The August riots in England

Understanding the involvement of young people

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Contents

The Research Team

This research study was conducted by a large and experienced research team, including qualitative researchers from a range of related backgrounds. Gareth Morrell was the project director and Sara Scott the corporate sponsor. Gareth and Sara led the day-to-day management of the project. They were supported by NatCen researchers Eloise Poole, Ashley Brown, Andy Scott, Linda Maynard, Faye Sadro, Jerome Finnegan and Tom Kenny. Administrative support was provided by Polly Dare, Cathy O'Donnell and Del Russell.

In addition to the central research team, dedicated teams were set up for each of the selected case study areas. These were led by Carol McNaughton-Nicholls, Di McNeish, Josie Dixon, Debbie Collins and Michelle Gray, with extensive fieldwork by Anna Ludvigsen, Daniel Clay, Alison Webster, Lin Hankinson and Rachel Kinsella. Recruitment support was provided by Gary Coombes, Gill Brown, John Asprey, John Hilton, Chris Evans, Nicola Claridge, Declan Walsh and Danai Chambati-Woodhead.

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Executive Summary

Study aims

The overall aim of this study was to explore the triggers of youth involvement in the August riots from the perspective of those involved and affected. Young people were not solely responsible for these events – older people were also involved – but they are the focus of this study because the role played by young people is of particular concern and their perspectives are less likely to be heard in other ways.

The core question we sought to answer was therefore: 'Why did young people get involved in the riots?" To address this, the report describes:

- **what** occurred in five affected areas and two areas unaffected by rioting
- **who** was involved in the riots
- **why and how** young people got involved

What happened?

In early August 2011, there were outbreaks of significant crime and disorder in some of England's major cities. The riots and disturbances began in **Tottenham** in North London on Saturday 6 August following a peaceful protest in response to the police handling of the shooting of Mark Duggan. An apparent incident between a young girl and police sparked clashes which escalated to wide-scale rioting. Windows were smashed and offices, shops and homes set on fire. Looting broke out in the early hours of Sunday in neighbouring Wood Green and Tottenham Hale. Over the course of the next few days, similar disturbances occurred in other parts of London and in other cities.

Different areas of London experienced varying levels of violent protest, vandalism and looting. In some areas like **Peckham** (8 August), clashes between police and groups of largely local young people sparked violence that turned into looting. Events took a different course in other areas, such as around **Clapham Junction** station in Battersea (8 August). Here, looting by local people, and others from surrounding areas, was not preceded by any significant protest or clashes with police and continued for several hours before police could arrive in sufficient numbers to halt proceedings. Similar events took place outside London. In **Birmingham**, looting in the city centre followed by clashes between police and rival groups in suburban areas took place across two nights (8–9 August). In **Salford** (9 August), events followed a similar pattern to Peckham, with initial aggression towards the police developing quickly into looting.

Who was involved?

A behavioural typology characterising the different types of involvement in the riots emerged following analysis of the data collected from young people in the affected areas.

A typology of involvement	
Watchers: were observing but not involved	**Bystanders:** happened to be there **The curious:** deliberately chose to be there
Rioters: involved in violent disturbances	**Protesters:** had a specific set of grievances **Retaliators:** acted against police or the "system" **Thrill-seekers:** looking for excitement or a "buzz"
Looters: involved in breaking into and/or stealing from broken-into shops or handling stolen goods	**Opportunists:** took a rare chance to get free stuff **Sellers:** planned their involvement to maximise "profits"
Non-involved	**Wannabes:** would have liked to be involved **Stay-aways:** chose not to get involved

These are distinct behaviours but some young people moved through different types of behaviour during the riots. For example, the curious watcher could become a thrill-seeker or the thrill-seeker an opportunist.

Why did young people get involved (or not)?

The first key part of answering this question is what motivated young people. Young people were motivated to get involved in rioting or looting by what they thought they might gain, but whether they chose to get involved or not was affected by a range of situational, personal and contextual influences.

Motivations related to benefits
- **Something exciting to do:** the riots were seen as an exciting event – a day like no other – described in terms of a wild party or "*like a rave*". The party atmosphere, adrenaline and hype were seen as encouraging and explaining young people's involvement by young people themselves and community stakeholders.
- **The opportunity to get free stuff:** the excitement of the events was also tied up with the thrill of getting "free stuff" – things they wouldn't otherwise be able to have.
- **A chance to get back at police:** in Tottenham, the rioting was described as a direct response to the police handling of the shooting of Mark Duggan. Here and elsewhere in London, the Mark Duggan case was also described as the origin of the riots and the way it was handled was seen as an example of a lack of respect by the police that was common in the experience of young black people in some parts of London. Outside London, the rioting was not generally attributed to the Mark Duggan case. However, the attitude and behaviour of the police locally **was** consistently cited as a trigger outside as well as within London.

Factors that facilitated or inhibited involvement

It was clear, however, that more than motivation is required for action. Young people described factors which helped to "nudge" them into getting involved (facilitators) and others which they felt had helped to "tug" them away from involvement (inhibitors). These factors can be categorised as situational, personal, family/community and societal.

Situational factors were related to events and the actions of others:

- **Group processes:** young people who would normally think that such behaviours were wrong were encouraged to join in by seeing many others cause damage and steal – either witnessing this in person or through news and social media.
- **A rapid flow of information:** news and social media speeded up the exchange of information. Young people talked about watching events unfold in real time showing *"people getting away with it"*, and thinking that if all these people are doing it, then it must be OK.
- **Locality:** where the rioting was happening could encourage involvement or act as an inhibitor depending on the proximity to young people
- **What the young person was doing:** boredom, "nothing better to do", was an important "nudge" factor. Conversely, being occupied through work, an apprenticeship or some other activity was an inhibitor to involvement.
- **What friends and peers were doing:** few young people got involved in the riots on their own. Most went along with friends and both influenced and were influenced by their peers in terms of how far they went in their involvement. However, peer influence was also seen as a "tug" factor by young people whose friends were not involved.
- **What authority figures were doing:** the presence of adults, particularly parents, at the time of the riots was described as playing an important role in preventing some young people from getting involved.

While situational "nudge" and "tug" factors give some insight into why some young people got involved and others did not, the extent to which young people were susceptible to these factors depended on a range of other underlying factors that they brought with them to riots. These were related to personal, family, community and societal circumstances.

Personal factors related to young people's values, experiences and prospects:

- **A criminal history:** previous criminal behaviour was a facilitating factor in involvement in rioting and looting, though prior experience of being in trouble also acted as a deterrent.
- **Experience of the police:** young people cited previous negative experiences of the police as a significant "nudge" factor to get involved in the riots.
- **Attitudes towards those with power and authority:** there were expressions of anger and resentment about authority figures, particularly politicians. Engagement in formal politics was seen as irrelevant to young people. However, there was awareness of political issues among young people and particular anger about the MPs' expenses scandal and the perceived greed of bankers.
- **Jobs, prospects and aspirations:** young people and community stakeholders made a distinction between young people who had a personal stake in

society and a sense of something to lose from any involvement in the riots and those who did not. Hope of a better future through current education and employment or an aspiration to work was seen as the main constituent of having something to lose. Alternatively, some young people felt that their prospects were so bleak that they had little to lose by their involvement.

Family and community factors' influence on relationships and identity:

- **Family attitudes and behaviour:** how young people are brought up was viewed as very important both in preventing and encouraging bad behaviour: *"My mum said: 'Don't you dare go outside the house.' I was joking: 'I could go and get myself some new trainers, I could get you some new trainers.' And she just looked at me and I just put my head down in shame. She took it very serious. I was raised up properly."* (Young person, Peckham)
- **Attachment to a community:** young people and community stakeholders described some neighbourhoods as having a prevailing culture of low-level criminality with negative attitudes towards the police and authority. Even young people who did not get involved themselves, talked about criminal behaviour being normalised: *"Half of their mams and dads don't work, half of them are bent, even I get to think it's normal, just how it is and … I wasn't brought up like that."* (Male, 18 and over, Salford)
  In contrast, young people also talked about the importance of belonging to a community (or a group or family within it) that opposed criminal behaviour. In particular, religion was mentioned as protecting them from getting involved: *"If I did this, my God wouldn't be happy, my parents wouldn't be happy. I have a bright future, my record is good. Imagine I did something that stupid, spoil my good reputation."* (Young person, Peckham)

Societal factors related to broader social issues:

- **Having a stake in the local area:** young people who were involved in voluntary and community work alongside older people were clear that this meant they had not wanted "*to trash their own backyard*". Other young people and community stakeholders identified a feeling that they were written off in their communities, a lost cause: *"[They feel] excluded – no expectations/aspirations and lack of support … called scum – told it enough they believe it."* (Female, 18 and over, Salford)
- **Youth Provision:** the immediate trigger of boredom and the desire for excitement was linked to a lack of legitimate things to do and places to go. Young people felt that they were a particular target for cuts in government spending with youth services cuts and the ending of Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMA).
- **Poverty and materialism:** life for some people was described as a constant struggle. Young people talked about the difficulty of managing on the money they received when out of work or in training. At the same time, a materialistic culture was cited as having contributed to looting by both young people and community stakeholders. Participants from the unaffected area in Sheffield suggested that the starker contrast between rich and poor in London might mean that the disparity between young people's material desires and what they could afford might be more pronounced.

Making choices

Young people both involved and not involved in the riots were exposed to the factors we have outlined, yet made different decisions about whether to get involved. These decisions were influenced by a combination of the factors above. Although some young people barely made a conscious choice at all, others appeared to have asked themselves one, or both, of two key questions when making their decisions:

| What do I think is right and wrong? | What do I risk if I get involved? |

- **Beliefs about right and wrong:** beliefs on right and wrong ranged from a very explicit moral code which said that all criminal behaviour is wrong, through to a much more nuanced set of values where certain criminal behaviours were "more wrong" or "less wrong" than others. Young people attributed their beliefs both to personal characteristics (e.g. being "*strong-minded*") and upbringing. However, they also observed that situational factors could "nudge" people into behaviour they would not normally consider. Taking "free stuff" was not always considered entirely wrong, even where young people didn't and wouldn't do it themselves.
  There was also a view that some targets of the riots were more "legitimate" than others: "*When they hit the local shops, they went too far.*" *S*ome behaviours were seen as much more wrong than others, with strong disapproval of behaviour which hurt people, put vulnerable people at risk or destroyed small family businesses.
- **Assessing the risks:** the risks of being caught, what that might mean for your future and whether it was "worth" it were themes that featured heavily in interviews. A fear of getting caught – through CCTV and DNA evidence, or serial numbers of stolen goods – was a key protective factor for young people. There were young people who made this calculation and decided they would be "smart" – e.g. cover their faces. Others said seeing the media coverage, the sheer numbers involved and the police not doing anything made them confident their chances of getting caught were low enough to reduce the risk sufficiently to get involved. A different calculation was made by young people who saw themselves as having too much to lose, even if the attractions were great and the risks low.

1 Introduction

In early August 2011, there were outbreaks of crime and disorder across England. The riots and disturbances began in Tottenham in North London on 6 August. Over the course of the next few days, similar disturbances occurred in other parts of London and in other cities. The events involved considerable damage to property and risk to life and attracted a great deal of attention and comment. In the period following the riots, the media broadcast daily stories of victims and of perpetrators and coverage intensified as more and more people were convicted of crimes related to the riots. Politicians and local leaders met and listened to people living in affected cities around the country. And commentators provided near continuous observation, analysis and interpretation of both cause and meaning.

An important means of achieving greater understanding of what happened is listening to the people directly involved and affected. This study therefore aimed to capture the perspectives of young people and community members living in the affected areas. This included young people involved, and not involved, in the riots. In addition, it includes the perspectives of young people and community members in other urban areas which stayed relatively calm.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

The overall aim of this study is to explore the triggers of youth involvement in the riots from the perspective of those involved and affected. It focuses particularly on young people, for two reasons: first, young people clearly played a significant role in the riots; and second, their perspectives are less likely to be heard in other ways.

The research had five key objectives:

- To understand the motives of young people who were involved in the riots
- To gather the perspectives of young people from affected areas who chose not to get involved
- To elicit the voices of other community members – residents, parents, business owners and community stakeholders – to capture their views about what led to the riots and why young people became involved
- To engage young people in areas unaffected by the riots to get their perspectives on why rioting did not break out in their areas
- To bring these different perspectives together in a summary of the key factors triggering and underpinning involvement in the riots, supported by evidence from the research encounters.

1.2 Overview of our approach

The research brief required a design that elicited a rich understanding of how and why young people became involved in the August riots. Figure 1.1, below, illustrates our approach, using a qualitative case study design.

Figure 1.1 – Research design

Local area scoping Working with key local gatekeepers	Desk scoping Social media listening, assessment of conviction data and profiling of affected area

Recruitment						

Affected areas					*Unaffected areas*	

Area 1 **Data collection from 30 young people** – Individual, paired or triad interviews with those involved in the riots – Individual interviews with those in custody – Individual, paired or triad interviews with those not involved **Discussion group with 10 "bystanders"**	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 5 – Three discussion groups in each area – Sampled on demographic of those convicted One group with over-18s, one with under-18s, one with community stakeholders	Area 6

Analysis						

Final output						

There were three essential elements to the design:

- understanding what is already known about what took place
- achieving a breadth of understanding across England; and
- uncovering depth and detail in individual views and experiences

The main stage of the research was preceded by a rapid scoping phase to provide an understanding of the dynamics of each area and theories that were emerging to explain these events. This comprised a review of social and print media, statistics on those convicted for involvement in the riots and information on the areas selected as case studies. In order to achieve a breadth of understanding, research was conducted in a variety of local contexts. Five affected areas – Tottenham, Peckham, Clapham Junction, Salford and Birmingham – and two unaffected areas – Poplar in East London and Firth Park in Sheffield – were selected for study. The selection aimed to achieve diversity with respect to demographics of the area, when the riots took place and the dynamics of events. In each affected area, we aimed to speak to around 30 people, comprising a roughly even spilt of under- and over-18s and diversity with respect to gender, ethnicity and work status.

Researchers in each area worked very closely with the local community to access participants and ensure the sample was derived from as wide a range of sources as possible. Depth and detail was achieved through interviewing one-on-one and face-to-face as far as possible, as well as using a range of fieldwork tools as stimulus material to assist with participant recall.

This study presented some particular challenges in terms of timescale, access, sensitivity and validity which we discuss in the Technical Appendix.

Achieved sample

Overall, the research involved 206 young people in affected areas who were interviewed individually or in groups of two to four; 39 of the interviews involved young people in custody. The breakdown of the sample against the key criteria was as follows:

	Under 18	18 and over	No Information	Total
Neither there nor involved	73	54	6	133
There but not involved	14	9	0	23
Involved	12	38	0	50
Total	99	101	6	206

In addition to these interviews, larger discussion groups were conducted with young people in some areas where this was practical and convenient. Discussion groups were also conducted with community stakeholders and/or residents from each area. A total of 51 people were included in these encounters across the five areas. The breakdown of the sample by other demographics and affected area is contained in the Technical Appendix.

In addition, in the two unaffected areas a total of 54 participants took part in six focus groups, broken down as follows:

	Under 18	18 and over	Community stakeholders
Poplar	8	6	12
Sheffield	8	10	10

1.3 About this report

The core question which this study sought to answer was:

Why did young people get involved in the riots?

This is not a simple question to answer. If any of us are asked why we do things, our explanations tend to start with our reactions to immediate stimuli (I hit him because I thought he was going to hit me) and shorter-term influences (I was already feeling angry that day because we'd had an argument in the morning). Given time for reflection and sufficient insight, we may suggest deeper personal or contextual explanations (I was brought up in a violent home and never learned other ways of dealing with conflict). Quite commonly, our understanding of why we do things is uncertain or partial – we have favourite ways of explaining ourselves which emphasise some factors and exclude others. A more complete picture of our motivations can often be obtained by combining how we explain ourselves with the observations of others.

When we asked young people about the motivations for their behaviour, they tended to first describe the immediate motivators – the "on-the-day" triggers. But in explaining their involvement, or non-involvement, they also talked about those things which had facilitated or inhibited it. They identified a range of factors which helped to "nudge" them towards getting involved and a range of "tug" factors which helped to prevent their involvement. Some of these factors were situational – they were to do with what was happening on the day. Others were more about the young people themselves – the characteristics and circumstances of individuals, their families or society more broadly which made involvement more or less attractive. Other informants (in this case, members of the local community) added depth and weight to these explanations through their own experience of the both the riots and the context of young peoples' lives in their communities. The report includes direct anonymised quotations from interviews that were audio recorded (in inverted commas) and paraphrased quotes from field notes where they were not (not in inverted commas).

Chapter 2 provides an account of **what** occurred in each of the areas of our study, based on a review of police and media reports and eye-witness accounts of the young people and community informants who were involved and/or observed what happened.

Chapter 3 describes a typology of **who** was involved in the riots based on our analysis of the different kinds of behaviour evident during the events and the characteristics of the groups involved.

The **why and how** of young people's involvement is described in Chapter 4, in terms of the motivators, facilitators and inhibitors they described.

Finally, Chapter 5 briefly outlines how the findings will be used to inform wider processes set up to respond to the riots.

A brief discussion of theoretical perspectives which may be relevant to the further interpretation of our data is included in the Technical Appendix.

2 What happened?

Between the 6 and 10 August 2011, a series of riots took place in London and other cities. This study is based on interviews undertaken in five areas affected by rioting (Tottenham, Peckham, Clapham Junction, Birmingham and Salford) and two unaffected areas (Firth Park, Sheffield, and Poplar, East London). The aim of the following short sections is to illuminate differences in local context and some key distinctions in the dynamics of events and the profiles of those involved in each area.

2.1 Tottenham

2.1.1 Background
Tottenham has previous experience of riots. A demonstration outside the police station in 1985 (following the death of a local woman who had collapsed during a police raid on her home) became violent, and that evening, a police officer was killed in intense rioting on the Broadwater Farm estate. Despite acknowledging some recent improvement, interviewees in this study described an ongoing, deeply embedded distrust of the police amongst people in Tottenham. It is an area of high unemployment where 48% of children are classified as living in poverty. Decline in local industry and subsequently in retail on its high street were factors seen as being responsible for the lack of jobs. Interviewees described the hopelessness of some young people in the face of limited opportunities. Despite its difficulties, Tottenham was also described as a good place to live. Young people and other residents expressed pride in the openness and tolerance of local people that fostered a sense of belonging amongst its various communities. Community stakeholders suggested that recent investment in secondary schools was beginning to pay dividends in terms of young people's educational achievement, but that this had come too late for those now over 18.

2.1.2 What happened in Tottenham?
The timeline in the figure below shows the chain of events that occurred in Tottenham. Interviewees who had been on the march for Mark Duggan and involved in the protest outside Tottenham police station described a peaceful, purposeful atmosphere. However, there was a view that some of those on the march had joined the protest intent on causing trouble.

> *Some of the people at the protest for Mark Duggan were gang people. They say he wasn't in a gang but the gang people knew him. So when they saw this happening, they're obviously going to get involved there.*
> (Young person, Tottenham)

An alleged incident involving a girl and the police, cited as a cause for the peaceful protest becoming violent, was also described by participants:

4 to 7 August – Tottenham

04.08.11

18:15 Mark Duggan is shot dead by police at Ferry Lane. → Britain's police watchdog opens an enquiry into the fatal shooting.

06.08.11

16:00 Duggan's friends and family gather outside Tottenham police station for a peaceful protest. About 200–300 people join the demonstration.

19:20 Bottles are thrown at police cars near the police station and one of the vehicles is set alight. Reports suggest violence began after an argument between a protester and a police officer.

20:20 Riot officers from the Territorial Support Group and police on horseback are deployed to disperse the crowds but come under attack from bottles, fireworks and other missiles.

20:45 The London Fire Brigade receives its first calls to attend.

21:45 Riot police at the scene come under attack from bottles and missiles. A red London double-decker bus is set alight and there are reports of shops being looted.

22:45 Shops set alight in the area include an Aldi supermarket and a carpet shop.

07.08.11

00:00 Police gain control of 200m of High Road, allowing Fire Brigade to tackle fires.

01:30 BBC and Sky News teams are attacked on High Street and both remove staff from area.

03:00 Looting reaches Wood Green and dozens of shops are looted including Vision Express, Boots, Argos, JD Sports and The Body Shop. No police in the area.

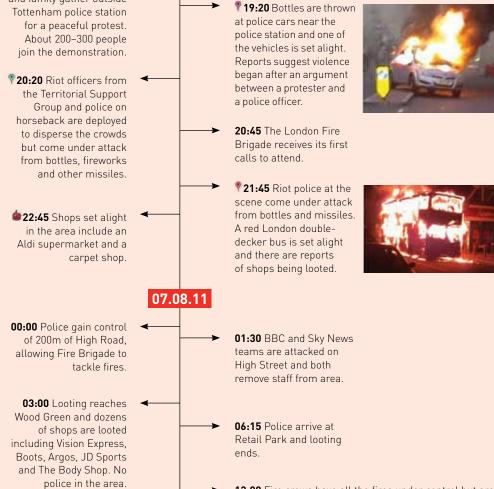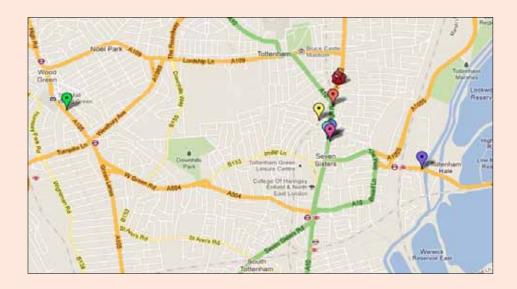**06:15** Police arrive at Retail Park and looting ends.

12:00 Fire crews have all the fires under control but are still damping down some burnt-out buildings. Scenes of crime officers begin investigating and gathering evidence.

It was all calm there, nothing happening. But then it kicked off, people got angry because of the girl – police hit her or something ... this pushed them over the top. (Young person, Tottenham)

At this stage, a police car was burnt out, prompting contrasting reactions: for some this turn of events was a sign to leave the protest and go home, while others came out to see what was happening. Riot police were called in and there was a stand-off between a line of people and the police. The situation then escalated, though it is not entirely clear how or why. Some interviewees thought the original group of protesters was swelled by gang members and others intent on causing trouble.

The escalation in vandalism on buildings and public vehicles included a bus being set on fire, the destruction of the historic building housing the Carpet Right store and a number of residential flats, as well as the Jobcentre, Fitness First, Aldi and others. Shop windows were first smashed to provide access to missiles to throw at police rather than to facilitate looting. Systematic looting later took place in the more lucrative areas neighbouring Tottenham High Road. Stores in the retail park at Tottenham Hale and Wood Green High Street were looted heavily, such that by 6am, the looting seemed to have run its natural course and was largely dispersed by police.
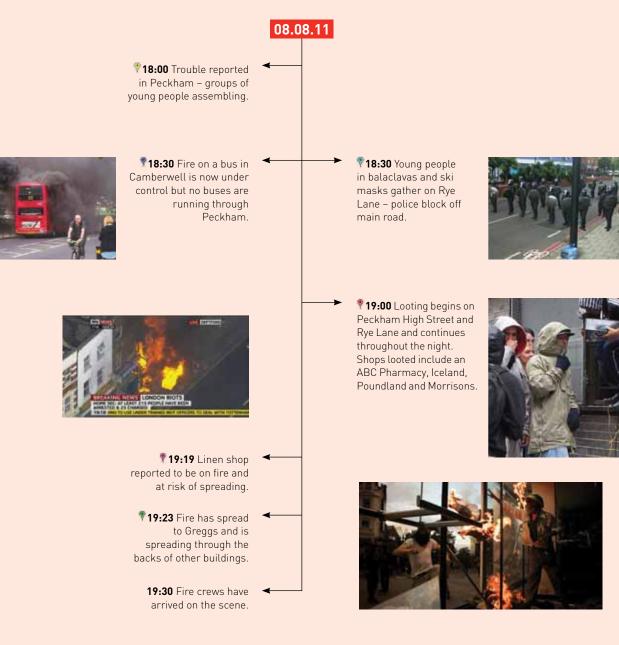
2.2 Peckham

2.2.1 Background
Interviewees had been unsurprised when the disturbances spread to Peckham. Some felt that the area's reputation for being dangerous was well founded and described a prominent gang culture and fears over gun and knife crime which made them feel unsafe. Others who knew lots of people in the area, or knew how to keep out of trouble, felt that Peckham was a safe area and it was not necessary to get mixed up in these issues. An alternative view was that crime in Peckham is exaggerated and that it is a good place to live. However, as in Tottenham, there was thought to be a poor relationship between the police and young people and it was felt that young people have limited opportunities in the area.

2.2.2 What happened in Peckham
Interviewees described gang members and young people on the periphery of these gangs initially gathering on Rye Lane around 6pm on Monday 8. Broadcasts on Blackberry Messenger (BBM) had been circulating from around 4pm. The first major incident to take place was a bus set on fire in Camberwell, which stopped all the bus routes through the area. At this stage riot police were blocking off part of Rye Lane, where running battles with police quickly developed. The atmosphere was described as "crazy", but people also noted that those involved seemed to be enjoying themselves.

The looting began in Peckham High Street and Rye Lane around 7.30pm. Iceland, Morrisons, Currys and local pharmacies were badly affected. Although it appears that lots of different types of people were involved, it was thought that gang members and those normally involved in criminal activity

8 August – Peckham

08.08.11

18:00 Trouble reported in Peckham – groups of young people assembling.

18:30 Fire on a bus in Camberwell is now under control but no buses are running through Peckham.

18:30 Young people in balaclavas and ski masks gather on Rye Lane – police block off main road.

19:00 Looting begins on Peckham High Street and Rye Lane and continues throughout the night. Shops looted include an ABC Pharmacy, Iceland, Poundland and Morrisons.

19:19 Linen shop reported to be on fire and at risk of spreading.

19:23 Fire has spread to Greggs and is spreading through the backs of other buildings.

19:30 Fire crews have arrived on the scene.

began the vandalism, which facilitated the looting. The situation escalated further with shops set on fire, spreading to private residences adjacent and above them, and people turning on each other. In Peckham some interviewees identified local gang culture as a factor in the riots:

> *"All sorts of people [were involved] but gangs led and did the breaking in then others followed in afterwards. People turned on, and robbed, each other."* (Young person, Peckham)

> *"There's a postcode thing. Young people can't go to other postcodes. It's SE15 against SE1, SE1 against Brixton ... If you go out of your area, other young people come up to you and if you don't say the right thing ... I'm not saying nothing would happen, but ... it makes you feel uncomfortable."* (Young person, Peckham)

It was not felt that people from outside the borough of Southwark were involved in the events in Peckham. However, it was reported that a "gang truce" between those from different estates or postcodes in the surrounding areas had enabled free movement on that night, some of which may have crossed to Brixton or Lewisham. The looting continued into the early evening. Within a few hours, as riot police came in to block off the most severely damaged streets and it appeared to have run its course, interviewees also reported that a possible breakdown of the gang truce had led to people retreating inside.

2.3 Clapham Junction, Battersea

2.3.1 Background
Clapham Junction station provides a distinct physical boundary between two very different areas of Battersea. South of the railway is an affluent area occupied by young professionals and families. A number of more deprived estates occupy the area north of the railway up to the river Thames. This creates two separate communities. People living on the estates described a sense of community among local people, but the inequalities between residents were also clearly apparent.

> *"If they [young people] ever wanted reminding of what they don't have, this is a good place to be."* (Community stakeholder, Clapham Junction)

Participants also felt that facilities for young people were not as good as they could be in the area. As a result, young people were left hanging around on the street and felt they were judged and harassed by police. Safety was not a major concern for young people from this area but in common with Tottenham and Peckham, this was felt to be dependent upon following the stark rules of the street:

> *"That's the law of the teenagers now. If you move and you're by yourself, not from this area, you will get stabbed."* (Young person, Clapham Junction)

2.3.2 What happened at Clapham Junction
While the kind of activities that people engaged in were similar to those elsewhere, the dynamics of how events unfolded in this area appear to be

8 August – Clapham Junction, Battersea

08.08.11

20:00 People gathering on Clapham Common to protect home and businesses.

21:00 Looting begins on Clapham Common with hundreds of looters breaking into shops including Debenhams, Currys, Headmasters and Ladbrokes.

22:00 Looting spreads to Lavender Hill. Carphone Warehouse is targeted.

22:00 Local people are gathered to watch the activity – no police on the scene.

22:50 First police arrive.

09.08.11

00:00 Reports that a fancy dress shop has been set alight.

00:30 Full scale riot police arrive in armoured vehicles. Looters begin to disperse.

02:00 The violence has nearly ended with just a few small pockets of violence involving small groups spread over the area.

quite different. Firstly, the events appear to have been more co-ordinated. Interviewees described receiving BBM messages early in the afternoon giving information on where to be and at what time. Possibly as a result, it appears that those involved may have come from a wider area of south London, from Brixton and Fulham for example. People first began congregating on the entryway to a long stretch of high street from Clapham Junction station down to Northcote Road. The police station on Lavender Hill was in view of this gathering; interviewees reported police looking on from the top of the hill. Apart from reports of some young people attacking police in the Winstanley Estate around 7pm, the community stakeholders who were present saw little protest or rioting against the police equivalent to that which preceded looting in other areas: *It didn't feel like they were angry at the time*. Instead, looting began apparently unprompted at around 8.30pm, continuing for several hours and moved up Lavender Hill, where buildings were set on fire.

While the looting was severe, the atmosphere appeared less chaotic than in some of the other areas and less likely to turn to violence. People who lived in the surrounding streets came out to watch and bemoan the lack of police presence. Between 10.30pm and 11pm, police started to move towards the main areas of looting, with officers in full riot gear joining them at 12.30am and largely dispersing the looters. Interviewees said there were rumours of police preparing to use rubber bullets which also persuaded many people to head home.

2.4 Salford

2.4.1 Background
Disturbances in Salford occurred in a small, discrete area of the city across a single afternoon and evening on 9 August. Salford precinct, the shopping centre around which the disturbances took place contains many low-cost stores and supermarkets and is surrounded by high-rise flats and estates. Despite major regeneration over the last 20 years, these areas are characterised by high unemployment. Poverty and inequality were acknowledged (in the Clarendon area close to the precinct, child poverty is almost 75%) and investment in Salford was not felt to have filtered down to local people. Participants described new housing developments for first-time buyers being occupied largely by professionals who work in Manchester and do not engage with the rest of the community. In addition to this, young people voiced criticism of the facilities in the area, contrasting what was available to them with those in neighbouring Manchester. There was a sense of ongoing antagonism towards the police and a general distrust or dislike of authority. However, an alternative view emphasised the great pride and affection felt for Salford, with people keen to suggest that the area's bad reputation is not warranted and that there is a strong sense of community – "*Everyone knows each other round here.*"

2.4.2 What happened in Salford?
Early in the afternoon of the 9 August, groups of mainly young people began gathering around the precinct where shops anticipating trouble had begun closing early. A window in the precinct was smashed and attempts were

9 August – Salford

09.08.11

14:00 Shops at Salford Shopping City were ordered to close at 2pm amid fears of trouble.

14.00 Groups of youths – many wearing hoods and balaclavas began to congregate near the complex.

14.00 Window smashed at Timpson led to 10 tactical aid unit vans being sent.

14:30 Police blocked the road and were involved in a 30 minute stand-off with young people. The gangs then broke up and the police retreated.

16.20 Around 100 school-age young people gathered at an estate off Churchill Way in Pendleton, near the shopping complex. They were confronted by around 50 police in riot gear with some of the rioters throwing bricks at the officers and their vans.
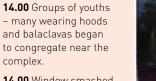

18:00 Trouble broke out again at the shopping complex when a BBC cameraman was assaulted by a group of men just before 6pm. Minutes later a small group of raiders – including children – smashed their way into Bargain Booze at the precinct and stole alcohol. They were seen running away, carrying bags of booze and laughing when the police turned up.

18.45 Two cars were overturned and torched when a mob gathered on Heywood Way. Explosions were heard as the cars blew up and thick black smoke filled the air. A group of riot police came under attack again with more bricks thrown at them – forcing them to retreat.

18.10 The Central Housing Office, run by Salix Homes, was firebombed at 6.10pm with three fire crews arriving to tackle the blaze. Riot police had to be called over to protect the firefighters.

20.00 Gangs began to grow to around 500-strong near the precinct. They started to smash the shutters of shops, trying to force their way inside.

20.00 Lidl was looted – four lads tried to pull down a lamp-post and a car in the Lidl car park was torched.

22.00 A number of shops in the precinct were then smashed up and torched with several buildings reported to be on fire.

22.00 Riot police had to make a cordon to allow firefighters to gain access.

made to provoke the police. The response was largely to block off roads and the police managed to quell the vandalism for only a short time. Separate groups began to congregate and throw missiles at police lines. There was a sense that those involved thought that this was Salford against the police:

> *"Some of the youths near him encouraged him to join in, saying: 'Come on, come on … just pick up a brick, throw it at the police. Come on, come on. For Salford, for Salford.'"* (Young person, Salford)

From late afternoon shops were looted. A Bargain Booze and Cash Converter on the precinct were targeted, as was a Lidl supermarket down the road. Local shops on the Langworthy Road were broken into and the local MP's office window smashed. There was also more serious vandalism: cars, an empty housing office and a disused library were all set on fire. As the evening wore on, looting continued and adults and families were seen stealing food, alcohol and cigarettes. As the local paper reported it:

> *"This was more of a party than an angry riot, as youngsters handed old people packs of cigs, and tins of Carlsberg freshly liberated from LIDL … all that was missing was the DJ. This was a very Salford riot."* (*Salford Star*, 9/8/11)

There is some debate as to whether people from outside the area were involved. Some participants felt outsiders had travelled to Salford, yet others thought this unlikely. Riots and looting were also taking place in Manchester city centre, within walking distance of Salford, but it is not clear whether there was any overlap amongst those involved. Interviewees accorded the rain a major role in clearing the streets and ensuring there was no further flare-up the following day.
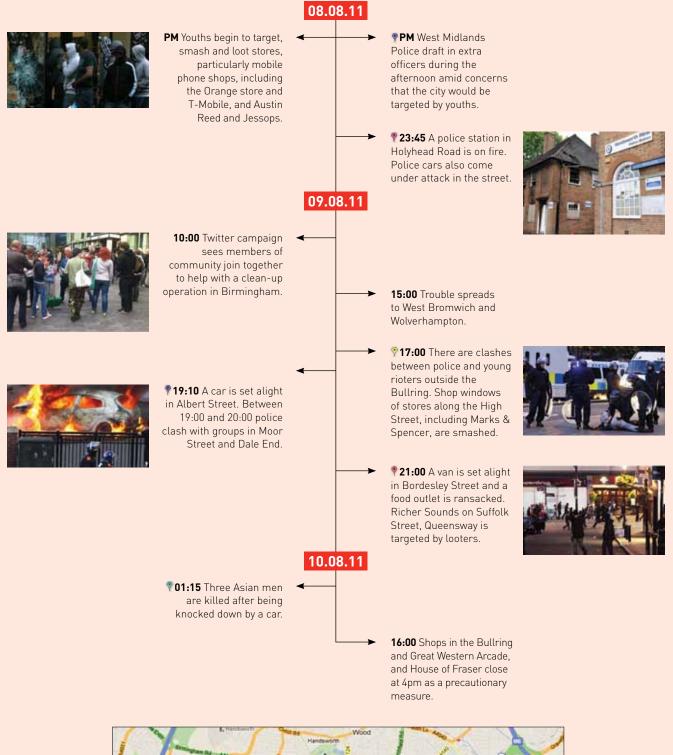
2.5 Birmingham

2.5.1 Background
The rioting and looting in Birmingham was spread over the 8 and 9 of August. It was a complex situation and involved disparate groups of people from around the city and people who travelled in from elsewhere in the West Midlands. Young people and community stakeholders thought that gangs may have been involved in instigating much of the trouble and, as in other areas, a truce was believed to have enabled different gangs to engage in violence and disorder alongside each other. Most of the looting occurred in the city centre and events appeared to spread from the centre into suburban areas such as Lozells, Aston and Handsworth. In common with other case study areas, interviewees identified a lack of opportunities for young people and a poor relationship with the police.

There were also dynamics distinct to some areas of Birmingham. Handsworth is a multi-ethnic area where participants described tensions between Asian and black communities. For some, this dimension has been exaggerated in the media, but it was acknowledged that this is the widespread perception and that there is a history of riots in the area that have been related to, amongst other things, racial tension. Interviewees from a number of areas in Birmingham described their area positively in the daytime, but expressed fear about crime and what they perceived as gang-related violence after dark.

8 and 9 August – Birmingham

08.08.11

PM Youths begin to target, smash and loot stores, particularly mobile phone shops, including the Orange store and T-Mobile, and Austin Reed and Jessops.

PM West Midlands Police draft in extra officers during the afternoon amid concerns that the city would be targeted by youths.

23:45 A police station in Holyhead Road is on fire. Police cars also come under attack in the street.

09.08.11

10:00 Twitter campaign sees members of community join together to help with a clean-up operation in Birmingham.

15:00 Trouble spreads to West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.

17:00 There are clashes between police and young rioters outside the Bullring. Shop windows of stores along the High Street, including Marks & Spencer, are smashed.

19:10 A car is set alight in Albert Street. Between 19:00 and 20:00 police clash with groups in Moor Street and Dale End.

21:00 A van is set alight in Bordesley Street and a food outlet is ransacked. Richer Sounds on Suffolk Street, Queensway is targeted by looters.

10.08.11

01:15 Three Asian men are killed after being knocked down by a car.

16:00 Shops in the Bullring and Great Western Arcade, and House of Fraser close at 4pm as a precautionary measure.

2.5.2 What happened across Birmingham?

The timeline of events in Birmingham is complicated, with events taking place in parallel across different areas. After two days of rioting in London, the city was preparing itself for disturbances: BBM messages were circulating and extra police were drafted in. Early in the evening of 8 August, groups of people, largely masked and hooded, began smashing the windows of high-end shops around the Bullring in the city centre. The looting in the city centre was not preceded by rioting or violence towards the police, but as people dispersed from the city centre back to the suburbs in which they lived, the atmosphere in some of these areas changed and the focus of attention became police stations and local shops.

The following morning, a Twitter campaign encouraged local people to engage in a clean-up of their streets. This did not, however, prevent further trouble the following evening, with disturbances also spreading to West Bromwich and Wolverhampton. Further looting took place in the city centre, and a greater police presence resulted in running battles and more altercations between police and the public. A van was set on fire in the city centre and, as on the previous night, trouble moved back into suburban areas and continued into the early hours of Wednesday 9. It was at around 1.15am that three Asian men were killed having been knocked down by a car in the Winson Green area. There was concern that after this incident, even more violence might occur, but the intervention of one of the men's fathers calling for calm appeared to have a profound effect on local people and no further trouble was reported.

2.6 Unaffected areas

The areas of Firth Park in Sheffield and Poplar in East London appear to share much in common with each other and the five affected areas. Young people described gangs as prevalent in and around Firth Park, with clashes of a territorial nature common. One interviewee had experienced a friend being killed as part of a gang rivalry. A common attitude, however, was that these problems were not as bad as in London. Young people in Poplar were also well aware of problems with gangs in their area, though in common with the affected areas of London, there was a view that people did not have to get mixed up in this. There were contrasting views across both areas as to whether there is a strong community in the areas. In Firth Park, young people were sceptical about the sense of community that existed, but, counter-intuitively, seemed to feel safe in the area and felt it was not as bad a place as outsiders would think. In Poplar, young people described a close community *"where people say hello to each other"* and those from different cultural backgrounds get on well.

In terms of opportunities for young people, a similar picture was painted by the focus group participants in unaffected areas to that described by interviewees in affected areas. Difficulties finding work were apparent across both areas. In Firth Park, there was a view that this was a result of neglect by central and local government and a lack of sufficient investment. In Poplar, a slightly different story emerged, suggesting that there had been investment in and around the area (the Olympics and Westfield shopping centre in Stratford, for example), yet this had not filtered through to jobs for local people. However, opportunities for education and training were felt to be available in Poplar.

In Firth Park, young people felt that rioting could easily have spread to the area, but *"no one had the balls to start it"*. This reflects another view that people in the area would have been fearful of the police response to rioting, who they felt were prepared to deal harshly with any outbreaks of disturbance: *"They'd just batter you."* However, it was felt that all it needed was a spark, for example, an event like the shooting in Tottenham. If rioting had started in Sheffield, young people felt others would have joined in. Young people in Poplar were aware of small events that happened in their area around the time of the riots, but reported that it did not go as far as in other places, *"It wasn't rioting."*

3 Who was involved?

The overview presented in the previous chapter of what happened in each of the areas affected by riots highlights three important points. First, although there were common occurrences across all the areas involved in this study, there were also differences. A single explanation of the riots cannot be applied across all localities. Second, the events in each area encompassed several kinds of behaviour which were different in the way they were enacted (most obviously, rioting and looting). In some cases, these behaviours were occurring at the same time in an area, whilst in others there was a sequence of events (e.g. starting with rioting, going on to looting). Third, these behaviours were not always enacted by the same people (e.g. looters were not necessarily rioters and vice versa).

This chapter describes who was involved in terms of what people did. As this is not a quantitative study, data on the prevalence of young people involved broken down by different demographic characteristics is not available. Data from interviews with young people and stakeholders suggests that all kinds of people were involved: mixed age groups, all ethnicities, people in work, training, education and the unemployed. Consequently, our focus is on understanding *who they were* in terms of *what they did* on the nights in question.

Figure 3.1 – A typology of involvement

Watchers Young people who were present at the incidents and observed some of what happened, but did not become involved in criminal activity	**Bystanders** Happened to be there – lived locally or were passing through when the events occurred **The curious** Deliberately chose to be there to see what was going on
Rioters Young people who were involved in violent disturbances and vandalism	**Protesters** Acted because of a specific grievance or set of grievances **Retaliators** Acted to get their own back on the police or the "system" **Thrill-seekers** Acted to get the excitement or "buzz"
Looters Young people involved in breaking into shops, stealing from broken-into shops or picking up stolen goods left on the street	**Opportunists** Saw the chance to steal things for themselves or family, or to sell on **Sellers** Planned their involvement to maximise their "profits"
Non-involved	**Stay-aways** Chose not to get involved or observe **Wannabes** Weren't there but would have liked to be

Analysis of the accounts of both young people and community informants reveals a behavioural typology that characterises particular types of involvement, illustrated in Figure 3.1 above. These are mutually exclusive behaviours, but the involvement of young people was not necessarily restricted to a single type of behaviour: for example, some young people were both rioters and looters; others started as watchers but got drawn into being rioters. This typology is helpful in understanding the differences between behaviours and, most importantly, the different motivations and triggers that underpin them. The subsequent sections provide more detail on the nature of these behaviours and the diversity within each type. The final section illustrates how some people moved from one type to the other, and their rationale for doing so.

3.1 Watchers

Young people talked about being present at the riots as "watchers". A first group had ended up watching more or less by accident: they happened to be passing through the area when rioting and looting was going on or they lived close to the location of the riots so watched events out of the window or on the street. These "**bystanders**" to the riots sometimes opted to leave the area (if they could) and were frightened by the experience:

> *"I was at home – I live right near where the library was set on fire, so watched it all from bedroom window. I was a bit scared – they battered a cameraman and an old lady. If they can do the shops, why not the houses – so scary."* (Young person, Salford)

Alternatively, young people also chose to stay around to see what would happen or had to venture out for other reasons.

> *I work in a shop sometimes, [name of family business]. On the Saturday night it was smashed up a bit. They had gone down to protect it but they needed to call the police and insurance and that. I had to go. When I was walking up the high street, it was madness. People running around with stuff from shops – people you wouldn't expect, posh people and that … looking at themselves in the mirror.* (Young person, Tottenham)

A second group of "watchers" ("**the curious**") made an active decision to go to where the riots were happening, after finding out about it on the news, or through friends or social media. Participants either went to see if the reports were really true or because they saw what was happening as an "event" which they did not want to miss out on witnessing: it made an exciting change from the normal kind of day.

> *"Was sleeping most of the day. Watched coverage of afternoon on the TV – tried to go but mate's dad wouldn't let us. When Lidl went up in smoke got pics sent by text from mates and went to see what was going on."* (Young person, Salford)

> *"I was curious. That's what made me come out to have a look. But it's another thing picking up a bottle. The things I viewed that day I thought was wrong. … I was curious definitely, but excited? Watching people being fools?"* (Young person, Peckham)

3.2 Rioters

The second group in our typology is "rioters": those young people who committed acts of violent disturbance by, for example, attacking the police, setting fire to buildings or vehicles, throwing bricks or breaking windows. Within this group, behaviour was described in three ways.

First, there were young people who got involved in the riots as "**protesters**" about specific issues or events, in particular the police handling of the Mark Duggan case in Tottenham.

> "We're all there in the first place because of Mark, so protesting as angry because of that. Then 'chicken run' with police, threw things, burnt the car and that seemed like revenge." (Young person, Tottenham)

> "They attacked the police station. It wasn't even his [Mark Duggan's] bullet. The police lied about it … People don't respect the police." (Young person, Peckham)

There were also young people in all the areas who said they got involved in rioting specifically to get their own back on the police for more general or longer-term grievances. These "**retaliators**" saw the riots as an opportunity to "get one over" on the police and, sometimes, on authority in general:

> "People doing it because they're angry at police. Police and people don't have a good relationship and feel mad when get pulled by the police. Government were going to close [swimming] baths and people were angry about this 'cos the only thing for young people to do." (Young person, in custody)

A third group of young people were drawn to rioting because of the excitement. These "**thrill-seekers**" did not generally identify any motivation for their involvement other than the buzz of doing things they couldn't or wouldn't normally do such as smashing things and being chased by the police:

> "I was excited about being in a riot, as had never been in one before and the opportunity was there in [name of town] … as I went into the shop I felt a big (adrenaline) rush." (Young person, in custody)

3.3 Looters

In addition to the types above, there were also young people involved mainly or exclusively as looters, rather than as rioters. This group can be classified as "**opportunists**" and "**sellers**". Opportunists talked about taking their chance to steal something they specifically wanted, for example, going to particular shops and trying things on before stealing them. One young woman described going into the supermarket and getting her weekly shop as usual – except not paying for it, while another young man, when asked about his motivation, simply replied: "*Free trainers.*" The opportunity to steal things to sell was also attractive. However, what distinguished this group from the sellers is that items were not always high value and were selected randomly.

In contrast, sellers took a more planned approach to their theft. They were mainly interested in events as a means of stealing as systematically and profitably as possible. They were described by interviewees as people involved in regular criminal behaviour for whom the riots presented a golden opportunity to get away with as much as possible. These looters were also described by interviewees as "smart" – the ones who successfully masked their identity, had a means of disposing of their stolen items quickly – and as the least likely to get caught.

In some areas local gangs and others with a background of professional criminal activity were thought to be involved. Interviewees linked this with the sight of people arriving from outside the area with vans and expensive cars to get involved in the looting.

3.4 Non-involved

A final group of young people interviewed neither rioted nor looted. Among this group, two clear attitudes can be identified. First, some of those not involved were disturbed by the events and disapproved of those involved. These "**stay-aways**" chose to avoid the riots per se:

> "I was inside planning my future. I couldn't see myself out there. It was stupid." (Young person, Peckham)

Amongst the "stay-aways", however, were those who admitted having been, to varying degrees, tempted to get involved. One girl who was at home and fasting for Ramadan was BBM-ing her friends:

> "I was, like: 'I'm tempted to go, I want some new stuff.' And she was, like: 'Yeah, same.' But then we were, like: 'No, can't be bothered, don't wanna get in trouble.'" (Young person, Clapham Junction)

Another described getting a phone call from friends who were looting, asking what she wanted them to get her. She resisted the temptation because she didn't want the police to be on her case.

However, our interviews identified a second group of young people who would have liked to get involved but were prevented from doing so. These "**wannabes**" sometimes expressed regret that they'd been away when the riots occurred in their area or that they had been stopped from taking part by their parents. Some said they would have been involved if it hadn't been Ramadan. Other deterrents or barriers included: a lack of transport, as the buses stopped running in several places during the riots; existing contact with the criminal justice system, such as already being electronically tagged or on licence for previous offences; and parents making it clear that involvement was not an option. These protective factors are discussed in full in the next chapter.

3.5 Moving between different types of behaviour

As we have noted in the introduction to this chapter, the typology presented is a mutually exclusive classification, yet young people did report more than

one type of behaviour. That is, young people gave clear examples of their involvement beginning in one behavioural group but finishing in another. There were two examples of this transition.

The first was a subset of young people who **started off as watchers but went on to loot**. These young people described different levels of control over their own actions, with some making an active decision to get involved and others feeling they were "caught up" in events in the "spur of the moment". However, the common feature of those in this group was that the transition in behaviour was motivated by *material reward*. Here, individuals described seizing an opportunity to steal something for themselves or their family:

> *"It was literally a moment of madness. Everyone saw everyone else doing it [looting] and so thought: 'I might as well do it as well.' There were 150 to 200 people doing it."* (Young person, in custody)

> *"I went out there to see. I really didn't think it was as bad as people were making out. I was shocked when I saw it but then seeing 80 people doing it [looting] made it look so easy, things led to other things and I did see it as a way out … ."* (Young person, in custody)

In contrast to those whose transition was underpinned by *material reward*, for the second transition group, behaviour change was the opportunity to *escalate their message or statement to society*. For example, there were some young people whose involvement in **rioting transcended into looting**. Here, looting seemed to be an extension of their expression of grievance with the system or police, and so was not about the financial value of goods taken. For example, one young person in custody talked about rioting against the police and then moving on to attack large "chain shops". However, when an independent store or an Oxfam store was targeted, there was noticeable anger amongst the crowd.

This chapter has presented a description of the different types of behaviour by young people, and closed with a broad explanation of why some behaviour began with one intention but ended in another. In the next chapter, we further develop our understanding of the riots by presenting a detailed explanation of individual involvement and non-involvement.

4 Why did young people get involved (or not)?

This chapter describes the motivators for involvement in rioting and/or looting as identified both by young people who were involved, and those who were not. The responses from both groups were very similar – young people identified the same set of immediate motivators whether they themselves had been involved or not. These were generally described in terms of benefiting from an exciting experience; an opportunity to get free stuff; and/or the chance to get back at police.

This, of course, raises the question of why some young people got involved and others did not. The potential gains we describe in this section could be attractive to a lot of young people, many of whom nevertheless chose not to get involved. In explaining this, young people identified a range of factors which helped to "nudge" them or others towards getting involved and a range of "tug" factors which helped to prevent or inhibit their involvement. Some of these factors were situational – they were to do with what was happening on the day. Others were more about the young people themselves – their personal characteristics or family or community relationships – or society more generally.

The "nudge" and "tug" factors we outline in this section go some way to explaining why some young people got involved and some did not. Some of the choices made by individual young people were not the ones you might expect: the young person with a lot to gain and apparently little to lose who nevertheless decided not to get involved; the young person with a lot to lose who still chose to riot or loot. When asked to explain their individual decisions, it became apparent that young people were asking themselves two questions. The first was a fundamental manifestation of the values of young people: their beliefs about what was right and wrong, and about "respect". The second was a more pragmatic assessment of risks and benefits – what are the chances of getting caught in these particular circumstances and how far are those risks offset by the gains of involvement.

Each of these factors and processes: the immediate motivators; the facilitators and inhibitors and the individual choices made by young people are interrelated. They are discussed separately here for clarity, though it was a combination of factors which influenced young people's behaviour (see Chapter 5). This was concisely captured by one 14-year-old who described the overlapping reasons of friends whom he knew had been involved:

> "I think some of them just wanted the free stuff and some of them wanted to get back at the police. … Some of them might have been there because of the cuts, because of the EMA. … There were different reasons why people went there. Some it was for the enjoyment, to be with friends, some because they were angry with the government, the police." (Young person, Peckham)

4.1 Motivators of involvement: what were the benefits?

Three potential gains from involvement in the riots were identified by interviewees as immediate motivators:

• Something exciting to do
• "Free stuff"
• Get back at the police

4.1.1 Something exciting to do

Where young people described their normal lives as boring and talked about *"nothing happening around here"*, the riots were seen as an exciting event, a day like no other.

> *"We was just bored really and obviously nothing like this has ever happened for however long we have been alive. It was a first really, and we decided just to go up there just so we can say we had been there, not to act cool or anything, just to say, it is so big, it will probably be put in history, so we decided to go up there. We were that bored."* (Young person, Birmingham)

However, the excitement was an attraction not just for the bored and under-occupied but also for young people who were otherwise engaged in work or education. In some instances, the events were described in terms of a wild party or, as one young person put it, *"like a rave"*. A sense of glee pervaded these accounts – people were often grinning while describing their experience – a delight that the normal order of things was briefly turned upside down. There was satisfaction in having "put two fingers up" to the "authorities" and pleasure in the memory of a day of disorder and misrule.

> *"It was unusual. It was one day off."* (Young person, Peckham)

The party atmosphere, adrenaline and hype were seen as both encouraging and explaining young people's involvement:

> *"[I felt] excited, adrenaline, scared, but a good scared, like: 'Wow, wow, wow, is this happening?' And the bin on fire was wow. It was a new experience. [I] think it was for everyone. People were excited, especially getting PS3 boxes."* (Young person, Peckham)

4.1.2 The opportunity to get free stuff

As is clear from the previous quotation, for some young people the excitement of the events was also tied up with the opportunity of getting "free stuff". This was a chance for young people to get things they would not otherwise be able to have. The attraction of getting a desirable object for themselves (e.g. trainers, TVs, PS3 boxes) and the chance to make money by selling things on were influential:

"The people who got the most … the most up … it's just opportunity – they just seized it and they didn't keep it. They just took it and sold it." (Young person, Clapham Junction)

"It wasn't to prove a point, just to get free stuff. Perhaps on the first day in Tottenham, people on the walk had a point to prove. Afterwards, it was just a laugh and to get free stuff. People didn't care about getting caught. … People didn't plan it, it just happened. Because everyone was doing it, people thought it was OK to just take free stuff." (Young person, Clapham Junction)

In some cases theft was motivated by a specific need, for example, stealing food, clothes for children. However, there was also scepticism that many of the people involved in looting were doing it out of poverty:

They didn't need that stuff, they just wanted it. Who needs anything in this country? The government helps you. I'm not going to lie – they give us £100 a week for kids. That's cool for us. We can get our food, clothing and then add up money for next week. It's cool. I don't think it was this. It was just a chance of making money. People with Porsche 911. They didn't need it. (Young person, Tottenham)

4.1.3 A chance to get back at the police

Some of the rioting behaviour in Tottenham was described as a direct response to the police handling of the shooting of Mark Duggan.

"The police should have had respect for the Duggan family and answered their questions." (Young person, Peckham)

However, across London, rather than interviewees making a direct link between the shooting of Mark Duggan and the riots, the enduring message from young people (both involved and not involved) and community stakeholders was that there was a lot of anger towards the police for their general treatment of young people in the area and this event provided the hook on which to hang other grievances:

"Without Duggan it wouldn't have happened. Not a lot of people like the police." (Young person, Peckham)

"One reason for the riots is anger with the police. People were wanting to get against the law for everything they have done. It was a chance. They wanted to show police what they could do. Many police round here are just doing their jobs but some are just rude. I have had my licence and ID questioned. I've been pulled over more than once." (Young person, Tottenham)

"Police treats you differently in Peckham than in Westminster – more polite in Westminster, while in Peckham they arrive in riot vans and have you up against the van with spread legs before you can say: 'Excuse me, sir.' This treatment affects young boys, a lot of them who haven't done anything, are innocent. People respond to police treating you like this. … Boys in Peckham are beginning to understand they are not being treated the same way as others. They do understand that – and they have a reputation to uphold." (Young person, Peckham)

"I got stopped [by the police] on my way to training. We asked: 'Why did you stop us?' 'For no reason.' But they don't have to tell, I knew already. We were, like, four black boys in the car. They don't need to tell us the reason. We know." (Young person, Peckham)

Outside London, the shooting of Mark Duggan was referred to by young people, but as part of a chain of related events rather than the key causal factor. For example, young people interviewed in Birmingham were scornful that the rioting there had anything to do with what happened in London:

"I was surprised when it started here [Birmingham], I thought what is the point of bringing something from over there [London] that has nothing to do with us? It was not related [to the shooting]." (Young person, Birmingham)

In common with the views from London, young people from other cities also spoke of poor relationships – in some cases strong animosity – between young people and the police in their area.

"That's what it was – revenge against the police for petty things they'd done us for." (Young person, Salford)

Community stakeholders also spoke of poor relationships between young people and the police. For example, young people in Salford were described by some stakeholders as having a confrontational relationship with police – and in some cases an intense hatred of police.

"It was an explosion of anger to police and authority in general who have let them down. Possibly the only way to be heard when they feel no one listens or does anything about their problems." (Community stakeholder, Salford)

In Tottenham, residents and community stakeholders described antagonism between the police and young people being entrenched through previous generations. This picture was not dissimilar in the unaffected areas, where young people and community stakeholders reported the same issues. Young people in particular felt they were targeted because of their age rather than their behaviour.

4.2 Factors which facilitated or inhibited involvement

The immediate motivators outlined above, despite their attraction, were not enough to trigger some young people's involvement. When asked why they did or did not get involved, young people described things which helped to "nudge" them into taking part (facilitators) and things which they felt had helped to "tug" them away from getting involved (inhibitors). These factors were identified by young people involved and not involved and were similarly reflected in the explanations offered by community stakeholders.

As summarised in the table below, some of these factors were situational: they were associated with what happened on the day, where young people were, what they were doing and who they were with.

However, some of the facilitators and inhibitors were brought to the events by the individual: the characteristics and circumstances of young people or the context of their family, community or society in general that made them more or less susceptible to involvement.

Table 4.1 – Factors affecting decision-making of young people

	Facilitators	Inhibitors
Situational	*Group processes*: Feeling disinhibited and swept along by the power of the group, seeing others "get away with it", feeling anonymous *Peer pressure*: Friends getting involved *Information*: Seeing it on the TV, getting texts/Facebook/BBM messages *Circumstances*: Not otherwise occupied, it was nearby/easy to get to *Presence of authority figure*: No adult telling them not to, everybody was doing it and nobody seemed to be getting caught	*Group processes*: Actively thinking toward future goals and not focussing on the "here and now" (see also individual factors) *Peer pressure*: Friends not involved *Information*: Didn't get any messages, not watching TV *Circumstances*: More difficult to get to (further away, no buses) *Presence of authority figure*: Parents, relatives or youth workers telling them not to
Individual	*Previous criminal activity*: Easy to get involved, "This is what they do round here" *Attitudes towards authority*: Cynicism/anger towards politicians, authority, negative experience of the police *Prospects*: Poor job prospects, low income, limited hope for the future, "Nothing to lose"	*Previous criminal activity*: Been caught once, know the risks *Attitudes towards authority*: No negative experience of the police *Prospects*: In work or expectations of work, aspirations – a lot to lose
Family or Community	*Family attitudes*: Relatives not disapproving *Community*: Attachment to a community with a culture of low-level criminality	*Family attitudes*: Disapproving, "Not brought up like that" *Community*: Attachment to a community with pro-social values/culture (including religious communities)
Societal	*Belonging:* Little sense of ownership or stake in society *Poverty and materialism:* Desire for material goods, but no means to pay for them	*Belonging:* Sense of "ownership" or stake in society

4.2.1 Situational nudges and tugs

Group processes
In the interviews with young people involved in looting in particular, the disinhibiting effect of seeing many other young people stealing, and being seen to get away with the theft, was described as a clear influence on their own impulsive involvement. This was linked to the experience of the riots as a time where normal rules of behaviour did not seem to apply. Young people described seeing other people stealing things, including those they would

normally view as "respectable": For example, older people, mums with young children, and thinking that if all these people are doing it, then it must be OK.

"Lot of people thought they wouldn't get nicked – too many of us. It was the excitement. People were cheering, like. It was like a party, sitting on the roofs of cars opening cans." (Young person, Salford)

"There was this big group of people running past, down Peckham High Street. It was like a movie, so many people shouting and screaming, shops broken into and broken glass everywhere. So many youths, so many policemen, so many people I recognised, laughing, having fun, literally joking." (Young person, Peckham)

Young people also described seeing images of the riots and looting in other places where people appeared to be getting away with it. This coverage added weight to the notion that: "If they can do it there, we can do it here."

"They put it on the news straight away. And basically, they just globalised it and let people know they could do what they want at this time and nothing would happen. So, to be honest, they just put their foot it in, really. And by showing it global, it spreaded round the country." (Young person, Tottenham)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, observing lots of people involved in rioting and looting acted to "nudge" some young people into getting involved, particularly those who had initially just gone to watch. However, as the events progressed in each area, there were descriptions of behaviour changing and young people gave accounts of feeling scared because things were "turning nasty" or police tactics were becoming more interventionist. As things changed, the "nudge" factors turned into "tug" factors, deterring the further involvement of some young people.

It may well be suggested that "blaming the power of the group" is a convenient post-hoc rationalisation, tailored to put a socially desirable spin on what were antisocial events, extensively portrayed by the media. However, to counter that suggestion, the prison sample was particularly quick to acknowledge they had committed a crime and were not trying to justify their behaviour. There was evidence to refute the "social desirability" excuse in the manner in which previous convictions were readily disclosed by young people. Finally, some young people who described seeing an antisocial group as the initial pull factor, also went on to talk about subsequent motivations and behaviours in shops that were explicitly aligned to personal, material gain.

It was a moment of madness. … I didn't have no idea of what I was going [into the shop for], I just went in. And then I saw it [the TV], everyone else was looking for TVs and so I said: 'I'm going to quietly take this one … '" (Young person, in custody)

In contrast, there were also young people who described being on the streets during the riots, watching the group, but deciding not to get involved in antisocial behaviour. Some of these people described being able to counter impulsive "here-and-now thinking", with thoughts about their future plans or long-term goals, and what they had to lose.

Media and information

Young people were generally able to describe quite vividly how they found out about the riots. Television news was clearly important, with young people also receiving more information about local events via social media (Facebook and BBM) and text messaging. From young people's accounts, there can be little doubt that the media, including social media, played a part in shaping involvement. Whilst social media did not necessarily trigger involvement, it undoubtedly speeded up the exchange of information and increased the number of young people aware of the events as they were happening – thereby giving more of them the chance to get involved. Some young people interviewed in prison particularly emphasised the role of BBM broadcasts in telling them and others *"what was happening and where to go next"*.

The portrayal of events in news media was also described as a "nudge" factor. Young people talked about watching events in different parts of the country unfold on the news and local reporting on real time TV which showed "people getting away with it", the police being outnumbered or responding in a low-key fashion. These news stories were described as having encouraged young people to get involved and creating a sense of momentum, often in combination with more direct, local information:

> *I was watching the news on Monday and thought is it really this bad, and my sister phoned me and said that the [name of London road] was really bad, Me being nosy, I decided to leave my house and have a look, to see if it's as bad as everyone is making out.* (Young person, in custody)

> *"People could either see it from their house or saw it on TV. It was easy to find out what was happening. Sky had a live update."* (Young person, Peckham)

However, for some young people the television and social media was a protective factor. That is, there were examples of people who described the television coverage as "scary", and in some cases the social media messages gave information on areas to avoid which helped them to avoid involvement.

It is also important to recognise the positive role social media had, as it was also used by communities to discourage rioting in their area. An example of this was a co-ordinated response by members of the community such as the police, local organisations and young people across Sheffield. Young people and community stakeholders in the Firth Park area suggested that the authorities were provided with intelligence about posts on social media which were then removed. Another strategy deployed was "counter posting" which involved young people using social and print media to call for calm in their area. This message was also replicated in the mainstream local press which celebrated the absence of rioting in the region. Young people reported being very aware of these campaigns.

Where the events were happening

Some of the areas affected by riots were very close to where the young people involved live. In Salford, for example, the events focused on the shopping precinct which is surrounded by flats and housing estates. Similarly, in Peckham, the Old Kent Road is in close proximity to some participants' homes. For some young people, the events were taking place just across the

road and they got involved because they were there and it was easy to do so –
had the riots only been taking place in nearby Manchester, some of the young
people in Salford would not have bothered to go. In Birmingham, however,
with much of the initial looting occurring in the city centre, those that were
involved spoke of how they had travelled to "see what was happening" and
this being viewed as "lower risk" because so many were doing so. However,
others in the city had chosen not to do so because they rarely travelled out of
their area. The locality of the rioting could, therefore, encourage involvement
or act as an inhibitor.

Evidence from the unaffected areas suggests that urban planning acted as
"nudge" or tug. Private spaces such as Canary Warf were less attractive to
loot because of high levels of surveillance and security. This was contrasted
with the "typical" high street:

> *I think [Canary Wharf] is too open. … Places like Lewisham that got looted
> is one big place, so you could have 1000 people looting. … You could walk
> away with a telly on your back and the police aren't taking no notice
> because you're one person. Canary Warf … all you've got is four roads to get
> out of there; someone is going to notice some moron with 40-inch plasma
> on their shoulder and CD player under their arm.* (Young person, Poplar)

What the young person was doing
The appeal of something exciting to do is stronger for those who are not
involved in doing much else. Some young people we interviewed did not have
regular occupation; they were without jobs and had few alternative structured
activities. In addition, the events took place during the school holidays, thereby
increasing the number of unoccupied young people. The boredom linked to
nothing better to do was described as an important "nudge" factor by young
people. Conversely, being otherwise occupied through education, work, an
apprenticeship or some other activity was described as a "tug" factor.

> *It was summer, people had nothing to do. But those people weren't going to
> school the next day or going to work. They didn't have to go to college, they
> didn't have to go to work. If it happened now, less people would be involved
> – 70% of people wouldn't be there. The people who were there, they don't
> have work, so they just take the money or get arrested. They don't care.*
> (Young person, Tottenham)

In Poplar, community stakeholders reported that youth services in youth
clubs and other community centres were kept open on the nights around the
riots. Youth workers and other staff members made efforts to advertise this
and encourage people to make use of what was on offer.

As might be expected, young people were vocal in their call for more things to
do in their area. However, they had support from many adults too, including
those who had no immediate cause to be sympathetic towards them, as
illustrated by this exchange from a stakeholder focus group discussion. The
shopkeeper quoted here had their shop badly looted in the Handsworth area;
the resident quoted is also a community figure who is heavily involved with
local people and works in the area:

Interviewer: *What would have prevented the riots here?*

Shopkeeper: *What is needed is kids having somewhere to go.*

Resident: *Thank you, yes, facilities.*

Interviewer: *Would that really make a difference though, to prevent riots happening?*

Shopkeeper: *Of course facilities would help. After school clubs in the community, they can talk to people in the community. Kids have nothing else to do but sit in front of the computer, TV or on the street, nothing positive to go to; if they went to youth centre they did not have to pay for, that would help.*
(Community stakeholder group, Birmingham)

There was, however, a view held by community stakeholders across the affected areas that suggested there was actually a low level of engagement with the facilities that did exist. Rather than just more facilities, it was seen as important to address some of the reasons for this, such as a lack of trust amongst young people for authority, and giving young people a sense of ownership of facilities.

What friends and peers were doing
Young people did not get involved in the riots on their own. Consequently, attending with friends had a bearing on the extent of their involvement. Young people talked about not wanting to be left out and described the process of how groups of friends, or people they knew of, went from talking about what was happening to actually getting involved:

I was coming back from training and I saw like a lot of people in the main part of [name of town] and thought: "What's going on?" So, I went home and dropped of my stuff and came back.

Interviewer: *Why did you drop off your stuff and come back?*

A couple of my friends was there.

Interviewer: *But why didn't you say to yourself: "I'm going to stay home, stay out of it?"*

I got a phone call from a friend when I was at home, he said I should come out and meet him, so I said: "Alright, I'll come and meet you."
(Young person, in custody)

More detailed descriptions of pressure from friends were often provided by people who had resisted the invitation to join in:

"They were ringing, texting, BBMs and asking me: "You wanna come?" I was, like, "No, not coming. No I think I'll go boxing instead, thank you very much. Get arrested for me.' … Then, later, more of it: 'You coming, you coming?' And I was, like: 'No, I'm still not coming!'" (Young person, Clapham Junction)

Encouragement to get involved did not just come from peers. Some talked about older people, including family members urging young people to get involved.

> *"Sometimes it is just pure peer pressure, that is what I think happened in the riots. Because their friends, their mother, their father, their ... they are like: 'My father is doing it, my aunt is doing, my cousin is doing it, I will just do it.'"* (Young person, Birmingham)

However, peer influence was also described as a "tug" factor by young people:

> *"Let me put it this way: most of my friends are not into that [rioting, crime], but if I had friends that were into it, then I probably would be into it. But most of my friends. if I linked into them and said: 'Oh, let's go rob a store!' they ain't gonna do it, so it would be me alone. So I am not going to do it."*
> (Young person, Birmingham)

What authority figures were doing
Adults, particularly parents, were described as playing an important role in preventing some young people from getting involved. This was either through direct intervention: refusing to allow young people out of the house, calling or texting to check their whereabouts and safety; or indirectly, with young people knowing their parents (or youth workers) would be horrified if they got involved: *"My mum would kill me."* Some appreciated their parent's concern while others resented it. One 14-year-old described the anger of his strict mother when he sneaked out of the house for a second time *"because he was curious"*, while another was upset that he was missing out because his equally strict father had kept him at home.

The strength of parents as inhibitors depended to some extent on whether they were around or not to actively prevent young people from going to where the riots were occurring and on the degree of their "control" – older young people being generally less susceptible to parental restraint. This situation was felt to be more pronounced in difficult economic times with community stakeholders suggesting that parents were more likely to have to be out working, sometimes working only or additionally in the evening. One young man, currently in prison for riot-related offences, said he had deliberately not taken his mobile with him when he went out because he knew his mother would have rung and ordered him home. Another young man in custody talked about how his parents had tried to stop him but he hadn't listened.

In Poplar, community stakeholders reported that direct action was taken by family intervention officers on the nights of the riots. Officers were making contact with young people and parents of young people from what were described as "vulnerable families" to try and encourage the young people not to get involved in rioting and parents to keep their children at home.

As discussed above, and related to the role of authority figures, there was also the perception of the police not intervening to stop people from rioting or looting:

> *"I saw one man hitting the police. They were just standing there with their riot shields not doing anything."* (Young person, Peckham)

These situational factors give some insight into why some young people got involved and others did not. But the extent to which young people were susceptible to these was influenced by a range of other factors related to their individual circumstances and contexts. These are explored in the following sections.

4.2.2 Individual facilitators and inhibitors

Previous criminal activity
Being in trouble with the police in the past appeared to influence behaviour in two ways: either the consequences of previous criminal activity acted as a protective factor to becoming involved in the riots; or these events provided an opportunity for those who might consider stealing anyway, to do this more easily.

Young people who did not get involved, suggested that their prior experience of being in trouble sometimes acted as a deterrent:

> *"I was in trouble with the police before. I didn't want to be arrested. I've been arrested before. Put in handcuffs. It's not nice"* (Young person, Peckham)

One young man described how he had done "stupid things" in the past and "been in with the wrong crowd" but had learnt from the consequences of this. He had resisted heavy pressure from friends on his estate to join the looting and speculated that if they knew what it would be like if they got caught, they would not have got involved:

> *On the night, people were asking me: "Come on, come out." But I said no. I don't cuss them for doing it. It's up to you, It's your life, not mine. But just know, that if you get caught, you're pissed. You go to court, these people don't know, they might have been arrested and let off, but they've never been to Crown Court, never been remanded … they don't realise that if they get arrested for looting they ain't getting bail. And then, you go to Crown Court and you're sitting there and it sinks in your heart, you're waiting to get picked up and transferred. That's when the shit hits the fan, and they'll be crying their eyes out wishing they never got involved. I've been through it myself.* (Young person, Tottenham)

Young people who had been in gangs previously described how they had come to recognise that gang members were only tough when they were together. One young male told of an older friend who had taught him that it was OK to be your own person and do what you think is right. He was now able to make his own decisions and not feel pressured to do what others do. However, in the context of the riots there was a side of him that thought about getting free stuff and he described himself as having been *"tempted, very tempted"*, thinking of all the stuff he could have, *"stuff he could get for his girlfriend, his mum, his nan"*. (Young person, Clapham Junction)

Alternatively, young people who were not involved in the riots talked about those who did as "the sort of people who do that kind of thing". There was a sense that if you are already involved in criminal activity, the opportunity presented by the riots was too good to pass up:

These guys are stealing and robbing the whole time. They see a time when no one's stopping them, what are they going to do? (Young person, Tottenham)

It should be noted, however, that this view was not held by any young people who were involved; perhaps unsurprisingly, none of them cited their criminal nature or know-how as a facilitator to their actions in the riots.

Attitudes towards those with power and authority

As described in Chapter 2, interviewees described an antagonistic relationship between young people and the police across the affected areas. The view that some young people were more likely to get involved in the riots because of previous negative experiences with the police was clearly expressed across the whole sample.

There were few positive comments about the police in general, even from young people who were not involved in the riots. There was, however, a tension throughout these accounts of how the police should have dealt with the riots. One view was an acknowledgment of the challenges they faced on the nights of the riots:

"The cops did their best, I mean 1000 people out there and 200 cops – that is like one man against the world. They did brilliant – look at how many [rioters] got caught. Why would I criticise them?" (Young person, Birmingham)

There was another view, however, that felt the police should have intervened more swiftly, with young people describing them looking on.

"In [Clapham] Junction, there were police officers there, but they chose to do nothing because they didn't think they could hold all of them off. That's why they introduced the plastic bullets to warn them off. I don't think it was the amount of police there, its just that they chose not to do nothing."
(Young person, Clapham Junction)

Young people did describe becoming aware of a "hardening" of police tactics during the course of the riots in some areas. Once the police intervened more strongly, people began to disperse as they realised the risks associated with their involvement were increasing (i.e. people were getting caught and they were more likely to get arrested as well). Rumours that the police were going to use rubber bullets or that indiscriminate arrests were occurring also had an effect.

So one view of young people and community stakeholders was that to prevent riots occurring in the future, the police should intervene sooner and use stronger tactics. There is a tension, however, in the accounts of young people between feeling more punitive tactics should have been used in the riots, but also being critical of such approaches in other circumstances, as there were concerns expressed about the behaviour of police when they did intervene more strongly.

"Police cars had blocked the area off and were stopping people, filming it on their phones; they were hitting this guy and he was like shouting: 'I'm down already.' But they kept hitting him." (Young person, Peckham)

There was a view that these incidents made young people see the police in an even more negative light. One community stakeholder in Tottenham explained that young people were critical of harsh tactics when they weren't necessary but welcomed them when police protection was really needed, a view reflected by this young male from the same area:

When you're not doing anything, just hanging with your friends, any group of kids, they will harass them. But, then on that night, with places burning, they weren't there. When we needed them, they let this happen. They took too long to get this under control. … So people don't respect the police. (Young person, Tottenham)

Young people, community stakeholders and local residents thought that improving relations with the police more generally was an important factor in making future riots less likely.

"Police need to be more open. Just a short statement after Mark Duggan's death would have helped. And if any police officer does anything wrong they should be dealt with. Need to show that they are not above the law themselves. We need to be able to trust them." (Young person, Tottenham)

It was not just the police who came in for criticism from young people. There were expressions of anger and resentment about others in authority, particularly politicians. Engagement in formal politics was rarely mentioned, except as being seen as irrelevant by young people:

"My mates – I don't talk politics with them – they aren't interested, don't vote. Young men like me think politics is a middle-class hobby, whatever party, and working class think nothing is going to change." (Young person, Salford)

While this alienation from the political process was seen as a facilitator of the riots by some community stakeholders, there was awareness of political issues among young people. Particular anger was expressed about MPs' expenses and cynicism about the motives of politicians and the greed of bankers. It was thought there was one rule for the rich and one for the poor:

"People don't trust government, the council – local services in general. The MP is not popular – over-claiming on expenses and when she was caught she said: 'Don't worry I'll just write you a cheque.' People think she's in it for money and not the people." (Young person, Salford)

Finally, there were young people who were simply puzzled by government spending priorities:

"Keep hearing about the government being in debt etc, but as soon as the looting had finished, heard that the government had set up a fund for £20 million, just like that, for companies that were uninsured. Shows there is money but not for the youth." (Young person, Clapham Junction)

Prospects and aspirations
In a variety of ways, young people and community stakeholders distinguished between young people who had a sense of something to lose from any

involvement in the riots and those who did not. Hope of a better future through education and employment was seen as the main constituent of this:

"I've hung around with bad people in the past but have avoided getting into bother. I wanted to get a job so, when I left school, I stopped hanging around with them. When I first left school I had no money – I didn't want to live life with no money so I was set on getting a job. This scheme could get me an apprenticeship so I came here. After the apprenticeship, there's a chance you'll get kept on." (Young person, Salford)

Used to be in trouble with the police but has plans for the future, at university and just did a secondment at a big finance company. Says he'll be able to buy dozens of TVs if he wants later on. Thinks those involved in the riots haven't planned their future. (Young person, Peckham)

"One mate got an eight-month stretch – it was a stupid mistake. The guys who didn't do it have got their heads screwed on. If they want a job, prison on the CV isn't going to look good. All I want is a job – if I was given the chance of a job, I'd work through snow and ice and I wouldn't let them down." (Young person, Salford)

These young people thought getting a job was going to be hard because unemployment was so high in their neighbourhoods, and they knew people who had recently been laid off, but they still aspired to work. The same picture of local opportunities was described by other young people yet, having been unemployed since leaving school, concluded their prospects were bleak and work unlikely. These young people felt they had little to lose by their involvement.

Community stakeholders described some young people who saw themselves as being "on the scrapheap" while still in their teens, and how the recession and government cuts had exacerbated problems for people who were already poor, including the young.

4.2.3 Family and community facilitators and inhibitors

Family attitudes and behaviour
The individual's attitudes towards criminal behaviour were commonly linked to the attitudes of their families, particularly parents. How young people are brought up was viewed as very important both in preventing and encouraging bad behaviour:

"Some parents are too soft – don't instill discipline, even encourage kids to get into trouble. Don't set a good example." (Young person, Clapham Junction)

"My mum said: 'Don't you dare go outside the house.' I was joking: 'I could go and get myself some new trainers, I could get you some new trainers.' And she just looked at me and I just put my head down in shame. She took it very serious. I was raised up properly." (Young person, Peckham)

Young people who were not involved reflected on how they would feel if they had been and sometimes talked about bringing shame on their family.

A small group of young people interviewed in Clapham suggested this was particularly true for girls:

"Girls must have self-respect and pride. It's not right for a girl to be involved. Not ladylike." (Young person, Clapham Junction)

There was also criticism of women looting, especially if they had young children or took their children with them. Some of the young people we interviewed were parents themselves and talked about their sense of responsibility towards their children acting as an inhibitor to getting involved in the riots:

"Why didn't I do it? Having children – I'm supposed to be responsible." (Young person, Salford)

Being part of a family with a history of criminality was thought likely to make involvement in the riots more acceptable for some young people. However, one 14-year-old pointed out that the police were more likely to identify those involved in looting if they had family involved in crime, and said that this knowledge of the risk of being caught prevented her even being tempted to get involved, despite knowing people who were.

Influence of a community with anti- or pro-social values
Linked to family attitudes, was the view that young people were more or less likely to get involved in rioting or looting depending on the kind of community they were attached to. Young people and community stakeholders described some neighbourhoods as having a prevailing culture of low-level criminality with negative attitudes towards the police and authority in general:

"This place is shit. Boring. Full of scruffy houses and robbing bastards."
(Young person, Salford)

In such circumstances, even young people who did not get involved themselves, talked about criminal behaviour being normalised. For example, this young man in Salford spoke of his mates:

"Half of their mams and dads don't work, half of them are bent. Even I get to think it's normal, just how it is and … I wasn't brought up like that."
(Young person, Salford)

By contrast, some young people talked about the importance of belonging to a community (or a group or family within it) that opposed criminal behaviour:

"I didn't get involved in the riots. I don't really know why some people go down that route, as I didn't myself. There are options. I guess I was lucky in that I had a lot of support at home, and a youth club from when I was still in primary. Have had a great life here. The community is alright. It isn't so much the area that makes up your experience growing up here – it is your own individual circumstances. It depends on how tight a family you are and who you happen to meet. I have a stable family and that is important." (Young person, Tottenham)

It was also suggested that communities needed places for everyone to come together, not just young people. It was felt that better community relations

would ensue if adults and young people did more things together as a community. In the unaffected areas, participants spoke of the importance of a sense of community. Young people and community stakeholders found it difficult to put their finger on exactly what it was about their community that meant it *"would not let rioting happen here"*. Yet it was clear there was something stopping the community turning in on itself:

> *"Around here it's a place where everyone pulls together. … There are different people but we're on the same side. … You keep your head down and get on with it."* (18–25 group, Firth Park)

Alongside the community influence, a clear theme emerging from some accounts was the role that religion played as a protective factor:

> *"If I did this, my God wouldn't be happy. My parents wouldn't be happy. I have a bright future, my record is good. Imagine I did something that stupid, spoil my good reputation."* (Young person, Peckham)

> *"Coming to mosque is a diversion, a safe haven. It is a community base, [I'm] happy to be here. [But] if it had not been for the month of Ramadan, I think I might have got involved – not so much for the looting, but just to be part of the vibe. The heated atmosphere was exciting."* (Young person, Tottenham)

In Poplar, one of the unaffected areas, it was reported that a set of common values amongst a very different social group had acted as an inhibitor to rioting taking place locally. It was suggested that a "moral code" amongst gangs meant that rather than riot, they would protect the area from others:

> Participant: *We had gangs from here protecting the shops, saying: 'No, you're not doing it here, you're not coming from Tottenham … to try and riot here. We're not going to let you do it.'*
>
> Interviewer: *Why weren't [the gangs] joining in?*
>
> Participant: *… it goes back to how we were brought up. … We hang around in gangs, we make sure we got each others back … but you're not going see us going and mugging someone who's earning a living.*
> (18–25 group, London)

4.2.4 Societal factors
A set of contextual factors relating to broader social issues were also mentioned in young people's accounts of their behaviour and in those provided by community stakeholders. The specific impact of these factors is difficult to determine, but they form the social fabric that young people are part of and so may provide clues as to why different individuals were more or less susceptible to the nudges and tugs identified in previous sections.

Belonging – having a stake in society
Feeling part of or having a stake in their society was seen as a protective factor – and the lack of one a facilitator of involvement in the riots. Young people who were involved in voluntary and community work alongside

older people were clear that this meant they had not wanted "to trash their own backyard".

There was a sense that too many young people were disengaged – for example, they were not part of their community in any positive way and they were uninterested in, or cynical about mainstream politics. There was a belief that young people did not think they could change anything through being involved in community or political action and that making trouble was the only way they could get heard. The immediate trigger of boredom and the desire for excitement was linked to a lack of legitimate things to do and places to go.

> *"Need to give kids more stuff to do. Prison is not enough to stop them taking part – they need to feel they are worth something."* (Young person, in custody)

> *"Need more opportunities for young people to express themselves and be listened to – feel like they're making a difference and influencing lives."* (Young person, in custody)

> *"There's not much for anyone to do. Right where I live, there used to be a neighbourhood football club – but man who ran it is too poorly to keep going and the young people who used to be involved are now causing trouble. Youth centres are being cut – one where a friend works is under threat and they're trying to fundraise, but nobody has any money for themselves, never mind for fundraising."* (Young person, Salford)

In contrast, young people in Firth Park felt that there were opportunities for them to influence improvements in their local area. A particular example was raised by a community stakeholder, where young people were consulted and worked closely with the local authority to make improvements in local services and how different groups worked together. While not directly cited as a protective factor by young people, community stakeholders felt that having these avenues open to young people would make them less likely to respond to grievances they may have through violent disorder and rioting.

There was also a view expressed by young people and community stakeholders that society was fundamentally unfair in its treatment of young people. Community stakeholders in both Peckham and Tottenham talked about the impact of decisions around youth services, not just on cuts, being taken without consultation with young people. Another view was that this unfairness was exemplified in the government's way of dealing with the economic deficit:

> *"Government has a problem – the deficit – but what they're doing is taking money from those who haven't got it and giving it to those that have."* (Young person, Peckham)

Some young people thought that the image of teenagers presented in the media is negative and unfair:

> *"People think this was teenagers running riot but actually it was mainly adults – 18- to 21-year-olds. We are scapegoated by everybody. We come*

last in our community, but we are the next generation. At this rate, we will be worse than the generation above us." (Young person, Tottenham)

There was a further concern expressed by stakeholders about the portrayal of the riots as a black issue:

"The media made out it was a black issue – black men doing the rioting and looting, but if you were there, it was people of all races. … It was everyone."
(Young person, Birmingham)

Fundamentally, there was a feeling amongst stakeholders, in particular those working closely with young people, that the "message" being sent to young people needed to change. These views related to government spending cuts and how young people may perceive such actions in terms of their place in society. This is explored further in the section below.

Poverty and materialism

Young people and community stakeholders explained the involvement of some people in looting in terms of a lack of income. They described life for some people as a constant struggle:

"The price of cigarettes have just gone up and the government just keep putting tax on it, and it is quite hard to get jobs right now and I think people do get worked up about it, because just everyday, just everyday things they are not able to get. They don't get to treat themselves. A lot of families are struggling, I think, and so I think the kids who have to live with hard lives, hard backgrounds, they got excited that they could get up town and get free stuff. They didn't really care about the consequences, they didn't really think about it, because they have not really had good backgrounds." (Young person, Birmingham)

Young people also talked about the impact of changes to EMA and the difficulty of managing on the money they received if they were out of work or in training. This young man was on a training scheme and explained:

"You can't live on the money people get on job seekers. It costs £30 a week just to get here on bus fares and I get £107 a fortnight. You can't manage on that. When I get paid, I end up with £40 to live on [for a fortnight] – I'm always chasing the next lot of money. … I live with my mum but pay rent and do everything else for myself, so I have to make money." (Young person, Salford)

Young people also talked about EMA indirectly – the allowance had not been cut from them personally (the allowance was discontinued rather than taken from anyone already receiving it), yet, according to some community stakeholders, knowledge of the policy was part of the wider negative message being sent to young people.

Discussion also focused on the limited job prospects for young people. Youth unemployment was noted to be very high in many areas. Young people interviewed often expressed desperation at their slim chances of finding a job and described their options as very limited. As a young man in Birmingham commented:

"The majority of people my age, like, resort to street life because you know you can earn money and you make a lot of close friends and it is easier to live that sort of lifestyle and you get what you want really … but if there were more opportunities out there, then I think it would attract a lot more people my age to brighten up and look to the future and see the opportunities that are there for them, instead of resorting to the streets." (Young person, Birmingham)

Improved employment opportunities were not just felt to be significant for giving young people more "hope" but also as a way to reduce the effect of peer pressure to get involved in crime, as this young man described:

"More jobs would definitely help. If you have 50 youths living in Handsworth and even 40 out of that 50 [are] working, and I mean, if that 10 youths, the ones not working, link up with the 40, and say: 'Let's go at this store,' the 40 most likely will say: 'Nah man, I ain't got no time for that, I got a job.' And then the 10, they are such a small amount they ain't going to do it by themselves." (Young person, Birmingham)

In parallel with this situation of poverty and struggle, a materialistic culture that fostered greed amongst young people was also cited as a factor in the looting by both young people and community stakeholders. What they described was the gap between what was portrayed in the media as representing the "good life" to which people should aspire, and what young people in their communities could actually have, given the poverty of income and opportunity.

"Those people without hope, they see others with these things, and they want them, getting trainers and stuff, TVs." (Young person, Tottenham)

"This country is quite cold – greed, advertisement, money, adverts on TV, greed, greed, greed and family. Like the iPhone advert: 'If you haven't got it, you haven't got IT.'" (Young person, Peckham)

"Find it sad that people talk proudly about what happened – I did this shop and that shop. Terrible that they think this is a good thing, and can't walk down the street with a normal pair of jeans on. It has to be designer and acceptable. Society has made us feel not part of things because we don't have the latest stuff." (Young person, Tottenham)

In addition, there was a feeling amongst some community stakeholders that, for some young people, this need to have material goods was not combined with a work ethic that would enable them to meet these needs:

"Today, with some young people, you feel like they want it now without working for it." (Community stakeholder, Clapham Junction)

4.3 Making choices

Young people both involved and not involved in the riots were subject to the influences we have outlined in Chapter 4. Yet, young people in broadly similar circumstances made different decisions about whether to get involved. Those

with a stronger stake in the community, higher aspirations for the future and a family which discourages antisocial behaviour may have had limited motivation to get involved; but some still did just as some of those lacking these influences did not get involved.

It is apparent that some young people may not have made a conscious choice at all. Interviewees have described how they didn't even think about it – it would never have occurred to them to get involved in rioting or looting. Events occurred so quickly for others that they hardly had time to think and got swept along with the tide. As a consequence, when we asked young people why they thought they had made the choices they did, it was often very difficult for them to answer.

Despite this, there were two clear decision-making processes evident in the responses we received, irrespective of how conscious these decision were at the time. First, young people made choices according to their beliefs about what was right and wrong, and about "respect". Second, young people made an assessment of the risks of involvement weighed against its benefits. These two questions were affected by the factors described in Chapter 4 in different ways.

4.3.1 Beliefs about right or wrong

Fundamentally, a key question that young people asked themselves, was whether getting involved in the different actions the riots were comprised of was right or wrong. As acknowledged above, this was not always a conscious process, but in describing their reasons for involvement or otherwise, this was an important consideration. This was based on beliefs about what was right and wrong which informed their choices. Three broad views could be identified. First, a very explicit moral code which said that all criminal behaviour is wrong; second, a more nuanced set of values, with young people talking about some behaviours in some circumstances being "more wrong" or "less wrong" than others, and expressing a sense that the rules of the game were different on those evenings, changed by events elsewhere. Finally, there was a view that the violent response was, in itself, justified.

Young people holding the first view, attributed their beliefs both to personal characteristics (e.g. being "strong-minded") and upbringing ("I wasn't brought up like that."). These beliefs were important explanations for some young people as to why they chose not to get involved in the riots or looting.

However, the more nuanced perspective suggested that morality is not necessarily fixed: that situational factors could "nudge" people into behaviour they would not normally consider:

> *"People who aren't bad people were considering going down there because it was a chance to get stuff for free – the police were not around to stop them."* (Young person, Clapham Junction)

Not all young people who did not get involved would describe the behaviour of rioters and looters as simply "wrong". As we note in the previous section, young people more commonly referred to those involved as "stupid" –for taking the risk and/or getting caught (including young people in prison calling their own behaviour "stupid"). Young people who knew those who had been convicted and imprisoned for riot-related offences, sometimes expressed

sadness at the consequences for someone whom they described as "making a stupid mistake".

It was also the case that not everyone thought taking "free stuff" was entirely wrong, even if they didn't and wouldn't do it themselves.

"There was an opportunity to get something for free and they took it, whether that makes them bad people or not, I don't know. It's like if you find money on the floor and you pick it up and put it in your pocket. It's an opportunity to take something, opportunists. All sorts of people did it, if they are bad for that, that's up to you; you don't know the reasons for it. Like some girl, she might need food or Pampers for her child. If the shop was open, already broken into. She has good intentions, but the opportunity is there to get something for free." (Young person, Peckham)

There was also a view that some targets of the riots were more "legitimate" than others.

"There was no need for people to rob each other when there was so much to steal from the shops." (Young person, in custody)

"A couple of shops on the precinct that rip people off got targeted." (Young person, Salford)

"Why steal from Lidl when the stuff is so cheap. It's a good place, that. You can go in with a tenner and get three or four weeks' food." (Young person, Salford)

Some behaviours were seen as much more wrong than others. There was particularly strong disapproval of behaviour which hurt people or put vulnerable people at risk. A group of young people talking about the events in Salford were shocked that "they battered a cameraman and an old lady" (Young person, Salford).

"I wouldn't do it 'cos have got respect. There are loads of old people live above the precinct." (Young person, Salford)

Finally, there was also a view that all behaviour that took place on those nights was justified – a proportionate response to a range of triggers already discussed above, from the shooting of Mark Duggan and general police behaviour to a "corrupt" political system and inequality.

4.3.2 Assessing the risks

Young people may have described why the disturbances and rioting were justified, or an empathy with those involved, yet not all chose to get involved. Thinking about the risk of being caught, what that might mean for your future and whether it was worth it were themes that featured heavily in interviews – including those with young people who had not considered these issues at the time of the riots but now regretted it. This manifested itself in three ways:

- Not thought about getting caught
- Concern about getting caught
- Don't see a risk of getting caught

Firstly, getting involved was not considered a risk for two reasons: either young people felt they did not have much to lose, as discussed in previous sections; or the possibility of being caught had not seriously occurred to some young people – that the situation was so unusual, normal considerations did not apply.

> *Some people weren't thinking ahead. Girl reported someone who 'pinged' while he was in [ELECTRICAL STORE] telling everyone that's where he was. And also people not thinking about the serial numbers on goods that can identify that the thing was stolen.* (Young person, Peckham)

Actions taken "on the spur of the moment" influenced by the fact that "everyone was doing it" were described, particularly by young people interviewed in prison who commonly described themselves as having been "swept along in the crowd". However, even in these instances, there was some acknowledgement of having calculated the risk, for example, believing that they did not need to fear any consequences because the police would not be able to come after everyone.

Secondly, other young people did feel they had something to lose by getting caught. One response to this was to see the risk of getting caught as a key protective factor for young people – e.g. thinking about CCTV, serial numbers on stolen goods, and that the police would follow up, even though they weren't making many arrests at the time.

> *"I know there are CCTVs all over Peckham, the TV could follow me to my vehicle, and see my registration number and trace it to my address. It's not worth it. I'm not going to jail for six months for stolen stuff worth perhaps £500, affecting my uni. It's not worth it."* (Young person, Peckham)

Alternatively, young people acknowledged the possibility of getting caught but decided to get involved anyway and reduce the risk by "being smart" – e.g. covering their faces or selling their goods immediately.

Finally, young people also felt there was no real risk attached to getting involved. Interviewees reported that seeing the media coverage, the sheer numbers involved and the police not doing anything made them confident their chances of getting caught were low enough to take the risk:

> *"People didn't think they'd get caught, thought there were too many people, that there was safety in numbers and someone else would get caught instead of you."* (Young person, Peckham)

However, a different calculation was still made by some young people who saw themselves as having too much to lose, even if the attractions were great and the risks low:

> *"Thinking stuff, money, free money, excitement, being part of something naughty, to boast to my friends, all of that mixed together with all that you have worked at for the last few years – it's not worth it."* (Young person, Peckham)

> *"All my life has been focussed on my education and I'm not going to jeopardise it for anything. I want to be the person who has worked for what he wants and gets what he wants."* (Young person, Tottenham)

While there was some empathy with their situation, some young people who did not get involved, as well as some who did, also did not see rioting or looting as a very clever thing to do, and were highly critical of those who had not properly considered the risks:

"Stupid bastards with their faces all over Crimewatch.*"* (Young person, Salford)

These key decisions, what was right or wrong and whether it was worth the risk, though not made consciously by all, are key to understanding the different routes taken by young people to different behaviours within the behavioural typology. They also illustrate the complexity of the overall picture of youth involvement in the riots.

5 Summary of key findings

This report has focused on the question: "Why did young people get involved in the riots?" It identifies various motivations, influencing factors and decision-making processes which affected young people's behaviour. The findings are complex but a clear picture emerges. Although there were differences in the way events unfolded in different areas, the underlying factors and issues were very similar:

- The riots had no precedent in young people's experience: it was "a day like no other", when normal rules did not seem to apply and for some "moments of madness" led to atypical behaviour.
- Young people's involvement in the rioting – what they actually did – can be classified into four main categories: watchers, rioters, looters and non-involved. Some young people moved through different types of behaviour during the riots: for example, **curious watchers** who went out to see what happened got caught up in events and become **opportunistic looters**.
- A set of initial motivations for involvement can be identified as directly related to how young people expected to benefit from their actions: excitement; "free stuff"; getting back at the police.
- How and whether young people acted on these motivations depended on **situational factors** that related to "on-the-night" group processes and dynamics, peer pressure and what young people saw happening around them.
- Young people also "brought with them" an additional set of influences: **individual factors** including previous history of criminality and involvement with the police; factors that related to the attitudes and attachment to **family and community**; and wider **societal factors** such as local youth provision, poverty and materialism.

Decisions about whether to get involved were based on what young people thought was **right or wrong**; and whether they felt the **benefits to themselves outweighed the risks**. These decisions were influenced by all the above factors. The range of factors identified affected decisions in different ways for different people: someone who initially saw the actions as justifiable, could end up deciding the personal risk was too great to get involved; someone who was initially unsure about taking part could end up deciding the chance of getting caught was minimal and so get involved.

Young people in unaffected areas reported a set of contextual factors that could have resulted in them making the same decisions as those in the affected areas. But, crucially, some key facilitators (such as less obvious inequality in Sheffield) were missing, or important inhibitors (such as resistance of local communities) were present, meaning that riots did not take place.

5.1 Next steps

We hope that this report has provided answers to some of the questions as to just what happened in August and why, by giving an evidenced account of the motivations of young people involved in the riots, from the perspective of young people themselves and other stakeholders and bystanders.

Beyond this, the riots raise questions for society about how it will respond. In part, this is a challenge for communities, as they rebuild and repair the damage to property and relationships in their area. In part, this is also a challenge to policy-makers at all levels of government. Whilst not designed to formulate policy proposals itself, this study is designed to contribute to those deliberations, and to help place them upon a more evidenced footing.

This research will therefore be shared with researchers and policy colleagues across government departments, to inform policy thinking on a range of subjects including home affairs, criminal justice, education and other areas of social policy.

In particular, it will feed into The Independent Riots Communities and Victims Panel. The Panel has been established to understand why the riots took place, what could have been done differently to prevent them, and how communities can be made more resilient against future problems of this kind. It will report to the Prime Minster, the Deputy Prime Minster and the Leader of the Opposition in March 2012.

Technical appendix

Overview of our approach

The research brief required a design that elicited a rich understanding of how and why young people became involved in the August riots. The diagram below illustrates our approach, using a qualitative case study design.

Local area scoping Working with key local gatekeepers					Desk scoping Social media listening, assessment of conviction data and profiling of affected area	
Recruitment						
Affected areas					*Unaffected areas*	
Area 1 – Data collection from 30 young people – Individual, paired or triad interviews with up to 15 young people involved in the riots – Five in custody – Individual, paired or triad interviews with up to 10 young people not involved – Discussion group with 10 "bystanders"	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	**Area 5** – Three discussion groups in each area – Sampled on demographic of those convicted – One group with over-18s, one with under-18s, one with community stakeholders	Area 6
Analysis						
Final output						

At the time the research was commissioned, there had already been extensive coverage and commentary on what caused the riots, with a whole range of opinion-formers and members of the public having their say. While acknowledging that many of these accounts were based on personal and professional experience, this research needed to cut through these hypotheses and uncover comprehensively the actual experiences and views of those involved or affected by the riots. There were three essential elements to the design:

• understanding what is already known about what took place
• achieving a breadth of understanding across England; and
• uncovering depth and detail in individual views and experiences

The main stage of the research was preceded by a rapid scoping phase to provide an understanding of the dynamics of each area and theories that were emerging to explain these events. This comprised a review of social and print media, statistics on those convicted for involvement in the riots and information on the areas selected as case studies. In order to achieve a breadth of understanding, research was conducted in a variety of local contexts. Researchers also worked closely with a wide range of local contacts

and gatekeepers to access young people as well as making the research openly available to others in the area. Depth and detail was achieved through interviewing one-on-one and face-to-face as far as possible, as well as using a range of fieldwork tools as stimulus material to assist with participant recall.

Each of these facets of the design is discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Research challenges

In designing this study, several challenges informed the practical and methodological choices that were made.

Defining the sample
Fieldwork for this study took place only five weeks after the riots. A clear picture of what happened had not yet emerged at this stage. Consequently, it was difficult to define key characteristics that might affect why people were involved in the riots that could then be used to select the sample. The approach taken was to specify quotas in each area on two sampling criteria of key policy interest (whether or not people were involved and their age). To ensure full diversity of views, the sample was also monitored for diversity with respect to young people's ethnicity and work status.

Accessing the sample
Accessing young people in an ethical and methodologically sound fashion requires preparation and relationship-building, particularly with hard-to-reach young people or those who do not access mainstream services. The timetable presented meant that researchers had no time to build trust directly with the young people. The approach taken was therefore to gain access and "borrow" trust through working closely with local organisations, community stakeholders and respected individuals.

The main difficulty was accessing people who had taken part in the riots and were willing to discuss this directly. We were concerned not to compromise gatekeepers' relationships with young people and were therefore unable to identify participants as involved in the riots prior to the interview itself and so were unable to select them purposively. The sample profile was assessed daily on this key characteristic across each area. As a result of suspicion about ongoing police operations, many individuals who we interviewed were reluctant to either admit involvement on tape or discuss their involvement in detail. Consequently, in order to achieve a diverse enough sample of young people that were involved in the riots, we increased the number of interviews conducted with young people in prison.

Sensitivity of the issue
The sensitivity of the issue under discussion also raised difficulties in terms of securing the support of a wide range of organisations and ensuring that interviews were open and wide-ranging. To mitigate both concerns, researchers reassured gatekeepers and young people of key aspects of this

research: the independence of NatCen from political affiliation, and the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected.

Selecting case study areas

A case study design was considered the most appropriate and efficient way to cover a range of local contexts in which rioting took place across England. In qualitative research, cases are chosen to represent the maximum diversity of context-specific factors affecting experiences of the focus of study. In this instance, affected areas were selected to achieve diversity with respect to:

- *Demographics of the area*: covering the levels of deprivation, diversity in terms of ethnicity and wealth, the physical geography of the area such as the predominance of a high street or precinct or city centre.[1]
- *When the riots happened*: it was important to include areas from across the time period of the riots to understand the nature of contagion across England.
- *The dynamics of the riots*: from what was already known it was important that the research covered areas where events took different courses in terms of who was involved, what came first (protesting, rioting looting etc) and how things were brought to an end.

The study also included two areas unaffected by rioting in which to conduct lighter-touch case studies. These areas were selected to mirror some of the common demographic and geographical characteristics of the affected areas (deprivation, ethnic diversity, proximity to commercial hub) and also to be different from each other. It was also important that there was not an obvious reason why rioting did not take place, such as wealthy areas or areas inhabited predominantly by a single close-knit community. One area from inside London and one from outside were selected as illustrated below.

Achieved sample

Overall, the research involved 206 young people who were interviewed individually or in groups of two to four. This number was distributed across the case study areas and prisons as follows:

Area	
Tottenham	36
Peckham	29
Clapham	35
Salford	25
Birmingham	42
In custody	39

1 For completeness, of course, areas were chosen from across London and England, though it is the locally specific conditions of these areas that are important rather than their location.

The breakdown of the sample against the key criteria was as follows:

	Under 18	18 and over	No information	Total
Neither there nor involved	73	54	6	133
There but not involved	14	9	0	23
Involved	12	38	0	50
Total	99	101	6	206

On our secondary sampling criteria, the sample was broken down as follows:

Gender	
Male	141
Female	65
Ethnicity	
White	83
Black	70
Asian	20
Mixed race	16
Other	13
No information	4
Employment status	
Employment	31
Education	119
Training	18
NEET	34
No information	4

In addition to these interviews, larger discussion groups were discussed in some areas where practical and convenient. Discussion groups were also conducted with community stakeholders and/or residents from each area. A total of 51 people were included in these encounters across the five areas.

In the unaffected areas, a total of 54 participants took part in six focus groups, broken down as follows:

	Under 18	18 and over	Community stakeholders
Poplar	8	6	12
Sheffield	8	10	10

Recruitment and fieldwork

Recruitment
Two distinct approaches were used to recruit young people in affected areas: open recruitment through establishing a visible and online presence locally; and targeted recruitment through gatekeepers and organisations.

Both of these approaches relied heavily on local gatekeepers and community members. Our method in each of the affected areas was, in the first instance, to contact a wide range of local organisations to understand the landscape of youth provision and other community facilities. The organisations we were keen to work with needed to have:

• Established links with and the respect of young people locally
• Access to other organisations or community members with links to young people
• A neutral and, where possible, a non-political stance within the local community.

Researchers worked with these local organisations to establish a visible local presence through a number of methods:

• Promoting the research through posters and flyers in key local venues, such as colleges, schools, libraries and community centres, spaces that attract young people, such as gyms, pool halls and barbers, and publications and websites for local young people.
• Utilising NatCen's local network of survey research interviewers to act as on-street recruiters and build relationships with local organisations, businesses and residents.
• Organising and advertising pre-set slots when researchers would spend time at key local venues, such as libraries and community centres, where participants could come to be interviewed.

In addition to open recruitment, a more targeted recruitment approach was carried out in parallel. Here researchers built and utilised links with local authority youth and offending services such as Youth Offending Teams, Probation offices, Community Payback schemes, Participation offices, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and, where they remain in place, detached youth work teams. In addition to these official channels, researchers also worked closely with youth workers in community and youth centres, training centres, migrant organisations, sports and art projects, churches, mosques and other religious groups, as well as schools and colleges. In these cases, two approaches were taken: a dedicated contact within the organisation arranged

interviews for researchers following a clear briefing on sample criteria; or researchers spent time in the organisation and approached young people using services.

Irrespective of which approach was taken, researchers and gatekeepers exercised extreme care in explaining the research to potential participants. There were four key elements to this:

- Explaining that participation in the research is completely **voluntary**.
- Clearly outlining the **disclosure policy and consent processes**. For this study, non-disclosure of previous criminal activity was agreed; researchers would have had to disclose specific details of future criminal activity and any information about harm to others unable to protect themselves.
- Reassuring participants of the **confidential and anonymous** nature of the research, explaining that data would not pass outside the research team and that personal details would not be stored.
- Reiterating that participation represented an opportunity to **have their voice heard** by a study that would be delivered to the centre of government.

All recruitment documents were designed to emphasise these key messages.

In the unaffected areas, a specialist agency was used to recruit participants. The agency was fully briefed on the requirements of the sample and provided with a set of recruitment materials. Participants in unaffected areas were given £20 in vouchers or cash in recognition of the time they had given up to take part. This is standard practice in social research. It was not followed in the affected areas as it was not possible to identify whether a participant had been involved in the riots or not and so it was not considered an appropriate use of public funds.

The recruitment of **participants in custody** was facilitated first by staff in the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) headquarters (the research also passed NOMS clearance processes in relation to ethics and data security), to identify potential participants in particular prisons. Following this, nominated staff in identified prisons made individual approaches to young people. As with the community recruitment, staff provided all potential participants in custody with an information leaflet. If consent for interview was given, appointments were organised by prison staff and the research team.

On the day of interview, research staff took time to independently go through the leaflet with participants, checking understanding and consent to continue. Consent forms were also used to verify agreement, with one copy retained by the participant for their records. As above, all interviews were conducted in private rooms and recorded using encrypted digital devices.

Incentives were not paid to any participant interviewed in custody.

Data collection
The choice of data collection method in affected areas was dictated by the need to elicit depth in the personal stories of participants. Using qualitative depth interviews enables skilled researchers to draw out and explore not

only the front-of-mind responses to questions on what triggers people to behave in a particular way, but also how these relate to underlying motivations and wider contextual factors. Interviewing one-to-one also mitigates, to some extent, biases relating to social desirability or post-rationalisation; probing questioning can encourage people to reflect on and reconsider initial responses.

However, data collection strategies also had to be pragmatic. In a number of cases, young people were interviewed in twos or small groups because they felt more comfortable in this format or were approached as an existing friendship group to take part. While these encounters may not uncover as much detail, as they were carried out, it was clear that they provided additional insight into the social dynamics that were in play during the riots.

For each of the data-collection encounters, researchers were able to draw on a range of specifically designed fieldwork material. This set of tools was used flexibly by researchers as stimulus to elicit greater depth and detail from the interviewee by overcoming two problems. First, a challenge for qualitative interviews that are aiming to understand motivations is to help participants recapture the frame of mind they were in when making a given decision. In this study, participants were asked what was going through their mind when they carried out certain actions in relation to the riots and or what stopped them. In order to do this, interviews adopted a timeline approach, asking participants to take us through their thoughts and actions on the day of the riots. Visual material, such as illustrated timelines, quotes from eyewitnesses and iconic pictures were used to assist participants recall their feelings at the time.

A second challenge is to create conditions in which interviewees feel comfortable describing behaviour they may not be proud of or have not previously shared. In this instance, to encourage discussion about different actions associated with rioting and looting, show cards were developed depicting different levels of involvement. Participants were invited to indicate which card(s) most closely reflected their actions.

All interviews were conducted in private or semi-private spaces and lasted between 10 and 70 minutes. The encounters were digitally recorded where permission was given, which was in around 90% of cases.

For community stakeholder groups and for all participants in unaffected areas, data was collected through focus groups. Individual interviews were not an appropriate method to discuss the riots and did not take place in some areas. People do not give a great deal of thought as to why they *do not* behave in a particular way, so interviews would not have been very productive. In a group setting, participants are able to feed off and reflect on each others views and experiences to further consider their own perspective. Focus groups lasted around 90 minutes and were carried out in neutral community venues with between six and 12 participants.

Data analysis

To meet the timetable set out in the original specification, a rapid and condensed version of NatCen's Framework approach to data management and analysis

was adopted for this study. The method involves the development of an analytical framework comprising a number of descriptive thematic headings under which to organise data. Typically, data are sorted and reduced (summarised) from interview transcripts into a series of thematic matrices. In order to save time on this study, matrices from a simplified framework were populated with field notes that had been compiled as close to the completion of the interview as possible. This generated a series of "charts" from each case study area.

This managed data set was used as stimulus material at an analysis workshop attended by researchers from each of the case study areas. At this workshop, common themes and locally specific nuances emerged from the data and were reorganised to communicate the complex data in an intelligible way. The result of this process is largely the structure and content of the remainder of this report.

Theoretical perspectives

The aim of this research was to describe the riots in the case study areas and understand young people's attitudes and behaviour within those areas. A theoretical interpretation of the data was not required and would not be particularly helpful at this stage. However, given that this report will feed into wider processes of evidence collection, there may be a time when setting the accounts of young people in a theoretical context may be of more use, particularly when planning intervention programmes with those at risk of future disorder.

As such, here we outline two established theories from social psychology that are pertinent to this research context: *deindividuation* (Zimbardo, 1969)[2]; and the *self-threat model* (Campbell and Sedikides, 1999)[3]. It is important to note that the aim of this summary is not to provide a comprehensive overview of all relevant theory within social psychology, sociology and criminology, coverage of which can found in seminal texts such as Feldman (1993)[4].

Firstly, deindividuation refers to a process whereby individuals ignore their own individuality and social norms. When deindividuation occurs, people are presumed to be less susceptible to feelings of guilt and fear, and less concerned with "accepted social standards" and the consequences of ignoring them. Zimbardo (1969) set out a model that identified the triggers and consequences of a deindividuated state. Among the contributing factors that have resonance with this study are increased arousal, feeling anonymous, being in a group, focusing on the here and now (and not longer-term plans or consequences) and diffused responsibility.

Secondly, the idea of how the actions of others can limit individual responsibility for antisocial behaviour is also a key premise in the self-threat

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2 Zimbardo, P. (1969). The human choice: Individuation, reason and order versus deindividuation, impulse and chaos. In W.J. Arnold and D. Levine (eds.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation,* vol. 17. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

3 Campbell, W.K. & Sedikides, C. (1999). The self-threat magnifies the self-serving bias: A meta-analytic integration. *Review of General Psychology*, 3, 23–43.

4 Feldman, P. (1993). *The Psychology of Crime: A Social Science Textbook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

model. This model assumes that people are motivated to protect and enhance their feelings of self-worth. Therefore, when their "positive self-concept" is threatened, people will act in ways to counter that threat. In addition, the more acute the threat to a positive sense of self, the more self-serving an individual's attributions will be. Common examples of self-serving attributions to justify antisocial behaviour are rationalisations that *"I was not the only person to do X"* or *"seeing others behave like Y made me feel it was OK to behave that way also"*. Also conceptualised as cognitive dissonance (Aronson, 1992)[5], understanding how individuals can process information to justify illegal or harmful actions has potential utility for a fuller understanding of the motivations underpinning involvement in the August riots.

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5 Aronson, E. (1992). The return of the repressed: Dissonance theory makes a comeback. *Psychological Enquiry*, 3, 303–311