Adjacent Neighbourhood Effects:
Case Study Report on Knowsley and Oxgangs

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Key Findings

- In neither of the neighbourhoods did residents conceptualise themselves as living in comparative 'poverty' compared to either their local areas or wider society, although they did recognise differences in income levels.

- The neighbourhoods tended to be conceptualised in two ways. In Hillside/ Primalt, the neighbourhood was commonly perceived as 'the same as everywhere else'. In Oxgangs the neighbourhood was commonly perceived as being located within a hierarchy of neighbourhoods in which Oxgangs was seen as one of the better 'Council' estates in the city.

- This greater awareness of neighbourhood difference in Oxgangs was a function of the visible physical, economic and social differences of adjacent neighbourhoods but also the greater levels of personal mobility amongst residents, in terms of their daily lives within the locality but also their greater propensity to have lived elsewhere. It was also a function of local schools in Oxgangs provided sites of direct interaction between residents from different types of neighbourhood.

- Residents in both neighbourhoods perceived their area to have a particular reputation and image within the wider urban locality.

- Although residents in Oxgangs perceived some physical, financial and social distance between themselves and those living in surrounding neighbourhoods, they did not perceive any distance in terms of different forms of behaviour or values.

- Residents did not attribute any higher relative moral worth to those living in more affluent neighbourhoods but neither did they articulate any resentment against those living in more affluent areas.

- The different mechanisms through which residents conceptualised the status of their neighbourhoods suggests that we need a more complex and nuanced understanding of how perceived neighbourhood status impacts on self-esteem.

- Residents' conceptualisations of their neighbourhoods should not be regarded as deliberate 'coping strategies' as a response to stigmatisation or inequality. In general residents attached less importance to adjacent neighbourhoods than the comparative/relative paradigm within urban research often suggests.

Contents

1.   Introduction

This paper is based upon interviews with residents in two neighbourhoods: Hillside/Primalt in North Huyton, Knowsley (29 interviews) and Oxgangs in Edinburgh (31 interviews). These neighbourhoods were selected as a contrasting pair: Hillside/Primalt is surrounded by similarly deprived neighbourhoods in a relatively deprived local authority whilst Oxgangs is surrounded by more affluent areas within a relatively affluent city local authority. Further details about the two neighbourhoods are provided in Annex One. This paper analyses the interview data generated in the interviews to explore what perceptions residents have of their neighbourhoods in the context of the neighbourhoods adjacent to where they live, what differences, if any, there are between the two neighbourhoods and what impact, if any, these perceptions have on residents' lives. The paper seeks to contribute to debates about whether poverty is experienced as a relative and comparative phenomenon and therefore whether neighbourhood and personal satisfaction and self esteem is affected by perceptions of sameness, difference or inequality (see for example Burrows and Rhodes, 1998). The paper uses the interview data to explore these issues. The interviews were obviously more wide ranging and other key themes emerging from them will be analysed in future stages of the research. It should also be noted that this analysis focused upon neighbourhood status, interaction and self-esteem. Other dimensions of inter-neighbourhood effects, such as accessing employment opportunities, will also be covered in future analysis.

2.   Methodology

It is important to avoid the ecological fallacy of attributing characteristics and viewpoints to individuals based on the area where they reside. In interpreting the findings presented in this paper, the reader should bear in mind that the evidence is based on a small sample of residents who may not be representative of the neighbourhood as a whole and that there was considerable variation in the views expressed by residents living in the same neighbourhood. However, there were clear patterns and differences in the responses articulated by residents in the two neighbourhoods. Secondly, the sample of residents from Hillside/Primalt contained a relatively high proportion of young people aged under 25 and it would be expected that, as a factor of their age, they would have less experience of other areas and neighbourhoods and spend a higher proportion of their time within their own neighbourhood. Thirdly, although this paper focuses on the responses residents gave about their perceptions of adjacent neighbourhoods, this was only one element of their life experience and therefore we cannot attribute a weighting to the relative importance residents attach to this dimension of their lives compared to other factors. It was also evident from the interviews that many residents had not particularly considered other neighbourhoods or conceptualised relative neighbourhood circumstances in the formulation that the researchers had. This issue will be explored in greater depth in forthcoming methodology papers.

3.   The Normalisation of Neighbourhood

One finding to emerge from the interviews was that many residents viewed their neighbourhoods as 'normal' and the same as everywhere else. This viewpoint was more common in Hillside/Primalt but was also present in Oxgangs.

"Oxgangs is just one of the ordinary places, this is just like your local, you know...so you know it's sort of just down to earth, normal."
Female, Oxgangs

It [Oxgangs] is not the most glamorous area but it's clean and tidy. I would say about it compared to any other areas it's basically the same.
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

Some residents conceived of this normality in relation to other 'estates', 'schemes' or 'Council' estates':

"It's just a normal estate init?"
Male, 20, Hillside/Primalt

"I mean its just as it is, its a Council estate."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

"Oxgangs...its no any different from any other schemes. I mean you get good and bad in every scheme."
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

"I don't dislike anything around here, it's just somewhere to live, there's nothing drastic about this place as opposed to other council estates that I've lived on."
Female, 40s, Oxgangs

But some residents normalised their neighbourhood in relation to residential areas more widely:

I think right across the country, I think everyone's on the same aren't they?
Female, 68, Hillside/Primalt

Its the same really [other areas] some people who just don't work and there's some people who work.
Male, 18, Hillside/Primalt

It [Oxgangs] is like any district, it has its good and its bad no matter where you stay there's good and there's bad and its no any worse.
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

This extended to normalising problems within the neighbourhoods and perceiving these problems to be present in all residential areas:

"You get your usual things around November with bonfires and that but I suppose that happens everywhere you go."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

"Yeah the yobs and drunks...actually I think you get that everywhere, every area, it doesn't matter where you stay you get your yob culture, drinking, I mean that's overall, that's every area, that's no just here."
Female, 50s, Oxgangs

"There are some bad people around but I think every area's the same."
Female, 38, Hillside/Primalt

"There's rough people in every area, even the nice areas, there's always a bad apple."
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

I think now there's lots of youths hanging about especially at the shops but then I suppose that's the same everywhere, I don't think its a thing about Oxgangs, I think its anywhere.
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

However, residents in Hillside/Primalt were more likely to conceive of surrounding neighbourhoods as being similar to their own:

"I think the majority of estates in Huyton are very similar.
Female, 50s, Hillside/Primalt

"People in the areas nearby, they're all the same."
Female, 68, Hillside/Primalt

"Only because this place has become run down, you know I'd say that was the only difference [to other areas]...I wouldn't say it [Hillside/Primalt] was unusual no, because there's these other places [that are also run down] as I was saying."
Female, 21, Hillside/Primalt

"In contrast, residents in Oxgangs were more likely to identify differences between Oxgangs and its surrounding neighbourhoods. So we're like stuck in the middle, surrounded by the posh, this area in the middle.
Female, 50s, Oxgangs

"Well most of the areas around Oxgangs are actually, well apart from Dreghorn which is a lot of army houses, most schemes around Oxgangs are actually privately owned houses, bungalows and so forth."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

Although there was a process of normalisation apparent in Hillside/Primalt, particularly in relation to its surrounding neighbourhoods, there was also an awareness that different types of residential area did exist in the wider Merseyside area:

"I reckon its better up there, better living...like I don't really know [what areas these would be]."
Male, 16, Hillside/Primalt

"It's good and bad I think, it's not the nicest place to live but there's good things that go on here like."

Male, 19, Hillside/Primalt

"Loads of places, Crosby, they've got nice houses, loads of places, its having the cash though isn't it?"
Female, 32, Hillside/Primalt

However, an awareness of more affluent neighbourhoods did not necessarily translate into a clear desire to live in them rather than residents' home area:

[Living in another part of Liverpool:] *"I'd like to live there but it'd be too quiet all the time wouldn't it...It'd be like all posh people wouldn't it?"*
Male, 16, Hillside/Primalt

"I've always wanted to live in Huyton anyway and Liverpool, I've never wanted to move out of Liverpool, but there is nicer places in Liverpool than Huyton."
Male, 18, Hillside/Primalt

"I think the majority of estates in Huyton are very similar but from what I've heard Hillside is more or less the worst."
Female, 50s, Hillside

Obviously part of the explanation for why Hillside/Primalt residents tended to view their neighbourhood as similar to other neighbourhoods was that this reflected the actual similarity of the surrounding areas. However, a further explanation is that a large proportion of residents in Hillside/Primalt had been born and raised in the neighbourhood and had the majority of their social connections (including family) located on the estate. In contrast, residents in Oxgangs were more likely to have moved into the area or to have lived elsewhere and therefore to have had direct experience of living in other neighbourhoods. In both neighbourhoods, this direct experience of other areas provided a framework for individuals to reflect in a comparative manner on where they currently lived:

"I was from a more affluent area. That's how I got involved here because when I moved here I couldn't believe the inequality."
Female, 60s, Hillside/Primalt

"Well I like this area, I think it's a nice area, compared to where we were before it's a nice area."
Female, 40s, Oxgangs

"God it's not as bad as where I used to live."
Female, Oxgangs

In addition, residents in Oxgangs were generally more likely to access the city centre and to travel to other areas of the city during their daily routines. This is partly due to Oxgangs being located within the city of Edinburgh, only three miles from the city centre, in contrast to Hillside/Primalt which is located outside the city boundaries of Liverpool. It is also due to the differing levels and types of employment in the samples of residents from each neighbourhood, with more residents in Oxgangs being in employment and working at sites further from their home neighbourhood.

This helps to explain why a construction of a hierarchy of neighbourhoods within their wider urban context, whilst present in both study areas, was more prominent in Oxgangs, as discussed in the next section.

4.   Neighbourhood Hierarchies

Although many residents in Hillside/Primalt normalised their neighbourhood as being 'the same' as adjacent neighbourhoods or indeed anywhere else, there was a recognition, particularly related to neighbourhood reputation (see the following section) that their neighbourhood was perceived negatively in relation to other residential areas. Several residents in Hillside/Primalt did identify areas that were either poorer or perceived to be less favourable places to live:

> *"I think its [Hillside/Primalt] better than a lot of places...talking to people and where they live, I mean I know somebody from Prescott and they won't go out, once it's dark they don't go through the door, they daren't."*
> Female, 70s, Hillside/Primalt.

> *"There's worse places than here I would think so like."*
> Female, 21, Hillside/Primalt

> *"There are other parts than us that I think are worse off."*
> Female, 50s, Hillside/Primalt

However, residents in Hillside/Primalt more frequently conceived of their neighbourhood as being similar to surrounding areas, to regard their neighbourhood as having a poor reputation or did not express a comparative view on other neighbourhoods in the wider urban area.

In contrast, residents in Oxgangs displayed an acute awareness of both the immediate and visible differences between their neighbourhood and adjacent areas and also located Oxgangs within a hierarchy of neighbourhoods throughout the city of Edinburgh. The proximity and immediacy of more affluent neighbourhoods next to Oxgangs and a local geography of difference was identified by most residents:

> R: *"It's like you go from one bit of Oxgangs, literally you can see the first house in Green Bank: it's a different world."*
>
> I:*" It's very close by isn't it?"*
>
> R: *"Right next to each other, Oxgangs literally you can stand one foot separated and one foot's in Oxgangs and one foot's in Greenbank."*
>
> *Female, 20s, Oxgangs*
>
> *"Yeah well if you walk out of here and down to the shops but turn right into Colinton Road and if you turn left that's supposed to be the dearest part of Edinburgh, it's called Greenbank, the houses are over half a million. They're very nice, big bungalows, the whole street is...I would stay snobbish compared to here and then I suppose you've got like Oxgangs Road up the side of Morrisons, if you go further up, again bungalows look very expensive, you know."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

R: "Basically you've got Oxgangs, Buxton and Keystone, that's basically that's where the wealthy people live if you want, that's where the bigger houses are and the ones up on the hill, as you come down the hill that's basically all pensioners that have been there for thirty, forty, fifty years. Then you've got this area that leads down to the road at the bottom that are these four-up type houses, behind that and you've got more or less the same till you get to the park and then that's where they're building all these new ones. Behind that again you're coming into the bigger houses going back out of Oxgangs up the hill."

I: "So they're quite wealthy areas are they? "

R: "Yes, they are quite wealthy areas... because that side of the road and that's a wealthier type area compared to this side of the road really..."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

"Well Oxgangs is like your local...as you go up there you've got Fairmilehead, Buxton and they're sort of snobby, they're well… once you get to just up the road there where the supermarket is once you go up that way you're into the snobby houses."
Female, Oxgangs

"Colinton Road is, Colinton Road is a wealthy area and if you go up the Avenue and you go up the hill and it's all bungalows up there, that's very wealthy, and right down into Morningside, Morningside is a wealthy area."
Female, 60s, Oxgangs

Although these residents make references to areas being snobbish, this local geography is primarily reported in a neutral and 'matter of fact' manner, with no relative judgements being articulated beyond the different style and value of properties. However, what was evident from the Oxgangs interviews was that residents located their own neighbourhood within a wider hierarchy in the city which was not nearly so pronounced in Hillside/Primalt. One resident made the important point that people living in less affluent areas, at least in the context of Edinburgh, were as likely as those living in more affluent localities to attribute status and reputation to other areas of the city:

Yeah even people from like areas like Oxgangs know of Oxgangs, but I mean there's other places like Pilton and things, if you're from there if you said 'I'm from   Pilton' I'd be like… it's the same sort of thing, just because you live in Oxgangs doesn't mean we don't think about other places like that.
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

Within this perceived hierarchy, Oxgangs was consistently placed within a comparative framework to other social housing estates in Edinburgh and was regarded as being one of the 'better' or indeed 'best' such estate(s) in the city:

"It is one of the better areas I think to stay in."
Female, 50s, Oxgangs

"I think it [Oxgangs] is pretty favourable against some of them [other areas of Edinburgh]. I don't think we have any problems.
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

"I think in Edinburgh is like, council estates as in Niddrie, Muirhouse, Wester Hailes, Oxgangs, whatever other ones there are, I would rank this as one of the nicer areas to live."
Female, 40s, Oxgangs

"I think a lot of people think it's a not bad area, because as I say you've got Muirhouse, Pilton, Wester Hales, Sitehill, Niddrie, Craigmillar, all those are the bad areas that, the rough areas, and Oxgangs, although it is an estate, it's one of the better ones."
Female, Oxgangs

"To be honest it's probably better than a lot of the other council areas for example Pilton and Wester Hailes, places like that, that's what you would want to compare it to I would imagine and I would say it's better than those areas definitely."
Male, 30s, Oxgangs

"As opposed to the other outlying areas round about like what you've got you've got Gracemount and Burdiehouse? And the next areas that way, you've got Wester Hailes going that way, I would say nine out of ten would choose to stay here before either of those two given the choice."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

"I think compared to other areas on a par with Oxgangs, like you know your Muirhouse, these kind of areas, I think this area, it's not, I was going to say as bad as those areas, but it's not on the same level, I mean you can go out and walk about at night without worrying about somebody going to mug you or try and attack you."
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

What is important in these perceptions is the regularity with which the same areas are repeatedly referred to. Several of these areas, such as Muirhouse and Pilton are located on the other side of Edinburgh, which illustrates how many residents have a frame of reference that encompasses the entire city. it is also noteworthy that, whilst Oxgangs is positively compared to these areas, this comparison also locates Oxgangs itself within a certain classification of neighbourhood. The fact that residents describe these areas as 'on a par with Oxgangs' and areas that 'you would want to compare Oxgangs to' highlights how residents have a nuanced and complex understanding of the relative social and economic status of neighbourhoods that references and grades other social housing areas rather than a binary classification of affluent or deprived localities.

Even within the context of an awareness of processes of stigmatisation of areas including Oxgangs and the knowledge that such processes misrepresented the reality of the populations and dynamics of these communities, some residents in Oxgangs made the same judgements of other areas, although these could be nuanced:

"Craigmillar is awful, you wouldn't want to go there."
Female, 50s, Oxgangs

"Wester Hailes, it gets a bad name because there's junkie and that there. Craigmillar that's another place but no everybody there's bad it gets a bad name because there's drug addicts there and a lot of them doesnae work...and then there's Muirhouse...then they've got the posh areas, Morningside, the Grange, big houses."

Female, 50s, Oxgangs

"I know it sounds snobby but I think when you go to look at an area if you see there's a lot of bought houses then you know it's a nice area to stay in because you think well people would nae buy their houses if it was nae a nice area to stay in."

Only two residents, both in Oxgangs, articulated the difference between neighbourhoods in class terms:

"I think you'd say we're in the lower end of the scale as far as...lower middle class is it?"
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

I would say it [Morningside] was quite, yeah, upper class I would say, I would say the kids in Morningside are a bit snooty compared to...
Female, 20, Oxgangs

What emerges from these interviews challenges the theory that stark social and economic difference increases dissatisfaction and resentment within deprived neighbourhoods. Rather, residents locate their neighbourhood within a spectrum that, whilst identifying more affluent neighbourhoods, also enables themselves to position their neighbourhood as being more desirable than others, based on the reputations that certain symbolic localities have within the wider urban area.

5. Neighbourhood Reputations

Residents in both Hillside/Primalt and Oxgangs reported that their neighbourhood had a poor reputation within the wider urban area, although the comparative reputation of the two neighbourhoods differed within their particular hierarchical contexts. This awareness of stigmatisation was articulated by young people as well as adults:

> *"A bad reputation cause it's not like the best of places."*
> Male, 16, Hillside/Primalt

> *"From what I've heard Hillside is more or less the worse. I think it's the worst of them all and that seems to be a pretty general opinion."*
> Female, 50s, Hillside

Some residents perceived this stigmatisation in general and indefinable terms:

> *R: "The reputation is not good so if you say you live in Hillside then they think 'oh'?"*

> *I: "Do they?"*

> *R: "Yeah"*

> *I: "And has that happened to you?"*

> *R: "Not really, but I know it's definitely there like."*

> Male, teens, Hillside.

Other residents provided direct personal accounts of the stigmatisation and poor reputation of their neighbourhood:

People say to me 'where do you live these days? and I say 'Hillside' they go 'Oh my God, poor you', you know it's reputation goes before it which is a shame.
Female, 50s, Hillside

> *"...Even now a friend actually dropped me off on Saturday and she said 'are you not frightened?"*
> Female, 21, Hillside

> *I think it did have a bad reputation because that house up for sale over there, some seller was driving up so that's what they do, they look and he said to me 'what's the area like round here, is it still fully of scallys'? I said 'no its a lot better' but I think that's why the houses weren't selling.*
> Female, 30s, Hillside

> *"We've had to fight for our area, you know we had a housing officer who said we deserved the regrettable reputation, and that was the housing officer said that to us."*
> Female, 68, Hillside

There was also some anecdotal evidence that neighbourhood reputation may impact on individual's ability to access the labour market:

> *"They're talented kids but coming from the area these young people used to say soon as they hear where we're from we won't get the job and it was the truth they were speaking."*
> Female, 49, Hillside

Some residents made the important point that views of a neighbourhood were often dependent on the home neighbourhood of those articulating such views, so that neighbourhoods could be simultaneously be regarded as desirable or undesirable by different sections of the population:

> *"People think its all the yobs...I don't know most people say Oxgangs is quite a nice place to stay...I think it depends on the area they come from."*
> Female, 50s, Oxgangs

Some residents were also honest about having negative impressions of their neighbourhood prior to actually living there:"

> *"Well I can honestly say that before I lived in Oxgangs I thought it was an absolute dump and I was pretty scared of the people who lived in it...it's like a stereotypical view that everybody in this place was a bit rough and a bit hard..."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

In both Hillside/Primalt and Oxgangs, almost all the residents who perceived a negative reputation believed that this was unfairly perpetuated by outsiders, did not reflect the positive elements of their neighbourhood and also argued that this poor reputation was historical and did not take account of the (generally positive) changes that had occurred within them in recent years.

One young male resident of Hillside/Primalt illustrated an awareness of how the general perception of deprived areas '*an estate like this*' permeated the external image of his neighbourhood and outsiders' expectations of the behaviour and dynamics that occur in such localities:

> *"Nothing really happens like you'd expect, like loads of people from an estate like this, think there'd be lots of trouble, there's not, none of the kids...they're dead well behaved and that."*
> Male, 18, Hillside

Residents' primary experience of their neighbourhood was one where social problems were largely limited, and whilst these existed they did not necessarily impinge on residents directly on a daily basis. This enabled some residents to be relatively sanguine about the negative reputation of their neighbourhood portrayed in the local media.

The dynamics of neighbourhood reputation and stigma played out in different ways in the two study neighbourhoods. Residents in Hillside/Primalt were more likely to identify their neighbourhood as having a negative reputation and sometimes a reputation as being the worst area in their wider urban locality. This may be expected to lead to a greater level of dissatisfaction and feelings of injustice than in Oxgangs.

However, although residents in Oxgangs frequently contrasted a negative reputation of their neighbourhood with the poorer reputation of other neighbourhoods, there was a sense that the greater diversity of neighbourhoods in Edinburgh, the presence of more affluent neighbourhoods and the cultural dynamics that this generated meant that they were equally likely to be affected by negative stereotyping:

> *"There's a dreadful snobbery, Oh Edinburgh's always been like that, specific areas are snobby."*
> Female, 50s, Oxgangs

This suggests a need to recognise that neighbourhood reputations are not generated by or experienced in relation to solely immediately surrounding areas and also that the extent and form of stigmatisation is not linked only to the actual socio-economic characteristics of a neighbourhood.

6. Inter-Neighbourhood Interactions

The interviews aimed to explore the interactions that residents had with other neighbourhoods, both adjacent to their own neighbourhood and further afield in the wider urban area. It was apparent that many residents did not spend much time in other neighbourhoods, even those adjacent to their own, and therefore recognised that their ability to comment on differences was limited.

A common finding, particularly in Hillside/Primalt was that when people travel through urban areas, for example on public transport, the other neighbourhoods they pass are noticed, but are not necessarily subject to a comparison with individuals' home locality:

> *"You go by [other neighbourhoods] on the bus and it doesn't even, like I say its never even come into my mind...I've never even thought about it until you said."*
> Female, 40s, Oxgangs

Therefore the wider urban area is often experienced as a series of trajectories and nodes, for example young people going from Hillside/Primalt directly to college and back again, without any interaction or engagement with the other neighbourhoods that they pass through. Mirroring the processes of reputation, image construction and assumption that they identified impacting on their own neighbourhoods, residents acknowledged that they applied similar judgements to other areas without direct personal knowledge or experience:

> *"You know Oxgangs, its like when you say Broomhouse they're like 'oh we're not going up there' it just. I think its just names. You say Corstorphine that's the posh area so its just names people sort of judge it before they've actually lived there."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

The physical differences between their own neighbourhoods and more affluent areas was commented upon by many residents, with an acknowledgement that they did not know the populations of these areas and a playing down of the differences between people as opposed to the built environment:

> *"I don't know what the people are like in them but they [the houses] look nice."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

> *"I think Colinton Mains, they are, it was ? houses I think and I think a lot of people class it as being kind of snobby, I think because it's houses and they've got gardens and stuff and the people probably aren't any better."*

> *"If you go to Knowsley Village it seems quiet and clean...the houses look good and things you know? I don't really know anyone, its just as you go through it seems   clean and quiet and there's no gangs or anything like that, or rubbish thrown."*
> Female, 38, Hillside/Primalt

"I suppose just different houses, the style of the houses and things like you know, you just think like 'it must have cost a big mortgage to...' but something like that and people like, I don't know, me, I wouldn't put myself into a lot of debt just to buy a house but I suppose some people do so I don't suppose you can really tell can you?"
Female, 21, Oxgangs

Some residents of Oxgangs who has visited other neighbourhoods did comment upon them in favourable terms:

"Hunter's Tryst...Well they're all private houses and cottages and bungalows, things like that and then there's Swanston, I know somebody actually stays in Swanston and it's a wee thatched cottage and it's got, you would nae see it from the street, it's surrounded by trees and you go right round and there's 5 or 6 wee thatched cottages and there's a wee river with a wee bridge going over the top of it, it's really lovely up there."
Female, 50s, Oxgangs

One resident in Oxgangs perceived there to be a dynamic of distinction operating between Oxgangs and its surrounding neighbourhoods:

R: "Because it's on the border of Oxgangs so that's different."

I: "So do you think that they think…"

R: "They do think that they're a bit better."

I: "A bit above the rest?"

R: "Yeah and it was always the further up the hill you are the more money you've got."

Female, 21 Oxgangs

However, this was not a commonly articulated viewpoint and residents in Oxgangs who had direct experience of more affluent neighbourhoods were more likely to view the residents of these areas in a positive light and to perceive them to be living in 'different worlds' rather than in a comparative relation to Oxgangs:

R: "Well I work for people, people that I work for, they're millionaires, they live in a totally different world."

I:" And does that bother you?"

R: "They're nice people but they live in a different world. It doesn't bother me no because that's the world, that's life, you just get on with it, you're gonna get the scruffy part and you're gonna get the more affluent part as well, you've got to make your own…"
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

"Well in as much as I class this as working class and don't get me wrong there's a lot of nice people in those houses "[in surrounding affluent areas]*...*
Female, 60s, Oxgangs

Similarly, whilst residents identified differences between the populations of their own and surrounding neighbourhoods, these differences were largely limited to visible signifiers such as dress, cars, jewellery and voice pronunciation, rather than differences in attitudes, behaviour or moral worth:

> *"I don't know, I suppose appearance, erm that's it really...appearance, clothes and things."*
> Female, 21, Hillside

> *"I wouldn't say it was a different accent, I just think maybe they pronounce things a lot better..and their clothes...it's like your suits, like your business men and their wives...dripping in their gold...at the parents night you know the mothers are dolled up to the eyeballs. "*
> Female, 50s, Oxgangs

> *"Just the way they dress, cars, the difference in house prices between Greenbank and here is immense."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

Whilst residents in Oxgangs were more likely to encounter and be aware of differences between themselves and others than residents in Hillside/Primalt (unsurprisingly given the relative heterogeneity and homogeneity of their respective neighbourhoods) again our findings cast doubt on the theory that this would lead to greater levels of either lower self-esteem or resentment of others. Rather, what we found was an equalising and normalising process where the populations of neighbourhoods were regarded as being essentially similar apart from obvious income differentials.

One slight contrast between the neighbourhoods was, that whilst a few residents in Hillside/Primalt perceived some resentment towards them from residents living in similar neighbourhoods due to the view of additional resources being allocated to Hillside/Primalt[1] through being a designated New Deal for Communities area, a couple of residents in Oxgangs believed that more affluent neighbourhood received better services:

> *"Oh aye they're better off, say you get a lot of ice and snow they wee thing'll come up and they'll no do it here, you'll maybe get a gritter coming up but you go further up there to Fairmilehead, you'll go there on the pavements and clear all the pavements."*
> Female, 70s, Oxgangs

> *"I think they get better treatment than we get in as much as looking after the roads and things like that. they build new houses up there at Fairmilehead, now there had been an orthopaedic hospital there for years and years which I attended with my daughter because she's an amputee and the pavements up there were a disgrace, there was no crossings or anything, hospital got demolished, the built fancy new houses and what was the first thing they done, put in fancy new pavements and put a crossing in."*
> Female, 60s, Oxgangs

One findings from our studies in both neighbourhoods is the lack of interaction between residents in other areas of the same estate and between adjacent neighbourhoods, which suggests that barriers to interaction are not merely constructed on social class or income lines. However, the permeability of Oxgangs

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[1] This perception needs to be viewed in the context of many residents arguing that Hillside/Primalt had suffered from a deliberate policy of underinvestment over a period of many years.

and its proximity to affluent neighbourhoods did appear to lead to greater interaction between individuals from different social backgrounds. Although one resident argued that:

"I don't know of any interaction between this area and the adjacent areas, it's not to say it's never happened but I've never seen it and although I cannae get about much now I used to."
Male, 80s, Oxgangs

Other residents did identify some daily encounters with residents from other neighbourhoods:

"Aye you just go to Colinton Road there, Colinton… I used to walk to the bowling club and go along that Colinton area, you're talking couple of hundred thousand for houses up there. But these people still come into Oxgangs, the Broadway to do their wee bit of shopping and that."
Male, 70s, Oxgangs

"Aye it's part of the wider area definitely. You could nae really say Oxgangs as in that bit there's Oxgangs and everywhere else round about is called something different, whether it's a different part of like Edinburgh but it's intermingled with us and they have to come to our schools, go to the doctors, we have to go to their shops, Morrisons is up on the ? Part of the place as it were."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

A key event and site for this interaction between residents of Oxgangs and its surrounding neighbourhoods was the amalgamation of local schools. Some residents of Oxgangs viewed this diversity and interaction as entirely positive:

"Yes they are quite wealthy areas, ?? wealthy areas because that side of the road and that's a wealthier type area compared to this side of the road really ? case, I suppose that's why it works so well because the schools round about, they're dotted round about so it's like you're no just having kids from that area go to the school, kids from both areas go to the school, they come from this area as well see, I think that's probably why they work so well."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

However, several other accounts identified considerable tensions arising from this 'mixed' schooling profile:

"A lot of [parents at the school] don't want their kids mixing with riff raff."
Female, 70s, Oxgangs

Some residents from Oxgangs who had attended the school believed that they had been subject to a degree of stigmatisation based on different financial status and cultural attitudes:

"You can sometimes get the impression that you're not as good as they are [other pupils at school], it probably bothers you more the fact that they can afford nice clothes and things and you can't as such. "
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

R: "Well it was more kids from posher areas that were in my school."

I: "What school was that again?"

R: "That was Comiston primary, the majority of them would have been from bought houses."

I: "Ok, were you aware that they were better off?"

R: "You could notice the difference."

I: "How would you know?"

R: "Just from their attitudes, even I think even the children, like my sister goes to St Marks and even my wee sister's pals, a lot of them are a lot more common than what my sister is, so I think it's just the different way they talk, the way their parents are, it's like the way you're brought up, where we've lived here there's certain things that we just weren't allowed to do, my sister, she's seven, she's not allowed out to play, whereas the other children the majority of them are allowed out on the street to play, children as young as three and before when I was wee you probably could have did that but you can't really do that now because there's too many strange people coming into the area. But I think the difference, people just sort of think 'oh from Oxgangs, Oxgangs isn't a very good area' people are of that opinion, haven't got a kind word to say, but I always felt I got judged because I was from Oxgangs and they were from other places, houses that cost quarter of a million, stuff like that."
Female, 21, Oxgangs

It was apparent from these accounts that children from both more affluent and deprived neighbourhoods could experience difficulties in negotiating these differences:

"Well that side's Colinton and Oxgangs Farm and everything. It's the same actually along the road because you had what was Comiston School just up and along there and you've got Hunter's Tryst School which was there but they two have now amalgamated and the Comiston school got redeveloped and all the kids from there went to Hunter's Tryst and apparently the Hunter's Tryst kids got into trouble because when they arrived on the first day all the kids were booing them because it was like they came from 'that side' and apparently there was a major hoo ha at the school because one of the parents from that side had said something along the lines of 'no wonder those kids they're this, that and that, look at the state of the parents' and it was just you know, the snooty end and the not so snooty end and they had to merge and now all of them are up at the new school but it's still very much an 'us and them' from what I've heard from other people, it's still 'us and them'."
Female, Oxgangs

Although we only have a small number of interviews to base our analysis of these processes upon, it would appear that, whilst adjacent neighbourhoods and populations are often viewed in a neutral or indeed positive manner, more direct and personalised interaction, such as through schooling, can in some cases accentuate social, economic or cultural differences and lead to tensions and a more direct comparison of individual social status, with resulting consequences for self-esteem.

7. Neighbourhood and Self Esteem

A common theme within the literature on urban inequality, social mixing and neighbourhood differentiation is that living amidst surrounding affluence may increase the sense of neighbourhood dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem of more deprived individuals. However, our research in both study localities found little evidence for this. Residents did not articulate a resentment towards those living in more affluent neighbourhoods:

> *"You see other people, you don't begrudge other people getting by. Don't get me wrong, I'm not like that, I'm like good luck to you I wish I could do it but you think oh yeah I'd really love to do that things like that but other than that I just like to see people getting by. I'm not one to think 'that should be me'."*
> Female, 38, Hillside/Primalt

> *"No I've never ever done that in my whole life, never. I've never even thought about until you said, it's just like nice houses, I mean I've worked for people, I've worked for millionaires in Mansion House Road when I've been doing cleaning jobs and home help for folk that have got money but even that doesn't interest me, it's just where you live is where you live. I mean it's like even this house, I'm overwhelmed with this house. Why would I want a huge big… I mean it's a quiet area as well, it's a quiet stair, nothing comes into it, I don't know if you're meaning jealousy or something?"*
> Female, 40s, Oxgangs

> *"We maybe didn't have as much money as other people did, you do feel slightly less but it was never anything that particularly bothered me."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

There was also a widespread process of equalisation and normalisation through which residents in different neighbourhoods were regarded as essentially being the same, despite different financial and housing circumstances:

> *"Probably not, I mean obviously there must be some differences because they have houses and the houses are worth quite a lot of month so obviously they've obviously got better jobs and some people… but that doesn't necessarily mean the people are different."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

> *"The only differences are the houses and the cars, the people in it are the same as everywhere else."*
> Female, 50s, Oxgangs

Some residents did perceive there to be some material differences in the circumstances of individuals:

> *R:" I think you get good people and bad people everywhere sort of thing, I don't think it's too much different about more affluent areas but I think obviously*

they're not having to struggle and scrape around for money and things which is less tension already and if you're in an area where you've not got as much money and a lot of the houses around here it's people that are on benefits or get their council and there's maybe problems already there so that's why I think it's maybe a bit more friction sometimes in areas like this."

I: "Right because people are…"

R: "Maybe have just not got as much as they'd like to have so everybody's trying to get more than they've got sort of thing."
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

R: "I think it would give you a different perspective on life, different views on things. I see things probably differently than someone in Greenbank sees things because I'm seeing different things like things go on… there's a big difference between us going down the bottom shops to get a loaf of bread and seeing things that go on down there from them going along to Buxton shops and never having to see anything like that, I'm not saying they don't it, but they probably see less of it."

I: "And do you think that gives you a broader perspective?"

R:"I wouldn't say broader, I'd just say a different perspective."
Female, 20s, Oxgangs

Other residents also recognised that households living in more affluent areas or larger properties could also experience relative financial hardship:

I: And what about here and other areas nearby, is there a clear difference in the money or whatever between Oxgangs and other areas around here?

R: I don't perceive it as that, I certainly did years ago but when you get to know the people if you work out of this area, round about here, you know maybe in the bigger houses and all, they're not any more financially off than we are, they maybe have more money but they're not necessarily have any more extra money than we have. We know people who don't go on holiday because they can't afford to.
Female, 30s, Oxgangs

Although there was no resentment directed towards more affluent individuals, there was equally a recognition that they may have benefited from particular circumstances, and crucially this lack of resentment was located alongside a very strong belief that there was no moral worth attached to affluence and therefore no sense of a lack of self-esteem arising from residing in a relatively deprived neighbourhood:

"They probably aren't any different really but they're maybe just been lucky or they've been born into families that maybe had a bit more money, that doesn't make them any better people."
Female, 21, Oxgangs

"Yeah I don't think anybody's better than I am and I don't think that I'm better than anybody else. I know there's people worse off than me and I know there's people better of than me but it doesn't mean they're a better or worse person than I am so I dunnae really look at it that way."
Female, Oxgangs

This translated into a belief that there was no sense of shame attached to living in a relatively deprived neighbourhood, even one surrounded by visibly affluent developments:

> *"I've never been embarrassed by living here, there's nothing wrong with it, it's just houses, a house is a house."*
> Female, 40s, Oxgangs

> *"It doesn't really matter where you're coming home to at night as long as it's what you stand for and what you want to do with yourself."*
> Female, 20s, Oxgangs

> *"I've always lived in a council house, I've never lived in a bought house but I don't… that makes it sound like I feel ashamed and I don't because I always think what's the difference?"*
> Male, 60s, Oxgangs

> *"Oh, there's nothing wrong with living here."*
> Female, 50s, Oxgangs

In addition to casting doubt on the relationship between immediate and visible inequality and lower satisfaction and esteem amongst lower income households, these quotations also suggest that many residents do not conceptualise their circumstances through a relative framework or a 'deficit' view, that is often applied in urban research paradigms. This issue is further explored in the following section. These findings equally cast doubt upon one of the rationales underpinning the promotion of 'mixed communities within policy': the idea that more affluent residents or those in employment will act as role models for other residents and influence other residents' behaviour.

8. Rethinking Comparative Conceptualisations of Neighbourhoods

This paper has presented evidence on how residents articulate their understanding of their neighbourhoods within the context of their wider urban locality. However, it is vital to acknowledge that these residents responded to direct questions asked of them. Clearly the responses presented above show that many residents have views on their own and adjacent neighbourhoods. However, many other residents provided responses that suggest a need to rethink how we theorise comparative conceptualisations of neighbourhoods.

Firstly, the fact that many residents have been brought up or spend most of their time in their neighbourhood means that they themselves acknowledge that they may not be aware of other neighbourhoods or the image that their own neighbourhood has. This was particularly the case for young people:

"I don't know [about its reputation]. I've always lived on Hillside so I wouldn't know."
Female, 21, Hillside

"Dunno cause I lived round here so long its just, don't know" [whether other areas are the same]
Male, 17, Hillside

But this response was also provided by adults:

I: *"What do you think people outside of Oxgangs think of the area?"*

R: *"Erm…. Well you'd have to ask them obviously, I've never asked anybody."*
Female, 40s, Oxgangs

However, several responses also suggested that residents did not conceptualise neighbourhoods in comparative terms and therefore that the dynamics of neighbourhood reputation and stigmatisation did not necessarily exist for some individuals:

"To be honest...I don't know really, probably just the same everywhere you go really init...just depends if you know them and that like, I think they're sound round here meself like...I don't know like, I mean...think nothing like but you ask someone off a different estate what they think about it [Hillside] *they'll probably tell you something different, whatever, as you do, they'd probably say something different."*
Male, 20, Hillside

I: *"People from outside of Oxgangs, do you know what they might think of the area?"*

R: *"I would nae say people think about areas in a general way like that, they're no… people dunnae sit and think about what's actually round about them, I would nae even have thought it myself if you had nae asked me if you know what I mean. Obviously I'm aware of what's round and about me and I use what I need to use, other than that I would say that most people would be the same. They're aware of what's there and use it if they need it."*
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

Even where individuals were aware of differences between adjacent neighbourhoods, they did not necessarily conceptualise them in comparative terms in relation to reputation or status:

"I mean it's just as it is, it's a council estate and then like I was saying earlier, you've got Green Bank and then further up you've got Fairmilehead...And coming down you've got Colinton Mains and then further down you've got Colinton Mains Road and these are all like posh houses surrounding in the middle is a council estate, it's not so much what we, basic average working people think of them, I think it would be more to the point of what they think of… it's not even an interest until you actually said that to me it's never even been an interest to me."
Male, 50s, Oxgangs

Residents therefore conceptualised their neighbourhood from close proximity as 'lived space' rather than something to be objectified from a distance.

A common finding, particularly in Hillside/Primalt was that when people travel through urban areas, for example on public transport, the other neighbourhoods they pass are noticed, but are not necessarily subject to a comparison with individuals' home locality:

"You go by [other neighbourhoods] on the bus and it doesn't even, like I say its never even come into my mind...I've never even thought about it until you said."
Female, 40s, Oxgangs

This paper has not addressed the non-spatial determinants of how residents conceptualise social problems in their area and compare these to perceived social problems in other neighbourhoods. For example the national and local media narrative of levels of anti-social behaviour is likely to impact on residents' perceptions of anti-social behaviour in both their own and other neighbourhoods and influence their comparative interpretation of where their neighbourhood is located in a hierarchy of residential areas.

These responses indicate that care needs to be taken in interpreting some of the findings presented here and in imposing a conceptual and analytical framework arising from the research approach that does not reflect the reality of residents' daily lives. In particular the responses above: '*It's not an interest until you actually said it to me*" and "*I've never even thought about it until you said*" highlight firstly how comparative neighbourhood images may be less important in residents' lives and secondly how the interviews may generate immediate or 'artificial' responses that do not truly capture residents' perceptions of their localities.

References

Burrows, R. and Rhodes, D. (1998) *Unpopular places? Area disadvantage and the geography of misery in England*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Appendix 1 - The Study Neighbourhoods

Hillside and Primalt

Our case study area in Knowsley is made up of two adjoining neighbourhoods, Hillside and Primalt. The neighbourhoods make up one-third of North Huyton New Deal for Communities (NDC) intervention area (the other areas being Finch House, Fincham, Woolfall North and Woolfall South). Primalt has been designated a discrete area by the NDC, but this strategy has been queried by local residents, who do not recognise it as such. These two neighbourhoods form a part of the collection of inter-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 following traditional street patterns. The case study area is predominantly White, with just one per cent of residents from a BME background.

Hillside is bounded by the M57, Seth Powell Way and Alt Park and appears to be one of the most isolated of all the NDC areas. This sense of isolation is reinforced by the demolition of existing housing, and the open spaces that have yet to be developed as part of the delivery plan for North Huyton.

The housing stock in this area is primarily social rented. It provides 813 Local Authority units of accommodation and 172 houses within private walled off estates built during the 1990's (source: North Huyton NDC Delivery Plan). In recent years void properties have been a significant problem with many empty properties declared structurally unstable and dangerous.

The area has few public buildings and amenities, and the one of the last remaining post offices in the area is due to close in the immediate future. Beechwood Primary School, one of three in the 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, which has been renovated. There are approximately 62 owner occupiers in the area, mainly concentrated along Parbrook and Altmoor Roads. Pennard Field, once covered in trees is viewed by local residents as an opportunity to provide an amenity for the whole community. There is an issue with anti-social behaviour in the Nyland Road area, and also environmental problems.

Oxgangs

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 basically considered to be part of the countryside. 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 a high demand for council housing in the area.

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 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 I.T facilities. Oxgangs has three primary schools, as well as a nearby high school with a very good reputation locally and further afield. Pupils travel from outside of Oxgangs to attend these popular schools. 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 demolished in November 2006. The demolition of Capelaw Court was filmed and featured on the National Geographic Channel, which interviewed residents of Oxgangs and community activist Heather Levy. The new homes, built on the site of the high rises, were designed in consultation with local people, and provide a mixture of homes, including provision for the elderly and the disabled. They address a local desire for 'low rise' housing with the need to build as many homes as possible on the site (source: 'Village in the Sky'). However, the high demand for housing in the Oxgangs area has not resulted in unanimous support for the new housing in the area, with some residents expressing a reluctance to move into the newly available accommodation because of its location and lay-out.