

Geographies of Encounters



Gill Valentine -
g.valentine@sheffield.ac.uk

Acknowledgements: Living with Difference Team



Research Design: Living with Difference

(<http://livedifference.group.shef.ac.uk>)

European Research Council



RQ: how do we develop the capacity to live with difference in an age of super-mobility and super-diversity?

Project A

Mapping Social Diversity

Opportunities for encounters

- Analysis of census data to identify areas of 'high', 'medium' and 'low' diversity.
- International survey to explore opportunities & types of encounter, & experiences of 'difference' (n=3000)

Project B

Lived Experience of Difference

Transmission of attitudes

- Informants sampled from A (include: youth; mid and retirement generations)
- Multi-method case studies or life stories with individuals to explore when, where and how attitudes develop over time (n=60).

Project C

Spaces of Conflict

Competing values & group rights claims

- Identified e.g.s. of existing or emerging tensions and conflicts in research sites.
- Analysis of media reports of tensions & key informant interviews. Plus focus groups & video diaries with members of the conflicting groups.

Project D

Meaningful Contact

Generating social change

- Focus on different types of micro-publics (e.g. University campus; & interfaith youth cricket project).
- Multi-method case studies (including focus groups, participant observation; 'Big Brother' methodology).

Project E

Spatial Experimentation

Creating meaningful contact

- Spatial 'play' & creation of tools for conviviality (partnership with Architecture)
- Diversity Den (kit tested at: i) community rugby gala, ii) university event, & iii) a National Citizen's Service event for +16 school pupils.

Challenge of 21st C: Unprecedented Population Change



i) *super-mobility* : accelerated migration (global economy & conflict)

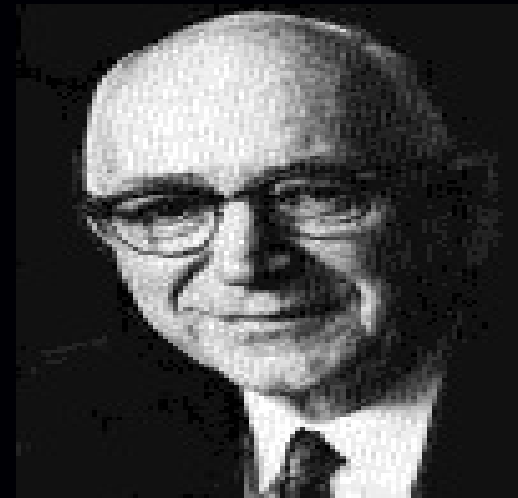
ii) *super-diversity*: de-traditionalisation & individualisation

**'capacity to live with difference is...the coming question of 21st C'
(Stuart Hall 1993: 361)**

It's a geographical question: given the role of shared space in providing opportunities for encounters between strangers

Its origins lie in psychology: **'Contact Hypothesis'**

Gordon Allport (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice*



City: Theorised as a Site of Tension, Conflict & Withdrawal



1990s – Putnam's thesis

As social diversity increases, so trust declines

Psychology –

As no. of 'out-groups' increases so prejudice increases

'Cosmopolitan Turn'



City: re-imagined as a site of connection

'a being together of strangers' (Young 1990)

Emergence of 'geographies of encounter'

"The massively apparent fact is that people in cities do talk to one another as customers & shopkeepers; passengers & cab drivers; as members of bus queues; regulars in bars & cafes; tourists & locals; beggars and passersby...and of course as neighbours" (Laurier et al. 2002: 353)

But Do Banal Encounters Produce Meaningful Contact?



Acceptance and Social Distance

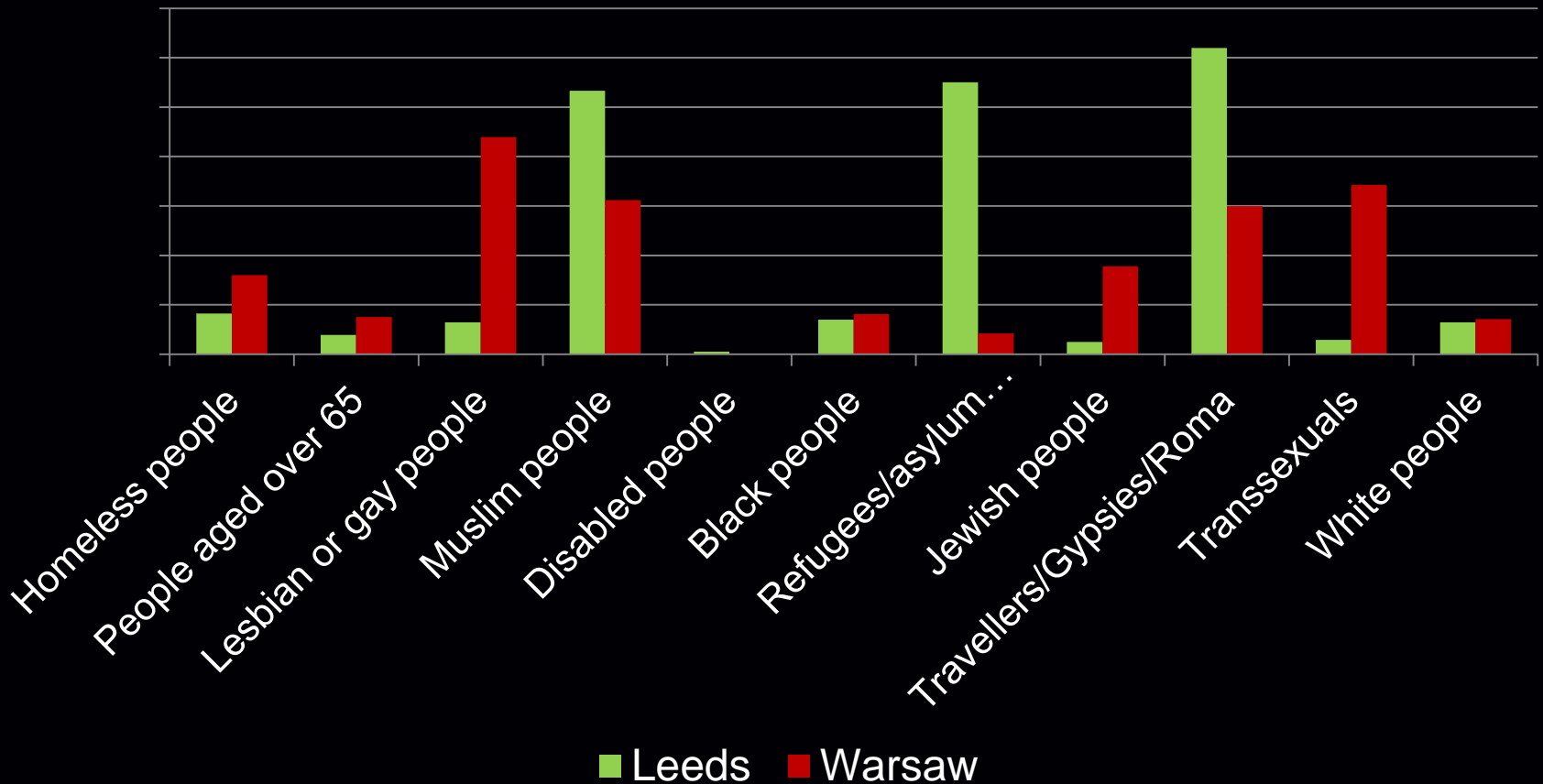


Less acceptance in Warsaw | Less acceptance in Leeds

The Persistence of Prejudice and Intolerance



Cooler feelings towards...



So Why are Everyday Encounters Romanticised?



Methodological Reasons

- Based on observational research
- Make **temporal assumptions** - about significance of 'fleeting' moments
- Overlooks personal histories & questions of durability in future encounters
- Makes **spatial assumptions** – that it is in public space where values/attitudes towards others are shaped
- Overlooks our moral dispositions

Theoretical Reasons

- Production of public space
- Normative codes of behaviour & contextual expectations regulate behaviour in public
- Civil encounters represent tolerance of others – this is not the same as respect
- Our intersectional identities enable us to prioritise '**what is**' over what we think '**ought to be**'

The Problem of Parallel Lives



Proximity does not necessarily equate with mixing it can breed...

- defensiveness & self-segregation
- competition for resources
- trigger latent emotions

"They forget that they've been born and bred here but they're not putting anything into the country...you know they're taking...you know people who haven't worked for over 20 years and they're getting this, that and the other, to me they're not putting anything in.

We found out that we would have to have fertility treatment and I was 31 and next door are black and she is 40 and she has a 17-year-old son. She just happened to mention over the fence to my husband just as we were bang smack in the middle of testing, 'oh, you're not going to believe it, but I'm pregnant'. He came and told me and I flipped my lid and in that process was kind of shouting around the house because I was so upset 'It's not fucking fair, stupid fucking black bitch, old cow', all that kind of stuff.

Intersections



Claims of sexism are mobilised to instantiate Islamophobia

Women are treated like second-class citizens. They're treated worse than animals. You see women walking behind the men. I mean they make them wear these stupid gowns... I don't tolerate them and I think it's wrong...I mean I've got lots of faults, but I don't treat my wife like a dog... I mean...I do occasionally go up to them [Muslim women wearing the hijab] and say 'Have you got a bomb under there?' type of thing, but you've got to be careful how you say it

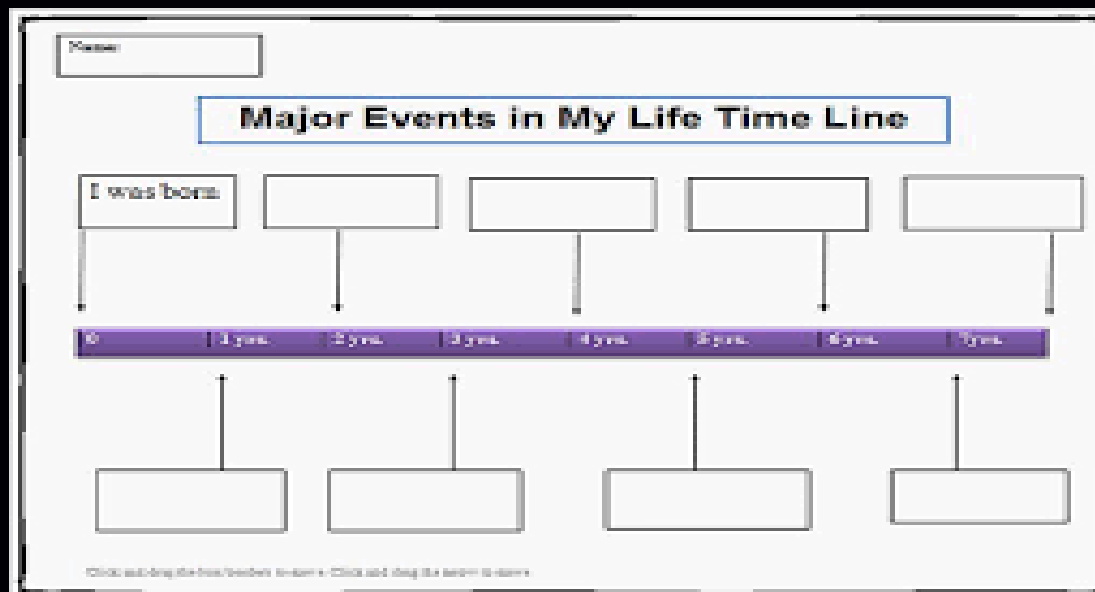
Personal Histories & Dispositions: Lived Experiences of Social Differentiation



Biographical Narratives:

capture moral dispositions; the dynamism of individuals' positionings; the constant processes of differentiation evident in socio-spatial relationships; and how prejudices can be developed, challenged & interrupted

(e.g. Craig; Amirah)



Narratives of Encounter: the Significance of Mobility & Emplacement



Craig

- Born into a poor white neighbourhood characterised by prejudice (e.g. BNP)
- 1st memories of difference were at school & football ('learning to labour'; racism/violence)
- Literal & social mobility – gained job in a cosmopolitan call centre. Reflected on his social/ethical practices & 'changed his disposition towards others (e.g. Urdu).
- BUT – not a simple linear transformation. He was passed over for promotion (piercings/class prejudice) & developed a narrative of injustice that he has no protection (no ism). Perceives immigrants to threaten his way of life & his kids future. His past haunts his perception of future

Amirah

- Born in Pakistan 1st memories of difference intrafamilial (sister's disability)
- Negative attitudes to disability informed by the treatment of her older sister in the community & sibling jealousy
- Married, moved to UK, had a son with learning difficulties (her fateful moment)
- Emplaced in a new spatial context; turned to UK neighbours for support – alienated her mother-in-law
- Head teacher huge support- discovered she was a lesbian; accommodated by de-categorising her, treating her as an individual with her view on homosexuality unchanged (*i.e. prioritised 'what is' over 'what ought to be'*)

Pre-reflexive routine orientations to the world produced by lived experience in emplaced contexts governed by particular social & cultural normativities



The Production of Public Space

Equality Law



e.g. Europe Article 13 of EU Treaty of Amsterdam 1997

Political Correctness



Common-sense perception of equality - negative discourse

Perception that Spatial Normativities are Being Redefined



i) **Obligation – how people are expected to relate to others (cf. Goffman)**

There are a lot of things that you can't say and do in everyday life that you used to be able to...Like eating. Is it politically correct for me to eat my lunch at my desk during Ramadan when a Muslim's fasting and sat next to me?

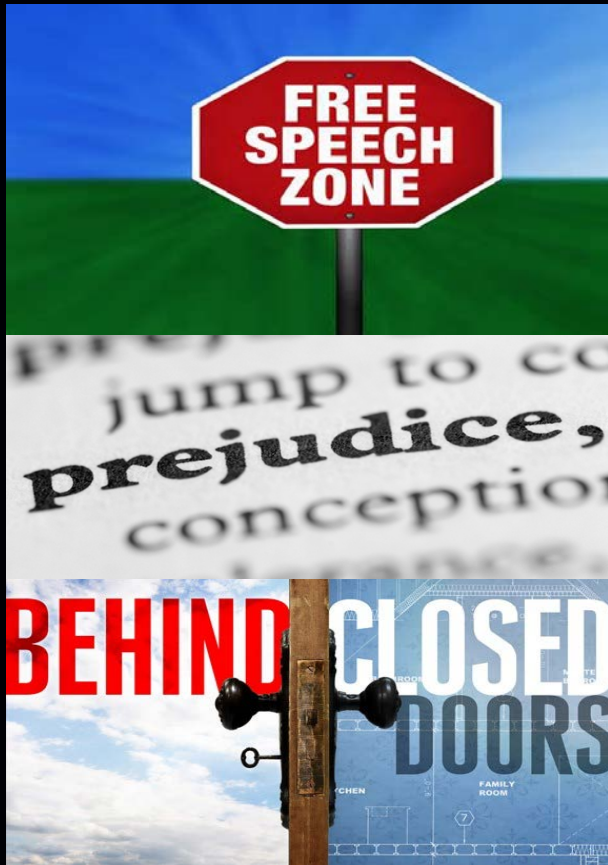
God, it's unbelievable. I've learnt - I've always been a man manager - a people manager, you should say now. Can't say man manager, you've got to say people manager...You've got watch your Ps and Qs, you need to be very careful what you say, which is a poor state to be in, when you can't express yourself for fear of saying the wrong word

ii) **Expectation – something will be done to them if they do not comply**

If another [bus] driver that's not English at work, say Polish, Pakistani, dark, whatever you want to call them. If they make a complaint about me the company will investigate....we've got notices up saying that calling names or slang or stuff like is a disciplinary offence. So if you get caught saying 'that bloody Paki over there has run me off the road today', if anybody hears you they can report you for it. It's a sackable offence now. It's political correctness gone overboard

In such ways, everyday common-sense understandings of the law mediate the production of public space

Privatisation of Prejudice



Reversal of the traditional understandings of the 'proper' place for free speech

I think privately, you're with your friends, family even, whatever, you can talk freely and say what you think. Then you go outside and you don't get into those conversations because how you feel is how you feel. You can't just change

Individuals carve out quasi-private spaces in public environments by 'feeling out'

When we had the shop, you get to know people that come in. A lot of them, come across middle class, butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, really educated a lot of them. Then you'd have a conversation with them and ...they will give you an opinion on something, say on immigration, they think that you want them to hear. But there's like an undertone, you can hear the undertone in the voice and in certain things that they say. It's like they mean, no I don't really agree with this. No, they're coming here and stealing all our jobs

Civil Encounters Represent Tolerance, Not Respect



Putting up with; prejudicial undertone

In my mind, tolerance kind of comes in with patience and acceptance of groups of people and I'm often told that I'm intolerant. I don't think I am intolerant. I think I'm quite patient and accepting. But tolerance is almost like you have to put up with something...like if you stick your hand in boiling water, how long can you tolerate it for?



To tolerate is an act of weakness; to be tolerated is have power

I think...the majority of people these days are tolerant. They just get their heads down and get on with it...As a tolerant society, our day-to-day lives are impacted and we do sit back because we're not a nation of complainers. We're not a nation of whingers. We don't take action against things. We just sit back and let it happen, so we are too tolerant...We accept that is the norm

How Do We Scale up Meaningful Contact to Create Inclusive Societies?



Conclusion: Difference Matters



- **Reflected on** geographies of encounters: how do we develop the capacity to live with difference?
- **Welcome** the ‘cosmopolitan turn’ for challenging the emphasis on cities as sites of exclusion/conflict
- **But worry about** romanticising urban encounters; as proximity does not necessarily equate with ‘meaningful contact’
- **Yes** - respect for difference can be produced by encounters (but it isn’t necessarily durable)
- **However:** how can this be scaled up when prejudices are rooted in narratives of economic/cultural injustice?
- **Solution?:** We need a politics that focuses not just on diversity but on the inequalities & insecurities that make prejudices hard to challenge & explain why tolerance is imperfectly lived

Living with Difference: Publications

<http://livedifference.group.shef.ac.uk>



- Mayblin, L., Valentine, G. & Winiarska, A., 2016** Migration and diversity in a post-socialist context: creating integrative encounters. *Environment and Planning A* 48: 960–978.
- Mayblin, L. Valentine, G. & Andersson, J. (2016)** In the contact zone: Engineering meaningful encounters across difference. *The Geographical Journal* 182: 213-222.
- Valentine, G., Piekut, A., Winiarska, A., Harris, C. & Jackson, L. 2015.** Mapping the meaning of 'difference' in Europe: a social topography of prejudice, *Ethnicities*,15: 568-585.
- Valentine, G., Piekut, A. & Harris, C. 2014.** Intimate encounters: the negotiation of difference within the family and its implications for social relations in public space, *The Geographical Journal*, 181: 280-294.
- Valentine G, Jackson, L. & Mayblin, L. 2014.** Ways of seeing: sexism the forgotten prejudice? *Gender, Place and Culture*, 21: 401-414.
- Valentine, G., & Sadgrove, J. 2014.** Biographical narratives of encounter: the significance of mobility & emplacement in shaping attitudes towards difference, *Urban Studies*, 51:1979-94.
- Waite, L., Valentine, G & Lewis, H. 2014.** Multiply vulnerable populations: mobilising a politics of compassion from the 'capacity to hurt'. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 15:313-31.
- Valentine, G. & Sadgrove J 2012.** Lived difference: the transmission of positive and negative attitudes towards others *Environment & Planning A* 44: 2049-67
- Valentine, G. 2008.** Living with difference: reflections on geographies of encounter. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 321-335.

So How Can We Generate Meaningful Encounters?



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

By creating spaces of interdependence & cultural destabilization

Micro-publics

(e.g. Sports clubs, urban gardens, youth groups)



My first real contact, if you like, with - two or three guys in particular I remember was at football. Two were Caribbean and one was Asian, real strong footballing guys, that sporty background. You click. I don't know what it is. You click and you become mates

Planning conviviality

(spaces that produce recognition & have redistributive functions)

