

## NEIGHBOURHOOD IDENTITY HELPS COPE WITH DIVERSITY

Neighbourhood Identity Helps Residents Cope with Residential Diversification: Contact in  
Increasingly Mixed Neighbourhoods of Northern Ireland.

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#### **Abstract**

Research on residential diversification has mainly focused on its negative impacts upon community cohesion and positive effects on intergroup relations. However, these analyses ignore how neighbourhood identity can shape the consequences of diversification among residents. Elsewhere, research using the Applied Social Identity Approach (ASIA) has demonstrated the potential for neighbourhood identity to provide social and psychological resources to cope with challenges. The current paper proposes a novel model whereby these ‘Social Cure’ processes can enable residents to cope with the specific challenges of diversification. We present two studies in support of this model, each from the increasingly religiously desegregated society of post-conflict Northern Ireland. Analysis of the 2012 ‘Northern Ireland Life and Times’ survey shows that across Northern Ireland, neighbourhood identity impacts positively upon both wellbeing and intergroup attitudes via a reduction in intergroup anxiety. A second custom-designed survey of residents in a newly-mixed area of Belfast shows that neighbourhood identification predicts increased wellbeing, reduced intergroup anxiety and reduced prejudice, independently of group norms and experiences of contact. For political psychologists, our evidence suggests a reformulation of the fundamental question of ‘*what effects does residential mixing have on neighbourhoods?*’ to ‘*how can neighbourhood communities support residents to collectively cope with contact?*’.

Keywords: Social identity, intergroup contact, residential mixing, Social Cure, intergroup anxiety

## **Introduction**

Dealing with the effects of residential diversification on geographically-based communities (neighbourhoods) is part of the global challenge posed by increased national and international migration (United Nations, 2016). However, political psychology has yet to effectively grapple with the psychological dynamics of residential mixing between different groups within the same neighbourhood. On the one hand, political scientists have postulated a negative link between diversification and associative behaviour among residents (e.g. Putnam, 2007), while on the other, social psychologists have emphasised the increased opportunities for positive intergroup contact (e.g. Schmid, Ramiah & Hewstone, 2014). Neither have focused to any great degree on how neighbourhoods collectively experience and cope with the challenges of residential diversification.

The present paper begins to address this deficit by firstly reviewing the evidence of the aggregate effects of residential diversification and then arguing for the need to examine how neighbourhood identity both shapes and is shaped by residential mixing. We then set out our rationale for examining residential mixing between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, a post-conflict society in which previously segregated neighbourhoods have recently experienced an increase in religious diversification. Our analyses of a region-wide and a neighbourhood-specific survey in this region demonstrate the pivotal role of neighbourhood identity in coping with the challenges of mixing. From this, we argue for a refocussing of research inquiry away from merely describing the effects of residential diversification towards the exploration of how neighbourhood communities can more effectively cope with mixing.

### **The Impacts of Residential Diversification**

Over the past two decades, the impact of social diversification on neighbourhood community cohesion has been debated across the social sciences. Emerging from the seminal work of Putnam, the predominant view is that diversification overwhelmingly undermines social capital. Putnam (2000; 2007) argues that an influx of incomers who differ from the existing population is likely to reduce the types of ‘bonding’ social capital within neighbourhoods which rely on similarity and solidarity. Drawing on ‘conflict theory’ (Blalock, 1967; Bobo, 1999) he suggests that the influx of outgroups could potentially lead to perceptions of competition and threat, thereby undermining neighbourhood cohesion. His own ‘constrict theory’ proposes that the resultant social withdrawal of residents from potential conflict will reduce associational behaviour and in turn, neighbourhood trust, cooperation and wellbeing. Evidence from large scale national surveys of neighbourhood cohesion show that, on aggregate, increased residential diversification shows an association with reduced social capital (Putnam, 2007).

However other research has shown that diversity does not have exclusively negative effects and that its impacts vary across different areas. For example, across the UK diversity typically has a pronounced negative effect only on socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods where resources are already scarce, competition for these resources is high, and intergroup conflict is already more likely (Laurence 2009). These areas tend to be sites of more affordable housing and higher proportions of private or social rental properties and hence tend to attract higher proportions of immigrant populations. Once deprivation is removed from the equation, diversification is actually associated with stronger social cohesion, especially in urban areas celebrated for their ethnic diversity (Laurence 2009; Sturges, Brunton-Smith, Kuha, & Jackson, 2014).

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Diversification affords opportunities for more positive contact between groups and an improvement in intergroup trust and cross-group cohesion or ‘bridging capital’ (Laurence 2014; Schmid et al., 2015). In line with the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) positive contact between members of different groups is theorised to reduce intergroup anxiety and increase empathy, thereby reducing prejudice. Early studies of residential contact suggested that, if positive, it could indeed improve intergroup relations (Deutch & Collins, 1951; Wilner, Walkley & Cook, 1955). Recent evidence indicates that local norms of mixing act to shape the occurrence, quality and consequence of contact in residential areas (Christ et al., 2014). Furthermore, the higher the proportion of the minority within a neighbourhood, the more opportunity for intergroup contact and the more positive the intergroup perceptions (Savelkoul Hewstone, Scheepers, & Stolle, 2015; Schmid, Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2014). If an individual has pre-existing ties with the outgroup, or if an influx of new residents increases these links, the effect will be positive (Laurence, 2009). Only if the resident lacks pre-existing links, or fails to make more links with incomers, does diversification lead to social withdrawal and poorer levels of neighbourhood trust (Stolle & Harell, 2013).

The overall picture then is that residents of diverse neighbourhoods experience a combination of negative and positive effects, depending upon the existing framework of intragroup and intergroup relations as well as the level of deprivation within the neighbourhood. However, as acknowledged by authors in this area, a substantial limitation of this large-scale survey-based work is that it tends to overlook mixing within the local context. Contact is often assumed rather than measured (Stolle & Harell, 2013), while the effects of mixing on the actual social interactions between residents of specific neighbourhoods is largely ignored (Marschall & Stolle, 2004). Researchers in the area have repeatedly called for an examination of case studies of residential life in specific

neighbourhood contexts as well as an examination of the effects of mixing on the perceptions, actions and identities of their residents (Savelkoul et al., 2015; Stolle et al., 2008; Tolsma et al., 2009).

### **The Neglect of Neighbourhood Identity**

The absence of a focus on identity dynamics at neighbourhood level means that several key features of diversification and its impacts upon the behaviours and identities of its residents have been overlooked. The physical structure of neighbourhoods offers a range of features which impact upon the identities and the social relations of their inhabitants. In general terms, insofar as neighbourhood constitute a meaningful location, they afford a sense of ‘place identity’ for residents, such that their sense of belonging (or alienation) will affect how they behave within that space (Dixon & Durrheim, 2005; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). The simple physical proximity of neighbours gives rise to daily opportunities for interactions which may form the basis for the emergence of meaningful social bonds (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2015). Likewise, proximity entails a degree of shared interest, as neighbours are affected by the same environmental conditions, including the actions of other neighbours, such that neighbours are both the group cohort and social context for residential life (McNamara, Stevenson & Muldoon, 2013). Finally, neighbourhoods often entail formal and informal understandings of the rights and responsibilities associated with residence as well as systems of political representation (Barnes, Auburn & Lea, 2004).

In effect, the environment, local structures, and social organisation within neighbourhoods can serve to bring residents together in common interest and common cause. From a psychological perspective, the key underpinning mechanism in this complex dynamic is psychological sense of

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community (Obst & White, 2005). If a resident feels themselves to belong to a neighbourhood and feels that they share a common bond of identity with neighbours, this facilitates positive social relations. Thus, they will feel supported and able to collectively cope with the challenges that they might face.

This property of neighbourhood identity as having a protective and supportive impact upon residents has been explored using the Applied Social Identity Approach (ASIA: Haslam, 2014) in psychology. Drawing upon the study of the positive effects of group membership on health, the 'Social Cure' paradigm (Jetten, Haslam, Haslam & Branscombe, 2009) demonstrates how shared group membership increases trust, helping, and cooperation between group members enabling them to better cope with threats. Research into deprived urban neighbourhoods in Limerick city in Ireland (McNamara, Stevenson & Muldoon, 2013) shows the key importance of these identity processes for residents' wellbeing. Using a survey methodology, local residents were asked to report their levels of neighbourhood identification, their feelings of 'collective efficacy' as a neighbourhood and their current levels of wellbeing. Results indicated a clear relationship between neighbourhood community identification and wellbeing which was mediated by the residents' perception of their neighbourhood as being able to act together in response to unforeseen challenges.

### **Neighbourhood Identity and The Challenges of Diversification**

Neighbourhoods therefore can provide social and psychological resources by furnishing residents with a shared social identity. An influx of residents who come from different or even opposing groups can threaten the existing neighbourhood identity. Thus, an increase in diversification could challenge the ability of neighbourhoods to support their residents by eroding supportive pre-

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existing social identities. For example, if incomers are perceived to have an identity that is incompatible and thus threatening to the pre-existing neighbourhood identity, existing residents might experience strong feelings of existential threat or ‘angst’ (Jetten & Wohl, 2012) and strong antipathy towards the incoming residents (Smeeks & Verkuyten, 2015). In line with Putnam’s analysis of the likely effects of diversification then, an influx of outgroup members into a neighbourhood seems likely to have accompanying psychological effects by undermining identity-based group dynamics and supportive Social Cure processes.

However, social identity processes can also help cope with the challenges associated with this kind of threat to the neighbourhood. Insofar as ingroup support increases coping and reduces perceptions of threat, we would expect confident, well-supported residents to experience less intergroup anxiety in the face of diversification. As research on the experience of minority groups indicates, support from one’s own group can help cope with perceived threats from an outgroup (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Among ethnic minority groups in particular, a strong sense of identity can effectively serve as a ‘secure base’ for engaging with other ethnic groups (Phinney, Jacoby & Silva, 2007). Specifically, if a sense of continuity can be actively maintained by residents during a phase of diversification or amalgamation, the perceived threat posed by incomers can potentially be reduced (Jetten & Hutchinson, 2011).

This will however depend on the established norms of behaviours within the neighbourhood. Less diverse neighbourhoods with a history of conflict and negative attitudes towards mixing will likely experience higher intergroup anxiety and lower levels of positive contact. Indeed, if these norms are prevalent within a neighbourhood, the contact that occurs in that area is more likely to be negative (Christ et al., 2015). However, the converse is also true: insofar as neighbourhood norms of mixing are positive, the neighbourhood should be conducive to positive contact and moreover



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the visibility of this contact should provide vicarious support for future intergroup interactions. As Marschall & Stolle (2004) argue: “*Neighbourhoods not only structure the social interactions that take place within them but determine the extent to which these interactions bring together homogenous or heterogenous groups of people*” (p133).

Furthermore, a reconfiguration of a group’s identity to include former outgroup members can transform threat-based intergroup processes into supportive intragroup processes (Haslam, Postmes & Ellemers, 2003; Reicher Cassidy Wolpert, Hopkins & Levine, 2006). Within organisational contexts, for example, the processes of redefining organisational boundaries and identity to include former outgroups has been actively harnessed to smooth organisational mergers (Haslam et al., 2003). Indeed, this redefining of group boundaries is one of the fundamental ways in which successful contact is thought to restructure intergroup relations. By bringing formerly opposed groups together through shared interests and goals, a ‘common’ or ‘superordinate’ identity can emerge (Gaertner et al., 2000). Neighbourhoods, by virtue of their physical locatedness, afford the development of such a superordinate identity between the different social groups that live there.

In summary, neighbourhood identity can potentially provide residents with social and psychological resources that enhance wellbeing and foster positive contact. If the neighbourhood identity is inclusive and has norms of positive mixing, then it can provide residents with resources to overcome the potential threat posed by residential mixing and thus enhance their wellbeing. In the current research, we aim to determine whether neighbourhood identity will indeed have these effects upon social relations within diverse neighbourhoods. To do this, we select a challenging test-case of residential mixing: the desegregation of religiously territorialised neighbourhoods in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

### **Case Study: Residential Mixing in Northern Ireland**

The period of armed conflict in Northern Ireland known as ‘the Troubles’ was brought to an end in 1998 with the declaration of ceasefires by local paramilitary groups and the signing of a powersharing agreement. The preceding 30 years of armed conflict had divided the society, such that Catholics and Protestants often led separate and parallel lives in the spheres of work, education and recreation as well as religion (Hughes, Campbell, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2007). In addition, the religious communities became physically separated at the neighbourhood level. This legacy of segregation persists to the present day, with 30% of Protestants living in neighbourhoods designated as segregated (80% or greater of their own tradition) and 44% of Catholics living in equally homogenous Catholic neighbourhoods (OFMDFM, 2013). In the capital city of Belfast, this figure is much higher, with 67% of Catholics and 73% of Protestants living in segregated neighbourhood. Segregation is also associated with poverty with almost 93% of social housing developments being ‘single identity’ and the most homogenous areas of Northern Ireland typically having a history of both deprivation and high exposure to political violence (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2010).

In spite of this persisting segregation, there is evidence of a greater level of movement and mixing between religious communities in all spheres of life. This has been made possible through greater feelings of physical safety brought about by the paramilitary ceasefires of the 1990s. The extensive research conducted on the effects of intergroup contact in Northern Ireland has been largely optimistic: higher levels of reported contact are associated with lower levels of perceived threat and better intergroup relations (Hewstone et al., 2005, 2008). The positive effects of contact have been found through indirect contact as well as direct contact (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004), with reduction of intergroup anxiety as the key mediator of contact effects (e.g., Paolini et

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al., 2004; Tausch, Hewstone, Kenworthy, Cairns, & Christ, 2007). However, even in educational settings where substantial progress has been made in fostering and supporting intergroup contact, it is evident that intergroup encounters are complex and nuanced and that proximity by itself does not automatically result in positive relationships (Loader & Hughes, 2017).

In terms of residential mobility, this positive picture appears to be reflected in public perceptions of mixing, with 82% of survey respondents preferring to live in mixed areas and 87% believing that mixing between Protestants and Catholics leads to better relations (OFMDFM, 2013). There has also been a degree of actual demographic change in single identity areas. Nolan (2013) noted that the 2011 census indicated “*a steep decline in the proportion of ‘single identity’ [electoral] wards (above a threshold of 80 per cent of one religion), from 55 per cent to 37 per cent*” and “*in line with the growth of the Catholic population, a change in 28 wards to a Catholic majority, with none going the other way*” (Peace Monitoring Report Two, p115). There is some evidence that this increased residential mixing in Northern Ireland does, on aggregate, lead to better intergroup relations. Surveys of mixed areas of Belfast show that some residents do generally have better intergroup attitudes, in part due to more frequent and better-quality interactions with those from the other religious group. However, living in mixed areas is also associated with a greater perception of threat from the outgroup and has more negative effects upon the attitudes and experiences of residents less well integrated into their neighbourhoods (Schmid, Hewstone, Hughes, Jenkins & Cairns, 2009; Schmid, Tausch, Hewstone, Hughes, & Cairns, 2007). Ethnographic research suggests a pattern of ‘hunkering down’, or social withdrawal, among residents of different religions during times of political unrest (Hughes, Campbell & Jenkins, 2011). In-depth interview research on mixed neighbourhoods across Belfast indicates that for residents of recently mixed areas, those who identify with their neighbourhood and form cross-

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religious community bonds within their neighbourhood were able to cope with the stresses of intergroup contact, while those who did not remained fearful and isolated (Stevenson & Sagherian-Dickey, 2016; 2017).

Therefore, in line with the broader literature on neighbourhood diversification (e.g. Laurence, 2009; Stolle & Harell, 2013), there is some evidence to suggest that residential mixing in Northern Ireland has a very different effect on residents according to their pre-existing level of neighbourhood integration and cross-religious community links. Moreover, qualitative research in Northern Ireland suggests that neighbourhood identification can shape the experience of diversification, such that the development of a shared neighbourhood identity will help facilitate better intergroup relations. We therefore set out to explore if and how neighbourhood identity enables residents to cope with mixing within this especially challenging intergroup context. Specifically, we hypothesised:

*H1:* On the basis of the Social Cure tradition, we expect to see a positive relationship between neighbourhood identity and wellbeing;

*H2:* From the Contact Hypothesis, we expect to see relationships between neighbourhood norms of positive intergroup contact, positive experiences of mixing, and more positive intergroup attitudes;

*H3:* From our combined model of contact group dynamics, we expect that increased neighbourhood identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, and mixing, will together predict positive intergroup attitudes and wellbeing, via reduced intergroup anxiety.

In order to test these hypotheses, our research modelled the relationships between six aspects of residential experience: neighbourhood identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, mixing,

intergroup anxiety, negative intergroup attitudes, and wellbeing. Modelling analyses were conducted on two populations. First, we conducted secondary data analyses of the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT), a social attitudes survey administered to a random sample of the population of Northern Ireland in 2012, containing questions pertaining to our hypotheses. Second, we conducted a custom-designed survey of residents within one mixed neighbourhood in Belfast using previously validated measures of our core theoretical concepts.

### **Study 1: The 2012 NILT**

#### **Method**

The NILT is an annual survey in Northern Ireland which recruits a systematic random sample of participants from all addresses in the province. In face-to-face interviews respondents are asked to provide demographic information and respond questions on their social and political attitudes (Devine, 2012). The composition of questions changes from year to year and in 2012 asked participants about their local neighbourhood, intergroup relations and wellbeing, making that year's dataset well suited for investigating the present research questions. For the purposes of our analysis, we sampled only respondents who identified as coming from a Catholic or Protestant religious background, resulting in 1,087 respondents.

**Measures.** Items were selected from the NILT 2012 that captured neighbourhood identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, mixing, intergroup anxiety, negative intergroup attitudes, and wellbeing. Items were coded to ensure that higher scores indicated a greater sense of neighbourhood identity, an increased sense of a shared neighbourhood, an increased sense of intergroup anxiety, increased instances of mixing between Catholics and Protestants, an increased sense of wellbeing, and more negative intergroup attitudes. Additionally, 'I don't know' responses

were recoded as missing values. Table 1 details the items selected for this study, and the latent variables to which these items theoretically corresponded. While items relating to neighbourhood identity ask participants about ‘community’, these items clearly link this to a specific geographical location such that they are well suited to the measurement of neighbourhood identity rather than religious community identity.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

**Ethical considerations.** Study one used secondary data which had been processed and anonymised for public use. Participants gave informed consent for their participation in the original research and are not identifiable in any way from their responses in the published data.

## Results

We conducted Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in Mplus version 7 using maximum likelihood estimation to analyse the NILT data, with 5000 bootstrapped resamples to obtain bias corrected confidence intervals around the indirect effects estimates (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Due to missing data and our focus only on Protestants and Catholics, the final sample analysed was  $N = 1,087$  ( $M_{age} = 50.12$ ,  $SD_{age} = 18.59$ ), of whom 47.7% were Catholics ( $n = 518$ , 56% female) and 52.3% Protestants ( $n = 569$ , 57% female).

We first specified a measurement model with six covarying factors: neighbourhood identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, mixing, intergroup anxiety, negative intergroup attitudes, and wellbeing. Table 2 details the correlations between the six factors. After we followed the modification indices and added a covariance between two intergroup anxiety items and another between two shared neighbourhood items, the fit of this model was excellent,  $\chi^2(153) = 480.76$ ,  $CFI = .951$ ,  $RMSEA = .044$ ,  $SRMR = 0.041$ .

[Table 2 about here]

We next specified the structural model, shown in Figure 1. We added regression paths from identification, shared neighbourhood and mixing to anxiety, negative intergroup attitudes, and wellbeing, as well as paths from anxiety to attitudes and wellbeing. We allowed identification, shared neighbourhood, and mixing to covary, as well as wellbeing and attitudes. We also included the two covariances suggested by the modification indices in the measurement model. This model was a re-specification of the measurement model and thus showed an equally excellent fit to the data,  $\chi^2(153) = 480.76$ , CFI = .951, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = 0.041, AIC = 22,800.56<sup>1</sup>.

The parameter estimates indicated that higher levels of identification ( $\beta = -.168$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% Bias Corrected (BC) CIs [-.249, -.079]), shared neighbourhood perceptions ( $\beta = -.313$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BC CIs [-.404, -.224]) and mixing ( $\beta = -.496$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BC CIs [-.591, -.404]) were all significantly associated with lower levels of intergroup anxiety.

Furthermore, higher levels of identification ( $\beta = .170$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BC CIs [.087, .264]) and lower levels of intergroup anxiety ( $\beta = -.163$ ,  $p = .040$ , 95% BC CIs [-.327, -.019]) were significantly associated with greater wellbeing, whereas shared neighbourhood ( $\beta = .043$ ,  $p = .399$ , 95% BC CIs [-.048, .154]) and mixing ( $\beta = .042$ ,  $p = .545$ , 95% BC CIs [-.093, .181]) were not significantly related to wellbeing.

Higher levels of intergroup anxiety ( $\beta = .362$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BC CIs [.242, .478]), fewer shared neighbourhood perceptions ( $\beta = -.205$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% BC CIs [-.287, -.130]), and less mixing ( $\beta =$

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<sup>1</sup> We also specified an alternative measurement model which collapsed identification, mixing, and shared neighbourhood into a single factor. This model fitted the data poorly even when we included the two covariances we added to the original model based on the modification indices:  $\chi^2(162) = 1314.22$ , CFI = .688, RMSEA = .109, SRMR = 0.156; and is a significantly poorer fit to the data than our proposed model:  $\Delta\chi^2(9) = 833.46$ ,  $p < .001$ .

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-.376,  $p < .001$ , 95% BC CIs [-.498, -.263]) were all significantly associated with more negative intergroup attitudes, whereas identification was not significantly related to intergroup attitudes ( $\beta = .024$ ,  $p = .509$ , 95% BC CIs [-.049, .096]).

There were weak yet robust indirect effects from higher levels of identification (*indirect* = .027, 95% BC CIs [.005, .066]), more shared neighbourhood perceptions (*indirect* = .051, 95% BC CIs [.009, .110]), and more mixing (*indirect* = .081, 95% BC CIs [.011, .176]) to wellbeing via a reduction in intergroup anxiety. There were stronger robust indirect effects from higher levels of identification (*indirect* = -.061, 95% BC CIs [-.101, -.030]), shared neighbourhood perceptions (*indirect* = -.113, 95% BC CIs [-.173, -.066]), and mixing (*indirect* = -.179, 95% BC CIs [-.252, -.124]) to less negative intergroup attitudes via a reduction in intergroup anxiety.

Because this was the first test of our theoretical model, we compared the fit of our theoretical model to two alternative models. Alternative Model 1 specified that intergroup anxiety and mixing predicted identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, negative intergroup attitudes, and wellbeing, and that identification and shared neighbourhood predicted negative intergroup attitudes and wellbeing. Alternative Model 2 specified that negative intergroup attitudes and mixing predicted identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, and intergroup anxiety, and that identification and shared neighbourhood also predicted intergroup anxiety and wellbeing. Our theoretical model was a significantly better fit to the data than Alternative Model 1 ( $\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 13.443$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Alternative Model 2 ( $\Delta\chi^2 (3) = 4$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

[Insert figure 1 here]

### Study 1: Discussion



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The results of study 1 provide preliminary support for our hypotheses. From the Social Cure tradition, we expected to see a positive relationship between identity and wellbeing (H1), while from the Contact Hypothesis we expected to see relationships between norms and experience of mixing and intergroup attitudes (H2). Our results bear these predictions out: stronger neighbourhood identification was related to enhanced wellbeing, whereas both norms and experience of mixing were associated with more positive intergroup attitudes. Furthermore, we found evidence that neighbourhood identity, norms and experience of mixing contributed to these effects through a reduction in intergroup anxiety. In addition, our integrated model found that identification indirectly led to more positive intergroup attitudes, while norms and experiences of mixing indirectly led to greater wellbeing, both via a reduction in intergroup anxiety (H3).

This first analysis spans residents from neighbourhoods of varying size, socio-economic status, density and ethno-religious composition across Northern Ireland, thus suggesting that these findings are robust across this region. However, the NILT lacks the level of geographical granularity which would provide confidence in our interpretation of the findings as reflecting the local identity dynamics of residential mixing. Accordingly, our second survey is specific to a single neighbourhood in Belfast which has experienced significant levels of religious group mixing over the past decade.

### **Study 2: Custom Designed Survey of an East Belfast Neighbourhood**

#### **Method**

We surveyed residents within a single neighbourhood in Belfast which has evidenced increased mixing. A postal study invitation was issued to all residents within the selected locale, with a total of 4000 invitations issued. This letter contained an introduction to the study, a web address and

QR code link to an information sheet, a consent form, and the online survey. The information sheet invited participants to take part in our research “*looking at how residents feel about living in your area*”. Recruitment took place from May to June 2017 and 223 completed responses were obtained. The survey was hosted on the online survey management software Qualtrics.

**Study site.** To protect the anonymity of participants, the neighbourhood studied during this investigation has not been named. This East Belfast neighbourhood was a predominantly Protestant area which has experienced a recent influx of Catholic residents as evidenced by population changes between the 2001 and 2011 census dates (Nolan, 2013).

### Measures

**Demographic measures.** Measures adapted from the Northern Ireland Census were used to record respondent age, gender, marital status, employment status, and the highest qualification they had achieved (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2011). Respondents were asked to indicate their religious upbringing, and this was used as an indicator of the participants’ religious background.

**Neighbourhood identification.** We used the single-item measure of social identification (SISI; Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013), with a seven-point response scale from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*agree completely*), to measure community identification (*I identify with the community in the [local] area*). The SISI measure has been shown to have high validity and reliability, and to strongly overlap with longer and more complex measures of identification.

**Norms of mixing.** Two items measured the perceptions of whether the neighbourhood facilitates mixing with neighbours from religious backgrounds (“*I think that people living in this community are friendly towards neighbours from different religious backgrounds*”; “*I think that*

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*people living in this community are happy to spend time with neighbours from different religious backgrounds*”). These items were adapted from previous research on the impact of group norms on contact (Turner et al., 2008). Participants rated their agreement to two statements on a seven-point scale, from one (do not agree at all) to seven (agree completely).

**Residential contact.** Four items measured the quantity and quality of contact between outgroups at neighbourhood meetings or events, and how often they talked to outgroups. These indicators were modified from previous contact research (Tausch, Hewstone, & Kenworthy, 2010). Respondents indicated the quantity of their contact on a two five-point Likert scales with response options from ‘never’ to ‘very often’ (*How often do you have contact with [religious outgroup] residents at community meetings or events?; How often do you talk to [religious outgroup] residents of the [local] area?*). They indicated the quality of their contact on two seven-point scales from unpleasant to pleasant, and from negative to positive (*If you do have contact with [religious outgroup] residents of the [local] area, has this been generally...*). Outgroups were specified by name (i.e. Catholic or Protestant, depending on the religious background of the participant). Following previous usage of these scales, their summed totals were multiplied to create a weighted product variable of outgroup contact.

**Intergroup anxiety.** Anxiety towards the religious outgroup was recorded using a six-item adapted version of the intergroup anxiety scale which has been used extensively in Northern Ireland (Turner, Hewstone, Voci & Vonofakou, 2008). Using a seven-point scale, respondents indicated the extent to which they would feel the following emotions if they were the only member of their religious group in an interaction with people from other religions groups: ‘comfortable’, ‘nervous’, ‘anxious’, ‘at ease’, ‘safe’ and ‘awkward’. The items in this scale were reversed where

necessary and the mean computed so that higher scores indicate greater anxiety. The scale had excellent reliability  $\alpha = .91$ .

**Intergroup attitudes.** ‘Feeling thermometers’ or unidimensional self-report scales of feelings of favourably or unfavourably towards the outgroup were used to capture intergroup attitudes. These have been used extensively in contact research as assessments of intergroup attitudes, in particular within the context of Northern Ireland (e.g. Hewstone et al., 2006). Participants were asked to indicate on a sliding scale of 0 - 100 how favourably they felt towards either Catholics or Protestants. Scores of warmth towards the other religious community were then produced on the basis of the participants own denomination.

**Wellbeing.** Wellbeing was measured using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index with a 0-5 response scale (Topp, Østergaard, & Søndergaard, 2015). We computed the mean of the five items (e.g. *“I have felt cheerful and in good spirits”*). The WHO-5 has shown high validity, adequate reliability, and has had successful application in a wide range of fields. The scale was found to have good reliability  $\alpha = .89$ .

**Ethical considerations.** Participants were fully informed of the survey contents, were able to withdraw from the research at any time during the study period, and provided with contact details of support services in case the research caused any distress. Ethical approval was granted by the research ethics committee of the first author’s institution.

### Results

We specified a saturated path model using Mplus version 7 with maximum likelihood robust estimation, which is robust against violations of multivariate normality common among smaller samples. We focused our analyses on respondents who identified as either Catholic or Protestant

and so had completed the appropriate outgroup measures. This gave a final sample of  $N = 182$  ( $M_{age} = 37.43$ ,  $SD_{age} = 11.39$ ) of which 51.6% were Catholics ( $n = 94$ , 57.4% female) and 48.4% Protestants ( $n = 88$ , 44.3% female).

[Table 3 about here]

Identification, shared neighbourhood perceptions, and mixing all covaried and predicted intergroup anxiety, wellbeing, and outgroup warmth in the expected directions. Correlations between variables in the East Belfast Neighbourhood survey are highlighted in Table 3. The path analysis indicated that intergroup anxiety predicted lower wellbeing and outgroup warmth, and wellbeing and outgroup warmth covaried. The model and results are shown in Figure 2.

High levels of neighbourhood identification ( $\beta = -.201$ ,  $p = .005$ , 95% CIs [-.341, -.061]) and shared neighbourhood perceptions ( $\beta = -.391$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CIs [-.535, -.246]) were significantly associated with less intergroup anxiety, although mixing was not ( $\beta = -.088$ ,  $p = .249$ , 95% CIs [-.237, .062]).

Higher levels of identification ( $\beta = .209$ ,  $p = .022$ , 95% CIs [.031, .387]) were also significantly related to higher wellbeing, and there was a marginally significant association between more mixing and higher wellbeing ( $\beta = .160$ ,  $p = .053$ , 95% CIs [-.002, .323]). Shared neighbourhood perceptions were not significantly related to wellbeing ( $\beta = .026$ ,  $p = .783$ , 95% CIs [-.157, .208]).

Higher levels of intergroup anxiety were significantly associated with less warmth towards the outgroup ( $\beta = -.288$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CIs [-.444, -.132]), and there were marginally significant associations between higher levels of mixing and outgroup warmth ( $\beta = .163$ ,  $p = .062$ , 95% CIs [-.008, .335]), and between shared neighbourhood perceptions and outgroup warmth ( $\beta = .150$ ,  $p$

= .088, 95% CIs [-.022, .323]). Identification was not significantly related to outgroup warmth ( $\beta = .122, p = .163, 95\% \text{ CIs } [-.049, .294]$ ).

We also computed indirect effects with 95% bias corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals using maximum likelihood estimation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). There were robust indirect effects from higher levels of identification (*standardized indirect effect* = .058, BC 95% CIs [.017, .124]), shared neighbourhood perceptions (*standardized indirect effect* = .112, BC 95% CIs [.051, .203]) to warmer feelings towards the outgroup via a reduction in intergroup anxiety. No other indirect effects were robust.

### **Study 2 Discussion**

Our study 2 findings further supported the Social Cure approach, demonstrating a direct relationship between neighbourhood identity and wellbeing (H1). Our results also lend support to the Contact Hypothesis: residents who perceived their neighbourhood as one where mixing was the norm, and who had experienced mixing themselves, had warmer feelings towards the religious outgroup. Perceiving that the neighbourhood endorsed norms of mixing also led to warmer feelings towards the religious outgroup indirectly by reducing the anxiety residents felt in intergroup situations (H2). Notably though, mixing by itself was not associated with a reduction of intergroup anxiety. In terms of the integrated model (H3), neighbourhood identity directly and indirectly predicted better intergroup attitudes and indirectly predicted better individual wellbeing via reduced intergroup anxiety.

### **General Discussion**

Putnam's provocative thesis concerning the negative impact of diversification on social capital ends with an optimistic note that often goes unremarked in the debates which his work has

generated. He posits that in the absence of ethnic homogeneity, new forms of commonality may transcend ethnic, religious and national divisions and that these new shared identities may compensate for, and even reverse, the negative impact of diversification:

*It is my hypothesis that a society will more easily reap the benefits of immigration, and overcome the challenges, if immigration policy focuses on the reconstruction of ethnic identities, reducing their social salience without eliminating their personal importance. In particular, it seems important to encourage permeable, syncretic, 'hyphenated' identities; identities that enable previously separate ethnic groups to see themselves, in part, as members of a shared group with a shared identity (2007, p161)*

However, Putnam speculates that such a transformation requires generations of coexistence and exogamy between ethnically divided groups. In contrast, our work suggests that neighbourhood identities based on shared geography and collective interest can play a role in the effects of residential mixing upon the attitudes of residents. Moreover, this process is evident even within the conflict-scarred, sectarian landscape of the aftermath of the Northern Ireland conflict.

We support our claims with evidence from two very different surveys: one region-wide and one neighbourhood-specific. Across both studies we replicated previous findings within the Contact tradition showing that norms and level of contact predicted better intergroup attitudes in this context (Hewstone et al., 2005; 2008), as well as replicating research within the Social Cure tradition showing the positive association between neighbourhood community identification and wellbeing (McNamara et al., 2013). In addition, we demonstrated that an integrated model also has explanatory value such that, over and above these discrete effects, neighbourhood identity is associated with more positive intergroup attitudes.

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On this basis we can make some general assertions. First, against the background of literature which indicates both positive and negative consequences of diversification upon neighbourhood cohesion, we point to the key psychological element that has been hitherto neglected: neighbourhood identity. We contend that these geographically-based community identities can and do have a profound effect on residents' everyday lives. In line with previous evidence of the impact of neighbourhood identification on residents' wellbeing and resilience (e.g. McNamara et al., 2013), we propose that, insofar as neighbourhood identity is meaningful to residents, it should form a 'perceptual prism' through which residents experience daily life within the area. Our results indicate that neighbourhood identity is indeed associated with better wellbeing, in this case partly through an association with reduced intergroup anxiety. Our first contention is therefore that in terms of the wellbeing of residents of diverse areas, *neighbourhood identity matters*.

In terms of the study of intergroup contact, previous research has clearly demonstrated the effects of positive contact in improving intergroup attitudes, in particular through the reduction in intergroup anxiety. Longstanding models of contact have pointed to the role of superordinate identities in facilitating positive contact and of local neighbourhood norms of intergroup behaviour as supporting contact (Gertner et al., 2000). Yet still the role of neighbourhood identity in facilitating or inhibiting residential mixing has gone overlooked. Our second contribution then is to highlight the specific influence of neighbourhood identity on the improvement of intergroup attitudes, independently of local norms of mixing or of contact experience. For our selected neighbourhood (study 2) and neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland (study 1), neighbourhood identification is associated with lower intergroup anxiety and better intergroup attitudes. In other words, our second contribution is to posit that under certain circumstances, *neighbourhood identity*



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*is associated with more positive effects of contact.* For the explanation of this effect we need to turn to our model of intragroup process.

Our third contribution is to an area of research that has already recognised the importance of neighbourhood community identity in providing support and resilience to residents. Work within the Social Cure tradition has largely focused on the intragroup identity dynamics which positively support health and wellbeing separately from the intergroup processes of conflict and contact. While attention has been paid to the ability of the group to provide support in the face of discrimination and threat (e.g. Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002), less consideration has been given to how intragroup support can reduce conflict and improve intergroup relations. In the case of intergroup contact, the pivotal mediating variable found to improve intergroup attitudes is the reduction in intergroup anxiety. As has been argued elsewhere (Stevenson & Sagherian-Dickey, 2016), the ability of the group to provide support to reduce this anxiety could be central to understanding how neighbourhoods support their residents towards a more positive coexistence with outgroup residents. This would also fit with previous research indicating that disadvantaged neighbourhoods with low levels of existing social capital, and hence lower ability to support their residents, are more vulnerable to the negative effects of diversification (Laurence, 2009). Of course, it would require longitudinal research to provide definitive evidence of the directionality of these relationships. Yet still, the current findings that group identification is associated with reduced prejudice via reduced anxiety is worthy of attention: *neighbourhoods can support their members to collectively cope with diversity.*

More generally, our integration of contact and social cure approaches brings to light a further issue: while the health consequences of conflict and trauma are well documented, the health benefits of improved intergroup relations remain unexplored. Our current findings suggest a relationship

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between health and social division. In our first study, residents' wellbeing covaries with intergroup attitude and is also affected by the range of factors - neighbourhood identity, shared neighbourhood norms and positive contact - which improve intergroup warmth through a reduction in anxiety. In our second study, we find direct effects of both identity and mixing on wellbeing, though the latter effect was marginal. From this we tentatively conclude that there is a health cost of prejudice and division and a health benefit of neighbourhood solidarity. This may in part be due to the reduction in social capital occasioned by diversification of this area, which could undermine the well-documented health benefits of social capital (Putnam, 2000; 2007). Also, insofar as intergroup anxiety operates to reduce wellbeing by adding to the allostatic load of residents, social division is then likely to add to urban stress. We suggest then that these findings in relation to health and wellbeing may widen the consideration of the consequences of contact beyond intergroup perception: our final contribution is therefore to suggest that *positive residential mixing can have health benefits*.

Of course, our current studies have several key limitations and there remains much to do to further elucidate this model of the interdependence of identity processes and intergroup dynamics. Our research is cross-sectional and, even with our statistical modelling, does not provide the definitive evidence of the directionality of the effects of residential diversification over time. Indeed, we would suggest that it is likely that the facts at play are likely to have bidirectional, recursive relationships, such that the emergent experiences of intergroup contact within a diversifying neighbourhood will act to shape residents' neighbourhood identification, which will in turn further shape perceptions and relations between residents. In this way positive intergroup relations are likely to produce a self-fulfilling 'virtuous cycle' of intragroup dynamics (Haslam, Reicher & Levine, 2012) while negative contact may still serve to undermine neighbourhood cohesion.

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We also acknowledge the particularities of our neighbourhood case study and the generalities of our population survey (though we would argue that their strengths complement one another). We further acknowledge that the picture of diversification presented here is necessarily a partial one – Northern Ireland has experienced international migration as well as internal mixing and the resultant nexus of multiple intergroup relations is considerably more complex than presented here.

As a result, there are three areas which should be addressed in future research. First, the mechanisms whereby neighbourhood identification leads to a reduction in intergroup anxiety remains to be determined. From the Social Cure tradition, we posit two explanations: that a shared identity increases interdependence and reduces conflict between residents and in addition, that the increased perception of social support derived from higher identification with the neighbourhood will have a generic anxiety-reducing effect. Further research into the specifics of these mechanisms can illuminate how enhancing neighbourhood identity can improve the integration of incoming groups.

Second, as asserted elsewhere, the current cross-sectional survey approach does much to mask the emergent dynamics of the relationships between different religious groups in the area (Stevenson & Sagherian-Dickey, 2016). Specifically, the identity-related concerns, experiences and reactions of incoming residents are likely to be fundamentally different from existing residents. This is particularly the case in a society where neighbourhoods have previously been segregated into group territories and where mixing thereby constitutes an identity-threat to the local population (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2010). In such cases, asymmetrical identity concerns are likely to fuel conflict (Shaylegh, Drury & Stevenson, 2017). While we argue that engaging with the concept of neighbourhood identity is necessary to capture such territorial dynamics, future research needs to

capture the experiences of incomers and long-term residents separately, in order to demonstrate how these asymmetrical identity dynamics interact and unfold over time.

Third, the focus on religious identity in the unique context of Northern Ireland does raise the question of whether this model is applicable to the experience of mixing between different groups and across different intergroup contexts. We would contend that the longstanding evidence for the generic effects of positive contact (e.g. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), alongside the more recent evidence of the applicability of the Social Cure approach in communities across the world (e.g. Jetten et al., 2009; McNamara et al., 2014; Pandey, Stevenson, Shankar, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2014), together suggest that our model will have a more general applicability, but this remains to be seen.

In conclusion, while there is work to be done in developing the content of our model and determining its transferability, we argue that our evidence goes some way towards demonstrating the applicability of the Applied Social Identity Approach to the dynamics of residential contact. In doing so, it points to the need to reformulate the one of the key questions debated across the social sciences and political sphere today: *'what effects does residential mixing have on neighbourhood communities?'*. In suggesting that neighbourhood identity processes shape the experience of residential contact, this question can now be restated in a way which draws attention to a possible solution: *'how can neighbourhood identity support residents to collectively cope with contact?'*. Given the global challenges posed by migration and residential diversification, as well as the intensifying politicisation of immigration in international relations, we think that this new question is a fundamental one for political psychology.

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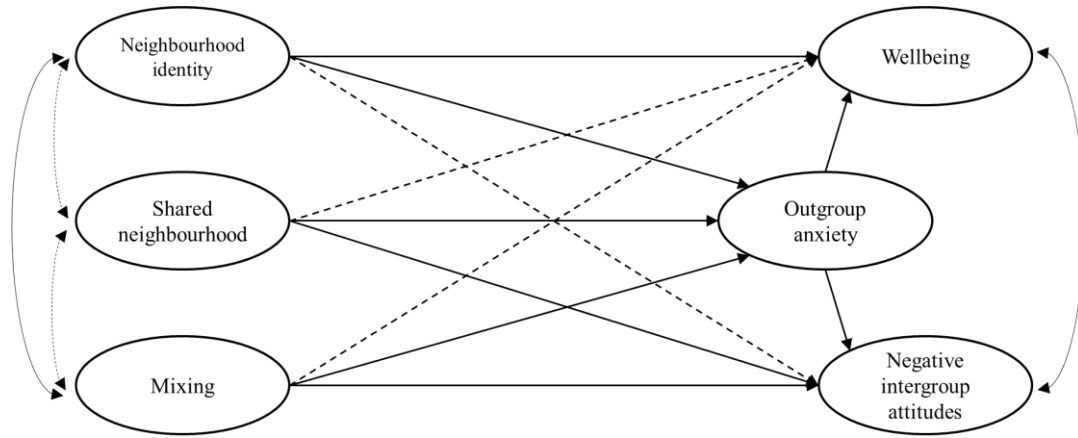


Figure 1: Structural model specified with the NILT data. Full lines are significant paths, dashed lines are non-significant

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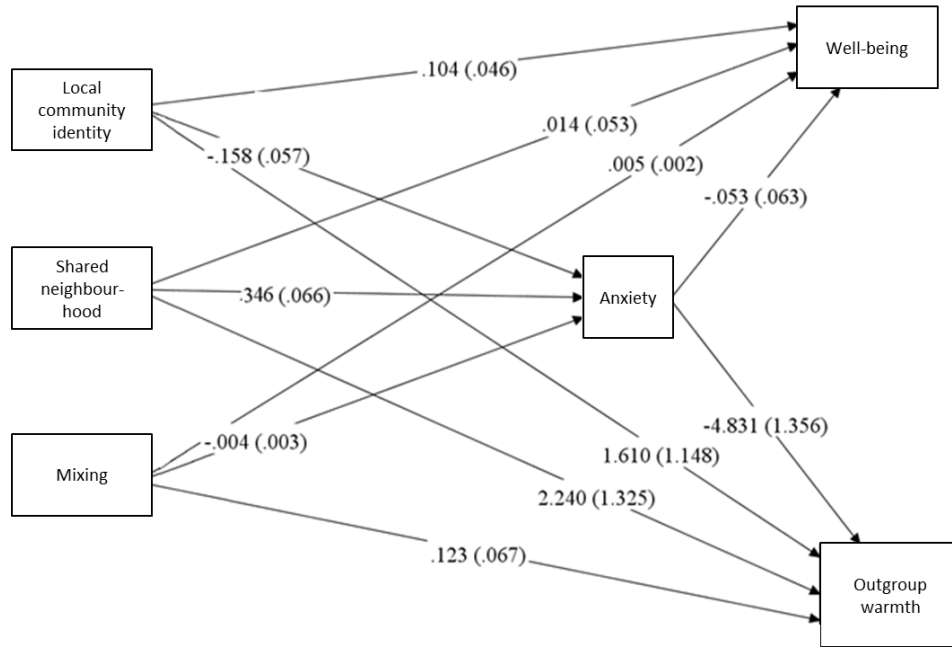


Figure 2: Significant paths from the Study 2 analyses, showing unstandardized estimates.

Covariances are omitted for clarity.

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Table 1: List of 2012 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey items included in analysis.

NILT item	Latent variable attributed to item
Thinking of the area within about half a mile of here. Do you think there is a strong sense of community or a weak sense of community among people living here? And do you personally feel a sense of belonging to that community?	Neighbourhood Identity
Do you think that libraries in this area are ‘shared and open’ to both Protestants and Catholics?	
Do you think that parks in this area are ‘shared and open’ to both Protestants and Catholics?	Perceived norms of neighbourhood sharedness
Do you think that leisure centres in this area are ‘shared and open’ to both Protestants and Catholics?	
Do you think that pubs in this area are ‘shared and open’ to both Protestants and Catholics?	
About how many of your friends would you say are the same religion as you?	
What about your neighbours? About how many are the same religion as you?	Experience of mixing
During the last year have you ever been put off going to an event because you felt that people of your religion might not be welcome there?	Outgroup anxiety
During the last year have you ever avoided using public transport to get somewhere because it would take you through an area where people of your religion might not be welcome?	
Suppose you were applying for a job, would you avoid workplaces situated in a mainly [outgroup] area?	
Supposing there was an event that you wanted to go to in a nearby town. How safe do you think you would feel going if it was to be held in [an outgroup association’s premises]? [A GAA Gaelic sports club; an Orange hall]	
If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of only your own religion, or in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?	
And if you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of only your own religion, or a mixed-religion school?	Intergroup attitudes
Personally, would you mind or not mind if one of their close relatives were to marry someone of a different religion?	
How much respect do you have for the [outgroup] community’s culture and traditions?	
Please think back over the last 12 months about how your health has been. Compared to people of your own age, would you say that your health has on the whole been... (very poor – excellent)	Wellbeing
Were you to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are on the whole... (not at all – very happy)	

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Table 2: Correlations between mean scores on the NILT community relations factors (n=1029).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Neighbourhood Identity	-					
2. Perceived norms of neighbourhood sharedness	.17**	-				
3. Experience of mixing	-.08*	.23***	-			
4. Outgroup anxiety	-.08	-.33***	-.28***	-		
5. Negative intergroup attitudes	-.01	-.41***	-.46***	.39***	-	
6. Wellbeing	.10**	.16***	.09**	-.16***	-.14***	-

Calculations performed using listwise deletion.

Correlation significance (two tailed) = \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Table 3: Correlations between variables in the East Belfast Neighbourhood survey (n=159).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Local Community Identity	-					
2. Perceived norms of neighbourhood sharedness	.33***	-				
3. Experience of mixing	.46***	.32***	-			
4. Outgroup anxiety	-.45***	-.29***	-.57***	-		
5. Outgroup Warmth	.41***	.34***	.42***	-.47***	-	
6. Wellbeing	.31***	.26**	.20*	-.22**	.19*	-

Calculations performed using listwise deletion.

Correlation significance (two tailed) = \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.