Neighbourhood Belonging, Social Class and Social Media—Providing Ladders to the Cloud

Peter Matthews

Published online: 04 Sep 2014.

Submit your article to this journal ⬏

Article views: 3504

View related articles ⬏

View Crossmark data ⬏

Citing articles: 5 View citing articles ⬏

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Neighbourhood Belonging, Social Class and Social Media—Providing Ladders to the Cloud

PETER MATTHEWS

School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK

ABSTRACT *The growth of social media over the past decade has transformed how we have interacted with the World Wide Web. This paper presents data from a research project coproduced with community organisations that had created an online archive through a Facebook site of a deprived neighbourhood in Edinburgh, Scotland. Framing the data from this site in the literature on class, place, stigma and belonging, the paper presents further evidence of the 'we-being' of working-class residence as opposed to the elective belonging of middle class people, and the stigma towards working-class neighbourhoods from wider society. The paper concludes by highlighting the benefits of social media in producing a natural discussion about neighbourhoods and residence and the importance of creating ladders to the cloud for working-class neighbourhoods.*

KEY WORDS: Social media, neighbourhood belonging, social class, neighbourhood deprivation, methods

Introduction

In February 2011, a housing association in Edinburgh began to post old black-and-white photographs of the neighbourhood it covers on a Facebook page—From There to Here: A Wester Hailes Story (http://www.on.fb.me/FromThere). The project was an experimental extension of a social history blog and was developed from an idea by their IT manager. Two years later, the page broke through the 2000 'likes' mark. Every Thursday afternoon, new photos are uploaded and rapidly receive numerous likes and an active archive of thousands of comments and shared reminiscence from residents' past and present has developed on the page. What is even more striking is these memories are being elicited about a neighbourhood that is relatively new—constructed between 1967 and 1972—and that has been subject to great upheaval and successive redevelopments.

Correspondence Address: Peter Matthews, School of the Built Environment, Edwin Chadwick Building, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh EH14 4AS, UK. Tel.: +44(0)1786 467688; Email: peter.matthews@stir.ac.uk

This paper reports on an action research project in the neighbourhood based on this social media activity. The nature of the coproduced research frames the discussion of the findings in this paper. A key aim for the community partners within the project was to explore the potential of the Facebook site for challenging widespread stigmatised views of Wester Hailes. The paper therefore firstly discusses stigma around certain neighbourhoods, and particularly social housing estates within the UK. This draws on literature on urban marginality (Hastings, 2004; Wacquant, 2008) linking this to the specific problems in policy problem-definition and implementation (Hastings, 2000; Matthews, 2010) and the unique context of socio-economic status, class and housing in the UK (Blokland, 2008; Hanley, 2007; Matthews, 2012b; Tucker, 1966).

The paper has a further two aims. The methodological novelty of using a Facebook site to access discussion and stories about a neighbourhood offers a new and exciting frontier for social research. The comments made by visitors to the Facebook page were probably as close to 'naturally' occurring memories and talk linked to place that it is possible to get without the intervention of a researcher—akin to participant observation. The paper therefore assesses the utility of this method for research on neighbourhoods, place and belonging. The vast majority of engagement is of a banal nature—the sharing of anecdotes and short stories of fun times in the past. These stories told by residents and former residents on the page are presented in terms of traditional and emerging understandings of place, belonging and attachment and particularly the classed nature of place attachment and sense of home, adding to a literature that has been dominated by the interview method (Allen, 2008; Benson & Jackson, 2013; Cole, 2013; Matthews, 2012b; Robertson *et al.*, 2008; Savage, 2010a; Watt, 2009).

Framing the discussion on the Facebook site in existing analyses of class and place-attachment, the paper suggests that it is unlikely that such activity, albeit of great utility, will challenge widespread stigma, or further create a level of community activism among residents today. However, from a methodological perspective, the research demonstrates the need to understand web 2.0 technologies as *media* which frame and create an audience response. While the discussion on the Facebook site was natural, it did respond to what had been posted, and this shaped the nature of engagement. Despite this, the paper concludes that the reminiscences on the site offer new and further insights into the sense of belonging and home expressed by working-class individuals within their communities.

Understanding Places—The Marginalisation and Stigmatisation of Social Housing Estates

The marginalisation of certain neighbourhoods is of growing interest as global inequalities increase. The work of Wacquant (2008) on urban outcasts has demonstrated how processes of economic liberalisation, the rolling-back of the welfare state and growing inequalities in Europe have produced many of the spatial patterns of marginalisation and social stigmatisation previously associated with the 'ghetto' in the USA. Patterns of extreme spatial marginalisation that were previously associated with the extremely precarious nature of public housing in the USA are now becoming commonplace within Europe as deindustrialisation and growing income inequality mark the urban environment (Blokland, 2008; Dekker & Van Kempen, 2004).

In the UK, a long history of class analysis within sociology and urban studies (Savage, 1995) has produced a rich and nuanced historical perspective on urban spatial inequality and class-based stigmatisation and marginalisation. This has highlighted the historical

persistence of the spatial patterning of deprivation and affluence. Charles Booth's famous map of London from 1898/1899 shows the same spatial patterns of dark blue 'Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.' and dark blue 'Very poor, casual. Chronic want.' as present-day Indices of Multiple Deprivation detail concentrations of worklessness, poor health and poverty. Similarly, the concentrations of deprivation that make life expectancy in some areas of the East End of Glasgow lower than those in most developing nations, are the same as concerned philanthropists in the nineteenth century (Pacione, 1997).

These spatial patterns and concentrations of deprivation can be market-driven, reflecting the hedonic nature of house and land prices—neighbourhoods suffer disinvestment as the market retreats and property investments become untenable (Cheshire, 2009). However, in the UK, and in Scotland in particular, the state has been the main actor in producing concentrations of deprivation through its role in the supply of housing for social rent. In Scotland in 1980, over half of the population rented their home from a local authority or other social landlords (predominantly housing associations); by 2008, this had fallen to around a quarter of all homes (McKee, 2010; Wightman, 2011). Those homes that remained were often of poor quality or a supply for those in greatest housing need and were concentrated into particular neighbourhoods that are particularly marked through stigmatising discourses (Matthews, 2010, 2012b; Robertson, 2013).

While the marginalisation of social housing as a tenure of choice can rightly be understood as a driver of this marginalisation, it is wrong to assume it is entirely a recent phenomenon. Class prejudice has driven socio-cultural constructions of place in the UK and Scotland for centuries (Robertson *et al.*, 2010). For example, Tucker (1966) details both the stigma and geographical divide between private, owner-occupied housing and council housing (as typified by the Cutteslowe Walls, built by private owner-occupiers in this Oxford suburb to explicitly keep out neighbouring council tenants). While housing provided by local authorities was traditionally affordable, as rents were tied closely to building costs and the quality of the housing, families experiencing poverty and marginalisation were often housed in the oldest and poorest quality housing. Subsequently, there were the fine socio-economic and status gradations within estates of council housing—between those with newer, high rent homes and those in poorer quality lower rent homes. In residents' perceptions, estates would be divided into the 'top', 'middle' and 'bottom', often geographically expressed (Tucker, 1966). Poor housing management and the creation of 'supervised housing' could entrench these spatial divisions. Policy processes and implementation therefore reflected and reinforced classed distinctions in places (Matthews, 2012b; Robertson, 2013; Robertson *et al.*, 2010).

This was reinforced by stigma from outwith estates themselves, akin to those processes identified by Wacquant and others. Again, the experience with social housing in the UK has made this different. In her 'intimate history' of being brought up on a council estate in Birmingham in the 1970s, Hanley (2007) speaks of this stigma, of the increasing otherness of living in a rented home in a world of increasing owner-occupation. While this stigma and marginalisation impacts on perceptions of places within wider society, the work of Wacquant and others has also focused our attention on the impact on residents themselves. As Skeggs & Loveday (2012, p. 473) assert, in the UK, there is a widespread context of derision towards working-class people and lifestyles and these 'historical legacies of distinction ... symbolically mark particular groups as bearers of bad culture, faulty psychology, as potentially dangerous, degenerate and underserving' and housing tenure and residence are increasingly part of this symbolism. In response, residents have to do the work necessary to defend their

neighbourhood or make sense of it in terms of values in mainstream society they share (Blokland, 2008; McKenzie, 2012). Hanley evocatively deploys the East German term 'walls in the mind' to describe the impact of urban marginalisation and stigmatisation on residents (Hanley, 2007; McKenzie, 2012).

Stories of Place—Elective Belonging and Being-in-Place

These stories of decline, deprivation and poverty contrast sharply with the 'normal' histories of more affluent neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods often have books lining the shelves in the local history section of public libraries written by long-established local history societies. They note local large houses, the history of parks and public places and the notable residents that have graced the streets of that neighbourhood, a historic narrative emphasising positive aspects of a neighbourhood (Blokland, 2009). The neighbourhood that is the subject of this research—Wester Hailes—has had one local history book written in this type of genre by a community activist (Sinclair, 1980).

These are the sorts of neighbourhoods that the affluent can choose to belong to and express their elective belonging (Savage, 2010a). These are often the sorts of histories and narratives incoming residents to gentrifying working-class inner-city neighbourhoods assert and deploy to create a place attachment disassociated from more negative stereotypes (Benson & Jackson, 2013; Blokland, 2009; May, 1996). These stories enable 'incomers to an area . . . to claim belonging as a result of their choice to move to an area that holds functional and symbolic importance for them, and subsequently claim moral ownership over the place that they live' (Benson & Jackson, 2013, p. 797). Importantly, as a market commodity, housing for these residents becomes a representation of self 'to a generalised other, by middle class people—a position in the space of positions in the market for housing' (Allen, 2008, p. 78). Subsequently, any threat to this position, through for example a neighbouring less affluent neighbourhood, requires work on the part of these residents to select the positive qualities of their neighbourhood and reaffirm their symbolic position (Watt, 2009).

The stories of deprivation and stigmatising of working-class neighbourhoods, discussed in the previous section, contrast with the elective belonging of the middle-classes and also the sense of home of working-class families in their neighbourhoods. Allen (2008) in his research on the implementation of the Housing Market Renewal policy in Liverpool describes this sense of place as 'we-being'. This derives from the sense of collective belonging found in the traditional community studies of post-war British sociology and valorised in regeneration policy from 1990s (Allen, 2008; Kearns, 2003; Savage, 2010b). Extending this to a sense of home and place, Allen emphasises that collective belonging is expressed as 'ethical disposition towards their [working class residents'] lives with others' (2008, p. 68). Home, in this conception, becomes somewhere comfortable and welcoming to others rather than a show home to a generalised other. Working-class residents therefore resist the discourses of policy-makers that seek to denigrate their neighbourhood to justify intervention; in previous research on Wester Hailes, this was done through knowingly using 'air quotes' around terms such as 'deprived neighbourhood', or 'distressed area' to ironically diffuse their intent (Matthews, 2012b). However, this resistance can be tempered with a doxic complicity of working-class residents to accepting their place—just being pleased that they have a home at all, while positioning this against the middle class sense of elective belonging, or position within a space of positions (Allen, 2008).

There is a presumption in this literature, and within the research reported in this paper, that the terminology of 'working class neighbourhood' is unproblematic in itself. The intersection of class and new technology—social media—in this research may reflect the ongoing debates in sociology about the end of the working-class (Allen, 2008; Savage *et al.*, 1992). However, a recent resurgence of interest in social class analysis, particularly using Bourdieuan theory, has led to a renewed focus on categories of social class (Savage *et al.*, 2013). This work increasingly highlights how class positions are made at the intersection of personal experience, the imposition of denigrated class positions by society and importantly place (see, for example Jones, 2012; McKenzie, 2012). However, it still remains that case that:

> Classifications have been endlessly blurred and reconfigured in order to make the basis of membership more problematic, and this has realized a range of problems both for academic spectators and for those who live lives accommodated to these forms. (Charlesworth, 2005, p. 298)

Thus a key challenge is whether we can genuinely access working-class experience at all and to acknowledge that:

> there is a phenomenological gap between academic studies and working-class experiences of dwelling, although this is grounded in a scientific-academic, rather than social-class based, habitus. (Flint, 2011, p. 76)

This paper contends that the arena of social media, in this case a Facebook site, offers a novel way to achieve genuine access and understanding place and belonging.

Community Activism and Social Media—A Picture of Wester Hailes

Before discussing the methodology, the paper will provide context for the findings from the history of Wester Hailes. The processes by which neighbourhoods become a byword for deprivation and somewhere to avoid are varied and nuanced often a product of local context, history and collective memory by which 'a community positions itself and sets boundaries' (Blokland, 2009, p. 1595; Robertson *et al.*, 2010). Stories that position neighbourhoods can include: episodes of riot; sub-standard or non-traditional physically different housing types; geographical peripherality; the racial or ethnic make-up of the neighbourhood; local industry—all of which can lead to the particular stigmatisation of a neighbourhood. Wester Hailes in Edinburgh was subject to this level of stigma from when the first residents moved in because of a combination of these factors. Construction of the new homes began in 1967, and they were being delivered in a housing market with an oversupply of homes, both socially rented and owner-occupied. The estate immediately became a low demand area. Those in greatest need in Edinburgh found themselves housed in the poorly constructed high-rise flats, including a disproportionate number of lone-parent families (Gilloran, 1983). The Edinburgh local evening newspaper reported the lack of local facilities and concentration of poverty and deprivation in lurid headlines throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Growing long-term unemployment and the rise of intravenous heroin use in the 1980s led to the estate becoming known as 'Waster's Hell'.

This history of concentrated deprivation is paralleled by a positive history of community activism. The first residents found themselves in a neighbourhood with no local facilities apart from their homes. Their response was to develop informal community activities, such as street-based childcare for lone parents. The local authority, the Lothian Regional Council, began to support these activities with investment in community development workers and community centres. The latter were immortalised in a documentary for UK television entitled *The Huts* (see the Facebook page for clips of this film). These provided the basis for a vast array of independent community activism, including the community newspaper *The Wester Hailes Sentinel* and neighbourhood councils which sent representatives to an umbrella Wester Hailes Representative Council (the RepCouncil). Much of the activity of these organisations was directed towards the local authorities, fighting for improvements to poor quality housing and public services, as well as projects to ameliorate the experience of poverty for residents.

In 1989, the neighbourhood was one of four selected for the *New Life for Urban Scotland* regeneration programme. Over 10 years, over £250 million was spent on physical regeneration—most notably the demolition of 18 high-rise blocks of flats—and community development. The RepCouncil grew to represent 27 neighbourhood councils, a vibrant local democracy holding the various partner agencies to the regeneration programme to account. The RepCouncil approached the process of partnership with a statement of intent, *The Pitlochry Affirmation*, stating:

> the community will do, not be done to – processes and policy determination must be led by the community; the agendas of other members of the Partnership are subordinate to this. (Quoted in: Hastings *et al.*, 1994, p. 13)

While the process of partnership building was tense, the levels of community activism led people who had worked in Wester Hailes to recall the period as one of intense democratic engagement. This 10-year programme of investment and rapid change came to a gradual end over the period 2000–2010 as wider Scottish regeneration policy changed (Matthews, 2012a). In 2008, the City of Edinburgh Council ended all of its funding to local, community-based newspapers and *The Sentinel* (which had broadened its geographical reach and become the *West Edinburgh Times*) ceased publication after almost 30 years in print. The archive of past issues and photographs was rescued by the local housing association, Prospect Community Housing Association. The RepCouncil had its funding withdrawn and ceased in June 2008. Wester Hailes was left with no democratic structures apart from local councillors and the structures of the local authority which covered a large geographical area and struggled to fully engage any community (Matthews, 2014).

Since the advent of sites such as Myspace, and particularly since the opening of Facebook to a global audience in 2007, social media has transformed communications (Hargittai, 2007). On 4 April 2011, a Facebook site called 'Lost Edinburgh' began. It posted photos from Edinburgh's past and rapidly gained thousands of 'Likes' with people commenting on photos—predominantly mourning the loss of buildings and streetscapes, and often bringing back memories. The page was rapidly shut down at the request of copyright owners. At the same time, Prospect Community Housing Association developed their own Facebook site using the archive of the *Wester Hailes Sentinel*, From There To Here … (http://www.on.fb.me/FromThere).

Since the early adoption of the Internet, there has been a hope that social mediation online may be able to revive democratic processes (Couclelis, 2004; Wellman, 2001) The instant success of the From There to Here page in garnering positive comments and 'likes' from present and former residents formed the basis of this research. Local community organisations saw it as a possible means to recreate former levels of activism within the neighbourhood and counter continued stigmatised reporting. The research team supported these activities by: providing a baseline study of activities; supporting on-going projects with specialist information and communication technologies and computing support; raising a 'digital totem pole' to provide a physical link (through scan-able quick response 'QR' codes) the 'ladder' to the cloud of data about the neighbourhood and social history walks based on code books linked by QR codes to galleries of images on the Facebook site. The From There to Here site in particular offered a valuable resource to understand place and belonging among current and former residents, and the innovations of using natural data from social media as a methodology provided an important focus for the research.

Digital Ethnography As a Methodology

Carrying out research on a Facebook page has distinct methodological advantages. The key advantage is the wealth of quantitative and trend data available from Facebook. The 'sites' section of the Facebook service (as distinct from the personal profiles) is primarily designed for businesses. If a page reaches a certain level of activity, then 'Insights' data becomes available which summarises engagement with the site—how many people have 'liked' posts, how many people have commented and also a metric calculating 'viral reach', how often posts from the page have appeared on other users' Facebook timelines. Further, Facebook provides demographic information on these users, breaking them down by gender, age brackets and location (Figures 1 and 2 report this data for the six months of funded research). Research on Facebook and similar social media suggests that the social nature of engagement means the demographic details users input
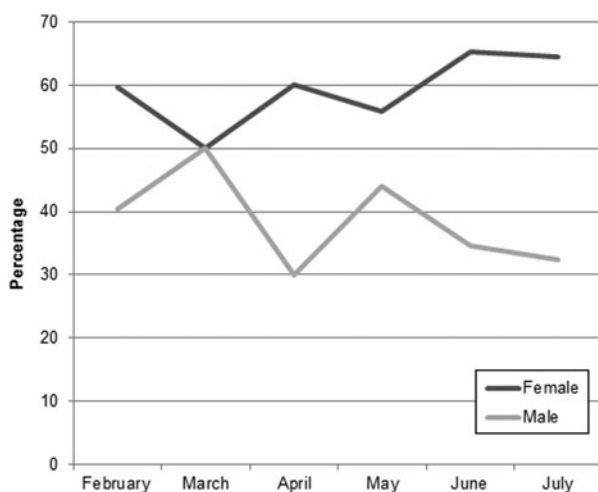

Figure 1. The gender of users of the Facebook site between February and July 2012.
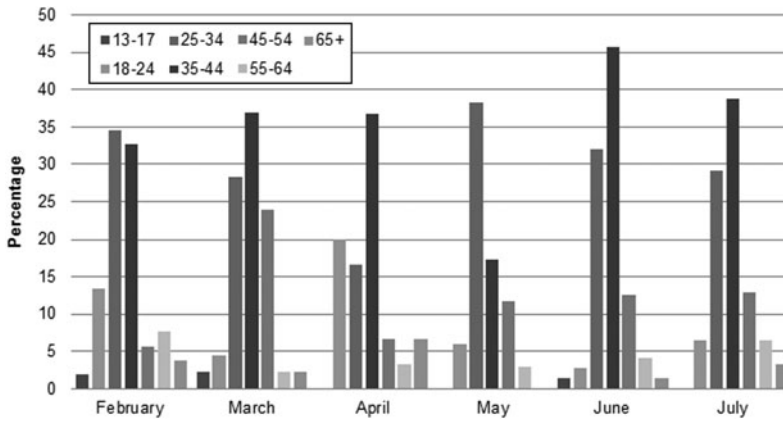
Figure 2. The age of users of the Facebook site between February and July 2012.

are highly reliable—put simply, if you put your date of birth and location into Facebook incorrectly your friends are likely to notice it and ensure you will correct it. There is an opportunity cost in terms of friendship-forming and trust for the user in lying about their basic biographical details (Hargittai, 2007).

Unlike traditional interview-based methods or even photo-elicitation research, the use of data from this Facebook site has the advantage of being almost 'natural' without the intervention of a researcher creating an interview situation (Fontana & Frey, 2000). As will be discussed below, arguably this allows the researcher to overcome some of the 'phenomenological gap' where as researchers, we 'risk depicting a sense of place and space that is different from the lived experience of its inhabitants' (Flint, 2011, p. 81). In many respects, and as will be elaborated on in the findings section below, this data is natural 'talk' between the residents and former residents of Wester Hailes and:

> [t]alk emerges from the instantiated disclosure of interpersonal forms that are constitutive of the lives that people lead. It is therefore the best place to start in any understanding of people's lives. (Charlesworth, 2005, p. 229)

The only element of non-natural talk was the intervention from the officers at the Housing Association who chose which photos to upload and also initially moderated the site.

A key challenge of the research method is whether the user base of the Facebook page is representative. First, Facebook does not provide fine-grained geographic information on users. People are listed as living in 'Edinburgh' but this includes a wide area of south-east Scotland. The only indicators we get that users of the page live in Wester Hailes is whether they comment upon it. The other issue is digital inclusion—the cost barriers to being online for lower-income households. The latest data in Scotland (from the 2009/2010 Scottish Household Survey) does suggest that a digital divide exists between people who cannot afford Internet access in the home and those who can. For example, only 35 per cent of households in the £6001–£10 000 per annum household income bracket had access to the Internet, compared to 97 per cent in households with an annual income over £40 001. However, focusing on place-based inequalities suggests a less stark divide with 52 per cent of homes in the most deprived 15 per cent of neighbourhoods having access to the Internet

at home, compared to 69 per cent in the rest of Scotland (Scottish Government, 2011). The data collected in the baseline survey did suggest the digital divide was particularly acute in Wester Hailes. The local library had the highest network load on its computers of any library in the city, double that of the next highest which was in a similarly deprived neighbourhood, suggesting that people had to use the free Internet access in the library to get online.

The use of smartphones as a cheaper way to access the Internet may be challenging the existing digital divide. The explosive growth of smartphone ownership around the world is reflected in Scotland. Figures from the telecommunications regulator Ofcom showed that in 2008 only 7 per cent of people in Scotland had accessed the Internet on their mobile phone. By 2012, this had increased to 31 per cent (Ofcom, 2012). The moral panic around smartphone use during the riots in urban England in 2011, particularly the use of BlackBerry devices and the BBM messaging service, suggests high levels of market penetration, especially among younger people (Baker, 2011). Unfortunately, there is no recent data on smartphone penetration in Scotland. We could use broadband reach as a proxy for possible smartphone use, particularly as both often involve an on-going contract and payments. In this case, there is a digital divide, but it is less than might be expected. The vast majority (over 90 per cent in all cases) of households with an Internet connection have a broadband connection, ranging from 92 per cent of households in the £6001–£10 000 annual household income bracket, to 99 per cent in households with an income over £40 001. With the relative price of technology falling, we can assume increasing penetration of web-based technologies; however, we have to be careful not to presume too much based on very scarce data. Allowing for these challenges, we do have a rich set of data on place, belonging and affiliation in a working-class neighbourhood.

The use of personal recollections on a Facebook page, without members giving informed consent to be involved in a research project, does raise clear ethical concerns. First, for the housing association running the page, as the organisation is carrying out a public service it has to be concerned with privacy and equalities and diversity legislation and broader policies with regard to users' comments. Because of this, all comments to the site were initially moderated. Rapidly the traffic became too much and the oversight had to become more light-touch and tread a fine line between what the officer readily described as the 'fruity language' used by some people commenting in enthusiasm and in the vernacular, and more offensive and possibly illegal comments. Very few comments have been deleted because they contravened policy or law. The most pressing ethical concern is whether comments on a Facebook site are in the public domain at all. The Facebook site is clearly public—anyone can access it and click 'like' to receive updates in their own feed. However, Facebook and other social media are providing a new level of publicness to previous private or semi-private social engagement and as Baym and boyd argue that level of moderate, widespread publicness is unprecedented. There are more layers of publicness available to those using networked media than ever before; as a result, people's relationship to public life is shifting in ways we have barely begun to understand (Baym & boyd, 2012, p. 4). What research there is does suggest people are aware of the publicness of Facebook and mediate their activities accordingly (Burkell *et al.*, 2014). As this is an emerging area, we have to take a precautionary approach and presume that the people engaging with this Facebook site would not want identifiable data to be made more publicly available and in an online domain over which they have less control (i.e. a journal website as compared to Facebook where virtually all interaction with a post tagged with

someone's name leads to a notification in the user's timeline). A number of posts on the Facebook page and associated blog users made people aware that the Facebook site and posts on it were being used in wider research. All the data presented below is anonymised, although as with all qualitative data, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. When the comments are quoted directly the original text, with vernacular spellings and typographical errors, are included. A glossary is appended defining or explaining vernacular and dialect terms.

Tales of Belonging—The Tale of the Crow

In this neighbourhood and community, the social history embodied in the images posted on From There to Here clearly had deep meaning for people. With very little active social marketing, the site grew into an Edinburgh Facebook phenomenon. The tale of the crow is an example typical of the stories of belonging being shared on the site and begins to demonstrate the links between talk, place and belonging in this working-class community. On 14 September 2011, as part of their weekly updates to the Facebook site, a grainy image of the bus stops and bus turning circle outside the Wester Hailes Centre—the local shopping centre—was posted on the site. As part of the regeneration, this turning circle was turned into a public square with a new library, the new neighbourhood office and the shopping centre got a new façade to cover the brutalist, mid-1970s concrete.

Almost immediately people began commenting on the photograph. Rather than disparaging comments about how unpleasant the building was, or how bad the built environment was, much more reminiscent, positive comments were posted. Sandie commented: 'aw … the old centre!! xx'; Martin reminisced that he: 'Used to love playing footbale at the shutter'; Kenneth even thought they 'Should have left it like that'. Then, two-and-a-half hours after the photo was posted, Michael asked if people remembered 'that old black crow that used to be at the big stones all the time trying to pinch food from people'. In 21 words, Michael captured the story of so many people's lives. Seven people 'liked' his story and Pamela and Nikki shared their stories of protecting their food from the voracious crow. A month later, Gillian was also reminded of the 'evil crow'. Three months later, in December 2011, the story of the crow ended. However, the photograph of the shopping centre was still generating sentimental comments eight months after the image was originally posted. The story of the crow is a particularly evocative and interesting example of the many images and comments. Through these comments, these residents and former residents talked about the neighbourhood and brought their memories and the associated meanings to the fore in a public setting. Thus, the Facebook site became a site to explore the complexity, conditionality and contextual nature of neighbourhood identity (Blokland, 2009; Cole, 2013).

A lot of the place attachment being displayed on the Facebook site could have been expected—they are stories of nostalgia and positive reminiscence (Blokland, 2009). A particular feature of Wester Hailes in the 1980s was a series of adventure playgrounds, 'The Venchies', built around the neighbourhood by community groups. Only eight images of these playgrounds were uploaded; however, between them, these got 100 'likes' and 60 comments. Most people commented to point out how the playgrounds would not be built today as they were so dangerous for the children to play in. That people who are now adults reminisced about having such fun in these as playground comes as no surprise. This

is the type of reminiscence of our childhoods we all engage in; the 'Venchie playgrounds' are the madeleine for these people in a Proustian moment.

However, the Facebook site also features hundreds of positive comments we would not necessarily expect based on prejudices against marginalised neighbourhoods and high-rise, socially rented housing. This becomes particularly apparent when we look at images that would ordinarily be used to portray an archetypal 'bad' neighbourhood—images of grey, modernist, concrete, mass-built, high-rise flats (Figure 3). When these were posted the conversation in the comments usually proceeded with someone tentatively asking if they had remembered the location correctly: 'was this at the old Westburn high flats xx'; 'mikey is that wester hailes drive?the flats where me mum and [name] lived?hope ur keeping well. x'. Once the location had been agreed upon, the wider comments commenced. What was most striking was the sense of community and also playful fun these evoke:

> I lived in 6/2 as a young child and had a great childhood everyone knew everyone, loved how you could go from one end to the other and not go out side.

> My Gran lived at 4/16, i loved growing up here as i child, tell my kids n friends about the good old days in the high rise, it was like its own little comunity, an how we used to play hide n seek inside the block when it was bad weather, lovely memories from here B-).

Figure 3. High-rise flats in Wester Hailes in the 1980s; image courtesy of RCAHMS.

> OMG!!! We were in 4/63 till I was 10. Looking at this pic reminds me of us kids shouting up for money when the ice cream man came and getting stuck in the lift with my wee brother during a power cut. Still got a phobia of lifts to this day. (LOL, see glossary of colloquial terms)

These are rose-tinted memories from childhood and many of the people commenting might have been unaware, or forgotten, about the privations of living in what were very poor quality homes that needed demolition or substantial refurbishment. But it is also clear that older people who moved to the neighbourhood as adults also share these memories: 'I move into one off these my first real home loved it there'. As such, the comments evoke the we-being described by Allen (2008); these high flats were a home with a welcoming sense of belonging, rather than an extension of self into a broader social realm that carried the stigma of an address in Wester Hailes with it.

   The social aspect of Facebook allows these reminiscences to be shared collectively. As people can link the images and memories with specific people through 'tagging' the post, the collective we-belonging is facilitated by technology and bonding social capital is reproduced by online links (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Hargittai, 2007). The invocation of personal relationships in this way was particularly heart-warming, such as when people who are now friends in adult life suddenly realised they lived as neighbours as children without knowing:

> OMG !!didnt know you live in block 6 as well chris !!!my flat is two flats along and three flats down from the right !!! we lived there from 1982 - 1986 !!! xx

The tagging of faces, in particular, allowed the site to become very popular as many of the early photographs posted were of groups of individuals. This led to many recollections of friendships, or in one of the favourite stories for the research team, a couple recognised themselves and were tagged on a photograph of the neighbourhood fun run in the 1990s. They had got together and remained a couple:

> Omg me &[partner] are in the same fun run & ended up 2gether 2 kids & still goin strong 14 year l8tr that's MAD! Lol x xx

Thus, the reminiscences were of people in the neighbourhood, with the buildings being a backdrop to the memories. This compared to the archival photos of the neighbourhood stored by Scotland's official architectural archive Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) which were notable by the lack of people in them.

   Often the memories were linked to key events in the history of the neighbourhood. The punk band The Exploited were formed thanks to a community music project in Wester Hailes and the famous cover of their album 'Punk's Not Dead' featured a photograph of some graffiti which gave nearby residents a lot of pride:

> I lived in 6/14 Hailesland Park and i could see the substation where the "Punks Not Dead" album cover photo was taken !!!!LOL !!! … its just out of shot on this photo !!! xx

The infectious enthusiasm for these reminiscences is catching. But they are reminiscence, filtered through memories over 20 or even 30 years. One commenter satirically called it: 'The era of white dog pooh, lol'—referring to a whole industry in the UK of 1980s-based memorabilia related to childhood memories of dog dirt that had dried out in the sun over the long summer school holidays.

Negotiating Difficulty—Bad Memories and Stigma

The era that most of the photographs date from was a difficult one for the neighbourhood— they either pre-date the regeneration investment that physically transformed the neighbourhood or record that redevelopment process. Before the regeneration, much of the housing was very poor quality. In 1988, 12 per cent of the population were in receipt of unemployment benefits and 29 per cent were recorded as economically inactive (WHP, 1989). Further, the impact of intravenous drug abuse and HIV/AIDS infections in the 1980s and early 1990s was great, as recalled by one community activist in interview:

> the majority of the kids [in the youth club] my God they're all adults now the majority that I knew are a' dead through drugs and through HIV and thin's like that they're gone.

Given the history of the neighbourhood, some of the sense of belonging expressed on the site was more contingent (Blokland, 2008). Although the vast majority of the comments are very positive, there are a very small number of comments that refer to this other experience of social problems and poor housing conditions:

> Stayed in Wester Hailes Drive for the first 5 years of my life. Don't know about Wester Hailes being 'much better back then' though. I'm pretty sure that it was even more rifewae junkies and bampots than it is now, and that's saying something.

> I remember the metal window frames freezing in winter and built in condensation lol.

As one commenter quite pointedly highlights, many of those interacting were likely to be former residents who have since moved away, in this example to the new town of Livingston, outside Edinburgh (livi): 'BYE BYE SHITHOLE away to sunny livi ????'. Overall though, entirely negative comments such as: 'Still a shithole … with a bunch of druggies and fcukin alcoholics living there' were extremely rare.

Given the stigma towards the neighbourhood from outside, the comments on the site more commonly allowed continuing and former residents to understand what their place attachment meant to them and challenge negative views:

> Al always be proud to say am fae westerhailes and i wouldnt change that wot a place to grow up as a child meny of good times keep the old pics coming in.

As one person proudly said to end a comment thread: 'we come fi wester hailes! x'.

These brief conversations that add some conditionality suggest a complexity in residents' sense of belonging. In response to the stigma, in one sense, these residents use comments such as 'we come fi wester hailes' to 'find value for themselves and their

families when their estate is often represented as a space of little value' (McKenzie, 2012, p. 465). Alternatively, for residents who have moved away the belonging is even more conditional. While their place attachment is not as limited as the residents of the 'project' recorded by Blokland (2008), it is more marginal than current residents. There is a sense in which they prospered *despite* the adversity of living in the neighbourhood and have since managed to move out and move on. Finally, even the most positive stories belie a *selective* belonging (Watt, 2009). The selection may be a product of the natural editing of memories that turns most peoples' childhood into a rosy story of long summers and fun games, but from the data available we cannot definitively say it is not an active process of selection to disassociate from more negative memories, stories or portrayals. Overall the comments do reflect the 'we-being' typical of working-class sense of residence and home (Allen, 2008).

Conclusion—Place-Making in Virtual Architectures

One of the main aims of the research this paper was to challenge the stigma of Wester Hailes. Overall, the engagement and comments on the Facebook site challenged accepted stories of the neighbourhood in wider Edinburgh—the Waster's Hell stigmatisation. These narratives are classed—an expression of symbolic violence through cultural capital that normalises affluent neighbourhoods and stigmatises non-affluent neighbourhoods (Robertson, 2013). Previous research in Wester Hailes also revealed the positive narrative of improvement and empowerment among many resident activists that actively challenged stigmatised views and understood the neighbourhood as a place of community activism (Matthews, 2012a, 2012b). In challenging these negative narratives more broadly, the intervention of this research did produce a number of positive stories about the neighbourhood in the local newspapers on the totem pole erected as part of the project.

The further two aims of the paper—to explore the methodological innovation of using social media and what the comments on this site add to our understanding of classed experience of belonging—can be brought together. The stories being created in the comments of the Facebook site add richness to our understanding of the lived experience of working-class neighbourhoods from a historic perspective. Traditional narratives of working-class neighbourhoods are typically ones of loss—loss of homes through redevelopment or local employment through deindustrialisation (Cole, 2013; May, 1996). In particular, they inform how we understand place attachment as classed and 'that there are very different ways of talking about one's residence, which closely map on to cultural divisions, and in particular, those associated with class and cultural inequalities' (Savage, 2010a, p. 132). Although being a neighbourhood of transformation, the stories here are not ones of loss and negativity per se, but echo the 'we-being' of collective sense of home of the working-class communities researched by Allen (2008). These working-class people used nostalgic dwelling narratives, linked to kin and community ties rather than narratives of elective belonging associated with the middle-class. The stories shared on this Facebook site are nostalgic, but because of the transformation in the neighbourhood they are not, and cannot be, linked directly to contemporary dwelling. Through regeneration, these people have moved away, or their homes have been demolished. This means the boundary work of the narratives, countering broader stigmatising discourses, is unlike that found in other studies of working-class narratives of place (Blokland, 2009; Savage, 2010a). These people do not disassociate themselves from individuals or the negative image of the neighbourhood—they 'come fi' Wester Hailes'.

Social media undeniably offered methodological novelty and utility for the research as the comments were produced in what is now a very natural setting for discussion for most people (Baym & boyd, 2012). Similar neighbourhoods have also undergone dramatic change and this has also been recorded through social history groups often with online resources. However, these are often actively led by organisations and community development staff, for example the website devoted to memories of the Red Road flats in Glasgow (http://www.redroadflats.org.uk/). This resource records memories that were actively sought out by artists and other officers from Glasgow Housing Association and the arts and leisure body Glasgow Life.

Although Prospect Community Housing does loosely 'curate' the contents of the Facebook site, the content of the comments was entirely created by residents and former residents who engaged with the site. To return to the story of the crow, the managers of the site were initially sceptical that images of buildings would provoke a response and only began posting them as they were running out of pictures of people. There was no intention that a dull, black-and-white photograph of an ugly shopping centre and bus-turning circle would lead to such a spontaneous evocation of place and belonging. Thus those interacting on the site were effectively creating a 'virtual place', a Wester Hailes on Facebook that is their neighbourhood, with their positive stories and images. While utopian discourses have suggested 'cyberplaces' will transform social relations in society (Couclelis, 2004), the activity on this Facebook site was much more banal, but it was re-making the neighbourhood through everyday exchange.

Analysing the 'Insights' (Figures 1 and 2 above) data, enables us to understand the impact of the curation of content by Prospect Community Housing and unpick further this process of virtual place-making. During the focused period of research, the active use of the page (likes and comments) became dramatically gendered and limited in age range. From attracting a range of engagement in February 2012, six months later, the site became dominated by activity from women (65 per cent) and people in the age range of 35–44 (45 per cent). This could be understood as working-class women expressing the sorts of social and cultural capital they express in offline environments (Colley & Maltby, 2008; Grimshaw, 2011; Jupp, 2008). Research into Internet use and gender suggests that women and men use the Internet along stereotypically gendered lines recreating behaviour they express in the offline world (Colley & Maltby, 2008) and research on social media suggests that online networks parallel offline networks (Hargittai, 2007; Steinfield *et al.*, 2008). The conversations that were happening on this Facebook site could have just as easily have taken place over a cup of tea in someone's living room; the only novelty is that they are taking place in a public forum in social media. As such, the stories represent natural talk of working-class belonging.

However, interrogating this changing trend in the use of the site demonstrates the nature of Facebook and similar social media as *media*—they contain content which invokes a particular audience. The usage statistics during the period discussed here were from a period where, entirely accidentally, the curators predominantly posted photos from the era where people who grew up would now be 35–44 and images that contained more women. The audience then reflected this content. Since the period of research, the curators have posted newer photos and these have brought down the age of people engaging with the page. This is exactly the way advertisers seek to use Facebook and its Insights data to target their content to the right audience. However, this does not discount the findings— the natural context of the discussions that continue to flow through the comments thread

are a rich resource to understand sense of home, place and belonging, overcoming the phenomenological gap in research with working-class participants, manifest in participants not understanding or being able to answer interview questions using a middle-class sensibility towards home (Flint, 2011). Social media can be successfully added to the methodological toolkit within housing studies, and as with other methods, we can learn the pitfalls and nuances of the method through critical reflection as it permeates research. Returning to the coproduced, participatory nature of the research project, most importantly the activities of Prospect Housing Association and residents in the From There to Here site have ensured Wester Hailes has a live archive of the neighbourhood, keeping the richness and vitality of this young neighbourhood alive for the future—ladders to the cloud.

Glossary of Colloquial Terms

LOL – laugh out loud;
OMG – Oh my god;
B-) – smiley emoticon;
l8tr – later;
wae – with;
junkies – heroin addicts;
bampots – uncontrollable people or people who engage in antisocial behaviour;
fae/fi – from

Acknowledgements

References

Allen, C. (2008) *Housing Market Renewal and Social Class* (Abingdon: Routledge).
Baker, S. A. (2011) The mediated crowd: New social media and new forms of rioting, *Sociological Research Online*, 16(4), p. 21.
Baym, N. K. & boyd, d. (2012) Socially mediated publicness: An introduction, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(3), pp. 320–329.
Benson, M. & Jackson, E. (2013) Place-making and place maintenance: Performativity, place and belonging among the Middle Classes, *Sociology*, 47(4), pp. 793–809.
Blokland, T. (2008) "You got to remember you live in public housing": Place-making in an American housing project, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 25(1), pp. 31–46.
Blokland, T. (2009) Celebrating local histories and defining neighbourhood communities: Place-making in a gentrified neighbourhood, *Urban Studies*, 46(8), pp. 1593–1610.
Burkell, J., Fortier, A. Wong, L.Y.C., & Simpson, J.L. (2014) Facebook: Public space, or private space? *Information, Communication & Society*: 1–12. doi:10.1080/1369118x.2013.870591, in press.
Charlesworth, S. J. (2005) Understanding social suffering: A phenomenological investigation of the experience of inequality, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 15(4), pp. 296–312.
Cheshire, P. (2009) Policies for mixed communities, *International Regional Science Review*, 32(3), pp. 343–375.

Cole, I. (2013) Whose place? Whose history? Contrasting narratives and experiences of neighbourhood change and housing renewal, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 30(1), pp. 65–83.

Colley, A. & Maltby, J. (2008) Impact of the Internet on our lives: Male and female personal perspectives, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(5), pp. 2005–2013.

Couclelis, H. (2004) The construction of the digital city, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 31(1), pp. 5–19.

Dekker, K. & Van Kempen, R. (2004) Large housing estates in Europe: Current situation and developments, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 95(5), pp. 570–577.

Flint, J. (2011) Housing studies, social class and being towards dwelling, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 28(1), pp. 75–91.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J. (2000) The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text, in: N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 645–672 (London: Sage).

Forrest, R. & Kearns, A. (2001) Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood, *Urban Studies*, 38(12), pp. 2125–2143.

Gilloran, A. (1983) *Wester Hailes Ten Years On* (Edinburgh: Wester Hailes Representative Council).

Grimshaw, L. (2011) Community work as women's work? The gendering of English neighbourhood partnerships, *Community Development Journal*, 46(3), pp. 327–340.

Hanley, L. (2007) *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta Books).

Hargittai, E. (2007) Whose space? Differences among users and non-users of social network sites, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), pp. 276–297.

Hastings, A. (2000) Connecting linguistic structures and social practices: A discursive approach to social policy analysis, *Journal of Social Policy*, 27(2), pp. 191–211.

Hastings, A. (2004) Stigma and social housing estates: Beyond pathological explanations, *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 19(3), pp. 233–254.

Hastings, A., McArthur, A., & McGregor, A. (1994) *Community Participation and Partnership in Estate Regeneration Projects: Case Study Report No. 2: The Wester Hailes Partnership* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, Training and Employment Research Unit).

Jones, O. (2012) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso Books).

Jupp, E. (2008) The feeling of participation: Everyday spaces and urban change, *Geoforum*, 39, pp. 331–343.

Kearns, A. (2003) Social capital, regeneration and urban policy, in: R. Imrie & M. Raco (Eds) *Urban Renaissance? New Labour, Community and Urban Policy*, pp. 37–60 (Bristol: Polity Press).

Matthews, P. (2010) Mind the gap? The persistence of pathological discourses in urban regeneration policy, *Housing Theory and Society*, 27(3), pp. 221–240.

Matthews, P. (2012a) From area-based initiatives to strategic partnerships: Have we lost the meaning of regeneration? *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 30(1), pp. 147–161.

Matthews, P. (2012b) Problem definition and re-evaluating a policy: The real successes of a regeneration scheme, *Critical Policy Studies*, 6(3), pp. 243–260.

Matthews, P. (2014) Being strategic in partnership—Interpreting local knowledge of modern local government, *Local Government Studies*, 40(3), pp. 451–472.

May, J. (1996) Globalization and the politics of place: Place and identity in an inner London neighbourhood, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21(1), pp. 194–215.

McKee, K. (2010) The end of the right to buy and the future of social housing in Scotland, *Local Economy*, 25(4), pp. 319–327.

McKenzie, L. (2012) A narrative from the inside, studying St Anns in Nottingham: Belonging, continuity and change, *The Sociological Review*, 60(3), pp. 457–475.

Ofcom (2012) *Communications Market Report: Scotland* (London: Ofcom).

Pacione, M. (1997) Introduction, in: M. Pacione (Ed.) *Britain's Cities: Geographies of Division in Urban Britain*, pp. 1–6 (London: Routledge).

Robertson, D. (2013) Knowing your place: The formation and sustenance of class-based place identity, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 30(4), 368–383.

Robertson, D., McIntosh, I., & Smyth, J. (2010) Neighbourhood identity: The path dependency of class and place, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 27(3), pp. 258–273.

Robertson, D., Smyth, J., & McIntosh, I. (2008) *Whaur are You Fae? A Study of People, Place and Identity in Stirling* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

Savage, M. (1995) Class analysis and social research, in: T. Butler & M. Savage (Eds) *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, pp. 15–25 (London: UCL Press).

Savage, M. (2010a) Class and elective belonging, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 27(2), pp. 115–136.

Savage, M. (2010b) *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Savage, M., Barlow, J., Dickens, P., & Fielding, T. (1992) *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture: Middle-Class Formation in Contemporary Britain* (London: Routledge).

Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., Le Roux, B., Friedman, S., Miles, A. (2013) A new model of social class: Findings from the BBC's Great British class survey experiment, *Sociology*, 47(2), pp. 219–250.

Scottish Government (2011) *Scotland's People Annual Report: Results from 2009/2010 Scottish Household Survey* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Government).

Sinclair, D. (1980) *Wester Hailes: A Sense of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh District Council).

Skeggs, B. & Loveday, V. (2012) Struggles for value: Value practices, injustice, judgment, affect and the idea of class, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 63(3), pp. 472–490.

Steinfield, C., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C. (2008) Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), pp. 434–445.

Tucker, J. (1966) *Honourable Estates* (London: Gollancz).

Wacquant, L. (2008) *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology if Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

Watt, P. (2009) Living in an oasis: Middle-class disaffiliation and selective belonging in an English suburb, *Environment and Planning A*, 41(12), pp. 2874–2892.

Wellman, B. (2001) Physical place and cyberplace: The rise of personalized networking, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25(2), pp. 227–252.

WHP (1989) *Realising the Potential: The Partnership Strategy for Wester Hailes* (Edinburgh: Scottish Office).

Wightman, A. (2011) *The Poor had No Lawyers: Who Owns Scotland and How They Got It* (Edinburgh: Birlinn).