxymoron apparent was that although many of the men reflectively shared experiences of behaviours that they would class as prolonged, degrading and targeted, only a small proportion of them refer to it as bullying in

hindsight. Invariably, induction involved non-acceptance by the watch, where individual voice, previous experience, or personal preference held no importance, which could last for years.

Doing gender – gendered norm circle behaviour

A critical moment emerges here for the men, where at some point they cease from being on the edge of the watch waiting to be accepted, to becoming an active watch member. At the crux of the discussion was the notion of assimilation to the self-organised power structures of the watch environment. Although different examples were cited they raised similar issues of personal lack of power, group-think-and-do, and hierarchy. There was a definite acceptance by all participants of the types of coercive action which underpinned their integrative process or the process of others. The old hands or old school behaviours referred to frequently in all of the male focus groups, symbolise a set of behaviours very much entrenched in power, hierarchy and coerced compliance. Their examples powerfully demonstrate the need to assimilate to the environment or leave. As discussed the notion that gender is "done" within every social interaction (see p. 55 Bem, 1993 and Risman, 2009), suggests a highly polarised, highly positional context within the FRS. The gender norms appear predicated upon gendered norm circles which actively resist women and instate a form of masculinity deemed acceptable through watch indoctrination. This is a powerful cultural setting which leaves no doubt concerning the preservation of patriarchal practice and arrangements. The tension that shows itself is because the men refers to the entity which shapes gender norms, that is, watch culture, outside of themselves and those who attended the focus groups did not include themselves within it. It is this tension that I wish now to explore.

Collective behaviour versus individual agency – the complicity of masculine membership

Individual and collective accountability with regard to gender inequality in the FRS has largely gone unacknowledged. In the same way, it would appear that leadership has not accepted responsibility for the known negative impact of the watch process. It has also failed to understand the impact of the watch structure on firefighter's integration to any meaningful extent.

Referencing the male firefighter focus groups, their discussions of inappropriate, coercive and bullying behaviour placed responsibility with the old hands. Whilst it may be reasonable to accept that there are a set of behaviours displayed by the old hands as active gatekeepers of the watch hierarchy, how does that impact on the other members of the watch? There is nothing within the accounts given to indicate that the group behaves in any way that is mutinous within its own structure with a view to ending the targeted campaign against the new member. There is a definite question of something more than assimilative behaviour displayed by the wider watch. The group actions or behaviours that allow a capable new worker into its confines, but does not allow their integration or belonging for a period of two years or more, suggests a deeper reality than is being verbalised.

The power of the gendered norm circle

Whilst some distanced themselves from old school behaviours, others admitted that they were part of its perpetuation, and some accepting it as the status quo. When making links in terms of behaviours and culture, the notion of the 'objective' and the 'subjective moment' which occur within the morphogenetic cycle (see p. 126) are an interesting consideration (Elder-Vass, 2012a p. 90 and 124). Bringing again the example of the firefighter who was treated so badly that he left his watch after two years, together with the firefighter's in men's focus group A acknowledgement of their role in perpetuating watch behaviours, can be considered as a subjective moment. It can be described as a time of human agency which is dependent upon the very possibility that our beliefs are influenced externally by the objective moment, that is the cultural system. What it is being described is an integral, mutuality of individual actions being influenced by the cultural norms and in turn, in the case of the watch, a reproduction of the behaviours that they appear to be distancing themselves from. Unsurprisingly many of the study participants spoke of the varying degrees of consequence as a result of subjective moments. There is a clear disconnect between culture and individual agency: and brings again the Elder-Vass question of the form of culture that is external to individuals but also able to influence their beliefs. The argument is towards individual reflexivity and choice which essentially holds individuals accountable for their complicity in group actions. The theoretical standpoint of norm circles can provide the answer to the ontological question. The objective moment was produced by the Zara's watch in their actions towards her, or Claire's experience of receiving grievances against her by all of her

male management team, or the actions of a group who would lead Wilma to lock her door in fear of what they might do, who in that circumstance became the gendered norm circle. It is the gendered norm circle which is at work in the objective moment of the morphogenetic cycle and it is at this juncture that a norm circle has the potential to exercise an emergent causal power (Elder-Vass, 2010a). In explanation, the causal power can increase the tendency of the individual(s) to conform to the norm that it endorses. This entity is made up of individuals (agents) who are committed, in relationship with others, to endorse and enforce the norm through their actions. The suggestion is that this type of commitment is not reflective of a personal commitment, but that members of the norm circle have an awareness of the shared commitment by other members of the circle. Therefore, the commitment can be levied more in terms of obligation to other members to enforce and endorse the norm, with the added expectation that the other members will in turn support them in their endorsement and enforcement activities of the norm. Individual members support for the norm at this point is more active than it would be, had they not shared this collective intention.

It is acknowledged that although social pressures are exercised by individuals when they are in activity to endorse or enforce the norm, within the strata of hierarchy of the watch. Using the example of the old hands wielding dominant, coercive behaviours over the new recruit or probationer, and others assimilating through fear, only part of the scenario is considered. It is the collective intention of the watch (norm circle) which enables the behaviour towards the individual, with the old hands becoming the representative of the activity for that norm. The argument is that conformity to the very norms that the watch advocates, is the tendency which is produced among the individuals within the norm circle. It is this tendency to conform, that is the causal power responsible for establishing the norms within social institutions, which are in themselves "indistinguishable" from culture (Elder-Vass, 2012a, see p. 124). This is meaningful as it argues that it is the collective endorsement of ideas, beliefs that make them culture. In contrast, Archer's suggestion is that the ideas (cultural system) exist independently of the social interactions of individuals. I am inclined towards the argument that although every individual has the power to hold a belief, it is only a group that has the power to "designate those beliefs as elements of shared culture. Culture is not simply belief, but socially endorsed belief, and that social endorsement can only be brought about by the group" (ibid). The example of the extradition of the firefighter from his watch as described

by the firefighter from the focus group, in his retelling of the story absolves himself from the group behaviour. His membership of the watch and decision not to act in support of his colleague, however, suggest his complicity. The disconnection in his account when he speaks of the watch as "they" and his membership of the group, where he disables himself from the group action appears to be a coping behaviour, and in itself creates contradictions of accountability versus agency. His account of the events, do not appear to include any action on his part to stop the behaviours towards his colleagues by the watch. The examples of disconnection cut across every participant grouping, and is a significant yet complex platform for understanding the seemingly incongruent or contradictory behaviour of FRS personnel. Drawing on the norm circle theory, within a normative environment the failure by members of the norm circle to endorse or enforce the behaviours of that norm circle, tends to prompt negative sanctions within the environment. Elder-Vass further outlines that observation of the norm will, likewise, tend towards a positive response (Archer & Elder-Vass, 2011 p.101). It is the understanding of the normative environment which induces the individual towards internalising a tendency to conform to the particular norm. This example suggests a tendency among the group to conform to the notion of hierarchal power, a self-organised pecking order and subordination based on first and last one in. Although in the firefighter's observation of the norm, he did not agree with the action, the negative sanction seems too great a cost for him not to enforce it. A possible enforcement behaviour could be to do nothing, and therefore become an implicit enforcer. Christine's example of the Deputy Chief's unwillingness to do anything about the Chief's bullying of her is a clear example. Her colleagues approach to her to find out how she was created the subjective moment which, in Christine's view was too high a cost. As she was clear to say, the Deputy got the Chief's job. However, the subjective moment offered a vantage point from which to do something different (see p. 92). Agency does exist.

Whilst the examples of patriarchy appear to answer the what and why of culture, exploring the watch, and related behaviours in this way, helps to explore how FRS cultural norms become established and perpetuate. It would seem that FRS culture is predicated upon cycles of integration into watch culture and its pursuant feed into wider FRS culture. The strength of the established normalised structure, through the single tier officer system has inevitably bled out into the wider culture of the organisation, creating platforms for decision making,

policy structure and governance of FRS organisations. The hyper-masculinised, behavioural-bequest type social structure that exists, suggests a more macro pre-existing structure that would position it with historical militaristic downward influence organisational models. However, the central role of the watch in terms of learned behaviours and concentric outward patterns suggest the existence of wider (and at times more hidden) constructions of accepted norms.

Four cultural constructions which normalise FRS patriarchal structure

To understand how the FRS organises itself culturally around women, it is important to delayer what is being constructed.

I will develop constructs of FRS culture in response to the research objectives of

- exploring of the social interplay of gender within operational firefighter culture, and its wider impact upon FRS organisational gender equality;
- critically analyse the extent to which FRS culture is gendered, considering its gender processes;
- broaden understanding of how processes that cause and enable gender processes, systemic inequality and patriarchal structures continue to exist.

There are four constructions of FRS culture which appear to develop (and historically have been developed) from the watch up. The development of these constructs underpin what is considered normal, and the stratification of men and women. Although denied, there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between leadership and the watch structure which is enabled through the single tier officer process. The constructs are not new, all operational personnel are socialized and normalised using the same methods. The constructs therefore are renewed through enabling and enforcing behaviours both inside and outside of the watch.

The four constructs which are imposed are

1 Women as outsiders

2 The discourse of operational women as incompetent

3 Patriarchy

4 Masculinity

Construct # 1 Women as outsiders

The first construct is the notion of marginalisation and the development of an in-group, out-group which, in the main, keeps women on the outside of the membership of the male group. It has the effect of a dual construct, or multiple cultural norms which emanate from the same set of processes. Through the marginalisation of women (gendered norm circle 1), the construction of a membership or collective of men is enforced and reinforced (gendered norm circle 2). There are two issues that emerge: the first is a definite grouping for men within the watch environment where homosocial relationships translate to membership. However, this constructed membership requires their adherence to the rules. I reference here the definition of patriarchy as a structure (Ortner, 2014) as discussed (p.45). Again the prevailing structural platforms are the relationships that men have with each other, and the relationships between women and men. In essence Ortner's definition discusses how relationships are established between the men themselves, and then the basis on which relationships or non-relationships are then established with women. Exploring the homosocial relationships first, the men's experience of abusive behaviour is discussed either in terms of entry into the group membership or as punishment for their failure to assimilate to the rules of the membership or normative (norm) circle. This aligns itself with Ortner's definition in that a leader (or formation of leadership) rewards or punishes the men within the patriarchal framing. The men's experience of abuse is described as being time-bound, ending once newer firefighters joined the group, adhered to watch authority or displayed masculine prowess at operational incident.

Moving to the relationships between men and women, the emergent reality for the women is that their marginalisation is rooted in their gender difference and therefore appears to keep them separate. For most operational women it would seem that no amount of time or event would see the transition from outsider to a member of the group. Where women felt gave examples of feeling accepted, they also gave examples which countered this, where such acceptance was rescinded by words or behaviours. Examples of acts of indirect and direct gender discrimination were discussed which continued mid to late career. Many concluded from this that they could only accept that they were outsiders and did not fit. They describe attempts to assimilate, dressing like men, neutralising their gender identity, and other submissive behaviours, all with similar outcomes. Invariably, they would activate a response

from a male watch member (and therefore the group) which would reinforce their outsider status. A definite decision was made by some of the participant women to move towards the masculine norm, and create professional distance from the female gender role, or alternatively choose to stay under the radar and invisible

Marginalizing women

In exploring visibility and gender, issues of performance pressures, marginalisation and exclusion the operational women are clear that they are highly visible. In Connie's words the lightbulb above her head has been there since she joined the job and has not gone away. An important element of this construct is that responses to visibility are linked to homosocial relationships where men make preferences towards other men to build networks and friendships. This challenges the idea that creating a critical mass of women will equal improved gender equality especially when viewed from the women's perspective. In the words of some of the operational women they would hide their own identity through baggy clothes (Beverley, Fg1), and others would distance themselves from other operational women (Betsy, Fg1).

The benefits of invisibility, it is argued, are the privileges of masculinity. The women who said that they kept below the radar, appeared to enjoy the benefits to contrived invisibility but only by alignment to the accepted masculine norm (Cassie, Trudy, Camilla). These privileges are viewed as normalised and so are rarely scrutinised or problematized. For the women who have effectively made themselves less visible in terms of their gender, there is a tension for women within this construction. The impact of a membership based only on gender has split the participants. There is a lineage of women who have struggled within the environment because they were women. There are participants who outline assimilating to masculine norms through their behaviours and choices, and those who have stood on the margin attempting to hold their identity of womanhood, whilst conceding at times to exhibit or accept behaviours that they would not consider, simply trying to survive the environment. Both senior women, and strategic leaders talked about a revolving door that existed for operational women, where they hit culture saturation point between year 5 and 10, with most operational men completing 30-years' service. There are accounts of directly appointed

senior women leaving their roles prematurely due to the impact of being reduced to 'outsider' status.

An illustration of this was at the beginning of focus group 1 where Susie began by saying that she loved her job, and her watch, but as the conversation ensued described the men in her watch as animals. The contradictions of the women's positionality is powerful as it is a challenge to the environment. Further tension exists where women have made themselves invisible by taking an *under the radar* positioning. These women, in certain FRS norm circles have appeared to thrive, earning the privileges of masculinity. The issues of identity for women are intricately and complexly woven into this construction, with the potential for the delayering of behavioural contradictions understood in this context. Ortner's (2014) definition discusses patriarchy in terms of women being specifically excluded from male groupings or included in ways that subordinated or controlled them. This potential for exclusion or punishment helps clarify the positioning of some of the women, and raises the matter of behavioural responses. Early in the women's focus group 1 discussion, a clear split emerged where they discussed operational women who clearly assimilated to their environment, and in their eyes behaved badly as one type of operational woman. The other type was the operational woman who navigated the environment as best she could, becoming wearied by the behaviour of the watch. This was similar with some of the senior women, for different reasons, where the behaviour of their female colleagues, in response to the environment was itself marginalised and in most cases failed to be understood. Layering translocational positionality at this stage allows space for the complexity of where each operational woman locates herself. As discussed the interplay of locations and dislocations, (see p.80) such as being faced with being an insider (operational firefighter with technical proficiency) but the watch, through dominant discourse, demands and marginalising behaviours place the woman outside of the group. The complexity of being located as a woman in a historically masculine role, being surrounded by hegemonic masculine demands, appear for some women to create a conflicting or alternative internal dialogue. This dialogue has resulted in de-identification of their own gender, re-identification with the masculine (or complete subordination to it), and disassociation from other women. The contradictions then emerge through varying types of behaviours (see p. 148). With the first woman second woman (p. 148) it is evident that assimilation and subjugation are difficult and complex for the "first" woman but it is clear that it is not acknowledged in this way. Her behaviours are a

symptom of her subjugation in the watch, and her attempts to belong even when demeaning and morally deficient. An outcome of such polarisation is that the potential for women to revolt against each other is high (a symptom and outcome of marginalisation). The end result is that they continue to be isolated or disconnected from each other; which appears to be a premise upon which this construct thrives. Movement towards the masculine, and the subsequent subjugation, de-gendering, and invisibility seem indicative of the translocations of gender positions alone, where responses to overtly oppressive patriarchal or hegemonic norms of the watch elicit both conflict and allegiance to the oppressor. A woman locating herself with the dominant male for reasons of membership, protection and belonging can be understood within the context of this patriarchal regime, as opposed to assimilative. These responses could also fit into the container of survival as named by the operational women (see p. 153). Understanding this behaviour as a symptom of the construction of male membership which actively places women on the outside of it, can help to acknowledge the challenges, complexities and contradictions of survival behaviour. If the behaviours are acknowledged in this way, the following can happen: it can allow for wider understanding in that a single position concerning women's responses to gendered constructions does not exist. It also acknowledges that gender does not have to be intersected for contradictions or complexities to exist. When gender equality meets patriarchal or hegemonic masculine strongholds, positionality for women can become tortuous. It can provide the basis to explore the constructions which force such positional responses, and the complexity of the power involved in doing so.

How operational women experience gender equality

Referencing the operational women's pictorial representation of gender (Fig.4), both groups of women came back with strong depictions of separation by gender. They suggest an oxymoron of having the smallest mouths but needing the biggest and loudest voices. As discussed, the dominance of men and the definitive stratification of women and men suggests continued production of policy and decisions in which women are perceived as men see them. The examples given by Betsy where policy was developed that women would wear toilet keys around their necks to keep the toilets women only spaces (which was later challenged), and Connie's near dismissal experience where she was told that her childcare issues did not fit "you're not a square peg in a round hole, you're a bloody octopus" begin to

illustrate that notion of policies as gendering practices are problematic and problematize women (see p.62). The non-gender-neutral construction of women's categorisation within the FRS culture creates a premise biased towards inequality in all decision making. Most of the women have talked about the self-organised activism of women and networks that have demanded change. The recentness of Connie's near sacking experience (one week prior to the focus group) hints at the ongoing shaping of gendered processes and practices where masculine normalities are framed within the context of prevalent practices and belief systems. The lack of accountability and the systemic and legal governance of women's issues appear far from the decision makers discussion and are illustrated by examples concerning the women sourcing their own uniform and problematizing Stacey for needing a facemask that fit a woman. Decision makers in FRS A and B discuss the decisions by their organisation not to specifically resource gender, but to manage difference in a softer, generic way could be called abandonment of gender equality focus and appears leagues away from the LGA view of FRS inclusion. At the very least it speaks to the wider FRS approach to mainstreaming of insufficient resourcing and lack of systemic planning and functionality for gender equality.

There is much ambiguity where gender equality is concerned. In the operational women's focus groups they were unable to offer clear lines of authority, key objectives or examples of sufficient resources for the progression of gender equality within their FRSs. These are basic components for gender mainstreaming. The women's focus groups and senior women such as Zara, Wilma and Maria discussed support from women's networks but gave no examples of systemic equality. From the women's standpoint many of the operational women said that they were not treated equally, giving examples of poor management, direct discrimination, and systemic inadequacies. The argument that the overriding structure of how everyday gendering practices, and regular routine interactions are foundations of social order and create structure for leadership from those interactions is a powerful and sobering viewpoint for the Fire Sector as a whole.

Improvements in gender equality

Concerning gender equality, Connie's description of ways in which women experience systemic and individual inequality within the FRS is significant (see p159). Gender inequality has come to be discussed by women in terms of its chronic status, accepting inequity as a

routine way of managing the environment. Routine systemic inequities serve, from Connie's account, to keep women marginalised.

The prevalence of how masculinity has impacted FRS governance is found throughout participant accounts, with watch culture leakage showing itself in leadership, policy making and systemic arrangements. All of the operational women who participated in the focus groups were ranked officers with many years of collective service and experience. All of them (with the exception of one) had experienced cultural concerns to varying degrees through watch and management integration and systemic discrimination in early to mid-career due to their gender. They spoke candidly of being content in their non-success in promotional processes, as it indicated non-preferential treatment. There is an importance to this which links to the success of the gender targets. It was established that work towards targets have not been linked strategically to cultural change, although the Thematic Inspection clearly outlined areas for change. The accounts suggest a culture which remains closed to them, with duty rosters inflexible illustrated through Zara's example of having to get her local nursery to open early so that she was able to respond to duty calls; unjustifiably discriminatory. FRS governance arrangements, for the operational middle manager's duty roster, still requires women to be available for call outs over twenty-four- or forty-eight-hour periods, regardless of caring responsibilities. As a result, most operational women do not consider moving past supervisory posts. Finally, congruent inclusive leadership appears limited with little change in responding to and planning for the needs of women. It is difficult to recognise congruence within the sector as concerns its notional intention towards gender equality. In 2008, the FBU reported the push for internal diversity following their findings of specific bullying and harassment in high numbers to women and BME firefighters. Despite the blueprint of the FRS Equality Framework, and toolkit, the lack of commitment by Chief Fire Officers has been demonstrated through the withdrawal equality resources over recent years.

The presumption of women's inequality rests in the perpetuating discourse and construction of difference between men and women, which reifies masculinity as norm and woman as incompetent outsider. The outcome of this normalises women as a group subordinate to men and marginalises them (Lorber 1994; Risman, 2004). This construct appears to have

embedded the positive outcome of the homosocial relationship for men as a cultural norm, and internalised the narrative that women do not fit for both men and women. The underlying assumption that if men and women experience structural conditions and role expectations identically, that "observable gender differences would disappear" (Risman, 2004 p.432) appears unobtainable in FRS culture when thinking specifically about gendered norm circles and integral issues of internalised gender and cultural homosocial relationships. It is a stance that nullifies and effectively sidesteps the voices of women in this study. It is arguable that the masculine structures have actively worked to maintain the structural integrity of inequality and conditions that would give preference to men. However, it is evident that adding women in is an insufficient means of creating gender equality outcomes within the FRS context. The resistance implied and established through the gendered norm constructions and enforced through gendered norm circle mechanisms presents an imbalance for women which cannot be countered through targets alone, and seriously questions the notion of the viability of targets for the FRS.

The lack of clear internal direction or strategic pathway for operational women and the specificity of gender equality, illustrates the outsider status that women occupy within the FRS. It further illustrates how the FRS has fallen short of its responsibilities as a public sector, and its inability to meet the cultural improvements asked of it at the time the gender-targets were imposed. It also raises the extreme deficit that PSED has created in the pursuance and implementation of gender equality. Under the GED FRS's would need to exercise its responsibilities to gather, use and assess information on its policies and practices affect gender equality, and its service delivery arrangements – and assess the impact of such policies, decisions and practices. It would further be required to make public both its plans and progress in this regard. The structural arrangements for gender equality would appear to both a product and an outcome of neo-patriarchy.

Construct # 2 The discourse of operational women as incompetent

The second construct is the prevalent discourse about women's competence. This is evident in part, through the isolation and the vulnerability of women. Early accounts are of women being deliberately isolated from other women, the traction of a narrative about women's

incompetence in and between the watches is established. The assumption of women's incompetence has been difficult to argue against when women have been – in the main - historically and systematically kept isolated, and the narrative about them having freedom to circulate, unabated. This dominant narrative, that women are not strong enough or dexterous enough to do the job is initiated by men, but has been perpetuated by both women and men and upholds the construction of masculinity.

A distinct theme underpinning discourse concerning operational women's capability was that of positive action in recruitment. Some of the participant men responded aggressively to the idea of positive action in recruiting operational women. They presented arguments of women's inabilities to pass the strength tests, and their non-attraction to operational roles and even that if women wanted to be firefighters they would be firefighters. The main protagonists of these arguments in both focus groups were the middle and supervisory officers, which corresponds with the link between leadership and cultural discourse. The notion of women being subject to men in Beveridge and Nott's discussion (see p.65) raises the complexity of what underlies how women are located in the operational sphere of the FRS. Women as weaker and physically ineffective reinforces the stratification towards masculinity. Effectively the anti-locution of women's inadequate strength has been successfully linked in watch circles to women's capability to successful carry out the operational firefighter role. The point of entry selection tests designed around job competence appears to have been omitted from the narrative (see p.17). It is not difficult to link to the notion that behaviour is gendered only when and because it is enacted within the gender order, giving it meaning as gendered. Women experiencing "deep discouragement" over men's collective mobilisation of masculinities links the women's accounts of needing to prove their credibility against the feelings of exhaustion and survival (see p.153). The gendered norm circle of women's incompetence is a powerful one and its impact fully demonstrated through the women's accounts of their own capabilities and readiness for promotion.

"Firemen": actively homosocial

This distinct aspect of the cultural journey of most of the operational women presents the detrimental impact of the gender process where the consequences of social order emerge.

There are cultural consequences for occupying a firefighter role as a woman. From the women's standpoint, Identifying as a woman and identifying as a firefighter are not synonymous and interfaces strongly with resistant behaviour from men in FRS circles. From a feminist standpoint view, the unique position of the operational firefighter affords them more power than other positions to say what is happening within its cultural context, especially when gender is at play. The standpoint of identity also underpins the behaviour of women who disassociate from their own gender group or women-led networks. Understood in this context where masculinity is endemically accepted as synonymous with the firefighter role, examples of disassociation from other women, Cassie's decision to stay under the radar show examples of a highly gendered stratification process between operational men and operational women. This wider social group both endorses and enforces the construction of the incompetence of women as a cultural norm (gendered norm circle 3). The notion that the women are constrained or empowered by the masculine or feminine space they occupy are strongly linked to the gendered norms being enforced, and therefore their ability to work in ways that make them less visible. The collective behaviour (of women or men) is the power that creates a tendency in individuals to comply with the gendered norm that is the emergent causal power of the gendered norm circle.

Women's credibility becomes an ensuing feature of the incompetent narrative. The argument points towards highlighting a homosociability enacted by men where there is a high visibility and presence of women causing an imbalance to the patriarchal order. This is important, as the women give accounts where their placement within a watch, or team has been followed by undesirable consequences. Their female presence has invariably been problematized by management or fellow colleagues. The conceptualisation of active homosociality shaping an environment that excludes or subjugates women is enlightening. It outlines that the male response to the imbalance of the patriarchal order which includes the marginalisation of women, actively fostering hostile non-women friendly working environments, and exhibiting controlling and constraining behaviours regarding the social interactions of women (see p. 63). The importance here is what is being constructing through the behaviour of the men between themselves, and what is being constructed in terms of the behaviour of men with regard to the women? It is clear that discourse has played a strong part in constructing, enforcing and endorsing norms regarding the incompetence of women.

The women themselves discuss the impact of their marginalisation which has not only shown itself in terms of the behaviour of men towards the women, but has seemed to involve the same types of behaviours from some women towards other women. An interesting outcome from the data has also been the developed narrative, and associated internalisation of a "credibility" which is a strong theme through the women's disclosure in both focus groups.

Construct # 3 Patriarchy

A third, more prevalent, construct has emerged which is male dominance over women, the social order of patriarchy. Although this may appear to be obvious it is the construct of male dominance which places and keeps women subordinated with permissions given for lenience. Women's accounts have described a violent, more sinister type of male aggression, where the behaviours towards them have been at best discriminatory and at worse criminal. According to the women's accounts, the patriarchal demand is that somewhere during their career, they have been asked to deny, relinquish or diminish what it is to be a woman. This has consequently pushed them towards a more neutralised, male version of themselves. Doreen's questioning of why her own gender matters so much within the FRS, fundamentally illustrates the significance gender plays within the sector. Again, I make reference to Ortner's (2014) definition of patriarchy as a structure (see p. 46). Men are described as competing for status and power which includes the domination and/or control of women.

The accounts of early integration offer examples of a social order that saw many of the women either brutalised or fathered by older male officers and colleagues during the early and mid-stages of their FRS careers. The accounts shared by some of the women suggest displays of behaviours, primarily by their managers, to either emasculate, dominate or both. I have discussed the types of domination the operational women have shared concerning men on their watches: masturbating in areas designated for them, leaving them porn magazines on their pillows, Connie, Trudy and Fay recalling men urinating and defecating in their boots or on their equipment, rendering their women-only spaces unusable. Zara's experiences of sexual assaults and finally Wilma's fear of rape all have cultural traction. The themes of violence or threatened violence (including sexual) towards them during their early career experiences were described as weaponry used was both to demean and demoralise. Being given extreme nicknames such as "the cunt", "the bitch", "the bird" and "toxic" which were used relentlessly by their managers and give clear indicators of resistance to women; three

out of five of the senior operational women gave examples of such names (gendered norm circle 4). This is contextualised against the pecking order experience the operational men (Focus group C) describe when they talk about demeaning tasks such as tea making and nicknames as a rite of passage.

The use of the examples given by the participant women is deliberate. They have not been used gratuitously as horror stories, to shock, or create a narrative of bad behaviour by men towards women within the Fire Sector, but merely to lay the foundation of their integration and cultural positioning within Fire Service life. The experience of extreme incidences of patriarchy, parading as normal, whether past or present do appear to have a continued bearing upon how operational women experience the FRS. A social order where women are subjugated for no other fact than they are women as described by most of the operational women participants, does not just occur. Examples outline members of the "privileged" group – the gendered norm circle - using violence and intimidation of women to sustain their dominant position (Acker, 2006 p. 83). The notion that the men who attack are asserting their dominant right supports the hegemonic assumption of their place within the environment.

The accounts given by the men of the type of integration that they themselves were subject to within their organisations does give scope for understanding the types of dominant behaviours displayed towards the women as described. The link between the manifesto for the FRS to diversify to include women, the threat to the masculine persona of role, and the actual change of demand from heroism to preventing fires presents a picture of a more disenfranchised group, where change is seen as both unnecessary and unwanted. The violence is a means of establishing, maintaining or reinforcing their dominance over women "in at least one area" (Crittenden and Wright, 2012 p. 1271). The suggestion is that although most men may endorse patriarchy, there appears a privileged and enforced position of masculinity and an androcentric bias to behaviours and cultural narratives which support highly gendered norms, maintaining patriarchal control. This brings an interesting layer to understanding how constructions of social order are made and maintained within the watch.

Acknowledging that the mechanism for the gendered norm circle may be the archetype of the watch or watch culture, and accepting that its leakage or legacy continues on in some

form throughout the organisation, the emergent process points to a version of patriarchy that seeks to remain embedded through behaviour, action and processes. The creation of social order which places women at the bottom, or outside of the group, must rely on the mechanisms of the gendered norm circle working, with endorsement from the collective group, and little disruption from, or manifest agency by individuals. The watch as described by the operational participants, acting as a self-managing organisation, enables and endorses such gendered behaviours without disrupting the prevalence of such norms. As such the groups actions must represent the group's intentions or wishes. Importantly, the data suggests that the normative behaviours of the watch (gendered norm circle) with regards to the constructions of patriarchal social order appear in various iterations (teams and leadership groups) throughout the organisation and so is not isolated to the watch scenario itself.

The causal effect has been the breaking of confidence in the women, and an ensuing internal struggle (for all) to prove themselves credible. With senior woman Christine dubbing her FRS "highly toxic", her examples also talk of isolation, exclusion from her peers, being bullied, undermined and ridiculed. Bringing forward the positionality of being marginalised, it becomes clearer to see the pecking order and cultural alliances she suggests amount to gendered norm circle activity. The prevalence of male power and dominant behaviours are inconsistent with a healthy organisational culture. Another causal effect has been the strengthening of women's resolve to gain power and therefore structurally and culturally change their environment through achieving the positional power of management. The data suggests leniency is sometimes shown towards women where assimilation to masculinity and its pursuant distancing of femininity or womanhood is evident.

There is a position in which social structures by their patterns induce identity choice and alternatives. However, it is argued that it is through the gendered norms of the social structure that individuals in similar positions or networks evaluate their own position comparatively against the alternative of others (Burt, 1982). The premise is that gender comparisons are based on the perceptions of deprivation or advantage. As such, when a woman positions herself as male or within the dominant male sphere she has the power to diffuse claims to, and expectations of gender equality. In distancing herself from matters of

gender equality, and pushing to a place beyond gender neutrality, she positions herself with the dominant alternative, finding power to navigate the culture.

Gender targets and patriarchy

Accepting the notion that gender in itself is a social structure, and gender stratification is embedded, then gender targets and cultural change have a grounding in the fundamental issue of gender identity. The distance of the FRS from gender neutrality, offers that individuals are faced with weighted choices regarding their gender identity, which the gender targets strongly evoke.

The conceptual premise is that targets diversify the employee group and bring about cultural change to that of inclusivity. The Home Office outline for the targets, the diversification of the employee group and the elimination of cultures of harassment and bullying, have seen limited change. The numbers of operational men still dominate the numbers of operational women disproportionately and with little change through the presence of targets and implementation of positive action measures. The nexus between the FRS as a highly gendered organisation with multiple gendered norm circles operating, and the FRS process and outcomes of gender mainstreaming are strong indicators of bottom up negative influences between operational personnel and the implementation of gender equality. It would seem that the underpinning of how cultural change can occur to improve the experience and structure of gender equality through mainstreaming and the progression of gender targets has been missed. It would appear that gender targets, positive action, structural issues of policy development impacting operational women's day to day lives at work has been used to silence them, as strongly illustrated in figure 5.

Construct # 4 Masculinity is the norm

The fourth construct is masculinity. What has been constructed is a form of hyper-masculinity of which both men and women have been asked to conform or submit to. Women have been asked to embody a construct of masculinity through both the behaviours and activity of the men in a variety of ways which amount to gender conformity. In addition, the rite of passage and hierarchal status afforded through the firefighter process is missing for directly appointed senior women, and their leadership credibility therefore questioned. Although technical

ability is argued for, it is also argued through the watch integration process that skill, knowledge and ability have little to do with status, membership and belonging. Simply put, masculine and coercive behaviours (gendered norm circle 5) has a strong history within the FRS (see p. 6). The impact of masculinity shows itself through structural and normative arrangements, for example, inadequate supply and source of female fitted uniforms, inappropriate use of (or no provision for) dignity facilities for women, promotional processes which do not account for caring responsibilities when in role, job vulnerability due to flexible working requests. Whilst there is a strong argument for inadequate processes for gender equality, it also points towards maleness and masculinity as a continuing central feature of the FRS. The argument of how masculinity is constructed and maintained occupationally and in doing so positions women as not only undesirable but also others, the woman as deficient. The exaltation of the masculine and the operational aversion to the feminine, has been the detail of some of the operational women's stories, suggesting the historical archetype of the watch as the constructing mechanism of causal power.

In positioning the cultural normality for women, it is appropriate again to revisit the theory of hegemonic masculinities (see p. 37), considering patriarchal norms and understanding "relations of alliance, dominance and subordination" (Connell, 1995 p.37). Through the accounts of watch culture, it can be argued that there is a denigration of other men as well as the subjugation of women, which serve as constructions designed to create inclusions and exclusions and maintain hierarchy. It is not enough to observe gender relationships as merely masculine (men) and feminine (woman), but acknowledge the realities which exist that enable patriarchy in ways that have not been considered. The data pool points towards systematic integration, of men by men, into a regime which places hierarchy and positioning above individual value and competence. It also points to a hierarchal structuration which does not consider women as equal within its arrangements. In the theoretical exploration of gender and power, the argument put forward is that of the structural organisation of gender organisationally within the FRS centralises masculinity. The theoretical principles discuss the interrelation of versions of masculinity and femininity with institutions. Crucially, it introduces the notion that it is usual for hegemonic masculinity to be constructed in relation to varying types of subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to the subordination of women. It is this significant interplay that resonates with the experiences of watch personnel

and why patriarchal social order is created and maintained. The concept of the legitimacy of patriarchy within the FRS with its implied, explicit gendered norm circle positioning of the dominance of men and subordination of women helps us to understand how ascendency or power and dominance are achieved. It is this concept that supports and helps decipher the data presented which appears inherently masculine from all angles, and offers an alternative to a universalism of masculinity and ascendency. Although hegemony is not referenced as an ascendancy based on force, but more of the creation of structure, it is not incompatible with ascendency achieved in this way (Connell, 1995). This sits strongly with the data which suggests ascendency by force and by structure, which we see through the women's and men's account of watch behaviour. The commonality of the two occurring together is referenced with the notion of dominant cultural patterns existing that justify violent or physical law and order justifications. The possibilities of complex but close connections between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal violence are evidenced in the women's stories (Walby, 1990; 2013). There is a distinction however, which confirms the peculiarity of FRS culture, which the participants suggest was not reflective of their normal lives. Conversely when referencing Christine, Claire, Wilma, Zara's and the accounts of other women in the study there appears to be an accepted normality by the men of the displays of hegemonic masculinities within the confines of the watch and within FRS management structures, where individual agency is not enacted and gendered norm circle behaviour presides.

The ideology concerning the social organisation of masculinity places patriarchal violence within this social order. The intimidation of women is not unusual, but occurs within the context that most men do not attack women, but those who do believe that they are justified, and are not behaving inappropriately (Connell, 2005). The interesting variable highlighted by the gendered norm circle is that even the men who do not attack the women are complicit in the justification of these behaviours. It would seem that the failure to endorse the norm is more problematic than individual acts of agency to intervene and challenge such norms. This dominant form of masculinity has been normative within the FRS, creating clarity for understanding the context within which women operate.

The interplay between different masculinities are intrinsic to patriarchal order and appear to have importance within the context of the FRS and the sheer dominance of men by number

(Johansson and Ottemo, 2015; Connell, 1995; 2006; 2012). This interplay recognises the ongoing struggle for power within forms of masculinities, and the absence of total power or control. It is curious how the detail of realism and the constructed subject extrapolates this issue. It is not discussed in terms of power, but with regard to social context and dispositions. The operational men have the capabilities of reflection and choice. The gendered norm circle assertion is that deliberations of power are made within the context of our memory of former discursive acts or pressures that are exerted upon us. The conclusion is that the gendered norm circles provide the important social context, as they can become the place of discursive pressure. As such, it is argued that the men may individually develop an "altered disposition" which impacts upon their ability to reflect and make independent choices. It also talks to the power of the gendered norm circle and the independence of each watch to be self-organised and self-managing. Men and women can be locked in the dynamic of being part of or subject to gendered norm circles for years with no prospect of emancipation from it. To also be considered is the pressure that an individual operational men would exert upon themselves, to conform to the gender norms in question. Finally, we must consider that for the consistency of influences to work watch members or FRS staff must be displaying systemic normative commitments which are similar (Elder-Vass, 2012a; 2012c). This may in fact be displayed in the conversations with Cassie and Sheila, and decision makers who down-play the significance of gendered behaviours, and discriminatory practice in FRS environments. The stagnant nature of watch population, the systematic integration through watch culture and single tier entry process and the voices of both women and men suggest this is highly probable.

The notion that most men have some form of complicated yet dependent relationship to power, considered against the individual agency of male firefighters, offers the suggestion of complicity on some level towards preserving an environment of masculinity above all else (Johansson and Ottemo, 2015). As the data appears to suggest clear delineations and hierarchies of power exist between men, it is interesting to think about the consequential structuration of power in, and how it upholds patriarchy. At this juncture it is difficult to see how women can fit equitably into this equation, if at all they do. The issue of gender inequality appears to be a casualty of maintaining the masculine: resisting operational women,

or the occupation of roles traditionally held by uniformed personnel is intricately layered through behaviours. It constitutes the behaviour of the norm circles but is not the cause.

I raise the notion of difference, its wilful acknowledgement and associated impact in the earlier discussions of the constructions of gender within organisations. The challenge of feminist assumptions that most organisations are gender neutral, presents the counter assumption that gender exists in the very fabric of how organisations are constructed. Therefore the standpoint that organisation are not gender neutral is a valid theoretical platform from which to view the FRS, which is further established through the data findings. It is helpful to contextualise the extent to which patriarchy shows itself in gender arrangements and relationships with the FRS. The data suggests not only the presence of highly gendered organisational structures, but a type of patriarchal masculinity that overwhelms and coerces conformity to itself. Acker's statement "the link between masculinity and organisational power was so obvious that no debate was needed" (1990 p.141) reflects the extent to which gendered processes have emerged throughout the data from strategic leaders to decision makers. Its effects however have been far reaching. With women firefighter statements of high visibility, marginality, discrimination and lack of opportunity the legacy of such oblivion continues. There is the sense that the impact of gender relations within FRSs have been ignored, and replaced by a relative acceptability of the status quo.

A masculine or mainstream approach to inclusion?

Strategically, a rehearsed form of rhetoric "we should represent the communities that we serve" was a phrase that given in answer to the question concerning targets by decision makers in the study. The decision maker from the metropolitan FRS offered that their own work towards diversity negated the need for targets. On that premise it is interesting that this particular FRS, although progressive, still hasn't achieved half of the 15% target for women. The discussion also developed to include how wider cultural, structural debates and demonstrable leadership of improvements in gender equality were lacking. There was wide suggestion, across most of the focus groups that positive action and recruitment and selection activities had been compromised by leadership in a bid to the increase numbers of underrepresented groups quickly.

In many FRSs across England, and true of the participating FRSs, dedicated equality and diversity resources have been disbanded in favour of a more mainstream approach to inclusion. This has meant the work in the main has stopped, and has been stopped on average for 6 years or more. In reference to the rescinding the central government requirement to audit equality progression, FRS (B) suggested a change in focus of their governance priorities, saying that equalities had "gone off the boil a bit".

In the face of the Fire Reform, there appears an implicit incongruence of the Fire Sector (NFCC and CFOA) that changed focus of the discussion of gender targets to a softer one of inclusion. It is challenging to ratify how the strategic direction taken can marry with the invigorated trajectory developed by the LGA with the introduction of the new gender targets of 30%. It is unclear whether the NFCC and FRS decisions to abandon targets post 2010, and scale back equality work was reflective of a direction of travel which offered a preference for cultural diversity over targeted numbers. If this is the case the NFCC offered little detail about how cultural diversity was to be achieved, with little if any audit work being undertaken to gauge sector performance. With no evidence of planning on a strategic level for operational women or even monitoring statistics of the sector's performance on the management distribution of women personnel, it is difficult to conclude that cultural change was integral to FRS progress. The numerical deficit of operational women is a diversity imperative that the NFCC had taken off the table prior to the LGA inclusion intervention. It also appears in tandem with the more gender-neutral approach discussed by participant decision makers.

As discussed the public sector positive duty to promote gender equality has still remained applicable, but with much less strength than the GED (The Sex Discrimination Code of Practice, 2007). Having a specific duty for gender gave organisations the mandate to make clear their intentions on how they intended to eliminate discriminatory behaviour and practices. The duty, being a positive, proactive one, made it a requirement for FRSs to show through the planning and policy activities, measurable gender equality outcomes. The Fire Sector response to letting go of, and abandoning the gender targets and associated work is a strong indicator that heavier measures of compliance are necessary for progressive steps towards eliminating discriminatory behaviours, practices and policies. The strength of working to the

framework of provisions laid out by the GED was that organisations were unable take merely compliant led approaches, they had to publicly outline their responsibilities through planning, monitoring and consultation. This type of approach has been evidenced as having localised success (see p.65) It does not seem that the devolvement of localised governance and management of the progression of gender equality outcomes is working for the changes necessary in the Fire Sector.

There is another Fire Sector relationship which enables the stronghold of patriarchal culture to continue to the extent that it does. The contradiction of central government, who made the requirement for gender targets, and has allowed the FRS relative autonomy in its actions and practice of reform brings the notion of neo-patriarchy to the fore. With no Fire Sector requirement to publish gender plans for employment responsibilities, and no requirement to monitor, evaluate or report gender equality activity towards the gender targets and cultural improvement, the passive elements of neo-patriarchy are realised. Whilst the government says that it requires the FRS to be diverse, and foster an inclusive culture, FRS organisations are still given the freedom to self-determine what, if any, resources, accountability structures, planning and activity is given to gender equity work under the localism agenda. Despite the dire lack of progress on the employment targets, and no systemic monitoring of the sector's poor performance on issues of culture and leadership by central government, their long arm supervision of the sector continues to support the full participation of men (by upholding the status quo) within the FRS environment without sanction (see p.48).

It is challenging to understand a framework of change for the Fire Sector in terms of its gender position that does not attempt to dismantle its cultural legacy and constructions of gender inequality. Within its history, prior to the Thematic Review the culture of the FRS was highlighted as institutionally sexist, with a strong resistance to women joining its operational rank structure (see Chapter 1.2). The conclusion was that leadership in this area was weak, and that the single tier promotion system supported the structural weakness. The regime of targets saw activity by FRSs which rendered change in mere percentile points, but little impact in its adjustment of cultural norms. From the standpoint of women's knowledge, leadership in this area remains week, and culturally behaviours systematically show gender inequity. The historically specific forms of patriarchy evident within the data findings through

male behaviours towards women and each other create a unique context from which to consider its governance. The women's positionality in FRS organisations means that gender mainstreaming - even when done well - can have very little impact as the types of male power evidenced translate to normative behaviours on a macro level, reflecting the structure of the environments in which the women exist (see p.55).

The notion of multiple norm circles which operate to endorse and enforce gendered norms help further clarify thinking. The main emergent discourse or constructions appears to be constructs #2 and #4 masculinity, and the incompetent woman. How a universal non-gendered status – which feminism suggests will err towards the universal man - meets the organisational need of the FRS against the new demands of the LGA Inclusion agenda is difficult to fathom. It raises the feminist position that a gender-neutral position usually lead to highly gendered organisational frameworks which preserve male dominance and obscure the importance of women's experiences (Acker, see p.56).

Women's standpoint create a platform for cultural knowledge based on the experiences of operational women, and senior women within the FRS. The implications of gender the FRS creates, needs its own set of responses given the environmental context of the watch, and the learned behaviours emanating from the watch. The suggestion is that familiarity with cultural production is a significant part of understanding gender construction. It is clear that in moving towards a more neutral type of language for the role of firefighter, the narrative hoped to support the patrolling of gender borders reinstated through the localism agenda. This is a vital consideration given the historical context of the FRS and masculinity (Parkin & Maddocks, 1993). The cultural production of the gendered norm circles, and in turn the constructions, appear firmly grounded in the structure of the organisation, rather than the characteristics of the individual men (Kanter, 1977). The gender differences follow the pattern of cultural production enabled through the constructions discussed. Although helpful in widening understanding, this does not absolve accountability for individual or collective agency as concerns the oppression of women.

Viewing the impact of constructions as concerns gender processes, gender status and the space women occupy, presents an interesting position for the FRS. The view "as a relational

phenomenon gender is difficult to see when only the masculine is present" (Acker, 1990, p.142) is both powerful and damning. It suggests an implicitness to some of the decision makers responses to gender equality. Operational women are not seen outside of the masculine in a systemic way. As such fundamental equitable outcomes for operational women as FRS employees remain unacknowledged and therefore, omitted. The assumption being made when women are absent is that women are treated equally, and that no issues of note are emergent for operational women (see p. 49), which from the majority of the women's standpoint, discussed in this chapter, is vehemently denied. Where constructions are being developed which fail to consider the implications of gender differences, yet establish and entrench gender status, FRS culture is failing women. The accounts of most of the operational women in this study suggest that the behaviours and actions that demean, outgroup and undermine still exist, and the impact of behavioural legacies are still felt. This is also true of two of the three directly appointed senior women, who occupied significant leadership roles. In thinking about the construct of social order, research on masculinity uses the visual of the dominant gender bearing arms against the weaker, and offers a curious term to define patriarchal femininity (Connell, 2005; 2011). It is suggested that a "dependence fearfulness", as a type of "cultural disarmament of women" can exist where women are found to accept the dominant group's definition of who they are as "incompetent and helpless" (p. 83). This may not be far from the experiences shared by some of the women, and offers clarity to the women's responses to the cultural normalities that they have navigated over decades.

Fig. 7 below illustrates the four cultural constructs which normalise, embed and uphold the FRS patriarchal structure, and the norm circles which underpin them.

Finally, FRS culture has nurtured an environment which has over time embedded and perpetuated a coercive, hierarchal and systematic process of integrating operational firefighters into watch systems. Accepting the history of detrimental watch-based behaviours, the FRS must look to its own history and pathology to understand how these behaviours are normalised, its culture perpetuated and legacies formed. Extreme forms of patriarchy, and a clear example of Neo-patriarchy have been created and embedded and are a matter for the FRS and central government to unpick and grapple with should it desire any meaningful

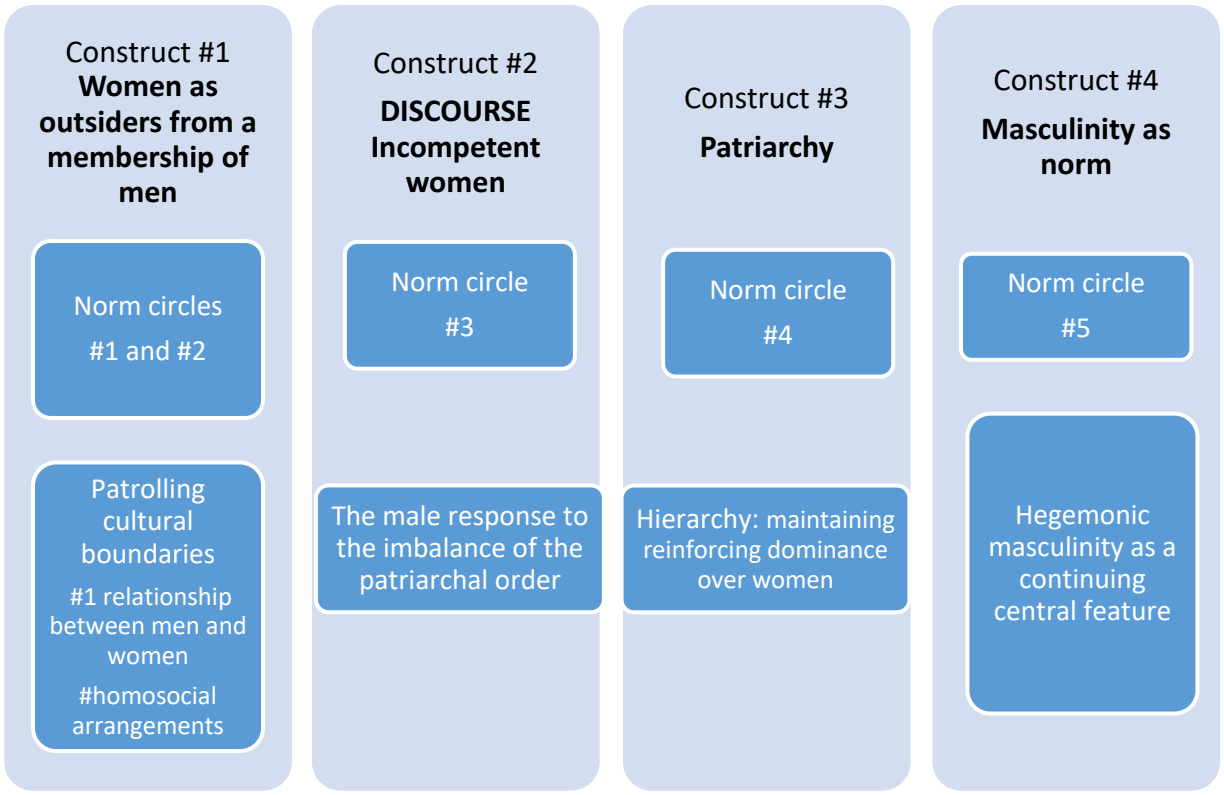
change. Research which examines the effects of patriarchy actually assumes the existence of patriarchy without first conceptualising it, or empirically measuring it. The data presented in this study offers empirical data which has allowed a conceptualisation of patriarchy in ways that can be seen and understood, and most importantly, dismantled. The data challenges the approach which accepts the social construct of patriarchy but then chooses to treated it as an "individual phenomenon" (Crittenden and Wright, 2012 p.1268). Through its integration, socialisation processes and homosocial arrangements, the FRS has created a sector-wide phenomenon of patriarchy which shows itself through gender inequity and androcentrism. The outcomes of this study point to systemic evidences of patriarchy, which privilege men and dominate women structurally and ideologically and the processes that enable perpetuate its continuance (Hunnicutt, 2009; Elder-Vass, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c).

It is my argument that the routine and systemic way in which women have been schooled in accepting organisational gender inequality has been normalised. The internalisation of such oppressive practices are borne out by way of the experiences of some of the women – the exhaustion, the use of words like survival, and the graphic description of decisions to neutralise or anathematise gender. Early questions raised in this study as to the constitution of gender equality (p. 22) have been answered in the accounts of routine and systemic omission of equitable outcomes for women. There are acute and chronic responses needed to answer the question of what happens to a woman when she is continually and systematically asked to wipe away traces of her femininity. From women being denied the basic right of using a female toilet, locking themselves in rooms to sleep or trying to create gender invisibility, the cultural context is one that is highly gendered with a pathologized set of processes. Many of the operational women talk about strides towards equality appearing to occur but inequity occurring more at a base level. So, for example although male and female signs may be posted on doors, the right to occupy still remains in the domain of men. The suggestion that men execute the rules, and women remain on the receiving end of their decisions-making continues. The seemingly accepted notion of some operational men that women are predisposed not to fit has renewed significance when measured against the discussions of visibility and gender identity (see p. 57). The prevalence of uninterrupted homosocial relationships and gendered norm circle activity, actively work to keep women on the outside of male FRS membership. The notion that men and women are able to shake off

the deeply gendered behaviours which amount to gender inequality, without delayering how and why such inequality exists, fails to acknowledge it as an embedded structure with historical and contextual significance.

The argument for change is a complex one, which calls for the need for a longitudinal review of the impact of the targets or quota outcomes over time. Exploration of the FRS in this regard is a timely offer. The journey of the FRS gender-target era is difficult to assess at face value when looking at the low numbers that it has achieved. The definition of success or catastrophic failure needs a wider view than simply increasing numbers – which is at the heart of this research. However, the low numbers over such a long period of time, coupled with a deeper understanding of the constructs concerning gender processes, suggests an alternative story. Taking Cranfield University's view that targets can bring about change based on the assumption of behavioural change, that is, an equation of "behaviours + systems change+ targets = culture and organisational change as a response" (Cranfield University School of Management 2016, p.45) demands an additional conversation, which may not suit the FRS. However, with the renewed, seemingly unreachable, gender target of 30%, an alternative discourse concerning acceptable outcomes of behavioural and systemic change must be had.

Figure 7 The four cultural constructions normalising FRS patriarchal structure



CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to understand the context in which gender operates for operational firefighters and leaders by exploring the experience of women. This study also sought to understand the paradox of gender equality and issues of inclusion within the FRS culture, and to consider the role of gender targets and their impact upon wider gender equality in FRSs.

The objectives of this study were

1. Conduct a critical review of literature relating to gender, patriarchy and critical realism as a premise to evaluate FRS culture.
2. To explore the social interplay of gender within operational firefighter culture, and its wider impact upon FRS organisational gender equality.
3. To critically analyse the extent to which FRS culture is gendered, considering its gender processes, the use of gender targets, and how this relates to experiences of inequity for women.
4. To develop a methodological approach which will broaden understanding of how processes that cause and enable gender processes, systemic inequality and patriarchal structures continue to exist.

In exploring the context of gender for women within the FRS, I have first explored the context of gender. I have critically reviewed literature concerned with patriarchy, gender, and public sector with regards to gender and culture. In considering appropriate methodologies I have also considered critical realism as a premise from which to view the mechanisms which embed and uphold culture. In order to understand the cultural and organisational arrangements within the FRS as concerns gender I have taken a qualitative approach. In doing so, I have interviewed senior women, FRS strategic leaders and decision makers, and held focus groups with operational women firefighters and male firefighters. In developing findings, I have found that women have historically been problematized within the FRS, with issues of gender having yet to be grappled with to any meaningful extent. As such although the context of leadership for women is touched upon, the significance of gender within the FRS has emerged as the fundamental challenge. Gender, within the operational framework of the FRS, namely operational women firefighters and directly appointed senior women has been the area of detailed exploration. Areas of discussion have included FRS integration and

socialisation processes, leadership, gender targets, and individual participant career experiences. In order to analyse the extent to which FRS culture is gendered and consideration of the processes of gender I have developed an integrated methodological lens. In applying the layered approach of reflexivity, positionality and realist constructionism, I have been able to analyse the wider findings of culture, gender equality and how gendered norms are established and upheld through gendered norm circles, as well as considering the experiences of women, and my own experience within the FRS as knowledge. I have also considered the impact of gender targets on gender equality.

6.1 Contribution to theory

Four constructions which establish patriarchy in FRS culture

I offer four key constructions with historical and current specificity, and are established and perpetuated throughout FRS culture. These constructions have a direct impact upon gender processes and gender equality.

Construct #1 Operational women firefighters and directly appointed senior women are outsiders of mainstream FRS culture. A male membership is formed within the watch which establishes and perpetuates a hegemonic form of homosocial relationships from which only men benefit;

Construct # 2 A prevalent discourse and activity which deem operational and directly appointed senior women as incompetent;

Construct # 3 Patriarchy. Establishes male as dominant, and a social order based on gender where women are subjugated;

Construct # 4 Masculinity is the normative from which all discourse, behaviours and decisions derive.

These four constructions specifically detriment women within the FRS environment, specifically subjugating women who wish to occupy roles traditionally occupied by operational firefighters and senior officers.

6.2 Contribution to practice

The watch as a catalyst for FRS culture

I argue the FRS watch system in England as a process of induction, integration, career and environment and is the catalyst of all social structures, interactions and processes for operational firefighting personnel. Watch culture is referred to by study participants as the prevalent set of behaviours and acceptable code of conduct established within a watch, enough to dominate how the watch operates, and has become synonymous with discriminatory, harassing and bullying behaviours. This study positions the watch as the means through which gendered process are created which establish the cultural premise of patriarchy in ways that enforce misogyny, produce gender inequality and achieve systemic sustainability. Through consistent and prevalent language, narratives and behaviours the watch has created an interplay of different masculinities which have become intrinsic to the patriarchal social order which positions men as dominant and women as subordinate.

In positioning cultural normalities within the watch hegemonic masculinities are evidenced in this study which rely on relationship alliances between men for the dominance and subjugation of women, creating exclusions based on gender and maintaining gender stratifications. The watch in its current iteration is not fit for the purpose of establishing gender equality, or a culture of inclusion.

Using the standpoint of participant women's voices as knowledge I have been able to identify the nature of patriarchal dynamics and relations between men and men, men and women and women and women. The historically specific context of the watch as a self-organised, self-managed entity has supported the legacy of watch culture across all areas of the FRS. The women's experiences has outlined the collective kinship system of the watch, its power and the consequence of gender inequality through direct, indirect discrimination and inequitable systemic governance structures. The women's experiences have It has shed light on how through it's every day activities and practices the watch produces and maintains gender hierarchies and symbols of competence based on gender.

Within the complexity of the everyday interactions of the watch and its cultural of hegemonic behaviours and patriarchal norms, the data identified, that culturally the capacity for individual agency diminished with individual operational personnel endorsing or enforcing group behaviour. It is a fundamental finding of this thesis. The eradication of individual agency and grouping around norms has appeared as central to hierarchy and stratification discussed by participants. In identifying the watch system as the central vehicle for establishing gendered norms, I argue that causal explanations exist for the development, endorsement and enforcement of dominant gendered discourse and behaviours.

Through the single tier entry system for operational firefighting personnel the watch as the single processing unit towards operational preparedness, has and does create, enable and enforce the dominant culture within the FRS, at all levels of the organisation. Of significance is the socialisation system of the watch and the single tier officer promotional process to the cultural legacy of the FRS. With career progression mainly depending on rank on rank promotion from firefighter to Chief Officer, the watch legacy of watch culture is not contained within the confines of each watch. As such the watch process is the pivotal factor in wider FRS cultural development and organisational arrangements. The nexus between watch legacy in leadership and the gender equity in production of governance, policy and practice is made, as the women's experiences point to decisions in which women are perceived as men perceive them.

The question of can the watch be reformed is a fundamental one. In its current form the watch relies on hegemonic masculinity in its structure which goes far beyond the incident command models used on the incident ground. Watches are primarily teams of people with technical expertise who can be dispatched to work in a team when needed. FRS organisations are public sector bodies with responsibilities for the protection and prevention of life and property in fire incidence, and rescue and protection in road and other emergencies. The answer to the question will require careful management by the sector, and a closer more auditable, accountable arrangement with central government. The conclusions raises the challenge of the FRS continuing to operate within a framework of gender mainstreaming, when its structures, governance and cultural framework require a gender-specific, auditable mandatory system of change.

Neither localism or gender mainstreaming has worked within the Fire Sector, which has chosen to abandon work specific work on gender which would have seen increases in the representation of operational women firefighters, increases in the number of operational women firefighters in managerial positions at all levels, and local arrangements that would bring about cultural change towards inclusion for women. This would suggest that watch reform could not work. However, it is ludicrous to fathom that a public sector body cannot align itself with gender equality law, and equitable practice. The role of central government would need to play an integral part in FRS cultural reform. A two stepped programme is necessary for gender equality in the FRS. The first is the need for the auditable, sanctionable governance of gender equality throughout FRS organisations which are resourced, specific, planned, monitored, published and judged on measurable improvements in outcomes for gender equality. The second would be the Fire Sector, as a mandatory measure, dismantle the present static watch system to be reorganised and reconfigured towards an integrative team model based on regularly updated operational risk.

It would be interesting to see if the FBU would stand as a coalition partner towards this type of radical change, as they advocate the notion of the professional firefighter, and also have shown themselves as an integral ally of gender equality. The radical feminist notion of the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house presupposes the notion that this, like all other attempts towards gender equality in the FRS would also be resisted too.

Gender Targets

I have argued that FRS culture is at best tolerant of gender targets, with poor evidence of planning or impact outside of positive action recruitment processes. In terms of progression of targets and gender equality outcomes, the FRS appears to remain resistant. The parameter for gender targets has been focussed on numbers only in response to Home Office monitoring. The associated progression of gender equality for operational women has not been planned for, and the experiences of the participant women do not suggest significant progress in systemic gender parity. Gender target setting has not positively affected the FRS due to its highly entrenched resistance to gender within the operational framework. A link exists between the FRS culture and it's resistance to women which shows itself in gender targets

and gender equality outcomes supporting the incompatibility of gender targets within a highly gendered cultural environment.

Finally, I offer that it is problematic to suggest that no improvements in gender equality have occurred since the inception of the gender targets, but due to lack of monitoring little can be attributed to it. The lack of governance structure and accountability does not support the Fire Sector need for change. Central government intervention which imposes a specific gender equality duty peculiar to the FRS with all of its requirements is the first step towards meaningful improvement in gender equality within the FRS.

In centralising women's experiences it is evident that FRS culture is not reflective of inclusion, gender equity or progressions in strategic planning for Sector-wide gender equality improvement. The women suggest minimal improvement, systematic resistance to gender related issues, and lack of accountability for change by their leadership.

6.3 Contribution to methodology

My methodological contribution is the integrative methodological lens of standpoint positionality, reflexivity and realist constructionism:

Using the integrative methodological lens of reflexivity, positionality and realist constructionism, I have developed an approach to identify and understand in using gendered norm circles, the mechanisms that create gendered norms and establish and embed patriarchal cultures. I am also able to consider the complexities and contradictions of the behaviour of women, which would ordinarily be considered as masculinized or assimilative to a masculine culture.

Reflexivity creates the capacity to manage data, its complexities and contradictions through the reflexive process of personal, empirical and theoretical positioning. Using the standpoint of women's voices as knowledge, the importance of holding simultaneous positioning is paramount. Simultaneous positioning and marginality as offered in translocation positioning perspective has allowed for a widening of perspective towards holding the contradiction of the possibility of multiple capacities and complexities of what can be deemed as polarizing

positions. Amplifying the potential for a critical feminist view to hold women's experiences without further marginalizing them is a powerful additional layering.

Realist constructionism brings together critical realism and social construction in a way that allows a closer interrogation of language, discourse and culture. As a means of understanding the mechanisms which create and uphold patriarchy, by specifically interrogating the use of gendered language, discourse and culture I have been able to unpick discourse and activity, undermining arguments of essentialism associated with patriarchy.

Using women's voices and experience (standpoint) has presented cultural insight to patriarchal processes, and have created points of knowledge for understanding the mechanisms of the gendered norm circles. The extent to which the gendered norms are founded and present emerge through the women's experiences. The embeddedness of patriarchal (fundamental) and hegemonic masculine (platform) constructed normalities, causally emergent, offer insights into cultural reality of patriarchy for women

Supported by the conceptual premise that gender as a process is produced in daily situations the gendered norm circle can provides a means of isolating and identifying – through women's standpoint – the focus for the question of how a gender process is created or may become manifest, and how oppressive structures can embed themselves. Accepting the realist constructionist principle that discursive rules have a causal impact on individuals, the notion that groups who are committed to rules, enforce them, can identify learning for us when using the cultural "lives" or experiences of women as knowledge. Being able to unpack and identify gendered discursive rules that have a causal impact on individuals as a result of the discursive norm circle creates transformational learning, and can connect with the view that in the space of interactions, social structures evolve: opening up identification of the mechanisms of macro as well as micro gender inequality oppressions and aggressions. Using situated knowledge to underpin the identification of gendered discursive rules, may give clearer information of impact, that is, how the structuration of gender occurs which separates people into differentiated gender structures. It can also support further understanding of how the interactions and ordinary practices within Acker's definition of gendered organisations create the blue print for the patterning of dominance and subordination. In

this way the gendered norm circle can be a powerful identifier of how prevalent narratives, structures and mechanisms are endorsed and enforced in any highly masculinised resistant culture. It can bring new insights and understanding of formations of patriarchy. The gendered norm circle is presented as an analysis tool for identifying the mechanisms of how patriarchal norms are created, embedded and enforced within organisational culture.
This approach seeks not only to identify the occurrence of gendered beliefs and behaviours, but how they become manifest and are perpetuated. It allows for historical specificity and legacies of behaviours and discourse to be understood in terms of their impact or manifest in presenting current challenging determinism. This layering allows for a deeper understanding of not only what is happening, but how it is occurring and how it is being maintained.

Finally, translocational positioning has been a supportive means of making sense of women's behaviours which initially read as contradictions, but when explored can be reflexively understood as responses to patriarchal oppression. First it has provided significant understanding of the areas of conflict that can exist in terms of women's positionality when faced with an oppressive work regime. When internal conflict is added together with specific arrangements of hierarchy, social order and sanction the contradictions of positionality become clearer, more explicit and more readily understood. In linking the complexities and contradictions to the integrative method I am able to hold a space for all of the women's experiences to be identified, explored and understood in the same continuum regardless of feminist positioning. The common feature is understanding them relative to patriarchal regimes. This approach offers that responsive behaviours may present differently but are not perceptibly different from each other as the common root is the demand of patriarchy. In this context all of the women's responses can be understood as indicators of, or responses to active patriarchal culture which resists women. Being able to link the complexities and contradictions of the presenting behavior whilst concurrently inquiring how patriarchy embeds itself is not covered in literature.

The integrative methodological lens supports a meaningful exploration the notion of patriarchy within the FRS, the role women occupy within its culture, and opportunities to extrapolate the tensions and paradoxes that exist for specific women. The lens helps in understanding how the process of patriarchy is embedded and perpetuated within FRS

culture and contextualises the extent to which the FRS culture is gendered. In identifying gendered norm circles and discussing the data in this way, I am able to argue the strength of the watch as a mechanism of causal power, enabling and perpetuating a hyper-masculine culture which is systemic. The explanations further help to explore gendered behaviour and gendered norm activity, identifying hegemonic masculinity displays of patriarchy and ways in which they are embedded and perpetuated.

6.4 Limitations

The main limitations concerned the context of leadership for women, national FRS information, and individual FRS organisation employee arrangements. An early objective of this study was to consider the context of leadership for senior women within the FRS which was concerned with the equity of power between women and men in leadership positions. However, with the study findings producing polarised gender processes for women at the most fundamental level, and low numbers of senior women, the study was better served in understanding the context of gender for operational women.

National statistics concerning operational women by role did not exist at the time of the study, and so finding strategic information which related to operational women (or women who hold roles traditionally held by operational personnel) was problematic. Further, as each FRS is an independent body, there was organisational variance in terms of governance arrangements, data collection and reporting which presented challenges in working meaningfully with the data.

The concept of realist constructionism is a relatively new approach, which lends itself well as a tool of analysis of patriarchy in cultural, organisational or group settings. The ability to create a gendered norm circle approach has brought an exciting layering to the study. However without further changes to its underpinning conceptualisations it is limited to analysis of groups.

6.5 Future Research

Adding gender in has not worked as a means of diversifying the Fire Sector, and in light of the causal powers of the social entities argued to be at work, will not. Gender neutrality does not

exist within the FRS, instead there is an underbelly of masculinity that has yet to be grappled with. This thesis offers explanations as to how and why gendered processes still exist within the FRS, and answers the question of how androcentrism operates culturally. Clearly there is a government focus for the FRS to diversify, as such I offer the following areas of continued research.

Systemic gender equality

There is learning across sectors from the FRS experience. Research which explores how to practically affect gender equity where the cultural context is the entrenched centralisation of masculinity within both systemic and social structures, and where women are resisted is necessary. Research which also seeks to measure the longitudinal impact of statutory, or imposed equality interventions within cultures which resist difference may also bring insight to whether sustainable, systemic equality-based change is possible.

FRS

Future work should seek to consider the concentric layering of the watch system on wider FRS cultural norms, and how the four constructions effect the behaviours and beliefs of non-operational staff. Work can consider how and where inclusive behaviours typically exist within FRS arrangements and whether there is scope to widen it beyond gender.

Issues of intersectionality present themselves for further exploration where equity in matters of race, class and sexual orientation and identity remain relatively undisturbed. Future work should consider any further cultural constructions, using the integrative methodical lens, which addresses resistance to difference within the FRS.

Finally, there is a link between the lack of strong leadership and equitable outcomes/experiences within the FRS. There is scope for the single tier leadership system to be explored against aspirational, ethical leadership and identity work. An inquiry which explores discursively deconstructing old identities and constructing new aspirational, inclusive identities within a single tier officer promotional system which seeks cultural change is a valuable possibility.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Operational Firefighter statistics by gender 2014/2015

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Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016

Appendix 2 Sample participant form

Barbara Brown
Doctoral Researcher
Faculty of Business
Headington Campus
Headington
Oxford OX3 0BP
e barbara.brown-2014@brookes.ac.uk
t phone number has been removed from this version of the thesis

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – SENIOR WOMEN

3.1.1 Study title

Symbolism or legitimate power: A study of women leaders in the British Fire Service

Introduction

This research will investigate the experiences of women who have been appointed to senior positions within the Fire & Rescue Service, within the framework of gender targets for the sector implemented in 2000. The research will further investigate organisational culture, exploring what, if anything has changed regarding gender equality as a consequence of the legislation.

3.1.2

Background

The Fire Service, since it's' inception in 1947 has largely been left to self-govern and shape itself. Landmark findings on inequality within Fire Service bodies across Great Britain resulted in key recommendations creating the first set of targets for women in 1999 regarding their recruitment, retention, and progression. As a result, Fire & Rescue Services, for the past 15 years, have worked within a performance framework to increase numbers of women in operational roles and management positions.

Despite what may appear to be a prevailing and dominant legacy of patriarchy, within the Fire Service, some women are occupying leadership positions, from that of CEO to Heads of Service. Whilst literature and research has been busily occupied with the building blocks to the successful outcome of increasing the numbers of women to senior management, little research exists that documents and analyses the experience of women within roles in the Fire Service, or the structural components/dynamics of the organisations that they exist in.

3.1.3 Deciding to take part

I am looking for Senior women from UK Fire & Rescue Services. I am seeking to conduct in-depth interviews with no more than 8 women occupying senior roles[2] within the Fire & Rescue Service as a representative sample from across UK FRS's. Taking part in this study is purely voluntary; it is your decision whether you participate in the research. Should you decide to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without providing a reason (see below).

What is the purpose of the study?

Consequently, the study aims to critically investigate the impact of the appointment of women in senior roles on organisational culture and gender equality in the Fire Service, and to explore the relationship between power and leadership for the women appointed.

What happens next if you decide to take part?

3.1.4 If you decide to take part you will be one of no more than 8 women who will be invited to interview. Although, fairly informal, the questions will asked you to be reflective of your career journey, systemic processes that have enabled or hindered your success, your thoughts on the implementation of gender targets, as well as the professional and personal impact of gender relations and organisational culture. The actual interview can be conducted by Skype, or telephone and your contribution will not be affiliated to any one specific Fire & Rescue Service. The interview should be no longer than 60 minutes.

3.1.5

3.1.6 Being a participant is completely voluntary, and you can decide to be a part of it or not. Should you decide to be part a consent form will be sent to you before the arranged interview date. You are asked to sign and return the

[2] Definition of Senior Role: Operational Role (promoted through single tier entry) Group Manager and above; Support Staff appointed directly to role or promoted Area Manager Equivalent and above.

consent form prior to the interview. This can be done electronically or a stamped addressed envelope will be provided if you prefer.

3.1.7 The interview will be recorded, in order to avoid note-taking during the interview. Permission to do this will be sought through the consent form. A handheld digital audio-recorder will be used to record the interview. During the process of the interview, you have the right to opt-out at any time, without a reason being sought. I will work hard to ensure a supportive, environment where the facilitation of questioning will take account of the nature and sensitivities that may emerge. However, should the discussion raise challenges for you, I will ensure that you can be signposted to the appropriate department/agency for further support and/or advice.

3.1.8 Once the transcript is complete you can be sent a summary copy for accuracy purposes.

3.1.9 The benefit that the research will bring is that it should help us understand how women lead within a strong patriarchal culture, the experiences and perspective of women within the Fire Service, and the exploration of how gender targets support/do not support the development of gender equality at work. The findings will be presented anonymously, once the study is complete, and published as Doctoral Research. Once the thesis is finalised I will be happy to send you a summary of the key findings on request.

3.1.10 **Will what I say in this study be confidential?**

All information collected about and from you will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). The method of how the study will be conducted has been developed to preserve confidentiality. Your name will be substituted with an anonymous code. Access to the interview records will be restricted to the Researcher, and her Supervisory Team (if necessary).. Whilst the study is underway the interview transcripts will be stored securely in the principal investigator's computer and they will be accessible only by password. Further, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

Once the research is completed the electronic files will be deleted and a paper record kept in a secure place at Oxford Brookes University. The data generated during the course of this research will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of this research project and will be retained in accordance with the University's policy of Academic Integrity www.brookes.ac.uk/Documents/Research/Policies-and-codes-of-practice/academic_integrity. Data may also be stored in Google Drive, for which Oxford Brooke's University has a security agreement. Audio data will be transferred to a written data file within the earliest timeframe possible, and kept securely as described above.

The University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University, has approved the research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research you can contact the Chair of the University Ethics Committee at ethics@brookes.ac.uk..

Should you have any queries about any aspect of this study, or would like to discuss it further please contact myself, or a member of the Supervisory Team, as listed.

Supervisory Team:

Dr Louise Grisoni
Faculty of Business
E127 Wheatley Campus
Oxford
e lgrisoni@brookes.ac.uk

Prof. Simonetta Manfredi
Faculty of Business
G205 Headington Campus
Headington
Oxford OX3 0BP
smanfredi@brookes.ac.uk

Dr Ivan Mitchell
Faculty of Business
N203 Wheatley Campus
Wheatley
Oxford
imitchell@brookes.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 3 Sample Consent Form

3.2 CONSENT FORM

Title of Study:

Symbolism or legitimate power: A study of women leaders in the British Fire Service

Researcher information:

Barbara Brown, Doctoral Researcher
Faculty of Business
Oxford Brookes University,
Headington Campus,
Headington,
Oxford OX3 0BP

e barbara.brown-2014@brookes.ac.uk
t **phone number has been removed from this version of the thesis**

		Please initial box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	☐
3.	I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

		Please initial box	
		Yes	No
4.	I agree to the interview / focus group / biography being audio recorded	☐	☐
6.	I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐
7.	I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research.	☐	☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 4 Exert Interview Senior Woman

(Page 3-4)

BB. *Alright then, so if you want to talk to me (Name) I a little bit about your career journey within the Fire Service*

3.39. Ok then so I joined in erm 1980 erm as a Fire Control Operator erm and erm I went through the rank system through Fire Control erm and erm made it to the highest rank possible within the Control arena erm and as you know from your own experiences Control structure has its own glass ceiling so there's a double glass ceiling there for Control staff as there is for support staff as well erm I'm not sure it's a double glass ceiling is the right word but erm

BB. *Yea*

4.17. it's how it felt erm but fortunately I worked in a Service which was quite progressive and erm I had been asked to assist in putting together a promotion system long before ADCs which allowed control staff and fire fighters to compete against one another so when we were looking to do the promotion rounds erm we went up against operational staff and then a ranking order was drawn and then when offers for posts were vacant they went from the ranking system and I scored reasonably well and I got offered erm a division (unintelligible) post erm and then became the Staff Officer to the Chief and to the Deputy and then in 1997 I was temporarily appointed an Assistant Chief Officer that was because we were going through the combined Fire Authority at a time when county councils were breaking up and erm Fire Authorities in (intelligible) became independent in their own right as indeed Avon did

BB. *Yea*

5.21. and so I was seconded for 12 months as an Assistant Chief Officer when the position became vacant so I applied for it in 1998 and was successful and in 2000 I was appointed as the Chief Executive er due to sick leave of the incumbent Chief Fire Officer erm and er that got a lot of flak and attention from a number of sources,

BB. *Yea*

5.48. and then er the Authority then decided to appoint a traditional Chief erm I was prohibited from applying erm but I still maintained my position as Assistant Chief Officer and I stayed in (FRS location) until 2006 and then in 2007 I, late 2006 I joined (FRS location) and I stayed there until June of this year when I retired, I took early retirement

BB. *Oh, gosh. It's been a long time that*

6.20. Yea

BB. *that you've been in a senior role*

6.23. Yea yea

BB. *Do you want to tell me about that? (chuckle)*

6.28. Well just a bit like a rollercoaster really, highs, really really big highs erm some really really awful lows to be honest er none of which will be too much of a surprise to you. Erm so yea I mean over all it's been (unintelligible) I don't ever regret mostly joining the Fire Service. I don't regret the career path I took erm but if anybody had told me how draining and demoralizing and how much of myself and my health it would cost me

BB. *Yea*

7.01. I still probably would have done it erm but maybe if I'd just listened a little bit more carefully

BB. *Yea*

7.07. Yea (chuckles).

BB. *So do you wanna just talk to me about how you feel your gender difference has or hasn't played a part in your experiences?*

7.26. Well it didn't, for me, unlike some of my operational female colleagues at senior level I think erm there were two issues that erm I was having to battle against erm one was because whilst on the face of it I thought that my background led me to be accepted, I think having had some space now some more experiences unpleasant since I last saw you

BB. *Oh*

7.55. erm I think that erm there's still very much a pecking order in the Fire Service and if you're not a fire fighter then you really don't matter.

BB. *Hmmm*

8.12. You don't really count for much in other people's eyes erm not not exclusively but I think that would have, I think my view now is that that is the prevailing

BB. *Yea*

8.26. attitude erm but there are some enlightened people erm but they still remain very much the minority. Erm so I think primarily for me erm it's hard for me to distinguish because I think it's my background erm that caused er the fight, the anxiety erm I think that the issue of my gender manifested itself much more in (FRS location) than I think it ever did in (FRS location)

Appendix 5 Exert of Interview with Strategic Leader (Male)

Page 4-5

(SL A) Yes, in each of the services I worked in I have always felt that we should reflect on the community. We should give more women within the work force. Particularly the operational workforce and I have certainly pushed for positive action and different forms prior to any recruitment processes. I think that review woke us up as a sector and reading it not throwing it away saying what a load of rubbish it was. Saying it actually made a point. (name) at the time was bold. I have thanked him since because it taught me a lot. I think about targets, my reflection of a labour government or deputy at the time setting targets for this. Although it plucked out of the air with 15% at the time which it was plucked out of the air. I think it did give a direction. Something I'm saying at the moment is that DCLG who owned us up until Christmas for about 10 years. There government's philosophy localism says it's all down to you. It doesn't create any structure. I have described as an abdication of leadership. I think I expect a government department to create direction and outcomes for me in my sector. I as a leader will create a great driven service. I do hopefully contribute to that framework and what it looks like, but it should be an agreement between the government departments, which I am seeing much more early signs of from the home office, which is encouraging. So coming back to targets, I think targets created a motivation within fire services to get on and do something physically because we can all talk about this for years, at the end of the day if you don't go to the recruitment fairs, if you don't go out and connect to the community and talk to young woman about the potential pf joining the fire service at a very young ages and seeing them growing up with a thought that this could be a career for them then actually you will make no difference the future gender split between our work force. Having said that I think if you look at the profiles, I was talking to Becky about this the other day, I'm not sure if I have seen a profile of women in the fire service since the review. I know it was under 1%. It went up to about 4.7% now. I really like to see a profile between 2000 and 2016 matched against when the targets were relevant and when they were removed by the conservatives in 2009/2010. I suspect the greatest progression was probably made through the noughties as it were and less was made in the last 6 years. I actually wish I brought my hand-written notes when I was thinking about talking with you and I just gone through crudely and looked at. The figures are disgusting to be honest with you, in terms if just pulling everything together from different places and the bigger jumps are in the early 2000's. As you are creeping down between 2008 and now there is movement but it us completely slow and there are lots of reasons for that, but yeah.
I think the targets do, and it is great that they prove that they had an effect. I know people bulk against targets. I wonder whether targets are the right term 51% of the population are female. What is the right above, but having intent at having a commitment to seeing that number grow might be a better way to phrase it? I think London have. I heard a couple of weeks ago that London fire brigade haver made a commitment that they will be the most diverse fire service work force on the world by 2025. You know it's a big bold statement an I like those aspirational statements that say something about an organisation. I think the fire service directed by the home office could say were going to have the most diverse work force in the world by 2025. That would be good government ministerial force. I would say as a leader, we need to play our part in that, we need to do something around this and the likes. Hopefully you would see that number grown. It's challenging because we know the general populous see this occupation as a white male occupation unfortunately still. I am always struck by the amount of effort that you have to put in to shift by one millimetre of public perception. Its huge. I still have senior figures talking about firemen and you hear politicos, now readers right through to I was told by (name) the other day a useful thing to catch on your mind is if you see a parent come into tb4e playground and with a small girl and a small boy, and there is a fire engine in the playground. The parent will push the small boy towards the fire engine and hold onto the small girl. If the formative years if you are preventing that young girl seeing herself as engaging with this. The parent obviously is think danger and probably this is a male occupation and a thing that a young boy with probably be more interested in. so you are fighter against a very well embedded public perception and more sociable norms and you're trying to shift those things. They will take decades to shift with a huge amount of effort…"

Appendix 6 Exert of focus group transcript (focus group 1, women)

Page 1 – 2, names removed

GROUP IS SET A TASK

Women are split into two groups and given flip chart paper and pens. They are asked to draw a pictorial representation of what gender looks like in the Fire and Rescue Service.

BB *Does this group want to decide, want to talk us through your representation of gender?*

00.54 I think we started didn't we all saying with the majority, minority. That was the obvious thing. And eventually we just put one woman on the opposite side of the fence or the wall – or whatever it is you want to call it – and (name) said, she didn't necessarily feel that way in her service, in that there was normally someone to talk to, so we added the extras. But we also talked about the difficulties sometimes in getting people to engage with the gender difference thing that is there. It is sort of a self-survival mechanism in that you don't want to be seen to be different when you first join the service. And that sort of..would that be a fair rationalisation of what we talked about?

1.19 Yes. There's like a timeline of engaging with eer other women and organisations like networking women. There seems to be a timeline that I've definitely noticed that that timeline is getting shorter. Sometimes for good reason sometimes for bad reasons. But this was how we spoke about how we see it now. Um and you sort of like question yourself because you don't want to believe it, you sort of don't want to believe it. But when we were having coffee this morning, me and (name), I just said stop, look round, look at that group there all those people having their coffee in the morning. There must have been about 30/40 people all white, all male, all just having their coffees, all just sort of roughly – some young people there – but roughly the same age, looking the same. And to me that's what's quite frightening, because I see that now that is the generation, that is the face that goes out there that's the leadership that teaches. And they are normally all linked. All linked somehow. A mate of a mate, a golf club buddy. Whatever organisation you want to call it. They've all got very big mouths, all very big opinions – oh yes – and there is always people behind them. Always someone coming through. So you're just getting the same. The same. And then there is like us little people, and we have got mouths but there are obviously a lot smaller. And then starting to group together but you've still got this, I can't, if I'm going to survive in this group (points to majority group in picture) I can't be part of this group (points to the minority group of women in the picture). I can't. And I just think that's really sad but that's just time seems to do away with that, and you get to the point that you 'you know what' tough, I need to – I'm never going to be part of this group, so you know what..

3.35 BB *And its interesting you've got, where the women link, their little tiny smiley faces, and the person (woman) on their own that's assimilating is a little more sad.*

3.42 Yes and uh, just surviving, not growing not moving on, just surviving. (Looking at the picture) I don't want to be in this gang anyway look at them..

LAUGHS

4.01 (BB) (referring to the second group and their picture) Do you want to explain you guys?

4.03 I think similar. So ours is very much again you've got the group here. That we are part of the team as a whole but never quite breaking through. We just happen to be there. So organisationally women have come in and it's kind of still that mentality – all the years down the line that we're still not quite sure what to do with you. We're not quite sure how to behave around you. Um, examples being you can come into a group and even myself joining, it was kind of – I got told afterwards – all our funs going to be spoilt now. We can't swear, we can't do this. So you are never quite, just be normal, be yourselves be your authentic self. And just be part of that group as a whole, hence why the brick wall, um we spoke about a few gaps there were to try and get through your voice had to be louder and bigger than anyone else. I think a few of us spoke about giving up sometimes in meetings because you felt that you were sort of – not shouted down – but people were, just weren't listening. Your opinion wasn't important, so it was just like what's the point I'm just gonna sit back and listen and just let it take its course. Perhaps seen as the token problem. Again this goes back to we don't quite know what to do with you. Any issues, If you speak up, I'm not quite happy with that. It's kind of, that all blows out of proportion rather than just dealing with it like an adult or group of adults and talking about it and getting through it together, it was like, oh the woman on the watch is not happy. Everybody descend. And actually they are highlighted then and it makes the whole thing worse, so…I don't know if anyone else…

5.39 The other thing that we said is that we put a lot of pressure on ourselves and we kind of felt, I know I certainly felt that if I got something wrong I was going to let down every woman that ever joined the fire service after me rather than be a bit crap at ….it was like 'oh I've let down womankind'. So I think you can also build up an internal pressure as well as the very real pressure outside

6.02 I think that pressure is put on you though. (agreement) Because you listen to any of the conversations I've found over the years if someone on the watch does something wrong, something is really heavy and you drop it will be like 'oh god Mark you've dropped it, or it 'll be like oh Peter you dropped it. It will be an individual. For us, as individuals, it's like 'oh my god, women they can't lift stuff, (agreement) or women find that really hard. So that label, and that gets dripped on you. And other women listen to that as well. So there is always the person at the next station, so if there is another woman there they will just totally listen, they've never heard anything positive about her – by the way it's all made up. They've never heard anything positive about that woman so why do you want to link yourself with that woman at the next station, when…those

6.58 Gender just comes into everything. So if you pass an exam, it is because you are a woman. If you fail the exam (intelligible) it's because you were a woman. Its, it's just included in everything. You only got it because …

7.12 The target… is that we've got the token girl in. But we don't really want her"

Appendix 7 Exert of firefighter focus group transcript (men)

Page 7-8, names removed

24.10 FF6 I hated the guy, hated the guy. And I remember I used to go into work and I would look at the rider board and hope that he wasn't on duty. And as a new recruit, you are not powerful enough to challenge it yourself. So that was one aspect that I found. The stations there I suppose, a couple of things that the guys have been saying, fire stations traditionally have never been built for females. One of the things I've found over the years, that as a manager of a watch it's very difficult to meet what the service want with the tools that they give you. That is a challenge.

BB Do you want to give me an example of that?

25.30 Yes, so normal day to day stuff or night to night stuff so dorms, changing facilities, showers those sorts of things. Womanly things, you know come on lets be real about it. Juggling the ball when it comes to crewing. It's generally true that females are not as strong as blokes and it's been brought to my attention since I've been a manager that this person can't do this and this person can't do that. And I suppose that in reality that some women do struggle to do things that we get asked to do. So cutting equipment for example. If you are holding that for a few minutes you know that you've got hold of it.

26.32 FF1 As do some blokes as well.

FF6 Absolutely, I'm talking generally.

BB So you are talking about you've got to manage if there is deficit in the group of people that have a job to do?

26.44 FF6 I think one of your jobs as a manager is you always look behind you and see who you have in your team. Especially when the bells go down and you've got something you think who have I got behind me. Now I'm not necessarily saying that you want all men behind you because there is certain times that I would definitely say the more diverse a toolbox that you have the better. You know I've been to a few RTCs where there have been women in distress and if you've got a female firefighter on your watch you can just allocate them to that person. It just makes sense doesn't it? You know, that works sometimes. But, there is a but what you find now with smaller workforces, the cutting equipment hasn't got any lighter really, alright there might be a few ounces in it. But the ladders are still the same, the 135 ladder is still the same as when I joined all those years ago

28.01 FF4 They've changed the height haven't they?

FF6 But they haven't got any lighter. And you know we can't send women into some hazard areas if they are pregnant or if there is a radiation source, you can't send women in.

BB At all?

28.21 FF6 Well I don't think you can if it's up to a certain level you can't send them in. So we are experiencing riding 4 people quite regularly right across so it doesn't take a lot really to take one person out. I don't want to paint a really negative picture here but um

BB You know what it's a really interesting issue that you raise. I think I am interested also in how often it occurs that you have to, it may not be now with the team that you have, but in the past how often you had to juggle the people resource that you had just to be able to get the job done.

29.10 FF6 Its harder, and that's not necessarily a female factor, I wouldn't say, that's generally harder. There's lots of balls that you juggle machines come off the run for different things, skills sets are a massive juggling ball now.

29.30 FF1 Recruitment has massively changed hasn't it. You've gone away from where historically in the fire service, forget gender, someone would be recruited on a skills set, so ex-navy, someone with a mechanical background you'll have an ADO sat in a room saying he looks like a good lad, she looks like a good woman. Whatever, they want to bring that skillset in. Whereas we've gone down anyone can get in this job and rightly so. But you've got people turning up late for interviews and they still get interviews and they still got the potential to get a job. The standards aren't quite there. They might have a degree, and there is nothing wrong with having a degree at all but they might not be the right person for the right job, but they can attain a criteria, therefore we can't say no. We've gone past the point where you can get a feel for somebody. When I worked in HR right, only in a warehouse you could look at somebody and think they are not going to fit. We are not going to employ them. They have passed everything but we are not going to employ them, they won't fit. We can't say that person's not going to fit. That's why I say there are women who can't do the job there are men that can't do the job they fit that criteria that statement that says they've achieved all this, they've achieved all these but no one's allowed to go but they are just not going to fit in the fire service.

30.35 FF3 I think it's interesting the way we recruit as well because particularly in our service, because each stage is done by a different department. So you'll have one that does the entry test, the written test, then you'll have another department that does the selection tests. All the tests are very stringent but at no point do you build up an opinion of any person that comes through, apart from the snapshot opinion that you have.

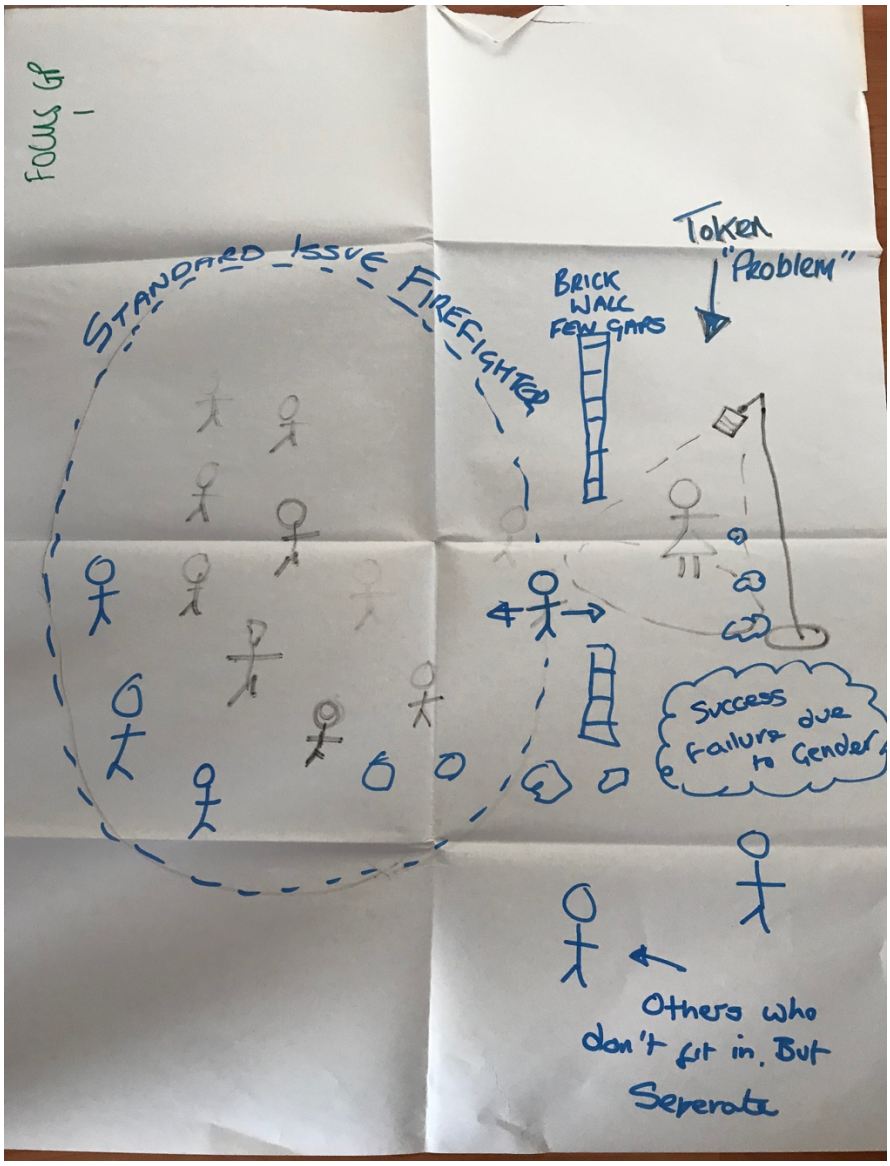
31.03 FF7 So you've just got to get those stages done by each section to tick the boxes for that one then you pass it on to the next.

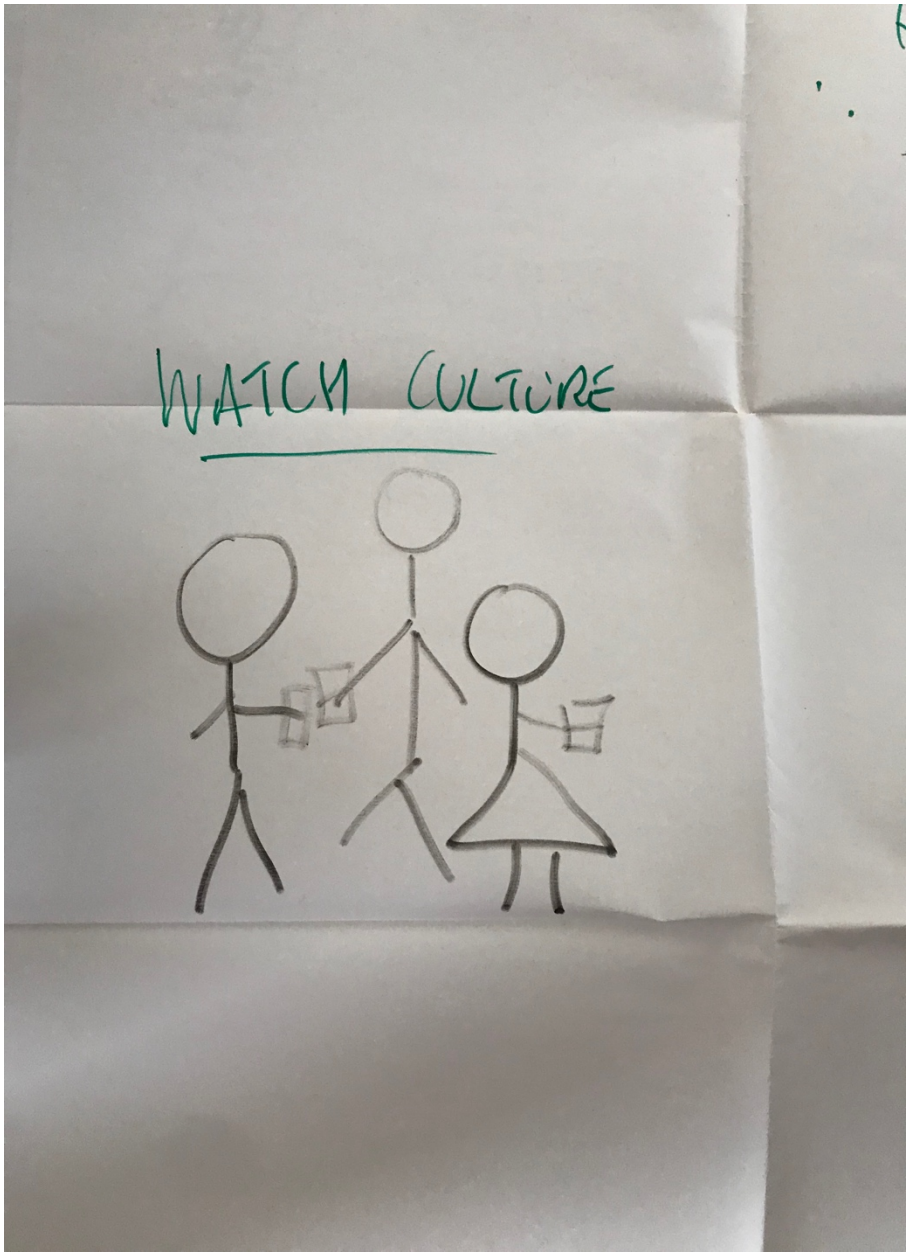
31.08 FF3 You've passed the written exam and you've sat quietly because you were told to, and you've done the physical test and you've done them well because you were told to but at no point has anyone delved into your personality and talked to you personally.

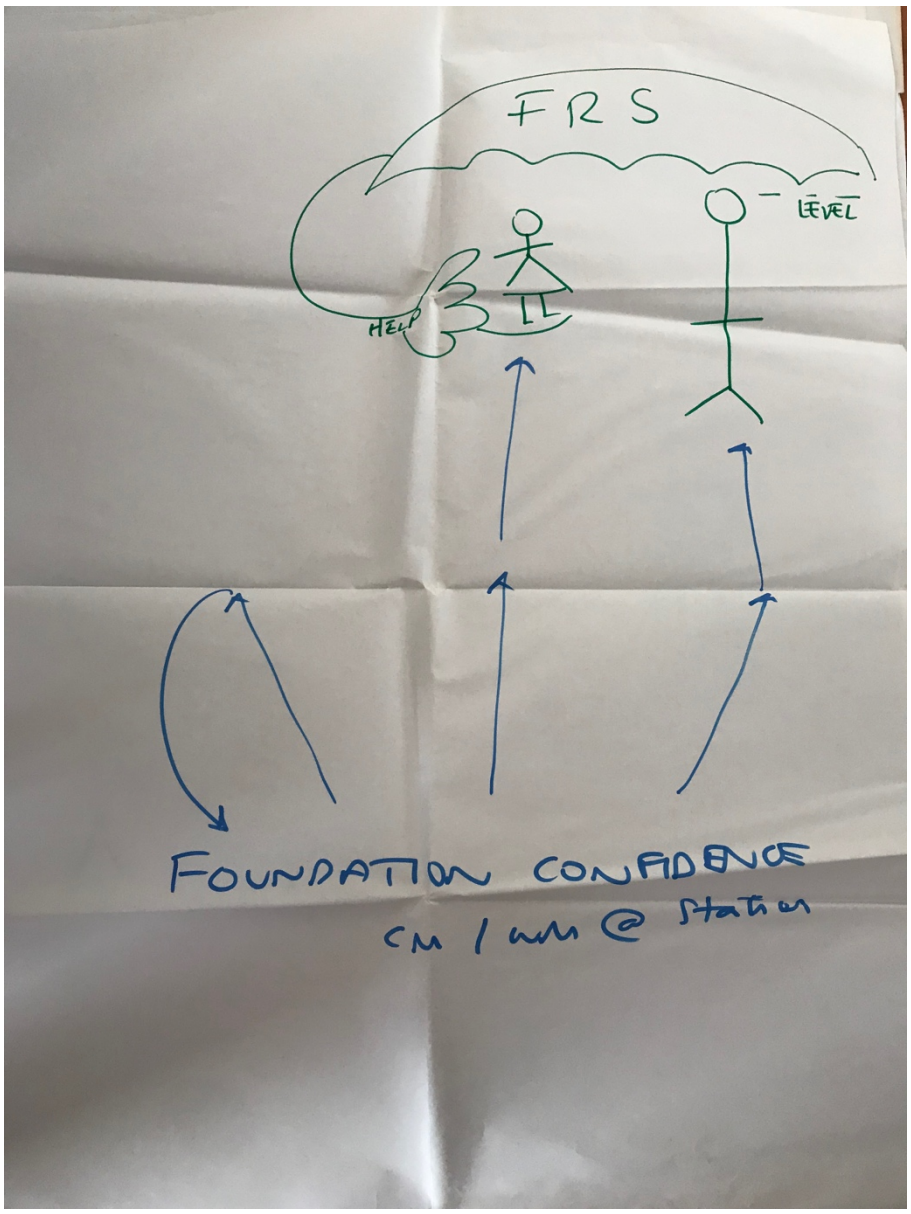
31.23 FF1 Personality it's not taken into account is it. You can see on the fitness test that that guys a bit of an idiot but no one's ever going to say anything, it's not taken into account. And you can end up with someone with attitude and you think you are never going to fit into team work criteria because you've got attitude from day one.

Appendix 8 Pictorial Illustrations of gender

Women firefighter focus group pictorial illustrations of gender in the FRS (3 pictures)




WATCH CULTURE


FRS
LEVEL
HELP
FOUNDATION CONFIDENCE

Appendix 9 Examples of interview questions: semi-structured, in-depth and focus groups

1. Interview Questions: Semi Structured interviews – policy makers/decision makers/managers

Context

- Can you explain your role within the organization and how long you have been part of it?
- Can you begin by talking to me about what you understand gender equality to be?
- What do you think the context of equality for women in the Fire Service is?

Gender equality activity

Her Majesty's Thematic Inspection into Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service in 2000, gave a number of recommendations for change, one being the issue of the under-representation of women in the Fire Service:

- Can you talk to me about the targets to increase the number of operational women within the Fire Service and into higher roles? What has this meant for your organization?
  What do you believe its impact to be upon (1) women (2) men (3) the organization?
- What has been your experience of any resistance to gender equality activity and/or challenges to its implementation? Can you give any examples?
- What, if anything do you believe has changed?
- Where do you think that the organization is now after 15 years of gender equality auditing, and what do you think remains to be done?

Organisational Culture and Leadership

- It has been said of organizational culture, that, "a person's ability to fit in…is more important than that person having the right skills". What is your view on this when you think about leadership within your own organization?
- Do you think that the organisation's intention towards gender equality, and its policy structure/implementation are congruent? Why? What do you think helps and what hinders this?
- What styles of leadership do you think are effective here/why?
- Describe the prevalent management style that exists here .
- To what extent does the command and control element of leadership play a part in management style?
- What part do you believe technical proficiency has to play in the appointments of senior personnel that have oversight across operational disciplines? What impact do you believe that this has had culturally within this organization?

2. Focus Group Facilitation

Key questions:

Women

Fire Service Context

- When did you join the Fire Service?
- How did you feel as a new employee? Talk a little about your integration and early years as a fire-fighter.

- It has been said of organizational culture, that "a person's ability to fit in is more important than that person having the right skills". What is your view when you think about your own journey and your own organization?

Difference and Gender Targets

- At any point did gender place you differently within your watch/team? What was the difference and what did it mean?
- What do you think about the implementation of the targets to increase the number of operational women into fire-fighter roles, and the number of women within 5% of earners with FRS?
- What role do you think the targets have played (culturally/politically/practically)?
- What impact have the targets had upon you personally?

Leadership

- How encouraged have you felt to apply for promotion? What if any factors would inhibit you? Would you encourage women to seek promotion?
- What part do you believe technical proficiency has to play in the appointments of senior personnel that have oversight across operational disciplines. What impact do you believe that this has had culturally within your respective organisations?
- The number of women in leadership positions are relatively low. Do you have any female senior officers within your organization? What do you want to say about (a) their appointment (b) their leadership style?

Men

Fire Service Context

- When did you join the Fire Service?
- How did you feel as a new employee? Talk a little about your integration and early years as a fire-fighter.
- What words would you use to describe the culture of your organization?

Difference and Gender Targets

- How many of you have worked with women within your watches? Do you want to talk about their integration into the watch? Was it similar to your own?
- What do you think about the implementation of the targets to increase the number of operational women into fire-fighter roles, and the number of women within 5% of earners with FRS?
- What role do you think the targets have played (culturally/politically/practically)?
- What impact do you think these targets have had upon your organisation, and upon you personally?
- Would you encourage women to apply to the Fire Service? Would you encourage them to seek promotion?

Leadership

- What part do you believe technical proficiency has to play in the appointments of senior personnel that have oversight across operational disciplines. What impact do you believe that this has had culturally within your respective organisations?
- What do you see as the prevalent leadership style within the Fire Service? What impact do you think that has; what do you think it means?
- The number of women in leadership positions are relatively low. Do you have any senior female officers? What do you want to say about (a) their appointment (b) their leadership style?

3. In depth interview (senior women)

You will be asked to reflect :

- A brief context of how you came to join the Fire Service.
- Your career journey within the Fire Service. Please reflect on how your gender difference has or has not played a part in your experiences. Please talk about the impact that this has had upon your journey. You may wish to include information about the support that you may have received within the organization to successfully negotiate key progression milestones. You are asked to reflect on systemic processes as well as your experiences that have enabled or hindered your progression.
- Your experiences as a senior manager. Your reflections should include how you believe you operate, taking account of any cultural or systemic challenges that may exist. Again, you may wish to talk about information about the support or changes that have taken place to enable you to lead or that hinder you from doing so.
- Please consider within your reflections
    - The prevalent organizational culture
    - Issues of power: how it is disseminated, who holds it (e.g. do you deem power to be positional and linked to role?)
    - The narrative within the organisation with regard to gender relations
    - How hierarchy has enabled or challenged your journey
    - How you are able to operate as a senior leader post appointment

Appendix 10. Impact of watch culture