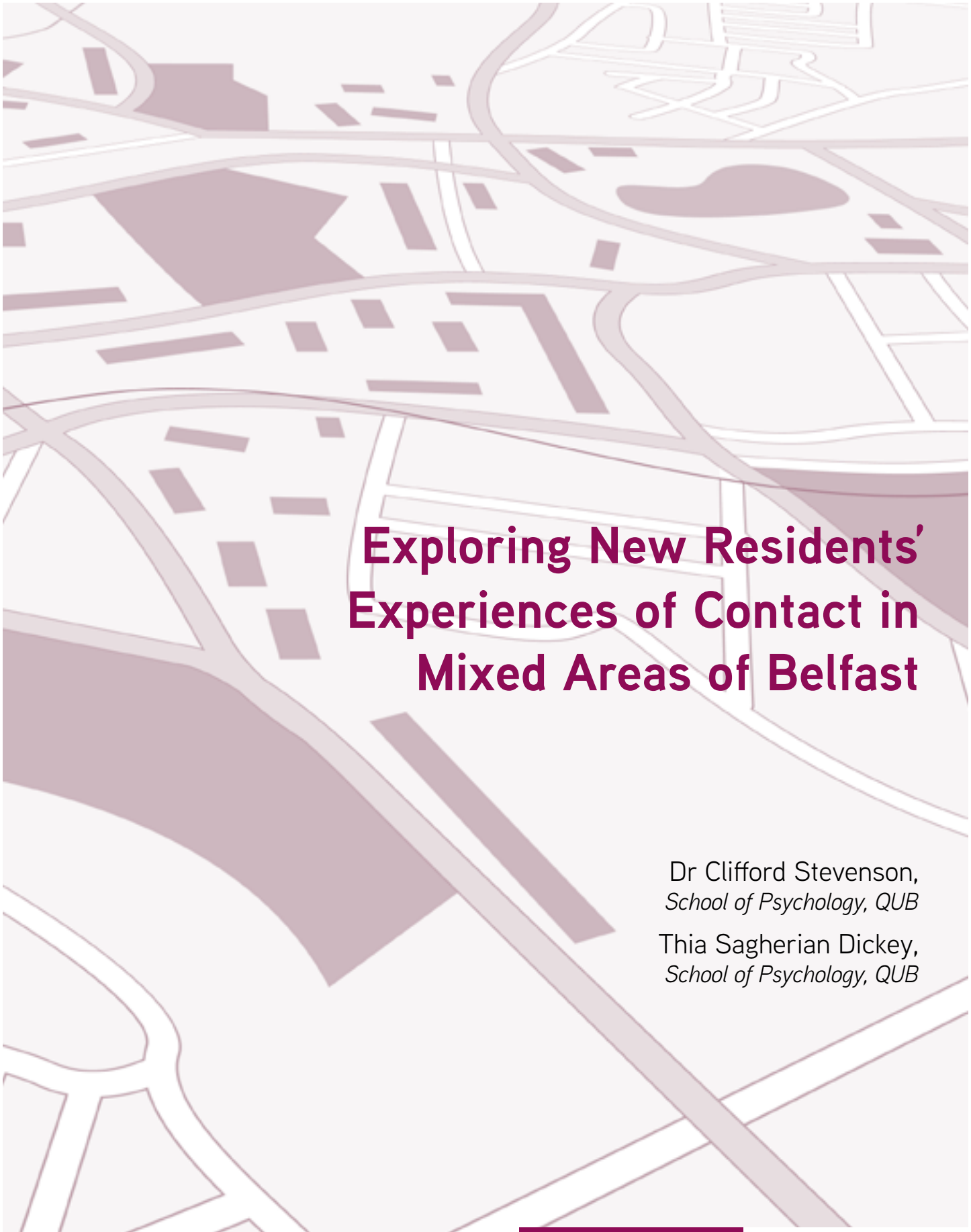

Exploring New Residents' Experiences of Contact in Mixed Areas of Belfast

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Executive Summary

1. Increased residential mobility in Northern Ireland since the ceasefires would appear to offer the chance for increased cross-community contact and better intercommunity relations.
2. However, previous research on residential mixing has provided inconsistent and conflicting results, with mixing leading to various levels of actual contact between communities and contact, when it does occur, leading to negative as well as positive outcomes for intergroup relations.
3. This research has been hampered by an overreliance on survey methods and a specific neglect of the actual experiences of those moving into mixed communities.
4. The present research used a combination of novel interview methods to interview 17 couples and singles (12 single-religion interviews; 5 interviews with participants in mixed relationships; 27 interviewees in total) who have moved into mixed areas within the past 10 years*.
5. Analysis revealed a wide variety of backgrounds and previous experiences within the sample and consequently a range of expectations of their new community, including of the mixed nature of the community.
6. Residents also reported a variety of social networks and daily routines in their new areas which afforded differing levels of contact and communication with other residents.
7. This resulted in a range of different levels of integration, from relative isolation to the development of a wide range of contacts from both religious traditions.
8. The consequence of this variation was that when confronted with potential threats and challenges, residents had a range of ability to gain the knowledge and support from their neighbours to deal with these.
9. This was particularly important for these new residents who were vulnerable to perceiving threats as sectarian and as personally directed against them.
10. Of crucial importance to the community's resilience against sectarian division was the residents' sense that if a sectarian attack occurred, the community would come together to oppose this.
11. Mixed marriage couples were particularly vulnerable to the perception of threat, from their own as well as the other community.
12. However they also could occupy a uniquely strong position in being able to have insight and relate to both communities simultaneously and act as moderating influences in this regard.
13. The implications of this research are that increased residential mixing can have negative as well as positive effects and that new residents are, in fact, psychologically predisposed to negative outcomes.
14. In order to promote positive outcomes, the networks of new residents need to be established and enhanced, especially with outgroup members. In effect, they would benefit from being welcomed into their new communities by people from both religious traditions.
15. Moreover, a 'united' mixed community would benefit from a clear communication between residents as to their shared goals and values as well as their opposition to sectarianism.
16. This could be facilitated through the NIHE Community Welcome Pack. The pack has previously been adapted by the Shared Neighbourhood Programme and could be further developed to address issues of sectarianism. In addition, disseminating an agreed set of norms for intergroup mixing among new and existing residents could reduce any potential misunderstanding between neighbours and establish a basis for collective resistance to sectarian threats.

*Due to the difficulty in recruiting mixed participants in one area, one couple fell outside this range at 25 years in the area.

Terms of Reference

The Community Relations Council

The Community Relations Council's (CRC) strategic aim is to promote a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society founded on the achievement of reconciliation, equality, co-operation, respect, mutual trust and good relations.

We do this by:

- Identifying and developing new and effective approaches to peace-building and reconciliation in partnership with people, organisations and government;
- Promoting the adoption of good relations policies and practice at local, community and institutional level; and
- Assisting communities and institutions in working through and beyond the legacies of the conflict.

In a changing environment, CRC works by promoting constructive and relevant dialogue, by actively supporting those taking real risks for relationship building, by acting as a practical bridge between groups in society and between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, and by promoting wider learning through developing better practice.

Brief for Present Research

Whilst at the macro level there is the indication of an increase in the number of "mixed" wards which appears as positive progression for society, many public, community, and educational settings which appear to an outside observer to be mixed are in fact segregated at the micro level.

Therefore this research sought to explore a number of areas in relation to the level of contact, integration and sharing across three Belfast wards where the census details have indicated that they have become more shared over the past period.

This research aimed to bring a more qualitative flavour to support understanding around the experience of integration and segregation. Its core goals were:

1. To explore the trajectory of the three areas identified that are considered more shared/ mixed and the related effects of this
2. To explore the specific processes and dynamics within the areas

As an experientially-focused piece of work, this research sought to explore within the agreed three wards within Belfast including the questions:

- What was the reason(s) for the movement?
- What attracted people from a different political background to the usual make-up of the area?
- What choices or considerations were factored when moving to the area?
- What is the quality of the "mixing" or "sharing" and is this considered to be important or not?
- What is the level, type and experience of interaction in the everyday lives of their local community?
- Do they feel safe living in the area at all times of the year?
- Where, how and with whom do these experiences of mixing and sharing occur?
- Is there a new identity/ethos emerging? If so why?
- Has their perception of the area changed, how and why?

At a functional level the research explored:

How are the services and facilities of the area being utilised or do the individuals gravitate to those of the old community?

- Are the facilities and services in the current area accessible, hospitable and do they feel comfortable using these services?

Finally, the research sought to draw out a series of conclusions and suggestions around how policy interventions could be made that would be helpful to the further enhancement and development of quality sharing/ mixing in housing to occur.

1

Chapter One:
Overview and Structure of the Report

Chapter One: Overview and Structure of the Report

1.1 Background to the research

Since the ceasefires of the 1990s, Northern Ireland has witnessed more residential mobility than in the years since the start of the Troubles. Areas designated as 'single identity' have declined and those designated as 'mixed' increased (Nolan, 2014). In line with previous government policy on intercommunity mixing, which traditionally viewed residential segregation as at the heart of the perpetuation of sectarianism in Northern Ireland, this is seen as having enormous potential for the development of more positive intercommunity relations. Shared Housing initiatives have been initiated and monitored across Northern Ireland and the development of new integrated housing is at the heart of the Northern Ireland government's new strategy 'Together Building a United Community' (OFMDFM, 2013).

However the effects of this increased mixing is uncertain. Research on contact in ostensibly mixed settings including further education, integrated education and even cross-community contact initiatives in Northern Ireland indicates that even in these situations groups tend to self-segregate. Consequently the occurrence of positive, consequential contact cannot be guaranteed by physical proximity alone. Moreover, previous survey research on mixed neighbourhoods has yielded contradictory and inconsistent results, with those living in mixed areas across Northern Ireland sometimes reporting higher levels of threat and poorer intergroup relations than those in single identity areas. Given the limitations of survey research, we do not yet know why this is the case, but residential mixing cannot be assumed to lead to better relations.

1.2 Theoretical basis of the research

The present research addresses this gap in knowledge by examining the experiences of residents moving into one of three mixed areas of the city of Belfast from a social psychological perspective. The social psychology of intergroup relations has identified the various mechanisms though which contact works. In particular, reducing 'intergroup anxiety' has been identified as a key factor in turning intergroup contact from a negative into a positive experience. Furthermore recent research has shown how groups, including local communities, can provide support and help to their members to enable them to cope with potential threats, including those posed by other groups. In other words, group support can reduce intergroup anxiety. However these theories have rarely been investigated in the real world where contact actually happens on a daily basis and has largely neglected the implications of the spatial and community contexts within which mixing occurs. Moreover the experiences of those who are changing the demographic landscape of Northern Ireland - those who move from one residential community to another – have yet to be examined.

1.3 The present research study

The present research interviewed residents who had moved into one of three 'mixed' areas of Belfast. These areas have shown demographic shifts towards mixing over the past 10 years and were chosen on the basis of census data and local knowledge: Ravenhill, Fortwilliam and Cliftondene/ Deerpark (a subsection of the Cliftonville electoral ward). Participants were selected on the basis of being from Northern Ireland and having moved to these areas within the past 10 years from other parts of Northern Ireland. Residents were approached though local community organisations, churches and schools as well as through informal networks. A leaflet drop was also conducted in two of the areas (Fortwilliam and Cliftondene/ Deerpark) to supplement recruitment there. Participants and were interviewed as couples or as individuals as they preferred. Overall we conducted and analysed seventeen interviews with a total of 27 participants: four interviews with individuals or single-identity couples in each area as well as an additional five interviews with mixed couples. The participants in eight of our initial interviewees agreed to take part in a

follow-up 'photo-elicitation' study, where they took photographs of the visible aspects of their local community which make them feel comfortable or not. A second interview talked the participants through their photographs as well as asking them to talk through a map of the local area. The data from all of these interviews were subjected to a 'thematic analysis', where the core patterns of participants' talk about their expectations of moving, their perceptions and experiences of their new area and their everyday interactions with others in the community were identified.

1.4 The main findings

1.4.1 Mixing as a secondary concern for new residents

The first main finding of the research is that while respondents were all aware of the religious mix of their new area, this was typically not the main reason or indeed an important reason in their move. Financial concerns, practical motivations and family considerations all featured much more heavily in the decision-making process. The religious mix of the area was typically mentioned only in terms of visible displays of political or paramilitary symbols which were reported as detracting from the perceived value and safety of the area.

1.4.2 Intergroup contact as incidental to the lives and goals of incomers

Relatedly, intercommunity contact was not a high priority for these respondents. Where intercommunity contact resulted as a consequence of the move, this was incidental to the other concerns and priorities of everyday life. Notably, for those with children, the level of contact with other neighbours (and as a consequence with people from other religious backgrounds) was reported to be much higher. Other points of contact included local shops and amenities and shared spaces in the local area.

1.4.3 Signifiers of religious division as a potential breach of intergroup civility.

Where issues of religious difference were present in residents' accounts, these were largely reported as negative issues which impinged upon the routines and goals of normal existence. Flags and paramilitary emblems were widely reported as a deterrent to moving into or staying in an area. While some respondents reported a tolerant attitude to the flying of (non-paramilitary) flags, others reported that such symbols affected their understanding of the composition and beliefs of the local community as well as their use of space within the locale.

1.4.4 Varieties of understandings of good community relations and of 'sharing'

Residents often had different understandings of what constitutes good cross-community relations: some reported wishing for a completely neutral environment, devoid of any political or religious signifiers. Others reported that the expression and tolerance of markers of difference, such as school uniforms or even flags, was evidence of successful cohesion. These different 'lay models' of contact had the potential for misunderstanding but could be reconciled through open communication.

1.4.5 New residents as vulnerable to threat; integration as providing support

While respondents reported a range of levels of integration within their new communities, the key determinant of their ability to cope with unexpected challenges in their lives (including perceived sectarian threats) was their new relationships with others within the community. This was particularly important for incomers due to the psychological and social consequences of the move itself. In effect, incomers are initially stripped of the familiar routines, contacts, friendships and broader community support which characterised their previous existence. This leaves these individuals potentially vulnerable within a new and unfamiliar environment.

The crucial importance of having bonds with neighbours is that they allow the incoming resident to cope with the unexpected in their new locale. All residents reported some unusual or challenging event in their settling-in period.

Given the unfamiliarity of their new environs, these events were characterised by a high level of uncertainty and anxiety. Residents were not able to discern whether the threats were typical of their new environment or if the threat was directed at them personally. For those who had established contact with neighbours, they were quickly able to gain information as to the severity of the threat and how to respond. For those without such contacts, the threat persisted and coloured their future experience of the neighbourhood.

1.4.6 The role of neighbourhood support in diffusing sectarian threat

The importance of social support for new incomers to a religiously mixed area is that potential threats can often be seen as sectarian. From the residents' perspective, mixing can constitute a potential risk and so any unusual events can be (rightly or wrongly) attributed to this distinctive feature of their new neighbourhood. Consequently our residents reported that information as to the non-sectarian nature of threats (or if sectarian, the low risk of reoccurrence) was particularly reassuring, *especially if it came from an outgroup member*. Conversely, a lack of information from the other community can result in misperception of threat, a misunderstanding of others' intentions and further alienation.

1.4.7 Community 'Collective Efficacy' enables resilience against threats to cohesion

The belief that the community could come together to oppose and resist a threat to its cross-community nature was particularly closely tied to new residents' perceptions of their ability to cope with such threats in the future. Those who did not believe that this would be the case reported that they would leave the community if such an attack were to occur.

1.4.8 Sectional symbols can undermine efficacy and resilience

Conversely, it was also noted that the display of political symbols could enact a corrosive effect on this sense of cross-community cohesion and resilience. While many residents refused to believe that the display of political or sectarian emblems reflected the sentiments of their wider community, they reported feeling unable to challenge these displays for fear of the organisations who were responsible. More generally the prevalence of symbols on private as well as public property led to a degree of uncertainty as to the commitment of others to having a shared neighbourhood and was occasionally linked to a reduction in the ability to rely on one's neighbours for help if needed.

1.4.9 Mixed couples as vulnerable, but also as emblematic of mixed communities

Individuals from mixed-partnerships often felt more vulnerable and exposed than their single-identity counterparts. Unlike the others, they were attentive to the religious mix of the area when choosing where to live and could object more vociferously to the display of political emblems in their areas. Some couples withdrew from their neighbours and were recognisably among the most threatened and vulnerable among the sample. For others, a guarded engagement with the local community was possible. For others still, their mixed partnership afforded a sense of being able to reflect and represent the ethos of the community at a local political level. In effect, although they face unique personal challenges, their experiences very much reflect their level of integration in the local community, much like any other incoming residents.

1.5 Implications

1.5.1 The need for a specific focus on new residents in mixed areas

Spontaneous population mobility in Northern Ireland occurs on an increasingly large scale and offers a unique opportunity to enhance better cross-community relations. However, this will not happen automatically. Increased opportunities for contact may not be taken up and contact may be negative as well as positive. Indeed the process

of moving between communities leaves incomers especially vulnerable to perceptions of threats as sectarian and can have the ironic consequence of increasing intergroup hostility. In order to address these negative consequences and to maximise the positive consequences of mixing, incomers need to be made to feel welcome and supported by their neighbours. In effect, residents need to feel part of a united community with a sense of shared 'collective efficacy' which can be mobilised to deal with sectarian as well as non-sectarian threats to its own cohesion.

1.5.2 Developing the NIHE/Shared Neighbourhood Programme 'Welcome Pack'

One possible avenue to develop this is by adapting the existing NIHE 'Community Welcome Pack' for incoming residents (NIHE, 2013) which contains information on norms of neighbourliness as well as general orientation information and a section on harassment. This has already been developed through the Shared Neighbourhood Programme so that, for example, the Springfarm area Welcome Pack contains an explicit section on dealing with racism (SDCA, n.d.). This could easily be adapted in two ways for newly mixed areas. First, inviting new residents to informal events would facilitate the establishment of the unofficial links and channels of communication that our residents report as valuable. Second, the pack could include an explicit message on sectarianism. This would both signal a collective commitment to a shared community and provide some substance to the idea of the community's identity as mixed for the incomer.

1.5.3 A specific welcome for mixed couples

This is particularly important for mixed couples who may feel especially vulnerable to sectarian threat as well as new residents who may have moved from previous communities in which they were not welcomed. The tendency among these types of incomers may be to keep themselves isolated from others, but this will have ironic consequences if they then experience threats to their security. An explicit mention that mixed couples are especially welcome, as they reflect the united ethos of the community, may help ameliorate their apprehension.

1.5.4 Embedding intergroup contact in the fibre of everyday life

More generally, it must be emphasised most of these new residents are not primarily concerned with the religious mix of their area or motivated to seek out cross-community contacts. It will be through harnessing the existing concerns and interests of residents' everyday lives that new cross-community relationships and an adherence to a cross-community ethos develops. The most obvious route to accomplish this is through residents' roles as parents. By harnessing parents' commitments to the betterment of their children's future as well as understanding how their childcare routines facilitate (or impede) intergroup contact, good relations can become ingrained in the mundane routines of everyday life.

1.5.5 Shared spaces as signifiers and opportunities for contact

Of particular importance are the shared spaces within a community. The ability to make the diversity of the community visible and accessible to all in this way is reported as reassuring and giving residents a sense of belonging. In addition it has the self-perpetuating effect of showing that diversity does not detract from community cohesion and furthermore that displays of political or paramilitary symbols (where they occur in, or near to mixed areas) do not in fact represent a divided or exclusive community.

1.5.6 Challenging sectarian behaviour

Also it must be acknowledged that overtly political displays and actions of a minority of community members can shape, if not disrupt, the community spaces and routines that are the (often fragile) infrastructure of good relations. Public occurrences of sectarian behaviour need to be challenged by community members, who in turn need to know that they will be supported

by their fellow residents. This can be done by making public a shared set of anti-sectarian norms, which have been agreed within a community, so that new residents know how they are expected to behave in relation to religious difference and what they can expect from their neighbours by way of respect and support. Such 'Neighbourhood Charters' have previously been developed by NIHE as part of the Shared Neighbourhood programme (see Appendix One), but would be of particular use in welcoming new residents to mixed areas. In this way, the identity dynamics within the community can be harnessed towards coping and resilience in the face of sectarian threat and new residents can be confident that the mixed nature of the community will be preserved.

1.6 Chapter structure

The social psychology of group dynamics and intergroup relations has provided the theoretical basis of the 'Contact Hypothesis' for the past 60 years. In that time, the various factors which facilitate positive contact between different groups have been specified and the 'mediators' or mechanisms through which contact works have been isolated. These are reviewed in chapter two. However the research in this tradition has tended to be laboratory and survey-based and has tended to make unsubstantiated assumptions as to how contact operates in the real world and in particular within community settings. The limitations to this tradition and alternative perspectives which investigate how contact occurs, fails to occur or results in negative outcomes is also reviewed in that chapter.

Chapter three outlines the previous social psychological research on contact in Northern Ireland. In applying the Contact Hypothesis to the Northern Ireland conflict researchers have illustrated the role of good quality, positive contact in reducing intergroup anxiety and promoting better intergroup relations. In terms of residential mixing these effects still pertain, though increased mixing is acknowledged to have potentially ironic effects in also increasing threat and intergroup antagonism among some residents. Given the prevalence of survey methods in this area, it is difficult to understand what these inconsistent findings mean at community level and certainly the qualitative research in this area paints a complex and varied picture of intercommunity relations in mixed areas. However none of this work has examined residential mixing from an experiential perspective. Moreover, even in the light of increased mixing across Northern Ireland, none has examined how moving into a mixed area is experienced by incomers. Given the government's goal of mainstreaming residential mixing for new builds of social and private housing, it is particularly important to understand the experiences of those moving into mixed communities from the outside.

In the current research, a total of 17 interviews (12 single-religion and five mixed-relationship interviews) were conducted and qualitatively analysed from a social psychological perspective. A second, follow-up interview was conducted with a subset of participants to further explore specific findings from the first round. This used a combination of novel methods including: 'photo-elicitation' or asking participants to take and explain photographs of elements of their locale; map completion, asking respondents to indicate their use of physical space within the locale; and indepth probing of theoretically interesting topics. These methods are detailed in chapter four, along with a description of the three residential areas selected for investigation and the composition of the final interview sample.

In the round one interviews, residents were asked about: their previous community lives; their motivations and expectations of their new communities; their initial experiences of settling in; their current networks of friends and daily routines. These accounts were transcribed and carefully analysed to examine the occurrence and experience of integration and of contact with other residents. The results of this analysis, along with the subsequent photo-elicitation study are outlined in chapter five.

Chapter six hones in on a crucial aspect of participants' experience which emerged from the analysis of their first interviews and was

pursued in the second. It became evident that participants were largely making and maintaining contact with others in their communities in the course of their daily routines, rather than through planned social activities. The occasions and nature of their encounters with others are documented here, along with their accounts of their resultant friendship networks. Second, these accounts of mundane encounters were accompanied by stories of unexpected threats or 'critical incidents' which occurred during their 'settling in' period. As a result of these events, new residents typically had to turn to their neighbours for explanation and assistance. These incidents proved vital in shaping the residents' subsequent understandings and experiences of their community and are detailed in this chapter.

Chapter seven focuses on a specific subset of the panel - those in mixed marriages - and examines in detail the characteristics of these couples, their unique concerns and considerations and the factors which facilitate or impede their successful integration. The analysis shows that while these couples are especially vulnerable to sectarian threat, they also have enormous potential in bridging the gap between traditional communities.

Chapter eight discusses these findings in the light of the previous research in this area and identifies the key contributions of the current research. The implications of the findings are discussed and future research which could shed further light on the successful development of mixed residential areas is outlined.

2

Chapter Two:
The Contact Hypothesis and its Limitations

Chapter Two: The Contact Hypothesis and its Limitations

In this chapter a non-technical overview of the Contact Hypothesis is presented along with an outline of some limitations to the theory and the methods traditionally used to investigate the occurrence of intergroup contact. A more detailed account with academic references is included in Appendix Two.

2.1 Contact and prejudice reduction

The Contact Hypothesis emerged in the 1950s within Social Psychology as a model of prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954). It is based on the observation that separation between groups fosters misunderstanding and gives rise to illusory negative stereotypes and prejudice, which in turn perpetuate division and segregation. It posited that while contact between groups in conflict can be antagonistic, under ideal conditions contact can reduce prejudice by dispelling myths and stereotypes and enabling the formation of cooperative, positive relationships. By providing an environment in which group members can come together for meaningful interactions on equal terms, for cooperative purposes and with the support of organisers of the initiative, contact should be positive and in turn lower prejudice and reduce conflict.

While the Contact Hypothesis emerged within a specific cultural and historical context (in the United States at the time of the Black civil rights movement and the repeal of the 'Jim Crow' racial segregation laws) it spawned thousands of subsequent studies in the US and elsewhere around the world. Early investigations attempted to simulate intergroup contact under controlled conditions and to identify which of the key conditions of optimal contact was most important to prejudice reduction. Later studies, including those on Northern Ireland (see chapter three below) created sophisticated survey tools to measure the level of self-reported contact within divided societies and use this to predict individuals' attitudes and behaviours towards others from different communities.

2.2 How does contact work? Knowledge, anxiety-reduction and empathy.

These experimental and survey studies have been used to identify what it is about contact that leads to a reduction in prejudice and the improvement in relations between groups. Four key factors have been identified which have an important role in successful contact: knowledge increase, anxiety reduction, increased empathy and shared identity.

2.2.1 Knowledge

Of these, the outcome of an increase in knowledge of the other group has been found to be the weakest predictor of good relations. Interventions aimed at increasing knowledge alone (for example educational campaigns) have little impact on prejudice. The reason for this would appear to be the strong effect that prejudice has upon how people absorb new information about the other group. Prejudices are notably resistant to change and tend to act in a self-confirming way as people tend to look for negative information that affirms their suspicions about the other group and to ignore new information that might challenge their long-held beliefs. Consequently, while the availability of knowledge which disconfirms traditional beliefs may potentially contribute to attitude change, information by itself (in the absence of other aspects of intergroup contact) would appear to be ineffectual.

2.2.2 Anxiety reduction

The second key element of contact is its effects on the reduction of anxiety in intergroup encounters. Intergroup encounters between members of opposed groups are often characterised by fear and anxiety. If relations between groups are poor, group members will are likely to be apprehensive when meeting unknown outgroup members. Even

if relations are not overtly antagonistic, a lack of knowledge about how to behave appropriately towards an outgroup member can lead to awkwardness and anxiety. Likewise a fear that the outgroup will have a negative impression of one's own group will increase anxiety. In turn this places a heavy mental strain upon the individual which reduces their ability to act naturally and this increases the likelihood that they will focus on errors and misunderstandings in the encounter. The encounter itself is therefore likely to be highly fraught with the anxiety of each party appearing as unfriendliness or even as prejudice to the other side. Indeed the expectation of being judged negatively or of eliciting a negative response can in turn lead to pre-emptive negative behaviour on behalf of participants, which thereby perpetuates the cycle of antagonism. In short, intergroup anxiety makes for negative contact.

Positive, good quality contact reduces these effects by countering the interpersonal aspects of anxiety. Familiarity with the outgroup leads to the establishment of norms of intergroup behaviour which can reduce uncertainty and increase the predictability of each participant's responses. Better communication and cooperation can reduce misunderstanding and counter misapprehensions as to the intentions and goals of the other group. Indeed research has demonstrated that even imagining successful contact with an outgroup member is sufficient to reduce apprehension about encountering them in real life. In other words, this aspect of contact operates by diffusing the fear associated with encountering an unfamiliar and potentially hostile outgroup member.

2.2.3 Empathy

Empathy, or the ability to share the perceptions and feelings of others, has also been shown to improve intergroup relations. Prejudice, by exaggerating the differences between people is thought to reduce the ability to empathise with others or see things from their perspective. Conversely, recognition of similarity with members of the outgroup, and in particular the familiarity occasioned by close friendship, leads to an increase in perspective taking and the ability to emotionally relate to outgroup members. Contact therefore increases empathy by offering the opportunity for friendship and closeness to emerge between members of different groups (though this will occur only if the contact is positive and of high quality). However, one problem with this aspect of contact is that people can view their outgroup friends as exceptions to their broader group and so intergroup friendship does not always translate into better attitudes towards the outgroup as a whole.

2.2.4 Shared identity

Finally, the degree to which people from different groups feel part of a single group has been shown to be associated with a lower level of prejudice. While many conflicts occur between members of groups with different religious, national or political 'identities', having a shared or 'common' identity which encompasses both groups, can foster feelings of similarity and interdependence. Intergroup contact can work to foster a common identity if the members of different groups are brought together for a common purpose or come to realise that they have a common set of concerns which can be addressed more effectively by working together.

However, again it is not always clear what this means for the practice of intergroup relations. Some contact theorists advocate an absence of identity as best for intergroup relations such that contact should occur in a neutral environment. Others suggest that contact works best when group members are explicitly representing their groups such that an environment of partnership and sharing should make for better contact. Others still suggest that having a new identity which includes both groups might be most effective. Overall it would appear that while identity issues are clearly relevant to understanding intergroup contact, there is no single 'one-size-fits-all' approach to better intergroup relations.

2.3 Some limitations to contact research

The tradition of theory and research outlined above spans over half a century and thousands

of individual studies. As noted previously, the general conclusion is that contact, under ideal circumstances, does indeed work to reduce prejudice and that identity is a key factor in how this operates. However, over the past decade, a body of criticism has arisen which questions the methods used in this tradition and the lack of real-world focus in the research. In particular, critics have pointed to the absence of research on how group members' own experiences and understandings of intergroup contact affect their subsequent attitudes and behaviours.

2.3.1 Self-reporting biases

Firstly, survey research relies heavily on the self-reporting of contact rather than examining the instances where contact actually occurs. Undoubtedly most survey respondents report honestly and openly, but sensitive political issues sometimes require more subtle and nuanced qualitative approaches. Furthermore survey research typically assumes the aspects of contact which have an effect. While this may capture some, or even most aspects of successful contact, it ignores the wider range of beliefs, emotions and experiences that characterise real-life contact encounters. This is particularly the case for contact initiatives where the interpretations and reactions of participants may be heavily shaped by local history and political context and so may differ considerably from what contact theorists predict.

2.3.2 The non-occurrence of contact and the impact of negative contact

Second, while the survey and laboratory research outlined above clearly demonstrates a link between increased contact and reduced prejudice, it tends to assume that contact will also happen relatively easily in the real world. It does not. Studies of intergroup contact in divided societies in South Africa, Israel, the US and the UK as well as Northern Ireland show that in naturalistic encounters, self-segregation between groups occurs spontaneously. This is not surprising – contact is challenging, anxiety-provoking and risks conflict and most people are motivated to avoid this. Simply increasing geographical proximity will not automatically increase good contact, if anything it will increase the likelihood of avoidance or even negative contact. The processes whereby good contact actually occurs needs to be understood where it occurs and from the participants' perspectives.

Related to this, the majority of research has focused on positive contact rather than the consequences of negative contact. More recently, researchers have demonstrated that instances of negative contact can have a more profound effect than those of positive contact. Positive contact tends to occur in safe and secure environment and is associated with decreased anxiety, familiarity and reassurance. However this means that it is also less memorable and less consequential than the instances of intergroup threat and conflict which, due to their fearful and anxiety-ridden nature, will have a much greater effect on beliefs and behaviours in the future. Good relations between opposing groups are fragile and as a consequence, a single 'critical' instance of intergroup conflict can have a disproportionate impact in undermining many previous instances of positive contact.

2.3.3 Everyday experiences of contact

Third, survey research typically ignores people's everyday lives as the source and site of contact experiences. As the work of contact researchers John Dixon (e.g. Dixon et al., 2005), Paul Connolly (e.g. Connolly, 2000) and others show, it is the routines and concerns of everyday life which act to shape intergroup attitudes and behaviours. Few people in divided societies are professional politicians or community workers concerned with improving intergroup relations. Most have other responsibilities, duties, worries and cares as well as relationships and recreations which make up their daily lives. It is these activities, rather than the abstract politics of community relations, which shape their thoughts and actions on a day-to-day basis.

For example, the issue of parenting is a focal one in many people's lives which shapes and colours their social and political attitudes. The priorities and needs of parents will be a much

better predictor of the choices that people make on a daily basis than their abstract political beliefs. Parenthood also has a profound effect on how people spend their time: those with young children will structure their morning, evening and weekend routines around caring for their children, delivering them and collecting them from school, facilitating their recreational activities and this in turn will affect who they meet and interact with in their daily lives. Sending children to segregated schools may serve to further segregate parents; cross-community recreational activities for children will serve to bring them together. In other words, interactions and intergroup contact need to be understood and examined in the routines and context of everyday lives.

2.3.4 Local community as the context for contact

Fourth, while contact research often uses the term 'community' and 'neighbourhood' it does not often explore how real-life communities shape contact. Interactions with neighbours and nearby family and friends have huge impact in shaping how we experience the world. Neighbourhoods are often an important source of social, emotional and instrumental support to residents and the degree to which people identify with their local community predicted the extent which they can rely on those nearby for help in emergencies or times of crisis. In turn, this has a profound effect on how secure they feel and how they view the outside world. If residents know that we are likely to be able to rely on others when needed and that they can come together with others to overcome difficulties, then their community will provide them with resilience in the face of unexpected events. This pattern of perceptions and behaviour is known as the 'social cure' dynamic and has been noted in groups as diverse as healthcare support groups and work organisations as well as residential communities.

In contrast, people who feel marginalised and alienated from their community will have fewer channels of communication with their neighbours. They will be less able to gain information and support in times of crisis and will be less likely to come together with other residents to collectively tackle local problems. They will also be less likely to engage with local services and community groups. These individuals are especially vulnerable to high levels of threat and stress in response to unexpected events, which may perpetuate their isolation from others.

In divided societies, this has several implications for intergroup contact. Often in segregated areas, single-identity communities provide support and resilience against threats from the outgroup. Challenges to this sense of identity can be met with resistance and intergroup contact can be conflictual and antagonistic, leading to the marginalisation or exclusion of vulnerable outgroup members. However, this depends upon the ethos and identity of the community. Communities with a more inclusive ethos can be welcoming to outgroup members and can actually provide support to residents when facing the challenges of intergroup contact. A community which has a strong identity of being a 'mixed area' can furthermore show resilience to challenges, as residents will come together to face threats to this identity including those posed by division and conflict. However the effects of community ethos and identity in divided societies are poorly understood and need to be investigated to understand how neighbourhood 'social cure' dynamics facilitate or impede contact.

2.3.5 The physical environment of contact

Finally, contact always occurs in a particular place which will impact upon its consequences. Most obviously, physical divides such as the 'peacewalls' of Northern Ireland and Israel can separate communities. More subtly, the physical layout of a local community will shape the movements of residents and their opportunities for contact with others, including members of the outgroup. Moreover, the environment is more than simply a backdrop to contact, it is infused with meanings and associations which reflect the ownership of the space, the identity of those who occupy it and what behaviours

can occur there. Increased contact between groups should change the ways that places and spaces are understood and used by members of different groups: better relations should lead to more successful sharing of spaces, while conflict will perpetuate physical segregation. Only by investigating how people see this local environment and its impact on their sense of who they are and what behaviours are appropriate for them, can we understand how place shapes complex social behaviours such as intergroup contact.

Summary

Overall, the neglect of these and many other real-world factors means that the broader political, social, community and personal context of contact is being systematically excluded from the bulk of research in this area. While the theories and research on identity-based contact are essential to the understanding of contact dynamics and consequences, the appreciation of this context of lived reality and everyday experience is also essential for an understanding of why contact does or does not work in specific locations. The next chapter extends these theoretical considerations and their critiques to the study of contact in Northern Ireland.

3

Chapter Three:
Contact in Northern Ireland

Chapter Three: Contact in Northern Ireland

3.1 Conflict and segregation in Northern Ireland

While there are many historical, national, political, economic and cultural dimensions to the conflict in Northern Ireland, it is generally acknowledged that the situation is primarily an 'identity conflict' (Cairns, 1982; Whyte, 1990). This means that the key dynamic of the situation is based on how each group defines themselves in relation to one another and how their actions and reactions are shaped by those of the other group. These two dimensions: the collective self-definition and the intergroup dynamic are characteristic of all identity conflicts across the world and lie at the heart of the intractability of such situations. They also provide potential solutions to conflict through the shaping and altering of identities at different levels of experience as well as the potential to generate new identities and identity dynamics.

Contemporary Northern Ireland has been shaped by decades and indeed centuries of identity conflict, which has resulted in the polarisation of the two main communities in Northern Ireland in terms of national identity, political preference, collective history, language, sports and cultural practices. Over time, the groups have distinguished themselves on these relevant axes of comparison, and the prejudicial stereotypes of the communities reflect these distinctions and the values attached to them. During the cycle of violence known as 'the Troubles' these differences and antagonisms were enacted in extreme and horrific ways, but even after the ceasefires the identity conflict persists, though largely now in non-violent arenas such as disputes surrounding the expression of political opinion and the display of identity.

3.1.1 Segregation in Northern Ireland

The legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland is ingrained in the social structure of the region and the geographical dispersal of its inhabitants. In addition to the gradual processes of social homophily, the conflict saw wholesale movement of individuals from mixed to single-identity areas (Whyte, 1990; Doherty & Poole, 1997). Today, geographical segregation still characterises the majority of residential areas across Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2010) while more generally, the population remains divided in terms of education and social networks. Even where contact does occur in ostensibly shared environments, it is often reported to be superficial and low in quality (Hewstone, Cairns & Niens, 2003). While this segregation operates to preserve and perpetuate the identities of each of these two communities, it also fosters the mistrust, misunderstanding and prejudice that lie at the core of all identity conflicts.

3.1.2 Educational segregation.

The vast majority of children in Northern Ireland still attend schools of predominantly one religion or another. Integrated education accounts for only 5.6% of Primary and 8.3% of Secondary school pupils. Despite this, progress has been made in developing intergroup contact through Shared Education programmes, whereby students from single-identity schools attend classes and share resources with pupils from nearby schools from the other community.

3.1.3 Personal and marital segregation

As Cairns and Hewstone report, religious homophily of social networks in Northern Ireland is high with around 55% of Protestants and 75% Catholics reporting that all or most of their friends are co-religionists. In line with the patterns of educational segregation noted above, Craig & Cairns (1999) report that 50% of children under the age of 15 do not have any outgroup friends and, furthermore, researchers have questioned the depth of cross-community friendships. Likewise, mixed-marriages are infrequent, accounting for just 4-10% of all marriages in Northern Ireland. Even when these do occur, researchers tend to assume that couples have tended to revert to one community

and to largely sever ties with the other. However recent research (Lloyd & Robinson, 2011) has challenged this, pointing out that while mixed marriages are associated with increased residential mixing and more moderate political opinion, they are not associated with fewer ties to family and friends.

3.1.4 Geographical segregation

Of all types of segregation, geographical segregation is perhaps the most significant as it physically precludes the opportunity for all other forms of face-to-face contact between groups. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister report that in the 2001 census, 30% of Protestants live in areas of 90% or greater of their own tradition while 44% of Catholics live in similarly homogenous Catholic areas (OFMDFM, 2007). 67% of Catholics and 73% of Protestants live in areas of 80% or more of one religion (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2008). However, since the paramilitary ceasefires of the 1990s, physical safety has become less of an immediate concern for the general public and a greater level of movement and mixing between communities is now possible in all spheres of life. In terms of residential mobility this has resulted in a greater reported desire to live in mixed areas (82% of respondents preferring to live in mixed areas with 87% believing that mixing leads to better relations – OFMDFM 2013) as well as a degree of actual demographic change in single identity areas. Nolan (2013) noted that the 2011 census indicated

- *a steep decline in the proportion of 'single identity' wards (above a threshold of 80 per cent of one religion), from 55 per cent to 37 per cent;*
- *in line with the growth of the Catholic population, a change in 28 wards to a Catholic majority, with none going the other way.* (Peace Monitoring Report Two, p115)

However, as Nolan also points out, this global pattern of change does not necessarily translate into desegregation at sub-ward level. Indeed analysis of the Fortwilliam Ward (one of the sites of the present research) indicates that the three subwards remain predominantly either Catholic or Protestant.

Moreover, simple geographical proximity does not guarantee social mixing or meaningful intergroup contact. As we have seen in the previous chapter, contact has been found to improve intergroup relations, but only under optimal conditions. In real world circumstances, informal segregation has been found to be endemic at micro-levels in divided societies. Within Northern Ireland the complex and subtle process of telling enables people to discern and signal religious denomination and thereby facilitates parallels and separate living even at close quarters (Whyte, 1990; Trew, 1996). Consequently, the degree to which desegregation leads to positive (rather than negative) encounters and leads to meaningful, constructive and consequential interactions between group members is a matter for investigation.

3.1.5 Government initiatives

At government level, the decline in political violence and increased mobility between communities has facilitated the development of policies and initiatives which aim to challenge traditional divisions and improve relations between the main ethno-political groups. Early evaluations of these programmes (Knox & Hughes, 1996) yielded mixed results, reflecting the early stages of the peace process. More recent formulations of government strategy, including the 'Shared Future' and 'Together Building a United Community' strategies have been more comprehensive in their approach and tackled issues of residential segregation alongside the more salient aspects of community division such as political emblems, interfaces and sectarian violence.

'A Shared Future' specified several key areas of policy which were to underpin how residential segregation was to be addressed in later initiatives. In tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism and racism, the framework aimed to create spaces which were more amenable to sharing by members of all communities (section 2.1); by developing shared spaces in town and

city centres it was hoped to develop places where people could 'meet, share, play, work and live together' (section 2.2) while longterm programmes of building better relations across interface areas (section 2.3) and the provision of shared services (section 2.10) were also outlined.

One subsequent programme that helped implement these aspirations was the 'Shared Neighbourhood Programme' run by the Housing Executive. From 2008-2011 this pilot initiative targeted 30 communities across Northern Ireland which evidenced mixing and a welcoming of diversity. The programme fostered this by providing the resources and training to establish local project teams of members of the local community alongside representatives from the District Council and Housing Executive. These teams were tasked with ascertaining local community needs, raising awareness of diversity and respect for all, offering opportunities for mixing and the development of a local good relations policy for their areas. The teams work to develop, agree and disseminate a local Shared Neighbourhood Charter (see Appendix One for an example) which sets out the community relations values and goals for the local neighbourhood. Notably they place an emphasis on welcoming new members to the community by providing a 'welcome pack' of information upon their arrival, though this is primarily focussed on providing orientation information to residents as well as tackling issues of racism rather than explicitly addressing issues of sectarian division. The success of this programme has led to the initiative being mainstreamed by the Department for Social Development in their 'Shared Communities Programme' which will target a further 20 existing mixed estates across Northern Ireland.

This major programme has become central to the housing dimension of the recent 'Together Building a United Community' policy. TBUC builds upon the Shared Future vision of shared space and increased mixing by specifying that this should occur at local community level (sections 3.10, 3.22; 4.23), even in interface areas and committing to mainstreaming good relations in future housing developments. These new developments will include four new urban villages in deprived areas and 10 new Shared Community housing developments. It is worth noting that these initiatives differ from those targeted by the Shared Neighbourhood Programme, in that SNP targeted areas of pre-existing mixing, where a potential for developing an ethos of diversity was evident. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that these specific initiatives do not capture the increased mixing noted in the previous section which is occurring spontaneously across private as well as social housing in previously single identity areas across Northern Ireland.

More generally, cross-community policies, from the broad ideals of the 'Shared Future' initiative of OFMDFM down to the specific events promoted in Good Relations Strategy of Belfast City Council, are typically based on the Contact Hypothesis – the idea that bringing together people from opposed communities under favourable conditions will improve intergroup relations (see chapter two above). Contact theory has a considerable evidence base from research conducted across the world and increasing support from survey and experimental research conducted in Northern Ireland. However it also has key limitations which need to be considered, especially in relation to the development of research-based policy targeted at fostering residential mixing and good relations.

3.2 Contact Research In Northern Ireland

3.2.1 Contact and prejudice reduction

The general finding noted in chapter two, that increased contact leads to lower prejudice and better intergroup attitudes, has been replicated and confirmed within Northern Ireland. Large-scale representative surveys of the general public attest to the beneficial impact of contact upon attitudes towards the other community (Hewstone et al., 2005; Hewstone et al., 2008). Self-reports of individuals' level of contact with the opposing community directly correlate with more positive intergroup attitudes, though this effect has been found to be stronger in the

majority (Protestant) community. The main mechanism through which this is found to operate is the reduction of intergroup anxiety, such that insofar as contact reduces the anxiety caused by the presence of the other group, it will have a positive effect on attitudes.

In addition, both quality and quantity of contact have been found to impact upon attitudes. Though some degree of contact is required to have an effect, the quality of the contact (measured in this research by asking how positive or negative the contact was) is found to have the greater effect. As one might expect, negative contact does not predict better intergroup attitudes.

3.2.2 Intergroup friendship

All forms of contact are not equivalent and friendships with outgroup members are found to be more effective in reducing prejudice than casual acquaintance. Contact with friends from the other community is found to reduce levels of anxiety and the closeness of the relationship has been associated with more positive outgroup attitudes. Moreover, indirect contact with members of the outgroup though ingroup friends has also been found to predict better intergroup attitudes. Having close ingroup friends who, in turn, have close outgroup friends has a lesser, but no less reliable association with lower levels of prejudice than direct contact itself.

3.2.3 Psychological mediators of the effects of contact

The ways in which friendship and other forms of quality contact operate are thought to be through a number of interrelated psychological mediators. In line with the broader research in this area (see chapter two above) friendship is associated with increased levels of empathy and perspective-taking. This ability to see things from the other groups' side and to share their emotion has been found to predict higher levels of intergroup forgiveness for past political violence and lower levels of prejudice.

Relatedly, intergroup trust has been found to mediate the impact of contact on prejudice and behavioural tendencies towards the outgroup. The feeling that one can predict and rely upon the cooperative behaviour of the other group makes a distinct contribution to the positive impact of contact over and above simply liking the outgroup. In other words, trust is more important in behaving positively towards the outgroup than positive attitudes alone. Conversely, distrust and the expectation of negative behaviour from the outgroup is associated with less positive contact effects.

3.2.4 Contact in educational settings

Despite the overwhelming educational segregation of religious communities in Northern Ireland, educational settings are good to implement contact initiatives. Being able to control the environment, regulate pupils' behaviour and closely monitor the results means that the optimal conditions of the contact hypothesis can potentially be implemented in full. Research comparing mixing in integrated and segregated schools finds a substantial positive impact of integrated education on less sectarian stances on national identity and political attitudes (Hayes, McAllister & Dowds, 2007). Moreover, there is a higher level of cross-group friendship in integrated schooling and that, across the board, intergroup friendship is associated with lower levels of anxiety and prejudice (Niens & Cairns, 2005; Stringer et al., 2009).

Despite this, questions have been raised as to the ethos of integrated schools in suppressing rather than expressing the identity of the pupils (Donnelly, 2008). Similarly, research across the different types of school in Northern Ireland indicate that it is the heterogeneity of the school, rather than the type of school itself, which leads to more positive intergroup norms towards contact and better intergroup relations (Hughes et al., 2013).

3.2.5 Contact in residential settings

While contact in education settings is amenable to manipulation and control, spontaneous contact in real-world settings is much less so. Accordingly, survey research has found that

residential mixing has been found to have less predictable effects on intergroup relations. Positive outcomes were found for some, but not all residents of mixed areas of Belfast, while higher levels of contact were associated with more negative outcomes in towns and rural areas across Northern Ireland (Schmid et al., 2009). Residents of mixed areas have better intergroup attitudes, but only if they have more frequent and better quality interactions with those from the other group. If so, they will also have a stronger sense of belonging and trust in others from their neighbourhood.

However residents living in mixed areas who do not have this level of contact actually experience *higher* levels of threat, *lower* levels of trust and *lower* levels of belonging than those who remain in single-identity communities. This is a particularly surprising finding, given that single identity areas are also associated with higher levels of exposure to political violence. The reason for this remains unclear, but overall contact appears to play a positive role in good relations in Northern Ireland only if the contact is frequent and of good quality and is accompanied by personal identification with the local community.

The understanding of how contact improves intergroup relations is less apparent. Those living in mixed residential areas are more likely to endorse the more inclusive identity category of 'Northern Irish', though notably this increase is evident only among Catholics. Overall, those who endorse the 'Northern Irish' identity are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the outgroup, but those who also identify with their own subgroup are most likely to have improved attitudes through contact. In other words, the evidence suggests that having a complex identity but also a strong sense of self which recognises both commonality and difference, is most likely to be associated with increased levels of mixing and better outcomes of contact.

Survey evidence additionally suggests that those who engage in higher levels of contact with others from the outgroup have a more complex sense of their own social identities. Lack of contact reinforces simplistic stereotypes of the outgroup as homogenous and undifferentiated, while contact leads to an appreciation of the variability and variety within groups. Social identity complexity has been shown to predict better intergroup attitudes, increased likelihood of living in mixed residential areas and indeed better attitudes towards other minority groups.

3.3 Limitations to the contact research in Northern Ireland

The contact research on Northern Ireland suffers from many of the limitations outlined in the previous chapter. Here we outline how these issues manifest themselves within the context of Northern Ireland and highlight a few of the issues which are idiosyncratic to the Northern Ireland case.

3.3.1 Reliance on self-report measures

The majority of research on contact in Northern Ireland has been done using surveys of representative or strategic samples in the region. This has the advantage of sampling a wide range of opinions, beliefs and self-reported behaviours and affording complex statistical analyses, but can be limited in the information that it obtained from individuals. Most notably, sectarianism is widely considered to be an undesirable characteristic and therefore is vulnerable to 'self-report bias'. Insofar as people are aware that contact with the other group is socially valued, they may be inclined to exaggerate the frequency and quality of contact. Consequently the results may tell us more about the characteristics associated with wishing to be seen to be unprejudiced than of contact itself.

Relatedly, the relationship between contact and prejudicial attitudes is typically quite small and in general, the relationship between attitudes and actual behaviours is typically quite weak. The evidence is that Northern Ireland remains a divided society such that the relatively high levels of reported contact are unlikely to be accurate. Moreover, there is a bias whereby people have been found to assume that their attitudes are more liberal, tolerant and positive than others within

their group. At the very least, this research needs to be supplemented by studies of actual contact behaviour and its consequences in the real-world.

3.3.2 Studying contact where it occurs (or does not occur)

While survey research asks people to reflect and report their contact experiences is far removed from studying contact where it actually occurs in real life. As noted above, it assumes that contact actually does occur in the manner in which it is reported and also largely avoids the issue of the avoidance of contact or the experience of negative contact. Recent research by Shelley McKeown (McKeown et al., 2013; Orr et al., 2012) on real-life contact in Northern Ireland suggests that self-segregation is much more prevalent than previously thought, even in ostensibly 'shared' locations. Studies of mixed classrooms at Further Education colleges, integrated schools and even cross-community contact initiatives showed patterns of self-segregation. In line with previous research in divided societies in South Africa, Israel, the US and England, it would appear that close proximity cannot be taken as evidence of positive and meaningful contact.

3.3.3 Overlooking the experience of contact

Contact theorists build upon a substantial body of research which points to several key factors or conditions of contact, as playing a key role in facilitating a positive contact experience. Rarely do they investigate the actual experience of contact by asking the participants what aspects matter most to them or indeed what other variety of outcomes (including negative outcomes) might occur. While the factors of anxiety, empathy, trust and friendship may well impact in a variety of ways upon people's experiences of contact, there are a wider range of perceptions, emotions, interpretations and reactions occurring in social interactions than are encapsulated by these general elements.

The survey literature does point to the 'quality' as well as quantity of contact as a key element of its effects on intergroup attitudes. However this research typically measures 'quality' by asking people if they found it to be positive or negative rather than investigating its content or meaning. In other words, it rarely examines what this experience actually entails. Without understanding how people actually anticipate and experience intergroup contact, including under what conditions people interact and how they actually behave towards one another, we are no closer to understanding how the 'quality' of interaction can lead to positive contact outcomes. In particular, the experience of fear and anxiety has been identified as a key feature of residential segregation in Northern Ireland (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2010) and is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Only be examining the actual occurrence of specific instances of apprehension and fear can the inter- and intragroup dynamics underpinning such occurrences be understood.

3.3.4 Overlooking lay-understandings of contact

In addition to ignoring the occurrence and experience of contact, survey research largely ignores the fact that people have their own opinions and theories about contact, its desirability and how it works. Members of each group may have a variety of opinions about the desirability of contact, the conditions under which it should occur, the positivity or negativity of different forms of contact and the consequences for them and their communities. In the same way as contact theorists may argue over the most appropriate 'model' of contact for an intervention, people themselves will have different expectations and preferences as to whether identity should be displayed or not in their local areas or whether a 'superordinate identity' of Northern Irish is a good thing to have. Without engaging with these beliefs and expectations, the results of intergroup encounters will not be fully understood and misunderstanding and conflict is likely to result.

3.3.5 Overlooking the imperatives of everyday lives

Relatedly, achieving positive contact with people from another community typically does not rank

highly in the everyday concerns and priorities of the general population. Contact is unlikely to be a priority for most individuals and indeed, as indicated by McKeown and colleagues, may be avoided. Moreover, survey research may create the illusion that people make carefully thought-out decisions as to the desirability of contact and then make efforts to ensure that this does or does not happen. The reality for most residents in Northern Ireland is that contact is incidental. It occurs by chance in the course of daily life or through the established work, family and friendship networks in which they live and are largely determined by other cares and concerns which do take centre stage.

The work of Paul Connolly on youth in Northern Ireland is particularly instructive in this regard (Connolly, 2000). Connolly's analysis of young people's behaviour in mixed social spaces revealed that, unsurprisingly, young people were not primarily concerned with the background politics of Northern Ireland. They were concerned with their own interests and pursuits. Sectarianism only became relevant either when it impinged on their lives from outside or when they made it relevant for other purposes. For example, sporting rivalry could occur along sectarian lines, or a youthful romantic-encounter-gone-wrong could be attributed to the community background of the partner. In other words, sectarianism may form a background to everyday life, it may occur incidentally as part of normal routine and it may provide a resource for social interactions, but is rarely emerges as a specific topic of concern or action in the course of daily life.

The implication for the Contact Hypothesis is that interventions and research need to take the concerns and interests of everyday life as a starting point. People typically do not want to mix for the sake of mixing. Mixing can be difficult, challenging and uncomfortable. Contact needs to be rooted in what people do want to do: in the important consequential and rewarding aspects of their lives, where contact can have a demonstrable benefit over and above mixing for its own sake.

3.3.6 Overlooking residential communities as context to contact

In Northern Ireland the importance of local community for the understanding of conflict is especially important as those communities which are most segregated and have the lowest level of positive intergroup attitudes are also those highest in deprivation. Poverty, unemployment and crime provide a complex and challenging background to everyday life as well as exposing residents to a variety of urban stressors over and above those associated with the conflict. Deprivation, perceived inequality and injustice all help to perpetuate marginalisation which, in a conflict situation, can feed intergroup antagonism and reinforce segregation.

In contrast, areas of increased mixing are likely to have atypical demographic profiles. As research by Byrne et al. (2005) on mixed residential areas in Belfast illustrates, mixed areas tend to evidence a positive experience of intergroup contact including: low levels of sectarian incidents, acceptance of cultural symbols and the freedom to express one's culture, freedom of movement and a high level of ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. While this is accompanied by a range of levels of community participation and a variety of different experiences of intergroup relations among younger and older residents as well as majority and minority groups, the overall pattern is of better community relations in such areas.

Such good community relations are not necessarily characterised by unequivocally high levels of contact. Hughes et al. (2011) in their study of three mixed areas across Northern Ireland found a more complex and nuanced picture of intercommunity relations. While these areas were typically overall characterised by good relations, interpersonal relations comprised a mixture of gradually developing relationships, managed contacts and strategic avoidances, especially during times of broader political or sectarian tension. In other words, their research paints a more complex and nuanced picture than a straightforward assumption that mixing

translates into contact and better relations in an automatic or mechanistic fashion.

3.3.7 Overlooking the unique experience of residential mobility

Large-scale cross-sectional surveys ignore the trajectories of peoples' lives and take a snap-shot of attitudes, beliefs and self-reported experiences and behaviours in the present. This is a poor methodology for capturing the experience of those who have undergone important transitions in their lives which have shaped their current perspectives and beliefs. The more detailed qualitative studies noted above do indeed investigate the experiences and behaviours of those living in mixed residential areas, but again fail to capture the experience of moving from the incoming residents' perspective.

This omission is significant in that the increasing residential mobility in Northern Ireland means that more people are moving from single identity areas into areas which are becoming increasingly mixed. This experience of transition raises a host of questions about the group members' relationship with their previous community, their motivations for moving, the initial experiences in their new community and the process of their integration which will mark them as different from both those neighbours they have left behind and those residents they have joined in their new community. Moreover their experiences of settling into their new community will afford a range of unique opportunities for both positive and negative contact. Given that these people actually constitute the population mobility evident in the census, exploring their perceptions and experiences is vital to understanding the causes as well as consequences of increased residential mixing in Northern Ireland.

3.4 Summary

The Contact Hypothesis posits that, under ideal conditions, contact between groups in a divided society will result in prejudice reduction and improvement in intergroup relations. Hundreds of laboratory and survey studies attest to this general principle and moreover specify that shifts in group identity, results in changes in knowledge, experience and empathy, underpin this effect. Despite this, critics have pointed out that contact in the real world is a more complex, fraught and unpredictable affair and that an examination of the experiences and perceptions of group members' engagement in contact in the social and environmental contexts in which it occurs is vital to predict when it will be successful.

Applied to Northern Ireland, survey research has demonstrated the expected effects of contact on prejudice reduction, but has also illustrated the complex and contradictory consequences of contact in residential settings. Mixing may or may not result in positive contact and prejudice reduction and can on occasions result in increased threat and poorer intergroup perceptions, even in mixed communities which are less exposed to political violence. Again the need for theoretically informed qualitative research into the experience of contact is essential to understand and predict the consequences of wholesale population movements towards increased residential mixing.

4

Chapter Four:
Methodology

Chapter Four: Methodology

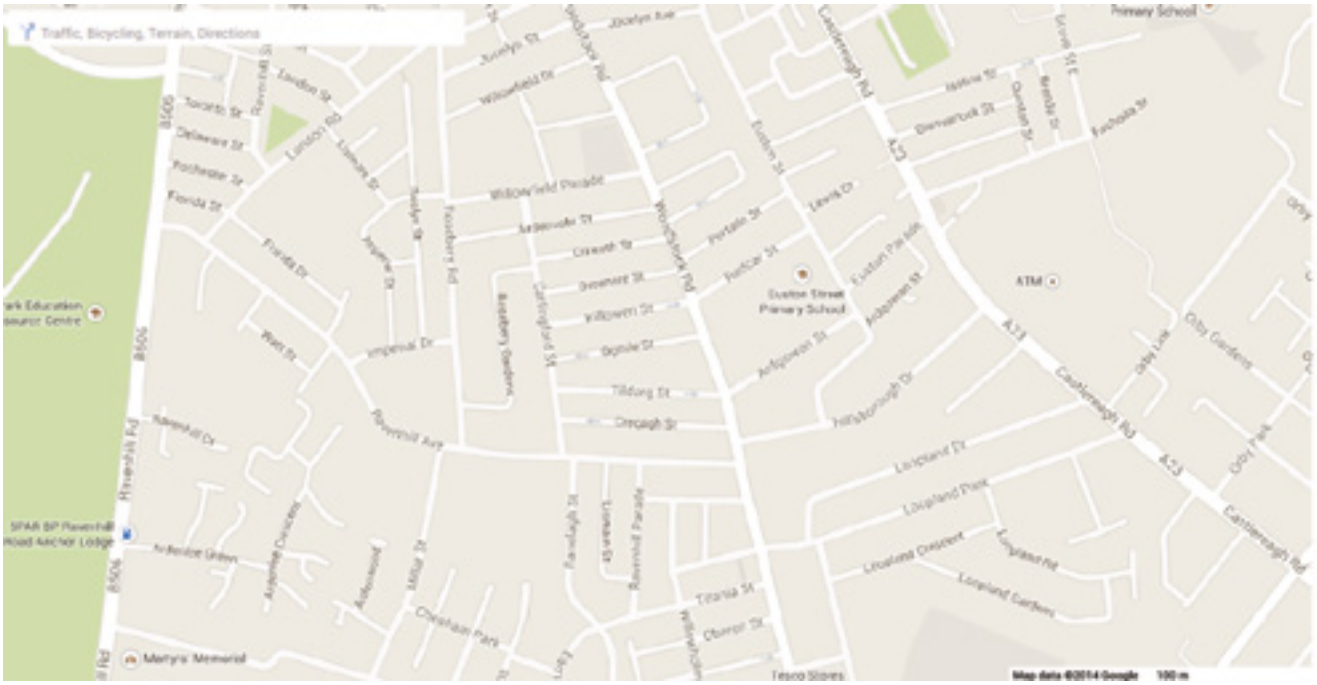
4.1 Recruitment areas

In order to get an indepth, thorough and reliable assessment of the impact of moving to more mixed residential areas, a combination of recruitment approaches and qualitative methods were required. We recruited participants from three residential areas of Belfast which have shown demographic shifts towards mixing over the past 10 years. The following areas were chosen on the basis of census data and local knowledge: Ravenhill, Fortwilliam and Cliftondene/Deerpark (a subsection of the Cliftonville electoral ward).

Electoral Ward	2001 Census		2011 Census	
	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant
Ravenhill	25.5	67.3	32.0	35.2
Fortwilliam	32.9	61.4	35.4	43.2
Cliftonville	63.8	29.2	63.1	18.4

Table 1: Percentages of Catholics and Protestants in Three 'Mixed' Areas of Belfast in 2001 and 2011.

The following accounts have been constructed from information provided locally by key informants, including community workers, religious ministers and longterm residents in each of the areas:

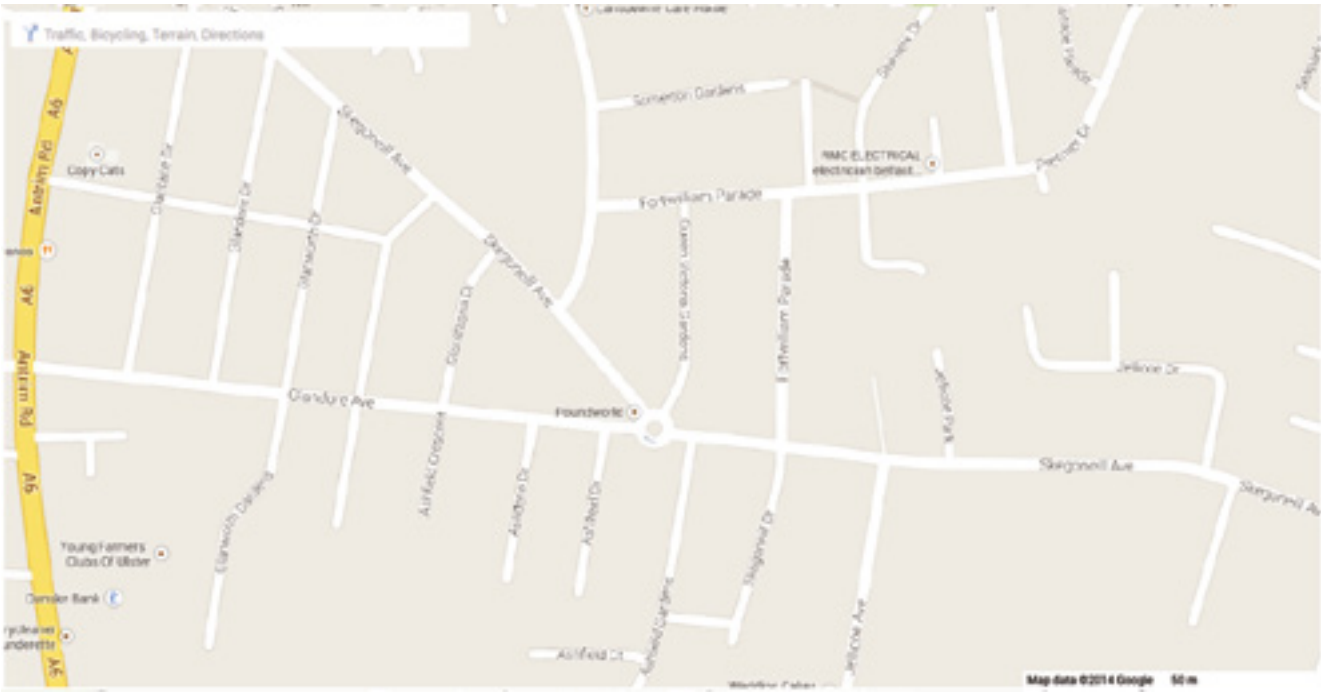


4.1.1 Ravenhill

The area of Ravenhill identified for the project stretches from Ravenhill Road across to Castlereagh Road, flanked by Ormeau Park to the west of Ravenhill Road and residential housing to its east. Ravenhill is traditionally a predominantly Protestant area, and would still be considered so at the lower end near the Albertbridge road. This area contains social housing, and has seen a major change in recent years with an increase in foreign nationals (*New and shifting populations in Belfast: analysis and impact,* n.d.). Some informants have commented that the change in the religious identity proportions in the area is due to foreign nationals moving in, rather than the migration of Catholics from other parts of Belfast or Northern Ireland to

that area. The increase in foreign nationals has put strain on the relations in the area, and accounts of racial attacks are not uncommon (B District: racist attacks – East Belfast, 2014, July 29; McDermott, 2013). Despite the traditional predominant Protestant identity of residents, there is a Catholic presence evident in the local St. Anthony's parish on Woodstock Road and the local Catholic school. The strong Protestant identity is seen in the presence of the Martyrs' Memorial Free Presbyterian and Ravenhill Presbyterian churches, as well as socio-political symbols such as Union Jack flags. This information was shared by informants and confirmed by interviewees.

The informants also commented on socio-economic divide in the area, separated where Ravenhill Avenue crosses the Woodstock/ Cregagh Road. Lower Ravenhill and the residential area around Woodstock house lower income residents, whereas upper Ranvehill and Cregagh are considered to house private homeowners and further on, middle class families. Lower Ravenhill, according to one informant, has been a good place for some who might feel that they are social outcasts in Belfast – members of the lesbian, gay and transgendered community, people of other ethnicities and community groups and even single individuals. Some residents are in mixed-religion marriages or partnerships. Despite its mixed identity, there continues to be some sectarian upheaval, largely due to the increase in foreign nationals.



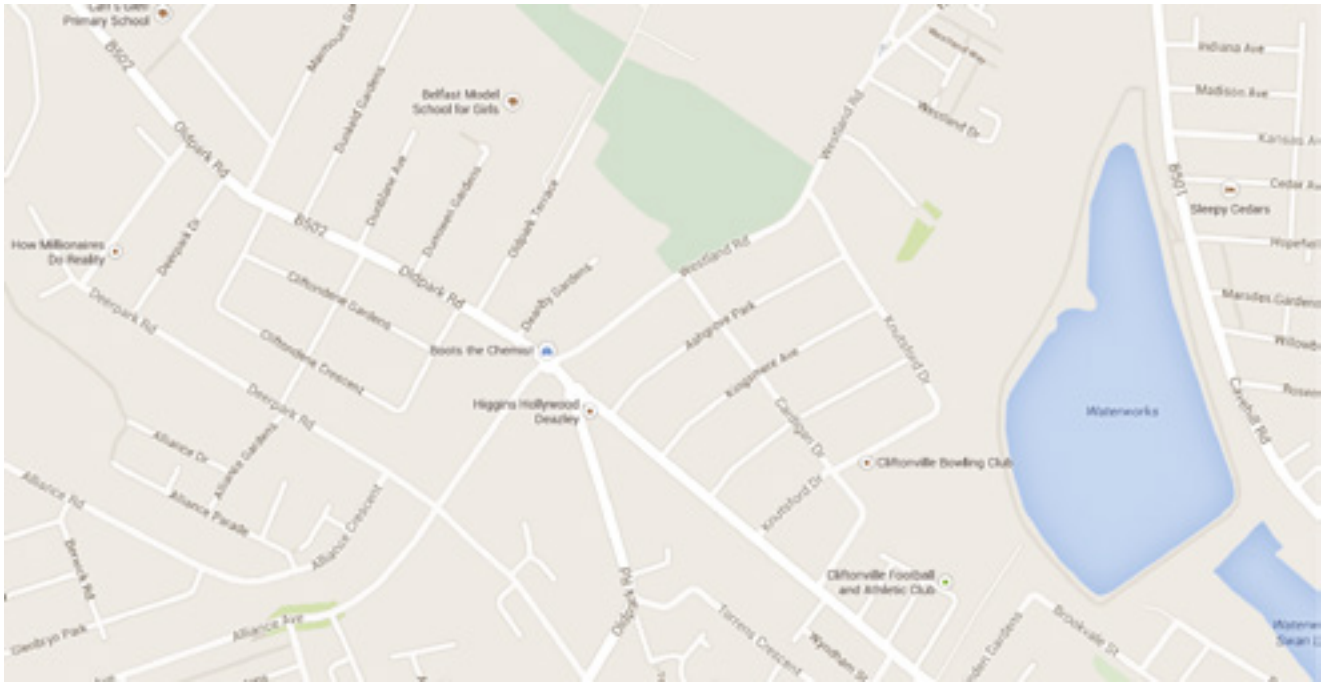
4.1.2 Fortwilliam

The area of Fortwilliam identified for the current research project encompasses a stretch between the Antrim and Shore roads. It includes the Skegoneill and Glandore Avenues, which meet at the Skegoneill-Glandore interface, as well as Somerton Road and the side streets of Glandore Avenue and much of Skegoneill Avenue. According to informants, Skegoneill is traditionally known as the Loyalist Protestant side and is said to have a history of UVF and UDA presence. Glandore traditionally has housed the Catholic side of the interface (Gaffikin, 2013). Informants and interviewees commented on the original purpose of the housing at the interface being designated for mixed religion couples. According to informants, many of the Northern Irish and Republic of Ireland residents are of mixed religion marriages or partnerships. But Fortwilliam has also seen some increase in foreign national residents in recent years, including Turkish, Filipino, Canadian, American and Polish nationalities.

Glandore has traditionally hosted middle class houses and residents, while Skegoneill's residents would traditionally have come from a working class or lower income background, according to informants. However, although many of the houses in Glandore are privately owned, there exists a certain amount of poverty there because a number of the aging population struggles financially despite being private homeowners.

According to the informants, this area has seen its fair share of sectarian upheaval over the years, with marked changes taking place in the last decade. A main reason for this is due to the cross-community work done with the residents in the area (this information was relayed not only by the informants but also by some of the interviewees). The *Skegoneill Glandore Common Purpose* is the local active good relations group, with its headquarters at the Thornbush community house on Ashfield Gardens. The group's work currently includes but is not limited to after-school homework clubs, a community garden and fun days. The informants made a point of stating that although Union flags are put up for a few hours each 12th of July (it is not clear, however, whether they are residents from Fortwilliam or from the neighbouring communities in the Shore Road direction and Tigers Bay area), they are taken down within a couple of days of the end of the public holiday. This point was both corroborated and contradicted by interviewees in the area.

It is worth noting that Glandore/Skegoneill is the only Shared Neighbourhood Programme area included in the present study. The initiatives detailed above have been undertaken as part of the SNP, and while our informants and residents did not report an awareness of this, the evaluation of the programme (Wallace Consulting, 2011) indicates that those residents who did respond to the completion survey recognised the mixed nature of the area, reported improving relations there and commented positively on the cross-community activities.



4.1.3 Cliftondene/Deerpark

Cliftondene/Deerpark is located off the Oldpark Road. It is surrounded by dominant single identity communities, such as Ballysillan, New Lodge and Cavehill. Historically, as far back as 40 years ago, it was known as a Protestant area until families and individuals from Catholic backgrounds began migrating there, due in large part to those who had moved up the socio-economic ladder and were able to buy private homes. According to the informants, this raised the area's status from its working class identification to a lower middle class

one. The increase in Catholic residents in the area was due to numerous reasons, but one recent common theme would be mixed religion marriages and partnerships. Protestants in mixed marriages would tend to choose a Catholic area to move to, and a working class Protestant would feel less threatened about moving in to a Catholic area than the other way around. Contrary to this statement however, the feedback from other informants regarding this area was that anyone moving here in recent years would be of a Catholic background, not a Protestant background. Any Protestant residents would be considered part of the 'host' community, having been there for two or more decades.

Informants felt that the residents of Cliftondene/ Deerpark show great respect for each other, being less likely to put flags up during specific politico-religious holidays, such as the 12th of July. One possible reason for this respect was suggested to be the increase in privately owned homes, while the Housing Executive owns few residences comparatively. Such a feature was reported to be physically visible – detached and semi-detached houses with well-manicured gardens on tree-lined roads.

4.2 Recruitment

We aimed to recruit a diverse sample of people who have moved to the three selected target areas. For the purposes of the present exploratory research, sampling criteria were established beforehand to make sure an equivalence of participants (i.e. that their experiences are comparable). Accordingly selection was restricted to those who had been resident for 10 years or less and to those moving from within Northern Ireland. Within these parameters the sample was diverse in terms of age, occupation and community of origin.

During the recruitment process, these parameters were occasionally relaxed so as to ensure reaching quota in each area and to ensure a usable sample within the timeframe of the research. Accordingly some excess interviews or interviews with participants from the Republic of Ireland were initially conducted which were later discarded when more suitable interviewees were located (interviews 3, 9, 16). However, some participants' partners were from the Republic of Ireland or further afield and these have been maintained in the dataset. Likewise due to the absence of Protestant recruits in Deerpark/Cliftondene only Catholics have been recruited. In addition, due to the evolving nature of the research questions, a sample of mixed-marriage participants was recruited from across all areas. Again, due to difficulties in recruitment, the selection criteria for Deerpark/Cliftondene were relaxed to include a mixed couple resident for 25 years in the area.

In terms of the recruitment approach, contact with potential participants was attempted through local community organisations, including local churches and community groups who were aware of newcomers to the area. However, we needed to bear in mind that as our research question concerns residents' level of engagement with their new community, this approach will tend to recruit the better-integrated residents. Accordingly, we also recruited participants through a range of informal local contacts. In addition, we performed a leaflet drop in two of the areas (Fortwilliam and Cliftondene/ Deerpark) as well as placing an advert in local papers offering a small incentive for participation. Finally, recruits were likely to know other co-religionists from their local area and so (bearing in mind the need to sample from multiple social networks) a snowballing of participants was also used to supplement these previous approaches.

Our interviews were predominantly a mix of younger couples, often with children. As a result many of the interviews were conducted with couples together and (in addition to increasing the overall number of participants in the sample) this afforded an insight into the collective decision-making processes governing moves of this kind. It also afforded an insight into how family life creates or limits opportunities for contact as well as how contact is facilitated and experienced through partners and children.

In terms of numbers of participants, we initially aimed to recruit 12 units, 4 from each target

area. This was successfully completed and complemented with a further five mixed couple interviews across the three areas. In addition a further eight second-round interviews were conducted with participants who were willing to undertake this further set of tasks.

Area	ID	Religious Identity	No. of years in area	Interview	Rel Status	Current area	Community of origin	Age	Included?	Phase 2
Ravenhill	2	Protestant	10	double	married	Loopland Pk	Ballycarry/ Comber	40F; 37M	Y	Y
	13	Catholic	5	single	married	Mountmerrion Dr	Bangor/West Belfast	44F	Y	N
	10	Protestant	3	double	married	Orby Grange	Carrickfergus	36F; 40M	Y	Y
	14	Catholic	10	double	married	Loopland Gdns	Holy Lands, then lower Ravenhill	41F; 44M	Y	N
	19	Mixed	4	double	married	Loopland Gdns	Kircubbin & Castlereigh	28F; 32M	Y	N
	3	Catholic	2	double	married	Oakleigh Pk	Kilkenny, Dublin (Irish Nationals)	42F; 40M	N	NA
Fortwilliam	6	Protestant	4	single	divorced	Ashfield Gdns	Seaview	41F	Y	Y
	4	Protestant	5	single	divorced	Ashfield Gdns	Cavehill	44F	Y	Y
	5	Protestant	8	double	married	Skegoneill Dr	York Park	42F; 42M	Y	N
	17	Catholic	4	single	single	Ardavon Pk, off Somerton Rd	Glandore Ave	66F	Y	Y
	16	Catholic	10	double	married	Alexandra Gdns	Hopefield Ave	68F; 71M	N	N
	11	Mixed	4 & 2	double	cohabiting	Glanworth Gdns	Greenisland/ Tyrone	33F; 27M	Y	N
	7	Mixed	7	double	married	Skegoneill Dr	South Belfast; Donegal/ Ballysillan	41F; 34M	Y	Y
	12	Mixed	2	single	married	Glantane Dr	Stranmillis	34F	Y	NA
	9	Catholic	15	single	divorced	Glanleam Dr	Co Offaly	59F	N	NA
Cliftondene/Deerpark	1	Catholic	7	single	widowed	Cliftondene Cr	Hillman St	50s	Y	Y
	18	Catholic	10	double	married	Deerpark Rd	Ardoyne & Deanby Grdns	36F; 35M	Y	Y
	8	Catholic	3	double	married	Deerpark Rd	Torrens Crescent	26F; 27M	Y	N
	20	Catholic	5	single	separated	Deerpark Rd	Ardoyne	57F	Y	N
	15	Mixed	25	double	married	Dunkeld Gdns	Shankill/ Ligoneil	54F; 67M	Y	N

4.3 Qualitative methods

As noted in the previous chapter, there are serious limitations to previous contact research which ignores or overlooks the ways in which participants themselves understand and experience contact. While qualitative research is designed to overcome such biases, any one method will also have its limitations and is likely to give a partial understanding of everyday contact. We addressed this in a number of ways. First we conducted an initial exploratory interview which was open-ended and participant-focused. Second we asked participants to engage in a 'photo-elicitation' study, where they took photographs of the visible aspects of their local community which make them feel comfortable or not. A follow-up interview talked the participants through their photographs as well as asking them to talk though a map of the local area. In addition the follow-up was used to revisit selected topics and issues raised in the first interview. These techniques and topics are detailed below:

4.3.1 Interview as method

Interviews are the most popular qualitative method in the social sciences as they allow a flexible exploration of the participants' perspective, while maintaining a degree of control over the topic coverage and depth of the discussion. Interviews work best with participants who feel themselves to be at ease in the interview situation, to be *well-informed* and *entitled* to speak on the topic (Kvale, 2008). While people working with a political, media or educational environment may thrive in such encounters, participants from socially marginalised groups may find interviews a daunting and intimidating ordeal. Sometimes interviewees can feel that they have little of worth to say to an 'expert' researcher and so the interview encounter needs to be participant-centred.

The first interviews were semi-structured and participant-focused with an emphasis on the participants' own perspective. Careful management of the interview encounter ensured that the participant(s) were always speaking from their personal experience and were assured confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews started by exploring participants' experiences of their previous communities, then asked about the decision-making process involved in selecting the new location. Next, participants were asked to detail their initial experiences in their new community, talk about settling in and meeting new people and go through their social activities and daily routines.

The interviews were subjected to a theoretically-driven thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On the basis of the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two above, the various elements of participants' experiences relevant to residential mobility, community integration and intercommunity contact were identified. These elements were organised into themes which allowed the identification of commonality and variation in experiences across the residents on each topic.

4.3.2 Photo-elicitation

The technique of 'photo-elicitation', or asking participants to take photos, then talk about them in an interview situation, can work to give the speaker the entitlement to talk about their own experiences while keeping the focus on the relevant events (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). It is a particularly effective method for use on sensitive topics or with participants from marginalised groups. Along with skilled and sensitive interviewing, these techniques provided an environment conducive to the elicitation and discussion of potentially sensitive personal views and experiences.

Residents' perception of the physical environment in which they live is a key part of how they see themselves to belong in the area and of their relationship with other members of the community. A physical environment seen as safe, shared and inclusive will afford a sense of attachment and community identity. In contrast, perceptions of signifiers of exclusion and threat (often invisible to the longterm residents) can contribute to experiences of marginalisation and

alienation. Residents were asked to use their camera phones to take pictures of 'anything you can see that makes you feel at home or not in this area'. In the follow-up interview these photographs were used in conjunction with maps of the local area to explore the participants' feelings about the physical environment in their new community as well as how they used the public shaped spaces (or not) in their weekly routines.

4.3.3 Mapping routines

In the first interviews, participants are asked about their daily routines and their social networks. In the follow up interview we asked participants to trace their daily routines on a map of their local area, indicating where they went on a daily basis and when as well as where they feel safe or not in their locale. Also we asked them to plot the distribution of their friends and family nearby to explore the extent to which their movements and networks were shaped by the understanding of the local environment.

4.3.4 Critical incidents

From the first round of interviews we found that reports of 'critical incidents' (unforeseen events of importance or urgency) revealed a lot about how people felt about their new communities. In particular, we found that during critical incidents people often turned to their neighbours for help, support and information in order to interpret and cope with the threat. Accordingly, we chose to explore this in more depth during the second round interviews by asking participants explicitly if any such events had occurred and, if not, how they imagine they would respond under such circumstances.

In the following chapters, interview excerpts are designated by their number and area of residence (e.g. Int 4, Fortwilliam) and participants by their gender (M or F). Second round interviews are indicated by the addition of .2 (e.g. Int 2.2).

5

Chapter Five:
Motivations and Expectations of New Residents

Chapter 5: Motivations and Expectations of New Residents

The initial interviews started by asking people about their previous community backgrounds and what had prompted them to relocate to their present communities. The first thing to note about the responses was their diversity. Participants had previously lived in other (sometimes multiple) parts of Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland for differing lengths of time and had a diverse range of experiences in these communities. Likewise, their motivations for moving were diverse and depended upon their previous circumstances as well as their employment and family situations. All of their previous experiences, life circumstances and family situations acted to shape their expectations of their new communities. Notably, while the religious composition of the new community was raised in most interviews, this was rarely reported as a key issue in the move.

5.1 Communities of origin

Respondents came from a variety of previous community backgrounds in terms of socio-economic status, religious composition and geographical locations across Belfast and Northern Ireland. Their reports of their previous locales also varied in terms of community cohesion, with some from tight-knit communities and others from areas of loosely connected residents. Moreover, they reported occupying different positions within the community, with some being central to community life and others being marginal or even excluded from their previous communities. As a result it was evident from the outset that the participants had a range of different understandings and experiences of what community is and what it should be.

5.1.1 Single identity community, integrated participant

Some participants reported coming from traditional single-identity Belfast communities with strong senses of community cohesion. Residents reported knowing most of their neighbours well and having a strong sense of belonging. This was often talked of in terms of how residents endured the violence of the Troubles in previous years. In these accounts of close community, family ties often featured prominently, with generations living in the same locale and adult siblings choosing to stay in the local area. Community was often associated with safety and security, with reports of closeness and social support in the face of adversity. For example:

Int 1, Cliftondene/Deerpark

M: [Participant's previous area] is a Catholic area. It would be seen as a Republican area and they live on the peace line, the peace line is just out the back here on Duncairn Gardens and there's a Protestant community behind the peace wall. It has seen a lot of trouble when I was here there was a lot of trouble; there was a lot of bombings and shootings and riots on a daily basis. And then when I got married I lived here in the area after I got married and brought my children up in this area.

I: Would you say that you felt that there was a sense of community here?

M: Definitely, yeah, it's a very strong community here.

I: Can you give me some examples of how that was seen?

M: Yeah, well during the troubles people were always helping each other out, I mean, as I say, there would have been riots, there would have been arrested, there was a lot of people murdered and the community just rallied round and helped each other out.

This strong sense of community was also reported by those coming from towns and rural

communities outside Belfast, where it was said to have both advantages and disadvantages. Participants reported some degree of restriction on their behaviour as they were readily identifiable by neighbours and occasionally this was reported as somewhat invasive. However in the main, people who came from close-knit communities reported a positive impact on their lives. Notably from these interviews, those who had enjoyed positive relationships with close-knit communities tended to view close ties between neighbours of a similar background to be an ideal form of community life and consequently could sometimes view diversity as a threat or at least a challenge to community life.

Others coming from close-knit single identity areas reported less positive experiences. Those who had moved into their previous communities from outside sometimes reported that they were not fully accepted by the local community:

Int 13, Ravenhill

F: In West Belfast I would say it was a very tight knit community which I didn't feel part of to be honest, even though I'm a Catholic, living there I felt more comfortable possibly than some might but not that comfortable to be honest. I didn't, I felt that there was a community, like I say I wasn't part of it and therefore I didn't even feel that comfortable going to the top of the street to go to the shop and things like that. […] my husband also would have felt like an outsider there even though he had been there 6 or 7 years, he hadn't grown up there so. He only bought the house there because of what he could afford at the time.

While these respondents recognised that the long history of the community and its close family-based bonds was a positive experience for those within it, they experienced this as exclusionary. Occasionally, this exclusion from a single-identity community was manifested as physical threat. One participant who had moved into a single identity area fell out with local residents and then experienced systematic intimidation from people purporting to represent a paramilitary organisation (though he was of their religious background).

For those of a different religious background living within a tight-knit community dominated by the other religious community, exclusion from a tight-knit community could be extreme indeed and was often the reason for their move out. Some participants reported having been forced out of their areas during the Troubles and some reported more recent instances of religious victimisation.

5.1.2 Mixed community, good relations

Some of the participants previously came from mixed areas in the city centre and South Belfast. As with other participants they reported a variety of perceptions of these communities and the degree to which they had integrated. Notably, social cohesion in these areas was reported to be lower here than in single identity areas and residents rarely knew all of their neighbours, but there was still a sense of friendliness and commonality. These communities tended to be quite diverse and the high turnover of residents was reported to reduce the opportunity and motivation to establishing lasting bonds with neighbours. Despite this, relations were generally reported to be good, except when exposure to single-identity communities became a problem:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: I asked you about some positive things, what would you say were the negative factors or aspects about living there?

F: In South Belfast? Just that the Lisburn Road is always busy traffic wise and the houses were pretty cramped together, there wasn't as much kind of space around.

M: People from the village would come up and start fights, violence.

F: I rarely saw that but I suppose in Dunluce you would have seen that more than me. You wouldn't have seen that in Ethel Street.

M: I did.

I: And that was something that wasn't appreciated by yourself and by the others in the area as well?

M: Well by myself. Violence, there was bits of violence.

I: Because of the people from the Village or just sort of among the students that lived there?

M: All the times that I experienced any violence in South Belfast it was down to people from the Village.

For these respondents then, low levels of community cohesion and high levels of anonymity had been experienced as facilitating good relations between diverse neighbours and, in contrast, single identity communities were associated with sectarian tensions.

5.1.3 Mixed community, social problems

A final subset of participants reported coming from areas with high levels of diversity and high levels of social cohesion, but also with community problems. The following interviewees reported a mix of religions and nationalities in their previous area, but also outlined some serious criminal activity

Int 8 Cliftondene/Deerpark

I: So it sounds like you knew the neighbours, would you have known them by name on a one on one basis?

Both: Yeah.

M: You spoke to them on a regular basis, you know, the guy, you used to get your bins and all brought in, everybody just, if your bin's there they'll pull it in, if it's not there they'll tell you the bin man's coming and stuff like that. If you needed anything, they says if they were going to the shop do you need anything or, you know.

I: So did you feel that there was a sense of community there?

F: Aye, everybody got on didn't they like.

M: For a while until the young girl moved in with the 2 kids, it just. Aye, they actually wanted to move because they had to phone the police a handful of times. Yeah, we actually went on holidays and came back and her house was all boarded up at the back, there was dirty nappies in our back garden and vodka bottles, everything. She had trashed the house and done a runner, you know, and then we had to phone the police because her boyfriend got his throat cut outside the front door, you know, and once that happened it was just like right, it's time to go and actually move and buy a house, you know, move down.

While the problems reported here were not attributed to the mix of the area, for these participants, having a good sense of community and friendly neighbours was not sufficient to deal with these threats to safety and so exit was deemed to be the only option.

5.2: Motivations for moving

From this wide variety of experiences of community and understandings of community life, participants displayed a similar diversity in their motivations for moving. As noted above, a small number of respondents who experienced exclusion, isolation or severe threat within their previous communities reported this as a core motivation for moving away. For the others, a mix of financial, practical and personal reasons were offered for the move.

5.2.1 Financial

The three residential areas examined in this research were reported to offer more affordable housing than in many other more affluent parts of the city, while still being more expensive than housing in mainly single-identity areas. Participants reported having looked across the city for housing within their price-range. Others reported a more closely focused geographical area when searching for a house due to practical concerns such as family ties, but again were driven by the affordability of the housing stock. Some noted that the cost of the housing was associated with safety, such that 'leafy areas' were taken to have fewer problems, but this was

presented as a separate issue from the religious mix within the areas.

5.2.2 Practical considerations

As noted above a range of practical considerations also dictated where participants sought accommodation. Along with affordability, size of property was an important concern, especially for those with young families. This tended to be associated with concerns about the accessibility of schools and other amenities for family life.

5.2.3 Family reasons

One's own immediate family could be a motivation for the selection of properties in these areas. For some, complications in their personal lives meant that more reliance was placed on family members for emotional support, which motivated a move towards a location where family lived nearby. More generally, family could also play an important part in the decision-making process. For some, having family in the area provided information as to the local community and quality of life in the area and family members provided a supportive role in moving and settling in to the new locale. For others, the fear and suspicion held by family and friends could put them off moving to some areas or if they moved anyway, could be a reminder of the uncertainty and threat within their new environment.

5.2.4 Religious composition

The religious mix of the area was rarely posited as a factor which drew residents to their new areas. When it was mentioned, it was a secondary concern and typically concerned the display of political or sectarian symbols which were taken to indicate that there may be a problem with the area. The exceptions were those in mixed marriages (see chapter seven below), but in the main issues of community relations were taken as a proxy for generally undesirable areas:

Int 2, Ravenhill

F: So yeah, it was essentially, as P says, more affordability than anything else. We probably didn't really know what the demographic of the area was or anything.

M: Well, we would have done like but, you know, we weren't looking in West Belfast, you know, we really.

F: We knew this side of Belfast was, yeah.

M: South and East Belfast.

I: Ok, so you knew where you didn't want to go and you knew, so you knew relatively well what the demographics were like here.

M: Yeah.

I: Did that bother you in any way or encourage you that it was a good place to move to, or you thought maybe?

M: Yeah, I think it encouraged us, but equally we would have had an eye out to see how many flags there were on the street. I don't mind a few flags but if it had have been lined with bunting and that sort of thing, you know, it would have turned us off.

On the rare occasion it was mentioned as a valued motivating factor (in the following extract) it concerned the opportunities for cross-community contact for children rather than the resident herself:

Int 1, Cliftondene/Deerpark

F: [Participant chose this area] because it's just up the road and it was easier for me to get to work, but also because I have two grandsons and my children, when I lived here my children grew up in a Catholic community with all Catholic neighbours and all Catholic friends and they did do some, they did meet some Protestant friends through my work because we did cross-community work from the youth centre here but I was more so I wanted my grandsons and any other grandchildren I have to have Protestant neighbours, you know.

5.3: Expectations and experiences

The range of prior experiences of community life in general (and of intercommunity contact in particular) meant that participants had different understandings of what to expect in their new communities. Some wanted the close-knit feel of their previous localities, others wanted to escape this and to experience a degree of privacy and anonymity. Some wished for greater diversity among their neighbours, others feared that this would cause disharmony.

5.3.1 Familiar or unfamiliar

At the most basic level residents differed according to their previous knowledge and experience of their new areas. Some participants were very familiar with areas and had lived nearby. Some had family in the area and an immediate connection and network.

Int 6, Fortwilliam

F: Well I mean I know the area so well and I know so many people and I'd spent so much time in and out of my mum's, my niece was living here at that time and my granny was here and my auntie was here, my granny was dead at that time so for me it was such a familiar thing, it was just really like coming home[…] Like any experience like that, moving house is stressful, like even moving from number 16 to 14, you know, but I think I was just so grateful that things had fallen into place the way that they had.

More often though, residents came to the area without any previous contact or knowledge and this was experienced as a stressful and occasionally fearful experience. This was especially the case when the new resident had previous experience of community exclusion or even of sectarian violence.

Int 1, Cliftondene/Deerpark

I: Can you describe that for me, that whole step of actually moving in? What was it like?

F: It was massive, it was really, really frightening and the whole time you're sort of thinking am I doing the right thing here? And then the reason we came to this area in the first place is because my mother's home, my mother was put out of her home with us.

I: So when you say this area, you mean here?

F: Here, yeah, and we lived up the Crumlin Road at the time and our house was petrol bombed, it was burned to the ground and we were put out of it, so it was scary because I was 13 when that happened and that never goes away. And I was thinking, if that was to happen again, you know, so it was a big step. It was massive for me; it wasn't so massive for my son because he hadn't seen any of that, you know. He'd seen riots and things like here in the area but he hadn't seen anyone attack our home where I had came through that. So it was a big step and it was just one I was prepared to take.

5.3.2 Distant, friendly or invasive

Secondly, in terms of the residents' experience of their new community, this again depended largely on their prior experience of community life. For some coming from close-knit communities, their new locales were cold and distant. From others, coming into the same communities from less cohesive neighbourhoods, the welcome could be experienced as warm or even as invasive. The following participant moved from a student area in Belfast into an apartment block which facilitated quickly getting to know her neighbours.

Int 11, Fortwilliam

F: And then the neighbours were all very friendly because, you know, it was an apartment, it was a house that was converted into apartments so the neighbours were all really nice and we kind of established a friendship really quickly in a sense of community, really quickly. I guess, also because in a building you have to do sort of building management so.

I: How did that look that sense of community, would you, what are some examples?

F: You know, you would be friendly with each other, you would chat to each other and visit each other's flat and know things about each other's lives and look out for each other.

Others reported that friendliness was tempered with respect for privacy and that they appreciated this balance:

Int 14, Ravenhill

F: I'm just thinking we were a few days in the house and M next door, M and A they've been there 50 years I think. But, I think I met her walking down the street and she said did you just move into number 49 and I said yeah, and she said, well "I'm M" she said, "I'm always next door if you need me but we're not the kind to be bothering you", that's what she said.

I: What did you think of that?

F: I just thought it was lovely. And that's how they have been, just been.

Likewise some participants, notably those from tightly knit communities in single identity areas, reported a degree of persisting distance:

Int 1, Cliftondene/Deerpark

F: I mean, if I'm going up the street there's people live up the street a bit from me and if I'm going up the street they say hello and I say hello but I don't know their name, Everybody knows everybody else's name in this area.

I: Do you wish that there had been? Are there ways that you could have been made to feel more welcome when you moved into Cliftondene? Do you wish that there had been maybe more people saying things or other things had happened? You were happy enough?

F: Not really because anyone I'd ever spoken to were really nice and we've stood and we've had conversations, now when the snow and that was there, there were people further up the street one time when I was coming down the street had called me and said 'don't you know you can get sand, you can get grit and things like that out of this yellow box' and I didn't know that but I said 'oh right, thank you'. No, I think people were as friendly as they could be, I mean they didn't know me and I didn't know them and I'm sure it was strange for my neighbours too somebody moving in and you don't know who's moving in.

Very occasionally, people reported overfamiliarity. In contrast to the previous residents, these were respondents who had come from a previous neighbourhood of low levels of community identity and were initially suspicious of overenthusiastic contact.

Int 7, Fortwilliam

M: One of the neighbours were locked out and they came and asked could you help.

I: They came and asked for help.

M: And I got the ladders out and climbed up onto their wee porch, climbed in and let them in but that was nice that they even though I'll go and ask for help, instead of getting a locksmith and all, it was nice that they did.

F: Whereas I was locked out one day and the bacon was on the grill and Tracey let me phone you and you came up from work so that kind of thing. One neighbour here was particularly over-friendly when we moved in first, not over friendly but was chatting through the fence all the time and that's kind of calmed down a lot.

Overall, participants reported a range of initial experiences which were recognisably linked to their past community lives. Only those who had previously lived nearby, or had family in the area, reported that they immediately fitted in. The rest reported some degree of initial uncertainty and anxiety. Thereafter, residents began to fit in according to their own preferences for privacy or integration.

5.4 Pathways to integration

Participants reported a number of different ways through which they met others in their

local community, over and above meeting their immediate neighbours upon arrival. In line with the work of Byrne et al. (2006) on mixed residential areas, fresh contact with other neighbours centred around leisure facilities and shops (though not bars) and local institutions such as churches and schools (though these tended towards religious segregation).

5.4.1 Local amenities

At the most basic level, participants reported using local amenities such as shops, parks and libraries and meeting other residents there. These public places were felt to constitute the heart of the community and to represent opportunities for openness and mixing even against a background of social division.

Int 11, Fortwilliam

M: But, yeah all the services around here are great, all the wee shops. I like using local shops, you know, when I can.

F: I really like Senna's, you know, the little, it's like the, what is it, a shipping container, I love that.

I: Would you use that?

F: Not very often. I just like that it's there.

M: We like that it's there but usually end up giving everything away.

F: I think they're really nice, they do community work and everything those people. Have you spoken to them?

I: Yes.

F: They're really nice. Yeah, like and they have little like family days and stuff and they have burgers. My sister and you came as well, didn't you, when we took our little niece down and I think it's just lovely down there.

M: Yeah, because that's the interface basically. But, I mean, them being there and then big community group as well, you know, they just do really good work and it doesn't feel like that at all. You know, we go down every day and we walk the dogs, we walk the dog in the park so it doesn't feel to us like an interface

Local services such as health facilities or schools were often dealt with as a matter of necessity and convenience. Rather than making a concerted effort to engage with local services or doing so on the basis of having moved communities, participants tended to change their doctors or childcare facilities when it became necessary. These services were rarely understood in terms of the contact they afforded with others in the community.

Int 2, Ravenhill

F: Yeah, we didn't change. My doctor was still my doctor from Comber and your doctor, you're still with the doctor in Ballycarry. Yeah, we didn't change that, we just, dentist-wise

M: We have done now.

F: Yeah, we have done now because we had the baby, whenever we had J five years ago we were advised to because you can be at the doctor's an awful lot so it'd be better to change your doctor.

I: So for those first five years?

F: Yeah, we didn't change it.

I: Of living here really you just kept your previous doctors and so on.

M: Yeah, we were young, we just weren't really thinking about doctors, I suppose.

F: And dentists and stuff, so it wasn't, it was no different from what we were doing already. Then whenever we had J, yeah, we moved doctors and it was easy enough getting into the doctors here.

M: Yeah the doctors up the top of the Cregagh Road, solicitors down the Cregagh Road.

F: Yeah.

M: Whatever you want, you get your shoes mended down Cregagh Road, Tesco's groceries, veg, meat, so.

However some places, especially pubs, were

deemed off limits as they were not welcoming to outsiders in general or to those of a particular religion. In fact in all three areas, respondents reported that they did not feel welcome in many if not all of the local pubs:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: Did you look out for pubs or restaurants or did you get involved in, I don't know if you're religious at all, would you have looked for a church or anything like that?

F: Well we knew quite quickly that there wasn't really much in the line of pubs around and some of them that were around were a bit dodgy and we knew they were very much one sided or the other but there is probably two bars that you could go to on the Antrim Road that you'd just go in for a drink kind of thing, you know.

5.4.2 Community organisations

In contrast to the findings of Byrne et al. (2005), new residents did not report much involvement with local community organisations. This was particularly the case for some in mixed marriages (see chapter seven below) but was also reported to be due to the lower level of entitlement felt by newcomers to speak and act on behalf of the community:

Int 6, Fortwilliam

M: There's Community House at the bottom of the street and that seems to be by invitation only, for those who (are asked)

I: So you can go there?

M: Not really, I had this conversation, I did another focus group with a guy Sean and we were talking about getting involved in the community and I had offered and volunteered time etc. but there is a sort of level of, you know, this is our territory, don't step on it type of thing, I don't know if it's my attitude problem or theirs and I don't really care in the same respect but that's a long story, there's sort of been division within the, you know, this is the sort of thing you get in very tight knit communities saying that there's a community group at the bottom of the street and there's a few core people that run it and I would have volunteered to help out at summer schemes etc. but then there was somebody else involved in it who didn't like the way things were running so now they've taken off and it's all just became a bit controversial, maybe that's the word. There's an inner circle, if you know what I mean?

5.4.3 Meeting others through children

Across the sample though, the most successful avenue to establishing new connections with other residents was through having children. Participants who moved with their children reported meeting others immediately through the spontaneous mixing of children in the area as well as through parenting groups and local schools. Participants who had children after moving reported that their neighbours spontaneously introduced themselves and brought presents for the newborn.

Int 14, Ravenhill

F: I remember when K was born, A and K, we were just home from the hospital 2 days and there was a knock on the front door and I opened the door and there was this wee old lady standing there, and honest to God, hand on my heart, I had never set eyes on her before in my life. And she's like, 'oh I live across the road and down, when I saw your wife was pregnant I started knitting these wee things' and comes out with a full set of knitted things for K, I was like, 'oh lovely', she was lovely, I mean, it's just that sort of a street. I mean, you would have seen that in Ardglass, maybe back in the village but I'd never seen anyone like that in Belfast before, really hadn't, you know, it was lovely, it was just so nice

Even those who did not live with their children but were visited occasionally by their grandchildren found that this transformed their relations with others in the local community. Those without children found this to be a barrier to integration:

Int 11, Fortwilliam

F: Like I think it's very easy for people, well it's a lot easier for people with children to be involved in the community like, my sister knows a lot of people through baby groups and stuff but for me, I don't have children and am not particularly interested in that but I would still really like to get to know people and like do positive things in the community. But it's difficult if you, I really do think it's difficult if you don't have kids because kids sort of contextualise you.

Furthermore, children were a reason to join local community groups and even becoming involved in cross-community activity on this basis.

Int 5, Fortwilliam

I: What would you say made you feel welcome when you moved here?

F: Just in this section the kind people, by coming to us and actually when we were in the garden or we were painting or we were out doing bits and pieces we were over – 'oh how are you, what's your name?', 'awk lovely kids', the neighbours were very approachable. So would you say that from the start you felt that you could fit into this community?

I: Yeah. Even though with S being not of a local, we were still made to feel very welcomed.

F: Were there any clubs or organisations that you joined?

I: No, not at that stage, no. As the kids have got older there's the Community House there and T would have went to the Aps project and if they had the cross community fun days I would have made the effort to go to them.

5.5 Experiences of intergroup contact

The general experiences of integration formed the basis for intergroup contact for these new residents. None reported cross-community activity for its own sake and (excepting the resident in the previous extract) none were associated with groups or associations which were primarily cross-community in focus. Rather, their experiences of meeting people from different religious background were incidental to their more general experiences of fitting in.

5.5.1 Expectations and experiences of intergroup contact

As noted above, the religious mix of the area was rarely a central reason for the initial selection of the new community. However participants were usually aware of the demographic mix of their destination, usually by its reputation or from knowledge passed on through relatives or friends and so had a variety of expectations as to what this might entail. Participants' expectations of the religious mix of their area recognisably varied along with their previous experiences of community life and intergroup contact. Some expected that the mixed nature of their areas was likely to cause trouble, but found that there was little evidence of sectarian tensions.

Int 5, Fortwilliam

I: Were you aware at all of the religious composition of this area?

F: Yeah because that's what a lot of people seemed to have a problem with because it is mainly Protestants and then it does become a Catholic area. I have no issue with it because with us we don't have any issue with religion but a lot of people, yeah, that's what they would be like, 'they'd be always fighting or coming to the 12th July or the 11th night there's always fights', this is what we were being told at the time but we've never had any problems at all.

Others had been warned of sectarian tensions, but had previously experienced much worse and by contrast their new community posed little threat. The following comes from a woman whose family had experienced discrimination when living as a Protestant minority in a predominantly Catholic area.

Int 4, Fortwilliam

I: And then obviously when you moved here you knew that coming here would probably be different, was there anything about moving here that put you off that you thought maybe this isn't the best place to come here? Was there anything when you were just thinking about it, when you were waiting with this house? There was nothing?

F: I had sort of been told about them having scuffles and stuff at the top of the street, the odd, it would happen now and again that kids would come and riot and stuff and it was like well, it's nothing that we haven't been used to but it's very, very seldom that it ever happens up there, very, very seldom and if it does it's maybe some shouting they'll do at each other and that's about the height of it, nothing like it would have been when we were from the Westland Estate, that estate is mad,

In contrast, those who came to the area with expectations of complete neutrality were not always happy with evidence of partisanship and sectarianism. This was especially the case for those in mixed marriages:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: Was there anything about moving in here that you didn't expect or was a surprise?

F: Yeah, just the flags.

M: The flags.[...]

F: Just those kind of things but no, mainly the flag situation.

I: Can you tell me a little bit more about that, what were some of the things that you observed, obviously you said you moved around this time April/May which is right into the flag season.

F: Yeah, well actually the first year the flags went up on something like the 10th, on this actual street they only went up like the 10th, 11th July and I always go to Donegal that weekend and I came back up and they were down so I was delighted, I thought that's fine but the following year or the year after, well anyway, around the Jubilee and then there was the royal wedding and I suppose every kind of event then just seemed to be more colour, more splash and now, and the bonfires with the, I suppose, my flag on top of it, it was horrible. So that's one thing I really don't like about it but that was up just beside the interface.

A final variety of expectation evidenced a different pattern. These respondents were keen to indicate that they were happy encountering those from the other community even if they overtly displayed their identity, as long as sectarian difference was not made a focus. They reported that a recognition and tolerance of the other community was a positive experience in their new community and one that indicated successful mixing.

Int 8, Cliftondene/Deerpark

F: Even though it's more Catholic down there, I'd say 95% Catholic down there.

M: Probably get more hassle down there.

F: Where up here I'd say would be 90?

M: Probably about 60, 40. But you don't know, you see in this street alone, it's not as if peoples walking up and down and saying are you Catholic, are you a Protestant, it was just by chance the day we were moving in I had light blue track suit bottoms on and a blue and white polo shirt with, it had an 'R', looked like a Rangers top, and the guy across the street says to me, 'do you fancy a pint round the corner?', I says, 'my type weren't allowed in there' and he just went 'dead on kid, that's brilliant'. From that day he's always asked me how we are, do we need anything, you know. He's bad with his hip, I always ask him do you need a lift, you know.

F: If we were stuck he just says come on over.

5.5.2 Fitting into a mixed community

In terms of local amenities and facilities, once more the general patterns of integration were

not primarily religious, but could take sectarian form. For example, while shops and parks were typically seen as neutral spaces, local pubs in particular could be seen as exclusive and unwelcoming on the basis of religion:

Int 8, Cliftondene/Deerpark

M: Like that bar owned by a Catholic fella round the corner, and Catholics can't drink in it. It's owned by a Catholic fella that bar.

I: Why can't they drink in it?

M: Because the UDA is in it, the paramilitaries.

I: Even though it's owned by a Catholic?

M: Yep. And it has been, they tried to burn it twice. He has tried to burn it himself so that he doesn't have to let them drink in there no more. But B drinks in it, I'd say there was about 6 to 8 people drink in it Monday to Friday and then at the weekends, if you're a Catholic that lives past the bar, at the weekends you have to get a taxi home. You can't walk past that bar.

Having children was also the basis for cross-community contact. Children from different backgrounds were often reported to play together. Younger children were taken to crèches and toddlers' groups which, though often held in churches or even nearby single identity areas, often attracted people from both community backgrounds:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: Can I just ask about the one in Tiger's Bay, when you say all backgrounds does that include various ethnic minorities as well or do you just mean Protestants and Catholics?

F: Yes, probably didn't see so many ethnic minorities, to be honest, I think more Protestant, Catholic just because I would have known people from the different groups and so on.

M: What's the story?

F: Just talking about the mother and toddler groups.

I: The mother and toddler groups she got involved in.

M: Oh you did, you were in all of them, you'd a different one each day.

F: Yeah, but I'm just saying that the one down in Tiger's Bay was like mixed but they were all mixed and the people who went there were just from, I don't think it really mattered, I think parents were just like I need to get out of the house for two hours.

M: Yeah, it didn't matter, they were just parents wanting to do stuff.

F: Yeah, and everybody was friendly.

However, children could also evidence religious division. As the majority of children attend segregated schools, the wearing of different uniforms made religious difference visible within the communities. Also, it was acknowledged that in escalations of intercommunity tensions, children could play a role in street violence and the intimidation of residents.

Finally a further consideration for participants was the degree to which they expressed (or failed to express) their own religious identity and the degree to which others within the community did as well. This was more of an issue for participants from a Catholic background who typically reported that they while they respected the right of their neighbours to display their Unionist identity through flags and emblems, they would be rather reluctant to overtly display their nationalist identity. Signifiers of difference, such as GAA jerseys or hurling sticks, were concealed and relatives visiting were discouraged from displaying any identifying items. Likewise, any instances of other Catholic neighbours displaying religious symbols were evaluated negatively. Other participants, and often those from a Protestant and mixed-marriage background, sometimes objected to the display of Union flags, especially from lampposts, as they felt that this devalued the area and could be seen as

exclusive. All mention of paramilitary displays was negative regardless of religious background.

5.5.3 Range and number of cross-community friends

The second round of interviews offered the opportunity to ask people directly about the religious composition of their social networks within the area. Participants varied according to how many friends they reported as well as how many friends from each community they could mention. They also varied in terms of how many friends they had nearby who they had known previously as opposed to friends made since arriving.

Some reported a mix of religious backgrounds among their friends, though the concentration of these could differ according to the immediate locality within the broader area:

Int 4.2, Fortwilliam

I: Would you know sort of what their religious background is?

F: Most of them, yeah.

I: And would they be a mixture?

F: Yeah.

I: Like how many of those people in your street would be Protestants and how many would be Catholics?

F: Maybe one or two in the street would be Catholics but.

I: Of the ones you know?

F: Yeah. But I don't think they practice their religion if you know what I mean, they're not, the rest would be a mixture.

I: Everything else would be a mixture in terms they'd be in mixed marriages or partnerships?

F: Yeah. There's actually a few mixed marriages in the street too and partnerships.

I: Would there be any that would be Protestants married with Protestants?

F: Yeah, the ones sort of round Jellicoe would be Protestants. Fortwilliam they would be Protestants, Somerton Gardens, would be mixed, they would, D's, yeah D was in a mixed marriage for years. Flip me I've known D for years and years and years.

Notable from this extract is the lack of specificity in the answer. The respondent is generally aware of the religious background of her friends, but not through their overt display of their religious background. Others inferred the religious background of those they vaguely knew from their broader knowledge of the demographic shifts in the area or from their knowledge of the family's history:

Int 6.2, Fortwilliam

I: Ok. How many of them would you say you're really close to like would frequently meet up because you want to, it's like a natural going out or?

F: Like friendship like that, none really.

I: Would you see them just because you happen to see them on the street or because you're doing something with the community house?

F: Yes, generally, yes.

I: And then what would their religious background be?

F: All mixed.

I: They're all mixed.

F: Yeah, like Catholic, Catholic, they'd be Protestant. I'm trying to think, there's N something, I forget, what's her name, I know her pretty well, N they would definitely be Protestant and S's family are Protestant. If I go round the court most people are Protestant in the court. Skegoneill Drive I think most of them would be Protestant, in this street I think there'd be more of a mix. We would, M across the street would be Catholic. I think M and J would be mixed. I know E's family, B's a Protestant and R's Catholic.

I: So all mixed partnerships as well?

F: It's all mixed partnerships as well, yeah. But some of them I would have to think about, you know.

I: So you wouldn't necessarily know?

F: No. Some of them I do know because E was confirmed last year and she had the white dress and that sort of thing, you know. And unfortunately it's still one of those things, you know, that people kind of just know, I don't know how you know, but you know. And then I probably be sort of privileged to more information because my mum's lived here for so long so she'd know more people than, to what I would, you know.

Several other respondents didn't appear to know the religious background of their neighbours or their more casual acquaintances nearby (unless they had overtly displayed their identity) and thought that this was a good indicator of cross-community relations in the area.

Int 2.2, Ravenhill

I: Would you know what religious background your neighbours are from?

F: Yes, I would know what those 2 are because of the flags outside their house.

I: So those are the 2 with the flags, ok.

F: But I would kind of guess that the rest are all Protestant backgrounds as well, yeah, pretty much.

I: Do you know or can you guess if they're any Catholics in the area?

F: Mary I'm not sure, she's from Donegal, I think she's a Protestant. But then, they call their little boy J and that's always a sign, you know, very biblical, I've no idea, I wouldn't ask, I don't see the point in asking. Now I did meet her at the mothers and toddler group so that's a sign that maybe she is a Protestant but she doesn't go to church so. And I would see her at all the Protestant churches toddler groups, but I've seen her at St Bernadette's Church as well so, I'm kind of guessing they're Protestants but I don't know. But yes, I would never ask her because it doesn't mean anything, doesn't matter, so it doesn't.

Very rarely, negative relations with members of the other religious tradition in the local community were reported. Notably these were presented as breaches of normal civility, occasioned by heightened relevance of sectarian issues. In the following extract a participant reports negative sectarian comments by a neighbour concerning the 12th July commemorative season. While the comment is presented as offensive, she attributes this to ignorance of norms of intergroup mixing rather than malice:

Int 9, Fortwilliam

F: I worked with a woman, a lovely, lovely woman and I actually stayed friends with her and she asked me, they were having a party, they were going to the 12th and I said "look, A, I'm going to be away because I usually go away anyway it's the only time I get fantastic holidays coming to the 12th and I said I'm going to be away" and she said "P, we're going to such and such a place, she was going to some place up in Newtownabbey, up in Newtownards there, you would like it and she said you'll have peace and quiet", she said "there's no fenians" and I just

I: That's what she said to you?

F: That's what she said to me. She indifferent, you know, (inaudible) and do you know what, she was an absolutely lovely, lovely woman, kind, generous, compassionate.

I: But this shocked you?

F: It did shock me coming from such a kind, considerate, compassionate woman and I just then went down and when I did get home I thought it comes natural because it must be part of the environment that she was brought up in and she probably didn't understand

5.6 Picturing the local community

The second round photo-elicitation interviews required participants to take photos of what they found welcoming or unwelcoming in their locale. This technique gives participants a chance to reflect on their experience of living in the community and to convey their experiences in a more open-ended fashion than through semi-structured interviews alone. As a result, they were particularly successful in affirming and developing the significance of the various themes above.

Afterwards we grouped the photo from the first eight of our respondents into common categories (those occurring in more than one set of pictures) and the most frequent categories are outlined below with a description of how these were interpreted by the respondents.

Respondent	Positive Photos	Negative Photos
2.2 Protestant Couple, Ravenhill	Shops Church (Presbyterian) Parks	Union Flags Non-sectarian mural/derelict site
4.2 Protestant Female, Fortwilliam	Shops Parks Non-sectarian Mural	None
6.2 Protestant Female, Fortwilliam	Own property (house) Shops Church (hall, Protestant) Park (Community garden)	Union Flags Northern Ireland flag Derelict buildings
7.2 Mixed Couple, Fortwilliam	Own property (garden) Park Park (Community garden) Non-Sectarian Mural	None
10.2 Protestant Couple, Ravenhill	Park (Sign for) Shops Non-sectarian mural	Paramilitary mural Paramilitary flag Abandoned lot
14.2 Catholic Couple, Ravenhill	Own property (house) Shops (and amenities) Community halls (Presbyterian and Scout)	None
17.2 Catholic Female, Fortwilliam	Own family Shops	Union Flag
18.2 Catholic Couple, Deerpark	Own property (house and garden) Park (Community play area) Park (public) Church (Catholic) Union flags	Derelict land Union flags

5.6.1 Own property

Participants took photos of their own property (and occasionally family) to indicate that their sense of home was located within their premisses. Participants reported that the sense of privacy their own home afforded provided them with security and safety (some referred to 'our little space') but then went on to report on photos of wider community life.

5.6.2 Local shops and services

Participants photographed these sites as positive locations where they would meet others from the neighbourhoods. Some photographed cornershops, others local supermarkets.

These sites were talked about in positive terms and, while the contacts made with other people in the neighbourhood were not always substantial or meaningful, they were reported as contributing to a sense of being part of the wider neighbourhood.

Int 4.2, Fortwilliam

I: So, if I were to ask you does it represent anything to you, what would you say?

F: Just that they're friendly, they know you. It's neighbourhood shopping.

I: So, if you were in that area, standing in front of one of the shops or inside even one of the shops, and someone were to approach you or sort of come near and stand near you, how would you feel?

F: Wouldn't annoy me, wouldn't annoy me in the slightest because I know that those shops are, most of those people in those shops will know me from going in and out.

I: Most of the people know you?

F: Yeah, most of them in any of those shops will know me going past or will have seen me in them.

I: Would they know you by name?

F: A few would, not all.

I: And would you know them by name as well?

F: Yeah.

5.6.3 Community halls and churches

Participants also mentioned a variety of church and community halls as locations of positive collective activities. These tended to be unrelated to religion or local community politics and more often concerned recreational activities or childcare. Indeed those attending the halls often spanned different religious backgrounds and were brought together for the purpose of the specific group.

5.6.4 Local parks

Along with shops, parks were reported to be important and positive parts of the daily and weekly routines, during which contact could be made with others from the local community. While participants did not use the terminology of 'shared space' they often reported that the freedom to enjoy open spaces with others in the community was important to them. In particular, participants talked about the visibility of the variety of people in the population as something that was important for their conception of the community (though again any contact made here was not often reported as sustained or meaningful).

Int 2.2, Ravenhill

I: Let's talk about the positive photos. Now, why did you put this as your very most positive one?

F: I think because I think Ormeau Park is really a positive thing in the area, you know, the Council seem to do a lot in it, there's a load of events in it, we have barbecues in there with our church as well. Whenever you go over there on a Saturday or whatever there's lots of people from all different walks of life there, there's tennis courts, there's people doing circuit training or boot camp stuff, all of that, you know. So, there's loads of different people from different walks of life, lots of different things happening in it, plus events happening over the summer and even, you know, that would be the end point for the Belfast Marathon as well which is always a really brilliant day. So I think it is a real positive force, you know, a sort of an area where lots of people from all different walks of life can go, you know, and it's very well used and it's a nice safe place.

5.6.5 Non-sectarian murals

While many participants reported negative views of political symbols and a desire for a locale free of symbolism, other public symbols in the form of community murals were sometimes presented as positive signifiers of the community. These typically represented some form of unity or the value of diversity and so were talked about in terms of their representation of local cohesion. They could be contrasted to other forms of political or sectarian murals.

Int 7.2, Fortwilliam

I: Ok. Tell me about this picture, what is it and why did you take it?

F: Well, it wasn't here when we moved here for sure but it's part of the Skegoneill, Glandore kind of community group and I know that the photograph doesn't, I mean, it stands out, it's quite bright, like it really stands out because of the colour, kind of the bold colour against the bricks. But, I think even though it's not probably a very peaceful or at ease area so much but I think this is an attempt towards that, you know, that it's supposed to be like a symbol that

is, you know, kind of across the divide if you like. And just the hands shaking, you know, I think from because the symbol itself is just beside the roundabout so, yeah, and I think it's actually.

I: And that's right at the interface isn't it?

F: Yeah. I think it's a really beautiful piece of art as well, you know, as everything else but, I suppose, to me it's like a tree with somebody's face coming out of the tree or it may be barbed wire, I don't know exactly even what it is apart from it symbolises that trying to have some kind of commonology across the divides.

5.6.6 Union and other flags

Union flags were typically described in negative terms. While some participants acknowledged the right of individuals to display flags from their own properties, most deplored the display of flags from public property. The objections included that the displays were not representative of the sentiments of local residents and that the presence of these flags gave a false impression of the community as single identity and exclusive.

Int 6.2, Fortwilliam

I: So, I noticed that your top 3 negative have flags in the pictures, could you describe what's in the pictures and why you have them as the top 3, maybe why this one is your first one, you know?

F: Probably because it's more prominent, you know, the view of that and the flags, we've discussed this before. I mean, we live in what is supposed to be a mixed area, a very mixed area, a mixed street, this happens every year and it's one person in the street that puts the flags up and it drives me crazy. I mean, I come from the Protestant community that's, you know, and I think it's offensive, I think it makes the area, is it 'cheapen' is the right word, or that it in some way it labels us all as intolerant. I think it's aggressive, I think it's offensive, I think it's intimidating, I certainly wouldn't want to be a home owner in this street who was trying to sell a property. They went up around mid-July again, as far as I know, there hasn't been any consensus given within the 2 streets here.

5.6.7 Paramilitary murals and flags

Displays of paramilitary symbols were presented as extremely negative by all who mentioned them throughout the interviews. In addition to the arguments concerning Union flags displayed from lampposts, paramilitary items were depicted as inherently sectarian, as intimidating and as completely unrepresentative of the local area.

Int 10.2, Ravenhill

F: Well, that's a photograph of a UVF mural with a gunman on it and it says East Belfast Battalion. I think it's very negative because that's a relatively new one, there used to be a more positive mural there and that was changed wasn't it?

M: Yeah. And where it sits, it's on a main road

and anybody driving past it you cannot miss it. I think it's very intimidating, it has a very negative aspect because it's, you can't not see a balaclava gunman on it.

F: And I think for me, a lot of these paramilitary things are just a small group of people forcing what they want on other people because nobody, a lot of those people living in those streets probably don't want that at the end of their street but they're not going to come up and tell them not to paint it or paint over it, you know. So, it's part of this sort of intimidatory feeling that they can do whatever they want, you know.

Photoelicitation Summary

The photos presented by new residents allow them to more fully capture and represent their feelings and experiences of their new communities. In line with their accounts of settling in and integrating within their locales, several themes were discernible in their responses including: the balance between privacy and integration; the importance of public space in affording contact with others and the embodiment of community life; the role of political and paramilitary symbols in undermining community cohesion and misrepresenting the mixed character of the local area.

Chapter Summary

The analysis of respondents' reports of their communities of origins and their motivations for moving indicates that, within our sample at least, there is a great variety of experience and expectation among new residents of these mixed areas. Indeed it is difficult to define general characteristics of this group of people other than that they were willing or obliged to move from their previous areas and converged on mixed areas. However, across all cases their previous community life demonstrably shapes their expectancies of their new communities. Most obviously those from tight-knit cohesive communities who value intimacy and closeness may experience their new neighbours as more distant and aloof while those escaping such communities or those who are used to less bonded communities will enjoy the increased privacy.

In terms of integrating into their new communities, our results echo those of previous research on mixed residential areas. Local shops and amenities are the site of casual contact with others in the locale, but having children is the main route to involvement in the local community. However we do note that some concern is expressed over involvement in community organisations which are sometimes experienced as partisan or as exclusive by new community members.

In terms of cross-community mixing, an important finding is that our sample of residents has not been attracted to these areas because of their mixed character (with the exception of the mixed couples described in chapter seven). The demographic mix of the area tends to be incidental to the life plans of the participants and, while overt displays of political identity such as flags and murals are treated as relevant consideration in the avoidance of trouble spots, religious composition is not central to the decision-making process. However, in line with residents' general experience of integration, past experience of intergroup contact demonstrably shapes present experience as well. Most notably, it is evident that our participants hold different assumptions and expectations about mixed communities. Some expect trouble and, in the main, have been pleasantly relieved. Others expect complete neutrality and are disappointed. A few seek mutual recognition and tolerance from those of different religious backgrounds and report that this is achievable.

The variety of factors which facilitate or impede local integration are also reported to impact upon cross-community mixing. Some amenities such as pubs are experienced as exclusive in terms of religious background, while many others, including shops and libraries afford cross-community contact. Public spaces allow residents to see and meet the broad variety of other residents, though those demarcated by political and paramilitary emblems are seen as

exclusive an unwelcoming to people from both communities. Having children affords meeting a diversity of other parents at toddlers groups and community group activities as well as among one's immediate neighbours. However at the same time, children's school uniforms also act to signify religious difference and indeed children themselves can engage in intercommunity antagonism.

All in all, while issues of religious difference and intercommunity contact are ingrained in everyday life, they do not form the central focus for these new residents. Rather they are typically facilitated and enacted in the same manner as more general processes of integration. In the next chapter we examine more closely the ways in which the routines and practices of everyday life afford opportunities for contact and then turn to examine how these structures of everyday life enable new residents to deal with the rare occasions on which religious difference and sectarianism does impinge upon their experiences.

6

Chapter Six:
Mundane Routines and Critical Incidents

Chapter 6: Mundane Routines and Critical Incidents

Previous chapters have investigated participants' accounts of moving to and settling into new communities as well how they imagine these communities to be. The present chapter returns to the social behaviours of the new residents to explore the ways in which their daily activities in the community act to structure their relationships with others and how these relationships in turn form the basis of coping with the challenges of settling into a new area. It will also explore how perceptions of sectarian threat shape incomers relations within their new communities and undermine their supports in times of crisis.

6.1 The mundane structures of daily life

6.1.1 The daily routine

In terms of daily routines the structure of the working weekday largely shapes the opportunities for contact with other members of the community. For some of our participants this means spending the majority of the day outside of their local area, returning only in the evening or at night. For others, and in particular those responsible for childcare, the routine is centred within the community and gives more occasions on which contact can be made. As a result, many couples with children reported an asymmetry in integration within the community, with the partner responsible for daily childcare being much more fully integrated than the partner working outside of the area.

Below is an example of two contrasting daily routines from a couple living in the Ravenhill area:

Int 2, Ravenhill

F: I leave the house about 8.40 every morning and drive up to the school, drop off the oldest two boys, come back, back here about 9.15, do a few things about the house and then usually go to toddler group in the local area. So I really have three days, three toddler groups that I would choose from kind of, but they're all in the local area. And so from here to the school you wouldn't probably see anybody, but if I was walking to the toddler group I may well see one of the neighbours on the Cregagh Road. And when I drive to toddler group, yeah, I see definitely other mums and childminders that I know live in the area.

I: And would you know them by name or would you just know them by face?

F: Yeah, I'd know them by name most of them, yeah, definitely. And then after the toddler group I'd come home, make lunch and pick up the boys from school, probably wouldn't see anybody, and in the good weather, wintertime I don't really leave the house after I pick the boys up from school, about 2pm. Good weather we always go to one of the local parks and then, yeah, there might be, you might meet somebody there I recognise from the street or some of the mums from the toddler groups might be there with their kids. It would be very rare for me to go to the park and not meet someone that I know by chance, someone that I recognise. And then do you want to go?

M: Yeah, I wouldn't see anybody really. I get up quite early, well I start work at 8.30 in Hillsborough and try to get out there for 8am. So my journey up on the way, sometimes, well, I go to the gym before work as well so sometimes I'd be out of the house at 6.20 so I wouldn't see anybody. Get home, depending, yeah, about 6pm and wouldn't see anybody really. I suppose in the summertime, you know, we might have dinner out the back and stuff and so we'd see the next door neighbour when he comes in, but

F: I would be in the running club as well, like I said, and there's people in the running club live in this area as well, so I would have recognised them, even in the house sometimes, I would have recognised people running past. But that's

quite a big one, perhaps you don't know everybody bringing in, but you would have recognised some people

Following on from the role played by parenthood in integrating within the community, contact is typically made with other parents on the school and crèche morning runs. Also, contact is often made in specific shared locations such as the park or local shopping area. Meetings on these occasions are sometimes reported to be with known friends for a chat, but more often are casual encounters where the other person's name may not be known, especially if they are familiar through children's friends or as fellow dog-owners.

Int 7, Fortwilliam

M: Aye, well the first person we'd see is the lollipop man.

F: And he's really friendly.

I: Yes, I've seen him.

F: And E said that B is leaving.

M: Oh no, is he leaving? That's probably all round the school.

I: So would you tend to see other people when you walk?

M: Yes, I'd see other parents bringing their wee'ins to school.

I: Would you know them by name?

M: Yeah, well I'd know (?) and I'd know your man there, what's his name, the fella across the street with the blonde hair, Jack's dad.

F: Jack's dad, I don't know his name.

M: Well I know his kid. I see them and then the classroom assistants, one of the classroom assistants lives next door from one of them schools. So I'd see those people and then the friends of some of them who I've met as well, there's a wee clique of mums then, A's pals and I'd kind of meet them because they're all heading to school and we'd all be 'hello' and 'hello'.

One additional effect of the morning rush, is that the community becomes more visible to its members, much in the same way as the park was noted to make the variety of residents visible to one another in the previous chapter. Residents commented on how distinctive members of the community could be easily distinguished (such as the lollipop man above), but also physically disabled children and those wearing different uniforms were also visible. For some this emphasised the diversity of their locality and was taken as evidence of the successful coexistence of different communities in the locale, which was contrasted to flashpoints of intercommunity antagonism between children on other occasions.

Int 8, Cliftondene/Deerpark

M: We know people on up but most of the kids that live on up get into a car, go to school because they would go to Barney, Fortwilliam, Little Flower.

F: It really only them 2 wee boys and then the kids here, isn't it?

M: Yeah. It's people, you see a lot of primary school kids, you know, that guy across the street.

F: And then sometimes the wee girls from Glenbryn are on up the top of, they're Protestants, they would be Protestants across the street, a couple of streets down so they would walk down here. I mean, there would be nothing said, even Ballysillan Catholic girls school is up through the park so they would come up this way.

I: But these are people that you wouldn't know, you wouldn't even know them by face?

M: No, they would walk. Ballysillan is up that way that's for Catholics, you'll see the girls walking up and walking through the play park and going in and not a word will be said to them from the girls that are coming down to go to the Girls Model.

F: Yeah, they would by pass on and other and nothing would be said, you know.

As noted above, the majority of these encounters on the daily rounds were incidental, casual encounters. Residents reported that their discussion with their neighbours were typically brief and superficial. Yet still they acknowledged that these were useful lines of communication that could be used to discuss more important matters:

Int 11, Fortwilliam

I: So when you're going out in the morning and then when you come back at lunch time are there people that you see regularly?

M: Yes, very often I would see U's sister out for a walk with her baby and her dog, sometimes I would see some of the neighbours, you know, the retired ones, and the lady from across the street as well. So just say hallo and all, you know, talk about the weather.

I: The retired ones, would they be the ones on this street?

M: Yeah, they would be, yeah. But it's basically look, I'm in a rush as well so I can't really stop to chat, you know, but something was going on I would talk to them about that.

Additionally, these mundane encounters could also be used to provide a degree of reassurance that all was well with the resident. As one participant with chronic health concerns acknowledged, the daily routine let concerned neighbours know she was well. Indeed in her absence, some neighbours were likely to check to see if she was ok.

Int 4, Fortwilliam

F: That can be any time from maybe 8am to 10am and usually at some point of the day I take a dander up to the shop and have a natter with Rosina up there. Oh my God, I forget her daughter's name, I know this girl as long as I know my own, Tammy, that's it, flip me. Now and again if Rosina doesn't see me about for a few days she'd come and she'll rap on the door because I wouldn't be well quite often, I'm not well, kidney stones and things like that so every now and again she'll be rapping the door just to see if I'm alright.

I: Just checking, is that person your neighbour or the person in the shop.

F: The person in the shop and then her daughter and son just live a few doors away.

As these routines were taken to indicate normality within the community and to provide reassurance to residents, their disruption could be experienced as stressful, especially if they were perceived as reflecting disunity or unrest in the local area. In the following extract the participants are complaining about the effects of protests concerning the flags issue on their lives:

Int 10.2, Ravenhill

F: The flag protesters.

M: The protesters. They were not sanctioned road-closures.

F: Because it was actually very annoying during the flag protest thing here because there was one incident coming up to Christmas, not last year the year before and it was starting to snow, the traffic round the town was terrible because they kept having on a Friday and the flag protesters closed off both the Woodstock Road and the Castlereagh Road so I couldn't get up either of the roads, traffic was blocked up and you look up and there are about 6 of them who are mostly children with their flags and the police sit there and let them do it. You know, and that really irked me greatly. And even another day sitting in the queue of traffic while they were having a flag protest and there's children going down trying to give you leaflets about why they're having the flag protest, you know. And that whole flag thing really did annoy me in this area.

I: Why did it irk you?

F: Because, the thing that irks me is, I'm coming home from work after having worked all day and you have the time to stand around the middle of the road blocking people from coming home from work.

6.1.2 Mapping the neighbourhood and the daily round

In the second interviews participants were invited to use a map to plot their photographs and their daily routine as well as the areas in which they felt comfortable or uncomfortable.

Most people felt as if they were able to traverse their local area without impediment. This was a default position whereby, unless there was a specific reason to be concerned about safety, people reported feeling comfortable in most areas. Most people designated the community spaces that they share with others as particularly positive, though some commented that this was dependent on the time of day as the areas could be dangerous if alone at night. Their daily routines were relatively unfettered by concerns about safety or social divisions and their friends were distributed throughout the local area (if somewhat more concentrated in their immediate neighbourhood).

Map 4.2, Fortwilliam

I: Ok. With the red and the green please shade for me on the map the areas where you feel comfortable going and the areas where you feel uncomfortable going.

F: Not sure I feel uncomfortable in any of them.

I: Ok. Some people have, when they've done this, they've said the same thing you've said, and then they've said well some places depending on the time of day or the time of year then I might feel uncomfortable. Or, if I'm on my own I wouldn't feel comfortable going there. Would that apply to you at all?

F: Time of night I suppose it would depend whether you came down past Dunmore and stuff because it's quite dark, yes I suppose Dunmore would be a bit at night I don't fancy Dunmore, I never have because it's a big long and there's not very many houses on it, so. Well, accept for the estate I suppose but it's sort of all there is, there's the park and if you pass Tesco's there really isn't that many houses until you get further down the street again.

I: Is there ever anything that happens there, have you ever heard of anything?

F: No, I just don't like it, it's very eerie and dark and at night, especially when it's dark, I imagine it would be easier for someone to jump you there. But the rest of it, I don't have no problem with at all.

In contrast, some less well-integrated participants were aware of marked social divides in the local area and this was reported to regulate their daily routines and the extent of their travels. Less welcoming territories could be described as 'rough areas' and these could correspond to derelict buildings or wasteland in their photographs in the previous section of the interview. The unwillingness to traverse these areas could be directly attributed to the character of the people living there rather than the physical environment itself. In the following extract the respondent describes these areas in terms of recognisable 'class' stereotypes and articulates a version of the close-knit community which is clearly distinct from her own interpretation of privacy as part of ideal community life.

Map 2.2, Ravenhill

I: However if I understand you correctly, even though you don't feel necessarily very comfortable you do go in to this area?

F: No really, very, very rarely. Only, as I say, if I had to park the car if it was raining, had to take the boys out, had to park the car run and get something in the street but, yeah, I wouldn't, never really walk around there, I've never any need to, it's not that I object to it, it's just I've never really any need and in a way that's part of the uncomfortable attitude or feeling this the fact that it's I don't know it. And then, yeah, the Woodstock Road, just has a different feel about it, just has a rougher kind of feel, you know, you do feel that on an evening if you were walking up the Woodstock Road into the centre of town, you know, you'd come across somebody walking along with a can of beer in their hand, you know. Whereas you wouldn't get that on the Cregagh Road[…]definitely the Woodstock Road has the, you know, just a different, more built up way about it and that's all it is, you just kind of feel everybody knows everybody and you do stand out like a sore thumb. You know, that if you kind of moved into one of those wee houses everyone would know everything about within a matter of days because they would.

As with the first interview study, issues of religious difference and sectarianism were largely secondary to more general issues of personal safety and comfort. In line with respondents' accounts of their decisions on choosing where to live, political or paramilitary symbols were used as guides to the safety of an area. Alternatively they could be used to signify the boundaries of neighbouring territories that were reported as unsafe, regardless of one's religious background:

Map 10.2, Ravenhill

I: What would be the reason? Both of you wouldn't feel comfortable there?

M: For myself, it takes an awful lot for me to be uncomfortable in it, again, that's because of my work history and work in areas like this. So to say I feel comfortable or uncomfortable is a kind of strange one for me to look at because there's some of these areas I would walk around, still be uncomfortable within them in myself. It's a case of if I had a choice would I want to hang around here, probably not.

F: I think in that lower part is just because you do have a lot of the flags and paramilitary stuff. But, you know, I would walk through it during the day but just normally at night wouldn't feel that happy about it.

However, on occasion, displays of political symbols close to one's own house were reported as making the individual feel uncomfortable as they felt it was a reflection on their own community and a misrepresentation of the mixed ethos of their locale.

Map 6.2, Fortwilliam

I: Ok. Next thing, with the red, mark out the areas that you generally feel uncomfortable going and the green would be where you feel comfortable walking or going to.

F: I don't think I could mark anything in red truthfully. See if I had to do it at this present time I would probably mark my own street in red because it makes me feel uncomfortable with those flags, every time I walk down it I crack up, I want rid of them, you know,

Summary

As with the description of daily routines, participants' understandings of the geographical characteristics of their locale were shaped by mundane practical concerns. Their immediate neighbourhood and trek to work, as well as their use of recreational space, combined to designate what was familiar and comfortable. These routines often coincided with the location of friends and acquaintances in the local area. Concerns about personal safety, especially at night, demarcated the boundaries of journeys as did understandings of the dangers of nearby areas. As such these boundaries precluded contact with others in the places, at these times. Occasionally safety concerns were articulated in sectarian terms, whereby a 'rough' area could be inferred from the display of paramilitary symbols. While the content of these displays may in themselves be objectionable, the overt impact upon participants' lives was reported as minimal. Occasionally displays of more mundane political symbolism did disrupt the participants' sense of familiarity and comfort and impinge upon their sense of community; more usually such symbolism implicitly shaped participants lives by circumscribing their areas of comfort.

6.2 Social support and critical incidents

6.2.1 Informal helping behaviour

In the previous section the role of daily routines in restricting or affording casual contact with neighbours was outlined. Beyond this daily round of causal contacts, participants also reported that they could rely on these friends and neighbours, to a greater or lesser degree, for support when required. Some reported that there was a minimum of regular helping but when major assistance was required, neighbours would certainly help.

Int 4, Fortwilliam

F: As I say, the time that the ambulance had come here, I mean that's the only time I've had to call on my neighbours. Awk now in saying that, if I needed the likes of, if I don't have a screwdriver or something like that I could go next door to J.

I: And you would do that?

F: Oh yes.

I: Would they ever come and ask you for anything?

F: Well J will come and ask me if he's waiting on something for the postman to come or will I nip it in for him or did I see such and such at him door but besides that, no, not really.

Such instances of helping in emergencies was often reported to lead to reciprocal acts of helping between neighbours and the sharing of responsibility for tasks such as child-minding:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

M: One of the neighbours were locked out and they came and asked could you help.

I: They came and asked for help.

M: And I got the ladders out and climbed up onto their wee porch, climbed in and let them in but that was nice that they even though I'll go and ask for help, instead of getting a locksmith and all, it was nice that they did.

F: Whereas I was locked out one day and the bacon was on the grill and T let me phone you and you came up from work so that kind of thing.

From the recurrence of such incidents, residents build up an expectation of receiving help when they expected it and derived some confidence from the knowledge that they could use this collective resource when needed. Instances of helping, especially from people of another religious background were also taken to reflect well upon the cohesive mixed nature of the community:

Int 4, Fortwilliam

I: Yeah, so how soon after you moved in did you meet the neighbours?

F: Oh literally within days! The guy next door and J next door, J next door actually knows my daddy so I'd sort of known her from before and I mean, anytime you go away or anything like that you just have to let the neighbours know and they're grand. The minute they hear, if they hear a noise at all in here they'll come in and check to see if maybe it's one of the sons but if they don't see the son's car outside they're straight on the phone to the police.

I: Has that ever happened before?

F: Once, once but it ended up it was actually the oldest son that was in the house and the cops came to the door (laughs). But J hadn't seen.

I: How does it make you feel knowing that they're looking out for you?

F: It's nice to know that your neighbours will look out if something is wrong but then again, it could be nosiness too but no, I prefer that at least you know that somebody is going to be listening out if anything is wrong, where up the Cavehill your house could have burnt down round you and they wouldn't give a damn, they just wouldn't have given a damn at all.

On occasion, participants reported that this sense of reciprocity could be harnessed on a common project or in response to a shared threat. Neighbours could come together to collectively respond to an occurrence that may have been too much to handle alone:

Int 11, Fortwilliam

I: Right. So walk me through your experience of moving, how did you find the actual move?

M: U was already getting on great with all the people who lived there and, you know, I sort of became friendly with them a bit so like, say I'd see C or J out, you know, I would talk to them and all. So would be on first name terms with everyone who lived there.

F: And then this guy moved in who was nuts and then the sense of community was like a support group for people who just couldn't tolerate this man, who's crazy. [...] So then, like part of it was like me and C and the other girls kind of despairing about what to do with him and like I spoke to his landlord and that sort of thing to try and get him to curb his behaviour. So, I guess we were all sort of looking out for each other.

6.2.2 Helping, coping and the 'social cure'

More generally, this sense of being able to avail of local support from neighbours proved crucial to many of the participants in this study. One key feature of many of the participants' accounts of moving into and settling down within their new community was the occurrence of 'critical incidents' or unexpected events which posed a threat to the residents. Many respondents reported some instances of vandalism or burglary, others reported frightening noises or events nearby. Almost all relayed some type of occurrence which both challenged their ability to cope and made them reflect upon their new life within the unfamiliar community.

A striking example is below, from an interview with a former resident of a tight-knit single identity community who had reported high levels of anxiety when moving into her new locality.

Int 1, Deerpark/Cliftondene

F: It's a massive step, it is a big, big step to move out from where you feel secure into where you don't feel so secure, it's a massive step. And I remember I was only up there about six weeks and there's an estate out the back of us up in Cliftondene and there was people coming out of that estate and they were running up the street and they were making a real riot. Now ordinarily if I was living here that wouldn't have bothered me, it wouldn't have scared me but that frightened the life out of me. And when I say they were making a racket, they were coming out of the estate to go to a pub at the top of the street and they were just jolly and happy and they were just obviously couldn't wait to get into the bar and they were having a laugh with each other, it was just exactly they came out of that estate and they were making this racket but it scared the life out of me.

I: Yeah, because it was new for you and you were not sure

F: It really just scared the living daylights out of me. I had, everything had been really quiet up until then and then my neighbour, S, she had, I went to see her the next day and she had said to me, 'I was thinking about you last night, did that scare you?', and I said 'that frightened the life out of me, I was going to come into you because my son was out, he was working at the time' and S says, 'don't be worrying about that', she says, 'because they do that all the time at weekends, they come out of that estate and come up the street and they're noisy, but they're not doing harm, I mean they're just noisy'.

This account captures many of the key features of these critical incidents. Firstly, the event is unexpected and threatening, and made more frightening by the vulnerability felt by a new and relatively isolated new member of the community. Secondly, the event is inherently ambiguous as the degree of actual threat is unknown. Most importantly though is the response of the local neighbour who provides informational support to the new resident which allows her to reconsider this situation as a harmless aberration which does not characterise life in the new community.

If we refer to chapter three above (section 2.3.5), in which the dynamics of positive community support were outlined, this event becomes interpretable as a 'social cure' response to threat. In effect, the coping resource provided by the neighbour allows the resident to experience the event as less threatening in the knowledge that they are likely to be able to cope. Moreover, elsewhere the resident reports having felt vulnerable on the basis of her religious identity and so the neighbour's information diffuses the potential misinterpretation of the event as sectarian in nature.

A similar account below bears many of the same hallmarks. Here the residents have their car vandalised on their first night in their new area, in a manner which is overtly sectarian:

Int 8, Cliftondene/Deerpark

F: The first night we moved in we had our car, (inaudible) parked out in the street and they wrecked the wing mirror, the wing mirror was cut off. That was our first night in here..

M: And they were only 14 years of age.

F: They were only kids like.

M: And the police caught them and didn't do nothing about them, they were threatening, 'my da's head of the UDA, I'll get him to come down and shoot you' and the police actually says 'do you take it serious?', I says 'well if somebody from the IRA or UDA threatens to shoot you what way does the police treat that?'. And he says, 'well that's a death threat' and I says 'well what are we meant to treat it as?'. He says, 'well she doesn't know where you live', I says, 'well she walked past the house and wrecked my car', you know, and that was the police just left it at that and didn't do nothing else about it. They says they couldn't prosecute her because she's only 14 and she was drunk. You know, so they get away with it.

I: So you said that happened on your first night here?

M: First day, I was only out of hospital.

F: Just moving in.

I: So, what was your reaction to the fact that, you know, on your first day in your new home?

F: He wanted to sell up and go.

M: Sell the house, I don't want to live here no more. But then, when we spoke to J, B, T, call that guy P next door, and C and that there, whenever we spoke to all them it was like 'this happens once in a blue moon'. He says 'that could happen to your car now and not happen to you for another 10 years', you know, it hasn't happened from it.

Again we see an unexpected event which poses a direct threat to the resident. Here though the event does become personally directed at the new occupants and has an overtly sectarian dimension as the respondent is threatened with a paramilitary organisation (albeit by a child). However, the response of the local neighbours (notably many with names characteristic of the other religion) in providing a context of the likelihood of the reoccurrence of the event allows the resident and his partner to reappraise the event as exceptional rather than characteristic of the area.

Of note in this account (and the previous one) is that the helpful neighbours were of a different religious background to the new resident. This helped reassure the resident that the event was not reflective of a sectarian locality and indeed reinforced the sense of living in a cohesive shared community. This is made explicit in a third similar account:

Int 20, Cliftondene/Deerpark

I: So having lived here now for 5 years how well would you say you fit in to Deerpark?

F: Well I would say I fit in pretty well, yeah. And we all as, I say, all wave to each other and we all speak to each other and all that.

I: So would you rely on them in an emergency?

F: I would. I know I could go to any of them ones.

I: And they could come to you if they needed anything. Do you have any stories like that, of like a case where there was something like a small emergency where either you needed their help or they needed yours?

F: Yes. Well at the time that our car was sitting out there and a car came past fast at night and knocked off the wing mirror and that fella across the street there was out like a shot and he says, listen I seen the car and the make of the car and he had that all taken down by the time I got out, you know what I mean, he had that all taken down and that by the time I got out.

I: That must have made you feel very safe?

F: It did. And it made me feel happy because he was a different religion from us and that made you feel that he didn't care what religion you were, do you know what I mean, that he was there to help and it didn't matter, religion didn't matter about it, didn't come in to it, you know what I mean, which was good.

I: Was that soon after moving here?

F: That was only about, we were only here about a year and a half when that happened

6.2.3 'Collective Efficacy' and community resilience against sectarianism

An additional dimension of accounts of critical incidents, was the understanding that the community would come together to respond to any threats to its mixed character. When asked what would happen if there was a sectarian attack in the locale, many respondents responded that the community would come together to publically respond and defend the mixed ethos of the locality. This gave individuals the sense that they could respond to such events and expect to be backed up by their neighbours.

Indeed such an incident was reported to have actually occurred in one of the areas, resulting in community members contacting the landlord of the offending individuals to report their sectarian behaviour, resulting in their eviction.

Int 14, Ravenhill

F: And then of course a couple, this time last year they were still there, we had a family moved in about, actually 3 doors down, and last spring and they were really, it was really bad, they were really anti-social and playing music loudly and.

M: And giving sectarian abuse to some of our other neighbours which was just lovely, just what you wanted.

I: This was a couple of years ago you say?

F: No, they moved out this time last year. But it was awful and it was all the more awful because it was just so completely not what any of us had experienced around us.

I: Did they rent the house?

F: They were renting, yeah.

M: Someone else had a word with the landlord and the landlord told them, 'oh sorry, actually I have people who are moving in' and kicked them out.

This expectation of community outrage against sectarian attacks was common in interviews across all three areas and was most evident for interviewees who felt highly identified with their area and their neighbours. In contrast, one set of participants who were less integrated into their local community reported that if there was a sectarian attack, their response would be to exit the community. While they maintained that they would expect to receive and give support (privately at least) they did not indicate any understanding that the community could act in concert to address the issue:

Int 2.2, Ravenhill

I: What if something actually sectarian were to happen on your street, [...] what would your reaction be?

M: What would my reaction be, disgust, probably we would want to, might consider getting out of the area but nothing like that's ever happened, I don't feel that anything would happen like that.

I: How do you think neighbours would react if it were to happen?

M: I think similarly, yeah.

I: Would it be the type of thing were you would feel that you could rely on them if you needed to for support?

M: Yeah, definitely. And likewise they also think.

I: I was asking if something sectarian were to happen on your street like a sectarian attack of sorts what would your reaction be?

F: To us in particular or just the general street?

I: Well, I guess you can take that either way.

F: Yeah, I'd be terrified if it happened to us so I would, yeah, it would be awful. If it happened to someone else in the street I guess we would kind of not want to get involved, would you want to get involved?

M: Not particularly, no.

F: Would just want to keep a low profile.

M: But equally, you know, to lend your support.

While much of the local support reported in response to critical incidents was informal in nature, some new residents found comfort in the organised local action against crime and especially in relation to potential sectarian threats. Notably this was in an area in which the Shared Neighbourhood Programme had been established.

Int 5, Fortwilliam

F: [...] over the street as we found out there's a lot of drugs and things over there and down the other street there's a paedophile living, so they were the other kind of things that we found out quite early on.

So that was like well, did we make the right move coming here, what have we done bringing our young family to here, what are they going to grow up listening to, that was the one thing about that house but we were in no position to move and we were like we own our house, why are we going to move, they are the ones with the Housing Executive.

I: So what helped to calm you down about those concerns or fears that you had about those different things?

F: Well there's a community watch that's been organised now within the centre so knowing that there's more information from the community that you can contact because I was able to contact the community watch about the neighbours next door and then if you heard any joyriding at all you could contact them also to let them know but the police were already on board about the joy riding and if there was any people hanging about the corners and things. So they had like an interface project as well that they would go between the two different sections to try and make sure everything was fine in that sense. I've never really seen anything bad between the Protestant and Catholic side of things and more just in general with youth

6.2.4 Undermining the 'social cure'

These extracts above indicate that community support can work to provide reassurance and reduce the levels of perceived threat among new residents. However, the reverse case was also occasionally evident in the interviews. If residents reported poor levels of community integration and few channels of communication with their neighbours, then the level of uncertainty as to the implications of unexpected or ambiguous effects tended to persist for longer. In contrast to the accounts above which detail immediate reassurance and support from neighbours, one participant reported that the uncertainty and anxiety caused by noise at night lasted for quite some time after they moved in:

Int 12, Fortwilliam

F: I suppose that was it, our experience that we were kind of waiting to see or interested in was there going to be a lot of noise at night time or is there going to be loads of, you know, you're kind of waiting to see are you going to feel safe or not really, I suppose that's the bottom line, isn't it? And then I suppose based on experiences from before when you didn't feel safe near here and, you know, a couple of nights we're starting to go at the weekends, flip me this is going to be a nightmare, you know, people coming back from the pub and being really noisy and wakening you up and you're going to be lying there and going, listening, you know to see what's going to happen next, you know. But it actually turned out to be not too bad, you know, we only heard people a couple of times, it wasn't as bad as what we thought.

In extreme cases, the lack of communication with neighbours could have deleterious effects on integration. Potential threats could be exaggerated and, as a consequence, misunderstandings could undermine relations with neighbours. One example is of an unattended car left near a new resident's house:

Int 2, Ravenhill

F: there was an incident last year, somebody had parked in front of our house and it was a car I didn't recognise, and this was on a Friday evening coming up to 5pm right across our driveway. And I was giving them the benefit of the doubt thinking P will be home from work soon, I'll wait and they'll come and move the car, it will be fine. Then it got to the stage where I thought they're really not coming back, they're not going to move their car, that's just ignorant that somebody's parked in front of your driveway. So I suppose from impatience or frustration I phoned the police just to say there was a car in front of my driveway, driver's not back, I wondered could you contact the owner and say, 'look, we really need to get into our driveway especially for a weekend', it turned out that it's actually somebody's daughter from a few houses up, but I'd never seen the car

before, it had R plates on it, which is, you know, I don't know if you know, it's like someone's just passed their driving test, so it's obviously a new car that somebody just got for passing their driving test. Didn't know whose car it was and the policeman then give them a ticket, […]

M: And not everyone's aware of how tricky it is. It's like, it looked bad, you know; we called the police and

F: They give them a ticket.

M: We genuinely didn't know whose car it was, we just thought nobody on the street would do that, and then the police finally found out who it was and he said 'oh, it's up the street' and we said 'right ok, don't make an issue' and he said 'no, I want to make an issue because they shouldn't so he gave them a ticket'. It's a tricky situation.

F: If I'd known whose car it was I wouldn't have thought twice about going and saying, 'Listen, I'm really sorry, but I'd never seen the car before so'

Evident from this extract is the degree to which new residents are left vulnerable because of their lack of local knowledge and absence of contact with their neighbours. An innocuous and easily resolvable occurrence becomes interpreted as a potential threat. In turn the residents' response damages relations and (while the consequences here are relatively light) the residents did indicate that in the end they never spoke to the neighbours and hence another line of communication was shut down.

A sense of collective efficacy in relation to potential threats (and in particular sectarian threats) was sometimes evidently dependent upon having a sense of a 'united community'. Perceptions of sectarian division within the community could operate to undermine the network of trust and help within the community. One couple, who were dismayed at the high level of political symbols displayed in their area during the marching season, reported that this undermined their sense of being able to rely on their neighbours for help if required.

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: So would your family come and visit around the 12th?

F: No, not around the 12th really, well not during the summertime because we would be up there more but they would, they're here pretty often.

I: And they would come and visit you here?

F: Yeah.

I: And how would they feel about coming here, especially if they'd seen the flags but even now, have they expressed anything?

F: Yeah, they would have been, I suppose shocked and annoyed.

M: Probably frightened

F: Yeah.

M: Probably scared.

F: I'd say my mum would have been a bit frightened, just not really expecting it, I would have told her in advance.

I: Has it put them off coming to visit?

M: I think it's put us off living here.

F: The thing is I like the fact that all the neighbours are, not all of the neighbours but there's a good section of the neighbours who we know and I feel I could trust and as you were saying earlier, I could call for help, I could go to somebody but I suppose for us on that level of just the kind of sectarian issue, the flags issue

Likewise another resident who had moved into her new community after an extremely negative sectarian attack reported that sectarianism in her new community undermined her ability to trust and rely on her neighbours. In part this was inferred from their public displays of political symbols (Union flags and activities around the 12th July). This belief added to her sense of isolation as well as her lack of willingness to proactively establish new contacts in the neighbourhood.

17.2, Fortwilliam

F: I've a couple of good neighbours now, down here. But you can still, we've even said ourselves, you can actually still feel that there's them and us, where we all talk and say hallo.

I: Them and us in terms of religion?

F: Yes, just wee things that's said. I just picked up on wee things that was said and I still think even in our age group too, and especially when people start saying to me racist remarks, 'blackies' or, you know, like that. And then you know rightly, and when it comes near the 12th they're getting their sandwiches all ready to go to their wee clubs. It's like isolated. And even with that they're friendly, they speak to you, they smile, they would laugh and what have you but you know rightly.

I: When did you first get to know D and K?

F: I was coming out and about even just after, well I came in here at the end of September I bothered with nobody, I was like a hermit, luckily enough I had my own friends that came up.

I: So no one came and knocked on your door and said we're your neighbours?

F: No, not a sinner came near me.

While this is clearly a complex situation, the perception of sectarianism in this case (and in the previous extract) can be seen to have element of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' in that negative encounters work to close potential avenues of cross-community communication and support.

Summary

This chapter has illustrated the organic and routinised nature of the relationship that incoming residents have with their new community. On one level, the mundane routines of everyday life offer the opportunities to meet neighbours and other residents from the local area. While work routines operate mainly to restrict opportunities for contact, the synchronised routines of the school run, the rush to work, lunchtime and the return home offer opportunities for neighbours with synchronised routines and activities to make casual contact and maintain a civil relationship. Such encounters are typically not meaningful or intimate, but can operate to demonstrate a degree of acceptance, integration and peaceful coexistence among residents. Moreover they also demonstrably maintain channels of communication which become necessary in times of need.

On another level, these informal networks of communication facilitate the initiation of low-level helping behaviour which again feeds back into an understanding of being part of a new community. Helping establishes reciprocity and so indicates the availability of future help if required. Reliance on this help (and also the experience of collectively acting towards a common goal) has a function of consolidating a shared sense of community as well as a feeling of resilience, such that one can expect to be able to deal with the unexpected in the future.

This feeling of 'collective efficacy' is crucial for incomers, as our data suggests that the occurrence of unexpected, potentially threatening events is common for new residents. As they are left vulnerable by their move away from their previous networks and are now immersed in a strange and unfamiliar environment, the occurrence of relatively innocuous events can be experienced as intense and personal threats. Moreover, as the resident feels vulnerable because of being a religious minority or because of having moved out of a single-identity area, these events are potentially interpretable as sectarian. Typically, the actions of kindly, concerned neighbours act to mitigate the impact of the threat and allow the new resident to reconsider the occurrence in less threatening terms. Indeed this works to reinforce the image of the community as cohesive and (especially where the helper is of the other religion) non-sectarian. Furthermore, the sense of collective efficacy gives neighbours the confidence to act against such occurrences, confident in the knowledge that the community will back them.

However, residents who lack channels of communication or reciprocity are vulnerable to misinterpreting unexpected events as unnecessarily threatful. This can inadvertently damage their sense of community and their relations with others and lead to exit from the community. Evidently, the perception of division within the community can undermine a sense of collective efficacy and perceptions of sectarianism in particular can be self-perpetuating in terms of closing down avenues of communication and cooperation.

7

Chapter Seven:
Mixed Marriages

Chapter 7: Mixed Marriages

In our sample, five interviews were conducted with partners in mixed marriages (with four couples and one partner interviewed alone). In this chapter, the specific characteristics of their interviews are considered in the light of what we now know about the challenges and experiences of residential mobility into mixed areas of Belfast.

7.1 Life trajectories

The five mixed marriages in our sample did not differ from the rest of the sample significantly, but tended to have a greater concentration of the unusual characteristics noted among other participants. For 4 of the couples, one partner came from outside of Belfast. Of the remaining couple, one reported a prolonged period away from his home community and profound political differences with his previous neighbours, while his partner reported having originally lived in an area predominantly of the other religion. Other members of this sample had previously lived in mixed urban or rural areas and some had otherwise distinctive life trajectories, including one Catholic who reported that he had previously served in the British Army, but also was active in GAA sports.

7.2 Selection of location

If the couples had lived together beforehand, this was usually in other mixed areas of Belfast. In marked contrast to the other participants in the sample, their choice to move to their current location was reported to have been heavily driven by considerations of the local demographic mix:

Int 11, Fortwilliam

F: Yeah, we only looked at maybe 4 or 5 houses. I mean, we did look at a house right, you know that one, there was a couple that we looked at that whenever we went there we realised we couldn't move there because there was a lot of flags.

I: Where was that?

M: The bottom of Donegall Park Avenue.

F: That's right, there was a guy who was the preacher or something, remember him, his house. And then then there was.

M: Aye, Lowwood as well, I think was the other one.

F: Is that the tall guy? Yeah.

I: So, seeing flags put you off?

M: Yes, it was a perfectly nice house but, yeah, seen all those sort of flags put us off, yeah.

F: Because we'd been looking, oh no, probably, what time of year was that October?

M: Yeah, it was, it was after the summer marching season.

F: So like if there's flags in October that's not a good sign. Like it's bad enough in sort of June, July when they've still got them in October that's like sort of a warning sign.

Mixed couples also reported taking note of indirect indicators as to the level of religious tolerance in the local area as in the following extract:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: So did you not know about the religious make up of this area or anything about it? Like the fact that it's on an interface, was that something that you were aware of?

F: Well, the woman that kind of had the house before kind of told us that everything was changing in the area and there was all this kind of community redevelopment so I totally believed what she was saying but I know there has been some and there are

M: And K was going on about peace and things and everybody getting along and stuff so I think we thought moving into an interface area, it wouldn't matter.

F: Yeah, I don't even know if we really considered the interface so much as we were more concerned about the cost of it

and the bidding but before we bought it I called into the house next door just to chat with them about what the neighbourhood was like because I was so unfamiliar with North Belfast and they were like mixed marriage, mixed religious gay couple guys and they'd been living there for three years and I thought well, if they're tolerated in the area

Most of these couples reported that their family had either first-hand experience of living in the new area or had taken care to give advice or express concern about whether to move to the locale or not. In other words, they reported that their family took a protective interest in their welfare as a result of the increased vulnerability they were considered to possess.

Int 11, Fortwilliam

I: What were some of the reactions from your family or friends when you actually first moved into the area?

F: It was definitely positive for me considering where I had been, it was a good move so, yeah, like we were kind of joking that it was like I was buying somewhere just to have a safe place to park the car. I was looking for a car park with a flat attached, that sort of thing. So, you know, it was good.

M: Yeah, my family were supportive, my dad he was the sort of local doctor around here so he knows everywhere very well. So he knows some of the streets aren't as integrated or aren't as nice as say, this street is. But you know, he was sort of like just be careful which.

F: He was a bit more wary, wasn't he?

M: He's quite a cautious person anyway but he's like just be careful which street because he knows of the interface, it's probably changed a lot since he was the doctor as well. But, he's like there's a few streets round there aren't as good but once, you know, we decided to move into this one, he's like, aye, he was happy.

7.3 Settling in and integration

Mixed couples tended to follow the same patterns of integration as other couples. Having children was again the most effective way of establishing links within the locale.

Int 7, Fortwilliam

I: So having been here now for a number of years, how well do you feel that you fit in to this neighbourhood?

F: I think we fit in ok. I mean I probably fit in more than you do.

M: I'd say you fit in more than I do.

F: For me like, it's culturally quite different but I think I fit in because this was through say, the kids and meeting up with people down the park and getting involved in some things around, and work, I work kind of close to here and Eddie goes to school near here so yeah, I definitely don't feel like not in the area but I don't think I would like to live in this particular area for life, for long term but certainly for the meantime it's fine.

However, these couples were aware that their marriage was a potential vulnerability. This was reported to be reinforced by their parent's fears for their safety:

Int 19, Ravenhill

F: Mummy always like, she would always say, you know, especially I think at the start of the relationship, you know, she was like she was happy enough and stuff but she says like, you know, just be careful who you tell, you know, if you meet anybody new and, because she came through all the bad troubles and stuff. And, because even one of her friends E [Irish name], she lives in the Short Strand and she came up to mummy's one time and so the whole night she was like don't be calling me [Irish name], call me [English equivalent], you know, so nobody knew. But I think that's from their generation, you know, because they've seen how bad the troubles

were and, you know, they don't realise it's moving forward slowly but it is moving.

Indeed this couple themselves reported that, in response to a sectarian incident they were worried about the mixed nature of their relationship becoming public knowledge:

Int 19, Ravenhill

M: I sort of felt intimidated a wee bit.

F: Yeah, and then worried as well, you know, oh goodness if they find out about me and him, you know.

M: I say my name sort of shields me a bit, especially living round here, it's a Protestant name, there's very little Catholics called [typically Protestant name] so it's sort of be able to know what way they take me

Others did not report fears of sectarian threat, but were notably withdrawn from their community which had led to an exceptionally high degree of uncertainty and anxiety as to the intentions of their neighbours. The following respondent had indicated knowing few neighbours and being unable to rely on any in an emergency.

Int 12, Fortwilliam

I: So you would know really nobody across the street?

F: No, not at all.

I: And what about sort of one house over on either side, would you know anyone there?

F: No. It so happens these 3 are stuck together here and these, so we're in the middle of 2 other ones and no, don't know anybody. […] I don't know I just have a general sense maybe of not feeling quite as safe here as I would in Stranmillis, it's hard to maybe put my finger on exactly quite why. I think it's just because you do, it sounds terribly stereo typical but yet there's more of a sense of maybe like hoodies here or wee gangs, there is a children's home just down at the end. I've done a wee bit of work in children's homes and, you know, you spot them there hanging around in their wee gangs and they're, you know, the thing is they don't really cause much fuss, they maybe, people maybe throw litter into the garden or something a wee bit, you know

7.4 Involvement in local community organisations

Some mixed couples reported a particular aversion to becoming involved in community organisations. This was reported to be due to the potential politicisation of these activities.

Int 11, Fortwilliam

M: Life's difficult I guess if you work full time like we both do as well. You know, it's getting the time and it's probably well you know, at the weekend you sort of think, you know, bit tired, don't want to spend the weekends doing.

F: It's just like, I don't know, I don't want to do something through a political group or through a community group that's dominated by some organisation, I just want to do something with a genuine sort of volunteering spirit that is good for the community. Because I know like a lot of community groups can be sort of hijacked by organisations and also become self-perpetuating things not actually for the benefit of the community, just to benefit the people in it. It's frustrating.

Others reported more explicit fears that community groups could be linked to paramilitary organisations and that this would constitute an unnecessary risk to them.

Int 7, Fortwilliam

M: I have to say the cross community group, M had suggested getting involved in that for herself and I would probably say I would have actively discouraged that.

I: Why is that?

M: Because of occasionally community groups have links with paramilitaries and

I just wouldn't want that for you.

I: Would you be afraid for her?

M: Yes, definitely.

F: I wouldn't be afraid for me.

I: Did you want to get involved?

F: I did, they would have meetings and all that stuff but there hasn't been so much on recently. But I've gone to a few things, just to things that they've had on that would have suited the kids as well.

M: I went to the events too but I think you wanted to join the community group at one stage.

F: Yes.

M: And that for me, I'd be like no, I don't do that, it's too risky.

F: Was that the mid Skegoneill Group/

M: Yes.

F: The mid Skegoneill Group probably not but the Skegoneill/Glandore Group.

M: Even that, I wouldn't join a community group, no.

However another couple were a distinct exception to the lack of involvement in local community politics, taking a proactive role in diffusing a potential community dispute surrounding controversial issues of parading and protest. To the extent to which the participant felt that she represented the broader nature of the community, she was able to effectively oppose polarisation of political opinion and diffuse a potentially sectarian conflict (even if ultimately another protest was held).

Int 15, Cliftondene/Deerpark

F: So the meeting, the 2 main people who spoke at the meeting were me and another fella, who had lived in Ballysillan on the Ballysillan Road. And we were like, 'let's not get this out of proportion'. There had been, his young lad worked in the Co and there had been, Protestants had been drunk and had gone in and wrecked the Co and he was more worried about that than he was about, he was more worried about them going in to the Co and damaging the place and all of that. And then there were all these Shinners who were, 'oh we need to protect the are' [...] At the end of the day sense prevailed, they wanted people out on the street and all of this, and at the end of the day the people from Cliftondene and our side of the road said 'no, we're not going to put up, we're not going to have a presence on the street and it calmed'. But the dissidents had a similar event between Cliftondene and the Deerpark Road and that ended up in fist fights.

7.5 Managing identity displays

Mixed couples discernibly evidenced more pronounced concern about the display and regulation of symbols of political partisanship than did most other respondents. In terms of selecting a location, one participant reported:

Int 19, Ravenhill

I: Did you look at other areas when you were thinking about buying a house?

M: I did. There was cheaper areas, likes of Ravenhill near the Cregagh Estate, would have been cheaper again but didn't want to bring trouble to our back door either, you know, because at the time I was heavily involved into hurley and GAA so I was. So I was bringing jerseys home to get washed so I couldn't hang them out on the washing line living over there so. Even this time of year, you know, June, July, August I sort of keep a low profile from the hurley game, what not. September onwards nobody really bothers and sort of I feel more relaxed as well, you know, what I leave on the washing line.

Other mixed couples were particularly sensitive to displays of political partisanship on behalf of other people. As the Catholic partner in a mixed marriage related:

Int 15, Cliftondene/Deerpark

F: Yes, there were 2 things, one, a girl I went to school with moved in and started to put holy statues out on the door and all of that and, well anyone we spoke to was horrified. I'm trying to think, S next door was absolutely disgusted, J and E, different people that we knew in the street were like, we don't want that because that's advertising Catholicism when there's Protestant kids walking up and down the street all the time and there's no need for it, the kids don't bother. Like, there was never any abuse with the girls coming from the Girls Model to the kids in the street, so I think somebody spoke to her and.

M: Well, she got less religious, I think they went through a wee phase didn't they?

One reason for this was that partners in a mixed couple could simultaneously be attending to both the perceptions of the outgroup and the impression of the rest of their ingroup. For example, the display of Union flags could be felt to be an embarrassment by the Protestant partner in front of his Catholic relatives:

Int 7, Fortwilliam

F: Yeah, well actually the first year the flags went up on something like the 10th, on this actual street they only went up like the 10th, 11th July and I always go to Donegal that weekend and I came back up and they were down so I was delighted, I thought that's fine but the following year or the year after, well anyway, around the jubilee and then there was the royal wedding and I suppose every kind of event then just seemed to be more colour, more splash and now, and the bonfires with the, I suppose, my flag on top of it, it was horrible. So that's one thing I really don't like about it but that was up just beside the interface.

I: That's where the bonfire is.

F: That's where the bonfire was when we moved here first but it's not now, it's moved down a wee bit.

I: Do you have any feelings about the fact that it's moved down?

F: I'm happy it's moved down, yeah.

M: Me too. For me, the flags going up I was kind of horrified and I was very sympathetic to M then and your family and all, it's embarrassing for me to have my in laws come up and there be flags, there no need, there is no need for any flags at all

However, this was not always the case, as in the following instance from an atypical Catholic who had previously lived in an area characterised by peaceful co-existence.

Int 19, Ravenhill

M: We knew it was quite quiet but your granda he did say to her, he did say look that area, he thought it was more predominantly Protestant, he didn't think there were any Catholics in the area, he goes no, try to keep yourself to yourself a wee bit until you sort of get the feel of the place. But, when we were moving in I was talking away to M, you could tell by his Southern brogue I was like, I'm worried here.

F: And then A.

M: A as well, you can tell by her Southern brogue.

F: And you've got S.

M: Aye, talk about S or you can talk about J next door.

F: Aye, but S he's Catholic.

M: Is he? Even we talk away, help A, he's the only one in the street, you know, holds a flag out, you know, over the twelfth and what not. It doesn't bother me, you know, I grew up with mates they hung flags out and that there. And for like a GAA man I was actually a British soldier as well so not too many GAA men can say that like. I was a British solder so I was.

Summary

These mixed couples provided a theoretically interesting counterpart to the single-identity couples. While few had both members from Belfast, they still constituted a partnership between members of each religious denomination and as such they effectively embody cross-community contact within their relationship. This was managed in a variety of different ways. Some had rejected their religion or had broken contact with their previous communities and behaved in a secular, non-denominational fashion. Others maintained their religion and family connections and dealt with the challenges of interfaith marriage in a pragmatic fashion.

All were concerned with the community relations in their new area and in contrast to the others, had typically chosen their new location expressly for the purpose of its religious mix (and occasionally for the way in which other mixed marriages had previously been received). Notably, mixed couples who maintained some sense of broader collective identity with their previous communities, tended to have more rather than less anxiety and concern about community relations in their locale. It became evident that in addition to the usual concerns about the perceptions of the outgroup, each partner also worried about the perceptions and actions of their 'own' group. Moreover, they could also feel responsible for how members of their own religious group would respond to their partner's co-religionists.

In coping with these added challenges, mixed couples adopted a variety of strategies (often in combination). Most avoided involvement in community groups for fear of any political polarisation which would undermine their own personal cross-community position. Some concealed their mixed relationship and attempted to pass as a single-identity couple, at least to strangers. Others withdrew to a degree from their neighbourhood, or lived their daily lives outside of the neighbourhood, thereby reducing the possibility of negative attention. However others managed to avail of their position as representing the mix of the community and to exert a moderating influence on local politics. In other words, while mixed couples were especially vulnerable to cross-community tensions, they had a range of coping strategies at their disposal, involving a range of different levels of integration. Consequently, in line with the previous discussion, those who integrated well did best in terms of their ability to cope with challenge, while those who remained peripheral or isolated tended to suffer more and report shorter futures in the community.

Chapter Eight:
Discussion

Chapter 8: Discussion

The present study examined the motivations, expectations and experiences of residents moving into mixed areas of Belfast city. Using a combination of interview methods, it investigated the general concerns and routines of new residents' lives with a view to ascertaining their level of integration with their new neighbourhood and the degree of intercommunity contact that resulted. Moreover it identified how residents navigated the geography of their new locale and how they responded to real or imagined threats and challenges within their new communities.

8.1 Review of main findings

8.1.1 Mixing as a secondary concern for new residents

The first main finding of the research is that while respondents were all aware of the religious mix of their new area, this was typically not the main reason or indeed an important reason in their selection of the area. Financial concerns, practical motivations and family considerations all featured much more heavily in the decision-making process. The fact that housing in these areas was cheaper than in more affluent areas of the city was often a primary motivator. The impact of the move upon the logistics of work and family life was often a second priority. The religious mix of the area was typically mentioned only in terms of visible displays of political or paramilitary symbols which were reported as detracting from the perceived value and safety of the area. A minority did focus upon the religious mix of the area in their considerations, though these tended to be mixed couples and will be discussed separately below.

8.1.2 Intergroup contact as incidental to the lives and goals of incomers

Relatedly, intercommunity contact was not a high priority for these respondents. Respondents had not moved for the purposes of making new friends in the other community and rarely engaged in any specifically cross-community activities. Accordingly, where intercommunity contact resulted as a consequence of the move, this was incidental to the other concerns and priorities of everyday live. Notably, for those with children, the level of contact with other neighbours (and as a consequence with people from other religious backgrounds) was reported to be much higher. This occurred through children's friendships, playtime in community areas and meeting other parents on the school run and at school-related activities (though of course for parents of children attending segregated schools, this did not entail cross-community contact). Other points of contact included local shops and amenities and shared spaces in the local area. Overwhelmingly, contact was reported as civil and pleasant, but perfunctory and largely superficial.

8.1.3 Signifiers of religious division as a potential breach of intergroup civility.

Where issues of religious difference were present in residents' accounts, these were largely reported as negative issues which impinged upon the routines and goals of normal existence. Flags and paramilitary emblems were widely reported as a deterrent to moving into an area. These symbols were usually reported as exclusive, intimidating and threatening by residents, even by those from the (Protestant) community the symbols purport to represent. While some respondents reported a tolerant attitude to the flying of (non-paramilitary) flags, others reported that such symbols affected their understanding of the composition and beliefs of the local community as well as their use of space within the locale. Respondents themselves were at pains to regulate the displays of their own identity (especially if they were from the minority religious tradition) so as not to offend their neighbours.

8.1.4 Varieties of understandings of good community relations and of 'sharing'

Residents often had different understandings of what constitutes good cross-community relations: some reported wishing for a

completely neutral environment, devoid of any political or religious signifiers. Others reported that the expression and tolerance of markers of difference, such as school uniforms or even flags, was evidence of successful cohesion. These different 'lay models' of contact do not reflect any difference in an underlying desire for good relations between individuals, but do have the potential for misunderstanding between people with these different values. These differing opinions and expectations require good channels of communication with neighbours to ensure that they do not result in conflict.

8.1.5 New residents as vulnerable to threat; integration as providing support

While respondents reported a range of levels of integration within their new communities, the key determinant of their ability to cope with unexpected challenges in their lives (including perceived sectarian threats) was their relationship with others within the community. Daily routines formed the infrastructure of their interactions with others in the neighbourhood. These contacts formed the basis of communication, trust and small acts of helping. This building of bonds of mutual obligation (social capital) in turn formed the basis of the residents' ability to collectively respond to the unexpected, whether this be locking oneself out of one's house or facing a sectarian attack.

The need to establish these bonds for newcomers is occasioned by the psychological and social consequences of the move itself. The transition from one community to another is of huge import in people's lives. In effect, they are stripped of the familiar routines, contacts, friendships and broader community support which characterised their previous existence. This leaves these individuals potentially vulnerable within a new and unfamiliar environment and this is especially challenging for those previously coming from a close-knit community. Some people maintain links with their previous community which affords a degree of continuity, but this can have a detrimental effect on integration, especially if the former community disapproves of the move or is fearful for the resident in their new environs. Other incoming residents maintain a degree of distance from their new neighbours which, though it may serve to protect their privacy and reduce the likelihood of negative interpersonal contact, perpetuates this vulnerability and heightens and prolongs their feeling of threat. Others integrate well and successfully build up channels of communication and bonds of mutual support which replace those of their previous community.

The crucial importance of such bonds is that they allow the new resident to cope with the unexpected in their new environment. All residents reported some unusual or challenging event in their 'settling in' period and their accounts of how they coped closely adhered to psychological models of threat, stress and coping. Given the unfamiliarity of their new environs, threats were characterised by a high level of uncertainty. Residents were not able to discern whether the threats were typical of their new environment or exceptional; whether the threat was directed at them personally or was indiscriminate. As a result the residents had difficulty ascertaining the level of the threat and judging their ability to cope, which resulted in high levels of anxiety. For those who had established contact with neighbours, they were quickly able to gain information as to the severity of the threat and how to respond. For those without such contacts, the threat persisted and coloured their future experience of their neighbourhood.

8.1.6 The role of neighbourhood support in diffusing sectarian threat

The importance of this for new incomers to a religiously mixed area is that these threats can often be seen as sectarian. From the residents' perspective, mixing can constitutes a potential risk and so any unusual events can be (rightly or wrongly) attributed to this distinctive feature of their new neighbourhood. This is particularly the case for minorities moving into an area who may feel conspicuous and especially vulnerable because of their different religious

background. Consequently our residents reported that information as to the non-sectarian nature of threats (or if sectarian, the low risk of reoccurrence) was particularly reassuring, especially if it came from an outgroup member. In other words, a channel of cross-community contact pays off when it provides reassurance as to the source of a potential threat. Conversely, a lack of information from the other religious group can result in misperception of threat, a misunderstanding of others' intentions and further alienation.

This finding is particularly important when considering the findings of the traditional contact literature in Northern Ireland (section 3.2 above). Schmid and colleagues had found that living in residentially mixed areas sometimes had a negative effect on intergroup attitudes by reducing trust and removing a sense of belonging. This could only be reversed if residents had positive intergroup contact and cross-community friendships. While the assumption in that survey research is that contact has intrinsic benefits (i.e. it should result in positive relations), the present research provides a more practical and problem-focused explanation for this: mixed communities can be fraught with uncertainty and threat, especially for new residents. In fact the vulnerability experienced by new residents predisposes them to negative contact experiences. Consequently, communication with other residents, especially those from the other side, is necessary to reconstrue these threats as manageable challenges. Therefore the ability to communicate with the outgroup to ensure a shared sense of perspective and mutual support is necessary to prevent a divergence of perceptions of threat and potential intergroup misunderstanding.

8.1.7 Community 'Collective Efficacy' enables resilience against threats to cohesion

Moreover, we identify a further dimension to coping with threats to new residents and in particular sectarian threat. The belief that the community could come together to oppose and resist a threat to its cross-community nature was particularly closely tied to new residents' perceptions of their ability to cope with such threats in the future. Indeed, those who did not believe that this would be the case reported that they would leave the community if such an attack were to occur. Moreover, we noted several incidents whereby this collective resilience had in fact occurred and neighbours had come together to oppose sectarianism, defend other community members and address a threat to their community cohesion. On this basis, we note that a perception of a united community (based on a commitment to residential mixing) along with an identification with this community, facilitated this sense of collective efficacy and resilience to sectarian division.

8.1.8 Sectional symbols can undermine efficacy and resilience

Conversely, it was also noted that the display of political symbols could enact a corrosive effect on this sense of cross-community cohesion and resilience. While many residents refused to believe that the display of political emblems reflected an exclusive sentiment among the wider community, they reported feeling unable to challenge these displays for fear of the organisations who were responsible. More generally the prevalence of symbols on private as well as public property led to a degree of uncertainty as to the commitment of others to residential mixing and was occasionally linked explicitly to a reduction in the ability to rely on one's neighbours for help if needed.

8.1.9 Mixed couples as vulnerable, but also as emblematic of mixed communities

This was particularly the case for those from mixed-partnerships who often felt more vulnerable and exposed than their single-identity counterparts. They were more attentive to the religious mix of the area when choosing where to live and could object more vociferously to the display of political emblems in their areas. While it has been suggested by Cairns & Hewstone (2003) that mixed marriage couples often revert to one or other of the traditional communities and sever ties to the other, our respondents

reported a higher degree of interest and support (though also concern) from their families.

The vulnerability of these couples was recognisably due to the fact that each member was attending to the perceptions of both their own and their partner's community. Respondents could feel threatened by the response of either side and on occasion reported embarrassment as to how the behaviour of their own co-religionists may be seen by their partner's community. Some couples withdrew from their neighbours and were recognisably among the most threatened and vulnerable among the sample, due to their resultant isolation. For others, a guarded engagement with the local community was possible. For others still, their mixed partnership afforded a sense of being able to reflect and represent the ethos of the community at a local political level. In effect, there is nothing inherently detrimental for partners in a mixed relationship. Although they face unique personal challenges, their experiences very much reflect their level of integration in the local community, much like any other incoming residents.

8.2 Implications

8.2.1 The need for a specific focus on new residents in mixed areas

Spontaneous population mobility in Northern Ireland occurs on an increasingly large scale and offers a unique opportunity to enhance better cross-community relations. However, this will not happen automatically. People who are moving into mixed areas are typically not primarily motivated to develop cross-community relations and, for these incomers, intergroup contact is usually incidental to the priorities of their everyday lives. Increased opportunities for contact may not be taken up and contact may be negative as well as positive. Indeed the process of moving between communities (and in particular from single-identity to mixed communities) leaves residents especially vulnerable to perceptions of threats as sectarian and can have the ironic consequence of increasing intergroup hostility. In other words, incoming residents need to be acknowledged as a distinct group with specific requirements occasioned by their previous experiences and their need for integration.

In order to address these negative consequences and to maximise the positive consequences of mixing, incomers need to be made to feel welcome by their neighbours. They need to be provided with contact with established members of the community, including those from other religious backgrounds. They need to be assured that the community will support and endorse positive cross-community relations and that threats to these relations will be resisted. In effect, residents need to feel part of a united community with sense of shared 'collective efficacy' which can be mobilised to deal with sectarian as well as non-sectarian threats to its own cohesion.

8.2.2 Developing the NIHE/Shared Neighbourhood Programme 'Welcome Pack'

One possible avenue to develop this is by adapting the existing NIHE 'Community Welcome Pack' for incoming residents (NIHE, 2013) which contains information on norms of neighbourliness as well as general orientation information and a section on harassment. This has already been developed through the Shared Neighbourhood Programme so that, for example, the Springfarm area Welcome Pack contains an explicit section on dealing with racism. This could easily be developed in two ways for newly mixed areas. First, using the welcome pack to invite new residents to informal events (and in particular non-political, social events) would facilitate the establishment of the unofficial links and channels of communication that our residents report as valuable. Even designating an unofficial neighbourhood 'buddy' to new arrivals would open a channel of communication in the first vital period when residents are unlikely to have made new friends. In the longer term, ensuring that newcomers feel welcome and entitled to have input at community meetings (as well as clarifying the purpose and political ethos of the committees) may help overcome the reluctance to engage in these fora noted in the present research.

Second, a welcome pack could include an explicit message on sectarianism. This would both signal a collective commitment to a united community and provide some substance to the idea of the mixed community identity for the incomer. Moreover, as noted above, one challenge for increasingly mixed neighbourhoods is that they will bring together people with different expectations of what good community relations mean: some will expect neutrality while others will expect the display and tolerance of cultural identity. The welcome pack can therefore provide a basis for a shared consensus as to what good neighbours in a mixed community can expect from one another. While the effects of overtly sectarian or paramilitary displays are unequivocally negative and corrosive on community relations (certainly for newcomers to an area), non-paramilitary political or religious displays are inherently ambiguous and so the consensual understanding behind their meaning and regulation needs to be established and disseminated across the whole community. This could be linked to an elaborated Shared Neighbourhood Charter which is developed and endorsed by all of the community (see 8.2.6) so that incomers are aware that all existing residents are aware of and endorse the key principles of mixing and respect for difference.

8.2.3 A specific welcome for mixed couples

This is particularly important for mixed couples who may feel especially vulnerable to sectarian threat as well as new residents who may have moved from previous communities in which they were not welcomed. The tendency among these types of incomers may be to keep themselves isolated from others, but this will have ironic consequences if they then experience threats to their security. An explicit mention that mixed-couples are especially welcome as they reflect the united ethos of the community may ameliorate their apprehension. An assurance that all residents in the area share a common understanding of appropriate behaviour may provide them with the confidence to engage with their neighbours.

8.2.4 Embedding intergroup contact in the fibre of everyday life

More generally, it must be emphasised most of these new residents are not primarily concerned with the religious mix of their area or motivated to seek out cross-community contacts. Any new community identity that they may develop needs to sit alongside the variety of religious, national and political identities of its residents. It needs to actively focus on the 'shared' and 'united' aspects of cross-community partnership which facilitate their pre-existing interests and priorities: shared spaces for contact and communal activity, shared goals for the betterment of all in the community and a shared commitment to foster and protect the united cross-community nature of the area. It will be through harnessing the existing concerns and interests of residents' everyday lives that new cross-community relationships and an adherence to a cross-community ethos develops. The most obvious route to accomplish this is through residents' roles as parents. By harnessing parents' commitments to the betterment of their children's future as well as understanding how their childcare routines facilitate (or impede) intergroup contact, good relations can become ingrained in the mundane routines of everyday life.

8.2.5 Shared spaces as signifiers and opportunities for contact

Of particular importance are the shared spaces within a community. The ability to make the diversity of the community visible and accessible to all in this way is reported as reassuring and giving residents a sense of belonging. In addition it has the self-perpetuating effect of showing that diversity does not detract from community cohesion and furthermore that displays of political or paramilitary symbols (where they occur in or near to mixed areas) do not in fact indicate a divided or exclusive community. However it must be noted that there are potentially a range of understandings of 'sharing' and 'shared spaces' that range from a preference for complete neutrality to a desire to publically express one's own identity (whilst

respecting the expression of other identities). These divergent opinions and aspirations need to be openly discussed and a consensus agreed among neighbours as to the acceptability and desirability of different forms of sharing.

8.2.6 Challenging sectarian behaviour

Also it must be acknowledged that overtly political displays and actions of a minority of community members can shape, if not disrupt, the community spaces and routines that are the (often fragile) infrastructure of good relations. In order to address these threats and potential misunderstandings, the development of an ethos of sharing within a previously single-identity community needs to proactively build up resilience by acknowledging and proactively challenging threats to these shared practices and aspirations. Public occurrences of sectarian behaviour need to be countered by community members, who in turn need to know that they will be supported by their fellow residents. Ideally, a solid network of neighbours with a shared commitment to mixing will provide the collective efficacy necessary to resist and challenge threats to community cohesion.

One way in which this could be achieved is through the use of another of the NIHE Shared Neighbourhood initiatives. As part of the SNP, project teams of members of the local community alongside representatives from the District Council and Housing Executive agree a 'Shared Neighbourhood Charter' which enshrines the local community's commitment to the value of diversity and respect for others. It outlines the responsibilities of neighbours in terms for their own behaviour, as well as their responsibility to care for others in need and gives a commitment to solve future problems through community cooperation (see Appendix One). These types of charters could easily be extended to encompass norms of behaviour surrounding religious difference as well as an explicit commitment to come together to address sectarian issues or threats if they arise. The policy basis for this has already been established in the TBUC commitment to a good neighbour charter in social housing (OFMDFM, 2013; section 3.65) which aims to clarify what neighbours can reasonably expect from one another. By extending this practice to include issues of community relations and by applying this across the wider range of communities in Northern Ireland, the identity dynamics within mixed communities can be harnessed towards coping and resilience in the face of sectarian threat. On this basis, new and existing residents can be confident that the mixed nature of the community will be preserved.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research

8.3.1 Generalising the present findings

While qualitative research of this kind is invaluable in gaining an insight into people's lives and their personal experiences, it does have limitations which impede its ability to answer particular research questions. The diversity of the sample here will certainly span much of the range of experience and belief among new residents of mixed areas, but it does not establish the prevalence or extent of these experiences. Quantitative research is required to determine the generality of these findings across urban areas of Belfast and further research could also usefully explore the urban/rural differences arising from the differing routines and community structures across Northern Ireland. Further research is also required to explore the specific experiences of incomers to Northern Ireland from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Given the main findings of the current report though, a next step in consolidating this research is to conduct a survey to establish the relationship between the psychological factors identified as impacting upon residents' integration and wellbeing. Specifically, we would predict that the degree to which incomers see their new community as cohesive and as mixed (along with the extent to which they identify with their new community) will predict how well they integrate. Integration should predict how well residents cope with urban stressors in general and sectarian threat in particular which in turn will determine the quality of their intergroup contact.

8.3.2 Exploring the dynamics of contact at the site of its occurrence

Second, reports of contact (even from the most open and honest of interviewees) are not the same as instances of contact. The analysis of the routines and patterns of interaction among these newcomers highlights opportunities for the observation and recording of real-life encounters between Catholic and Protestants where they actually occur within the community. The subtle verbal and non-verbal forms of communication occurring within such encounters are fertile ground for the examination of how different beliefs and expectations may facilitate or inhibit good contact. These investigations are likely to highlight subtle and even unnoticed aspects of intergroup contact that may escape the attention of residents within a community. One such avenue of exploration is the impact of political symbols upon the ways in which people perceive the local community and how they interact with others within it. Another is how interactions with local service providers is seen to reflect the identity and ethos of the local community.

8.3.3 Examining the experiences of long-term residents and residents in mixed new-builds

Thirdly, this research has focused on the experiences of those moving into newly mixed areas rather than long-term residents. This is only one half of the equation. Given what we know of the community dynamics underpinning the geographical segregation of Northern Ireland, there is likely to be a degree of threat experienced by existing residents in response to an influx of outsiders. Existing residents will have their own experiences, concerns and relationships with neighbours, which will shape the way they perceive and interact with incomers and these need to be considered as part of the mixing process.

In addition, the TBUC strategy outlines the development of new mixed housing areas in which all residents will be new residents. Were this to occur, this would be a large-scale contact intervention promising enormous potential for improving community relations, but also posing serious risks. New mixed developments are a novel social engineering task in which the organic development of a new local community will need to negotiate of issues of diversity and co-existence. This is a significant challenge, given that incomers (especially those from single-identity areas) are predisposed to anxiety and threat-perception within a new mixed environment. However a new community, comprised entirely of incomers, constitutes a unique opportunity to develop a next generation of mixed community identities, unconstrained by any local history of negative intergroup relations. The present research suggests that for this to be successful, it will require careful scaffolding of community development in terms of the planning of the physical environment and amenities in the area to facilitate the organic development of a mixed community infrastructure and identity. It will also require the facilitation and support of local community organisations and activities expressly geared towards fostering an identity of mixing and sharing as well as developing resilience to threat and division.

Appendix One: Example of a Shared Neighbourhood Charter

Our Shared Future

Creating a common vision and sense of belonging for residents

The principles of a shared future neighbourhood:

- All residents should respect their neighbour and property and look out for their neighbour in times of need. We should be especially vigilant in the care of the vulnerable and less fortunate in our community.
- Everyone in the area is equal regardless of religious/political/cultural belief
- The responsibility of children and their actions remain firmly with their parents.
- Adults should also respect the rights of children of our area to play in a safe and happy environment.
- We as residents respect the environment in which we live and strive to keep our neighbourhood clean and tidy, i.e. no dumping/no vandalism/no anti-social behaviour.
- We believe that the community spirit that exists within the community will help alleviate problems as they arise.
- If problems persist every resident has the right to approach any group or committee set up by the residents in order that grievances can be sorted out amicably and to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Appendix Two: Theories of Intergroup Contact

Below is a more technical description of the area of intergroup contact which provides further details of the different models of contact, along with the references to the original publications.

Contact and Prejudice Reduction

The Contact Hypothesis, or the prediction that sustained meaningful contact between members of opposing groups under optimal conditions will reduce prejudice, has been researched thoroughly by psychologists across the world in hundreds of laboratory studies, controlled interventions and surveys. A substantial body of evidence has emerged from these research traditions showing that in providing an environment in which group members can come together for meaningful interactions on equal terms, for cooperative purposes and with the support of organisers of the initiative, contact should be positive and in turn reduce prejudice and reduce conflict. Statistical reviews of this body of work (e.g. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; 2006) show a reliable, if modest correlation between contact under optimal conditions and prejudice reduction (of r=.26). Moreover, less than 6% of studies show the reverse effect: an increase in prejudice with contact. Overall then, contact under these ideal conditions does indeed appear to reduce prejudice: contact works.

How Does Contact Work? Knowledge, Anxiety-reduction and Empathy

While the effect of contact is well documented, the question of how contact works is less clear. A variety of different models have emerged which focus on the role of different cognitive, emotional and behavioural factors thought to underpin the benefits of contact, all of which have some degree of empirical support. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) meta-analysis of over 500 studies indicates that three main factors have been closely examined for their mediating role in successful contact interventions: knowledge increase, anxiety reduction and increased empathy.

Knowledge

Of these, knowledge has been found to be the weakest predictor. Stereotypes and other cognitive 'schemas' act to fit new information with existing knowledge and beliefs. Accordingly prejudices are notably resistant to change and tend to act in a self-confirming way. Information consistent with existing beliefs is actively sought and disconfirming information is discounted as exceptional or non-representative of the target group (Stangor & Lange, 1994).

Anxiety Reduction

As Stephan and Stephan (1985) point out, the perception of threat and the experience of anxiety in intergroup encounters are fundamental to the perpetuation of prejudice. Intergroup encounters, they argue, are characterised by fear and anxiety due to a number of interrelated perceptions and cognitive biases. If relations between groups are poor, then knowledge of antagonistic intergroup relations as well as previous experience of negative encounters with outgroup members will predispose group members to negative expectations and experiences of intergroup encounters. Moreover, if the outgroup appears to threaten the resources or the values of the group, then apprehension and anxiety are likely to frame the intergroup encounter (Stephan & Stephan, 2002).

Even if relations are not overtly antagonistic, then anxiety about one's ignorance of an outgroup, a lack of knowledge about how to behave appropriately towards an outgroup member and apprehension about how the other group will construe one's behaviour (stigma consciousness, Pinel, 1999) will all exacerbate anxiety. In turn this places a large 'cognitive load' upon the individual which reduces their ability to perform socially and increases the likelihood that they will focus on errors and misunderstandings in

the encounter. The encounter itself is likely to be highly fraught with the anxiety of each party likely to appear as unfriendliness or even as prejudice by the other side (Dovidio et al., 2006). Indeed the expectation of being judged negatively or of eliciting a negative response can in turn lead to pre-emptive negative behaviour on behalf of participants which thereby perpetuates the cycle of antagonism. The intensely negative emotions resultant from such a toxic environment are likely to colour future information and encounters with the outgroup.

Contact reduces these effects by countering the interpersonal aspects of anxiety. Familiarity with the outgroup leads to the establishment of norms of intergroup behaviour which can reduce uncertainty and increase the predictability of each participant's responses (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Better communication and cooperation can reduce misunderstanding and diffuse misapprehensions as to the intentions and goals of the other group. Indeed research has demonstrated that even imagining successful contact with an outgroup member is sufficient to reduce apprehension about encountering them in real life. In other words, this aspect of contact operates by diffusing the self-perpetuating negative emotions associated with encountering an unfamiliar and potentially hostile outgroup member.

Similarity and Empathy

The third element of intergroup empathy has its roots in the work of Cook (1985) who suggested that interpersonal contact led to an increased recognition of similarity between members of different groups. In turn, this was thought to lead to the convergence of worldviews, increased perspective-taking between individuals and eventually friendship, trust and empathy. In other words the opportunity to recognise similarity afforded by contact was the basis of subsequent improvement in interpersonal relations.

A more recent reworking of this paradigm asserts that empathy results from the ability of the group member to 'incorporate the other into the self' (Wright, Aron & Tropp, 2002). By extending our self-concept to encompass the experience of other people, though sharing of experience and intimate friendship, we are more able to place ourselves in their shoes. As a result their social as well as personal identities become knowable to us and we are able to appreciate the concerns and interests of the outgroup in a more open and trusting way.

While perhaps intuitively appealing, this approach immediately raises several issues. Firstly, different groups (especially groups from separate cultures which live in isolation from one another) do have many differences and so contact between them are as likely to highlight discrepancies and contrasts as similarities. Cook's theory does not provide any basis or guidance for when these differences become relevant or which aspects of similarity of difference are consequential for good contact.

Related to this, the level of analysis offered by Cook and Wright is primarily interpersonal in nature. On a personal level there may or may not be commonalities between individuals from different groups. However these may have little bearing on the larger differences between the groups. Indeed research suggests that people are often ready to make exceptions to their prejudices for individual outgroup members on a case-by-case basis if they are seen to be exceptions to their broader groups, while their stereotypes of these groups remain intact. Finally, in terms of the broader ethics of co-existence and mutual respect among different social groups, differences should arguably be acknowledged and respected.

In sum, while Cook's early model of interpersonal similarity may be an oversimplification of the mechanisms underlying contact, we do know that similarity and empathy do play a key role in intergroup relations: in sustaining cooperation within groups and, through their absence, perpetuating conflict between groups. However these factors need to be considered along with a further group level consideration intergroup contact – that of its relationship with group identity.

Group Identity

Recent advances in Contact research have highlighted the central role that 'identity' plays in prejudice reduction. Contact which involves group members interacting together in terms of their personal identity may result in personal friendships but is unlikely to have an effect on other group members. Contact in terms of group identities is more likely to alter intergroup perceptions and generalise any improvement in attitudes to the wider groups, but at the same time in situations of intergroup conflict, group identities may well be the source of antagonism. In light of these considerations, three broad models of identity-based contact have been developed.

A. *Decategorisation (Brewer & Miller, 1984).* In this model, group identities are the problem and so the removal of these from contact situations affords the best pathway to improved relationships. Stressing the common humanity of participants and the degree to which they share common cultural experiences and resources is one way of reducing the 'salience' of group identities and hence removing the perceptual and behavioural biases which undermine contact encounters. This shares many of the limitations of Cook's model of interpersonal contact as outlined in the previous section.

B. *Recategorisation models (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).* In this model the goal is to supplement the existing identities with a superordinate category which encompasses both groups. Group members effectively refocus their identification on the new group and by emphasising this newfound commonality, the intergroup processes which foster antagonism are ideally replaced by more positive intragroup processes. This model faces several challenges when it comes to entrenched social divisions which are resistant to recategorisation.

C. *Mutual Intergroup Differentiation (Dual Identity) model (Hewstone & Brown, 1986).* This third model stresses the need to maintain the original group identities as the key focus of intergroup contact so as to ensure that the effects of contact can generalise beyond the intergroup encounter. Recognising and valuing group differences is seen as the goal of contact and, from this, the appreciation of the complementarity of group skills and roles within society and the mutual dependency of groups upon one another is emphasised. From this an additional superordinate identity of cooperation can emerge such that group members identify with both subordinate and superordinate identities simultaneously. Again, the degree to which this model is applicable to situations of entrenched hatred and antagonism has been questioned as have the precise dynamics of how conflict is transformed to interdependency.

D. *The 'Social Cure' Model of Group Response to Stress: Identity, Contact and Group Resilience.* A more recent model of identity processes has been put forward to account for how groups collectively experience and react to stress. Sharing a group identity with another member has been shown to increase perceived similarity. This in turn increases the expectation of agreement with that person on identity-related matters, as well as increased trust and helping behaviour. Moreover, these behaviours become self-fulfilling as the experience of being trusted and helped by similar others increases the level of identification with the group. This self-perpetuating phenomenon has become known as the 'social cure' (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten, Haslam & Haslam, 2011) and is thought to underpin the general ability of groups to provide social and emotional support to their members in response to external threats. Such support is experienced as 'collective efficacy' (cf Bandura, 1994 - the belief that the group can together respond effectively to challenge) which works to transform the perception of potential threats into manageable challenges, thereby reducing stress for the individual.

One such threat is that posed by the experience of intergroup contact. The social cure paradigm provides two possible ways in which group dynamics can be harnessed towards positive contact. In the first instance, it can provide support to its members in their intergroup engagements. This can take the form of advice, encouragement, moral support and even leading by example. This enables the group member to experience an intergroup threat as manageable and turns a potential stress into a manageable challenge. Hence rather than forming the basis of intergroup conflict, community identity can reduce intergroup anxiety and make positive contact possible.

A second route is through the development of a 'common identity' that can incorporate both groups. As noted above, a shared identity generates perceived similarity, reciprocal helping and trust, all of which have been found to give rise to positive contact. In line with the mutual distinctiveness model outlined above, the development of a commonly held identity can transform intergroup threat and antagonism into ingroup solidarity and support. This is a creative process and requires the active development of a sense of commonality, as well as a high degree of group cohesion and consensus to deal with any perceived threat to the group's original identity. If achieved though, this sense of commonality should provide resilience to any future threats to the new community's identity. Group members who have an investment in bellowing to a successful mixed community will come together to resist threats to their members and their unity.

Appendix Three: Interview Schedules

Interviews were semi-structured so that the questions below served as a guide for the discussion, rather than as a strict set of sequential questions

Interview schedule – Phase 1

1. Previous community: Where did you live before moving to this area; what was it like living there?

    - What was the local community like?
    - What were your neighbours like?
    - Did you have many friends or family in the area?
    - What the local sense of community like?
    - Did people tend to look out for one another?
    - What were the most positive things about living there? And the negative things?
    - Why did you move from that area?

2. Choice of locale: Why did you choose this area to move to?

    - What areas did you consider moving to?
    - What kinds of things did you take into consideration (what things did you find appealing or off-putting about the areas you considered?)
    - What did you know about this particular area?
    - Were you aware of the religious composition of the area? Did this feature I your decision
    - Had anyone you knew moved here?
    - What did the people from your last area think about you moving here?
    - Were there any things that may have put you off about coming here
    - What were the things that finally helped you decide?

3. Experience of moving: How did you find the move from your previous area to here?

    - What were the practical difficulties of moving?
    - How did you fin moving away from family and friends?
    - How did you children feel about the move (if applicable)?
    - Was it difficult to relocate to local services e.g. doctors, schools, etc? Was there any problem in moving services? How did you find the service providers?
    - Was there anything about the move that you didn't expect?
    - Do you still have much contact with your previous community? How often would you go back to visit?
    - Would your family and friends come over to visit you here? (if not, why not?)

4. First experience of new community: How have you found moving into this new community?

    - What were your first impressions when you moved in? Who were the first people that you met?
    - Were there any things that struck you as different from your previous community?
    - Were you made to feel welcome in your new neighbourhood? Do you think there as anything else that people could or should have done to make you welcome?
    - Did you feel that you were able to fit in to the local community?
    - Was it easy to make new friends? Who did you tend to get to know?
    - Were there any other people who moved to the area that you got to know?
    - Were you able to join any clubs or organisations?

5. Current experiences of new community: So how well do you think you fit into the community now?

    - How many people in the neighbourhood do you know?
    - Do you think you could rely on them in an emergency?

- What about on a day to day level – would people tend to help one antoher out?
- Have you joined any orgqnisations or clubs?
- Would you attend a church? Do you know many people through that? What services do you use in the local area?
- Do your children play with others form the local area (if applicable)? Would you know other parents? Would you be involved in school activities?
- Do you know anyone from work in the local area?

6. Average day exercise: Take me through an average day and tell me what you do and who you would meet in your daily routine.

    - How many neighbours might you encounter through the day?
    - What kind of interactions would you have with them?
    - Would you know much about them e.g. what they do, their religious background?
    - Would there be anyone in the local area you would not be keen to meet in your daily round?
    - What changes during the week? How is it different on weekends?

Interview schedule – Phase 2

1. Photoelicitation: (20-40min)

    a. Sort photos into positive and negative piles.
    b. Rank your photos (most to least in each group). Why did you take this picture?
    c. When did you first notice this (what is in the photo)?
    d. How do you feel about it now?
    e. What is this photo about/what does it represent? (as appropriate) How do you think the community sees it?

After going through all (or selected) photos in this phase of the interview:

    f. If approached by someone while you are near the subject of this photo (these photos), how would you feel?
    g. If something were to happen while you were near the subject of this photo (these photos), would you ask for help? Who would you ask?

2. Map – everyday routine; use of space: (10min)

    a. Number each photo on the map
    b. Think about the people that you know here:
        i. Who are they? [age, relationship, # of years known, frequency of meeting, family/children, religious background]
        ii. Where do they live? Mark of the map
    c. Shade areas on the map where you feel comfortable/uncomfortable going
    d. Draw your average day/everyday routine on the map (route) with approximate times at specific points. Who might you meet along the way, and where? [If appropriate,] how did you feel at every stage of the route?

3. Critical incidents: (15min)

    By the way, some people have talked about significant or unexpected events that gave them an impression of the area. Did this happen to you as well? Please tell me about it.

    a. What happened? [If appropriate], who do you think was responsible and how did the other neighbours react? [use Qb if needed]
    b. If this were to happen in the future, how would you react? What would you do? [property damage, car damage etc]
    c. Who do you think would be responsible for this act/incident?
    d. How do you think your neighbours would react? Could you rely on them for support?
    e. If it were a sectarian attack, how would you feel? How do you think your neighbours would about it?

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