Work, Place and Identity: The Salience of Work for Residents in Six Neighbourhoods

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Work, Place and Identity: The Salience of Work for Residents in Six Neighbourhoods

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1. Introduction

This working paper explores the relationship between work, place and identity in six low-income neighbourhoods across Britain. The purpose of the research is threefold. Firstly, it seeks to understand perceptions of the landscape of economic opportunity facing individuals living in particular places. Secondly, it examines the significance of work within individual lives and the impact it has upon financial and emotional well-being. Thirdly, it considers the extent to which individuals make comparative assessments of working status with other residents and the way in which this serves to produce social distinctions within neighbourhoods.

This paper directly addresses two strands of debate. The first of these relates to a growing volume of academic research on the quality of paid work available in the lower end of the labour market. This has largely focused on the inability of employment to lift individuals or households above poverty thresholds (Cooke and Lawton, 2008) as well as the onerous or insecure terms and conditions it entails (Charlesworth, 2000; Peck, 2001; McDowell, 2003; Smith, 2005). There is less research, however, that focuses explicitly on the meanings attached to such forms of work, and the role it plays in generating self-esteem or the construction of identity. Moreover, such debates rarely consider the role or significance invested in unpaid activities outside the labour market (for a critique, see Levitas 2005). This research seeks to explore these gaps in understanding through a broader investigation of the salience of work in both paid and unpaid forms for individuals living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The paper also engages with a second debate concerning the way in which places shape experiences of, and orientations to, work. There has been some suggestion that economic restructuring has reduced the salience of work for individuals whilst contributing to the decline of 'community' (Beck, 1992, 2000; Bauman, 1998). Some academics (Murray, 1990; Wilson, 1996) and policymakers (SEU, 2000; HM Treasury, 2003) have framed this in cultural terms by suggesting that concentrations of worklessness can generate localised outlooks characterised by a reluctance to engage in paid work. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2000: 24) suggested, for example, that economic shocks have '*created areas with little culture of work and few working role models*'. These cultural explanations have been challenged, however, by other research (Fletcher *et al,* 2008; Sanderson, 2006) that emphasises the need to understand how attitudes towards work are governed by the availability and quality of employment in local labour markets rather than '*a distinctive set of attitudes, norms and values to work that lies outside those of mainstream society*' (Syrett and North, 2008: 81). In light of these claims, this paper considers the strength of relationship between work, place and identity including the role of work in the formation and maintenance of social distinctions.

This paper complements a previous JRF published report – '*Work and worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods'* (Crisp *et al,*. 2009a) - that examined how experiences of work compare with the assumptions of policymakers regarding paid employment. It found that paid work can sometimes be an important source of esteem, social interaction and sense of independence for residents of deprived neighbourhoods in the way policymakers suggest. Nonetheless, it also challenged official claims about the benefits of work by highlighting how those receiving an income from work can still experience financial hardship. Moreover, paid employment can impose onerous

terms and conditions that are detrimental to individual well-being and the quality of family life.

To avoid repetition, this paper does not seek to replicate the policy analysis undertaken in the previous *'Work and worklessness'* report. It does, however, discuss new policy implications that emerge from the specific analysis undertaken from this paper, particularly in the concluding chapter. It is, of course, noteworthy that there has been a change of government since the previous report. Whilst it is perhaps too early reflect on the precise implications of this for welfare and employment policy, both analyses carried out before the election (Crisp *et al*, 2009b) and post-election (Simmonds, 2010) suggest that there are significant continuities between the policies of New Labour and the new Coalition government. Granted, differences clearly exist with the new government proposing to implement a new welfare-to-work scheme called the Work Programme. This will see changes to the sequencing and intensity of support for the workless alongside a greater role for the private and third sector in employment service delivery (Freud, 2010). Nonetheless, there is little evidence that the Coalition approach represents a significant departure from New Labour's preference for using supply-side mechanisms to improve employability. Moreover, worklessness continues to be framed as a problem that is both behavioural and encouraged by perverse financial incentives in the benefits system that encourage *'welfare dependency'* (HM Government, 2010).

In terms of the structure of the paper, section two outlines the methods used to collect data and profiles levels of worklessness in the case study neighbourhoods and the economic status of interviewees. Section three reviews the existing research evidence on the relationship between work, place and identity. Section four is the first of three empirical sections and begins by exploring perceptions of conditions in local labour markets including the narratives deployed by residents to describe economic change. Section five explores work in terms of negative experiences of paid employment before considering the benefits associated with work. Section six considers conceptions of the working status of other residents as well as the way in which comparative assessments of working status or orientations to work function as markers of social distinction within neighbourhoods. It also explores the role of unpaid activities outside the labour market in generating esteem and a sense of identity.

The concluding section reviews the evidence on the relationship between work and identity and reflects on the implications of these findings for policymakers. It considers how residents within some of the six neighbourhoods often frame the trajectory of these areas within narratives of decline focusing on changes in patterns of male employment. It shows how experiences of work vary with residents highlighting the difficulties imposed by work characterised by low pay, insecurity or poor terms and conditions. At the same time, paid employment is also considered by some to deliver self-esteem, a sense of purpose, valued social contact and a sense of independence. Work seemed particularly valued by women for whom it sometimes provided a source of identity outside of domestic roles. The paper also concludes by suggesting that work is also important in neighbourhoods because of its symbolic power in reproducing social distinctions. Perceived orientations to work were a particular observable marker of distinction, with some residents seeking to disassociate themselves from those considered ‘undeserving’ of benefits because of their deficient motivations to find work. Finally, unpaid work in the form of parenting, caring and volunteering conferred satisfaction and meaning to some residents. This highlights the importance of avoiding a singular emphasis on paid employment in understanding the salience of work in deprived neighbourhoods.

2. Methods

This paper reviews the evidence on work from interviews carried out in the six case study neighbourhoods that featured in the '*Living through change in challenging neighbourhoods'* study: W*est Marsh*, a neighbourhood to the west of Grimsby town centre in North East Lincolnshire; *Wensley Fold,* a residential area close to Blackburn town centre, in Lancashire; the *West Kensington* estate in the Earls Court area of West London; the town of *Amlwch* in Anglesey, in a semi-rural setting; the *Oxgangs* estate located just outside the centre of Edinburgh; and the *Hillside* estate in the local authority of Knowsley. The six areas vary by social composition, housing stock, transport links and availability of local amenities. A full description of each neighbourhood is provided in the Appendix.

Interviews were carried out in two waves with approximately 30 interviews undertaken with residents in each neighbourhood in 2008 followed by 20 repeat interviews in 2009. Interviewees were selected from a larger pool of respondents to a short, preliminary door-to-door survey undertaken in the case study neighbourhoods. A common topic guide was used across the neighbourhoods with new themes were introduced for the wave 2 interviews. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. This data provides the basis of the findings presented in this paper. Further details on the methods used are available in companion working papers[1].

Residents were usually interviewed in their homes although some interviews took place in neighbourhood-based facilities such as community centres. Interviews were conducted using a series of questions based on key themes including social networks; perceptions of neighbourhood change; experiences of work; availability and use of amenities; and perceptions and experiences of living in other areas. Whilst the research team took pains to emphasise the informality of the interview and the validity of all views and perceptions of participants, it is likely that some respondents may have given answers they considered 'acceptable' or most of interest to researchers. Moreover, it is important to recognise that qualitative interviews do not necessarily provide a direct insight into the lived experience of residents in deprived areas. The clipped or hesitant answers given by some interviewees may support Charlesworth's (2000: 135) assertion that '*the most marginal and dispossessed seem the least able to articulate their experience*'. There may be much that remains unsaid.

The six case study areas were selected on the basis that they all faced significant disadvantage. In brief, all six had higher levels of worklessness than local and national comparator areas at the time when the data was compiled (see Table 1 below).

[1] For other working papers see http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/reports.html

Table 1: Working age claimant rates in Case Study areas: August 2009

Working age claimant rate (per cent)				
	Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)	**Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)/Incapacity Benefits (IB/SDA)**	**Income Support for Lone Parents (IS-LP)**	**Total**
Hillside	9	19	6	34
Knowsley	7	13	4	24
Wensley Fold	8	18	4	30
Blackburn with	5	12	3	20
West Marsh	11	10	6	27
North East	6	8	3	17
West Kensington	6	11	6	23
Ham & Fulham	4	7	3	14
England	**4**	**7**	**2**	**13**
Oxgangs	6	15	3	24
City of Edinburgh	3*	7*	1*	11
Scotland	**4**	**9**	**2**	**15**
Amlwch	7	11	2	20
Anglesey	4	9	2	15
Wales	**4**	**10**	**2**	**16**

Source: DWP benefits, ONS population mid year estimates, NOMIS and Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics indicates data from May 2009

There are variations across case study areas, with Hillside, Wensley Fold and Oxgangs notable for the high levels of ESA/IB/SDA claimants whilst West Marsh has the largest proportion of working-age residents claiming JSA. Total worklessness (the sum of IB/ESA, JSA and IS-LP claimant rates) is high in all areas although there is a thirteen percentage point difference between the neighbourhood with the highest (Hillside, 34 per cent) and lowest (Amlwch, 20 per cent) combined rates. Clearly, it is important to note that the research was undertaken at the height of the recession in 2008-09 which subsequently saw worklessness peak at 2.51 million in 2010.

In terms of economic profiles, West Kensington is an inner-London neighbourhood located within a dynamic and diverse city-wide labour market but one that is highly polarised with stark inequalities in the quality of work and wages provided (see for example Sassen, 2001). It is also a neighbourhood that can be seen to constitute one the pockets of worklessness dispersed across the city. Similarly, Oxgangs is a low-income, inner-city neighbourhood that borders areas of affluence within a city that has experienced significant growth in high-skilled industries including business and finance. By contrast, the other four neighbourhoods are located in far less buoyant labour markets that have witnessed the long-term decline of key industries including textiles (Wensley Fold), manufacturing (Wensley Fold and Hillside),

chemical processing (Amlwch), fishing (West Marsh and Amlwch), food processing (West Marsh) and shipbuilding (Amlwch).

Alongside these variations in the particular sectors experiencing decline, the neighbourhoods are also distinguished by their geographical proximity to key centres of employment. Amlwch stands out for its relative isolation from other towns that are important sources of work such as Llangefni (13 miles), Holyhead (20 miles) and Bangor (25 miles). The Hillside estate in Knowsley is also in a peripheral location as a legacy of its original role as a municipal housing estate developed to accommodate ‘overspill’ from slum clearance programmes in Liverpool. These two areas contrast with the other four neighbourhoods which are often located in the heart of major cities (London and Edinburgh) or border town centres (West Marsh and Wensley Fold).

Section four provides more contextual detail on the economic trajectory of the case study neighbourhoods and the structure of employment opportunity from the perspective of residents. Whilst these qualitative accounts offer reflections on local economic conditions, they should not be read, however, as direct and unmediated accounts of labour market health. They capture the experiences and perceptions of interviewees and should, therefore, be considered narratives of change that warrant analysis in their own right. To this end, section 4.2 examines these narratives as subjective frameworks for articulating change.

Table 2 below details the employment status of interviewees across the four case study areas. It shows there is a higher proportion of non-working to working interviewees in all four areas although this ranges from a near equitable split to West Marsh (17/14) to a ratio of nearly four to one in Hillside (23/6). The data also indicates that the self-reported status of those not working varies across case study areas with the largest group represented by the sick or disabled in West Marsh, the retired in Amlwch and those looking after the home in West Kensington and Wensley Fold.

In studying the experiences of work for residents living within particular neighbours, it is important to recognise that urban labour markets are spatially diffuse and porous (see for example Martin and Morrison, 2002). Geographically, they are far broader than any single neighbourhood and also do not adhere to neat spatial boundaries. It is also true, however, that the spatial horizons of residents of low-income neighbourhoods are often limited. Research among young people living in deprived communities has shown that some lack an extensive knowledge of key sources of employment opportunity outside of their immediate area (Green and White, 2007). Moreover, there is also evidence that those with low skills tend to commute shorter distances to work than more highly-skilled individuals (Green and Owen, 2006). Limited spatial horizons in terms of job search and commuting patterns have also been observed in other studies of working-class areas (Watt, 2003).

Table 2: Employment status of residents interviewed

		West Marsh	West Ken	Amlwch	Wensley Fold	Hillside	Oxgangs
Employment Status	Full-time	11	10	8	7	4	4
	Part-time	3	2	1	1	2	9
	Self-employed	0	0	2	1	0	0
	Total in employment	**14**	**12**	**11**	**8**	**6**	**13**
	Unemployed	0	2	3	3	8	2
	Long-term sick/disability	7	1	0	2	1	2
	Full-time education	0	2	0	1	6	2
	Retired	6	2	10	2	4	6
	Looking after home	4	7	5	13	3	5
	Other	0	2	0	0	1	1
	Total not in employment	**17**	**16**	**18**	**21**	**23**	**18**

With these considerations in mind, one of the tasks of this paper is to seek to make connections between the landscape of employment opportunity facing residents and their experiences and perceptions regarding work. Whilst all six neighbourhoods have high levels of worklessness relative to local or national comparators, there are variations between case study areas as highlighted by Table 1 above. Table 2 also shows that economic status varies between the samples for each neighbourhood. One of the aims of this paper, therefore, is to reflect on how, if at all, experiences and perceptions of work vary according to the geography of economic opportunity or by the socio-demographic characteristics of the residents interviewed.

3

3. Existing evidence

This section looks at the existing evidence on economic change; work as a source of individual self-esteem and identity; the role of place in shaping identities around work; and comparative assessments of working status.

3.1. Economic change

There have been widespread transformations in the nature of employment opportunity within the UK over the past four decades (McDowell, 2003) with two key changes identified. Firstly, economic restructuring has seen a decline in male-dominated, primary and traditional industries accompanied by a fall in demand for semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour (Performance Innovation Unit, 2000; Sanderson, 2006). Whilst this has been partially offset in terms of growth in employment in service sector work (Turok and Edge, 1999), there remain significant spatial disparities in the distribution of employment. Clusters of worklessness have developed where declining industries are located including 'inner city' areas, especially in London and the major metropolitan cities; areas formerly dependent upon mining and traditional industries; certain isolated coastal areas; and some rural localities (Dewson *et al*, 2007). This spatial polarisation is particularly evident at the neighbourhood level where worklessness is often concentrated (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). It is claimed this polarisation has been exacerbated by 'residential sorting' whereby workless households without the financial means to exercise choice over housing become clustered in areas dominated by social housing or cheap private rented accommodation (SEU, 2004; Syrett and North, 2008).

A second component of economic restructuring alongside the decline in the quantity of work in certain industries is changes in the quality of available employment. At the lower end of the labour market, commentators have highlighted a decline in reasonably well-paid opportunities for those with low or no skills (McDowell, 2003) which has been replaced by an increase in low-paid, low-skilled employment characterised variously as '*donkey work'* (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998: 5), '*junk jobs*' (Lash, 1994) or *'poor work'* (McDowell, 2003: esp. section 2). Accounts have also emphasised the short-term nature and poor terms and conditions associated with such contingent forms of work (Peck, 2001; Smith, 2005). Moreover, research has challenged the notion that work is a route out of poverty as claimed by policymakers by highlighting how moving from benefits into work can still leave individuals and households struggling to manage financially (Goulden, 2010: 8). A recent quantitative study showed that six in ten poor households in the UK (57 per cent) have someone in work, demonstrating that '*[while] work is undoubtedly the surest route out of poverty, it is far from an inevitable one*' (Cooke and Lawton, 2008: 5). Meanwhile, a qualitative study of low-income workers found that even though tax credits were helpful, paid work was still not financially beneficial for many parents, and those who worked were sometimes worse off for doing so (Hooper *et al*, 2007).

3.2. Work and identity

It has long been argued that work has an importance beyond the provision of income in terms of the construction and maintenance of individual esteem, status and identity. Jahoda's (1981) theory of the '*latent functions'* of work based on her earlier observations of one village in depression-era Austria in the 1930s argued that work

performed five essential functions comprising: shared experience; a structured experience of time; collective purpose; status and identity and required regular activity. The loss of access to these categories of experience explained the high levels of psychological distress experienced by workless residents. Such claims are highlighted in a long tradition of research emphasising the negative psychosocial consequences of job loss (Bakke, 1933; Marsden, 1982; Gallie *et al*, 1994).

Recent policy statements on welfare-to-work made by the previous New Labour government also echo these academic claims about the benefits of work relative to the negative impact of worklessness. The Green paper on welfare reform – *No One Written Off* (DWP, 2008) - asserted that work can deliver a multitude of social and economic benefits, both to individuals and their wider communities:

> *Paid work is the route to independence, health and well-being for most people. Work promotes choice, supports an inclusive society and increases community cohesion*
> (DWP, 2008: 25; see Crisp *et al,* 2009b for a fuller discussion).

There has been debate within the academic community, however, about the extent to which work at the lower end of the labour market is capable of enhancing well-being in this way, with some research emphasising the lack of satisfaction derived from contingent forms of low-paid work (Charlesworth, 2000; McDowell, 2003; Toynbee, 2003). Smith's (2005) ethnographic study of residents on the margins of the labour market in a low-income neighbourhood in South London concluded that:

> *For those employed in the flexible labour market of expanding peripheral work, employment is experienced as a further source of insecurity and fragmentation rather than the means to security, an improved standard of living and entry into occupations that provide a source of collective identity… In the absence of employment that provides any intrinsic satisfaction or alternative means of self-respect, the material rewards of employment are central since they provide the only incentive to enter formal work.*
> (2005: 191, 193)

Such negative accounts that assign low-quality work a purely instrumental function in terms of providing income have been countered by research highlighting the importance of non-monetary aspects of employment. Ray *et al*'s (2010) study of low-skilled workers found that whilst moving into paid work did not mean the disappearance of financial strain, work did bring other benefits including social interaction, self-esteem, confidence and independence. Similarly, Shildrick *et al* (2010: 26) study of recurrent poverty in Teesside found that '*low quality jobs were, perhaps surprisingly, often described in highly positive terms in interviewees' subjective evaluations'*. This was attributed to the way that work boosted self-esteem and confidence and realised orientations to work including a negative attitude towards unemployment. The report also found that these benefits were often expressed in terms of work in general and were sometimes accompanied at the same time by negative accounts of the *'unpleasantness, injustices and hardships'* (ibid.) of particular jobs they had done. Similar findings have emerged in older studies that have emphasised the capacity of male, manual workers to derive satisfaction from the autonomy, camaraderie and practical mastery provided through work that is otherwise dirty, dangerous or monotonous (Willis, 1977; Savage 2000; Hodson, 2001)

3.3. The role of work in shaping place-based identities

Historically, particular forms of manual work have been seen to contribute to the formation of place-based identities given the degree of overlap between workplace, residence and social networks (see especially Young and Wilmott, 1957). Rogaly and Taylor's (2009: 82) recent ethnographic study of a working-class estate in Norwich describes how older residents reflecting on the immediate post-war era *'spoke of a profound sense of spatial and social continuity between home and workplace, as work colleagues were often family or neighbours, and places of employment close enough to go home for their dinner break'*. These continuities are perhaps epitomised by studies of traditional mining communities that emphasise the '*unusually strong community solidarities conceptualised holistically…in terms of a high degree of overlap between their occupational, social and domestic experiences'* (Parry, 2003: 230). Such portrayals are now sometimes seen as exaggerated and blind to internal cleavages, particular along gender lines, which existed, for example, in coalmining communities (Crow, 2002; Parry, 2003). Nonetheless, there remains a broad body of evidence concerning the historical link between employment, identity and social relations in particular neighbourhoods.

The changes in the nature of economic opportunity described above, however, have prompted debates about the impact of economic restructuring on the capacity of work to shape place-based identities. Theorists such as Beck (2000), Bauman (1998) and Sennett (1998) have argued that economic restructuring and the rise of flexible forms of employment have had a profound and largely negative impact in terms of what Stenning (2003: 238) has summarised as '*the diminishment of community and withdrawal from civic life'.* Empirical evidence that supports such claims includes Dean's (2007: 528) qualitative study of 42 economically active working-age parents in an inner-London, low-income neighbourhood. This found that there was a '*powerlessness'* derived from '*no apparent sense in which they shared or held their labour market experiences in common'* (ibid.).

Nonetheless, other academics caution against overstating the linear, negative impact of economic restructuring upon experiences of, and attitudes towards work. There are two principal caveats. Firstly, accounts of the '*supposed collapse of community or extended kinship'* (McDowell, 2001: 454) are seen as inattentive to gender insofar as they neglect the growing attachment of women to the labour market throughout the period during which male manual work has been in decline. This claim is reflected empirically in Watt's (2006) work on the impact of economic restructuring on the residents of a local authority housing estate in Camden, North London. The study found that it was often middle-aged or older men who produced narratives of loss focusing on the '*decline of community* [that were] *partly associated with the collapse of relatively well-paid Fordist employment'* (ibid. 782). In other words, the association between economic and social decline is derived from the experiences and perceptions of a particular segment of the male workforce. It has also been suggested that these gendered associations can be enduring even if they only partially reflect local employment trends. Robertson *et al*, (2008: 84) study of three working-class neighbourhoods in Scotland suggests that the the social identity and status of neighbourhoods often continues to be defined by '*historic and consequently outmoded male employment patterns'* even when there is a concurrent history of female employment in the area.

A second caveat is that economic decline may impact on the importance of work for those marginalised from the formal economy but this is not necessarily synonymous with withdrawal from neighbourhood life. Parry's (2003) study of the activities of ex-miners in a former coal mining area in South Wales observed that whilst paid work had diminished in salience for many of those faced with the prospect of unattractive work in the wake of redundancy, some had reconfigured their lives around activities

such as volunteering that provided new sources of meaning. Orr *et al,* (2006) study of low income households in Teesside also observed that volunteering can provide a routine and purpose that is particularly valued by individuals unable to work in regular paid employment. Informal work can also provide both an income and activity for those without work (Smith, 2005). Nonetheless, research has shown that it is often those in employment with the necessary equipment or social networks that can most easily access additional earning opportunities outside the formal labour market (see for example Pahl, 1987).

This evidence suggests a more nuanced relationship between industrial decline, individual identity and the social life of neighbourhoods. It also underlines the importance of extending analyses of the impact of economic decline beyond the sphere of paid employment as individuals can navigate economic change through engagement in a broad range of activities including unpaid work. In this respect, Glucksmann's (2009) concept of the Total Social Organisation of Labour (TSOL) is useful in illustrating how a focus on paid work neglects the diverse range of activities performed within a range of contexts that could be considered forms of work. This holds that work can be undertaken across a *'spectrum of socio-economic modes (market, state, not-for-profit, household, community and so on)*' (ibid. ,886). It provides an important reminder that the totality of individual experience of managing on a low income is not solely mediated through the presence or absence of formal employment.

3.4. Work as a marker of social distinctions in neighbourhoods

The relationship between work, self-esteem and identity can also be mediated by place in terms of the way employment status serves as fulcrum around which social distinctions within particular areas are constructed. Distinctions along lines of '*roughness'* and '*respectability'* have been enduring features of working-class neighbourhoods, with income and occupation providing, at least historically, one mechanism for asserting difference (Watt, 2006; see also Skeggs, 1997). Watt (2006) suggests, however, that the ability to assert social distinctions through occupational status has been increasingly undermined by the poor quality and growing precariousness of available work. Meanwhile, Savage *et al*'s (2005) empirical research on four middle-class neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester concluded that residential location rather than employment status has increasingly come to define social status and identity.

Rather than undermine the processes by which social distinctions are generated altogether, some research claims that economic change and spatial polarisation has have seen new markers of differentiation emerge. Smith's (2005: 190-191) study of a low income neighbourhood in South London, for example, found that:

> *Different elements of dominant ideological discourses around work and welfare are applied in a critical and often contradictory manner towards each other, encouraging division and isolation. For the unemployed, benefit fraudsters epitomised the 'welfare scrounger' through their rejection of legitimate avenues to attain a living and were criticised for giving the genuinely unemployed an undeserved reputation. Cash workers, meanwhile, positively contrasted their own adherence to the 'work ethic' with the passivity of the unemployed and workless, who are regarded as 'scroungers' for having eschewed a commitment to work.*

Similarly, Pahl *et al*'s qualitative (2007) study of attitudes towards inequality found that groupings were identified on the basis of orientation to work. Interviewees made moral distinctions between people who were *willing* to work, people who were *unable*

to work, and people who were *not prepared to work.* Those not prepared to work were labelled 'scroungers', 'parasites' and 'work-shy'.

Whilst these judgements emanate from residents themselves and relate to internal groupings within neighbourhoods, such characterisations have been associated with broader policy or media discourses that emphasise the '*individualistic and behavioural'* (Peck and Theodore, 2000: 729) causes of worklessness (see also Levitas, 2005). According to Smith (2005), the pervasiveness of such discourses forces individuals on the margins of the labour market to strive to assert a positive identity by distancing themselves from others deemed less worthy within the same neighbourhood. This process of 'othering' can help define the self and affirm identify whilst reducing the stigma associated with occupying particular social and spatial locations (Lister, 2004; see also Parker and Pharaoh with Hale, 2008).

3.5. Summary

The evidence base reviewed above suggests that economic change has reconfigured the relationship between work and identity in those places most affected by industrial restructuring. The precise dynamics of these changes are, however, clearly the subject of debate. Whilst some academics have highlighted the growth of poorly-paid, secure forms of work and its negative impact on the experience of work, other research has suggested that low-waged, low-skilled employment can constitute a source of meaning and satisfaction in areas affected by economic decline. In addition, changes in employment patterns have sometimes been identified as weakening social ties within neighbourhoods or diminishing the quality of 'community life'. Nonetheless, other labour market observers have cautioned against simplistic, linear accounts of economic decline based on the loss of male employment. This is seen as inattentive both to the increasing labour market participation of women and to the forms of unpaid work which continue in deprived areas. Finally, academics have suggested that paid work in terms of income and status has become less important in the formation of identity, although research does indicate that perceived orientations to work may have became an increasingly significant marker of distinction.

This paper sets out to contribute towards these debates about the relationship between work and identity in four distinct ways. Firstly, it explores perceptions of economic change to understand if, and how, the identity of neighbourhoods is shaped by industrial restructuring. Secondly, it examines experiences of work to reflect on some of the claims made about the growth and nature of 'poor work', particularly in terms of its capacity to deliver meaning and satisfaction. Thirdly, it considers the role that employment status or orientations to work plays in shaping identities with an emphasis on the extent to which this serves as marker of social distinction. Fourthly, it extends the definition of work to include unpaid activities such as parenting, caring and volunteering to explore the possibilities for new forms of identity to emerge outside the labour market. In addressing these four themes, the papers aims to contribute to understandings of how the dynamics of economic change reconfigure the identities and relationships of residents to particular places.

4

4. Perceptions of employment opportunity

This is the first of three empirical sections that examine the perceptions and experiences of work of the residents interviewed. It begins by focusing on the perceived nature of economic opportunity in the local area in terms of personal experiences of finding and securing work, before looking at the financial and emotional implications for individuals and households affected by worklessness. The section continues with some more general reflections on conditions in the local labour market in order to identify perceptions of economic change and opportunity.

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, it provides contextual data that serves to highlight similarities and differences in economic conditions between case study areas and helps to frame the discussion in subsequent sections on the experience of work (section five) and perceptions of the working status of other residents (section six). Secondly, it seeks to understand how economic change is framed within 'narratives of loss' which, again, has implications for the analysis presented in subsequent sections. There is, of course, a balance to be struck between treating these accounts as both context and discourse. In other words, it is important to value such accounts as reflections of economic change whilst also recognising that such accounts can be structured and inflected by dominant discourses such as gendered ‘narratives of loss’ (as highlighted in section 3.3). The intent, therefore, is to suggest that the experiences and perceptions recounted do provide valuable insights into the nature of labour market conditions but in ways that also tell us something about the meanings invested in, or attached to, particular places.

4.1. Finding and securing work

Looking firstly at experiences of finding work, a number of interviewees in Amlwch, Hillside and Wensley Fold identified a lack of work as a barrier to finding employment. One young woman in Amlwch, for example, who was looking after children full-time but contemplating a return to work when her youngest child started school spoke of her concerns about the level of vacancies:

> *It’s probably again the job situation. There aren’t many jobs locally, certainly there’s not a lot of jobs that can be done around school hours.*
> (Lorna, Amlwch, 30-34, looking after family full-time)

In this particular case, the concern to find work with family-friendly hours also appeared to limit the scope of employment opportunities. This also mirrors observations in other research (Watt, 2003; Crisp *et al*, 2009) that women often preferred to find part-time work that fit around school hours to avoid the need to use formal childcare.

Another interviewee from Amlwch, Carl, also described the difficulties he encountered when trying to return to work after losing his previous job as a construction worker through stress brought on by the large debts he had incurred (approximately £5,000):

Carl: *I think it's got harder to get jobs…I applied for maybe half a dozen jobs, got very little feedback, this time last year I would have at least got a phone call back.*

Interviewer: *So similar sort of building, labouring work?*

Carl: *No I went to look into social care. This was towards Bangor, about 20 minutes away.*

Interviewer: *So there is less work then. Is that part of the recession then?*

Carl: *Yeah I think so yeah, there's been a lot of people laid off as well…Rehau* [a local factory], *they've been laying lads off*
(Carl, Amlwch, 25-29, unemployed).

Evidently, there is a perception that there has been a decline in the quantity of work available in the local area. It is also interesting to note, though, that Carl considers looking for work in social care, suggesting that there may be alternative sources of employment in different sectors. Eventually, Carl successfully applied to move from Jobseekers Allowance to Incapacity Benefit which enabled him to work two days a week as a labourer for his father's construction company as part of the Permitted Work rules governing receipt of Incapacity Benefit. This indicates that social capital in terms of access to work through family connections and friends can enable individuals to find at least some employment in an otherwise slack labour market.

This tightening of the job market was also observed in Hillside. One young man who had just been accepted on a 13 week construction course that could, potentially, lead to an apprenticeship noted:

I've only had one other job before this and that was…doing labouring, it was an extension getting built so I was there for about six months and after that I was out of work since before last Christmas and I just got this job then… it's the credit crunch isn't it and there's not that much work and not many job offers going and you're lucky if you get something.
(Dale, Hillside, 16-24, on a government scheme)

Economic change could also impact upon on those in work with variable earnings. One respondent from Oxgangs spoke, for instance, of how the recession had impacted her husband's earning potential as a taxi driver:

[It has] *definitely impacted on Wayne, not so much on me because I'm on a fixed wage but certainly he's finding it very difficult and very hard to get motivated to go out and trawl the street. People aren't going out at the moment, people might say it's not affecting them in such a way but it certainly is impacting on us because he does rely on people going out to earn his money, people aren't doing that at the moment.*
(Zara, Oxgangs, 30-34, works part-time in a bank)

The perceived lack of work was particular notable in Blackburn where several interviewees described the difficulties they encountered in looking for work. One older man, Brett, who was unemployed during the Wave 1 interview had found part-work as a joiner by the Wave 2 interview but described the tightening of the job market he observed when looking for work:

I think it's getting tighter and tighter… this crunch now… it's making it harder and also you see now jobs advertised 'minimum wage' everything's minimum wage
(Brett, Wensley Fold, 45-64, working part-time).

Such comments indicate that not only were employment opportunities perceived to have become more scarce, but also that the quality of vacancies in terms of wages was regarded as poor. Moreover, whilst Brett did finally find work as a joiner that paid above the minimum wage, both his wife and his son lost their jobs as, respectively, a factory operative and a welder in the intervening period.

Two male interviewees from Wensley Fold who were out of work at the time of interview also recounted their difficulties in finding work. Khaliq formerly worked in as a food production operative and had been unemployed for over twelve months. He had applied for over 20 jobs but had received no response despite both extending his job search to the neighbouring towns of Preston and Accrington and considering unfamiliar occupations including care work. He attributed his lack of success directly to the declining volume of jobs in the sectors where he usually found work:

It's the fact that the majority of factories are closed down and they're still closing down, if there were only 10 factories left and there were only 10 vacancies then 10 people can go for jobs but if nine factories have closed down then they're not going to be able to offer 10 jobs, they'll only have one job on offer so this is the main problem
(Khaliq, Wensley Fold, 30-34, unemployed)

Losing work has clearly had an impact on household finances as well as imposing an emotional toll with Khaliq describing how '*now I haven't got any money and I've got a lot of worries'.*

Another young man, Hashim, moved to England from Pakistan four years ago but lost his job in a bakery a year ago and has since only secured short spells of temporary work. He reflected that:

The recession has hit Blackburn in a really bad way because the factories that they had here, they've all closed down, a lot of them have been demolished and they've actually built new houses there instead. By getting rid of the factories they've closed down our means of earning a living and putting food on the table.
(Hashim, Wensley Fold, 35-44, unemployed)

Here, the physical change in the use of land appears to symbolise the loss of employment and the opportunity to '*put food on the table'*. He also described finding it '*very, very hard'* to manage financially as he was using his benefits to support his own household and to send money back to family in Pakistan. Once more, this illustrates the financial hardships imposed by job loss which, in this case, were exacerbated by the need to support other family members outside the UK.

Even where interviewees had no recent direct experience of worklessness, they often referred to close family or friends who had suffered job loss or reductions in hours in the economic downturn:

[My husband's] *self employed* [as a joiner] *and there's not much work at all round here now… he was working for* [name of local employer] *but there's no work with them they've had to lay him off now, so for the last six weeks he's had no work.*
(Polly, Amlwch, 35-44, works part-time)

> [My partner's] *on the dole…* [the recession's] *hit him bad cos he's a joiner and there's just naff all at the minute.* [Melanie, West Marsh, 16-24, looking after family full-time]

> [The recession] *isn't affecting me at all because it doesn't affect pensioners quite so much because your pension comes doesn't it and you're not frightened of losing your job. I have got some nephews that it's affecting because on of them works for* [a company producing chemicals] *and they've gone on a short week.*
> (Peggy, West Marsh, 65+, retired).

> T*here's another two* [friends] *I know personally, they were made redundant because Woolworths went down, it had a knock on effect and all the companies that were supplying them, because of that they've been made redundant. It's very difficult, obviously whenever you ask them 'where you going?' they're going the job centre to find a job… the demand for jobs has gone up but the jobs supply is down*.
> (Faizal, Wensley Fold, 16-24, studying for law degree)

> [My husband] *was working but he got made redundant… he was employed through the council… he done that for 4½ years and then he got finished and he was out of work for a couple of months and then he got a job in Liverpool city centre. He was only there three months and 40 odd of 'em got made redundant because of the recession, because they were dealing with mortgages and that so he's just been struggling, trying to find something because he's 60 now as well so that makes it… age really comes into it*
> (Irene, Hillside, 65+, retired)

This series of quotes illustrates that perceptions of employment opportunity are not just shaped by direct, personal experiences of job loss but also by the labour market outcome of broader networks of family and friends.

It was also evident that the negative impact of job loss can also affect the well-being of other household members. This is apparent in the following case of a female respondent from Wensley Fold currently looking after young children full-time who described the effect of her husband's inability to find work on household life:

> *That's the biggest problem, he's not working, he's on Jobseekers Allowance at the moment there's no jobs in Blackburn whatsoever now, it's really hard to find a job. Yeah we are* [struggling] *financially mainly cos it's like hard, we've got our two year old and then we've got bills on top of that…he'll be at home 24/7, he's stressed cos of the fact that he can't find a job and I'm stressed cos there's not much income coming in and there's a lot of tension with the job side.*
> (Safah, Wensley Fold, 16-24, looking after family full-time)

In this case, the combined impact of low income and her husband's difficulty in securing employment appear to contribute to high levels of tension within the household. This indicates that the negative psycho-social consequences accrue not just to those with direct experience of job loss but to other household members.

One final observation worth making is that the tendency of residents to highlight economic misfortunes such as job loss that affected either themselves or some combination of family, friends or neighbours was far less evident in both West Kensington and Oxgangs. Even when prompted about the recession, there was not a strong sense that this had adversely impacted upon themselves or other people in the area as the following two examples from Oxgangs show:

I wouldn't say that I've seen massive changes in the area
(Wilma, Oxgangs, 35-44, works part-time)

People that worked are still working, I've never heard anybody saying 'I've lost my job' maybe it's just that I've no heard of them but I've never… and even like [my friends and neighbours], *they've never said to me about anybody that 'it's a shame about his work' they seem to all still have that. Saying that, that's a lie, my brother-in-law, he's just got laid off, that's shocking, he just got paid off, he's a joiner.*
(Norma, Oxgangs, 45-64, working part-time)

Whilst the second interviewee eventually recalled that a close relative had been made redundant, the initial oversight in remembering this is perhaps a reflection that this was not a common experience within her network of family and friends. Such differences in accounts of the level of employment opportunity in West Kensington and Oxgangs compared with the other four neighbourhoods is perhaps explained by the greater buoyancy of the wider labour markets in which the first two neighbourhoods are located, as discussed in more detail in section 4.2 which follows.

4.2. Narratives of decline

Alongside these personal accounts of difficulties in finding work, interviewees also framed employment opportunities within more general narratives of decline. These tended to focus on cutbacks or closures relating to key local employers or the longer-term decline of key industries. In Amlwch, this was expressed in terms of actual or potential redundancies at four of the largest employers on the island: Wilva (a power station); Tinto (an aluminium producer); Rehau (plastic window manufacturer) and Octel (a chemical plant). All except Octel currently remain open.

Tinto are going to go, that's going to be a big blow. [Rehau] *they've laid a few off. Octel's gone*.
(Peter, Amlwch, 45-64, works full-time)

Industry, jobs you've lost about 16 jobs have gone at Rehau plastics, that's a major amount of work that's gone.
(Roger, Amlwch, 45-64, works part-time)

The chemical plant [Octel] *was a major employer and that's completely gone now and then there's the power station five miles up the road, that's only got another 18 months perhaps to go.*
(Jack, Amlwch, 45-64, retired)

In West Marsh, interviewees discussed the closure of factories primarily engaged in food production that had been major employers in the past:

Grimsby as a whole work wise it's gone downhill a long way because there's been factories closing here, there and everywhere so there is, considering the size of town, which I don't think it's a very big town compared to others but there's a lot of unemployment
(Harold, West Marsh, 35-44, working full-time)

[Mariner's] *did ready meals, I worked there for 4½ years and we did that well they actually built another factory because they couldn't cope with the business*

*because they were getting that much volume. Then last year it went under, both the factories. I think a lot of people relied on it, a lot of people worked there for years. (*Malcolm, West Marsh, 16-24, working full-time)

Such accounts of factory closures also emerged in the accounts of Wensley Fold residents, as illustrated in the quotes presented previously on page 16.

At other times, perceptions of economic decline were expressed through inter-generational concern for the lack of opportunities for young people. One older man in Amlwch who had recently retired from his job of driving a lorry expressed a view that:

I think it's a fine place if you're of my age, I think for a younger person it's rather more tricky because there's no work for young people, very little work.
(Jack, Amlwch 45-64, retired)

Another retiree from Amlwch who worked for 37 years as a supervisor in a chemical works also voiced concerns about the lack of economic opportunity for young people:

I made an apprentice of painting and decorating… there's nobody taking apprenticeships on now or anything.
(Lloyd, Amlwch, 65+, retired)

Such comments convey a belief that there had been a time when jobs were more plentiful in the local economy. Similar observations were made in Hillside about the availability of work for young people:

Interviewer: *Is there nowhere else* [young people] *can get work round here?*

Winnie: *Not really, not much… they apply for Tesco and things like that but there's no production work getting done anywhere round here. I think Marconi was one of the last people to go from Edge Lane. Years ago, there was a factory on every corner and gradually over the years we've seen everything from printers, Mecano, all them were along there and all over the years… Marconi was the last one and when that went it's just dead along that road now.*
(Winnie, Hillside, 45-64, works part-time)

This quote is also interesting because it suggests differences between neighbourhoods in the way these processes of decline were characterised. Whilst residents in Wensley Fold, Amlwch, West Marsh and Hillside all alluded to the loss or contraction of large-scale local employers or key industries, there was a sense in Hillside that this process of deindustrialisation was largely complete. In the other three neighbourhoods, however, factory closures or cutbacks seemed a more immediate and, perhaps therefore, rawer problem given the continued attrition of local industry. This is also a significant finding as it indicates that the economic shock of past recessions continue to reverberate and, by extension, shape the identity of those neighbourhoods affected.

Alongside these temporal reference points, a handful of interviews also made spatial comparisons with other areas perceived to have greater opportunities. A taxi driver in Wensley Fold who had spent a number of years living in Bedford in Southeast England described the difference in the economic profile of the two areas:

Interviewee: *In Bedford, most of the high flyers* [work] *in London, it's a commuter town… it's generally supposed to be a better area. Here it's ex-heavy industry town… so the people in this town are heavy industry people, engineers or*

something to do with that line and there's nothing for them to do now…That's why it's very hard for youngsters to get out to some sort of apprenticeship.
(Sajid, Wensley Fold, 30-34, working full-time)

In this instance, the sense that labour markets were more buoyant elsewhere once again translated into concerns about the lack of employment for young people. The references to former engineers with 'nothing to do' also indicates how these spatial disparities are seen to have developed over time.

What is particular particularly striking from the research is that such narratives were largely absent in the accounts of interviewees in West Kensington and Oxgangs where there was little discussion of changes in the nature and scope of employment opportunity. In the case of West Kensington, this may partially reflect the difficulty in conceptualising the diversity of the labour market in London (Dean, 2007) that has, historically, been less dependent on a small number of industrial sectors or individual employers. One implication of this is that it has not experienced the more enduring and collective experience of the decline of key employers and sectors observed in the other case study neighbourhoods, as well as in other research of working-class areas (see for example Robertson *et al*, 2008 study of Stirling in Scotland).

Moreover, the high level of demand for housing and escalating house prices in both West Kensington and Oxgangs combined with the strength of the London and Edinburgh economies would also seem to preclude such narratives. As Lupton's (2003) study of 12 disadvantaged neighbourhoods shows, it is often the social problems and sense of '*community shrinking under pressure'* in *depopulating* neighbourhoods that contribute to perceptions of area decline. Finally, in the case of West Kensington, it may also reflect the lower levels of worklessness in the neighbourhood relative to some of the other case study areas, as detailed in section two. Whilst the qualitative accounts of a small sample of residents should not be read off as an direct indicator of the health of labour markets, there does seem to be some correlation between the accounts of decline in this study and statistical indicators of worklessness.

Although most accounts of local labour market conditions emphasised the scarcity of work, a minority of respondents did proffer views that jobs could be found despite the economic constraints faced by the respective areas. In Hillside, the case study area with the highest level of worklessness, one young man expressed confidence that he would be able to find construction work in view of the physical regeneration of the area that had been planned:

There should be more jobs now like all the houses are getting started, there should be more jobs coming up, like labouring jobs and that…so when they start on sites I'll go down and see if there's any labouring or anything.…Cos they said that they were going to take local lads on.
(Peter, Hillside, 16-24, unemployed)

The subsequent freeze on the construction of new housing developments[2] may have curtailed this ambition. Nonetheless, it reveals how some residents continue to feel optimistic about labour market prospects.

It was also notable in some cases that even where interviewees were more sanguine about the availability of work, they remained adamant that jobs could be found. Following a discussion of factory closures in Grimsby, one interviewee in West Marsh went on to assert that *'there is work if you're really prepared to look for it, there is if*

[2] This freeze on regeneration is explained in more detail in the companion JRF Working paper on Neighbourhood Mix (Cole and Green, 2010)

you really want work' [Harold, West Marsh, 35-44, working full-time]. Similarly, another West Marsh resident working full-time as a factory operative maintained that *'there's work round here, it's just if you can be bothered to do it'.* [Morgan, West Marsh, 30-34, working full-time]. Explicit in these claims is a sense that work can be secured *if* those out of work are willing to invest the time and effort in looking for it. Such claims, though, fall short of asserting that work was readily available. Moreover, there were largely atypical of the majority of respondents who echoed the view that employment was limited.

4.3. Summary

Direct experiences of looking for work or those of family and friends suggest that labour market conditions in four of the case study neighbourhoods - Amlwch, Hillside, West Marsh and especially Wensley Fold - were highly constrained. Job opportunities were considered scarce, not least because of the decline of key employers. Workless interviewees or those living in households where the usual main earner was not in employment noted the financial difficulties this created as well as the toll it exacted on well-being in terms of creating stress and tensions. Such findings corroborate the long tradition of research emphasising the negative impact of worklessness (Bakke, 1933; Marsden, 1982; Gallie *et al*, 1994).

Alongside these personal accounts of job loss, interviewees deployed more general narratives of economic decline, framed primarily in terms of the decline or closure of key sources of employment. What is particular particularly striking from the research is that such narratives were largely absent in the accounts of interviewees in London where there was little discussion of changes in the nature and scope of employment opportunity. This may reflect its location in a more buoyant housing and labour market.

The significance of these findings, however, extend beyond establishing the local labour market context that faces residents. Three further observations can be made. Firstly, in most of the neighbourhoods except West Kensington there was a profound sense of loss attached to the perceived decline of important sources of work. Such accounts often transcended individual experiences of job loss or difficulties in finding to work to convey a more generalised sense of living in an area deeply affected by economic change. As Stenning (2003: 239) observes: *'In many places at the sharp end of economic restructuring, discourses of loss and decline dominate, creating an overriding sense of community failure, itself a poor basis of recovery'*. This shows how local economic trajectories can shape the perceived character of neighbourhoods. It is also interesting to note that these narratives of decline were often framed in terms of the loss of a few dominant local employers or industries. This suggests that neighbourhood identity is intimately linked to the fortunes of large-scale, Fordist-style workplaces which, again, may explain the lack of these narratives in West Kensington given the greater diversity of the labour market in which it is located.

Secondly, these narratives indicate that interviewees have a keen sense that structural economic change has had a deep and lasting impact on the availability of work. Unlike the predilection of policymakers for attributing worklessness to supply-side causes, residents evidently believe that a lack of demand for labour is a key factor in explaining the difficulties experienced in finding work (see Crisp *et al,* 2009 for a fuller account of the debate). Yet whilst this engenders some sympathy for groups such as young people felt to be marginalised by economic change, this does not necessarily always translate into widespread sympathy with those out of work as section six outlines. Moreover, there was a sense among a handful of interviewees that work was available for those sufficiently motivated to find it.

Thirdly, it is noteworthy that these narratives are framed largely in terms of the loss of large-scale employers, particularly manufacturers that would have provided male, manual work. This echoes the narratives of decline deployed by theorists such as Beck (2000) and Bauman (1998) in emphasising the loss of traditional male employers. In doing so, they add weight to McDowell's (2001) observation that such accounts are implicitly gendered because they exclude the growing participation in paid employment of women. In this respect, it is interesting to note that it is largely men who provide such accounts (see also Watt, 2006), which explains the absence of female voices in section 4.2. It is also true, however, that *neither* gender tended to discuss changes in employment opportunities. In other words, there is no countervailing narrative to male accounts of decline. This is not to diminish the concerns of interviewees, nor to suggest that the loss of male manual employment is not significant as it clearly plays a prominent role in understandings and experiences of economic change. Nonetheless, it does contrast notably with some accounts of the benefits of service work, particularly among women, highlighted in section five which follows.

5. Experiences of work

This section explores the experiences of work of residents and begins with an examination of negative experiences of work. It continues by considering positive experiences in terms of the benefits identified with paid employment. The section concludes by reflecting on how these findings relate to broader academic debates about the quality of work at the lower end of the labour market.

5.1. Negative experiences of work

An earlier JRF report, '*Work and worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods'* based on interviews with 180 residents across the six case study neighbourhoods in 2008 and 2009 highlighted a number of issues regarding the quality of work available. It found that:

> *'many of the research respondents are trapped in 'poor work' characterised by combinations of low pay, long hours or pervasive job insecurity as they cycle between employment and worklessness.'*
> (Crisp *et al*, 2009: 19)

The analysis undertaken for this paper, which includes data not available at the time of writing the 2009 report, confirms that these experiences are widespread across the six case study areas. Low wages were cited as an issue by some interviewees in work:

> Interviewer: *So you work full time and then work in a pub in an evening as well?*
>
> Bunny: *Yeah about three nights a week.*
>
> Interviewer: *Why do you do that then?*
>
> Bunny: *Because I don't earn enough.* (Bunny, Amlwch, 30-34, works full-time in the public sector)
>
> Interviewer: *You're full time aren't you?*
>
> Nigel: *I'm with the agency so I don't really get major wages either.*
> (Nigel, West Kensington, 30-34, worked full-time as a street cleaner (Wave 1) but unemployed by Wave 2)

> *When my daughter was born I had to give up work because I wasn't earning enough to pay out child care so I had to give up that job when she was three month., I went back to work part time and that was a hard, hard period and we just didn't have any extra money at all and we did have to go without to make sure that she had milk and stuff, but it has gradually got better over the years*
> (Zara, Oxgangs, 30-34, working part-time)

Workless interviewees looking for a job also expressed difficulties in finding work that paid an adequate wage. One young man from Amlwch who was currently out of work

due to mental health issues described the lack of reasonably paid work available to him given his low level of skills:

Interviewer: *What's it like for jobs round here then, are there many going?*

Carl: *Yeah, but you can't be too fussy, not really well paid…I would be looking at a job between £6-7 an hour, that's probably the most I could get at the moment.*

Interviewer: *Can you get by with that?*

Carl: *I think that's the bare minimum to get by…. Maybe if the job was minimum wage, I might not even take it.*

Interviewer: *And doing that sort of job, what would it be, typically?*

Carl: *Unskilled job, factory work, shop-floor work*
(Carl, Amlwch 25-29, Amlwch, claims Incapacity Benefit but works part-time under Permitted Hours rules).

Housing and potential childcare costs also seemed to constitute an additional disincentive to work in view of the low wages on offer as the following three cases illustrate:

In London I did do two part time jobs, I was lecturing …and I worked in a hospital as a counsellor. I had a dual role there, part-time on both of them and I enjoyed that thoroughly. I miss working now but I've got different circumstances, I've got a five year old and that comes with a whole package of needing child care which is expensive. The wages here, I was getting very good money in London for what I was doing, that wages here are not comparable but you need to pay for child care so I'd really be working to give child care.
(Maureen, Amlwch, 45-64, retired)

I worked for 8 months, I went away and did a support workers course and I was working and basically every penny that I was earning was going into the rent, I was paying £720 of the rent myself because I was working, I was getting working tax credit and family tax credit, I was getting my wages, my child benefit and I was having to pay my rent and my council tax myself so I gave up working … my housing benefit gets paid in full, I keep my house and I get to spend more time with my kids, and it all worked out in its favour.
(Heaven, Oxgangs, 25-29, looks after children full-time)

I would have to be working 7 days a week 24 hours just to cover everything … rent and everything else and I feel that is pointless… Even if [work] *was available I feel what's the point of having kids because you're working all that time, you're having kids, you're not spending time with the kids… they're like pushed out sort of thing and I feel that's wrong.*
(Stacey, West Marsh, 30-34, unemployed)

Two points can be made about the examples above. The first case illustrates how place matters in that decisions regarding work are intimately connected with the conditions that prevail in *local* labour markets. The experience of working in high-skilled, well-paid jobs in London provides a stark contrast with the low pay on offer in Amlwch which, ultimately, appears to act as a deterrent to returning to work. At the same time, the second and third case indicates that such decisions are not purely made on the basis on economic rationale, with the low pay on offer combining with a moral conviction that looking after children is a higher priority than finding paid employment.

Long hours were another negative element of paid employment identifed by residents. One interviewee from West Marsh, for example, explained how his job working on the docks involved working irregular hours depending on the availability of work. At certain times of the year, this could entail very long shifts:

> *I work stupid o'clocks, I can go in at 6 in the morning and get home 8 at night sometimes… there's times at the minute with us being in this mini recession, we haven't got a lot on but as soon as Easter kicks in we go mental. As I say sometimes I don't get home in summer, been 11 o'clock at night hasn't it?*
> (Alfie, West Marsh, 45-64, working full-time)

Another respondent working full-time as a machine operative producing duck meat also expressed concerns about the length of working day that a proposed change in shift patterns would engender:

> *At the moment you do 10 hour shifts, four 10 hour shifts and now they're proposing to do four 11 hour shifts making 44 hours which is ok but it's a long day*. [The factory] *is 12 miles, I get picked up at the Market Hotel at 20 minutes past 6, get there for 10 to 7. I'm not a big one for getting up early, I get up at half past 5 and that gives me enough time to get sorted and out the door but by the time you get home it's quarter to 6 so you've done a 12 hour shift including transport anyway on a 10 hour working day.*
> (Callum, West Marsh, 35-44, works full-time but off sick due to injury)

For some self-employed individuals, the need to work long hours was directly associated with the decline in business experienced with the onset of recession. One taxi driver in Wensley Fold, for example, explained how he used to work eight hours a day but had been forced to increase his hours to compensate for the decrease in custom:

> *Well like I said prior to that I was doing eight hour shift, therefore I can spend a lot of time with my wife and children but now I struggle to even pick my daughter up and drop her off at school. I have someone to do that for me …the only time I do spend with my children are probably on a Sunday. I have Sunday off because if I had a day off on a week day they'd be busy with school and mosque so I wouldn't see them anyway so…*
> (Sajid, Wensley Fold, 30-34, working full-time)

Such experiences illustrate how low wages and irregular custom can force individuals to work long hours to the detriment of the quality of family life.

Unsocial hours were also a feature of the working lives of some interviewees as in the following two examples of individuals working as machine operatives in factories in Grimsby:

> *At the minute I'm employed by a* [local factory] *… I work permanent nights…It's all right. I find it sometimes more knackering than what I would do doing shifts because it's at night time.*
> (Harold, West Marsh, 35-44, works full-time)

> *I do 7 at night till 2 in the morning… It's Tuesday to Sunday but I mean a job's a job, I'm not proud of working anyway, I'll do anything to work…The hours was good so I said I'll have it. I don't get much of a social life at the minute but it's a job.*
> (Malcolm, 16-24, working full-time)

Malcolm later went on to secure a job as a supervisor at a local supermarket where, again, he worked nights due to the better pay on offer:

> Malcolm: *Sometimes you don't get much sleep but I never really get much sleep anyway so it's just getting used to it. Some nights I have two, three hours, four hours, but I can get about five most. I would go off nights but money wise as well…I'm on about £10.80 an hour and on days it's about £6 summat, so it's quite a big… everything comes down to money, anything you do in life.*
>
> Interviewer: *How much longer could you see yourself doing nights for?*
>
> Malcolm: *Probably another year, I couldn't do it any longer cos I'm not suited on nights. They always say you can't work longer than 10 years on nights, knocks about five years off your life apparently.*

The perceived financial necessity to work nights shows how individuals can circumvent the low wages endemic within low-skilled work in the local economy but at considerable personal cost. The decision to work nights to benefit from higher wages has a direct impact on social life and, in the long-term, could affect health.

Insecurity was also a feature of working lives highlighted by many interviewees alongside negative experiences of the actual forms and conditions of work. This manifested itself both in terms of irregular work secured through private employment agencies as well as experiences of cycling between employment and periods of worklessness. Individuals who had used agencies expressed frustrations over the unpredictability of work secured through this route:

> *No I've done agency work when I finished from council which was year 2000 and I don't wish it on no-one, agency…it's not constant, you can, the agency'll phone you and say 'oh there's a job going for you. On the dock, it's 6 till 2' you go down there, do a day, the next day they don't want you, ring the agency 'go to a different factory over there' do a day there, they still don't want you, so you're chopping and changing, it's not good with agencies.*
> (Callum, West Marsh, 35-44, works full-time but off sick due to injury)

> *We first started when we moved over here, we registered with all agencies, they kept saying 'we've got you loads of work' it were brilliant, one day and that's it, next day we'd get a phone call 'no work today, no work today' so then I was supposed to pay rent on one day's wage 'but it's going to pick up next week' and every single one said exactly same so it were a nightmare*
> (Stuart, West Marsh, 30-34, currently unable to work due to disability)

> *I don't deal with agencies…I went to one particular agency cos nothing was going right at the time so I thought 'I've got to do something' and I registered. There was me and these group of foreign people, Polish and all that. They did it the same day but the agency employed them the next day and I was told to wait. A year and a half later they phoned me up, the agency, and said 'oh we've got a job for you' and that's the only time I had any contact with them and I told them to stuff it.*
> (Harold, West Marsh, 35-44, works full-time)

In all cases, the erratic and unpredictable nature of work offered was a source of intense dissatisfaction, compounded in the second case by the perception that migrant workers were being favoured.

Insecurity also manifested itself in experiences of periods of employment interspersed with spells of worklessness. In the following three examples, interviewees recount the difficulties they or their spouse had encountered in finding stable, long-term work:

> Kyle: *I'm a demolition worker.*
>
> Interviewer: *Right and you did that from… did you leave school…*
>
> Kyle: *No I done different jobs, I were, I got me qualification to be a chef then I went on to do some warehouse work for Focus and I started doing demolition April last year, I'm just waiting for a new job to start up now again.*
> (Kyle, Hillside, 16-24, unemployed)
>
> Interviewee: *My husband's been in and out of work because* [names a major food manufacturer], *we thought that was going to be a brilliant job to stay in for the rest of his life up to retirement, no that's going, another place is suppose to be taking over but I tell you something the workers that's already there won't have that job. It gets me mad because the government's not doing enough, I mean Grimsby used to be buzzing you could go out of one job one day and still get another job the same day, you can't do that now, it's not like that now and it's wrong*.
> (Ethel, West Marsh, 45-64, unable to work due to ill health or disability)
>
> Interviewee: *I've stayed with the same job, I'm a midday supervisor for the local county school, working with children, well young adults…me husband, he used to work away but now there's no work so he's had to come back here and he's in and out of work.*
> (Polly, Amlwch, 35-44, works part-time)

Whilst Ethel is currently not working herself due to health problems, Polly is in stable employment but is nonetheless affected by her husband's difficulties in finding secure work as a joiner. Again this shows how experiences and perceptions of work impact not just on the individuals directly concerned but also on other household members.

In summary, this sub-section adds weight to the evidence within the *'Work and worklessness*' (Crisp *et al*, 2009) report that work for individuals in the lower reaches of the labour market is often characterised by combinations of low pay or long or unsocial hours. Moreover, such work can be insecure and punctuated by periods of worklessness either because of the irregularity of agency work or the difficulties in securing stable, long-term employment. Once again, there are geographical differences with experiences of poor work most prevalent in Amlwch, Wensley Fold, West Marsh and Hillside. In terms of observable differences between these four neighbourhoods, West Marsh was notable both for the highest level of engagement in work involving unsocial hours and for the prevalence of casual, agency work. This may reflect the dominance of short-term, shift work within the food production sector within which a number of the West Marsh interviewees were employed. Whilst low-paid, low-skilled work also featured in the working lives of residents in the other three neighbourhoods, it was less prevalent and less concentrated within particular occupations and industries.

By contrast, fewer individuals in West Kensington and, to lesser extent, Oxgangs appeared to have engaged in such forms of employment. This perhaps reflects the more buoyant labour market conditions and better employment opportunities which exist in both cities. High levels of public sector employment among the samples in these two neighbourhoods may also have reduced exposure to the kind of working

practices routinely described, for example, by West Marsh residents. In West Kensington, three interviewees worked in high-skilled positions for the local authority, two were employed as practitioners by the NHS and one was employed by the police. By comparison, not a single interviewee in West Marsh worked in the public sector. This perhaps indicates how the availability of, and access to, public sector work, is an important mediating factor to experiences of work for residents living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

These accounts also corroborate claims about the inability of low-paid, low-skilled work to lift individuals above the poverty threshold or to enhance health and well-being (see Charlesworth, 2000; McDowell, 2003; Smith, 2005). It would be misleading, however, to conclude from this section that these experiences were universal or all-encompassing. As the following section illustrates, interviewees were also able to identify positive elements of work that contributed to self-esteem and well-being.

5.2. Positive experiences of work

Interviewees across all six case study areas were able to identify a number of benefits associated with work. In a small number of cases, individuals who had recently returned to work highlighted the financial gains they experienced:

> *I work in* [at a college] *serving food to hungry students, part-time.* [I'm] *better off, if I had worked before they [introduced tax credits]...I wouldn't have been better off*.
> (Tammie, Oxgangs, 30-34, works part-time)

> [It's become] *easier, a lot easier… obviously I get my wages which cos I work part time it's not a lot but tax credits are really good, they give you a lot of money, they give you working tax credit and they still give you child tax credit. They pay for 80 per cent of my son's nursery place plus I get in work credit which is £60 a week for the first year of working so the benefits system is very good. I'm probably about £75 a week better off which is good definitely.*
> (Sandra, West Kensington, 25-29, works part-time in a shop, previously looking after family full-time)

> *I do care [work], I've been working for four months now. It's good yeah... Actually it's become better financially yeah…I think it's quite a bit better, a lot better. We are happier, we have more money so it's nice.*
> (Fudiya, West Kensington, 35-44, works part- time as a care assistant, previously looking after family full-time)

> *I can afford more stuff cos I work weekends and I don't go out drinking and that…Just like now I've started decorating upstairs and just getting more for the kids and that…I've always got money in my bank now where before I didn't because I was always going overdrawn.*
> (Harriet, Amlwch, 25-29, works part-time in a bar, previously looking after family full-time)

These examples show that moving from benefits to work can increase spending power, ease debts and enhance the well-being of individuals and other household members. Given that the type of work secured in all three cases is unlikely to pay high wages, especially on a part-time basis, this indicates that even comparatively low-paid work can still provide financial gains for some over and above the income secured from out-of-work benefits. As the first two comments illustrates, however,

this may be as much a consequence of the in-work benefits to which former claimants are entitled rather than the wages on offer per se.

Progression within work can also lead to financial gain as in the case of one resident in West Marsh who had been promoted to manager of a day care centre by the time of the second interview:

> *I was working at a day care centre but I'm manager now, gone up in the world…* [it has] *made a difference, obviously more money and it's better for me. Obviously I can do more, I can get in there and do more for the girls and stuff, it's teenage mums you see so all my mums are under 16 which is scary, but I've got loads more happening for them which is what I wanted.*
> (Doris, West Marsh, 30-34, working full-time)

It is notable, however, that monetary gain was not the only benefit with Doris also emphasising the difference promotion has made in terms of her ability to help the young parents attending the day care centre. The sense of vocation provided though her work seemed as important as the increase in income experienced. This adds to the evidence presented later in this section regarding the extent to which the perception of 'making a difference' is a valued element of work.

In rare instances, individuals discussed the benefits of enjoying a high income, as in the case of an apprentice fabricator in Grimsby who, whilst currently on a low-income, had enjoyed periods of high pay and considered himself likely to find well-paid work on completing his apprenticeship. The comments below also include reflections from his equally high-earning brother who worked as a planner at a local oil refinery:

> Mark: *I'm on £180 a week now …I think the most I ever got was actually a grand, I was usually on 7 to 800 quid a week which is really really good for an apprentice, that's including lodge money and all that but…*
>
> Interviewer: *So once you're qualified what sort of pay are you on?*
>
> Mark: *If I stay with [name of company*] it's £15.10 an hour, that's including the bonus, I think it's 14 *quid an hour… but it'll go up in January… It's a good company to be in, good industry.*
> *Mark's brother: You're talking maybe 30-40,000 a year basic. That's 38 hours a week, just basic hours, I earn just over 13 quid an hour and I'm on 38 hours and I earn 27 grand a year so he'll be on more than me. It's a really good wage like.*
> (Mark, West Marsh, 16-24, works full-time as apprentice fabricator in petrochemical industry)

It is important to highlight that this was exceptional across the case study areas in terms of the earning potential of a young man without degree-level qualifications, albeit set to qualify as a skilled worker within the petrochemical industry. It indicates that there remain pockets of opportunity in labour markets otherwise characterised by a paucity of well-paid work. The difficulty, however, in securing such employment is evident in that the respondent considered himself lucky to have secured the apprenticeship in the face of stiff competition.

The other notable example of high income concerned a young man living in West Kensington employed as an accountant within the NHS who clearly enjoyed the comfortable lifestyle his income afforded:

> *I'm relatively, I'm not hugely ambitious but I'm relatively ambitious in that I think work is, one is it pays money, I quite like spending money so I want to have a*

comfortable lifestyle. I want to be able to afford the things that I want but also to make sure that at the point that I have a family that I'm able to support them, I think that's probably quite important. I probably got that from my dad very much, it's a bit old fashioned I guess but a man's always very much a bread winner and I think my dad's view was very much a man that doesn't work, there's a certain stigma attached to that and that's not to say that if circumstances are beyond your control and you can't work that's something to be ashamed of, but equally if you're someone that can work then you should.
(Waseem, West Kensington, 30-34, works full-time)

Whilst the lifestyle enjoyed is clearly one benefit derived from the income earned, this is also framed within masculine notions about the importance of fulfilling the male breadwinner role (Yeandle, 2003; Crompton, 2006) as and when Waseem intends to start a family. The benefits of earning well were not simply experienced through consumption, therefore, but also through satisfying culturally inherited notions about the appropriate role of men as the economic providers within householders.

One element of working and earning a living that interviewees also seemed to value was the sense of financial independence it provided. In both the quote above and the following example, this was expressed in terms of avoiding dependence on welfare:

The job is my life, if I don't go to work I can't pay my rent, I can't look after the family. It's my living, if I don't go to work I don't get money, I don't want to be on government, getting money for the government, so I just work to get the things I need, I want to buy something when I work I get paid that's when I can do things I want to do.
(Gary, West Kensington, 45-64, works full-time)

In both cases, the financial benefits of work extend to a sense of pride in earning an independent living whilst fulfilling perceived responsibilities to work.

Expressions of the importance of financial independence sometimes appeared to have a gendered element. One female respondent reflecting on the value placed on financial independence expressed this more in relation to the freedom to take on additional role outside the household:

Financially I wouldn't say we were any better off but me personally, because I've been to college for three years and passed my exams and I've got a job and I feel better in myself yeah definitely and more… that I've done something. Yeah cos you kind of have your kids and do bit jobs cos that's all you can do and you get an husband who's got a good job and yeah it's lovely, it's a nice life, but there's nothing for you… I did the college course for me, not for anybody else, just for me.
(Geraldine, West Marsh, 35-44, works part-time as a nursery assistant)

Another woman from Wensley Fold who previously worked as seamstress but had not engaged in paid work for over 20 years appeared to express similar sentiments when explaining her desire to go back into employment: *'I just want a bit more than staying at home and cleaning and tidying, socialising more if anything'* [Nusrat, 30-34, looking after family full-time]. Once again, there is conscious desire to extend roles and social relationships beyond the domestic sphere.

In both these cases, work provides an opportunity to take on new roles to complement gendered identities within the household as a mother or financial dependant of a male partner in paid employment. This indicates that the benefits of work are related to the gendered roles performed before returning to the labour

market. It also adds weight to McDowell's (2001) contention that narratives of decline that focus on the loss of male manual work perhaps fail to account for changes in women's experiences of work. The value women derived from taking on new roles and identities in the labour market does not square easily with the narratives of decline attached to these areas as outlined in section 4.2.

It was notable, however, that most of the comments regarding the benefits of work did not concern financial gains or the sense of independence gained through receiving an income from paid employment. More frequently cited benefits cited included social contact with colleagues; a sense of purpose derived from structured, meaningful activity; a notion of 'making a difference'; and social status. Looking at each in turn, it was notable that social contact with colleagues was valued highly by some interviewees in their experiences of work:

> *Refuse collector, brilliant job. I'm a people person, I love talking to people, you can have a laugh, they take the mickey out of you. I enjoyed it but the way things changed I just thought… cos it's twice the miles now.*
> (Callum, West Marsh, 35-44, former refuse collector, now works full-time as machine operative in factory)

> Interviewer: *So it's about money. Are there any other aspects of work that are important to you?*
>
> Gary: *Yeah working, socialising*. [Gary, West Kensington, 45-64, works full-time as bus driver].
>
> *I worked in a factory, that's not in this area, it's in Blackburn and we made magazine binders but I met all me friends there because there were three guys and the rest of us girls and that was the biggest laugh I've ever had, it was the best job you could ever imagine having. It were fantastic, me bosses, father and son, really really lenient, ridiculously lenient, we used to go to work really for a laugh and for the money, not to actually do anything. Then once you get wrapped up in that it were hard to leave because you didn't want to leave your friends and you didn't want to leave the money and everything so, but then I decided when I'd had* [my daughter, my partner] *said 'I'd like it if you didn't go back to work straight away and looked after kids for a bit' so I says 'right go on then'.*
> (Tracey, Wensley Fold, 25-29, looking after children full-time)

Whilst all interviewees assert the value of social contact with colleagues or clients, the final example indicates that perceptions of the benefits of work can change in accordance with changes in life circumstances. The birth of a second child prompted a decision to prioritise parenting despite the satisfaction gained from work which was evidently encouraged by a male partner who preferred her to stay at home. Notably, Tracey is now keen to return to the labour market which seems inspired, in part, by the growing sense of missing the social contact work provides:

> *To be honest I don't miss getting up, getting ready and going to work, I don't miss the fact that by time I get home at night, kids get home at night and I've made tea there were no time for us. I do miss the socialising part of it because even though me and quite a few of me friends don't actually work, cos they've brought up their kids, it's very rarely we get to spend time with each other and sometimes you just want to sit and talk to an adult about adult things instead of talking to a kid about colours of the rainbow. You just do feel lonely sometimes, especially when it's raining and you can't go anywhere and you think 'I wish I*

were at work with all me friends'. The money, I don't even miss the money because you adapt to situations so the only thing I do miss is me friends.

Once again, there is a strong sense emanating from this account that work provides an important opportunity to take on new roles outside of the household, especially for full-time mothers. Gender thus plays an important role in shaping orientations to work. In this case, it prompts the initial decision to leave work to become a full-time mother but also, over time, imposes a domestic identity that becomes restrictive and unsatisfying to the point where it encourages thoughts of returning to the labour market.

Interviewees also seemed to value the structured activity that work provided. One woman working as a carer in a nursing home explained how she missed this element of work whilst on leave:

> *I like it, it's good. It's a lot better than being unemployed because I'm in a routine… I've just been on a holiday with my annual leave this week and … I've been so annoyed the last couple of days cos I've had nothing to do. It was good the first three days but then I started getting bored so I can't wait until I'm back at work… if it's been a good day at work I come in like satisfied.*
> (Zara, Oxgangs, 30-34, works part-time)

Another aspect of work valued by interviewees was the sense of achievement and purpose derived from engaging in meaningful activity. An apprentice fabricator from West Marsh and his brother, who works as at an oil refinery, described the satisfaction obtained from completing a job despite the sometimes monotonous nature of work:

> Mark: *I do enjoy it, it can be a bit boring sometimes but when you're actually busy it's quite enjoyable, it makes the day go by, get your head into it, if you make a good job of it, you're proud of it.*
>
> Brother: *It's hard to see the bigger picture when you're doing stuff in the yard but when you actually get on site and you've seen it put together it's summat to be proud of, that you've actually helped put this pipeline in, it could be one of the main pipelines on the site.*
> (Mark, West Marsh, 16-24, works full-time)

This tangible sense of achievement was also evident in the account of Julie from West Marsh who described the satisfaction derived from the varied and sometimes challenging tasks involved in her role as a personal carer to a woman with Parkinson's disease:

> *We do all sorts. I actually tiled the bathroom, never tiled a bathroom and I thoroughly enjoyed it. And to get paid for doing something that you get so much satisfaction out of, it's not a job is it? I do gardening so I'm paid to go out in the sunshine and garden. I get out and about with her because we go shopping, clothes shopping and we go and have a coffee and a chat and meet friends out, not many people can have a job where you have got to look after somebody but you still have a social life at the same time, which we do.*
> (Julie, West Marsh, 45-64, works full-time)

In this instance, the combination of meaningful practical activity, the value attached to providing care and the social contact the job affords all combine to produce a genuine sense of vocation. Given that this is a role which pays little above the minimum wage, it shows that low-paid work can, in some circumstances, still deliver a number of important benefits. It also indicates that jobs that do not necessarily

require high levels of formal qualifications can still demand practical and social skills. These perhaps go unrecognised in formulations, for example, that characterise the personal service industry as one of a number of industries that provide '*donkey work*'[3] (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998: 5). Equally, it is important to recognise this type of one-to-one personal care service may be more challenging and, by extension, stimulating than more routinised care work based within large institutions. Nonetheless, it is still indicative of how individuals with low skills and limited employment options are sometimes able to navigate these opportunities in a way that enables them to secure some degree of esteem and satisfaction from paid work.

A further positive element of work identified by interviewees was a sense of 'making a difference'. This was sometimes couched in terms of helping to improve the circumstances of the particular client group they worked with:

> *My clients, their well being, I like to serve them better, I would like to go that extra mile for them which I can't at the moment* [because of an increase in workload] *so that's important to me. I wish I had that time, sometimes the elderly come and they want to talk and I really can't stand and chat with them.*
> (Zaneb, West Kensington, 45-64, works full-time as pharmacy dispenser)

> *What I get out of it is that the people I work with, they're instant in their response they give to positive energy, where there's like mainstream people don't understand... but the kind of people I work with will be 'thank you Leon' like they understand that you're thinking about…it's not really just about the pay, the pay is definitely not even secondary, that's about third… I like helping, I would do that for free… as long as my bills are paid I would do that, if the government was to say 'we'll pay your bills' I would do.*
> (Leon, West Kensington, 25-29, works full-time as support worker for people with learning disabilities)

> *It's a feeling that you're making a difference, I like to think that one day, obviously if it's not one of my own children, one day one of the children I've ever taught may grow up and have a seed of a thought that I may have given them and then use that in their adulthood and be someone.*
> (Sarah, West Kensington, 45-64, works full-time as teaching assistant)

Providing a service they believe clients or students value or will benefit from is clearly considered rewarding by all three interviewees. Indeed, the second quote from Leon suggests that such rewards strongly outweigh more instrumental motives for working.

In other cases, this feeling of making a contribution was expressed more broadly in terms of fulfilling responsibilities to society as a whole. A young male law student from Wensley Fold who had volunteered extensively by running sports activities for young people in his area expressed a view that:

> *You have to work to keep going, there's no way round it, I'm not a millionaire where I can sit on my bum and I think it's crucial that I work in order to secure my own future and my family's future and my family as in my own children to come. And I think society has given me so much I think now it's time for me to become a tax payer and give back to society. The government have done a lot for me, the Labour government especially, I've been working with these*

[3] Included in this pejorative frame are serving, guarding, cleaning, waiting and helping in the private health and care services, as well as hospitality industries.

community centres and they've been the ones providing the funding and I'm really grateful for that and it's my turn now to give back to society.
(Faizal, Wensley Fold, 16-24, studying for law degree]

Explicit in such observations is that, alongside meeting financial need, work also provides an opportunity to make a personal contribution as a taxpayer to reciprocate the support provided by the government to deliver the activities in which he was involved as a volunteer. Employment thus becomes a way of meeting his perceived obligations to community or, more broadly, society as a whole.

A final benefit that work provided for a small number of interviewees was the social status derived from occupational position. One young man from Amlwch who worked full-time as a pharmacy technician in a local hospital described how he felt *'a respected member of the community cos I work in hospital'* [Robert, Amlwch, 25-29, works full-time]. It was observable, however, that few interviewees discussed the work in terms of social status and, when they did, it was rarely framed in terms of comparisons with the status of others. Waseem from West Kensington proved an exception in making the following comments about his progression in his career as an accountant in the NHS:

Waseem: *I tend to compare my financial circumstances to the people I, not so much worked with, but went to university with or trained as an accountant with, I like to see where I'm doing against those people.*

Interviewer: *And do you know how you're doing?*

Waseem: *Yeah I do, I was on the NHS graduate training scheme so I'm still in touch with a number of people that I trained with as an accountant and it's a fast track scheme so some people will do quite well, I'm sort of in the middle range of career progression so I do know where I am.*
(Waseem, West Kensington, 30-34, working full-time)

This account aside, status was rarely derived from making comparative assessments based on occupational locations. Indeed, it was entirely absent from the accounts of those in low-paid, less-skilled work, suggesting that such forms of judgment may be restricted for those for whom career progression was an expected and desired part of the job. Whilst social distinctions within working-class neighbourhoods may, historically have been constructed around differences in occupation or income (see Watt, 2006), this was not evident in any of the case study areas. Indeed, even in the example of Waseem above, the distinction is based more on comparison with peers within a defined career structure than an attempt to locate his occupational position within broader social hierarchies. Nonetheless, this does not mean that social distinctions based around work are entirely absent, as section 6.2 which follows later indicates.

A final but important observation is that some accounts conveyed the way in which the benefits of work could be experienced *in spite* of otherwise onerous terms and conditions. This was evident in the case of one Hillside resident who had experienced a significant pay-cut when made redundant from a full-time cleaning job that included generous overtime. She had since only managed to find part-time cleaning work with another company and these hours had been further reduced because of the recession. Her husband had also been made redundant recently following a number of years in skilled manual work and they consequently found it difficult to manage financially. Despite the low wages and insecurity associated with her present job, she still reflected:

Well with working in [in my previous cleaning job] *I was up at quarter to 5 every morning to be in for 6 so I've always, even before then, in the schools and that when I worked, I've always been a morning person, up and out and that's what I like about me job, I get up and go out and go in in a morning, plus the people I work with are nice, that helps.*
(Barbara, Hillside, 45-64, works part-time)

Barbara clearly enjoys the social contact that work afford despite the lack of financial rewards or security it provides.

In another case, a young man from Amlwch had cycled through a succession of low paid jobs after leaving one employer because of stress brought on by long hours, low pay and sense of exploitation. At the time of interview, he worked painting and repairing caravans on a local site. Despite his negative experiences, he still reflected that work conferred important social benefits in terms of providing a structure and sense of purpose:

I enjoy working, I couldn't sit in the house all day watching telly, that's not me, there's only so much you can do in the house, painting and stuff so no, I enjoy work.
(Bryn, Amlwch, 25-29, works full-time)

Again, this indicates that low-skilled, low-paid work can deliver valued benefits even when insecure. Labels such as 'poor work' (McDowell, 2003) perhaps underestimate the meanings attached to such forms of employment.

5.3. Summary

This section has shown that work can have a negative impact upon health and well-being. Low pay, long or unsocial hours and job insecurity all contributed to difficulties in managing financially or generated stress for the individuals concerned and other household members. Whilst negative experiences of work featured prominently in the accounts of residents in all neighbourhoods except West Kensington, insecurity and unsocial hours seemed a particularly prevalent feature of working lives in West Marsh. This may reflect the prevalence of short-term shift work within the food processing industry. Such a finding highlights how negative experiences of work are not necessarily uniform across areas that have witnessed the decline of key industries and the growth of high levels of worklessness. The particular configuration of economic opportunities in the labour market may shape the extent and nature of unsatisfactory experiences of work. Equally, it is reminder that the decline of key industries associated with the economic shocks of 1980s and 1990s has not entirely reduced the dependence of some areas on particular forms of manual work.

Whilst these accounts corroborates many of the negative portrayals of work within academic debates (Charlesworth, 2000; Smith, 2005), it is also the case that low-paid, low-skilled employment appeared to confer a number of valued benefits. Although some experienced financial gains in moving into work or, in a minority of cases, good incomes, the benefits identified were largely non-financial. They included several of Jahoda's (1981) latent functions of work such as social contact, a sense of purpose, structured activity and social status as well as other elements including financial independence and a feeling of 'making a difference'.

These findings are significant in that they suggest that labels such as 'poor work' (McDowell, 2003), 'donkey work' (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998) or 'junk jobs' (Lash, 1994) fail to capture some of the value attached to work at the lower end of the labour market. Whilst is certainly the case that such forms of employment can

involve low pay, long or unsocial hours and pervasive insecurity, it is also evident that these jobs can still generate esteem and provide the basis around which dignified working identities can be constructed. This echoes the findings of other research emphasising the capacity of low-paid work to deliver valued benefits (Shildrick *et al,* 2010; Ray *et al,* 2010) At times, this takes on a gendered dimension with women placing importance on the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities beyond domestic identities that are sometimes experienced as restrictive, unfulfilling and monotonous. Such accounts challenge the linear narratives of economic decline centred on contraction with male-dominated industries that fail to account for how the growth of female employment has changed women's experience of work.

It does not seem, as other research suggests (Macdonald, 2005), that low-paid, low-skilled work is sometimes viewed positively because it satisfies a desire to work per se, even if the day-to-day experience is largely onerous, unpleasant or unsatisfying. Rather, it appears that experiences of specific jobs can combine both positive and negative elements at the same time. For example, insecure or low paid work can be valued for the social contact the workplace affords. One implication of this ambivalence is that the research does not fully endorse the position of policymakers (see for example DWP, 2008) that work is unambiguously good for health and well-being. Instead, it could be argued that work can deliver some of the benefits claimed for it *in spite* of the low pay or poor terms and conditions often attached to it.

Finally, the evidence suggests that whilst work can confer self-esteem and respect, individuals rarely derive this by making direct comparisons with the occupational status of others. This does not mean, however, that work does not function as a marker of social distinction. Indeed, as the next section suggests, *orientations* to work continue to play a role in the construction of identity as residents seek to distance themselves from those deemed to lack commitment to paid employment.

6

6. The working status of other residents

The Living through Change study had a strong focus on how interviewees perceived other residents within the neighbourhoods where they lived. This section focuses specifically on how interviewees discussed the working status of neighbours and other residents. It begins by considering perceptions of the extent to which others in the neighbourhood were in work and also looks at how worklessness is conceptualised. It moves on to explore the way in which employment status or orientations to work are used to maintain social distinctions in the neighbourhoods.

6.1. Perceptions of levels of employment

Across all case study areas, some interviewees expressed a view that most residents were in work as the following selection of quotes indicates:

> Interviewer: *Do you think most people round where you live work?*
>
> Marcia: *Yeah, one's a postman, another one I think she's looking after old people in a care home.*
> (Marcia, Wensley Fold, 16-24, looking after children full-time)
>
> Brett: *The ones I know, I'd say,* [pointing out window] *he's got a job, he starts in two weeks time, I'd say three quarters are working on the street.*
>
> Interviewer: *What sort of sectors are they in?*
>
> Brett: *Factory work, one's got their own shop, I think one works in a restaurant, it's mainly factories. There's about a quarter aren't working.*
> (Brett, Wensley Fold, 45-64, works part-time)

> *I know a lot of people who is on the street is about, opposite door all these people working, about five houses, all of them is working..Another house is also two doctor studying and working and our next door they are not working I think next door and those people in the corner I don't know, I don't know them very well.*
> (Khahijah, 25-29 West Kensington, unemployed]

> *Yeah I'd say yeah. I think most of them are in work*
> (Aaliyah, West Kensington, 25-29, in education)

> *Yeah there's a lot of people, especially people who come from same country I come from…there's a lot of ladies who work…children grow up and they decide go work. The two ladies I know, they are child minders and another two ladies they work in school, they are teaching assistants.*
> (Tabasxamu, female, West Kensington, 25-29, looking after children full-time)

It was evident that West Kensington interviewees were more likely to express a view that other residents were in work, which is perhaps a reflection of the lower levels of worklessness in that neighbourhood relative to some of the other case study areas.

It was also striking that most of the interviewees cited above tended to identify known neighbours when commenting on the proportion of residents in work rather than reflect on employment patterns across the neighbourhood more broadly. Indeed, some individuals explicitly commented on the difficulties inherent in making a judgement on whether other residents were working. One resident in West Kensington, for example, observed that her own working routine made it difficult to speculate on the working status of other residents, whilst noting that attending residents meetings about proposed redevelopment has raised her awareness:

> *I don't know, I'm not here during the day unless it's a school holiday so I don't know how many people are hanging around. I really don't know, it's been a bit of an eye opener going to these meetings because you do meet people who say 'I work in the airport' or 'I work in Slough' and they drive a car or whatever road or train links they've got…there are a few of the people I see around now who I wouldn't necessarily have acknowledged in the street*
> (Sarah, West Kensington, 45-64, works full-time)

Once again, this indicates that acquaintance appears to be a precursor to identifying whether individuals in work. Without this familiarity, some interviewees expressed uncertainty about the working status of others, with only visible signs of wealth providing some uncertain cues regarding working status:

> *Sometimes you look at people and you think 'they're not at work' but then sometimes you see certain cars parked outside and you're thinking 'that's a nice 40 grand car how did you get that on benefits?' there is quite a few in the new houses and they are workers, I probably reckon out of the estate a good 40% maybe 50 percent but I'm not sure, I'm just going on how they do the new extensions to a house but I don't know if they're working or not, they've got a nice car but I don't know if they're on the dole or not.*
> (Nigel, West Kensington, 30-34, unemployed and training to be a plasterer]

These difficulties in identifying the working status of other residents or the tendency to do so only in reference to familiar individuals indicates that respondents have little awareness of both levels of employment or key sources of employment for others within the neighbourhood. This echoes Dean's (2007: 528) findings from research in an inner-London neighbourhood that individuals '*had no apparent sense in which they shared or held their labour market experiences in common'.* Whilst there is no evidence to support Dean's (ibid.) subsequent contention that this induces a form of '*powerlessness'* , it does suggest that these neighbourhoods are marked by an absence of collective identities around work. Whilst a number of case study neighbourhoods had identities linked to the decline of particular forms of work (see section 4.2), this did not seem to extend to strong, collective associations based on shared experiences of work in the present.

This contrasts with the findings of older or historical studies of working-class neighbourhoods where work, place and social networks overlapped (Young and Wilmot, 1957; Parry, 2003; Rogaly and Taylor, 2009). This is not to imply that certain forms of work do not dominate in particular neighbourhoods, as the prevalence of employment in food processing in Grimsby indicates. Nonetheless, there still remained little explicit sense that neighbourhood identity was linked to particular forms of employment, nor that it formed the basis of collective experiences or patterns of association among residents.

It is insightful to compare this difficulty with identifying individuals in work with the greater certainty of interviewees who believed that most residents did not work. In some cases, this was expressed in terms of familiar others, as in the following example of one young woman in Wensley Fold who looked after young children full-time:

> *My next door neighbour she doesn't work but her husband works. I'm not sure where he works… next door is my sister and her husband, he's been unemployed since my husband's been unemployed cos they used to work together at Crossfield Bakery*
> (Safah, Wensley Fold, 16-24, looking after family full-time)

It was more common, however, that individuals attached such a view to particular groups with whom they were not necessarily personally acquainted:

> Interviewer: *Do you think most people round here are in work?*
>
> Safah: *No I don't, I think most people around here are maybe seeking asylum or the other lot, there are a huge amount of people who live here who do work, then there's a big percentage of young guys from 19 up to 30, even 35, that just don't work, they sign on, they do not work, I don't understand that. I suppose there probably are more people that don't work than people who do work.*
> (Sandra, West Kensington, 25-29, works part-time in a shop)
>
> *I don't think so no. A lot of Somalis… I think they get used to the system.*
> (Fudiya, Female, West Kensington, looking after family full-time)
>
> *Obviously like every other town there is an awful lot of unemployment here but I think also my youngest son's generation don't want to work and they don't see why they should work*
> (Julie, West Marsh, 45-64, works full-time]
>
> *I would say the majority aren't working… unfortunately I think there are some of them who do not want to work, there seem to be a certain element who prefer to indulge in criminal activities shall we say*
> (Lara, Hillside, 45-64, works full-time)
>
> *Just word of mouth, what I've heard, the young ones don't want to work, we did hear that because they get Jobseekers Allowance or something and they manage on that and that kind of thing.. But I don't think the youth of today do really want to work and when you have Eastern Europeans who come into the country and are more than willing to work… but these kids who don't work will not take* [employment], *and that infuriates me because they want everything handed on a platter, a lot of them.*
> (Vera, Oxgangs, 65+, retired)

The more pronounced tendency of residents to identify individuals not in paid employment may, of course, be a consequence of the greater visibility of those out of work given that they do not regularly leave the area to go to work. Nonetheless, there are some interesting observations about the way in which those out of work are described. It is noteworthy, for example, that in four of the examples above, the lack of employment among other residents is attached to general groups – Somalis, asylum seekers and young men - rather than known individuals. Explicit also in the references above is a degree of condemnation of the inability of these groups to find work. This is evident in more subtle references to how these groups 'sign on' and 'get used to the system' as well as more explicit judgements about 'criminal activities' and wanting 'everything handed on a platter'.

Such judgments seemed even more strident in Wensley Fold where some residents highlighted the undesirable or, at least, unfortunate, behaviour of those out of work. One woman who did not work but volunteered at a local community facility described how:

> Interviewer: *Do you think most people round here work?*
>
> Interviewee: *No I don't, I think most of them are on benefits…you see them drinking cans outside and if they're not doing that you know most of them don't work. We have a lot of people sat in the centre all day long, one to keep warm and not use their own heating and because they're not in work and stuff like that so they congregate in the café. I think an awful lot of people are on benefits.*
> (Kimberley, Wensley Fold, Female, 35-44, looking after family full-time)

As with the previous comments, worklessness is attached to a particular group, but in this case the problematic behaviour of that group is also emphasised, with drinking in public conflated with being on benefits. Whilst there is evident sympathy for those who attend the café to reduce home heating bills, there is also a sense that worklessness becomes pathologised as a particular form of undesirable behaviour. At the very least, those who drink in public appear to symbolise a far broader group of residents out of work.

Similarly, another Wensley Fold resident who has been out of work and claiming benefits due to ill-health since 1979 referred to the public behaviour of other residents when asked about the working status of others living nearby:

> *Not all of them* [work] *because, I mean there's one guy I see, he's always up and down the road, he can't be working because if he were working you wouldn't see him so often, he's always up and down the road, standing outside the boozer or pub, that pub, trying to cadge a fag or money or whatever or he stands outside the bookies. It's quite a lot that's not working, when you see them with cans on the street or a bottle of sherry.*
> (Arthur, Wensley Fold, 45-64, unable to work because of ill-health)

Once again there is a clear association made between worklessness and inappropriate behaviours.

A number of points can be made about this series of comments relating to perceptions that most or, at least, a considerable proportion of other residents were not in work. Firstly, these generalisations often attach themselves to particular groups identified by age or ethnicity. Secondly, comments relating to high levels of worklessness contain implicit or, at times, explicit moral judgements about the character of those out of work. Thirdly, these judgements are often based on personal observations of the public behaviour of a few visible individuals. In combination, these points suggest that claims regarding levels of worklessness are not simply measured assessments of the balance of work and worklessness but perhaps also discourses through which worklessness is constructed as an explanation for a broad array of social problems and irresponsible or threatening behaviours of particular groups. This is not to deny that there are high levels of worklessness, as the statistics clearly confirm this, nor that residents are not able to identify other residents who are workless. Nonetheless, discussions of worklessness are laced with moral judgements and a symbolism that extends beyond the mere categorisation of the number of residents out of work. As the next section suggests, this is perhaps explained by the way in which employment status or orientations to work become important markers against which social distinctions are constructed.

6.2. Work as a marker of social distinction

It was suggested in section (5.2) that occupational status or income levels appeared to play little role in generating self-esteem. It was certainly the case, however, that employment status *per se* as well as orientations to work played a role in the construction of self-identity. Social distinctions were made between those in work and out of work as well as between different groups *within* the workless population. Looking firstly at the perceptions of interviewees in work, there was a tendency amongst some to contrast the moral superiority of their commitment to work with the perceived irresponsibility or aversion to work of others on benefits. One young man in West Marsh who had worked since leaving school at 16 outlined his belief in the importance of work and his accompanying reluctance to claim benefits:

> *Morally I've always done it, I've had a job since I was about 12 always done some sort of work, paper rounds, odd jobs, I've always done it, never been out of work ever. I've had two months out of work and that was my choice cos I got made redundant so I took two months off and started a job straight after that, never been out of work ever, never been on the dole either, never gone to the dole.*
> (Malcolm, West Marsh, 16-24, works full-time)

Malcolm currently works as a supervisor at a supermarket but had made enquiries in 2008 at his local Jobcentre about the possibility of retraining as a plasterer. His discovery that free training was only available to individuals claiming benefits generated a strong sense of injustice centred on the eligibility of those he perceived to be less deserving:

> *I wanted to do a free plastering course and the advice they give me was like 'best thing mate is go on the dole, you get it all paid for'. That's a joke, you've got some guy peeing outside as well, I never lose my rag often, I said 'that's a joke, I want to better myself and you're telling me I'm better off on the dole because I get it all paid for'. I just walked out. Someone who's not bothered, who's drinking outside and can get it for free and isn't bothered anyway.*

Once again, worklessness becomes associated with unacceptable forms of public behaviour, with the sense of injustice exacerbated by the perceived fecklessness of others. This tangible frustration later develops into a more general condemnation of the character of individuals out of work:

> *I know a lot of people can't find jobs, but some of them are just bone lazy and don't want to work and drugs and that but I think they should make them people come up the parks, clear up the rivers to make their money, earn the money. I know some of them can't but it helps everything. If the council can't afford to pick up litter and pick up stuff out of the river so why are they paying those people to sit on their bums, why can't they come and do it for a couple of hours a day.*

Here, the specific grievance over the lack of financial support for re-training appears to underpin a broader conviction of moral superiority compared with those too 'bone lazy' to work. Malcolm's sense of self-worth is, therefore, clearly predicated on the distinction made between his own commitment to work in contrast with the perceived idleness of others. This is combined with a strong and enduring sense of injustice that his efforts to improve himself appeared to have been rebuffed in favour of those deemed to be less committed to finding paid employment.

Another young woman from Wensley Fold who worked part-time as a care assistant at weekends and was studying at college also made moral distinctions between her working status and the attitudes of those on benefits:

> *Nobody's pushing me to work because I've two young children, three of them are under 16, nobody pushing me, nobody asking me, so I just want to work… some people they just go 'I don't want to work' stay on benefit their whole life, and some people like me nobody pushing me but I want to do something, I want to be working, independent, I want my children to be independent. Sometimes I struggle with the money, if I work they take it off and some people say 'what's the point you working, they take it off'.*
> (Carmel, Wensley Fold, 20-24, works part-time)

There are a number of reasons why Carmel wanted to work including the sense of independence it affords but there is also evident satisfaction that, as a lone parent, she had found work without 'pushing' as her children were too young for her to be required to look for work as a condition of receiving benefit. This generated a certain pride that she had been able to find and sustain employment despite having a young family in contrast with others are believed to be content to remain on benefits. Once again, it illustrates how paid employment can function as source of self-esteem derived from comparisons with others deemed to hold less commendable orientations to work.

Being in work was also identified as conferring a sense of belonging or, at least, a greater likelihood of being accepted as someone moving into a new community. One interviewee who worked as a midday supervisor at a school in Amlwch discussed the importance of work in terms of, among other things, differentiating her from other 'newcomers' who claim benefits:

> Interviewer: *And why is work important to you? What is it about work that is important?*
>
> Polly: *Well obviously the finance part, money, it's also doing, I like to be doing things as well, I don't like to sit around all day and do nothing. It's also about mixing with people as well because I don't like… I like the idea of being with people and communicating with all ages but it is important that I also contribute… because I live in Amlwch I don't want to be claiming benefits, I don't want people to label me as 'one of those from Manchester again coming here scrounging'.*
>
> Interviewer: *Is that how people are labelled then?*
>
> Polly: *Yes they are, there's not only Manchester people, there's others coming round here and 'they're scrounging' or 'they're taking our job' or 'they've just come here, they haven't got a job and look at them, they've got a council house…' or 'they've got private rent, how've they got that when we didn't know about it?'…if there's any trouble it's got to be done by somebody from out of town.*
> (Polly, Amlwch, 35-44, works part-time)

This shows how perceptions of moral worth based on employment status can also take on unique dimensions within particular places. In Amlwch, the distinctions made between deserving or undeserving claimants or recipients of housing are also associated, according to the interviewee, with location of origin and time of residence in Amlwch. Incomers are perceived to be more likely to claim benefits and secure housing at the expense of long-standing residents. This appears to generate a personal conviction that it is important to work to be seen to '*contribute*', thereby

avoiding the pejorative '*label'* attached to some who move into the area. In Amlwch, therefore, the moral associations attached to claiming benefits seem to map onto strong tendencies in this neighbourhood to distinguish between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Elias, 1994) based on origin and length of resident[4].

One caveat, however, is that the quality of work secured, at least in terms of financial rewards for effort expended, could undermine any sense of distinction derived from being in work. One interviewee in West Kensington who works part-time as a kitchen assistant suggested that the benefits of work were not always self-evident for her relative to other women she knows who are not in paid employment:

> *I mean we live from pay cheque to pay cheque … sometimes I feel like a mug, I get up, go to work, I've always worked, I went back to work when my son was six months old, my mum had him then, and I get up and go to work… I know someone* [that does not work]*, she's laid on her on her bed, I'm rushing to drop him at school… if I don't work then I'll get bored but I'd just like to say 'let me take a breather' take six months off and sit back and stay at home with* [my son] *to be honest with you… I actually feel like I need to get up to go to work not so much more the money, more so for, to show my kids a work ethic, we were showed a work ethic, my dad still works, my mum's passed now but my son knows pay day's coming, if he's in need of something just wait, mummy's going to get paid.*
> (Cordell, West Kensington, 30-34, works-part time.)

This account reveals conflicting emotions about the benefits of work. On the one hand, there is a strong sense that work matters because of the meaningful activity it provides and the work ethic it helps instil in her children. At the same time, though, there is a feeling that the limited financial rewards as well as the effort involved in combining work with parenting make the decision of other women not to work understandable and, in her more wistful moments, almost preferable. Paid employment seems to satisfy a deeply ingrained work ethic but any moral advantage this confers is, at least partially, offset by the limited financial gains to be made and the practical difficulties it engenders.

Moral distinctions were not simply made along binary distinctions of being in or out of work however. Individuals who were not in work sometimes asserted their greater entitlement to benefits or moral superiority over others out of work. One man from Wensley Fold who had not worked for over 30 years explained how:

> *I haven't worked since '79 really, it's hard work to get into the labour force. They are trying to get people like off the sick into work but they should sort out these people who can work first. I mean now there's so much unemployment, I think they did say it's probably over three million so they want to sort that out first before they get us on the sick, you know them proper people that's on the sick to work. I knew there's quite a lot that's on the sick that shouldn't be but you get the good and the bad. Mine's genuine, I've got arthritis …it's not like I put on.*
> (Arthur, Wensley Fold 45-64, unable to work because of ill-health)

These comments indicate a determination to assert the validity of his own claim whilst disassociating himself from other less deserving claimants believed to be able to work. This echoes other research that identifies the different moral judgements are attached to different positions *outside* the labour market (Smith, 2005; Pahl *et. al,* 2007) which, in this case, evidently cleave along long-standing distinctions between

[4] These distinctions are explored more fully in a companion working paper on *'Self-Esteem, Comparative Poverty and Neighbourhoods'* (Batty and Flint, 2010).

the 'deserving and 'undeserving' poor (Bauman, 2005). As Parker *et al*'s, (2008) study of families facing material hardship also noted, this processes of social distancing may become all the more imperative when powerful and pervasive discourse of the deficiencies of those on benefits circulate in particular neighbourhoods.

The vehemence with which Arthur makes these distinctions is also related to concerns about government plans to re-test and, potentially, require those on health-related benefits to look for work. The perceived need to make distinctions about entitlement to benefits is, therefore, intimately linked with benefit rules determined at national level, especially as his personal entitlement is believed to be under threat. This shows how processes of disassociation are not only generated internally within neighbourhoods but also shaped by institutional processes operating at broader spatial scales.

Such distinctions were also evident in the case of an interviewee from West Marsh who was no longer able to work because of disability. She explained her vexation at how she wanted to work but was unable to do so whilst others capable of work chose not to:

> *...the system wants to change because there's a lot of people that are getting away with it cos I know some and it's so wrong. I know some people that's like that, they don't care, they said 'why should I work?' I mean I know one guy he's, I can't remember if he's 52 or 54, he says 'why should I get a job now?' 'Well why not? You take my illness and I'll go out to work then'. That's a really bad attitude to take.*
> (Ethel, West Marsh, 45-64, unable to work because of ill-health)

There is a clear attempt in this account to assert the deservingness of her own workless status relative to the perceived malingering of a neighbour. Again this exemplifies the way in which moral distinctions are based on comparative assessments of orientations to work *within* the workless population. Moreover, it shows how individuals attempt to resist or at least, limit the stigmatisation associated with being out of work though processes of disassociation based on a strong moral sense of what constitutes correct behaviour.

In some cases, these forms of condemnation were linked to a sense of injustice derived from being denied benefits to which they felt entitled. One Oxgangs resident in employment described how aggrieved she felt about the refusal of her husband's claim for incapacity benefits after leaving work due to ill-health:

> *We're having a bit of a fight about that at the moment…don't get me wrong it's not a huge amount of money, I think it's £65 a week or something, compared to what he was earning it's peanuts but it's £65 a week that buys our food and Jimmy's been very bitter about it and he's got quite upset about it and I've been saying 'if you don't get it don't worry about it just forget it' because I don't want him being ill… It's the principle because he's worked since he left school and we know a lot of people that's not worked and are getting plenty, plenty hand out every week and he's very bitter about it… And it's all right to say there's no jobs, that's a crock, there's jobs if they want them, maybe not the job they want, maybe not paying them the money they want but there is jobs and I kind of feel bitter about that as well cos they're not working and they're getting handouts to them. We had to work and we struggled but we still had to work and in situations like that I'm really, I don't feel sorry for them, not for those ones, I just don't.*

Here, the sense of injustice generates a clear antipathy towards other workless individuals perceived to be 'work-shy' (Pahl *et al*, 2007). It is interesting to note also how frustration at institutional processes becomes re-directed at others on low incomes believed to be benefiting falsely from the system. That institutional processes determined elsewhere can shape moral distinctions made within neighbourhoods again highlights how processes of disassociation are not entirely generated in-situ.

Overall, it was particularly striking across all case study areas bar West Kensington that there was tendency to identify worklessness among other residents as an '*individualistic and behavioural'* (Peck and Theodore, 2000: 729) problem. The difference in West Kensington may be explained by the lower overall level of worklessness in the area which means both that there are fewer visible signs of worklessness. There are also fewer workless interviewees in the West Kensington sample relative to other cases study neighbourhoods so perhaps, by extension, fewer individuals in this group who felt compelled to legitimise their status. It may also be linked to the tendency of interviewees of West Kensington to express uncertainty about the working status of other residents, as observed on page 42. This uncertainty may, in turn, stem from the more limited degree of involvement with, and therefore knowledge of, neighbours relative to some of the other case study neighbourhoods that was observed in a companion working paper on *'Family, Friends and Neighbours'* (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). West Kensington clearly stood out as the neighbourhood where interviewees had the least inclination to engage with other residents.

These findings also prompt reflections on broader conceptualisations of worklessness. The discourses of policymakers around a '*culture of worklessness*' (HM, 2003) or, in the words of the Chancellor George Osborne, welfare as a '*lifestyle choice'* (Parker, 2010), certainly appear to be reproduced among residents in deprived neighbourhoods. It is also interesting to compare these tendencies with the narratives of economic decline outlined in section 4.2. Whilst residents were aware of, and concerned by, structural economic change, this rarely translated into sympathetic accounts of the predicament of the workless. Where exceptions were made, these tended to relate to workless family or neighbours with whom interviewees were personally acquainted or, in a minority of cases, perceptions among older people that young people were likely to suffer unduly from the impact of the recession. Otherwise, an inability to secure work was discussed within moral frameworks that personalised and, at times, pathologised a lack of work as stemming from flawed orientations to work.

There were a few notable exceptions such as in Amlwch, for example, where one individual linked undesirable behaviour to a lack of economic opportunity for young people. A resident working as a midday supervisor at a local school observed that:

> *No it's changed, it really has changed round here now, the drugs, and it's not just people from out of town, it's locals as well. They've got no jobs to go to, nothing like that so what they do is turn to the drugs.*
> (Polly, Amlwch, 35-44, works part-time)

It was rare, however, that residents made such a link between economic conditions, worklessness and undesirable behaviour. This apparent disconnect between perceptions of broader economic conditions and conceptualisations of the behaviour and moral character of those without work perhaps reflects the tendency highlighted by Bourdieu (1984: 156) for structural phenomenon to shift from the *'social terrain of critique and crisis to the personal terrain of critique and crisis'.* Certainly, there is a sense in which understandings of economic change and perceptions of worklessness at the neighbourhood level operate within different frameworks of

explanation. Whilst residents often framed the trajectory of neighbourhood within ‘narratives of decline’, a failure to find work was still considered a personal shortcoming rather than the unfortunate consequence of any subsequent squeeze on economic opportunity.

6.3 Unpaid activities outside the labour market

The discussion in the section above indicates how those without paid employment were often subject to critique and condemnation. This sometimes prompted those without work to seek to legitimise their status with reference to the ‘deservingness’ of their entitlement to benefits. It was also notable, however, that some residents across the six neighbourhoods engaged in activities outside the labour market including parenting, caring and volunteering did not seem to engage in these processes of disassociation. These activities were often described as a source of meaning and identity and, perhaps significantly, also presented as socially valuable in terms of benefiting other household members or, more broadly, wider communities.

This included full-time mothers who asserted the importance of their parenting responsibilities:

> *I just* [worked] *when I was a teenager because I had three in the family and I was at that age when I used to stay at home and look after them. They don’t do that now do they, they have to go to work some of them. It’s a shame really cos I think that’s what’s happened to all the children…, they haven’t got that care from an early age, a mother there all the time to learn them right and wrong.*
> (Cherry, Wensley Fold, 45-64, retired due to ill-health)

> Interviewer: *Are your intentions to work?*

> Sabina: *No not at the moment. I want to look after my little child which is 18 months now, I want to bring him up nicely and once he’s responsible for his own things I will want to work. … In my family none of my sisters are working right now, my brother in laws are all working.*
> (Sabina, female, Wensley Fold, 30-34, looking after children full-time)

> [We are] *looking after the children at home. I don’t think Asian families are really comfortable with child care facilities, unless it’s a genuine modern girl, like my daughter when she’s older, maybe she would take advantage of that kind of facility but generally no, I think because their husband’s bringing in the income anyway and if they’ve got a family business they’ve got no worries really have they, and generally it’s all men that work in that business anyway.*
> (Nusrat, female, Wensley Fold, 35-44, looking after children full-time)

In the first two cases, mothers assert the importance of being at home to bring up children and to teach them appropriate values and standards of behaviour. The final two examples also indicate that parenting can be explained with reference to a gendered division of labour within households where mothers look after children whilst fathers generate income through paid employment. Bringing up children in a household supported by one earner appeared to confer a sense of respectability and purpose. The third interviewee also suggested that cultural preferences that favoured looking after their own children over formal child care also accounted for decisions to remain at home. Thus various combinations of moral, economic and cultural factors seemed to enable these women to legitimise their non-working status. They were able to draw on positive identities that were not always available, for example, in the case of some of residents claiming benefits profiled in section 6.2.

Caring for other family members was also cited as a form of valued activity. One older man in Wensley Fold who has not worked since 1979 for health reasons described how, in the absence of work, he supported his wife who had a number of health conditions:

> *I'm that busy doing, looking after the wife, me friend helps out, doing work on the house, cleaning, cooking, the general…She has mental problems, she has, she's been diagnosed as having schizophrenia but she suffers more from depression and she has illnesses like now with her legs, she's got that psoriasis on her legs and it's bandaged up.*
> (Arthur, Wensley Fold, 45-64, unable to work because of ill-health)

The emphasis here on being 'busy' underlines the vocation-like quality of caring for his wife and carrying out domestic chores. Again, it implicitly confers a legitimacy to this activity.

Another full-time carer for a disabled partner in Oxgangs even expressed a view that the benefits of being a carer outweighed those of paid employment:

> *I had a nervous breakdown, I met* [my husband] *in hospital, and we sort of just got together and I had taken early severance from the office and I became his full time carer. I actual feel more confident doing that than I ever did in the office really, I feel I'm needed, he couldn't do without me …I enjoy looking after him as well because I'm a career type of person anyway, but I don't really miss work*.
> (Maureen, Oxgangs, 45-64, retired)

This illustrates how work undertaken outside the labour market can provide both self-esteem and a sense of purpose comparable, or even superior, to the satisfactions to be gained from paid employment.

Volunteering was another form of activity undertaken in the absence of work that also seemed to provide a sense of purpose as well as a way of fulfilling broader responsibilities. Ahmed, a Sudanese refugee in West Kensington and carer for his sick mother explained the benefits derived from his volunteer positions with a local hospital and charity:

> *I am full time carer but in order to feed myself as a human and provide something to my society I am not living just for my mother, I have two days per week to four days ,one day I go* [to a hospital] *and work as volunteer there.., and I work also as volunteer in my culture in the church, if the church need anything. In any occasion related to the church the bishop will call me in order to come and serve in this occasion because I am professional at take photo. I feel that I am providing something to my society, I'm not completely isolated*.
> [Ahmed 45-64, West Kensington, full-time carer for his mother]

These volunteer activities clearly provide Ahmed with valued social contact whilst also instilling him with a sense of purpose and of making a contribution to society more broadly. This echoes the findings of other research that found that volunteering can be perceived as a way of making a contribution to society for those unable to take up paid employment (Orr *et al,* 2006)

Similarly, a young mother in Wensley Fold about to enrol on a course to qualify her to teach in a primary school explained the genuine satisfaction she derived from her volunteer activities:

Love it, reading with young kids. And I also work at a drug and alcohol organisation down the road…I just wanted to go and see the different aspects of people's lives that I've never had to encounter and I did and I love it, I really do love it. If I do get offered a job down there before I finish my college thing I'd take the job and I'd rather that than go into that than teaching… I feel like I give them something at the end of it, I'm not just going to work.
(Tracey, Wensley Fold , 25-29, looking after family full-time)

Another interviewee who helps organise activities at a day centre in Oxgangs also identified this activity as providing both a sense of pride and achievement:

I go up to the local Fir Hill day centre and I'm a member of the organising committee for that and I'm quite proud about being able to contribute to that committee and meetings, I'm quite good at that.
(Mary, Oxgangs 45-64, unable to work due to ill-health)

Other benefits identified by volunteers in Wensley Fold and Oxgangs included the opportunities for social contact provided:

We have so much social contact that church that to be quite honest at the end of the day you want to lock yourself in an attic somewhere and have some quiet time on your own with no other people around because you are moving in a circle where you have to interact all the time with various people on various levels. You don't miss going to work for the social bit because you've *got all that in that field*.
(Kimberley, Wensley Fold, 35-44, looking after family full-time, volunteers at local church)

I'm on the tenants committee and the management committee for here as well, so I get more involved but I think it's a lot better and you meet other people.
(Felicity, Oxgangs, 35-44, works full-time)

All of the quotes above indicate that a high degree of meaning and satisfaction can be derived in unpaid activities such a parenting, caring and volunteering. The fact that many of these interviewees are not in paid employment also corroborates other research that highlights the value of unpaid activities for those outside the labour market (Parry, 2003; Orr *et al,* 2006).

It is important to observe that there are differences in the extent of engagement in unpaid activities across the case study neighbourhoods neighbourhoods. Volunteering, for example, was more prevalent in Amlwch, Oxgangs and Wensley Fold whilst, at the other end of the scale, notably absent in West Marsh. One potential explanation is that West Marsh's local facilities and public spaces are relatively limited compared with the other neighbourhood's more extensive neighbourhood-based infrastructure, as described in more detail in a companion working paper on '*Third Spaces'* (Hickman, 2009). This may mean that there are fewer opportunities to volunteer. One implication of this is that the experience of worklessness may well be mediated by the extent of opportunities to engage in meaningful activity outside the labour market within in near particular places.

These findings on activities outside the labour market have three implications. Firstly, they indicate that such activities can enable individuals not in paid employment to construct alternative identities that confer self-respect. Moreover, it is observable that individuals with a high degree of involvement in unpaid activities appeared less inclined to try and dissociate themselves from the 'undeserving' workless in the ways identified in section 6.2. This may indicate that, at least from their own perspective, there is less sense of stigma attached to being out of work because they are

engaged in socially valuable activity. One caveat is that the information collected for this study did not include evidence on how interviewees viewed the unpaid activities of others around them. It is not possible to comment, therefore, on whether engagement in unpaid work 'exempts' individuals from the sort of critique subjected at those deemed to be undeserving of the benefits they claim, as highlighted in section 6.2 above.

Secondly, these findings underline that paid employment is not only the only form of valued activity performed by individuals living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. As Parry's (2003) research among ex-miners and their families suggests, such activities can provide important sources of esteem, identity and social contact for men and women, particularly when compared with the potential benefits of paid work. Whilst this study does highlight a number of number of benefits associated with paid employment (see section 5.2), it is also clear that this is often tempered by the poor terms and conditions sometimes attached to such work. By contrast, unpaid activities and, in particular volunteering, appear to confer a rich and sometimes unmitigated source of satisfaction for those individuals directly involved. This challenges policy assertions about the primacy of *paid* work as a form of social inclusion (for a critique of this position see Levitas, 2005) Moreover, this indicates that worklessness is not always detrimental to health and well-being in the way that much of the policy and academic literature suggests (Jahoda, 1981; Marsden, 1982; DWP, 2008). This is not to deny the potentially corrosive effect of being out of work on individuals but simply to highlight the potential for alternative activities to provide meaningful and valued activity in its absence.

Thirdly, it highlights the need for studies of poverty or disadvantaged neighbourhoods to consider the full spectrum of activities that could be conceived of as work, as captured in Glucksmann's (2009) concept of the Total Social Organisation of Labour. This holds that work can be undertaken in range of contexts across a *'spectrum of socio-economic modes (market, state, not-for-profit, household, community and so on)*' (ibid. ,886). A narrow focus on paid employment, or its absence, may well neglect the creative and meaningful ways in which individuals on low incomes organise their lives outside the labour market.

6.4 Summary

This section has shown that the research participants' awareness of the employment status of other residents was limited, perhaps reflecting the lack of shared experiences of work within the six neighbourhoods. It could also be explained by declining levels of social interactions and growing ambivalence towards neighbours, particularly in West Kensington, observed in a companion JRF report on *'Family, Friends and Neighbours'* (Crisp and Robinson, 2010). Neighbours who do not interact much are not likely to know a great deal about the employment status of fellow residents. Nonetheless, there was a discernible tendency to generalise more about the number of residents out of work than those in employment. Moreover, these generalisations often contained implicit or explicit moral judgements about the character of others and these were sometimes predicated on observations of public behaviour deemed unacceptable. This suggests that conceptualisations of worklessness may perform a symbolic role in capturing fears and concerns about undesirable social practices within the neighbourhood.

Whilst *experiences* of work did not appear to contribute to the formation of collective, place-based identities, *orientations* to work did play an important function in providing a marker around which social distinctions within the neighbourhood were constructed. Both those in work and those out of work sought to disassociate themselves from others deemed to have a cultural aversion to work. Such

distinctions between '*rough'* and '*respectable'* residents have a long pedigree in working-class neighbourhoods (Watt, 2006). It was striking, however, that these distinctions were made almost exclusively using moral or social criteria based on perceived attitudes to work. Individuals were primarily concerned with distancing themselves from the behaviours and attitudes associated with worklessness than asserting differences in occupational status or income. Perhaps, as Watt (2006: 794) suggests from his study of a North London neighbourhood, this highlights the way in which the growing precariousness of employment has reduced the material grounds on which such distinctions were traditionally constructed:

> *The paradoxical result that expressing a social distinction between themselves and the low-status others around them, via emphasizing their own respectability, has become increasingly 'necessary' within the contemporary working-class habitus at the same time that the material basis for such a distinction has markedly narrowed.* (Watt, 2006: 794)

It could be argued, therefore, that employment still functions as signifier of social difference but more on the basis of cultural orientations to work than the financial rewards it confers.

Whilst most of those out of work often feel themselves subject to critique from others, some individuals engaged in unpaid activities such as parenting, caring and volunteering appear to have constructed identities outside of the labour market that, from their perspective, confer legitimacy and respect. Moreover, the benefits associated with these activities, especially volunteering, equal or even outweigh those delivered by work. This destabilises distinctions made between the positive impact of paid work on well-being and the negative effects of worklessness. At the same time, it highlights the need to study a broad range of activities in understanding work. Paid employment is only part of the story.

Two final observations can be made about the findings in this section. Firstly, place continues to matter in the construction of identities around work. This is not because residents share experiences of work or are necessarily even aware of what exactly their neighbours do. Rather, place remains important because employment status or orientations to work take on particular symbolic significance where stigmatising discourses around worklessness are most powerful and pervasive. Furthermore, there does seem to be some relationship between the potency of these discourses and actual levels of worklessness. It is notable, for example, that the propensity to dissociate from other residents on this basis was highest in Wensley Fold and lowest in West Kensington, in broad relation to actual levels of worklessness. This suggests that individuals in the most hard-pressed places may feel the greatest need to make social distinctions around orientations to work. It also shows that economic decline does not appear to have reduced the cultural or symbolic salience of work in neighbourhoods with high levels of worklessness.

Secondly, whilst residents do not tend to make comparative judgements about work in relation to those with more income or higher occupational status, there is a countervailing tendency to distinguish themselves from those deemed to occupy inferior positions. In the first instance, this seems to indicate that individuals on a low income, whether in or out of work, do not experience the weight of relative judgement from above in terms of the perceptions of higher earners or those with more cultural and social capital. Nonetheless, it must also be remembered that processes of creating social distinctions across the six neighbourhoods often involve the use of discourses that closely align with representations of poverty and worklessness made by both policymakers and the media (see Levitas, 2005; Smith, 2005). Official claims regarding '*culture*[s] *of worklessness*' (HM, 2003) or, in the words of the Chancellor George Osborne, welfare as a '*lifestyle choice'* (Parker, 2010) are mirrored in the

way worklessness is discussed by some residents in this study. The judgment of more powerful others is perhaps, therefore, implicit in attempts to put distance between others considered less deserving. This is not to suggest, however, that residents are merely drawing on narratives that originate elsewhere. The relationship may be more symbiotic, with official, media and popular discourses serving to reaffirm the legitimacy of each other

7

7. Conclusion

This working paper set out to explore the relationship between work, place and identity in six low-income neighbourhoods in Britain. It aimed to identify perceptions of economic opportunity, experiences of work and to understand if, and how, work functioned as a mechanism for constructing social distinctions. The paper located these this research objectives within broader debates about the salience of work in areas experiencing economic decline (McDowell, 2001) as well as characterisations of work in the lower end of the labour market.

The findings highlighted personal difficulties in finding work as well as a more profound sense of loss centred on the perceived decline of key sources of employment in all neighbourhoods except West Kensington and Oxgangs. This is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it shows how economic trajectories shape the perceived character of neighbourhoods. Processes of decline are deeply embedded in residents' understandings of the places where they live. Secondly, these findings also illustrate a strong feeling that worklessness is a demand-side problem contrary to the supply-side emphasis within official explanations of work, although this did not necessarily translate into sympathy for the workless.

Thirdly, it suggests that residents' understandings of change echo the narratives of theorists such as Beck (2000) and Bauman (1998) insofar as they emphasise the corrosive effects of decline of male-dominated, workplaces on the social fabric of those neighbourhoods affected. This also mirrors other empirical research on how the perceptions of residents and identity of neighbourhoods tend to be shaped by historical patterns of *male* employment (Watt, 2006; Robertson *et al*, 2008). By contrast, there was little discussion of changing employment opportunities for women, despite the growing participation of this group in the labour market (McDowell, 2001). One implication is that processes of recovery, as and when they occur, may take longer to embed themselves in conceptions of neighbourhoods, especially if growth does not occur in a narrow range of male-dominated industries or workplaces. The newly-employed female carer working in a nursing home perhaps does not have the same collective resonance as the marginalised male factory worker.

This research also highlighted that work could have a negative impact upon financial and emotional well-being through combinations of low pay, long and unsocial hours and job insecurity. Such employment can also generate stress and tensions for the individuals directly concerned and other household members. Whilst these findings corroborate many of the negative portrayals of low-skilled, low-paid work within academic debates (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; Charlesworth, 2000; Smith, 2005), it is also the case that these forms of employment could also confer a number of valued benefits. These included financial independence, social contact, a sense of purpose, a feeling of 'making a difference' and social status. This suggests the importance of providing a more nuanced portrayal of work at the lower end of the labour market given its capacity to both impact negatively on well-being whilst delivering a number of important benefits. This is not to endorse simplistic claims about the value and importance of work made by policymakers (see DWP, 2008) but to suggest individuals can invest meaning and significance in employment *in spite* of otherwise onerous terms and conditions.

The findings also identified a gendered dimension to the benefits associated with paid work. Some women placed importance on the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities beyond domestic roles that were experienced as restrictive, unfulfilling or monotonous. Such accounts perhaps challenge the linear narratives of economic decline centred on contraction with male-dominated industries that fail to account for how the growth of female employment has changed women's experience of work (McDowell, 2001). This is not to deny the powerful and often corrosive impact of long-term economic restructuring but, rather, to suggest that it is not necessarily uni-directional nor even in its effects on different groups in the labour market. The benefits of paid employment identified by some female interviewees indicates there are countervailing trends to some of the pervasive narratives of decline.

Finally, the evidence presented indicated that residents tended to have limited awareness of the precise employment status of neighbours, although this was sometimes inferred from observable daily routines. This lends weight to Dean's (2007) observation that low-income neighbourhoods do not support shared experiences of work. Nonetheless, work continued to exert a powerful hold because of the symbolic and cultural associations made between worklessness and socially unacceptable behaviours. In this context, disassociation from others on the basis of employment status or orientation to work appeared to play an important function in asserting moral and social distance from groups deemed undesirable within neighbourhoods. It could be argued, therefore, that employment still functions as signifier of social difference but more on the basis of cultural orientations to work than the financial rewards or status it confers.

Whist some worklessness individuals clearly felt the weight of moral judgements, other residents engaged in unpaid activities outside the labour market appeared to have constructed identities that, at least from their perspective, conferred legitimacy and respect. These activities also delivered a number of benefits including a sense of purpose, social contact and a feeling of 'making a difference' to the wider community or society as whole. Moreover, the benefits associated with particular forms of activity, especially volunteering, sometimes seemed to equal or even outweigh those delivered by paid work. This challenges distinctions made by policy makers and academics between the positive impact of paid work on well-being and the negative effects of worklessness (DWP, 2008; Jahoda 1933/72). At the same time, it highlights the need to study a broad range of activities in understanding work and its relation to poverty and place-based disadvantage. Debates about the economic link between worklessness, paid work and poverty are clearly important but could perhaps benefit from a concurrent focus on the potential for other forms of unpaid activity to alleviate some of the social consequences of poverty.

These findings also have important policy ramifications. The evidence suggests there could be value in ensuring that individuals have the maximum opportunity to engage in unpaid activities in the absence of employment given the benefits it delivers. In this respect, the government has outlined a commitment to *'foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action'* (Cameron, 2010) within its vision of a 'Big Society'. The question remains, however, whether that commitment includes a willingness to countenance the idea of unpaid activity as a legitimate alternative to work.

Encouragingly, the Coalition government have expressed interest in the notion of a Community Allowance put forward by a group of organisations known collectively as the Create Consortium. The Community Allowance would be paid on top of benefits to enable workless individuals to undertake 'community work' in their local area. The Allowance would be funded directly by government or by local organisations looking to recruit someone to undertake work of some benefit to a particular community.

Whilst it is ultimately envisaged as a way of improving confidence and employability as a route back into employment rather than a genuine alternative to paid work, it nonetheless offers a way of supporting individuals to perform vital work in their communities. Clearly, the proposal does raise new issues such as the impact this might have on existing unpaid activity such as volunteering if paid alternatives become available. Nonetheless, it does at least open up an important debate on how workless individuals in disadvantaged areas might be encouraged to engage in socially valuable activity that deliver benefits both to themselves and to others living in the wider area.

Overall, this paper has shown that experiences of work and the relationship between work, place and identity are complex and nuanced. No single narrative would appear to capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives of work, especially when unpaid work is also taken into account. Whilst work undoubtedly continues to matter for residents in low-income neighbourhoods neighbours, it clearly matters in different ways according to range of a variables including age, gender, employment status. Moreover, place plays a particularly important role in shaping the relationship between work and identity. Experiences of employment in particular workplaces may no longer be a common reference point but perceived orientations to work remain key markers of social distinction. That these distinctions seem more pronounced in neighbourhoods such as West Marsh and Wensley Fold suggests that place plays an important role in shaping the extent to which the workless are subject to critique and condemnation.

As a final observation, it is important to highlight that the ways in which work is sought and secured, and the processes by which employment status or orientations to work provide the basis for esteem or identity, often require *active* management of the self. Economic change and the restructuring of employment opportunity are not simply processes which determine the outcomes for individuals living in the areas affected. They are, rather, the context in which individuals seek, negotiate and manage the economic opportunities or constraints they face. The extent to which they will continue to be able to do this may be constrained, however, if the predicted rises in worklessness in the wake of ‘austerity’ cuts materialise. Some of these areas have never fully recovered from the shocks of past recessions. Protracted economic decline in the near future may test the limits of residents’ capacity to navigate turbulent labour markets.

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Appendix 1: Case Study Profiles

Hillside, Knowsley

The Hillside case study is made up of two adjoining neighbourhoods, Hillside and Primalt. Primalt is the formal name given to the area for planning purposes and by the NDC partnership, but the whole area is generally known by residents as Hillside, and this is as the term for the case study area in the rest of this report. The neighbourhoods make up one-third of North Huyton New Deal for Communities (NDC) intervention area (the other areas are Finch House, Fincham, Woolfall North and Woolfall South).

These two neighbourhoods, and the wider NDC area, form a part of the collection of inter-war and post-war municipal housing estates that were developed as 'overspill' from the City of Liverpool slum clearance programmes and the expansion of the Liverpool Docks. The majority of dwellings are two storey semi-detached and terraced family houses arranged in traditional street patterns. Households in the case study area are predominantly White, with just one per cent of residents from a minority ethnic background, according to the 2001 Census.

Analysis from the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for the two lower super output areas (LSOAs) that approximate most closely to Hillside show that the area is in the most deprived decile on four of the seven domains: income, employment, health, and education, skills and training; it is in the second most deprived decile on 'crime' and 'living environment', and the third lowest decile on 'barriers to housing and services'. The ONS statistics on population turnover for 2005/6 showed a rate of 50 per 1,000 (compared to a median turnover rate for Medium SOAs in England and Wales of 78 per 1,000).

The age profile of the area according to 2006 mid year estimates broadly matches the wider local authority and national picture, with a slightly higher proportion of young people under the age of 16. In the 2001 census, 25 per cent of households were classified as lone parent (compared to 19 per cent in Knowsley and 10 per cent in England) and 53 per cent lived in social housing (compared to 32 per cent and 19 per cent respectively). In February 2008, 6.4 per cent of the working age population in the area was claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) (compared to 4.2 per cent in Knowsley and 2.2 per cent in England) and 19 per cent were claiming Incapacity Benefit (IB)/Severe Disability Allowance (SDA) (compared to 13.6 per cent and 6.8 per cent respectively).

Hillside is bounded by the M57, a dual carriageway (Seth Powell Way) and a park (Alt Park) and is one of the more isolated areas in the wider neighbourhood. In recent years void properties have been a significant problem in the housing stock, with many empty properties declared structurally unstable and dangerous. The sense of isolation has been reinforced by the demolition of a considerable proportion of the housing stock, leaving many unused open spaces that have yet to be developed as part of the masterplan for the area.

New development to replace demolished dwellings has recently been suspended, as a consequence of the economic downturn. The area has few public buildings and amenities, and one of the last remaining post offices in the area closed last year.

Beechwood Primary School, which was one of three primary schools in the North Huyton area, has also recently closed down. The one public building in Hillside, the 'Hillywood' Community Centre, is well used by a range of local groups, residents and stakeholders. It is staffed by two paid community workers and a small band of dedicated volunteers.

The Primalt area comprises 648 units of accommodation including a renovated tower block known as Knowsley Heights. There are around sixty owner-occupied properties in the area. There are problems with anti-social behaviour in parts of the estate, and environmental problems, although one area, Pennard Field, is seen as a potential amenity for the whole community. There are no other public amenities in the Primalt area.

Oxgangs, Edinburgh

Oxgangs is a suburb of Edinburgh, located in the south-west of the city. It is named after an 'oxgang', an ancient Scottish land measure. The development of the area started in the early 1950s; it had previously been mostly farmland and was considered part of the countryside on the fringe of the city. The area consists of large housing schemes, ranging from Edinburgh City Council-owned high rise tower blocks to private bungalows. A large proportion of former council-owned properties in Oxgangs have been bought by tenants under the Right to Buy scheme, and there is now a high demand for what remains of the council housing stock in the area.

An analysis of the LSOAs for Oxgangs in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) for 2007 shows that the area is in the third most deprived decile overall, and is classed in this decile for income, health and crime. It is in the second most deprived decile in terms of education, skills and training and housing, in the fourth most deprived decile for employment, and the fifth for geographic access. The age profile of the area in the 2006 mid-year estimates is broadly similar to the city and national picture, with a slightly higher proportion of older residents (21 per cent, compared to 17 per cent for Edinburgh and 19 per cent for Scotland). There was a relatively high proportion of lone parent households in the areas (14 per cent compared to 8 per cent in Edinburgh and 11 per cent in Scotland) and of households in the social housing sector (46 per cent compared to 18 per cent and 29 per cent respectively).

As of November 2007, 2.6 per cent of the working age population in Oxgangs was claiming JSA (compared to 1.6 per cent in Edinburgh and 2.1 in Scotland) and 14.7 per cent were claiming IB/SDA (compared to 7.2 per cent and 9.4 per cent respectively).

The neighbourhood is well served by a variety of shops, amenities and public facilities. It has two small shopping areas at each end of Oxgangs known to the locals as the 'top' and 'bottom' shops. The top shops (Oxgangs Broadway) are the larger and feature a small convenient store known as 'Denis's', named after the owner of the shop. Other shops in the top area include a newsagents, a hairdressers, and three take-aways.
There is also a post office and a pharmacy.

The local library is a popular hub of the community, and is regularly used for meetings and classes as well as for its wide range of books and IT facilities. Oxgangs has three primary schools, as well as a nearby high school with a very good reputation locally and further afield. Two neighbouring primary schools situated on Oxgangs Green (Comiston and Hunters Tryst) were recently merged and renamed Pentland Primary. Local churches in the area include: Church of Scotland,

Scottish Episcopal Church, a Roman Catholic Church and a recently built Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 2003 Edinburgh City Council (in consultation with tenants) took the decision to demolish and redevelop Oxgangs high rise flats, originally known as Comiston Luxury Flats. In April 2005 the long-standing tower block, Capelaw Court, was demolished to make way for new housing. Capelaw was one of three high rise flats built in Oxgangs Crescent in 1961 and 1962. The other two buildings (Caerketton Court and Allermuir Court) were then demolished in November 2006. The new homes, built on the site of the high rises, were designed in consultation with local people, and provide a mixture of dwellings, including provision for the elderly and the disabled. The scheme reflected a local desire for 'low rise' housing, coupled with the need to achieve relatively high dwelling densities in the face of high housing demand. However, some local residents have expressed reluctance about moving into the newly available accommodation because of its location and lay-out.

Wensley Fold, Blackburn

Wensley Fold is a neighbourhood of Blackburn, a Lancashire town with a population of some 100,000 in 2001, and the administrative centre of the unitary authority of Blackburn and Darwen (population 137,000 in 2001). The neighbourhood is located immediately west of Blackburn town centre. It is bounded to the North by the A677 Preston New Road, to the South by a mixed use retail and industrial area and to the West by a large park. The area has a population of approximately 3,000, occupies a hillside situation and is characterised by rows of parallel terraced houses organised in a compressed grid pattern. Recently, the area has been subject to redevelopment, as part of the Pennine Lancashire Housing Market Renewal programme, with a number of terraces being demolished and replaced by new-build terrace properties, with more space between each row allowing for gardens and back yards to be developed.

Blackburn has a long history of immigration, particularly from India and Pakistan, and one in five (21 per cent) of the population in the town were recorded as of South Asian ethnic origin by the 2001 Census. In the study area, more than half of the local population were recorded as having a non-White ethnic origin by the 2001 Census, and 51 per cent were recorded as of South Asian ethnic origin. The LSOAs that were combined to create an area almost equivalent to the case-study neighbourhood were in the most deprived decile on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2007. The area was in the most deprived decile on six of the seven domains measured by the IMD: income, employment, health and disability, education, skills and training, and living environment. In contrast, the area was in the least deprived decile in the 'barriers to housing and services' domain, reflecting its proximity to the town centre.

According to the 2006 mid year population estimates, the neighbourhood has a young age profile. A relatively large proportion of the population are children less than 16 years old (29 per cent, compared to 24 per cent in the local authority district and 19 per cent in England) and only 11 per cent are men over 65 years old or women over 60 years old (compared to 19 per cent nationally). The 2001 Census recorded a relatively large proportion of single person households (41 per cent) and households containing dependent children (39 per cent). The neighbourhood has relatively large social rented (30 per cent) and private rented (16 per cent) sectors, according to the 2001 Census. Only half (50 per cent) of the households live in owner occupied accommodation, compared to 71 per cent of households in the district and 69 per cent of all households in England.

A relatively high proportion of the local population were in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disability Allowance in February 2008. The proportion of people in receipt of the latter was almost treble the national level (18.8 per cent in the case study neighbourhood, compared to 11.6 per cent across the district and 6.8 per cent across England).
The area has a vibrant local shopping centre, with local shops specialising in South Asian produce. There are also a number of major supermarket stores on the edge of the area and the town centre is within walking distance. Local community resources include a community centre that runs various training, educational and social activities targeted at the whole population, as well as places of worship and parks.

West Marsh, Grimsby

West Marsh is a neighbourhood of Grimsby, the largest town in the district of North East Lincolnshire, with a population of about 90,000. Grimsby has a long history as a fishing port and nearby Immingham is a major container port. Other major employers in the district include the chemical and food processing industries.

West Marsh is located immediately adjacent to the town centre and also close to the A180, the main route into the town from the west. A major feature of the area is the River Freshney, which runs west to east through the neighbourhood. On the north side of the River is a park. Together, these two physical features divide the neighbourhood into two distinct areas. North of the River and West of the park is an area often to referred to locally as 'Gilby'. Centred on Gilby Road, this area is relatively isolated, and consists of three parallel no-through-roads, criss-crossed by six parallel no-through-roads. South of the river is an area that many local people refer to as 'West Marsh', which is characterised by parallel roads of terraced houses.

The population of the LSOAs that are almost equivalent to the study area was just over 3,000, according to the 2006 mid-year estimate. Almost two-thirds (64 per cent) were of working age and 23 per cent were less than 16 years old. The area has a relatively small older population (13 per cent of the population, compared to 20 per cent in North east Lincolnshire and 19 per cent in England). According to the 2001 Census, a relatively small proportion of households are couples, with or without children (46 per cent, compared to 57 per cent in the district and 57 per cent across England). 17 per cent of households are lone parent families, compared to 12 per cent in the district and 10 per cent in England.

The area is relatively deprived, falling within the most deprived decile of lower super output areas in England. The area is placed in the lowest decile in relation to education skills and training, crime and the living environment on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). It is in the second lowest decile in terms of income, employment and health. In February 2008, 15.7 per cent of the working age population were in receipt of JSA or IB/SDA, compared to 11.1 per cent of people of working age in North Lincolnshire and 9.0 per cent in England.

The neighbourhood, like the wider district, is ethnically homogenous. According to the 2001 Census, 98 per cent of the population of the neighbourhood and the district were White British or Irish, one per cent were White Other and one per cent were Mixed Heritage. The study team did come across anecdotal evidence, however, that migrant workers from the EU accession states had arrived into Grimsby in recent years, with some people settling in West Marsh, although the scale of new immigration is unclear.

Terraced housing is the dominant built form in the neighbourhood. Many of these properties have no garden or curtilege at the front, the front door opening straight

onto the street. A relatively large proportion of the housing stock is privately rented (20 per cent, double the district and national average), while the proportion in the owner occupied sector (64 per cent) is below the proportion in North East Lincolnshire (72 per cent) and England (69 per cent).

There are a limited number of community facilities in the neighbourhood and several shops are shut and boarded up. There is, however, a community centre on the northern fringe of the area, which provides various courses, classes and groups, including youth activities. Shortly before the study team visited the area for the first stage interviews a local man had been stabbed to death in the area. At the time of the visit, the police investigation was ongoing and police divers were combing the River Freshney for evidence.

West Kensington, London

The West Kensington case study area is located in west London, in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The area is located within walking distance of Earls Court Exhibition Centre and a number of London Underground stations including West Kensington, West Brompton, and Earls Court. The area is surrounded by several high status neighbourhoods including Chelsea, Baron's Court and Kensington.

The case study area, which comprises 1,800 properties in two social housing estates, West Kensington and Gibbs Green, forms part of a larger neighbourhood which most locals refer to as 'West Kensington.' The neighbourhood is centred on the intersection between North End and Lillie Roads, where most of the area's numerous shops, pubs and cafes are located. The area also has a bustling (semi-permanent) market which is located on Lillie Road. The West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates are located in the north of the neighbourhood on the eastern side of North End Road. Reflecting the diversity of the wider West Kensington area, the neighbourhood is a mixed income area and contains many households with above average incomes. In some parts of the area, property prices are very high, with some selling recently for more than £1.5 million.

The LSOAs for the area do not match the case study exactly, but are close enough to indicate the profile of deprivation in the locality. In terms of the IMD 2007, the areas were in the lowest decile for income and living environment, in the second lowest overall and in terms of employment, health and barriers to housing and services, and the third lowest for crime. It was however (just) in the least deprived half of LSOAs in terms of education, training and skills. In terms of the age profile, there is a slightly higher proportion of younger residents under 16 (20 per cent) than in the borough (16 per cent) or nationally (19 per cent) and a lower proportion of older residents (12 per cent) than in England (19 per cent). According to the 2001 Census, 23 per cent of households are lone parents, compared to 12 per cent in Hammersmith and Fulham and 10 per cent in England, and 11 per cent are multi-person households, compared to 13 per cent in the borough and just three per cent nationally.

65 per cent of households were described as 'white' or 'white other' in the area (78 per cent in Hammersmith and Fulham and 91 per cent in England) and 21 per cent described themselves as 'black' (compared to 11 per cent and 3 per cent respectively). The black and minority ethnic population includes members of Afro-Caribbean, West African and Somali communities. 57 per cent of households on the estates were in the social housing sector, compared to 33 per cent in the borough and 19 per cent nationally, and just 25 per cent were owner-occupiers (compared to 44 per cent and 69 per cent respectively).

The study area is covered by the North Fulham New Deal for Communities programme, and social housing units on the West Kensington and Gibbs Green estates are being modernised as part of this initiative. The West Kensington estate comprises approximately 1,000 units and was built in the early 1970s. It is a mixed development comprising five tower blocks, low rise flats, maisonettes and some terraced houses. The Gibbs Green estate comprises some 160 flats and maisonettes, built in the late 1950s/ early 1960s. The properties are set out in six four storey blocks and one eight storey block, which is due to be replaced by low rise housing and a communal hall under redevelopment proposals.

Amlwch, Anglesey

Amlwch is a small town located on the northern tip of Anglesey in Wales. It is the fourth biggest settlement on the island and has a population of 1,400. It is relatively isolated geographically and the nearest towns to it are Llangefni (13 miles away) and Holyhead (20 miles). Amlwch comprises distinct neighbourhoods, including Amlwch Port, which was once a thriving port, Amlwch town itself, where most shops and services are based, and Craig-y-don, a small local authority housing estate located between Amlwch and Amlwch Port. The residential areas contain a mixture of property types, although most of the stock consists of houses of traditional construction.

The town was once of the main centres of industry in Wales. It had one of the world's largest copper mountains (Parys Mountain), was once a centre for ship building and repair, and the base for a chemical plant which extracted bromine from sea water. However, these industries have all closed and, despite the continuing economic value to the town of the nearby Wylfa nuclear power station, the town has been in economic decline for the past thirty years or so. As a relatively deprived area, there is some regeneration activity being undertaken in Amlwch, coordinated by the regeneration agency for Wales, *Communities First*.

The LSOAs selected do not match exactly the study area but they nevertheless provide reliable estimates of its socio-economic position. In terms of the Welsh IMD, Amlwch is in the second most deprived decile in terms of community safety, environment, access to services and housing, and in the third most deprived in terms of income and its overall ranking. It is in the fourth most deprived decile for employment, heath and education. It does not have as high a WIMD score as many of the communities in the South Wales valleys, but the reason for selecting the area was due to its greater geographical isolation and relative immobility, signified by a population turnover rate for mid 2005 to mid 2006 of 44 per 1,000 population (compared to a median of 78 per 1,000 for England and Wales).

In the 2006 MYE, the age profile was broadly similar to district and national averages with a slightly higher proportion of those under 16 (20 per cent compared to 18 per cent for Anglesey and 19 per cent for Wales). Slightly higher proportions of the population were lone parent (13 per cent) or single person (35 per cent) households than in Anglesey (11 per cent and 29 per cent) and in Wales (12 per cent and 29 per cent). 98 per cent of the population is of 'White British/Irish' population ethic origin (the same as for the district and one per cent higher than the national average).

In the 2001 Census, just over two-thirds (67 per cent) of households in Amlwch owned their homes (68 per cent in Anglesey and 71 per cent in Wales) and 18 per cent were in the social housing sector (compared to 17 per cent and 18 per cent respectively). In February 2008, 5.1 per cent of the working age population were JSA claimants (3.1 per cent in Anglesey and 6.6 per cent in Wales) and 12.3 per

cent were JSA/SDA claimants (compared to 9.5 per cent and 10.9 per cent respectively).

Many residents speak Welsh and it is the first language for some. In acknowledgment of this, residents were asked which language they would like to be interviewed in. Most did not have a preference, but two of the in-depth interviews undertaken by the research team were conducted in Welsh.