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Collectively Coping with Contact: The role of intragroup support in dealing with the

challenges of intergroup mixing in residential contexts

Abstract

The Social Identity approach to stress has shown how intragroup support processes shape individuals' responses to stress across healthcare, workplace and community settings. However the issue of how these 'Social Cure' processes can help cope with the stress of intergroup contact has yet to be explored. This is particularly important given the pivotal role of intergroup threat and anxiety in the experience of contact as well as the effect of contact on extending the boundaries of group inclusion. The present study applies this perspective to a real-life instance of residential contact in a divided society. Semi-structured interviews with 14 Catholic and 13 Protestant new residents of increasingly mixed areas of Belfast city, Northern Ireland, were thematically analysed. Results highlight that transitioning to mixed communities was fraught with intergroup anxiety, especially for those coming from 'single-identity' areas. Help from existing residents, especially when offered by members of other religious denominations, signalled a 'mixed community ethos' to new residents which facilitated adopting and sharing this identity. This shared identity then enabled them to deal with unexpected intergroup threats and provided resilience to future sectarian division. New residents who did not adopt this shared identity remained isolated, fearful and prone to negative contact.

Keywords: social identity; Social Cure; intergroup contact; residential contact; intergroup encounter; intergroup threat; intergroup anxiety; identity transition

Research within the *Social Cure* approach to the understanding of group responses to stress (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, & Branscombe, 2009) demonstrates that social identities provide a network of meanings through which threats are interpreted and experienced. Furthermore, fellow group members provide the social and psychological resources to respond to, cope with, and transform threats within the group's environment. In effect, social identities provide a 'perceptual prism' through which the world is experienced, as well as a means of coping with and challenging threat and disadvantage (Haslam, Reicher, & Levine, 2012).

Currently absent from this programme of investigation is the examination of how intragroup processes affect the experience of intergroup contact. Although it is more generally assumed that intragroup processes are associated with negative intergroup relations (e.g., Dovidio, 2013), the experience of real-life contact has several characteristics which suggest that ingroup support could in fact play a positive role: intergroup encounters in real-world settings typically involve multiple members of both groups in complex social situations (Connolly, 2000; Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005); intergroup encounters are typically characterised by high levels of threat and anxiety which are pivotal in perpetuating negative perceptions of outgroup members (e.g., Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 2000; Stephan, 2014); successful contact has the potential to change psychological group boundaries (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) so that successful contact should extend the inclusivity of intragroup support.

The current paper illustrates the importance of these considerations when investigating naturally occurring contact in real-world settings. Taking the example of residential contact in a divided society, a qualitative analysis investigates the role of intragroup support processes in shaping the apprehensions and anxieties of group members moving from 'single-identity' to mixed residential areas, their integration into their new communities and their

subsequent experiences of intergroup contact. In doing so, the investigation aims to reintegrate the analysis of the intra- and intergroup processes affecting experiences of contact (Dovidio, 2013) as well as pointing to the enormous potential to harness Social Cure processes in the service of improving intergroup relations in divided societies.

The 'Social Cure' and the collective experience of stress

The Social Identity approach to stress (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, O'Brien, & Jacobs, 2004; Jetten et al., 2009) has reconceptualised how social identities are thought to shape individuals' perceptions of threat (primary appraisal) and their ability to cope (secondary appraisal). The content and meaning of social identity impacts upon primary appraisal such that events deemed to be identity-relevant are experienced in relation to the group's identity. For example, bomb-disposal experts report their jobs as no more stressful than do bar workers (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005). In terms of secondary appraisal, intragroup processes impact upon the experience of events as stressful or not by feeding into group members' assessment of their collective coping ability (Haslam et al., 2004; Haslam et al., 2012). The perception of sharing an identity within the group leads to increased helping and accepting of aid as well as enhanced communication, social influence processes and shared cognition, all of which enhance the 'collective efficacy' of the group (Haslam & Reicher, 2006). Group members who feel that they can effectively call upon these group resources to cope with threats will experience events as less stressful than those who cannot.

The effects of intragroup support are particularly evident in times of identity change. Individuals experience high levels of stress during 'transitions' between different groups as they often initially lose the support of their original group before establishing supportive bonds within their new group (e.g., Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Jetten, Haslam, Iyer & Haslam, 2009). Factors that make for a smoother transition between groups

include: compatibility between previous and new group identities; belonging to other groups which can provide compensatory support during transition; the rapid formation of new supportive bonds within the new group via the new shared identity.

Social Cure processes can also be extended to new group members or withdrawn from existing members according to the shifting the boundaries of intergroup relations. Stigmatisation, marginalisation and exclusion of previous group members can strip them of group support and leave them vulnerable to threat and stress (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012; Stevenson, McNamara, & Muldoon, 2014). Conversely, new members can be included within the group, insofar as they are recategorised as sharing an identity, and this support can ease their transition and provide resilience to future stress (Iyer et al., 2009).

However, while the dynamic of extending or withholding intragroup support is well understood, this has yet to be applied to the stress of intergroup contact. Specifically the possibilities of reducing intergroup threat and anxiety in intergroup encounters, though providing intragroup support or extending the boundaries of the group, remain unexamined.

Intergroup contact, threat and anxiety

As Stephan and Stephan (1985, 2000) point out, intergroup contact encounters are often intensely stressful. Against a background of negative prior intergroup relations, apprehension about the potential behaviour and evaluation by outgroup members can be compounded by awareness of one's own ignorance of the outgroup, a fear of embarrassment and of causing offence by one's own behaviour in the encounter. The resultant anxiety can lead to awkwardness, excessive adherence to one's own group norms, miscommunication and the disproportionate interpretation of minor misunderstandings as encounters unfold (e.g., Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 2000; Stephan, 2014; West, Shelton, & Trail, 2009). Together these effects mean that intergroup contact is often predisposed to negative consequences.

Indeed, more recent studies have indicated an asymmetry in the impact of positive and negative contact, such that the anxiety-laden nature of negative encounters and the resultant salience of group identities (the valence-salience effect) make them more impactful upon intergroup dynamics (Barlow et al., 2012; Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010).

Given the centrality of intergroup anxiety to the perpetuation of intergroup prejudice, a considerable body of research has focused on anxiety-reduction as a pathway to better intergroup relations. Reduced anxiety is thought to impact upon actual intergroup perception and interactions by reducing the likelihood of miscommunication and misunderstanding (Stephan, 2014). The major meta-analyses that have benchmarked the effects of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice and improving intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008) have identified anxiety-reduction as a key mediating factor in the positive effects of contact. Indeed this fundamental effect of anxiety-reduction can be seen across the range of contact studies, including more recent studies involving intergroup friendship, indirect contact and imagined contact (e.g., Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, 2008).

It is notable, however, that this research has largely overlooked the role of intragroup processes in structuring the experience of contact in general and of contact-related anxiety in particular. For the study of contact, this omission is problematic in three main ways. First, from a practical perspective, it is possible that in certain circumstances, groups can help reduce intergroup threat and anxiety among their members. If so, this can make an important contribution to the understanding of successful contact. Second, a central tenet of contact theory is that successful contact should reconfigure the boundaries between groups, through the development of 'common ingroup identity' (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). However the specific processes through which contact can transform intergroup relations into intragroup dynamics remain poorly understood (Dovidio, 2013; Pettigrew, 1998). Finally, encounters between groups in day-to-day community life often occur between multiple group members.

The bar, the shop, the park and the workplace are sites of multiple participant intergroup interactions (e.g., Connolly, 2000; Dixon, Levine, & McAuley, 2006; Hughes, Campbell, & Jenkins, 2011), where the shared norms of contact within and between groups will necessarily shape the dynamics of unfolding intergroup encounters. Recent quantitative research highlights the impact of shared norms of contact upon the intergroup attitudes of residents of local neighbourhoods (Christ et al., 2014) as well as the role played by social ties in enabling residents to deal with neighbourhood diversification (Stolle, Soroka, & Johnston, 2008). However, with the exceptions outlined below, this intersection between intragroup dynamics and intergroup encounters remains largely unexplored.

Multi-participant intergroup encounters

One area in which contact has typically been studied as a collective encounter is in structured intergroup interventions in deeply divided societies, where small numbers of group members are brought together to discuss their similarities and differences. While such interventions have been demonstrated to evidence the same modest positive effect as those in less conflictual settings (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015), they are considerably more fraught. Encounters are inevitably shaped by the group's collective history of conflict, while being constrained by their shared beliefs and norms (Bekerman, 2009; Maoz, 2000, 2002, 2011). When communication does occur, traditional group narratives are typically reproduced, often hardening rather than softening group positions (Bekerman, 2007; Pilecki & Hammack, 2014). In effect, while the encounters are riven with intragroup processes, these tend to perpetuate opposition.

The other main study of multi-participant encounters is through naturalistic observation of contact where it occurs, or does not occur in everyday life. Research indicates that collective avoidance, separation and informal boundary formation characterise everyday group

behaviour in divided societies, even in ostensibly 'shared' social spaces (Dixon et al., 2008; Thomas, 2005). Such informal segregation is reported by group members to stem from apprehension and anxiety in mixed company and a desire for the relative security of one's own group (Alexander & Tredoux, 2010; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). In contrast, successful group encounters tend to be characterised by feelings of safety (King, Baxter Magolda, & Massé, 2011) achieved through the presence, consent and support of other ingroup members. This suggests that intragroup support can structure the experience of positive intergroup encounters, though this has not been an explicit focus of investigation.

The current research redresses this neglect by examining directly the role of intragroup support in shaping experiences of intergroup contact. Taking the example of residential contact in a divided post-conflict society, it investigates how the dynamics within each group form the context for intergroup interactions and how these interactions can then transform group boundaries. By focusing on a community setting, it takes as its starting point the multiple intra- as well as intergroup encounters which characterise daily life. Furthermore, by using an interview methodology it aims to tap into the lived experience of intergroup contact, and in particular by interviewing couples (where they have moved into an area together) it begins to examine shared perceptions of threat and experiences of anxiety in contact encounters.

The Case of Northern Ireland

Since the cease-fires of 1998, which brought to an end a phase of over 30 years of armed conflict, Northern Ireland remains a divided society. Catholics and Protestants often lead separate and parallel lives in the spheres of education, recreation and religion (Hughes, Campbell, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2007). Moreover, the region evidences high levels of residential segregation, especially in more deprived urban areas. In the capital city of Belfast,

67% of Catholics and 73% of Protestants live in segregated areas of 80% or greater of their own tradition (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006).

Research on contact in Northern Ireland has followed the broader pattern of contact research elsewhere: self-report surveys have shown that higher levels of contact are associated with lower levels of prejudice 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 al., 2004; Tausch, Hewstone, Kenworthy, Cairns, & Christ, 2007).

However, survey research has found that instances of contact in real-life settings have less predictable effects on intergroup relations. Within Belfast, residents of mixed areas have better average intergroup attitudes - in part due to more frequent and better quality interactions with those from the other group - but also have higher levels of perceived threat (Schmid, Hewstone, Hughes, Jenkins, & Cairns, 2009; Schmid, Tausch, Hewstone, Hughes, & Cairns, 2008). Indeed, living in mixed areas has negative effects upon the intergroup attitudes and experiences of individuals who are less integrated into their neighbourhoods.

The ethnographic evidence paints a similarly complex pattern. While there is an observable increase in intergroup contact in mixed areas, this is often qualified by a strategic withdrawal at different times according to political tensions (Hughes et al., 2007). For residents, contact can be superficial as well as meaningful, and negative as well as positive, so that the consequences of contact depend very much upon the contexts within which it occurs. Also, ethnographic research points to a distinction largely overlooked by survey research: the experience of contact is qualitatively different for long-term residents compared to recent incomers (Byrne, Hannson, & Bell, 2006).

The current research aims to examine the experiences of incomers to a range of mixed areas of Belfast with a view to exploring their encounters with others from their own and other religious backgrounds. From this we aim to determine what intragroup factors shape the perceptions and experiences of threat and anxiety in the intergroup encounters of everyday life.

Method

We recruited participants from three residential areas of Belfast which have shown demographic shifts towards mixing over the past 10 years. The areas differ in terms of local history but, in line with all newly mixed areas of Belfast, were previously Protestant single-identity areas experiencing an influx of both Catholic and Protestant residents. In each area we recruited people who had been resident for less than 10 years, having previously lived in other parts of Northern Ireland. Within these parameters the sample was diverse in terms of occupation (professional, manual, unemployed) and location of origin. We conducted 17 interviews with a total of 27 respondents (13 Protestant, 14 Catholic). Our interviews were predominantly with younger couples (10 interviews) who we interviewed together. In line with previous research which aimed to recreate group dynamics through multiple-participant interviews (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher, 1998), this gave us an insight into the collective decision-making processes involved in their initial move and how they experienced the transition together.

Interviewees were recruited through local community organisations, church groups, and snowballing from existing participants. Participants were asked to take part "in a study examining residents' experiences of living in a 'mixed' part of the city". Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes by the second author. The interview schedule was semi-structured, questions were as open and non-directional as possible and the interviews

were led by the participants' accounts of their experiences. Topics included: their life in their previous community (e.g., *Where did you live before moving to this area; what was it like living there?)*; their decision to move (e.g., *Why did you choose this area to move to?)*; the knowledge and expectations of their new community (e.g., *What did you know about this particular area?*); their experiences of moving (e.g., *How did you find the move from your previous area to here?);* and their experiences of settling into their new area (e.g., *How have you found moving into this new community?*). All interviews were transcribed verbatim (with 'I' indicating interviewer and 'M' and 'F' indicating the gender of participants) and anonymised.

A theoretically-guided thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whereby the principles of the social identity approach were used to identify topics within the transcripts which were relevant to the group dynamics of the reported events (e.g., feelings of belonging within communities, transitions between communities, expectancies of intragroup interactions, instances of intergroup encounters) so as to examine how these were understood and described in participants' own terms. All instances were identified across the data set and placed in a file for analysis. From this file, the systematic variations or 'themes' in participants' accounts were identified. Particular attention was paid to instances that did not fit the general pattern observed across the data. These 'deviant cases' were returned to the context of their occurrence within the data and scrutinised to identify the basis of their difference (Seale, 1999). The general explanation of the theme was then amended to incorporate these exceptional cases until all cases were accounted for. As Haslam and McGarty (2014) outline, this process is thus a recursive engagement with the data which aims to arrive at a satisfactory 'fit' between theoretical preconceptions and the emergent thematic structure.

Analysis

Three broad themes were identified across the data set which captured the social identity dynamics of residents' reports of their moves to their new locales: 'apprehensions and anxieties on moving to the new area', 'varieties of integration' and 'critical intergroup encounters'.

Theme 1: Apprehensions and anxieties on moving to the new area.

While our participants had a variety of different understandings of what constituted their 'community' (from broad geographical area to immediate neighbours only) all gave accounts of moving in which they reported being conscious of their religious identity within the new locale. In addition, the sample had various levels of previous contact with members of other religious traditions: some had lived all of their lives in 'single identity' areas and had little (or negative) contact with those from different religious traditions, others with more heterogeneous social networks had experienced substantial and largely positive contact.

In the first extract below we see a Catholic respondent relating how her move to a newly mixed area was characterised by high levels of fear and uncertainty, because of a prior negative intergroup experience. As a child, her family had been petrol-bombed out of their house in that area by Protestant neighbours. In between times, she had lived in a single-identity Catholic community, which she had characterised as safe and secure ('*like a fortress, there was walls everywhere and we lived inside*' Interview 1, Catholic single). Against that background, her return to the site of this early trauma was reported to be fraught with anxiety:

Extract 1: Interview 1, Catholic single

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

F: It was massive, it was really, really frightening and the whole time you're sort of thinking 'Am I doing the right thing here?' And then the reason we [moved to

Catholic single-identity area] in the first place is because my mother's home, my mother was put out of her home with us… our house was petrol bombed, it was burned to the ground and we were put out of it. So it was scary because I was 13 when that happened and that never goes away. And I was thinking, 'If that was to happen again', you know, so it was a big step.

Other participants did not have such extreme prior experiences, but reported being aware of the potentially negative consequences that intergroup encounters might entail. These residents typically did not have much prior experience of residential mixing and had relied on the advice of family and friends in their previous community in deciding whether to move or not. One participant reported being warned of the regular occurrence of fights between Catholic and Protestant youths: '*I had sort of been told about them having scuffles and stuff at the top of the street, the odd, it would happen now and again that kids would come and riot and stuff*' (Interview 4, Protestant single). Other participants reported being warned of flashpoints between the two religious groupings in the area at politically sensitive times of year:

Extract 2: Interview 5, Protestant couple

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

F: Yeah because that's what a lot of people seemed to have a problem with because it is mainly Protestants and then it does become a Catholic area. I have no issue with it because with us we don't have any issue with religion but a lot of people, yeah, "that's what they would be like, they'd be always fighting or coming to the 12th July or the 11th night[1] there's always fights", this is what we were being told at the time but we've never had any problems at all.

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[1] The 12th July is the anniversary of the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James of England at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The commemorative parades on the 12th, and the celebratory bonfires the night before, are often occasions of increased intercommunal tension across Northern Ireland.

Despite these warnings from their previous communities, our participants invariably reported that they had not encountered the expected intergroup conflict.

For other participants, the reputation of their new area for successful religious mixing was taken as an indicator of tolerance and as evidence of positive intercommunity relations: the prospect of an ethos of religious diversity was an attractive aspect of the new area. These participants tended to have come from more mixed backgrounds which favoured and supported religious diversity or from a problematic single-identity community, and in their interviews they often contrasted mixed areas to single-identity areas in which local paramilitary groups had an influence:

Extract 3: Interview 14, Catholic couple

I: Why is that, why did you not want to move to a Catholic area?

M: I grew up in one and have had enough of it. Just, it might be different somewhere else in the world, it probably would be a lot different in the South I'm sure, but up here, you get the inevitable scumbags. It's as simple as that. I'd rather move somewhere mixed by a very long way at least that way, you know, the paramilitary presence is going to be severely reduced compared to, as I say, single identity communities up here tend to have their own problems. So, just something I'd rather stay away from if you give me a choice.

A final subset of participants was already very familiar with their new areas, having friends or relatives in the area who had provided positive information about the mixed character of the locale. These had access to an immediate connection and social network within the community and typically reported feeling an immediate sense of belonging and integration within their new area:

Extract 4: Interview 6, Protestant single

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

In sum, our participants' reported a range of experiences of mixing within their prior communities and indeed described these communities in a number of ways: from tight-knit single-identity residential communities to loosely defined neighbourhood areas to diffuse and heterogeneous social networks. However, their experience of relocating was recognisably that of an 'identity transition' (Iyer et al., 2009) from a known to a (more or less) unknown residential community, which was additionally complicated by the religiously diverse nature of their destination. Their appraisal of the move was shaped by the collective experience, norms and advice of their various prior communities: those originating from single-identity areas which are opposed to mixing were more fearful; those from communities which were supportive of mixing were less so. Evidently, participants' initial appraisals were shaped by intragroup influence of prior group memberships.

Theme 2: Varieties of integration into a mixed community

As noted above, some residents reported feeling an immediate sense of belonging and integration within their area due to prior connections in the neighbourhood. For others, this process took more time, but most did report eventually feeling connected, integrated and identified with their new community. Those who developed this sense of shared identity reported basing this on their observation of norms of mixing and support in the locale. For example, in the next extract a Catholic couple reported an instance of misrecognition

(Rangers is considered to be a 'Protestant' football team), which resulted in a respectful acknowledgement of religious difference and an enduring neighbourly friendship:

Extract 5: Interview 8, Catholic couple

M: It was just by chance the day we were moving in I had light blue track suit bottoms on and a blue and white polo shirt with, it had an R, looked like a Rangers top, and the guy across the street says to me, "Do you fancy a pint round the corner?", I says, "My type weren't allowed in there" and he just went "Dead on kid, that's brilliant". From that day he's always asked me how we are, do we need anything, you know. He's bad with his hip, I always ask him do you need a lift, you know.

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

Of note in this and other similar accounts is that the newly established relationships which were reported as evidencing successful integration into the mixed community were often those with neighbours of a different religious background. These experiences helped reassure the residents that the neighbourhood was not divided along sectarian lines and reinforced the sense of living in a mixed community with a shared identity. Likewise, residents who felt integrated in this way reported that they could rely on others when needed and again emphasised that this was irrespective of religious background:

Extract 6: Interview 20, Catholic single

F: Well at the time that our car was sitting out there and a car came past fast at night and knocked off the wing mirror and that fella across the street there was out like a shot […]

I: That must have made you feel very safe.

F: It did. And it made me feel happy because he was a different religion from us and that made you feel that he didn't care what religion you were, do you know what I

mean, that he was there to help and it didn't matter, religion didn't matter about it, didn't come in to it, you know what I mean, which was good.

However, other residents were less convinced of the cross-community cohesion within their new locales and distanced themselves from their local communities as a result. Perceptions of sectarian division within the community, such as displays of political flags or emblems, could operate to undermine their sense of belonging to a network of trust and help within the community. One couple reported that the display of sectarian flags in their local area undermined their sense of being able to rely on their neighbours for help if required:

Extract 7: Interview 7, Mixed couple

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

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

A few participants reported that they completely failed to integrate into their local areas due to sectarian division and exclusion. These residents did not form any bonds in their new neighbourhood and denied any sense of involvement or identification with their new locale. In terms of social support, they tended to rely completely on prior networks of friends and relatives outside of the area. Interactions with neighbours, especially of the other religion, were reported to be superficial and were interpreted as reflecting tensions and resentments, particularly around sensitive political issues or times of the year. The following extract comes from a Catholic participant, who had been forced out of her previous area by Protestant paramilitaries and now viewed her new Protestant neighbours with suspicion:

Extract 8: Interview 17, Catholic single

F: And then you know rightly, and when it comes near the 12th they're getting their sandwiches all ready to go to their wee clubs. It's like isolated. And even with that they're friendly, they speak to you, they smile, they would laugh and what have you, but you know rightly […] I came in here at the end of September, I bothered with nobody, I was like a hermit, luckily enough I had my own friends that came up.

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

F: No, not a sinner came near me.

In line with previous ethnographic investigations of mixed areas (Byrne et al., 2006), isolated residents were particularly prone to withdraw around politically sensitive times such as the 12th July (the height of the controversial Protestant 'marching season'). Here though, we see that the residents' perception of a divided and sectarian community is also accompanied by a more general account of marginalisation and loneliness as well as a reliance on pre-existing friends.

Overall the second theme demonstrates that feelings of integration into mixed neighbourhoods were reportedly inferred from observation of local norms of behaviour. Participants who were well-integrated offered examples of forming reciprocal bonds of helping with residents, especially those of another religious background, as evidence of the shared identity of their community and its ethos of mixing. In contrast, those who viewed their neighbourhoods as divided along sectarian lines reported isolation and low levels of integration. In effect, those residents who had successfully transitioned into their new community viewed their interactions with neighbours in intragroup terms, while those who did not recognise or adopt the mixed identity of the neighbourhood viewed relations in intergroup terms:

Theme 3: Critical intergroup incidents

One key feature of many of the participants' accounts of settling into their new community was the occurrence of 'critical incidents' or unexpected events that posed a potential sectarian threat. Some reported instances of vandalism or burglary, others reported frightening noises or of hearing altercations nearby. Almost all participants' relayed some type of pivotal occurrence which was potentially intergroup in nature and which made them reflect upon their new life within the unfamiliar community.

We have previously seen one example in extract 6 above; another comes from an interview with a former resident of a tight-knit Catholic community talking about her move:

Extract 9: Interview 1, Catholic single

F: It's a massive step, it is a big, big step to move out from where you feel secure into where you don't feel so secure, it's a massive step. And I remember I was only up there about six weeks and there's an estate out the back of us up in Cliftondene and there was people coming out of that estate and they were running up the street and they were making a real riot. Now ordinarily if I was living here that wouldn't have bothered me, it wouldn't have scared me, but that frightened the life out of me […] and then my neighbour, S, she had, I went to see her the next day and she had said to me, "I was thinking about you last night, did that scare you?", and I said "That frightened the life out of me, I was going to come into you because my son was out, he was working at the time" and S says, "Don't be worrying about that", she says, "Because they do that all the time at weekends, they come out of that estate and come up the street and they're noisy, but they're not doing harm, I mean they're just noisy".

This account captures many of the key features of these accounts of critical incidents. Firstly, the event is unexpected and threatening, and made more frightening by the vulnerability felt by a new and relatively isolated member of the community. Secondly, the event is inherently ambiguous, as the degree of actual threat is unknown, but it is still potentially relevant to the

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new resident's religious background (the nearby estate is known to be exclusively Protestant). Most importantly though is the response of the local neighbour (known to be Protestant) who provides informational support, which allows the new resident to reconsider this situation as a harmless aberration that does not characterise life in the new community. In effect, the information allows the resident to reappraise the event as less threatening.

A similar account below bears many of the same hallmarks and is stated even more explicitly in identity terms. This comes from a Catholic couple (seen in Extract 5 above) who quickly established good connections with Protestant neighbours in their new area. Here these residents report having their car vandalised on their first night in their new area:

Extract 10: Interview 8, Catholic couple

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

M: And they were only 14 years of age.

F: They were only kids like.

M: And the police caught them and didn't do nothing about them, they were threatening, "My da's head of the UDA, I'll get him to come down and shoot you" […]

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

F: He wanted to sell up and go.

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

Again we see an unexpected event which poses a direct threat to the new residents. Here the event has an overtly sectarian dimension as the respondent is threatened with a paramilitary organisation (the Protestant 'Ulster Defence Association'). However, in providing a context of the likelihood of the reoccurrence of the event, the response of the local neighbours – known to be Protestant – allows the Catholic resident and his partner to reappraise the event as an exception rather than as characteristic of the area.

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

Extract 11: Interview 14, Catholic couple

F: We had a family moved in about, actually 3 doors down, and last spring and they were really, it was really bad, they were really anti-social and playing music loudly and.

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

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

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

M: […][another of the neighbours] had a word with the landlord and the landlord told them, "Oh sorry, actually I have people who are moving in" and kicked them out.

This expectation of community rejection of sectarianism was most evident for interviewees who reported feeling highly integrated and identified with their area. In contrast, one set of

participants who were less integrated into their local community reported that if there were a sectarian attack, their response would be to leave:

Extract 12: Interview 2, Protestant couple

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

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

M: Not particularly, no.

F: Would just want to keep a low profile.

This third theme reflects the consequences of the support gained by residents from integration and identification with their new mixed community. Negative incidents were initially interpreted as due to local sectarian division, but owing to the informational, emotional and instrumental support offered by their new neighbours (especially those from another religious background) the events could be reappraised as non-sectarian, or at least as not reflecting inherent division in the community. On the other hand, a lack of integration and identification was more closely associated with vulnerability to perception of sectarian threat.

Discussion

[Table 1 about here]

This research investigates how the dynamics of intragroup support enable coping with the threats and anxiety associated with intergroup encounters in a real-world setting. The current study elucidated these processes within the context of residential mixing in a divided society,

where the challenges of intergroup contact are compounded by the uncertainties of transitioning between neighbourhoods. As summarised in Table 1, residents reported some initial apprehension which evidently derived from their prior communities: those moving from single-identity communities with norms of avoidance were more fearful than those moving from communities which were supportive of mixing. For those who successful transitioned to their new mixed community, the perception of an ethos of mixing and the availability of intragroup support helped them to deal with incidents of potentially negative intergroup experiences. In contrast, those who remained marginalised and isolated felt threatened and suspicious of intergroup encounters. This fits with previous research showing how group norms of avoidance and social isolation can perpetuate group members' intergroup anxiety, while intragroup support, social ties and positive neighbourhood norms of contact can scaffold positive intergroup encounters (Christ et al., 2011; King et al., 2011; Stolle et al., 2008).

In terms of theory, we argue that our findings firstly attest to the enormous potential of understanding how group dynamics can structure the experience of intergroup encounters in everyday life, through initially shaping intergroup anxieties and then transforming intergroup perceptions of threat into intragroup experiences of support. This develops previous work demonstrating the ideal role of common ingroup identification in reducing intergroup threat (e.g., Riek, Mania, Gaertner, McDonald & Lamoreaux, 2010) by pointing to a set of intragroup processes which may bridge the gap between intractable identity conflict and the emergence of a common ingroup: while incompatible, antagonistic identities may predispose group members to negative intergroup encounters, displays of cross-group support can be used to infer a sense of shared identity can be. In turn, this reconceptualises former outgroup members as part of a common ingroup based on diversity while also providing shared resources to deal with threats to unity.

Secondly, from a 'Social Cure' perspective, the present study adds to a growing body of Social Cure research attesting to the flexible boundaries of group membership as a pivotal site of social inclusion and exclusion (Reicher et al., 2006; Stevenson et al., 2014). Specifically it illustrates that while inclusion of new members can extend positive intragroup dynamics to them, this can be a bi-directional process such that displays of social support can encourage potential members to infer and adopt a shared identity. In addition it enriches the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (Iyer et al., 2009) by illustrating that while incompatibility of group identities impedes transition, the compatibility of identities (in our case those previous communities which endorsed mixing) can conversely encourage, support and facilitate transition. Also our data exemplifies how transition can take the form of moving from a group defined by homogeneity to one defined by its diversity. Given the current challenges of global population mobility and increasing ethnic pluralism we expect this to be a fruitful line of future inquiry.

Third, these findings speak to a paradox in recent research on residential contact: that within the same residential area, mixing can affect some residents' intergroup attitudes positively and others negatively (Schmid et al., 2008). We would suggest that this is partly attributable to the processes of identity transition (Iyer et al., 2009). Those transitioning from a safe and secure single-identity environment into a mixed locale will require compensatory intragroup support from their new community, otherwise their isolation will predispose them to increased intergroup threat and anxiety. The policy implication of this finding is that, while increased residential mixing is typically assumed to be an indicator of the improvement of intergroup relations (OFMDFM, 2013), incomers are actually predisposed to negative rather than positive contact. In order to improve community relations through residential mixing, government needs to appreciate this complexity and support the development of local community identities.

In terms of limitations to the study, our participants' accounts cannot be taken to span all experiences of residential mixing in divided societies: residential areas differ widely in terms of their ethos and history of mixing; experiences of incomers will differ systematically from those of existing residents; private residents moving on a voluntary basis will experience residential mixing differently than those moving to social housing. However in all cases we expect the dynamics of transition to fundamentally shape the outcome of residential mixing. Also, while we argue that multiple-participant interviews go some way to redressing the methodological individualism of much previous contact research, these retrospective interviews do not capture the unfolding dynamics of actual intergroup encounters. Analyses of intergroup interactions within their community settings are required. Finally, we acknowledge that spontaneous residential mixing in post-conflict settings differs greatly from structured intergroup encounters in ongoing conflicts elsewhere, in which the need to redress structural inequality accompanies the need to develop common ground (Dixon, Durrheim, Stevenson & Cakal, 2016; Maoz, 2011). Yet still, our results suggest that much is to be gained from considering how intragroup dynamics can be harnessed to reduce intergroup conflict. Specifically they suggest how everyday mundane acts of communication and cross-group helping can potentially scaffold the development and sharing of mixed identities in divided societies.

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