

## **Innovative qualitative methods in urban research**

**Berlin, 29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2013**

### **Session 14.1: Community resilience in the urban context**

**Title: Resilience and Urban Youth: Conclusions from a Case Study in Pilton, Edinburgh**

#### **Abstract:**

Scholars broadly agree that resilience refers to:

*a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.* (Luthar et al 2000, p.543).

This paper draws on research with young people in Pilton, a peripheral housing estate or 'scheme' in Edinburgh, Scotland, carried out between June 2012 and March 2013, including sixteen observation sessions in a local Youth Centre and semi-structured interviews with twenty-six young people. I asked young people to share with me their perspectives on what was important in their lives, rather than focussing solely on my pre-identified issues. This meant that there were considerable variations about what we discussed from interview to interview. However, their sense and fear of violence, actual and metaphorical, institutional and individual, was a constantly recurring and important theme. I will describe the urban context of Pilton and provide examples of young people's descriptions of violence in their everyday lives and the strategies they adopt to manage within that context. In my conclusions, I will argue that, rather than prioritising supporting individual young people to overcome adversity, in policy, a more social model of resilience, focussing on the "dynamics of social interweavings" (Elias 1978), addressing structural causes of disadvantage, configuring social practices of support across settings (Edwards 2007), and reducing institutional/systemic as well as individual abuse and violence towards young people is needed.

#### **Introduction**

The concept of youth transitions is useful in its provision of a metaphor to allow the analyst to account for both the structural limitations within which young people find

themselves and the possibilities that they have to make choices to influence the direction of their transitions to adulthood (Pollock 2008). Youth is typically presented as a life stage, with the markers at its end stage signalling a move from dependence to independence (France 2007). Such markers might include the shift from full time education into further and higher education and into the employment market, changing residence to rent or buy one's own home, co-habiting with a partner or having a baby, though also paying attention to how variables such as gender, class and ethnicity impact on these. Some (for example, Barry 2005) have discussed other transitions such as transitions into new family formations and into criminal and/or drug careers.

Historical transitions for young people have often been presented as linear and predictable (Chamberlain 1989; Craine & MacDonald 1997; Willis 1977). Undoubtedly changes in the labour market have meant that the material experiences of young people nowadays are different from in the past. However, the paucity of research exploring either historical or contemporary subjective experiences of young people renders general assertions about their subjective experiences, without empirical research to support it, as dubious and partial (Goodwin & O'Connor 2005a, 2005b; O'Connor & Goodwin 2004). While material disadvantage continues in the same communities, impacting on all areas of people's lives, including health, social functioning, educational achievement and employment (MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Wilkinson and Pickett 2006, 2007), social and economic changes have disproportionately affected working class young people. They often have to negotiate transitions at an earlier age than more socially advantaged young people (Roberts 2005) and face the prospect of 'patchwork careers' characterised by part-time and casualised jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment or as having to find their way through a plethora of training and other schemes (Bynner 2005).

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) have cited Elias' (1978) metaphor of *chains of interdependence* as a useful construct for exposing why many young people nowadays seem to be in crisis:

“some of the problems faced by young people in modern Britain stem from an attempt to negotiate difficulties on an individual level. Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to

resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure” (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, p.114).

The point being made is that the individualisation of problems and solutions confuses and damages young people who are denied the resources that they need to flourish and also blamed for their own failure. No wonder that their responses can sometimes be violent and destructive to themselves and others.

### **Definitions of poverty and the emergence of the concept of social exclusion**

In the UK, since the 1990s the term ‘social exclusion’ has been found to be useful in capturing the multiple dimensions of poverty and deprivation (Milbourne 2002) and the dynamic (Seddon 2006) nature of contemporary disadvantage in ways that poverty alone does not (Butler & Watt 2007). Whereas measures of relative poverty assume differences in societal participation because of economic deprivation, social exclusion directly assesses behavioural and circumstantial indicators of societal participation (Roosa et al 2005). Smith (2005) describes eight facets of social exclusion: from gaining a livelihood; exclusion from social services, welfare and security networks; exclusion from consumer culture; exclusion from political choice; exclusion from bases of popular organisation and solidarity; exclusion from understanding what is happening to society and themselves; exclusion from shelter; exclusion from personal interaction. These different aspects co-exist and interact dynamic with each other and in their impact on young people’s lives. Where multiple disadvantage occurs, the impact can also be multiplied.

### **Description of the urban context: Pilton**

The City of Edinburgh (population just under 500,000) frequently tops polls of “most desirable” places to live in the United Kingdom (Scottish government, 2009). However, Edinburgh is also a city where there are huge health, economic and social inequalities (Forth Neighbourhood Partnership 2008a, 2008b). Greater Pilton (West Pilton, East Pilton, Drylaw, Granton, Muirhouse) is one of Edinburgh’s three major peripheral ‘schemes’. Pilton is located fairly centrally within Edinburgh, only three miles north of the city centre, but its location gives it a peripheral feel (Hastings 2004). There has been a lot of demolition and rebuilding since the 1980s. Houses

range from 1930s tenements to recent social-housing and owner-occupation developments. Greater Pilton's population is around 27,000. Despite a succession of regeneration programmes since the 1980s and some improvements, many of Pilton's social and economic problems continue. Moreover, and typical of other deprived or declining social housing estates, Pilton residents are negatively stigmatised by outsiders (Hastings 2004).

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2009 combines 38 indicators across 7 domains, namely: income, employment, health, education, skills and training, housing, geographic access and crime. The SIMD is presented at data zone level, enabling small pockets of deprivation to be identified, with a median population size of 769. The overall index is a weighted sum of the seven domain scores. Forty-five per cent of residents in West Pilton data zone S01002279 are considered "income deprived", compared to a Scottish average of 15% (Scottish Government 2009). The neighbourhood is significantly deprived on a range of levels, coming in the last five per cent of data zones in terms of income and health, in the last ten per cent in terms of employment and education, training and skills, in the last ten to fifteen per cent in terms of crime, in the last fifteen to twenty per cent in terms of housing (Scottish Government 2009).

As well as being economically disadvantaged, compared to other schools in Edinburgh and Scotland, school students attain less academically (HMI 2006, 2008, 2009). This has an impact on what young people do after they leave school. In 2009 (HMI 2009), 35% of school leavers from the local Craigoyston High School were not heading to destinations of employment, education or training. This compared with figures of 17% and 12% respectively for Edinburgh and Scotland.

## **Stigma**

Hastings (2004) has examined the concept of stigma on three social housing estates, including West Pilton. She describes three discourses related to stigma: "pathological", due to the special concentration of an "underclass"; "structural", blaming socio-spatial inequalities and the interaction between these and economic change; the third discourse is what she calls the "area-effects" thesis which includes external aspects of neighbourhoods such as, for example, isolated location or poor

quality public services and internal aspects such as a culture of low self-esteem or high proportions of lone parents (Hastings 2004). Hastings also suggests that “pathological” discourses about estates like Pilton are especially prevalent where people lack much experience of the estates. Elias and Scotsman (1994) have noted that individual beliefs represent individual variations of standard beliefs and attitudes current in neighbourhoods. Outsiders and inhabitants of Pilton often share an oversimplistic, one-dimensional and negative sense of what characterises the place. This is grounded in decades of stigma that attach to the neighbourhood. As far back as 1944, in an article in The “Evening News” of 23<sup>rd</sup> March, Mr M. Murchison of the City of Edinburgh Architect’s Department is quoted as remarking:

“If people behave as they are doing at West Pilton today, how can they ever be fit custodians of all the things they are to be provided with in the future?”

Griffin (1997b) argues that although mainstream society acknowledges defiance and rebellion as inevitable parts of growing-up, only certain forms of defiance can be tolerated. She argues that young people in areas like Pilton are singled out for an increasing imposition of a system of legal and social controls as an exertion of power, rather than a necessary response to what are objective and challengeable social problems. Within this context, the emergence of violent responses and what are considered to be anti-social responses can be comprehended as a reaction to structural violence “from above” (Wacquant 2008, p.24).

## **Drugs**

Unemployment, poverty and problem drug use often co-exist in areas experiencing multiple socio-economic deprivation (Buchanan 2004). In the 1980s a local drug culture emerged in Pilton. This also led to a high incidence of AIDS and international notoriety as the setting for Irvine Welsh’s novel “Trainspotting”, which focused on drug users and their chaotic lifestyles. Brent (2009) and MacDonald and Marsh (2002) argue that experimental drug use in poor communities is more risky than the recreational use of drugs by middle class young people. From various studies in Teeside, MacDonald and Marsh (2002) suggest that the boundaries between recreational and problematic use for poor, socially disadvantaged young people in Teeside are loose and the motivation for using what they call the ‘poverty drug’ of

heroin is to achieve a numbing effect, very different from the 'joyful' use of drugs such as ecstasy in other contexts. West Pilton continues to have huge drug and alcohol problems; there are about three times the national average for admissions to hospital for alcohol misuse, seven times the rate for drug misuse (Scottish Government 2009).

### **Young people's experiences of violence**

Wacquant's research in French banlieues and US 'ghettos' unearthed experiences of what he calls an "extraordinary prevalence of physical danger and...acute sense of insecurity" (Wacquant 2008,p.54). He contextualises the daily experience of young people within what he calls "violence 'from above'" (2008, p. 24). His thesis, also applicable to Pilton, is that young people are constantly abused by the impacts of macro—level socio-economic change including, mass unemployment, relegation to decaying neighbourhoods and a heightened stigmatisation in their daily lives. Violent responses to this, though often self-destructive for individuals and communities are easily comprehensible.

However, it would be inappropriate to overclaim similarities between the experiences of young people in Pilton and those studied by Wacquant. For one thing, Pilton is far smaller in population and geographical size than the places he researched. Pilton shares more similarities with the banlieues than with the US ghettos. Like the banlieues, Pilton is on the edge of the city but not very far out. The US ghettos Wacquant describes are very racially segregated whereas Pilton is nearly 100% white. Levels of crime in Pilton may be high compared to the rest of Edinburgh and Scotland but this is nothing compared to inner-city US Chicago. Like the US ghettos and French banlieues, Pilton is a "historical constellation, not an unchanging archetype" (Wacquant 2008, p.168). There is therefore a need for empirical research such as this in different locations to investigate causes, meanings and impacts on young people's lives is important in order to interpret the "*generic mechanisms* that produce it, like the *specific forms* it assumes" (Wacquant 2008, p.2).

**Pilton: Fear of violence**

For most of my interviewees, a fear of actual physical violence was always there when they were in the streets of Pilton. This fear was specific to street location but homes and local youth centres were usually described as being safe places:

“Ye cannae always be sure that there's no somebody just oot there, wanting tae dae something. And it could end up bein you that they dae it too.” (Edgar, 17)

“I'm so scared. Like, not always, like it's not always a walking about, constant fear but ah, it's hard to explain but yet I mean, I've always been timid around new people, people I don't know. So it's people that I don't know that make me feel threatened. It's just so much worse.” (Leona, 20)

The general anxiety was that violence would come from other young people, more often younger ones who were felt to be 'out of control'. However, several people also described their fear of street drinkers:

“No the junkies, ah wouldnae say them but the alcies, when they're steamin' drunk and they try and fight wi ye.” (John, 16)

Some young people suggested that young men were more at risk than young women:

“I think it's more difficult for guys. Because I think when guys go up toon, like, they just pick fights wi other guys for no reason and people get stabbed for no reason. That scares me when my brothers are walking the streets.” (Patsy, 18)

In response to this, young men adapt 'macho' attitudes:

“Ye dinnae, ye try no tae show weakness...if you've goat, a weakness or if you show that you're easy tae get picked on, they'll pick on you as a group.” (Donald, 17)

The fear of violence tended to be less for people who had grown up in the area and had strong networks of support, whether this was family or friends:

“It makes it feel a wee bit more securer than if you'd just moved into the area but in a way it's no much different from anybody else. Still ye cannae no look over your shoulder. You have to keep a lookout.” (Edgar, 17)

Several young people described their fear of paedophiles and one young woman described how a stranger in a car had tried to get her to enter it.

“When I was like, maybe, school finished at about 3 o'clock so I didn't, I had an after school club, 3 till half 4 at the old Craigroyston, and I was walking home for about half four, it was kind of dark, that's when it gets darkish, just walking home the back way, past the doctor's and things, walking home. This car drove past me and started to give me a so much, “I mean I know your mum, I'll take ye home” and things. “Naw” I went, “I'm walking home”.” (Steffi, 16)

Such events were described as almost common place. However, it also seemed that the casualisation of the descriptions was a coping mechanism to enable them to deal with a situation which they felt it was beyond their power to change.

**Pilton: Institutional violence: “from above”**

### **School**

Several interviewees described disrupted and troubled school experiences, including falling behind and truanting. In common with findings of Shildrick and MacDonald in Teeside (2007), most young people in Pilton “displayed a curious combination of personal resilience and acquiescence”. As in Teeside, most “seemed disenfranchised from any discourse of social justice”. Regret and acceptance of personal responsibility for what they felt was lack of achievement or failure at school usually took precedence in their personal narratives over complaints about the school system or teachers. For example, two young women described how, with the pressure of caring for sick parents and siblings, they began to fall behind at school and then started truanting. This could be viewed as a subdued but “embodied and physically expressed” form of resistance (MacDonald & Shildrick 2010, p.196) which, unfortunately only served to further marginalise these young people:

“It wasnae like I didnae like school. It was mainly that I had to help my mum out a lot cos she's no well. But then I was hardly ever there.” (Grace, 16)

“Because it just made me then drop classes cos I was like top set and then I got moved doon and all that because I was missing school...well ah had tae nurse ma sister wi ma mum.” (Fiona, 18)

Another young woman, now diagnosed with mental illness and receiving treatment which is working, also truanted when her medical condition was not recognised:

“I just got so depressed that it was just the worst place in the world. I mean, it's halfway down quite a long road so I'd get off the bus and start walking down that road and I would have a panic attack, just walking down that road, just made me freak out...So I would go to the nurse and she would be like "You're not ill" but she couldn't argue it if I said that, if I made up some kind of illness about, that was like something inside, my head hurt or I felt sick, she couldn't argue it because there was no proof...I didn't even know that it was a mental illness. I thought, I just genuinely thought, somedays I actually thought, I was like, "I feel so sick" and it was because of the anxiety that came with depression.” (Leona, 20)

There were a few instances where young people described individually abusive behaviour by teachers. For example, John described how a teacher took his mobile phone away and read out his private text messages to the class. He knew that that was inappropriate but accepted the humiliation meted out to him:

“And there was one time where the teacher, she said, "Can I have your phone?" and so I said "Aye" and so I gied her my phone and next minute she's reading my texts out tae the whole class. Which I didnae think that was personally right masel'..but anyway, it wis ma fault in the end ae the day. Aw aye it wis ma fault...because, anything I said at that school, it was still my fault.” (John, 16).

## **Employers**

Many young people emphasised their commitment to finding paid work and for most it was the most important marker of transition to adulthood. However, like young

people in Teeside (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007), young people in Pilton described disjointed *churning about* between training schemes, short-term, unstable employment, unemployment and volunteering. Not one interviewee had entered stable employment after transiting through immediate post-school training and/or education. Toynbee (2003) has described the impact not only of economic poverty but also the disrespect shown to unemployed people and low-paid workers by institutions and employers. Such treatment seems to be a common experience of young people in Pilton. Patsy described the importance of finding her first paid job as a hairdresser as a marker of a move towards independence from her mother. However, it turned out that she had been employed illegally, with the employer not making any contribution to her tax or national insurance payments:

“I was getting paid ‘cash in hand’ and ah didnae know that. Like, I just thought I was getting money. I was like “This is brilliant”. I was getting money every week. I wasnae getting taxed. Ah just didnae know and ma mum was asking “Why are you no getting wage slips?” an ah wis like “Oh maw, it doesnae matter. Try tae keep outae ma way...ah was trying tae keep her out ae my life. I wis earning this money that I thought was amazing so I was trying tae keep ma mum outae my life. But I wouldnae have got taxed anyway on the amount of money I was earning because I wasnae earning enough but I was still getting paid ‘cash in hand’.” (Patsy, 18)

Nonetheless, Patsy said she bore no resentment towards the employer. The experience of having some spending money overrode any consideration of the employer taking advantage of her:

“Cos I was only 16 and I was getting an apprenticeship wage. I was getting what every other apprentice was getting in a hairdresser's. But I just never knew. It was my very first job and I just thought it was amazing because I was getting money. So it wis like, “Ah can dae this and that wi’ ma pals” cos ah had the money.” (Patsy, 18)

A young man described doing work experience then going to the local technical college, followed by a series of short term jobs and the impact this is having on his mental health:

“Aye, ah’ve had a few jobs. Network Rail. Welding and fabricator. Workin’ wi the council. Glazier...glazier company went bust. Building and fabricating company went bust. The council was only an 8 months job, never got taken back on. And the Network Rail was meant tae be a start-up. Ah never heard anything back...Depressing. Aye, depressing mate. Very depressing. Sittin’ about. Wakin’ up. Just daein’ the same thing every day. You waken up in the morning and you go “Oh my God, what am I going to do today”. Laze about. Look out the windae. Look at the same shite that’s happening in Pilton every single day...it’s just stressed me tae the hilt now. Tae the fact that ah cannae handle sittin’ about any mair...ah’ll tell ye for a fact right now. Stress is a big problem. In my life anyway.” (Vincent, 22)

However, rather than locating the causes of his problems in changes in how the labour market has become structured, Vincent diverted his anger towards immigrants, despite the fact that there are very few in Pilton. He believed they were being favoured over local people and cheating the welfare benefits system:

“Because it’s hard tae get money. And ye see people doon at the job centre, these Polish people, they’ve got, like 3 and 4 bairns, that might not even be their 3 or 4 bairns, they could be their pals’ 3 or 4 bairns but they’re just usin’ their names tae get like...£5-600 a week he’s earning that. They’re earning that on Job Seekers’ Allowance. Ah dinnae understand it. That’s what pisses me off.” (Vincent, 22)

### **Violence from other young people**

The fear of physical violence that young people have was often grounded in past experiences, their own or things that had happened to people around them. Many described petrol-bombing of cars as though it were not an exceptional occurrence. Several mentioned direct knowledge of murders having taken place. One young woman described her terror and confusion and anger when her car was attacked by a gang of young people and the window was smashed:

“I was driving home from my gran’s with my mum in the front seat and - this is my old car – and I was quite close to my house, so it was in Pilton and there was a massive group of, I’d say, 13 – 15 or 16 year olds. And my window was

open and we were talking. So we stopped talking when we went past them. I don't know why. They did seem intimidating but they were children, so we shouldn't have been – my mum's 40, I'm almost 20, we shouldn't have been intimidated. And then, as we drove past them, we were a wee bit past them and they smashed my back window. I don't know what with, but it completely shattered...and I was quite annoyed, because I was, I was actually scared...Like if I hadn't been in my car, I wouldn't have been angry. In fact, if they had just attacked the car, I would have been annoyed, but I was in the car. My mum was in the car. It was like, if only it had just been me... I only just got out...I was so angry that we - it was bad, it was wrong. It did a lot of damage.” (Leona, 20)

She described her lack of comprehension of why such an attack has taken place:

“The people that attacked my car or attacked my friends car, we hadn't done anything to them. So I don't understand them. If you're angry, be angry at or try and be angry at the person.” (Leona, 20)

The incident was reported to the police and she understood that the perpetrators were young people who had subsequently been taken into care. Although she was outraged, she also felt guilty and responsible to some extent for their being taken away from the familial home:

“I think they did capture them but they were under 16. Even so, I don't know what got done...I think they were – it makes me feel terrible though – I think they were getting put into care.” (Leona, 20)

Most young people suggested that people younger than them were responsible for the lack of safety in the community. Patsy explained this as being due to them having nothing to do and also because there was lack of parental control. :

“All the bairns like I say, they just have nothing to dae, absolutely nothing here for children tae dae except for this club...and when these clubs arenae open, the bairns are just running wild and they just smashin' windows and smashin' cars and battering, like, other bairns and it's just crazy cos there's nothing for them tae dae so they just go wild and do what they want. And some ae their mums just actually dinnae have control over them.” (Patsy, 18)

Elias and Scotsman (1994) have suggested that more powerful groups can effectively stigmatise other groups if they are well established in positions of power from which the stigmatised group is excluded. There is ample evidence that this occurs in Pilton. While usually excluding themselves and those close to them from moral judgements, young people described in broad terms how other young people were out of control and how other parents were neglectful. The general sense was that the community's identity was defined by a *minority of the worst* rather than a *minority of the best* (Elias & Scotsman 1994)'.

### **Violence within the family**

Although for most young people the street was where the threat of violence existed, for some violence took place within the family setting. Steffi described the constant abuse she receives from her mother and the physical violence she suffered when her brother was living at home:

“I don't get on wi' ma mum...I just fall out wi' her all the time and things, so I'll be moving home soon...just like, if I go to the chip shop and ye've not done it properly or go to the shops and it's not the correct bread or something.”  
(Steffi, 16)

“He was smashing my mum's house up, my big brother, cos kind of, I think he's got a behaviour problem...I don't really get on with him and we don't get on at all. Cos when he used tae batter me, things like that, so it wasn't nice.”  
(Steffi, 16)

### **Gangs**

From research in Glasgow, Holligan et al (2009) concluded that although territoriality is associated with gangs and disorder, it can be positive in helping to build bonding social capital. Young people living in neighbourhoods such as Pilton often feel unfairly judged by adults who perceive all youth gatherings to be troublesome and all friendship groups to be 'gangs', engaged in anti-social and/or criminal activities (Deuchar 2009). 'Gang' is a loose and contested concept. In Pilton there is a mythology that a flourishing gang culture existed in previous decades but few young people believed that there were organised gangs any more. Rather, the groups of

young people who were seen to cause trouble nowadays were perceived as unruly, though destructive, children:

“When we were younger, there was, like, YPD, Young Pilton Derry. But like aw them got the jail and then there was a younger teen who kinda took the role for a couple of years but ah wouldnae class them as a gang cos they’re all wee bairns...between 13-17. But they dinnae really dae anything. They just set fire to cars, they’ve had one fight with the MCF (Muirhouse Casual Fighters).” (Nora, 18)

“When I was younger I can still remember people like running about streets, just commonly like knives, everything just, it was really daft. A lot ae the elder guys went tae jail. Murder, everything like that.” (Donald, 17)

Violent fighting between people from Pilton and neighbouring areas are sometimes ritualised, embedded as customs that characterise the neighbourhood for young people in Pilton. For example, there is a tradition of gangs from neighbouring Muirhouse coming to Pilton for a fight on 5<sup>th</sup> November, bonfire night, every year. While the fieldwork was being conducted, this resulted in the destruction of an all-weather sports playing ground.

“The Muirhousers come along tae Pilton every bonfire night wi fireworks and then they throw them and then the Piltoners throw theirs and obviously it all starts and people start fighting.” (Donald, 17)

### **Racist violence**

Emerging racial tensions with new immigrants have led to a possible emergence of racially-segregated gangs. Casual comments indicating racist attitudes emerged in several interviews. I only interviewed one non-white person, Mark, an African immigrant who described several experiences of aggressive racism against himself and his family:

“There’s a McDonald’s just off Pilton, but, hey, the people who’ll be in there will be Pilton people...so, I knock a chair by mistake you know, like, and then it falls over and then someone goes...“You fucking black teenage vandal”.” (Mark, 20)

Mark talked about the intimidating behaviour that his mother had experienced from youths climbing onto her balcony:

“She’s too quiet. She never speaks to no-one....there were these kids were on her balcony...so they went outside, they climbed onto the balcony and started like knocking – bam, bam, bam, bam...to victimise my mother really.”  
(Mark, 20)

Racial violence is not limited to being against non-British people. Xander discussed a scenario at school where he had been enjoined by his teacher to befriend a new student, a young English man who had joined the class. He had been pleased to take up this task and went to approach the young man in the street after school. However, just before doing so, another group of young men approached and attacked the young English man:

“I remember there was an English boy called Mackie. And he came into Pilton. And he was a year below me at school. And ah wis like, ken when the teacher comes round, and she’s like one people, two people frae every class, show him about an’ that. An’ me and another boy in ma class wi one ae them fae the older class. And I remember when I seen him at school, I seen him outside the school, and I was going to go over and talk tae him. And then four guys came out a back lane and battered him. Right in front ae me.” (Xander, 22)

Xander described feelings of powerlessness, frustration and fear and a lasting sense of guilt that he hadn’t been able to do anything to intervene. He understood that the English family had moved back to England very soon afterwards and he blamed the violence for this.

Mark, the young African man, also talked about being approached to see if he would deal drugs and how other black or mixed race youths (in his words “half castes”) were, in his view engaged in illegal activities, evidenced by their ostentatious display of material goods such as expensive wristwatches. He described a dangerous, disturbing and confusing incident which had happened not long before the interview where he had been mistaken as a drug dealer and threatened with a knife:

“And this guy just comes out of nowhere, he just comes out of nowhere, you know, with a knife...says “Give me all the weed you have”. “Like what?” I said, “Give me all the weed you have...you bought so much weed from –“ from who, I dunno, I did not recognise the name. Cos ,you know, it’s really, everything is happening, it’s hectic you know, like, you’re holding a knife at me, you know. It’s really, really fast and I’m trying to get, I’m, like, holding his hand, you know, holding the knife and shit. he goes, like, he bought, I don’t know how many grammes of weed you bought. I’m, like, “Right. I never got no weed”. And then the guy freaks me, you know, like, check, checking, checking, checking. And then he learns I don’t have the weed. Here. And then I had a backpack so now he was really wanting to get in my backpack...so then this guy, he was pulling my big jumper so, considering I’m skinny, I didn’t know if I could, like, if I could fight him back or something. And he’s holding a knife, yeah? And then he learns I don’t have the weed and then he goes...”Do not follow me”, you know. Do not follow me. Cos I was like, what am I, like right down the stairs he runs. He was pulling on a mask as well. So, you know, it was like a movie or something...Aw man, you’ve no idea. I was scared you know. I got home. I couldn’t really think of nothing you know, like, what really happened? Why did it happen in the first place, you know? And I don’t know what’s happening at all, you know?” (Mark, 20)

### **Personal involvement as perpetrator of violence**

Wacquant (2008) argues that violence is a reasoned response to various kinds of violence ‘from above’ and an intelligible by-product of the policy of abandonment of the urban core. Several young people described indulging in anti-social behaviour almost as a rite-of-passage, silly stuff that you give up when you reach the age of sixteen, unless you have been taken into custody before then. One young man, Edgar, described several run-ins with the criminal justice system, culminating in a charge for possession of a dangerous weapon, a knife, when he narrowly avoided being imprisoned. He also claimed that he was innocent of any intention to harm anyone with the knife:

“First charge was when I was twelve and my last one was when I was, just over a year and a half ago...just stuff tae keep maself amused. Silly stuff

when I was younger, like setting fires, throwing eggs at windaes, smashin' windaes, just aw silly things, eh. The worst thing I've ever been done for was when my pal's kitchen windae got smashed and we ran out his back door and, me being me, ah didnae realise ah had a knife in my hand because I was cutting a bit of cheese and I ran away doon the street and I got caught off the polis...ah didnae even realise ah had the knife in my hand. Because ah wis cuttin' cheese in his kitchen and a brick came through the windae and just, my reaction was to run right out the back door...ah didnae even realise that ah had the knife in ma hand. I wis just runnin' efter them." (Edgar, 17)

Patsy described how petty acts of criminal damage and violence between groups of young people had escalated to the point where two of her cousins had ended up murdering people:

"Truthfully, most ae it's ma family. That are idiots. Cos it's basically, it's like my whole family lives here but it was mostly years ago when it was all crime and they were just, it was all just about crime wi' them...just violence. Fighting over motor bikes and stupid stuff like that but wee things like that turned intae bigger things when they got older which turned intae, like, drug wars and, it's just stupid...Now I've got, now I've got two cousins that are in jail for a couple of murders that happened here over stupid things and it's, stuff like that that you're looking at and you think "Oh my God". (Patsy, 18)

Alongside rites-of-passage type behaviours, experience of frustration in relation to employment has led to simmering ideas by some young people about actively attacking immigrants in the community, who are blamed for taking jobs away from 'Piltoners':

"If they want us tae putt in and pull aw these Cs oot and dae it, an' take over their shops, happy tae dae it...Ah could put ma whole family and the whole ae Pilton on this right now, the whole of Pilton would get together right now and rip every single person oot. Right now." (William, 19)

### **Strategies for protection**

With varying degrees of consciousness and with different opportunities, young people in Pilton adopt behaviours to try to protect themselves from violence. The

effect sometimes is to render the violence and their fears and anxieties invisible. They also actively try not to 'stand out' as a strategy to avoid being victimised in future. From his research in Southmead, Bristol, Brent describes how official reports on poor areas:

“possess an almost fetishistic belief in map and census material, which transposes Southmead into lists of figures or into a shape. There is an irony that it is the very aliveness of the Southmeads of the world, indeed of all social relationships, that leads to demands for a knowledge that attempts to reduce them to an inanimate objectivity that substitutes ‘statistical ensembles for social actors’” (Brent 2009, p.87)

This problem is also evident in Pilton. Many violent criminal incidents go unreported to the police. Steffi described an incident where her family had felt threatened in their home by a disturbance outside. They briefly considered reporting it to the police but didn't do so as they were worried that this would lead them to get into more trouble if they were identified as the people who had gone to the police. Fear, rather than wanting to be silent, informed this decision:

“But I don't really want tae be in the grass as well so – that could get maself in trouble when I'm older.” (Steffi, 16)

The policeman I interviewed told me that racial crime was not really an issue as there were hardly any reports of it and it was apparently getting better. At odds with this, from my interviews, several racially-aggravated incidents against the African family were not reported and do not figure on any list of crime statistics. For officialdom, such incidents, and there must be others, do not exist.

## **Denial**

Much of the violence that young people experience in Pilton is hidden even from family members. Some young people described their sense that parents were not able to protect them or that their responses to violent incidents would make matters worse, fail to solve the problem and/or lead them to curtail the freedoms of the victims, ostensibly to protect them. The latter situation effectively meant that experiences of violence were affecting transitions to independence for young people, making the gaining of independence a subversive process, founded on deceit and

cover-up. Parents were sometimes unaware of young people's experiences. Mark, who was threatened at knifepoint, did not tell his mother about it, both for fear of raising her anxiety levels and also judging that her likely response would be inappropriate:

"I wouldn't tell my mum because mum to freak out and stuff. And for years I'm not allowed to go out, just to go out at night, because she was scared." (Mark, 20)

Steffi, who was approached to get into a stranger's car, chose not to report this to her mother. She unfortunately told her aunt though, who passed it on. As expected, her mother's response was to get upset and angry. Rather than offering support and advice, the young woman felt that she had to deal with someone else's emotions as well as her own. The lesson was learned – to stay quiet in future:

"Ah never told anybody till it slipped out when I telt my auntie but she promised to say, I said, "Don't tell my mum", cos I'm that kind of person, no wanting tae tell anybody anything...and then she slipped out by telling my mum and then she started to get upset and things and then it just went on for months...that's why I dinnae tell my mum anything about it, it disnae help." (Steffi, 16)

### **Not standing out/ becoming invisible**

As well as covering up or not reporting experiences of violence perpetrated against them, some young people described conscious strategies to ensure that they did not attract attention so as to become victims of crime in the future. These included avoiding streets which they sensed to be more dangerous than other places:

"I don't go right through the middle of Pilton, I stick to the edge of it, stick to what I know is safe." (Andy, 20)

One young woman had a car and she described driving everywhere rather than walking so as to be safe:

"I kind of don't hang about in Pilton. I feel safe in my house and in my street but in the Pilton, Granton, Royston, sort of the surrounding areas, I don't feel particularly safe...I drive everywhere." (Leona, 20)

Another strategy for fitting in was to join in with disruptive behaviours:

“If you try and be different, you'll either get judged or, like, bullied and stuff like that. But everyone, like, tries to follow the crowd so none ae that really happens to them.” (Helen, 16)

From fieldwork in Newcastle and Edinburgh, McCulloch et al (2006, p.542) concluded that young people “create their identities through leisure and consumer activities”. Young people they interviewed described style and dress as being important. I found this with a very small number of interviewees in Pilton. However, it seemed that dress and style were used more often to make people invisible, to help them not stand out rather than as positive expressions of individual or group identity. Steffi said she tried not to:

“to look smart and things cos, when you look smart and things, there’s a lot ae bad people about...rapin’ ae people and stuff like that.” (Steffi, 16)

Such actions are consciously taken, with an assessment of the options open to you. Donald eloquently expressed this:

“I think if you come in, it's probably best tae no be as individual as possible. Like, I know you're meant tae be individual but it's best tae just blend in.” (Donald,17)

Of course, for some people, such as the African family, it would be very difficult not to stand out, no matter how much they tried to *keep themselves tae themselves*.

### **Fighting back/joining in**

“If ye're fae Pilton, it's quite sterotypical, ye're meant tae be quite hard.” (Donald, 17)

Elias and Scotsman (1994) discuss how people gain power in a group by relinquishing some individual freedoms and signing up to group norms. For some young people in Pilton, there was a strong pressure to join in with violent and anti-social behaviours.

“You've goat tae really. If ye dinnae and you try, if you're just a normal individual, they'll really say to you, "What, you know are ye no daein this? Why are ye no daein that for?" they'll encourage ye tae be racist, tae be violent and tae vandalise. That's what's the general idea, they just go about, they just tip cars, burn stuff. It's just general stupid stuff.” (Donald, 17)

Wacquant (2008) argues that there is not social disorganisation in the ghetto; rather, there is different organisation. In Pilton, some young people described fighting back, physically and metaphorically to assaults. Donald described the group mores, whereby you had to defend your friends if others attacked them. His description was also exuberant; the fighting was at the same time an expression of youthful masculinity, group belonging and self defence:

“It's like if one ae yer pals fight, if they're gettin battered, ye've got tae be there for them like. Ye've got tae jump in and help them. If ye dinnae, ye probably get battered off them yerself like.” (Donald, 17)

Among what might loosely be described as gangs, there appeared to be an informal code of behaviour that people follow. There are risks associated with this but in general, the sense was that it was followed. Donald described how, for example, if you agree the numbers who will engage in a battle, the code is to adhere to that.

“Ye just need tae hope that people stand by their word, like. If ah say tae somebody, ah've got somebody say tae me, "Ah'm gonnae batter ye. Ah want ye tae meet me now for a one on one, ah would turn up by myself, just hopin' that they would turn up by theirselves but if they didnae then my ain fault for turning up by myself.” (Donald, 17)

There were few descriptions of individuals actively fighting back to defend themselves from bullying or aggression. Mark said that he would have been more likely to do this if he had been drinking:

“If I'm sober, I'll be fine, like, you know. I can just go like “What did you say that for?” or something. But it's a different, a whole different story when I'm drunk...yeah, I will, I get really angry...well not that woman, but if this was a man had said what she had said, even if I was not drunk, whether I was drunk or otherwise, I would have reacted.”(Mark, 20)

### **Relying on supportive networks: friends and family**

Among the stories of daily challenges, the theme about the importance of the support of a good network of friends and family to help you get through recurred. Some young people described feeling isolated but more often, people told stories of how they appreciated the people around them:

“Like I say, if ye've got a good group of friends that really helps. That's what I've got, a good group of friends.” (Donald, 17)

Young people strategised to surround themselves with friends who could support them. This also meant filtering out and dissociating themselves from a wider group which was engaging in anti-social behaviour.

The process of becoming 'mature' was described in terms of sorting out who you wanted to be with and who not but there was also a sense in some interviews that the bonding capital that people gained from their peers sometimes conflicted with the bridging capital that they wanted to have in order to become adults. One group of four young people told me of their loyalty to and protection of each other and how they wanted it to continue forever:

“We always look after each other. We would never leave each other so that's a good thing.” (Grace, 16)

“We've got our ain wee group...And when we drink, when it's like parties and stuff like that, we dinnae get intae a crowd where they're all taking drugs. We dinnae like that stuff. We can tell each other everything. We can share stuff with each other and we know that they willnae go back and say tae people.” (John, 16)

Just as in Winston Parva (Elias & Scotsman 1994), young people in Pilton who had an established family network, with a history of belonging to the place, seemed to have less fear of danger, as well as less experience of assaults. One young woman said:

“I've always felt safe here. But I have a member ae my family on every corner.” (Patsy, 18)

This clearly has personal benefits in terms of keeping physically safe. However, these are at the same time couched within an acceptance of danger and anti-social behaviour as a community norm that can't really be changed. Patsy, pressed to give an example of how neighbours and family look out for each other, said:

“Like, someone trying to break into my house and all the neighbours are there for each other, if you know what I mean. They all speak, so they can all warn each other and stuff like that and because we're all from here me and all my friends are all close by so we've all got each other and our mums and that now know each other so they're all friends because we've been friends for years. So it's advantages like that as well.” (Patsy, 18)

Families and friends can also serve to encourage young people to desist from their anti-social behaviours. When Edgar became concerned that he might be interned, he changed his behaviour, citing as the main inspiration the fact that being deprived of his liberty would mean that he couldn't see his family every day:

“Just the thought ae, like, not bein' able tae like, sit down and have something tae eat. Like, and talk tae ma mum and ma brothers. And no bein' able to go out and see all ma pals and that.” (Edgar, 17)

### **The Police**

According to Wacquant (2008, p. 32):

“In the French working-class banlieues, the police are regarded by the youths of the housing projects (of North-African and French origins alike) as an undesirable presence sent for the express purpose of intimidating and harassing them, and nearly all instances of collective unrest over the past two decades have at their start an incident opposing them to agents of law enforcement.”

I gained very little sense from any interviewee that they felt that the police could protect them from violence. Although there is an overwhelming lack of confidence among young people in Pilton about the competence of the police to address important crime-related issues, there are differences about why they believe this is the case. One young man described the police as “inept” and “clueless” but then

suggested that they willingly just turn a *blind eye*, that is, that they're not very interested in the place or in helping to resolve its problems. They were felt not to prioritise important things but rather to concentrate on dealing with unimportant issues, when they were not harassing young people getting on with their daily lives.

Helen said:

“Like, say, a proper emergency would happen, they'd take forever to come but say the most pointless thing would happen, like a windae got smashed, they'd be there in a matter of about 2 seconds. But say somebody got stabbed or something, they'd take forever to get here.” (Helen, 16)

This sense that the police don't care about people in Pilton was repeated by another young woman, Fiona:

“Tae be honest, I dinnae think they actually care about here.” (Fiona, 18)

Edgar, who himself had narrowly escaped imprisonment, explained the police's perceived nonchalance on what he thought was the failure of the judicial system to hand out strong enough sentences to punish and deter troublemakers from reoffending:

“Ah think they're just gettin' sick ae catchin' them and chargin' them and they're no' endin' up gettin' secure because, tae be honest wi' ye, half o' them really dae need tae get secure tae show them that they're no' aw invincible and there's consequences for what they're doing.” (Edgar, 17)

Several young people suggested that the police were actually too frightened of young people and the community to be effective:

“Ah'd say they're mair terrorised, the polis...you can see there are mair and mair stolen motor bikes, more about drugs as well. And mair fights and killin, stabbins and that.” (Steffi, 16)

Many young people experienced what they felt to be continual harassment by police when they were simply *muckin' aboot* with their friends in the street. Several interviewees said that local people hated the police. However, for most interviewees, there was little sense of constructive engagement with official processes to try to

review and change inappropriate police practices. More often, there seemed to be an anger that was internalised by individuals and across groups:

“If you're just standing there with your pals, I've seen the polis just grab you and take you away. They take you. They battered one ae ma pals before. They battered my sister's brother. They're just hated. It's just the way they use their power tae their advantage too much like.” (Donald,17)

## **Conclusions**

This study has found that many young people in Pilton live with a strong sense of violence, actual and metaphorical, institutional and individual, which pervades all areas of their daily lives. “Violence from above” (Wacquant 2008, p.24), the abuse of poor young people in a neoliberal global market with increasing inequalities, sets the context for daily lived experiences. Young ‘Piltoners’ adopt a range of strategies to manage on a day to day level but fear of violence is never far away. As well as being part of a city and country with huge inequalities exist, Pilton is an unequal neighbourhood. In a difficult economic context, visible minorities, such as immigrants, can be more likely than others to become victims of violence.

From this study, having strong, established networks and families helps young people in Pilton to feel and to remain safe. On the other hand, formal sources of support or redress, such as police or political systems, are often eschewed by them as ineffective or irrelevant. In common with Shildrick et al’s (2009) study in Teeside, young people in Pilton demonstrate a stoicism to routine stopping and questioning by police during their normal leisure activities, while at the same time they feel that the police are powerless and/or unwilling to act to protect them. Although there is a functioning Youth Forum<sup>1</sup>, which has had some successful campaigns, to protect themselves from violence, most young people in this study focus on becoming individually ‘resilient’, *steeling themselves* to survive in a tough environment that is not going to change.

Of course, supporting young people to defend themselves from individual acts of violence and encouraging them to find individual traits to help them assess options and manage their lives, is realistic, admirable even, as an objective for those who

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<sup>1</sup> This merits another paper.

work with young people. However, in policy terms, I would conclude by asserting that a more social model of resilience, focussing on the “dynamics of social interweavings” (Elias 1978), addressing structural causes of disadvantage, configuring social practices of support across settings (Edwards 2007), and reducing institutional/systemic as well as individual abuse and violence towards young people is needed. Enabling young people to survive or cope should not be enough. All young people should be able to thrive.

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