

Insights into problems of stigma and place

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What does stigma mean?

- 'Disqualified from full social acceptance because one possesses an attribute that is 'deeply discrediting' (Goffman: *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*)
 - Characteristics/attributes are devalued
 - Mark people out as inferior
 - Negative labelling and stereotyping of people
- Neighbourhoods/addresses can be a 'discrediting attribute' for their residents

Experiences of neighbourhood stigma:

‘Oh god, we’re late again!’ I said, ‘There were 16 bloody red lights and I got every one of them this morning!’ And she said to me, ‘Oh, where do you come from?’ And I said, ‘Corio’. And she went, ‘Oh, really.’ And you can feel the cold air coming across as soon as you say Corio. She never really spoke to me again, she’d say ‘Hello’ but we never sat and had a conversation again like we had before’.
(From: Warr, 2005)

'I've noticed that like with me and my two kids, before moving out here, I didn't have half as much trouble as I'm having now. Like, just the way I perceive myself, how I am more aware of how, ahm, the wider community is perceiving me and, I suppose, because I have my own thoughts about Corio, ahm, because it's a disadvantaged area, how I perceive it, and I think that's probably half of my reasons why I'm so vigilant, especially when people say, 'Where do you live?' And I'm like, do I really have to say? Because this is the Bronx, this is called the Bronx of Geelong, this is the ghetto, and nobody wants to be here and we haven't got no choice. Like in L.A. , they've got their trailer park trash and in Geelong you've got Corio and Norlane trash – It's a very negative way to rise up every morning. (from Warr, 2005)

What's the worst thing about living here?

- The stigma of 'Birdsville'
- Stigma of the neighbourhood, treated as a lesser person.
- The stigma. I don't like the opinion of others outside Wendouree West.
- Stigma attached to living here
- People's prejudice of Wendouree West
- Bad reputation
- Stigma that goes with the area. I don't like the stigma attached to Doveton and Dovetoners that they are sub-standard Australians or that this stigma is attached to me
- Other peoples attitude to the west.
- Perceived stigma about living in Corio- having to justify housing choice..
- Stigma of living in Norlane
- Stigma of being in this 'low cost' area.
- Assumption of people from other areas that we are lower class. (from Kelaher, Warr, Tacticos & Feldman, 2010)

- Bad reputation, crime rate high, don't feel comfortable. Noisy – lots of people walking past yelling and drunk. (R)
- The perception as play up by the media and how people outside [the neighbourhood] form an opinion without knowing the people (M)
- Other people outside of the area have a poor perception of the area and its people (M)
- Discrimination from other people when I mention where I live – it's known as the 'Bronx' (R)
- People judge you because of the area you live in (M)
- I dislike the reputation of the place. I don't think this is true. It's an unfair reputation (M)
- Don't like people criticizing the place when they don't know anything about it.
- The pig-headed opinion that some people have about the area. That the scum live in Doveton (from Kelaher, Warr, Tacticos & Feldman, 2010)

Neighbourhood stigma by selected sample characteristics
(NR/LGA): (from Kelaher, Warr, Tacticos & Feldman, 2010)

Age categories:	LGA % (n=1795)	NR % (n=4103)
18-25	19.1	66.5
26-40	19.4	61.7
41-60	12.6	54.1
61-80	8.5	38.9
Over 80 years	4.5	25.0
Born in:	LGA % (n=1815)	NR % (n=4519)
Australia	14.0	58.4
Other English-speaking	13.5	55.9
Non-English speaking	19.6	39.1
Education:	LGA % (n=1789)	NR % (n=4089)
Year 10 or below	13.0	51.6
Above year 10	14.9	59.9

Poverty as a discrediting attribute

- Poverty has long been perceived a discrediting attribute because it supposedly reflects something about the deficient character or culture of those who are poor (see Waxman, 1983)
- Are there aspects of contemporary contexts of poverty that intensify the effects of the stigmatisation of poverty?
 - processes of socio-spatial polarisation
 - Production to consumption capitalism

Contemporary contexts of socio-spatial polarisation:

- Sociologists and social geographers talk about:
 - The ‘respatialisation of class’ (Burrows & Ellison)
 - Suburban landscapes as ‘mosaics of advantage and disadvantage’ (Baum et al.)
 - ‘archipelagos’ (Gleeson)
 - Processes of ‘splintering urbanism’ (Graham & Marvin)
 - Problems of ‘urban marginality’ (Wacquant)
- Social exclusion acquires spatial dimensions
- Easier to brand entire neighbourhoods and suburbs with negative labels
- Reduces opportunities for everyday interaction and encounters that challenge labels and stereotypes

Wacquant (1999) identified 4 key dynamics generating experiences of urban marginality:

- Widening socio-economic disparities
- Deteriorating conditions of waged labour
- The paring back of the welfare state
- The *geographic concentration and stigmatisation* of socioeconomic disadvantage and vulnerability

- Stigmatised reputations tend to be a deceptive mix of experience/perception, fact/fiction
- Misrepresent places – aren't accurate portrayals of everyday life

'It matters little that the discourses of demonisation that have mushroomed about them [poor neighbourhoods] often have only tenuous connections to the reality of everyday life in them. A pervading territorial stigma is firmly affixed upon the residents of such neighbourhoods of socioeconomic exile that adds its burden to the disrepute of poverty and resurging prejudice against ethnic minorities and immigrants' (Wacquant 1999)

Contemporary contexts of consumer capitalism:

- Shift in the relative importance of the material and the social deprivations inherent in poverty, intensifying the significance of the social implications of poverty and disadvantage (Fitzpatrick, 2004)
- Problems of living in 'a world of consumer references that defines individuals as worthy, valuable or worthless. Suitable for relations or not' (Charlesworth, 2000:51)

People lack self-esteem and this arises through a lack of understanding of their place in society, and how they can contribute, have influence to change their life or their children's lives – it impinges on them: 'I don't know what I don't know' and know knowing what to aspire to. There are also feelings that 'I'm not worthwhile –it doesn't matter what happens- I'm worthless'. People can have little sense of their rights- what they can ask for in their community. It also puts people in a no-win situation if they are dependent on the help of others- its lose/lose- 'I can't respect what you give me because you gave it to me' this can also mean having less empathy for others in similar situations and this inhibits social solidarity ...

Broadmeadows used to have a 'poverty action group' and this group had a strong sense of being able to change and communicate circumstance and it gave people a sense of control. What has changed since then? No structure to feel that they have any say in their destiny. (Warr, 2008:)

Consequences of stigma:

- Postcode discrimination
- Corrosive effects of self-esteem and self-confidence of 'living inferiority' (Charlesworth)
- Arises (partly) out of socio-spatial segregation which also exacerbates these processes (Green)
- Excludes people from wider arenas of social participation, opportunities to encounter alternative social vistas
- Limits participation in public debate and policy-making concerning one's own experiences

How can we challenge stigma?

- Isn't automatically addressed through neighbourhood renewal efforts, requires specific action (see Hastings,)
- Initiatives to develop positive place-identities (but these also need to have some traction in the wider community)
- Reconsider the ways in which communities are required to 'perform poverty' (Peel, 2003) to put issues on political agendas, to obtain resources
- Collaborative and participatory approaches to research
- Consider the implications of research dissemination strategies (what are the potential interpretations and reactions across different groups?)
- Reflect on the assumptions we hold about others and how they influence our world views

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