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Original Citation

Thomas, Paul, Busher, Joel, Macklin, Graham, Rogerson, Michelle and Christmann, Kris (2017) Hopes and Fears: Community cohesion and the 'White working class' in one of the 'failed spaces' of multiculturalism. *Sociology: The journal of the British Sociological Association*. ISSN 0038-0385

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Hopes and Fears: Community cohesion and the ‘White working class’ in one of the ‘failed spaces’ of multiculturalism

Abstract

Since 2001, community cohesion has been an English policy concern, with accompanying media discourse portraying a supposed failure by Muslims to integrate. Latterly, academia has foregrounded White majority attitudes towards ethnic diversity, particularly those of the ‘White working class’. Whilst questioning this categorisation, we present data on attitudes towards diversity from low income, mainly White areas within Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, a town portrayed in media discourse as one of the ‘failed spaces’ of multiculturalism. Drawing on mixed methods research, we present and discuss data that provide a complex message, seemingly confirming pessimistic analyses around ethnic diversity and predominantly White neighbourhoods but also highlighting an appetite within the same communities for greater and more productive inter-ethnic contact. Furthermore, anxieties about diversity and integration have largely failed to coalesce into broad support for organised anti-minority politics manifest in groups such as the English Defence League.

Key words: Anti-minority politics; Cohesion; Ethnicity; Integration; Policy; White communities.

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Introduction

Since the 2001 riots in northern England, the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations has been a significant English policy concern. The analysis of 'parallel lives' made by the post-riots Cattle report (2001) led to the policy prioritisation of 'community cohesion' under the then-Labour government and national-level state encouragement of greater and more harmonious inter-ethnic contact. Concerns about ethnic segregation were side-lined under the 2010 Coalition government (Thomas, 2014) but returned to the fore as part of a wider focus on Islamist extremism (Cameron, 2015): a good example of how elite-level political discourse around cohesion has been largely concerned with the supposed failure of ethnic and religious minorities generally, specifically Muslims, to integrate – the trope of 'self-segregation' (Finney and Simpson, 2009).

This has arguably amplified the stigmatising focus on the loyalties of Muslims in the wake of the 7/7 London bombings (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012). It has also deflected concern from the role of White-majority communities in the creation and maintenance of 'parallel lives' and their potential responsibility for improving cohesion. National (Cattle, 2001) and local (e.g. Ritchie, 2001) post-riots reports explicitly identified negative, even racist, attitudes within White-majority communities as problematic. This, however, was largely ignored in subsequent policy implementation. Latterly, White majority attitudes towards and engagement with these issues (Beider, 2011; 2015; Rhodes, 2012; Open Society Foundation, 2014; Thomas and Sanderson, 2013) have been explored but this literature remains embryonic and based almost exclusively on qualitative research. The mixed methods case study data presented here addresses this deficit.

This article focuses on a highly-contested part of the White majority: the so-called 'White working class' – variously characterised as 'forgotten' (Collins, 2004), as the 'real' victims of racial inequality (Svenisson, 2009), as a social grouping resentful of growing ethnic diversity

(Open Society Foundation, 2014) and as a potential wellspring of the far-right (Extremis/YouGov, 2012). While the very existence of such a group and the discursive purpose of the concept has been questioned (Gillborn, 2010), there is nevertheless evidence that fear and resentment of greater ethnic diversity is particularly prevalent among, albeit certainly not exclusive to, White people on low incomes (Batty, 2011).

The case study data presented here aims to contribute to the debate about the role of low income White communities in the evolving community cohesion dynamic. Specifically, this article presents a critical discussion of two key issues within this debate: the dispositions of White residents in low income areas towards cohesion, and the dispositions of the same population towards organised anti-minority activism.

The data stems from a mixed methods study of low income, mainly White neighbourhoods in the town of Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, a town often presented in media discourse as one of the 'failed spaces' (Jones, 2013) of English multiculturalism (Khosrokhavar, 2016). A series of racialized events over several decades have been portrayed as indicative of chronic ethnic tensions in the town. These have included a school boycott by White parents opposed to their children attending a predominantly-Asian primary school (Naylor, 1989); a serious riot in 1989 prompted by the far-right British National Party (BNP) seeking to exploit this school dispute and subsequent low-level racial violence (Lockwood, 2011); the fact that the plot leader of the 7/7 London bombings, Mohammed Siddique Khan, lived in the town; several EDL rallies including one which was subject to an attempted Islamist bomb attack; and two young Muslims from the town travelling to Syria, with one of them gaining notoriety as the 'UK's youngest suicide bomber' (Grierson, 2015). In 2016, after this research was carried out, Dewsbury was again thrust into the spotlight when, during the final stages of the UK's EU referendum campaign, Jo Cox, MP for the neighbouring Batley and Spen constituency was murdered by a local White man with links to an extreme far-right party (Dodd, 2016). Dialectically related to these events has been a persistent narrative of grievance within sections of Dewsbury's White communities, most clearly articulated by a provocative local paper, the *Dewsbury Press*.

The next section of the article theoretically contextualises community cohesion, particularly in relation to the problematic category of the 'White working class', before outlining the

study's methodology. We then present the findings and discussion, concluding with a reflection on the policy implications of this study.

Community Cohesion and the 'white working class'

The community cohesion policy agenda emerged following the 2001 riots in northern England and subsequent reports. It encompassed both the spatial ethnic segregation identified by Cantle (2001) and the extent to which diversity is accepted, embraced or challenged by those living in the affected areas. These became focal points for policy discourse – captured and analysed through the regular 'Place' survey questions about residents' perceptions of how people from 'different backgrounds' 'got on' in their 'local area'. While nominally a national agenda, the spotlight has continued to fall primarily upon the northern towns that initially inspired this interest in cohesion, several of which are more duo-cultural than multicultural (Thomas, 2011).

Since its inception, community cohesion was a contested agenda. It has been observed that spatial segregation along ethnic lines is actually slowly breaking down nationally, bringing into question the appropriateness and relevance of the agenda's focus (Finney and Simpson, 2009). Concerns have also been expressed about the conceptual foundations of community cohesion (Ratcliffe, 2012), and about how the agenda's clear focus on commonality and shared values felt like a lurch back from multiculturalism towards assimilationism (Back et al, 2002). Yet research on community cohesion implementation also shows that it had considerable professional support (Thomas, 2011; Jones, 2013) and that through processes of mediation and enactment by local practitioners (see Braun et al, 2010) it enabled continued recognition of ethnic identities and inequalities within the greater focus on commonality. Indeed, Meer and Modood (2009) contest that cohesion practice has comprised a re-naming and 're-balancing' of multiculturalism, not its 'death'.

While a fuller discussion of these debates goes beyond the scope of this article, two issues are of particular relevance. The first concerns the fact that while community cohesion practice has sometimes focussed on various social differences (Thomas, 2011), within the cohesion framework difference has primarily been conceived of in terms of ethnicity. Class or socio-economic background was largely set aside.

Second, and related to this, community cohesion has had a problematic relationship with White majority communities. Contrary to some criticisms (Back et al, 2002), the 2001 reports were as critical of attitudes and dispositions in majority White communities as they were of attitudes within minority/Muslim communities. For Cantle, *'both White and non-White communities will need to change both attitudes and behaviour'* (2001:19). The Oldham report was even blunter: *'For many White people the attitude seems to be that we would rather the Asians were not here, we will have as little to do with them as possible'* (Ritchie, 2001:9). This perspective was often not operationalised, though, with community cohesion activity largely concentrating on minority rather than White-majority populations. Arguably, this was as much due to an inability within marginalised White communities to access cohesion funding and opportunities as due to the emphasis placed on minority responsibility for improved cohesion within much elite-level policy discourse (e.g. Cameron, 2015). Goodhart (2013) notes the 'asymmetrical' nature of British multiculturalism, arguing that while support has been targeted at ethnic minority civil society, an absence of a concomitant focus on class-based differences and inequalities has contributed to the political marginalisation of poor White communities. Beider (2011; 2015), meanwhile, identifies how weak civil society in many marginalised White communities, hollowed out by de-industrialisation and the neo-liberal re-shaping of the state, left such communities ill-equipped to participate in cohesion work and lacking either leadership or organisations that would enable them to do so.

It is here that debates around community cohesion intersect with policy debates about low income White British communities – often discussed under the rubric of 'the White working class'. Indeed, in some ways the 'White working class' have become a focus of policy and media discourse precisely through the operation of multiculturalist policies and mechanisms such as ethnic monitoring (Thomas and Sanderson, 2013).

As several authors observe, the concept of a 'White working class' is itself problematic. Much of the political and media discourse, including claims about how this group is now the most educationally disadvantaged, has made very partial use of this concept by, for example, focussing only on the poorest elements receiving free school meals rather than on a broader understanding of the working class (Svenisson, 2009). This touches on a wider

point: who is seen as part of the 'White' majority has changed historically, with previous excludees such as Jewish and Irish immigrants now seen as 'us' in contrast to recent 'White' but 'othered' East European migrants (Bonnett 2000), who are negatively highlighted in the data below. Such definitional debates are not merely 'academic'. It has been argued that the interchangeable use of 'working class' and 'White working class' contributes to the 'othering' of British-born visible minorities including recent (White and non-White skinned) migrants through use of terms like '*indigenous*' since it suggests a false fixedness of majority class identity and experience (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009:54). This has been linked to a discourse about poor Whites feeling that they are the *real* victims of racism (Hewitt, 2005), a discourse that critical race theorists argue is part of the maintenance of White supremacy: the latest example of a historic tendency to discipline minority groups by warning how equality measures will inflame racism (Gillborn 2010).

Whilst the 'White working class' label is conceptually problematic, there are however clear currents of anxiety, even resentment, within low income White communities across Europe around growing ethnic diversity (Open Society Foundation, 2014). The literature offers a number of explanations for this. The Open Society Foundation's (2014) research with '*members of 'majority' populations living in neighbourhoods and districts with high indicators of social, economic and political marginalisation*' (2014:9) in six European cities documents state failure to involve such communities in integration initiatives or engage meaningfully with concerns about increasing immigration and ethnic diversity. Their argument that cultural anxieties mixed with socio-economic insecurity could be undermining community cohesion echoes Putnam's (2007) sobering finding that social trust seems to diminish, at least initially, as local ethnic diversity increases. Schaeffer's (2014) pessimistic analysis of low income communities in several European cities also highlights issues of the speed of social change and limited adaptive capacities in such communities. Drawing on Durkheim's notion of anomie, he formulates a 'disintegration theory':

'This process of disintegration, meaning that an individual's capacities of adaption cannot keep up with the speed of social change, is associated with substantive uncertainty, feelings of threats and questions about personal, social and national identity. The responsibilities for

these unsatisfying circumstances are then projected in ethnic out-groups' (Schaeffer, 2014:100).

Such explanations raise the possibility that White majority anxiety about growing ethnic diversity may be interpreted as a coping mechanism, one arguably given a language for expression by policy approaches that have emphasised ethnic distinctiveness whilst downplaying discussion of economic inequality and class solidarity (Thomas and Sanderson, 2013). It certainly echoes findings from previous studies showing White youth racism being fuelled by the perception that the street-level balance of power is changing (Cockburn, 2007). In some cases, racism is a resource that White young people (and adults) can utilise when under pressure (Back, 1996). The sort of racist or anti-outsider hostility indicated above might be rooted more in feelings of insecurity than feelings of 'supremacy'.

A theme in the research that remains underexplored and often overlooked, however, concerns findings of sometimes significant support within low income White communities for greater and improved inter-ethnic contact. Beider, for example, found that *'residents wanted to increase interaction with different people in their neighbourhood'* (2011: 36), whilst the Open Society Foundation identified that *'focus group participants in several cities expressed openness towards people of different cultural backgrounds and a willingness to interact with them'* (2014: 18). It is the apparent tensions in these accounts of low-income White communities and the need to explore how they fit in relation to emerging policy agendas that prompted this research.

Methodology

The data presented here comprise part of a larger project commissioned by Kirklees Council on 'Understanding concerns about community relations in Kirklees'. In commissioning this research, the Council hoped that it would have *product* benefits in that the data would give them policy insights into marginalised White communities and the extent of support, if any, within such communities for organised anti-minority politics (Thomas et al, 2015). It also hoped for *process* benefits through overtly consulting with communities who felt that they were marginalised and not listened to by the authorities. A similar project was conducted in neighbouring Calderdale and is reported elsewhere (Busher et al, 2015).

The research combined survey-based quantitative methods with qualitative interviews and focus groups. This allowed the research team to understand a broad sweep of views on community relations and perceptions of the English Defence League (EDL), at the time of the research the predominant vehicle for anti-minority politics in the area, whilst simultaneously undertaking a deeper exploration of the lived experience of local residents and those professional practitioners tasked with undertaking cohesion work in the area.

The survey addressed five main themes: What participants valued most about their locality and their town as a place to live; the challenges facing people in their locality, their town and the UK; community relations and integration; civic participation and trust; and awareness of and attitudes towards anti-minority protest. Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards mixing and integration with regards both ethnic and religious groupings in order to examine the extent to which people made a distinction between ethnic and religious identifications – reflecting evidence of increasing anti-Muslim prejudice in society (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012) and in the explicitly anti-Muslim rhetoric of the EDL (Busher, 2015).

The Dewsbury sample comprised 336 responses (Kirklees: n=434) gained during a face-to-face doorstep survey across three areas of Dewsbury. These areas, identified in collaboration with Kirklees, were priority areas for the Council's revised cohesion strategy, and also included a comparator area from the south of Kirklees. Local cohesion strategy prioritises Dewsbury because, historically, the results from its 'Place' survey regarding perceptions of how different communities got on, were much lower than both national averages and other areas of Kirklees. Within each of the three areas of Dewsbury, a targeted sample was used to reflect neighbourhoods with challenging economic circumstances and where local EDL activists were known to have sought to build support. It is important to emphasise that this sample was not representative of Dewsbury/Kirklees as a whole, or indeed of the electoral wards within Kirklees within which the samples were taken.

The qualitative element comprised six Key Informant (KI) interviews and twelve focus group (FG) discussions. KIs were selected purposively to ensure coverage of each of the three research sites and a range of institutional stakeholders. The final sample comprised one police officer, one Council officer, two Council youth workers, one school Head teacher, and

one Council community worker. Interviews were semi-structured and focused on how attitudes towards contact and integration with people from other ethnic and religious backgrounds were changing, and more broadly on engagement with the cohesion agenda within low income White communities. Key informants were asked to discuss their own views, experiences and understanding and were not asked to speak on behalf of their organisations.

At least three FGs were conducted in each area, one in each of the following age groups: 16-20, 21-50 and 50+. Themes discussed included cross-community contact and community tensions and how these have changed in recent years. All interviews and focus groups were voice-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was read and coded by at least two members of the research team. Initial coding identified themes, which were then cross-checked across the research team before integrating the quantitative and qualitative data and analysis.

Results

Attitudes towards diversity and mixing: the survey data

The survey data on attitudes to diversity and mixing offer a picture of considerable ambivalence, lending themselves to both more optimistic and more pessimistic readings of the prospects for community cohesion and inter-group relations in Dewsbury. In response to the standard question previously used in the Place Survey about perceptions of how people from different ethnic groups get along locally, only 26.8% of Dewsbury respondents agreed either 'definitely' or 'mostly' that Dewsbury 'is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds get on'. The majority (58.4%) disagreed either 'mostly' or 'definitely' and 14.8% said that they were 'not sure' (Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 here

Similar responses were given to the question of whether Dewsbury is a place where people from different religious backgrounds get on. A majority (55.9%) disagreed either mostly or

strongly, just 26.4% agreed either definitely or mostly and 17.7% stated that they were 'not sure', and (Figure 2 below).

Insert Figure 2 here

Such data would appear to provide a fairly bleak picture of inter-group relations in the town. Respondents' views were, however, more equivocal when asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'it is good that there are people of different ethnic backgrounds living in Dewsbury'. Just over half of the respondents (52.1%) definitely or mostly agreed, 28.5% definitely or mostly *disagreed*, and 19.5% stated that they were not sure (Figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 here

Similarly, 54% of respondents definitely or mostly agreed with the statement 'it is good that there are people from different religious backgrounds living in Dewsbury', with 25.8% stating that they definitely or mostly disagreed and again, a considerable number (20.1%) stating that they were 'not sure' (Figure 4).

Insert Figure 4 here

There was also more support for than opposition to statements in favour of greater mixing between people from different backgrounds. 52.4% of respondents definitely or mostly agreed that there should be more contact between people of different ethnic backgrounds, while 27.6% definitely or mostly disagreed and 20.1% state that they were not sure (Figure 5).

Insert Figure 5 here

Similarly, 53.3% of Dewsbury respondents definitely or mostly agreed that there should be more contact between people of different religious backgrounds, whereas a quarter (26.4%) 'definitely' or 'mostly' disagreed and 20.4% stated that they were 'not sure' (Figure 6).

Insert Figure 6 here

The fact that more than half the respondents endorsed (either definitely or mostly) positive statements about diversity and supported statements that there should be more inter-group contact could arguably challenge the more pessimistic analysis of public attitudes towards growing ethnic diversity (Goodhart, 2013; Schaeffer, 2014), as could the fact that only slightly over a quarter of respondents expressed opposition to such statements. Yet a more gloomy reading is also possible. It should be noted that only 15% of those that endorsed statements about diversity being a good thing did so unequivocally (definitely agreeing) as did only around 15% of those that endorsed the view that there should be more mixing between people from different backgrounds.

What makes these data particularly challenging to decipher is the high number of respondents who indicated 'not sure' to these questions. These not-sures might be open to a number of interpretations. A more pessimistic interpretation would be to read them as indicative of widespread unwillingness to embrace ethnic diversity. Indeed, it might be proposed that some of the not-sures are the product of a social desirability bias i.e. some respondents who might have erred towards expressing disagreement with these positive statements might have opted for the less contentious 'not sure' because they felt reluctant to appear bigoted in the context of a face to face interview. As such, the survey data might be read as indicating a broad groundswell of resistance to established and newly arrived minority communities.

Yet there is also a more encouraging interpretation that might be offered. Taken at face value, these data may indicate that there is a significant portion of these communities who are genuinely 'not sure' and therefore potentially open to a more positive interpretation of diversity and inter-group contact. Arguably, this reflects the need and significant potential for greater community debate about and involvement in cohesion activity that demonstrates the benefits of diversity and contact (Thomas, 2011; Cattle, 2012).

What is not clear from the responses presented in Figures 5 and 6 about respondents' views on whether there should be more mixing, and what would go some way to enable accurate interpretation of the data, is who respondents believe should be responsible for doing the mixing. There is a subtle but important difference between the view that all residents ought to endeavour to have more meaningful interactions with people from different

backgrounds, and the view that the 'Other' ought to be doing more to integrate into the supposed host community. While the former would lend weight to a more positive reading of these results, the latter would indicate that a more negative reading might sail closer to the truth. We return to this question below.

Attitudes towards diversity and mixing: the interview and focus group data

The qualitative data reinforce the ambivalent picture provided by the survey data. Indeed, within interviews and focus groups the norm was for more 'positive' statements to be quickly qualified by more 'negative' statements, and vice versa. For example:

I think behind closed doors and behind closed ears and behind closed eyes I think there is still quite a lot of scepticism about contact [...]. In predominantly White communities there is distrust of anything that's not the same as them. But I don't think it's any more marked round here than it is in most economically deprived areas (KI 1).

I would say the majority do try and get on, and if they can't get on they stay away from each other, which isn't always the best way but sometimes it is because if you can't get on and you don't want to get on, you stay apart, but that does nothing for community cohesion (KI 3).

I think it was a good idea to mix them [a predominantly White school and a predominantly Asian school], but in some senses it's not a good idea to mix, because it can cause friction (FG: Young Adult).

FG discussions were peppered with negative comments about diversity and mixing as well as a slew of negative perceptions about 'Asians'. Mixed in with more general grumblings about how '*they seem to take over*' (FG: Older Adult) and that '*they think they're better than us [...]. They think this is their country [...]*' (FG: Young Person) were several more specific themes. There were multiple references to perceived cultural differences, with the apparently increasing use of overtly Islamic dress by Muslim women in Dewsbury a particular focus for consternation – a symbol that lent itself both to concerns about security and deception and to claims about the supposed backwardness of Islam and Muslims:

I don't see why they should be walking about and driving with all this, with just their eyes showing, you don't know whether they're men or women! (FG: Older Adult).

You see live feeds of Karachi and Islamabad in news reports and the women are running around in jeans over there and it's like sort of 1420 here in WH Smiths [a stationary shop] (FG: Older Adult).

Whilst such comments focus on cultural 'markers', other data indicate a more basic sense of racialised difference. Here, another prominent theme concerned anti-social and criminal behaviour, particularly by young Asian men. These ranged across issues from drug-dealing to abuse of planning regulations, and included accounts offered by young women of being harassed and abused by Asian youths and men – an issue of considerable relevance at the time of the research due to emerging scandals about sexual exploitation 'grooming gangs' in Rochdale and Rotherham (Miah, 2015):

One time when I was walking up to Sizzlers [a takeaway in nearby Batley] with my mum and we were walking back down they went, do you want to jump in the car you two fit lasses, they thought I was an adult and I went no, my mum started swearing and everything and they started beeping their horn at us, my granddad had to come sort them out because they wouldn't leave us alone they was following us all the way home (FG: Young Person).

*I got stopped in broad daylight - Four Asians in a car, cos I said no, I got called a slag, a white c***, a white, white everything white (FG: Young Person).*

Researchers challenged participants strongly as to whether men of all backgrounds sexually harassed them in such ways but young, White female participants were adamant that the ethnic backgrounds of both parties was central to such encounters, suggesting a highly-gendered as well as racialised sense of space and of territoriality (Back, 1996).

These comments were often infused with claims that, as a White person, they are negatively judged and stigmatised by Asian communities, with such claims serving to support and reinforce assertions of their status as the real victims of prejudice and discrimination (see also Hewitt, 2005). Indeed, there were claims from several of the young White people that

young Asian people were actively discouraged by their friends and families from mixing with White people – claims that, regardless of their veracity, served to shift the blame for a lack of mixing onto Asians.

If we are with one of them we would get bullied... If an Asian person hangs around with a White person they get done by the brothers and that lot, its like 'what are you hanging round a White person for'?! (FG: Young Person).

Preferential treatment of ethnic minorities, and particularly 'Asians', was another prominent theme: one that has long been a feature of White backlash against demographic change and the politics of multiculturalism (Hewitt, 2005; Beider, 2011; Busher, 2015). Such claims were made during conversations about a range of different issues and social contexts. For example, a common complaint among young White people was that during conflicts between pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, preferential treatment is given to Asian pupils:

I go to a Catholic school, we have had to start letting all the Asians in and then what they have been doing is trying to fight all White people and then we get done for it for fighting but they don't get done for anything (FG: Young Person).

There were also more general claims about how "Savile Town [Dewsbury's main Asian-dominated housing area] get treated better than us" (FG: Young Person), whether the discussion was about delayed plans to build a skate-park in one of the predominantly White areas or new traffic calming measures built in a predominantly Asian area . As one focus group participant quipped:

There is a Muslim tiddlywinks club: they have just been given thirty thousand pound (FG: Older Adult).

Such claims about unfairness took participants beyond simply negative perceptions of Asians and other minorities to elaborate allegations about systemic bias against White people: again, a claim that has often been encouraged and exploited by far-right and/or anti-minority groups as they have sought to garner support (Busher, 2015; Rhodes 2010).

KIs also described encountering such negative and even hostile attitudes to diversity and mixing during the course of their daily professional work within communities. Indeed, some raised concerns that, particularly where housing and schooling decisions were concerned, segregation seemed to be becoming more rather than less entrenched, meaning that even where mixing was happening in educational or employment spaces such relationships rarely extended beyond these highly circumscribed settings.

Yet the qualitative data also indicated that such negative views are often challenged. Many FG participants described quite positive experiences of inter-group contact and expressed broadly positive attitudes towards diversity and mixing. For example, in response to some nakedly racist comments by a fellow FG participant, another participant countered:

Well, I can't complain because where I came from I had Asian neighbours and they were good to me, I can't say a wrong word about my neighbour I had. There's good and bad in us all (FG: Older Adult).

Often these positive experiences of cross-ethnic mixing were associated with sport and other recreational activities:

We played a game the other week against Savile Town which was played in really good spirit, you know, everybody got on well, there was no animosity whatsoever, you couldn't see any difference - they were just two football teams playing football. It was smashing. (FG: Young Adult).

We [a community centre group] have done twinning, so like from Ravensthorpe and Savile Town, they came here, ours went to theirs and it was like a twinning project [...] we worked well with them [...] it was brilliant. (FG: Young Adult).

It's always been mixed in this youth club, we do black history month and stuff like that. (FG: Young Person).

Such examples, based around sport and voluntary youth activities, offer prime examples of what, in the terms of contact-theory, would be considered positive contact (Thomas, 2011), with participants not under duress and activities focused on super-ordinate goals rather

than individual identity or group difference. In a similar vein, several younger focus group participants and some of the KIs spoke about an emergent street culture of ethnically mixed groups. It was noted for example that there was a mixed-ethnicity 'gang' calling themselves the 'West Town Warriors', comprising White British and Asian British youth, that had engaged in confrontations with groups of youths from neighbouring areas and had also engaged in confrontations with groups of young people of Eastern European origin – while hardly an enterprise KIs encouraged, an indication nonetheless of how the boundaries of 'us' and 'them' were more dynamic than high-level policy discourse would have us believe. There was also considerable agreement that schools and workplaces sometimes offered opportunities for cross-ethnic relationships to flourish:

You will walk out during the lunch break and you will see kind of sat on the kitchen step a White girl and a Muslim girl working for six pound fifty an hour just sat away chatting happily you know as if they have actually cracked the riddle the rest of us are trying to work out (FG: Older Adult).

When FG participants expressed hostility towards the idea of mixing, it tended to be expressed primarily as resistance to cohesion activities that felt 'forced'. While there was considerable expressed support among FG participants and KIs for events that promote across-community contact, and in particular for work that focused on younger people, there were a number of critical observations about such overt cohesion activity and reticence about anything that could feel like 'social engineering':

Mixing? Yes, I think provided that they [community-members] want it and it's not forced upon them, I think it's when it's forced upon them [...] (FG: Older Adult).

It just comes down to that fact of not being forced to: it's our choice [...]. You can't force groups of people to get together and enjoy themselves: it has to happen naturally (FG: Young Adult).

In one FG, participants even challenged the use of categories that emphasise difference, preferring to focus on whether or not people 'were Dewsbury' rather than whether or not they were from a White or an Asian background, suggesting a shared 'neighbourhood

nationalism' (Back, 1996) similar to the *'being St. Ann's'* that Mackenzie (2015) identifies in her ethnographic study of a Nottingham housing estate. As one participant explained,

We have always had an Asian community [in Dewsbury]. To me they are just "us" [Dewsbury] aren't they? (FG: Young Adult).

Attitudes towards organised anti-minority politics

Where the data are less ambivalent is with regard to support for organised anti-minority politics. As described above, a number of the attitudes expressed by FG participants clearly resonated with some of the narratives around which anti-minority groups, including the EDL, have mobilised, such as anxieties about the possible cultural and security threat posed by Islam and Muslims and the claims about the preferential treatment of immigrant and minority ethnic groups over White British populations. Furthermore, there was clear evidence that issues such as the cases of 'grooming gangs' resonate strongly among some parts of Dewsbury's predominantly White neighbourhoods. As one KI observed,

It's surprising how many girls want to get involved in the EDL rallies [...] It's exciting, it's curiosity, they've had issues with probably Asian boyfriends or contact with Asian men... they've had issues with trying to get jobs [...] (KI 5).

Yet in spite of this apparent potential alignment of interests, little support was expressed for organised anti-minority politics. Of the 334 survey respondents, 43.7% said that they had heard of the EDL and knew what the group was about and 21.6% that they had heard of the EDL but were not sure what the group was about. In spite of the fact that, at the time of the research, the EDL had visited Dewsbury town centre on two separate occasions, 34.7% of respondents stated that they had not heard of the EDL.

Of those who had heard of the EDL, the overwhelming majority (81%) described them in broadly negative terms (Figure 7). The five terms most frequently used to describe the EDL were anti-Muslim (58.3% of respondents), racist (36.2%), hooligans (27.5%), misguided (27.5%) and nuisance (19.7%). The five terms least frequently used to describe the EDL were insignificant (3.2%), heroes (5%), peaceful (6.4%), joke (6.9%) and brave (7.8%). These data are not entirely without their complexities, for example, only 36.2% of respondents

described the EDL as a racist organisation, indicating that the group had had at least some success in persuading the public that they were not a racist or a far-right movement. It is also worth noting that 'anti-Muslim' as a descriptor was used in conjunction both with more positive and negative terms. This would indicate that for at least some of our respondents being 'anti-Muslim' would appear to be seen as a broadly positive characteristic. These data do however provide a fairly unequivocal picture of only scant public support for the group.

The qualitative data broadly support these findings. Several FG participants and KIs observed that the EDL sometimes touched on and mobilised around issues that were of major concern to many people in the area:

I think they're only saying what the majority of people are thinking, but there aren't enough people to do anything about it (FG: Older Adult).

Some participants had clearly been persuaded by the EDL's claims that it was neither a 'racist' nor generally 'Islamophobic' organisation:

They are not racist, it is not a racist group... they don't target all Muslims do they, it's the Muslim extremists (FG: Young Person).

Furthermore, several young people in particular reported having either attended a demonstration or knowing somebody who had attended a demonstration, albeit this was often framed as much as an act of curiosity as an act of support.

Yet FG participants and survey enumerators observed that where there were pockets of support for groups such as the EDL they tended to be highly localised – within a specific family or handful of houses on a specific street – and the discussions were also characterised by a large number of highly critical comments. More often than not these criticisms centred on perceptions that the EDL were '*just trouble-makers*' (FG: Older Adult) and several FG participants complained about the disruptive nature of EDL demonstrations in the town:

I don't know, they just come bombing it and throwing stuff and wrecking the whole town centre which means that nobody can go out shopping and all the shops have to close down (FG: Young Person).

Interestingly, rather than eliciting sympathy for the group, the fact that an EDL demonstration in Dewsbury had been the target of an Islamist bomb plot appeared actually to have added to perceptions that the group brought trouble to town: *'they nearly got us blown up!'* (FG: Young Person).

The idea that disapproval of the EDL is often grounded more in feelings of opposition towards their *modus operandi* and their reputation for thuggery is consonant with other research on public attitudes towards the EDL (Extremis/YouGov, 2012). However, it is important to note that there was also considerable criticism of the arguments and values that groups such as the EDL were seen to represent. For example:

When I've seen the EDL group been going on in Dewsbury what they say is get the Asians out of Dewsbury and stuff like that, basically get them off the streets. They don't want them here; they say they are bad news they are grooming all us women and killing all our soldiers and stuff like that. At the end of the day it's not all of them though, I don't understand, at the end of the day we are all born on this planet and we all are humans; the only difference is skin colour (FG: Young Person).

The survey data and recent electoral results also indicate that while there is a quite striking disconnection from the main political parties, there is only limited support for extra-parliamentary anti-minority politics. While survey respondents expressed far from overwhelming support for the three main parties there was not a great deal of support expressed for challenger parties from the extreme or radical right. Thirty-six per cent (36%) of respondents said that Labour best represented their views as compared with 5% for the Conservatives and 4% for the Liberal Democrats, while 12% said that UKIP best represented their views and 7% BNP. Thirty-two per cent (32%) stated that they felt that no political party best represented their views.

Discussion and conclusions

As set out in the first two sections of this article, there has, particularly in the last fifteen years, been considerable policy and scholarly discussion about the attitudes of so-called 'White working class' communities towards greater ethnic diversity and community cohesion. This case study research aimed to investigate such attitudes and dispositions in Dewsbury, one of the apparently 'failed spaces' (Jones, 2013) of multiculturalism.

What is clear from this research is that while census data may indicate a slow breaking down of residential segregation (Finney and Simpson, 2009) the perception of our 'White working class' respondents was that 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001) are a lived reality in their town. Discourses focused around racial and religious differences 'saturate' (Hewitt, 2005) everyday life – they are the lens through which social and political life is read by many local people. Almost any policy issue, from decisions about the funding of leisure facilities to the placement of traffic calming measures, could lend itself to racialisation and further claims of bias and unfairness, and with that to the construction of racial, religious and cultural stereotypes. This is especially the case when much of this cognitive labour is being done by local or national media who repeatedly apply such interpretive frames. National policy discourse that emphasises supposed Muslim failure to 'integrate' (e.g. Cameron, 2015) merely deepens rather than challenges such modes of interpretation.

What is also clear is that in towns such as Dewsbury there is a strong undertow of hostility towards Asian residents and recent 'White' European migrants identified as outsiders, and considerable anxiety about community relations. However we interpret the high numbers of 'not sure' responses in the survey data, it is clear that a significant portion of respondents mostly or definitely feel negatively about the growing ethnic and religious diversity of their town and the idea of more contact between people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds. This is a sobering finding 40 years after the passing of the 1976 Race Relations Act.

This research indicates however that there are at least two ways in which this picture ought to be nuanced if we are to avoid slipping into and promulgating caricatured and potentially stigmatising images of low-income predominantly White neighbourhoods. Firstly, while some of the anxieties expressed about diversity and mixing would appear to be aligned with some of the themes and issues around which anti-minority groups have sought to mobilise,

such anxieties have not crystallised into widespread support or even overt sympathy for organised anti-minority politics. Indeed, we found considerable opposition and hostility towards groups such as the EDL. Understanding this resistance and how it evolves or withers should be a priority for attempts to understand societal resilience to the diffusion of anti-minority politics, a key part of cohesion.

Secondly, while there is clearly widespread suspicion of anything that smacks of 'forced' integration, there is also considerable support for greater cross-community contact. A majority of survey respondents, albeit a slim one, wanted more contact between different ethnic and religious groups in the town and while FG discussions and KI interviews contained multiple references to anxiety about and sometime outright hostility towards mixing, they were also characterised by people challenging negative stereotypes about 'Asians' and sharing positive experiences about inter-ethnic contact. This of course is hardly a ringing endorsement of multiculturalism, but it does at the very least indicate that contrary to some characterisations of low income predominantly White communities, many do not support separation and do not perceive it to be realistic to simply retreat into monocultural communities.

These findings have a number of implications for policy and practice in the area of cohesion and community relations. They make clear the importance of identifying approaches that tack effectively between public reticence on the one hand about 'social engineering' and the acknowledgement on the other about the value of inter-group contact – a recognition already leading some policy practitioners to move towards 'mainstreaming' cohesion activities (Collett et al, 2014). They make clear the importance of examining how we can limit the extent to which debates about the allocation of resources become aligned with possible racial and ethnic discourses of unfairness, particularly at a time of increasing pressure on local authority budgets and declining influence of local authorities over questions of resource allocation – a challenge that is particularly stark in towns such as Dewsbury that are struggling for economic viability. They also make clear how, if it is to be effective, cohesion work must have at its centre a process of talking about and negotiating notions of fairness.

The research on which this article is based was made possible by funding from Kirklees Metropolitan Council as part of a project also funded by Calderdale Metropolitan District Council.

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Figure 1: Survey respondents' views on whether Dewsbury is a place where people from different *ethnic* backgrounds get on well together (N= 336)

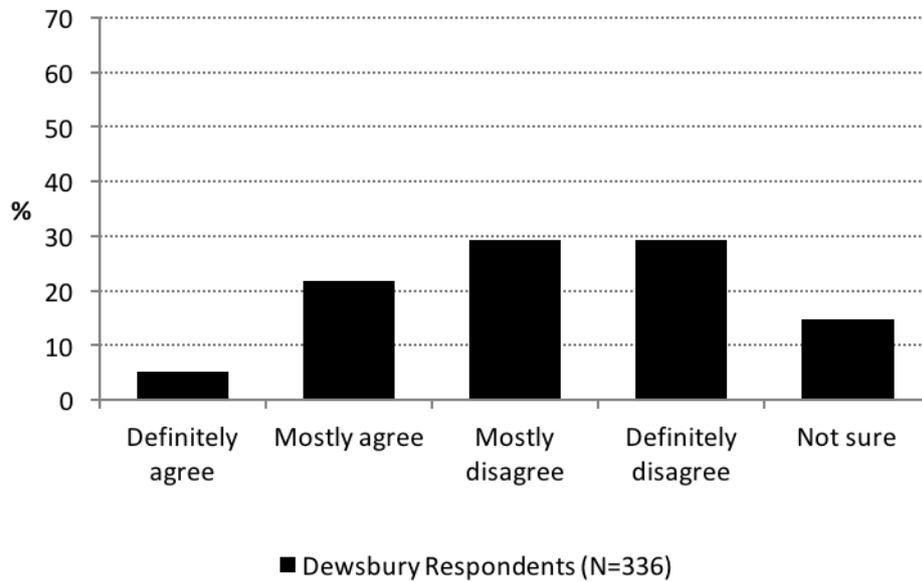


Figure 2: Survey respondents' views on whether Dewsbury is a place where people from different *religious* backgrounds get on well together (N= 336)

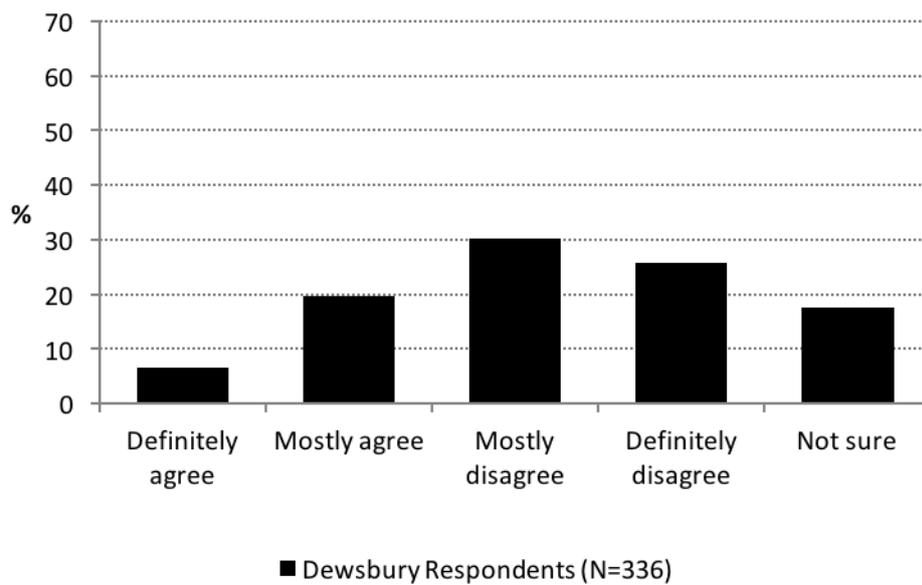


Figure 3: Survey respondents' views on whether it is good that there are people from different *ethnic* backgrounds living in Dewsbury (N= 336)

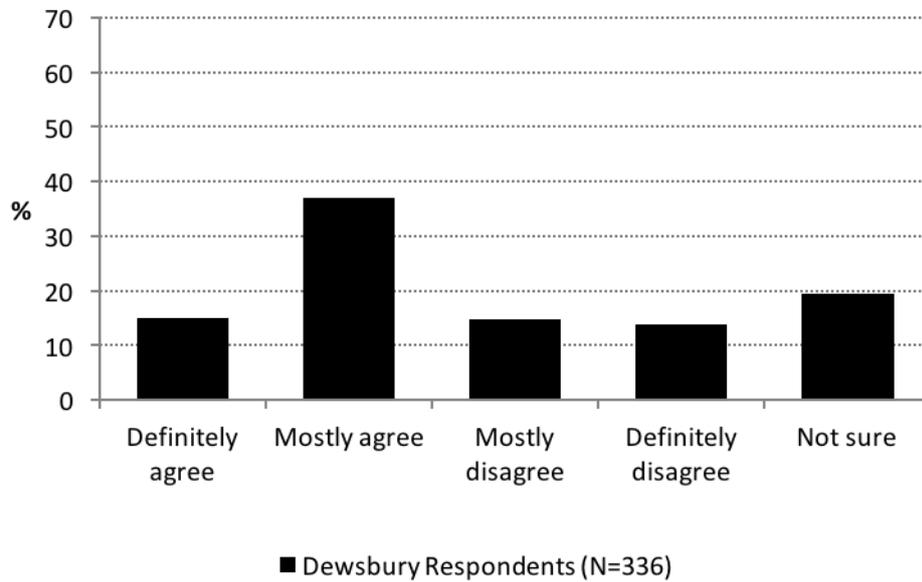


Figure 4: Survey respondents' views on whether it is good that there are people from different *religious* backgrounds living in Dewsbury (N= 336)

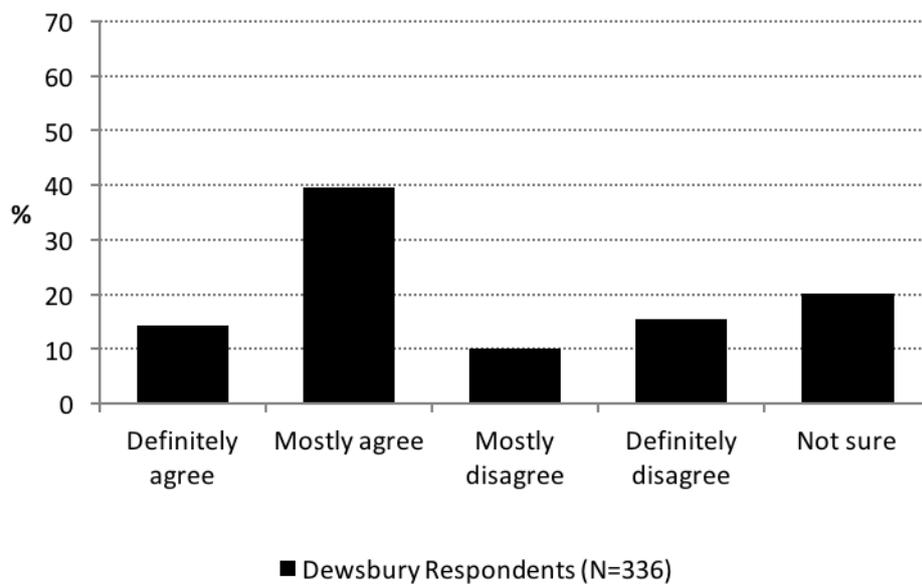


Figure 5: Survey respondents' views on whether there should be more contact between people from different *ethnic* backgrounds in Dewsbury (N= 336)

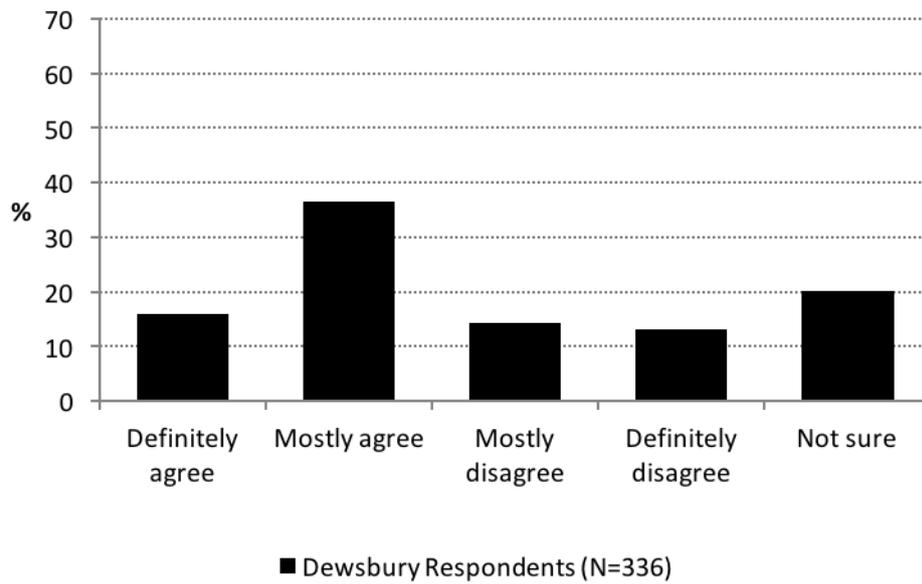


Figure 6: Survey respondents' views on whether there should be more contact between people from different *religious* backgrounds in Dewsbury (N= 336)

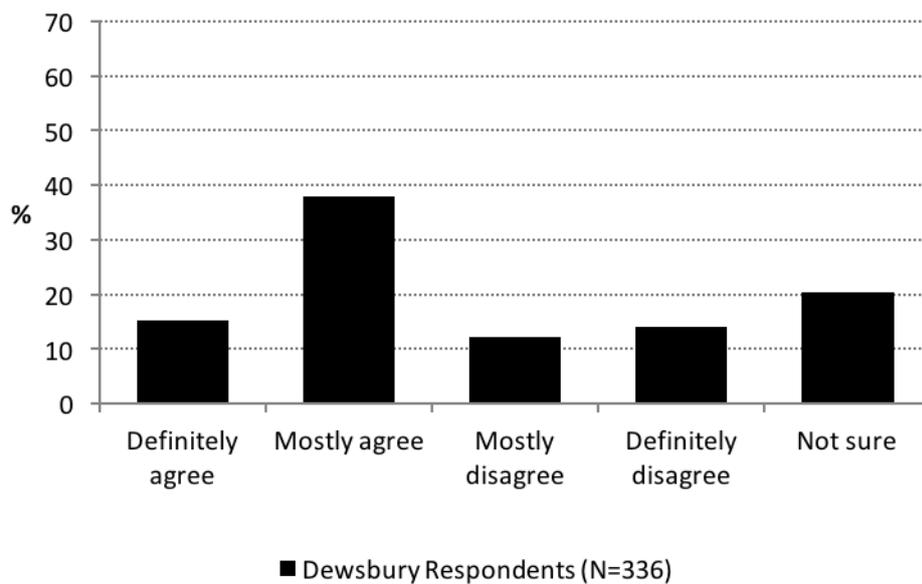


Figure 7: Words associated with the EDL among Dewsbury Respondents

