Charm Offensive

Cultivating civility in 21st Century Britain

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[Civility] makes us enter deeply into each other's sentiments, and causes like passions and inclinations to run, as it were, by contagion, through the whole club or knot of companions.

— David Hume, 18th century philosopher[1]

1 Introduction

We're outside a busy train station in East London on a drizzly morning. Three overcrowded buses pull up at the bus stop at the same time. Dozens of commuters pour out, jostling with bags and half-erected umbrellas. This huge crowd moves as one mass towards the station entrance. An older man is trying to walk against the flow, saying "Excuse me, excuse me," as he inevitably bumps into people in the crowd. Suddenly, one of the commuters erupts in anger, "Fucking wanker! Where the fuck do you think you're going?" The older man says nothing and continues to push through the crowd to his bus. Nobody says anything. Nobody intervenes.

— *Field notes: London*

> *"Rudeness is just as bad as racism."*
>
> — David Cameron in 2007[2]

This report is about civility: how we behave towards each other, and what might be done to influence this. The riots in several English districts in August 2011 – and the positive responses of some communities in their wake – have brought the issue of social norms, and the extent to which these have fragmented, into sharp relief. While the causes behind the riots are likely to be myriad, and the behaviour went well beyond our subject, this report suggests that civility – the often small, everyday ways in which we treat each other – acts as an important social 'glue' which we care about deeply.

Talk to people in most areas of Britain, and it is not long before the conversation turns to the way we treat each other. Whether we live in an inner city housing estate, city centre or a small village, the behaviour of others matters greatly to us. We are discomforted and become stressed when people are rude, thoughtless or act aggressively towards us.

But what do we know about civility? Most people think that standards have declined, and that at some point in the past others were more courteous than they are today. There is no shortage of examples of bad behaviour, from the actions of some celebrities to concerns about the conduct of teenagers. Meanwhile, alarmist views are encouraged by newspapers, which tend to respond to public interest in this topic with sweeping generalisations that magnify the bad and drown out the good.

We wanted to get beneath these generalisations to explore what is really happening. In this report we have brought together what is known about civility from a variety of disciplines, including existing projects supported by the AHRC and ESRC. We have drawn on discussions with philosophers, criminologists, neuroscientists, sociologists, theologians and politicians, along with new empirical research.

An earlier Young Foundation pamphlet, Civility Lost and Found, prepared the way, setting out some of the history of the idea and providing a theoretical framework that we have used as the basis for this study.[3] But theories are only useful if they illuminate reality; our main purpose has been to look at how civility is experienced in three very different places that together make up a reasonable composite picture of modern Britain. The empirical research helps us to address a series of fundamental questions.

First, we ask whether civility matters. We find that it does, for pretty much every group in society, albeit in subtly different ways depending on whether you are male or female, young or old. Our findings confirm those of many surveys and

polls, as well as the anecdotal evidence of politicians and community workers, teachers and police officers.

Second, we ask whether levels of civility are changing; are we getting ruder? Our research confirms that although subjectively civility is perceived to be deteriorating there is no objective evidence for this. By some standards behaviour is better than a generation or two ago, with much less casual violence or racism. But in other respects life does appear to be less civil.

Third, we ask what patterns can be found and whether there are particularly uncivil places. Here the key finding is one about granularity: civility breaks down in particular places at particular times and for particular reasons. A high street, for example, can be transformed from a bustling shopping area to a threatening and hostile place within a couple of hours. A group of young people walking down a deserted street can be intimidating. But sit down with them at the local fish and chips shop and very soon they emerge as simply energetic teenagers.

Fourth, we ask what can be done to improve civility. We conclude that there are many practical steps which can be taken to shape behaviour, but that they, too, generally need to be at the right level of granularity, rewarding the good and constraining the bad at the specific times and places where things can go awry.

All of us want to be able to walk freely around our towns and cities without fear of being abused, jostled, pushed or inconvenienced. No one wants to be on the receiving end of road rage or air rage or any other kind of rage. That is particularly true of people who feel vulnerable anyway, like the frail elderly. But it is an irony that – like crime – the teenagers who are most often associated with incivility are also the most likely to be its victims.

Social analysis tends to veer towards big systems and structures; incivility gets blamed on unemployment or the welfare state. We also tend to highlight cultural shifts; from the ubiquity of modern media, to declining family values. But these claims obscure more than they illuminate. Here we suggest that a more useful framework is to think of civility as akin to the tiny bacteria that sustain complex ecosystems, including our own bodies. They are invisible to the outside observer but turn out to be critical for helping organisms survive. Small acts of daily civility and incivility are equally invisible: but they too play a critical role in helping societies to get by and flourish.

Bacteria are noticed most when they disappear. That is when ecologies fall apart, and something parallel happens in human communities, when parts of housing estates become no-go areas, or – as we have seen recently – when high streets descend into violence. Spirals of decline quickly ensue as relationships of reciprocity become vindictive rather than virtuous. We set out to refocus the microscope on these everyday connections between people, whether healthy or unhealthy; our research involved spending long periods of time in market towns,

shopping centres and suburbs, talking to people during trips to the shop, on the school run or on the daily commute.

This research, presented in Part I, shows that what matters most to people is often quite prosaic: simple gestures like saying ‘thank you’ and ‘good morning’, considerate behaviour from neighbours and fellow commuters, and respect for the elderly and for public servants. An aggressive encounter on the street or on the road can influence not only our interaction with others, but our personal wellbeing. Our research showed that experience of incivility can exert an even greater influence on our perceptions of social health than crime statistics.

In Part II we look at some of the key flashpoints. People feel that their working lives are more pressured and that mobility has increased, meaning that they have more interaction with strangers. There is a sense that lives have become more constrained (partly because of perceived changes such as longer commuting times), and that there is less interaction between the generations. But the key flashpoints turn out to be quite specific. They do not occur just because of more interaction with strangers (and we point to many areas with very high levels of turnover that nevertheless sustain high standards of civil behaviour) or simply because a place is poor. Nor are they the inevitable effect of mixing up different generations. Rather than the demographic make-up of a place, we conclude that it is the way life feels in these places that makes the greatest difference: whether people feel calm or stressed; whether neighbours believe that they belong and have a stake in their surroundings; or whether the infrastructure they use (from mobile phones to public car parks) is of a high standard.

We conclude by looking at how civility can be nurtured on three levels. The first level is personal. We argue that people need to be equipped with skills which allow them to take account of other’s feelings and therefore to understand the impact of their actions on others; what psychologists call ‘perspective taking’. Our analysis draws on literature from the field of developmental psychology, which explains the effect of experience and disposition in reinforcing or undermining our ability to be empathetic, how mature empathetic skills help people understand and control their behaviour. We argue that certain personal assets, such as self-awareness or feeling a strong sense of belonging to a positive group, will be conducive to civil behaviour. We also analyse the growing body of evidence demonstrating that our social environment plays a critical role in fostering these skills.[4]

The second level is inter-personal. A rich body of sociological literature shows that our behaviours are determined by social situations and social norms. Inter-personal relations are governed by complex ‘interaction rituals’.[5] The quality of these inter-personal transactions becomes more important in plural societies where people may share less in common.[6] The quality of these relationships will be determined by rules of reciprocity – or ‘tit for tat’ – whereby civil behaviour is conditional on receiving civil behaviour in return. We then explore the

implications of social network theories which argue that emotions and behaviours can be ‘catching’.[7]

The third level is contextual. Studies in the field of sociology and criminology show that the character of our environment (from streets and transport systems to workplaces and neighbourhoods) sends out powerful cues which influence our behaviour. Happy, well-kempt, well-designed, supportive places breed civil people. Conversely, neglected, abrasive and hostile places harbour incivility.[8] We consider the role that the built environment, planning, public policy and public space play in promoting “voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by people themselves”.[9] We argue that a community-wide effort to cultivate small acts of courtesy and compassion in our daily lives will yield greater results, over time, than top-down approaches which try to enforce respect.

Our definition

> *“Kindness is the parent of kindness.”*
>
> — Adam Smith[10]

Our working definition of civility is largely pragmatic: we define it as covering the codes of behaviour that allow us to share public spaces and public services. We argue that civility is something we have to learn and we draw a comparison with language. In the same way that we are born pre-disposed for sociability, we are born with a disposition to speak well-formed sentences. But we still need to learn how to speak, how to read and write, and our abilities are shaped by what we see around us and by the constantly shifting norms of pronunciation. Norms and rules of civility are first learned in childhood (through the family and through schools) and then reinforced (or undermined) in adult life through messages and experiences on the street, at work, in the media and in the many interactions that make up society. In other words, civility is a matter of individual disposition but also has to be cultivated, what we call a learned grammar of sociability, that demonstrates respect for others and which entails sacrificing immediate self-interest when appropriate.

Civility is about much more than being polite. It is not just about being tolerant either; living in changing societies requires that we do more than just passively ‘tolerate’ the changes that are taking place around us. It involves mindfully adapting our own behaviour in the light of others’ needs. Civility is also different from pure etiquette, which Julian Baggini argues are arbitrary social rules designed primarily to distinguish between insiders and outsiders.[11]

Our previous report, Civility Lost and Found, explored the different dimensions of civility: ‘surface and deep civility’ and ‘visible and invisible civility’ (see

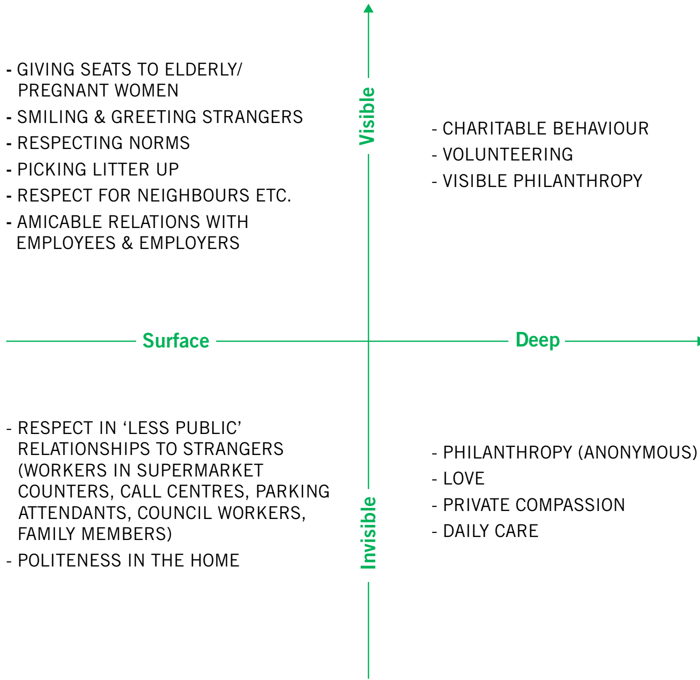
Figure 1). It argued that civility includes both visible aspects (behaviours in public and on display) and much less visible aspects (how people behave at home or in the workplace). Our framework is illustrative of the different realms in which civility operates.

Our aim was to explore the concept of civility from an empirical perspective that focused on how people understand and enact the concept: how civility and incivility impact on feelings of belonging and wellbeing; whether people's day-to-day experiences and interactions resonate with our framework, and what implications this has for policy and practice.

Civility is in many ways a benchmark, setting the standard for what most people see as a decent way to deal with others. It is quite different from civic behaviour, which takes the form of action towards a common good (for example, voting, participating in public decisions, volunteering or shopping ethically) or restraint to preserve common resources.[12] It is also different from civil society; civility can provide the basis for reinforcing civil society but it is not coterminous. It can, as an unspoken language for interaction, provide the basis for achieving a 'good society'; through the emphasis on qualities such as respect, empathy and compassion.

'Civil society' meanwhile refers to associational life, the 'space' of organised activity not undertaken by government or business; including formal and informal associations such as voluntary and community associations, trade unions and so on. Civil society is the public sphere in which citizens deliberate and define their common interests; civility is an essential precondition for this kind of peaceful dialogue and makes it easier to co-operate.

Figure 1. Framework of civility with selected examples[13]



Our approach

Civility is negotiated and maintained through everyday encounters. There has been a tendency among social researchers, policy makers and the media to focus investigation, analysis and intervention on extreme behaviours in extreme places: anti-social behaviour in deprived areas or bullying in inner city schools for example. Our aim was to shift the lens back to more representative interactions between people; the everyday encounters that take place in everyday places between everyday people. We wanted to hear about people's experiences of civility and incivility. Are these concepts still relevant or important to people in the 21st century? What are their stories? How does civil and uncivil behaviour affect them, the communities in which they live and society more broadly?

Our fieldwork was based on ethnographic observation and interviews. We spent time in a wide range of public spaces: on high streets and in town and city centres, in markets and shopping centres, in residential areas, in and around rail and bus stations, in public parks and playgrounds, and in cafes, pubs and restaurants. In all these locations we asked people to reflect on what was happening around them: how others were behaving in different settings. We then asked them to reflect on their previous experiences of civil and uncivil behaviour, tell us their

stories and give examples of incidents they have witnessed or been involved in, exploring how these had affected them, how it had made them feel and how they had reacted. We used these narratives as prompts to explore what people thought of the concept of civility, how they thought it might have changed and whether they considered it important or not.

We targeted people working on the frontline of the service economy and public services in particular: receptionists, shopkeepers, taxi-drivers, bus drivers and community support officers. In a similar way, we observed how interactions worked. We asked participants to reflect on the way they felt they were treated and how they behaved towards clients or customers. We were interested in the variations in behaviour they observe, how people interact with them at different times of the day, or how different groups people act in different circumstances.

We wanted to find out whether people thought civility could be influenced. If civility is an important part of how society functions, can it be enhanced? Did people think there was much scope for intervention? What initiatives, approaches or policies could increase civil behaviour or, at the very least, reduce instances of uncivil behaviour? We conducted interviews with different community leaders, local politicians, policy makers and representatives of voluntary sector organisations. These interviews allowed us to follow up on the observations and interview data collected during the primary fieldwork in each of the places we visited.

We wanted to explore understandings and experiences of everyday civility in different contexts. The research was designed to look at three case study areas: an inner city area where we were likely to find a diverse population; a more rural area; and a new purpose-built community. We chose the London Borough of Newham, the new town of Cambourne in Cambridgeshire and the market towns of Salisbury, Trowbridge and Devies in Wiltshire. Detailed profiles of these areas can be found in the next chapter. Interviews and observational research were conducted in these three sites from June to November 2010.

PART I

CIVILITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Jane and Sarah are young Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). They explain:

"PCSOs are less formal than police... people talk to us. After the London bombings, people would just come up to shake my hand and say thanks... Mornings are the worst; people have the right hump. They are in a rush to get to work. I think different things trigger different people off. Even if you're nice to them, it can set them off. One time there was this guy and I pointed out that his shoelaces were undone. He'd had a bit to drink and before I knew it I was rolling around wrestling him on the ground." Jane thinks for a moment, "Do you know what? I think the rudest people are men in suits."

— *Field notes: London*

2 Civility in the UK

I'm chatting to a taxi driver, Brian, as he waits for his next fare in a small market town in Wiltshire. Our conversation is interrupted by three long loud blasts of a car horn. A purple Ford Fiesta has stopped in the middle of the road and the driver is leaning out of window shouting in an attempt to get the attention of a couple eating in a fast food restaurant. Brian looks on disapprovingly. "That's what I mean; not a thought for other people," he says. The traffic backs up behind the Fiesta, the other drivers start honking. The driver continues to shout to his friends. The queue behind him is getting longer and blocks off the High Street. Suddenly, after a few minutes, the Fiesta driver accelerates away with screeching tyres, leaving a long traffic jam in his wake. Brian sighs and shakes his head, "It's just selfish isn't it? No thought for others. Society has got very selfish. It's very sad."

— *Field notes: Wiltshire*

'Stand up to yob rule on the top deck of buses.'[14] 'Millions of our over 50s living in fear of yobs'.[15] These are just two headlines to appear during the period of our research. From inconsiderate mobile phone users to bolshy teenagers, we are confronted by a daily barrage of news about incivility.

The decline of consideration, respect and civility seems to be one issue that media commentators from the left and right agree on. Newspapers are full of celebrities behaving badly, known as much for their outrageous behaviour as for their musical or acting careers. A judge condemned ITV's Jeremy Kyle Show as a "human form of bear-baiting" after a guest on the programme became the first person convicted of assault on a British talk show.[16]

Does this reflect our lived experience? Measuring civility and perceptions of civility is not straightforward. The first challenge is coming up with measures that can be used objectively and comparatively because of the intrinsic complexities in terms of what constitutes uncivil behaviour. It is also hard to pin down what people experience and what they hear about from others, or read in the papers.

The second challenge is that at present there is little by way of public opinion data specifically related to civility. In the US, the General Social Survey regularly asks questions about rude behaviour, and the Pew Charitable Trust and others measure people's perceptions of rudeness and standards of civility. Israel carries out a national survey of politeness. There is currently no equivalent in the UK where most indicators relate to experiences of crime, or anti-social behaviour. The British Crime Survey, for example, asks people whether there are burnt out cars, rubbish and vandalism where they live, as well as questions relating to alcohol consumption and bad behaviour. However, in recent years we have seen considerable analysis of inter-personal trust and social capital. Although these are relevant to our understanding of civility (we can assume people are more trusting when they encounter civility more often than incivility), there are currently no surveys that explicitly set out to understand people's encounters with rudeness or lack of consideration.

In their analysis of rude strangers in Melbourne, Philip Smith, Timothy Philips and Ryan King argue that the way data about civility is collected is in fact misleading.[17] First, they highlight the fact that many analyses are driven by a relentless focus on deprived inner city areas, which means that while we know a lot about working class environments we are left relatively ignorant of what happens in other contexts. This drives a perception that there "is no incivility in 'respectable' places like Surbiton, Surrey or Fairfield, Connecticut."

Second, they argue that these surveys tend to emphasise patterns of incivility in spatially fixed neighbourhoods, most likely within a 15-minute walk from people's homes. Therefore, they fail to capture the lived reality of our daily lives – our commute to and from work, the visit to the supermarket or our trip to the city centre – which are the places we are most likely to encounter incivility. Finally,

they found that researchers focus on interactions in a narrow way, not capturing the full gamut of behaviours encompassed by incivility; the little bits of grit, such as rude gestures, poor body management or dirty looks. There is also little research into incivility in cyber space, although there is growing concern about rudeness and bullying online, especially among young people.

In this section we turn primarily to the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) – the UK's most comprehensive source of primary social research – as well as research into perceptions of anti-social behaviour, and on a series of international comparative polls into politeness, social health and trust.

Are we an uncivil nation?

One of the clearest conclusions that we can draw from our qualitative research is that people care hugely about civility. While not everyone was familiar with the term 'civility', we found that the concept resonated with almost everyone we interviewed. People responded with interest and energy and were keen to tell us their experiences and stories. Far from being an abstract or archaic concept, people immediately related to our questions and were eager to talk about how civility was important in shaping their interactions with others and to discuss the damage caused when such behaviour was absent. Wherever they lived, most people agreed that civility is central to shaping life; many felt it was the single most important contributor to their quality of life.

But just because civility matters to people, it does not necessarily follow that we are facing a crisis of civility. The conclusion we draw from our fieldwork is that the quality of people's interactions is very mixed and that certain stressors – such as commuting in crowded conditions or poor service – can have a huge impact on everyday civility.

Contrary to media portrayal, most of the people we spoke to did not feel that they lived in a "nasty, vindictive, intolerant little country."[18] For the most part people experienced regular acts of politeness and small gestures of kindness: from neighbours who took in deliveries, to commuters who swiftly gave their seats to expectant mothers. We heard many stories of people offering others in distress a helping hand. Most of the people we spoke to were aware that, in the words of one of our interviewees, "you get what you give". While people did relate many powerful encounters with incivility, most felt that their immediate communities were civil and that they were treated with respect and consideration in their day-to-day lives.

Our analysis of the BSAS confirmed many of these observations. It showed that the proportion of the public agreeing that people can usually be trusted has remained fairly constant since 1997.[19] In 2007, almost three quarters agreed

that people in their neighbourhoods generally treated each other with respect and consideration; eight in 10 thought that most people they came across in their day-to-day lives treated them with respect. Earlier analysis by Ipsos MORI has found that concerns about anti-social behaviour (including perceptions of drunkenness, abandoned cars, vandalism and graffiti as being big problems in local neighbourhoods) have fallen consistently.[20] Likewise, in 2006 the National Audit Office (NAO) found a decrease in the proportion of the British public rating anti-social behaviour as 'high' in their area between 2003 and 2006.[21] Other surveys have found that when asked for their views on the most important values for living in Britain, people tend to rank tolerance and politeness towards others as highly as respect for the law.[22]

However, while people are generally positive about their personal experiences and their neighbourhoods, in general views tend to be far more negative at a more generic or abstract level; a fact reflected in our qualitative research and wider analyses. For example, according to the BSAS, only four in 10 people agree that individuals generally treat others with respect; around the same proportion disagree. Surveys by Ipsos MORI have found similar trends, and in 2007 a poll conducted for the BBC by ComRes found that 83 per cent of people believed that Britain was in "moral decline".[23] The explanation for this apparent discrepancy may lie in part in the fact that, when polled, people are generally more positive about things they experience directly and encounter regularly; they tend to be more positive about their GP than about the NHS or about their MP than about politicians, for example.[24] However, it also reflects the extent to which largely negative public discourse about civility has permeated people's view, regardless of their personal experiences.[25]

How does the UK compare?

Trust is a useful proxy for measuring civility – our assumption is that places with higher levels of inter-personal trust are likely to be more civil. In 2007, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey highlighted the degree of trust in different countries. When presented with the statement "Most people in society are trustworthy," 65 per cent of British people agreed. This was lower than Sweden (where 78 per cent agreed) and Canada (71 per cent), but significantly ahead of all other Western European countries, the US, South Korea and Japan (in the latter two fewer than half agreed with the statement). The researchers found that levels of trust in Britain had increased since 1991, when 55 per cent agreed that most people could be trusted.[26]

Other surveys have revealed similar trends. In 2006, the Reader's Digest posted a group of undercover reporters to major cities in 35 countries. The reporters walked into buildings to see if the people in front of them would hold the door open, they bought small items in stores and recorded whether the salespeople

said ‘thank you’, and they dropped a folder full of papers in busy locations to see if anyone would help pick them up. London emerged joint fifteenth, ahead of Paris, Moscow and Bucharest.

The available statistics confirm that Britain ranks either positively or average in international surveys of inter-personal trust, tolerance and politeness. These findings reaffirm the importance of re-articulating our national narrative around civility.

Civility and wellbeing

Civil behaviour makes us feel better about ourselves and where we live. Studies show that people who behave with civility are more likely to be happy. Active civility, in the form of kindness or charitable behaviour, is personally rewarding, provides stress relief and boosts self-confidence.[27] MRI scans have shown that civil actions stimulate similar areas of the brain as experiences such as falling in love or holding a baby.[28] Inspiring a sense of belonging is much easier in civil places.[29]

Biologists studying theories of evolution increasingly argue that in the same way that our brains are hardwired to communicate through language, humans are pre-disposed to sociability and hence civility. In his book, The Age of Empathy, Frans de Waal argues that society depends on our innate instinct to reach out to others, a type of herd instinct that pre-disposes us to read others’ feelings and pursue the common good because we are all better for it; what he calls the “invisible helping hand”.[30] Recent experiments have shown how even at 18 months, babies are able to respond empathetically, offering help to adults in distress and responding with concern.[31]

It is clear that simple acts of incivility can have equally powerful effects on our wellbeing. People on the street were able to relate, often with detailed precision, their encounters with incivility: the bad looks they had received, the annoying person with the headphones or the grumpy responses from passers-by. Often they described feelings which seemed completely out of proportion: loss of face, shame, mortification, burning up inside.

Some people spoke about incivility making them feel afraid and therefore less trusting, making them “keep themselves to themselves,” hide in the safety of their homes and their immediate families. The triggers for this type of isolation were very often quite banal: unfriendly or cliquey neighbours, young people who, while not necessarily threatening or aggressive, did not seem to care for or respect their elders.

We spoke to many people who seemed to have grown almost blind or accustomed to incivility. We observed how thick-skinned commuters in the underground tuned

out of countless incivilities; not just people playing their music too loudly but transport guards barking orders and people jostling for space. People working on the frontline of the service economy – shop attendants or receptionists – were often strikingly hardened. We spoke to taxi drivers who described how Saturday night shifts left them "feeling invisible." Asian shopkeepers told us how they viewed the countless incivilities they confronted over the counter, racist taunts or drunken behaviour, as part and parcel of running a business.

In the same way that civility can be hugely rewarding, sustained over long periods, a daily abrasiveness in our social relations is hugely damaging: it is likely to increase anxiety and drive defensiveness or indifference. It shrinks the space for positive behaviours, such as politeness, kindness or generosity. Previous work by the Young Foundation stresses the importance of social connections in addressing serious and worsening psychological wellbeing.[32] It identified certain groups who were particularly vulnerable to loneliness and isolation and the psychological risks that this presents. The experience of incivility can exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

Civil places

Civility is likely to play out differently in different places. Through case studies, our aim was to put civility into context and explore how broader social, demographic and economic trends have an influence. We were particularly interested in exploring two potential tensions.

First, stability and longevity versus churn and changeability: to what extent were areas that are experiencing high levels of flux in their population, less or more conducive to civil behaviour? Our aim was to test whether more stable populations, where people are more likely to know each other, would create better conditions for civility to take hold. We also wanted to explore to what extent a sense of attachment and belonging to place improved civility.

Second, homogeneity versus plurality (including racial, social and generational): are familiarity and commonality necessary building blocks for civility? Our aim was to explore assumptions that pre-suppose that it is easier to cultivate civility in places where people have more in common.

When choosing the case studies, we took into consideration other factors which we felt could influence civility: whether people commuted or worked close to home, whether the local area had good economic prospects, whether there was an active civil society and good amenities to help people interact (such as community centres, churches or cafes).

Newham is a London borough with a population 250,000 and has seen huge transformations: a major manufacturing centre, it suffered decline and deprivation and is now in the process of regeneration. Along with Brent, it is the local authority with the most diverse population in the UK. In 2005 almost 40 per cent of residents were born outside the UK, coming from over 40 different countries. Local charities point to hidden populations of up to 70,000, made up of the jobless, failed asylum seekers and others. Newham has some of the highest rates of population churn in the country, at around 20 per cent.

The borough has the youngest age structure in England and Wales, with the highest proportion of children under the age of one in the country, and the second lowest proportion of population over the age of 65. It has the highest number of families with dependent children and the largest average household size (2.64) in England and Wales.

Based on questions concerning local friendships, willingness to work with people in the local area to improve the neighbourhood and connectivity with people in the neighbourhood (ranked from one to eight, eight being the highest), Newham's affiliation rank was 4.45, which is lower than the UK and London averages (5.52 and 4.68 respectively). Just over one third of residents are members of at least one local organisation (lower than the national average). However, the area records very high levels of tolerance; over 80 per cent of people say that relations in the community are positive.

According to the 2007 national Index of Multiple Deprivation, Newham is the sixth most deprived borough in England. Although every part of the borough has high levels of deprivation compared to the UK average, some areas have pockets of very high deprivation, with Custom House and Canning Town featuring highly.

Over the last 20 years Newham has seen a huge investment into regeneration. Investments totalling over £15bn will mean a growth in population equivalent to the city of Cambridge (131,000 people) and some 62,000 new jobs from sites like the Olympics and its legacy, Stratford City, Canning Town and Custom House, the Royal Docks and Beckton. This regeneration activity forms a central part of a much wider project: the Thames Gateway, Europe's biggest regeneration project, which extends from the Isle of Dogs in London to Southend in Essex and the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. Public funding in this area reached £9 billion between 2008 and 2011. Newham is a hub of civil society experimentation, with a wide range of organisations engaged including Community Links, Eastside Leaders Academy, YPAC (a council led organisation targeting young people affected by crime), Newham Asian Women's Project and Newham City Farm, among others.

Cambourne in South Cambridgeshire has a population 6,540 and is a new community first occupied in 1999 with planning consent for 3,300 homes. The planning vision was to create 'country living with urban amenities' and the average cost of a three-bedroom home was £229,626 in November 2010. Thirty per cent of housing is deemed 'affordable' with a high proportion of social housing; according to local builders, housing supply cannot keep up with demand. Inhabitants refer to themselves as pioneers and stress that they share a 'can do' spirit. The town prides itself on having a strong sense of community: residents offer lifts to Cambridge and the community-run magazine prints letters reminding parents and children to keep to cycle paths.

The vision for Cambourne was of three satellite villages brought together by 'one heart'. The town has good-quality amenities: a multi-purpose complex housing a library; a state of the art Sure Start Centre and medical surgery. It has a skate park and youth centre with football pitches; playgrounds, allotments, a wildlife trust, multi-denomination church, an art group, public art, parish notice boards and a large community centre. The hub of activity is a large Morrison's supermarket, which dominates the main square and caters for locals and the surrounding villages. The roads are relatively quiet.

Cambourne is primarily occupied by families, mainly those with toddlers and young children. The birth rate in 2009 was almost double the national average and 30 per cent of residents are under 15. It is a relatively ethnically diverse development, popular with public sector and IT workers; 20 languages are spoken. The streets are well kempt with lawns mown, pathways well maintained and cared for front gardens. Signage tells people to be 'responsible dog owners' and there are no obvious CCTV cameras, security guards or gates. Issues of youth behaviour feature prominently among people's concerns (30 per cent cite this as a dislike in Cambourne.) Most residents commute to work and complain about the stresses caused by traffic congestion and long journeys; time is in short supply for many. Social tensions between social housing residents and private homeowners have been a determining factor in shaping local community relations.

Wiltshire is one of the least densely populated counties in the South West of England. Approximately 90 per cent of the county is classified as rural.

While Wiltshire a generally prosperous area – with the highest level of Gross Disposable Income in the South West – there are also pockets of deprivation. According to the 2007 Multiple Index of Deprivation, only three areas were within the most deprived 20 per cent nationally. They are home to just over 5,000 people. Two of the three areas are in Trowbridge and the other is in Salisbury.

In recent years, Wiltshire has experienced a high rate population growth (7.5 per cent over the last 10 years). However, this population is largely made up by over 65s. At 3.2 per cent of the population, Wiltshire has a lower population of ethnic minorities than the South West Region as a whole (4.3 per cent) and considerably less than the national share (England: 11.3 per cent). However, the rate of increase in the ethnic minority population in Wiltshire has been much higher than for the South West region and the rest of England.

Well over two thirds (67.9 per cent) of respondents to the Wiltshire Household Panel Survey say they belong strongly to their neighbourhood. Around a quarter, 23 per cent, say they belong “not very strongly” and just 9.1 per cent say they belong “not at all strongly”. According to the Wiltshire Household Panel Survey, 84.8 per cent agree that people from different backgrounds got on well together.

Case study findings

By choosing three contrasting case studies our aim was not to develop any form of ranking. Rather, the purpose was to find contrasting contexts that we felt could help us understand the conditions that have the greatest impact on people's behaviour.

The central observation drawn from the on-site work was how many generalisations about civility tend to be proved wrong. Assumptions linking incivility to disadvantage or diversity are simplistic; we found very high levels of civility in some disadvantaged, diverse places, as well as instances of serious incivility, in the form of intolerance and rudeness, in more prosperous and homogenous contexts. In Queen's market in Newham, an East London borough which sits close to the top of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, we observed how shoppers of a range of ethnicities queued patiently and stepped out of the way of prams and elderly shoppers. Shopkeepers were adamant that maintaining civility was critical to their commercial success. Those who treated customers from different cultures or ethnicities rudely soon went out of business. Stall holders had adapted with the times – in East London markets it is not unusual for Cockney salesmen to speak fluent Urdu, for example.

Places that showed high levels of superficial civility, where people greeted and thanked each other, often hid deeper, covert incivilities (such as domestic violence or racism). While these hidden problems were not necessarily experienced at a higher level, the point is that caution is needed when making assumptions about levels of civility. For example, there is a general view that young people are troublesome and the chief perpetrators of common incivilities. However, our younger interviewees recounted how they felt that they were also on the receiving end of uncivil behaviours. Some spoke of behaving rudely to adults to "give them a taste of their own medicine."

Accounts of this cycle of incivility recurred particularly regularly in Wiltshire. While in the other case study areas adult interviewees were able to put teenage misbehavior into perspective, the people we spoke to in Salisbury, Trowbridge and Frome were much quicker to jump to conclusions about "spoilt", "rowdy", "rude" and "intimidating" young people. Perceptions of young people seemed starkly at odds with broader trends characterising this part of the country - not only relatively affluent, but ranking positively in surveys of belonging and community relations.

One of the conclusions we drew from the time we spent in the case study areas was that certain combinations of factors seemed less propitious. In particular, minority groups in areas where the majority was largely homogeneous seemed to cause the greatest stress. So places where the majority of the population was elderly (such as Wiltshire, a popular retirement destination with higher than

average numbers of over 65s) seemed to find it harder to deal with teenagers behaving badly. People in areas with a younger population (such as Cambourne and Newham) seemed much more capable of putting the same patterns of behaviour into perspective, avoiding polarisation between generations and dealing more effectively with problematic behaviour.

Likewise, social housing residents were more likely to be viewed as a ‘problem’ in places where most of the housing was privately owned. This became apparent in Cambourne, for example. As we drove past the quiet pavements, the well-kempt lawns and the almost film set-like detached houses, this seemed like a very unlikely place to come to find out about the dynamics of civility in British communities. However, up until recently, the community had wrestled with the tensions which emerged partly from the fact that it had been designed as a mixed tenure new community (the original planning agreement for Cambourne stipulated that 30 per cent of the housing provided would be affordable, much of it social, aimed at families who needed space for their children, many of them single parents).

The situation came to a head after local journalists labelled the development ‘Crimebourne’. Even though crime rates were much lower than in surrounding market towns, reports of vandalism and drug abuse regularly made it into the Cambridgeshire papers. The local community development worker explained how the media portrayal soon translated into an undercurrent of resentment on the streets and cul-de-sacs. The summer was particularly problematic because council housing residents often used their front lawns to catch the sun, giving the impression that they were just “sitting around” all day. Children from social housing were also finding it difficult to integrate into the local schools. Antagonism, some of it virulent, was voiced through the local online platform.

The popular assumption was of course that the disruption which people read about in the local papers was caused by poorer neighbours (even though the authorities suspected that the perpetrators were generally wealthier, bored teenage residents messing about in parking lots). Whether false or exaggerated, these rumours became a disruptive force which made it much more difficult to foster civility at a crucial point in this new community’s evolution.

Similar dynamics were present in relation to ethnic diversity. Respondents in Cambourne and Newham, both places that received high numbers of new comers from many different places, were much more at ease with new arrivals than places where a single group was in the majority. In the words of one stallholder in East London: “we have to be polite because we’re so different.” Paradoxically, the minorities which people perceived to be most likely to perpetuate incivility were also the most likely to be at the receiving end of incivility.

In these contexts some stressors seem to have a greater impact on everyday civility. Excessive alcohol consumption, for example, is often perceived to be the

'problematic behaviour' more likely to be displayed by a recognised minority. For example, people we interviewed in Cambourne were more likely to complain about the loud behavior of council housing residents. And in parts of rural Wiltshire the recently arrived Eastern European immigrants were often blamed for bad behavior associated with drinking.

The behaviour of girls featured highly among the concerns of people we spoke to in all the case study areas. Newham Council, for example, had put measures in place to identify where young girls "hung out", because their perception was that where girls went trouble soon followed. In the words of one taxi driver: "The girls are worse than the blokes. The guys might scrap with each other; but the girls become loud and abusive". A prevailing attitude was that while the young men on the town "become morons", the girls "become scary".

Once perceptions like these became entrenched, people generally made little effort to verify whether they were true, with many basing their views on hearsay rather than direct experience. People became caught up in what one interviewee called "self-perpetuating cycles of incivility", as groups became distrustful and disconnected. In the words of one community organiser, groups had "perceptions of each other [when] they hadn't even spoken to each other."

In this context a single incident – whether an alarmist story in the local newspaper or a rumour about young people's antics – can have a powerful effect on the local mood, particularly if left unmanaged. Many interviewees felt that these stresses were likely to intensify with a worsening recession, resulting in increased frustration; many believed that economic problems could threaten the social standing and self-respect that underpinned civil behaviour. At the same time we also observed that conditions of shared adversity could be conducive to remarkable civility. This is consistent with studies that have found that the 9/11 terrorist attacks sparked a hike in tolerance and politeness in New York. Residents in Cambourne for example spoke of how starting a new community had instilled a pioneering spirit in residents which made them make more of an effort to be cordial and neighbourly.

It is tempting to generalise about the intrinsic conditions that make places more or less civil; to conclude for example that it is the places which have made significant investments in improvements to infrastructure, which seem most successful at generating the conditions for civility to thrive. This may apply to Cambourne, for example. When tensions intensified, consultants were commissioned to find out what was going on. Their report warned that if the issues were not dealt with Cambourne would remain a stop over town for people making their way up the property ladder.[33]

To the credit of local authorities, rather than resort to CCTV or private security guards to address its negative image, they decided to redouble investment into community infrastructure. Today the town boasts a lending library, a skate park, a

youth centre, numerous playgrounds, allotments, a multi-denomination church, an art group, some public art, parish notice boards, a cafe and a large community centre. According to the parish clerk, the value of local community assets grew from a mere £800 a couple of years ago to over £2 million today. He told us that he has lost count of the number of festivals and groups that get together – everything from baby yoga and aerobics for the elderly to fireworks committees.

The main lesson to draw from this experience is that investment into strong community infrastructure can be one of the most effective ways of fostering civility, particularly in places that are changing rapidly and having to wrestle with high levels of diversity. The biggest losers from distrust are not the property developers, but local people who become caught up in the stereotypes of each other. As articulated by one young single mother with regards to her relationship with a middle aged, professional mother she'd met at one of the local mum and baby groups, people of all classes have a huge amount to gain from people who are different to themselves. The role of those designing communities is to ensure that they create the spaces for these interactions to take place. Civility can soon follow.

However, as the recent riots show, spending money on the regeneration of the built environment alone is not guaranteed to increase civil behaviour. The areas worst affected included Woolwich's General Gordon Square and Dalston's Gillett Square which between them have had millions invested in recent years. It may be that in areas of high inequality regeneration can – while improving the feel of a place – exacerbate some people's sense of being 'priced out' of the benefits of investment. There are likely to be a number of pressures at play in each area where trouble occurred. These questions are beyond the scope of this report. However, our research suggests that community regeneration which emphasises the social as well as the built environment – whether in the form of better and busier community centres, a buzzing local market and cafes or volunteering drives, street festivals and village fetes – is identified by residents as having a transformative effect.[34] The riots also demonstrate the power of social norms; how invisible but important codes of civility are and the devastating contagion effects that can occur when these are set aside.

3 Civility under pressure

It is nine in the morning in Stratford Station, London. The platforms are heaving with suited people walking purposefully, grabbing free newspapers, wearing headphones. When trains pull up, people jostle, they heave themselves inside. Two hours later the scene is transformed. The suits are replaced by jeans, prams and shopping trolleys. The rush-hour hum is silenced. People stand patiently and gesture 'after you'. Busy and crowded lives are not conducive to civility: the space for us to act with civility shrinks; it makes us defensive rather than empathetic.

— *Field notes: London*

Periods of dramatic technological change and social upheaval tend to coincide with hikes of concern about general standards of behaviour. The 16th and 17th century Puritans despaired of drama, dancing and games of chance. Aldous Huxley wrote Brave New World out of fear of the lack of morals in the roaring 1920s. Since then we have had moral panics about teddy boys, mods and rockers, Hells Angels, skinheads and hippies in the 1960s and 1970s. In his 1983 classic, Hooligan, Geoffrey Pearson illuminates our tendency to constantly recall a golden era – typically 20 years earlier – where young people's behaviour was better, crime lower and where civility flourished.[35] And in the 1990s, 'hoodies' became a symbol of the decline of respect in the UK.

The purpose of this chapter is to disentangle the factors which we think are most unique to our contemporary lives and which we think put particular stress on the cultivation of civility: mobility and churn, space and time poverty, and technology.

Churn, stress and technology

> **"Life is busier now. My husband and I both work and we're in and out of the house the whole time, back and forth in the car. Cars isolate people, I think... Before, my Mum didn't work. She was in the front garden and there was time to talk. There were personalised little shops. People who know each other. Not like now.**
>
> — Field notes: Cambourne

The aim of this section is to set out some of the preconditions for civility that are being put under most strain. Many of the people we spoke to identified busy lives as one of the issues driving down standards because civility requires sacrifices of time. It takes time to get to know your neighbours, let alone be helpful or thoughtful. This is even more so the case with the people you may encounter on your daily commute, the newspaper salesman or the person who serves you your daily dose of caffeine.

The evidence on whether we are busier than before is mixed. According to Eurostat data, UK women are among the busiest in Europe, spending a total of 16.8 hours a week on paid work and 29.75 hours on unpaid work (for men the

figures are reversed: 29.16 for paid and 16.1 for unpaid).[36] But it also shows that people living in places like London are very time poor; 13 per cent of Londoners spend up to 60 hours a week working, meaning a fifth of those living in the capital have just three hours of time for themselves a week.[37] A quarter of Londoners regularly feel stressed at work. Four in 10 blamed heavy workloads and a third said that dealing with difficult clients or customers left them feeling frazzled. Average Londoners commute for almost 80 minutes a day. Crowded public transport and traffic jams feature highly in studies that chart the amount of time spent in a prolonged state of stress or unhappiness.[38]

Professor Jonathan Gershuny, Director of the Centre for Time Use Research at Oxford University, has argued that our relationship with time has become inverted in recent decades.[39] While in the past, free time was worn as a badge of respectability and social standing, today people demonstrate their social position through what has been referred to as 'conspicuous industry'. In other words, we want to be busy and we want to appear to be busier than others.

But are time-poor people more likely to be uncivil? Aspects of civility that require thoughtfulness, will inevitably suffer. Our work observing behaviours in busy places also indicated that busy people are likely to be thicker skinned, to take incivilities in their stride, but also to see how acting with civility was in their own personal interest. The less busy on the other hand were more likely to harbour grudges, paint negative pictures of others and be less adaptable in terms of their own behaviours. This finding echoes with Darley and Batson's now infamous 'good Samaritan study', which showed that whether people stopped to help a man slumped in a doorway had more to do with their level of 'hurriness' than their religious beliefs or whether they had just heard the story of the good Samaritan.[40]

The impact of space was somewhat different. High-population density can have a huge impact on how we perceive the behaviour of others. According to one study by Ipsos MORI, the more densely populated an area, the higher the perception of anti-social behaviour.[41] Given that the UK is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, and that demographic, environmental and economic trends are likely to result in higher density living, this is significant and makes the issue of 'how we live together' more pressing.[42]

The combination of high population density with high levels churn is particularly problematic. Neighbourliness, engagement in civic action and social networks tend to increase the longer individuals reside in an area. Areas that have higher numbers of people leaving than entering are more likely to suffer from high levels of perceived anti-social behaviour. A report produced for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) identified how churn affects long-term residents most, causing more anxiety, fear, resentment and distrust of newcomers.[43] With very high levels of population churn, London is both the most unstable and the 'least neighbourly' region in England.[44]

A sense of local stewardship will be harder to engender in areas experiencing a high turnover of people. In the same way that we are likely to take less care of a rented house or to drive a hire car more recklessly, we are also less likely to be mindful about our behaviour in a transitory neighbourhood because the incentives for civility are possibly lower. As Richard Layard puts it, "In a world of increasing mobility, where we constantly change our associates, the force of such motives (approval or reputation) is steadily diminishing".[45]

One final component is technology. Mobile phones are most commonly cited as one of the biggest stressors in our daily routines. In the words of one interviewee, "phones mean that others are mentally absent but physically present". In other words, they interfere with the sense of personal responsibility for how our behaviour impacts on others around us. A study of 'mobile manners' undertaken by Intel found that 67 per cent of Europeans think that people talking too loudly on their phones in public spaces was the thing that annoyed them most. The survey also revealed that 40 per cent of respondents were guilty of typing in front of others.[46] The anonymity offered by the internet and social networking has broadened the space for uncivil behaviour, including cyber-bullying. Many people feel that our online lives are getting in the way of sociability, particularly among young people.

Technology is changing our behaviours dramatically. It is revolutionising how we relate to others, including strangers. Future advances such as augmented reality (where a computer adds explanatory data to a scene to help explain what is going on, who people are or to provide directions – likely to available on mass market by 2015) will make it all the more prevalent. Many of those we spoke to felt that technological development was so fast that it has outstripped our ability to develop codes of behaviour that would allow us to engage with it with sensitivity to others.

These long term trends – high density living, a mobile population and the increased use of technologies – all impact on the way in which civility flourishes or declines and is experienced. In the next section we explore the codes on civility that are likely to only become more significant.

4 A Golden Rule for the 21st Century?

The stall holders at the busy East London market have adapted with the times – it's not unusual to meet Cockney salesmen who speak fluent Urdu for example. In their words: "We have to be polite because we are so different." In other words, clashes and prejudices just don't make business sense. Old-fashioned civility could also be a means of coping with the constant flux of modernity.

— *Field notes: London*

Over the last half century, the UK has become a more culturally fluid and diverse society. People are generally less deferential to traditional forms of power and are more prepared to challenge the status quo. At the same time, the collective institutions that influenced broad social norms have been in decline or fragmented. In this context, codes of civility are less determined by deference to age or social class and navigating them becomes an increasingly complex matter.

Migration and ethnic diversity are common in many major cities, and parts of London, Leicester and Birmingham have already made the transition to hyper-diversity. Other districts, including rural areas, are experiencing greater levels of cultural or ethnic diversity than ever before. Our working patterns have become more specialised and different generations interact less. Technological advances mean that our networks are more diffuse, exposing us to an ever-expanding range of people without the constraints of space and time.[48]

Codes of civility have become both more fragmented and more changeable. While in previous generations social norms would have been passed on from each generation, this process has become less straightforward. The decline of institutions such as the army, trade unions and formal religion means that we rely on a much more diffuse set of actors to instill codes of civility, including the media and our peers.

Our qualitative research confirmed that these changes make everyday civility more challenging, yet more critical than ever before. As society becomes more diverse and mobile, it is necessary to consider how people can be enabled to share values and to generate civility, mutual understanding and empathy. Civility is a key part of how they do so without conflict.

In this context, the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their actions increases. One shopkeeper explained: “I am not rude so people aren’t rude to me.” But analysis of the British Attitudes Survey shows that we are generally very reluctant to take account of ourselves. Very small proportions of the public admit to personally undertaking inconsiderate behaviours. For example, when asked whether they had made rude gestures in public at some point in the last year or dropped litter, only a fifth will own up. The proportion of people who own up to jumping a queue, swearing or shouting at a stranger, or pushing someone is even lower.

Conversely, more than four times as many respondents reported having witnessed this kind of behaviour as admitted to this type of conduct. In their analysis of the 2007 British Social Attitudes Survey, Clery and Stockdale report that individuals “considerably under-report the proportion of people who themselves engage in inconsiderate behaviour.”[49] One of the biggest challenges in promoting civility in the 21st century is how to instil self-awareness and mindfulness of our own actions.

Recent years have seen an explosion of interest in behavioural economics and in particular the way in which policies and 'choice architecture' may help us to make better choices and behave more consistently with our beliefs and aspirations.[50] In particular, the implications of 'neurological reflectivity' – of people understanding more being more aware of their own actions and heuristics – in shaping our actions.[51]

Some of the things that come up again and again as complaints in relation to every day civility are relatively small and often require relatively passive behaviours. For example, loud music from headphones was a constant focus of frustration among interviewees, particularly commuters. One participant asked whether a simple application could help people become more aware of the fact that their loud bass was audible to others (possibly by registering outside noise alongside the volume register). There are already relatively simple examples in play: for example, Google have developed Mail Goggles to help prevent the intoxicated from sending embarrassing late-night emails they might regret in the morning. When activated, the program forces users to solve a series of math problems before allowing any message to be sent.

It may be that the area of civility – and how we can 'nudge' ourselves to be more aware of civil codes and when we transgress these – is an area where behavioural economics has much to add.

PART II

CAN WE NURTURE CIVILITY?

I'm pushing my son on the swings in our local park when I hear a commotion by the climbing frame; a little boy is having a tantrum because he doesn't want to go home. I eavesdrop with sympathy, as I know I'll face the same situation shortly. The boy's mother's voice rings out, "Don't you fucking swear at me." The woman pushing the swing next to me shakes her head in despair, "I wonder where he gets it from?"

— Field notes: London

5 Civility and empathy

Stan, a stocky 45-year old brick layer, has been on building sites since his teens. He claims to have seen it all. During our conversation over the security fence he shares his theories on why people act with incivility: most of the time they simply do not think about the impact on others. This is mostly the case with young people who are still testing themselves and cannot measure the impact of their actions. His view is that punishment really isn't the solution: "You can raise the metal mesh as much as you like, the kids will just think it's more of a challenge." Much better in his view: just sit down and explain. He tells us that the site security guard often chats with the kids in the area over a bag of chips and a can of Coke, and to great effect. He attributes his ability to put behaviour into perspective to the fact that he can "empathise because I was probably up to worse things when I was a lad."

— *Field notes: Cambourne*

From neuroscience to behavioural economics, civility is today widely debated and researched. However, these strands have remained largely compartmentalised. In the next part of this report we draw on insights from a range of disciplines including criminology, urban studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology and psychotherapy, among others. We set out an approach promoting civility at a personal level (through the promotion of empathy skills), inter-personal level (by shaping norms of reciprocity and by sparking positive contagious behaviours) and contextual level (ensuring that the places we live, work and play in send out cues which are conducive to civil behaviour).

Empathy, the ability to put ourselves in other people's shoes, is a critical component of civility. A high level of empathy is consistently associated with an improvement in people's attitudes and behaviour. Studies have found that people who are induced to empathise are likely to volunteer more, are less intolerant and are more likely to defend victims of bullying. Lack of empathy is associated with negative behaviours such as child abuse or sexual and alcohol-related aggression. [52]

Humans are hardwired for empathetic behaviour.[53] In most cases the cultivation of empathy will happen naturally, through positive family relationships and social interactions. But in the same way that we learn norms of grammar and pronunciation, empathy is not a fact of nature. It needs to be taught and reinforced throughout our lives, particularly at key developmental stages or at times of intense change and stress. Empathy is one of the skills most severely truncated in children who experience abuse or neglect, as shown by child psychologists such as Sue Gerhardt and others.[54]

Contrary to long-standing assumptions about empathy as an intrinsic quality, a growing body of literature and practice on how to teach empathy has emerged in the past two decades. It has been applied to everything from how to help doctors communicate better with their patients to the teaching of non-violence in the Middle East.

One of the most ambitious examples is the Second Step Programme, an empathy curriculum adopted over a decade ago in public schools across the state of Massachusetts in the US and today replicated in schools around the world. Empathy is taught through discussion, coaching and role-play. Young children watch videos of children expressing emotions in real-life situations; teachers use photomontage to help students connect with their own emotional experiences and children are encouraged to relate to characters in books.

The overall purpose of these techniques is to instil what social psychologists call 'perspective taking'. From challenging stereotypes to promoting awareness, experiments have shown that such techniques have powerful effects. In one case, Adam Galinsky and his colleagues showed participants a photograph of a professor, a cheerleader, and elderly person or an African American man.[55] Some of the volunteers were asked to be the person in the photograph and write

a day in the life of that individual. Asked to rate their own traits after the exercise, those who had imagined themselves as cheerleaders rated themselves as more sexy and attractive compared with the controls. Those who walked in the shoes of the elderly person felt weaker and more dependent. Similar experiments have been carried out with trainee geriatrics nurses. Trainees were dressed in physical limitation suits allowing them to experience joint stiffness and limited mobility, and made to use equipment that simulated vision and hearing impairment, shortness of breath and skin ulcers. Journals kept by the participants all showed that these experiences had made a lasting impression and boosted empathy skills.

In recent years empathy training has made significant inroads into UK schools. Today over 90 per cent of primary and 70 per cent of secondary schools provide some form of social and emotional learning (SEAL). However, the field has suffered a number of setbacks. National evaluations have shown limited impact, and government is currently considering immediate cuts to this form of provision. But most experts agree that the shortcomings of SEAL are the product more of poor and diffuse implementation (the original programme design included over 50 goals), rather than an indictment of their overall purpose. A series of Young Foundation pilots, drawing on the work of Professor Martin Seligman and the Positive Psychology Centre, involving several thousand pupils have shown that, implemented coherently, emotional training programmes can have a powerful impact, not just on behaviour but also on academic results. They found that resilience training also had a significant effect on depression and anxiety symptoms.

Effective empathy training programmes help people accurately identify their own feelings in order to determine the emotional state of another person. In other words, they help people learn to understand themselves better in order to develop awareness of how they affect others and, as a result, allow them to regulate their own behaviour accordingly. Unlike citizenship education, which teaches people norms and good forms of behaviour, or awareness-raising campaigns, which provide information in a bid to sensitise people about negative behaviour but do little to address intrinsic values and beliefs, these are experiential interventions, which shape our own deeper feelings and understanding. In the words of Mary Gordon, creator of the Roots of Empathy programme, this type of learning is likely to be lasting because “when you’ve got emotion and cognition happening at the same time, that’s deep learning.”[56] We argue that teaching people perspective taking skills, what one of our elderly interviewees described as “taking time to consider other people’s feelings”, is likely to have the greatest and most sustained impact when it comes to promoting civility. There is already a range of innovations aiming to cultivate empathy that could be utilised more broadly in the school and community context.

Empathetic Gaming. Researchers in the US have begun experimenting on the use of making video games more than simple entertainment, and finding ways of harnessing their power to encourage pro-social behaviour, including empathy.

Their theory is that games are particularly well-suited to this task because they allow players to inhabit the roles and perspectives of other people or groups in a uniquely immersive way. Rather than scoring points for shooting down gangsters or blowing up buildings, the games have been produced with the aim of putting players in the roles of other people in highly emotive contexts; the role of a manager charged with making redundancies, for example. Designers have found that by immersing players in emotive situations, ‘empathetic play’ can positively influence attitudes and behaviour.[57]

Show and tell with babies. Roots of Empathy, founded in 1996, works in schools with bullying problems. They hold monthly class visits by a mother and her newborn baby. Children sit round the baby and mother with the aim of understanding the baby’s feelings. Instructors help by labelling them and teach children strategies for comforting a crying baby. They discover that everyone comes into the world with a different temperament, including themselves and their classmates. They see how hard it can be to be a parent, which helps them empathise with their own mothers and fathers. Evaluations have shown that children who have participated in the programmes are kinder, more cooperative, more inclusive of others, less aggressive and less likely to bully others compared to children who do not participate.[58]

Community Conversations is an approach being used in some of the most diverse parts of London to enable meaningful conversation between people of different backgrounds who live in the same neigbourhood. Facilitated by trained volunteers, this methodology brings together people who do not usually interact to share opinions, views and experiences with the aim of reducing community tensions. The conversations can be facilitated as brief chats among parents dropping their children off at the school gates or as longer community workshops and larger public meetings.[59]

6 Promote positive reciprocity

"There is an elderly lady that I see every day when I drop off the kids. We always say hello. We don't know each other, but we always say hello. It's quite nice. It makes you feel part of a community. I always laugh to myself afterwards. It's nice."

— Field notes: Cambourne

Civility is underpinned by the expectation of reciprocity. Time and again the people we interviewed described their understanding of civility in terms of how they would like to be treated. A bus driver we interviewed in Newham said: "Civility is treating people with the respect you think you would like". Similarly, one of the older people we spoke to in Wiltshire described it as "treating people how you would like to be treated yourself." A taxi driver summed it up succinctly, "Civility? We give out and we get back."

Anthropologists and sociologists have long argued that reciprocity is a social norm that features in all human cultures, albeit taking radically different forms.[60] It plays a critical role in maintaining the stability of social structures, as Serge-Christophe Kolm puts it, reciprocity is the "the basic glue that makes people constitute groups or societies."[61]

Reciprocity, by definition, implies that you will get something back in return for your actions. When you greet someone, hold a door open, or perform a kind deed, you expect that person to respond with an acknowledgement of gratitude and to reciprocate with another kind deed or action in the future. Thus, social relations and groups are formed. Reciprocity channels the egoistic impulses towards the maintenance of the social system. When individuals are part of an established group the expectations of reciprocity may generate what Peter Blau terms "indirect forms of exchange."[62] Person A might help person B, and person B might help person C. If C helps A then the group is satisfied, even though C did not directly reciprocate B's help. Everybody in the group benefits as the norm of reciprocity suggests that a person's helpfulness will be repaid by someone else in the group indirectly.

But the norm of reciprocity is conditional. Rather than the unconditional Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you (or variants of the same that are evident in almost every major religion) – conditional reciprocity operates with the understanding that 'I'll do a good deed for you today, if you'll do something for me in the future.' It has the implied threat that 'if you don't help me out, then I won't help you out in the future'; what game theorists call 'tit-for-tat'.[63]

This negative aspect of the tit-for-tat strategy was reflected in one of the conversations we had with a teenage mother in the Wiltshire town of Trowbridge. She felt the older neighbours were failing to treat her with respect and were judgemental of her decision to have a baby on her own and at an early age. "Old people give you looks. If you are queuing for a bus or something and I'm with my daughter they stare at me. They've got this look, which is disapproving, as if I've done something wrong. It's not just me. My friends have the same thing. The old people don't respect us so we wind them up. Why not? They start it."

Just as one can see how quickly relationships can break down and conflicts can emerge if one responds to an uncivil action (or a perceived uncivil action) with another, responding to one civil gesture with another can bond individuals and strengthen communities.

Another technique was to be overly civil back: respond to incivility with emphasised civility. One of the managers at the bus station in Newham was convinced that civil behaviour elicits civility, even from the rudest of people. Talking about the rudest behaviour and incivility his staff face on a daily basis, he said: "Somehow we need to break the trend, not in some American syrupy way. Just having a friendly face gets people to respond. People will surprise you. Civility sparks civility". One of the workers in a London kebab shop employed a similar technique. When he encountered customers who weren't treating him well, he would emphasis his 'pleases' and 'thank yous', his 'Yes, sirs' and 'Sorry sirs' to excess. When this didn't work, he challenged one of his customers. "I say please and thank you to you every night, and you have never once said please or thank you back. Why not?" The surprised customer apologised. "She's been as polite as you'd like ever since, it just takes a while."

The infectiousness of incivility has been the subject of a substantial body of academic literature. Most influential have been 'broken windows' theories, which make the link between low-level anti-social behaviour and crime. From the former Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani's 'zero tolerance' policy in the 1980s, to former UK prime minister, Tony Blair's Respect agenda in the 1990s, the theory is that clamping down on the most visible aspects of incivility – anti-social behaviour, graffiti or littering – inspires more positive relations more broadly, and therefore reduces crime levels.

Critics of these theories have argued that they have been stigmatising, costly, have contributed to the over-population of prisons and the criminalisation of vulnerable young people[64] and have proved unsustainable – making communities over-reliant on law and order to control uncivil behaviour and causing invasive policing.[65]

Supporters claim that the UK's use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) have been necessary and effective in tackling the more extreme forms of incivility, such as 'neighbours from hell' or those engaged in creating extreme noise nuisance. They argue that these circumstances require intervention from police and authorities and cannot be left to individuals on their own to resolve; and that for too long poorer neighbourhoods, where density and deprivation levels are highest, have not had enough assistance in tackling these issues.

Advocates of ASBOs maintain that they have been the most transformative in the most deprived areas (nearly a third of people living in the most deprived areas report high levels of anti-social behaviour compared with only 7 per cent in the least deprived areas).[66] They argue that they have had the greatest impact on the most vulnerable members of society, including those with disabilities and young people, who are also the most likely victims of anti-social behaviour.[67]

The evidence on whether anti-social behaviour strategies have been effective is mixed. This is largely because their use has been at the discretion of the police and local authorities. So while parts of the UK have made significant use of ASBOs, others have hardly resorted to them (an offender is 50 times more likely to be the subject of an ASBO in Manchester than in Merseyside, for example). Local police forces use very different definitions for ASBOs. Most evaluations have focused on how the introduction of ASBOs and other sanctions aimed at tackling anti-social behaviour have impacted on people's perceptions regarding behaviour in their communities. The 2009 British Crime Survey indicated that the introduction of harsher penalties in relation to anti-social behaviour had not resulted in significant reductions to the level of concern about the problem.

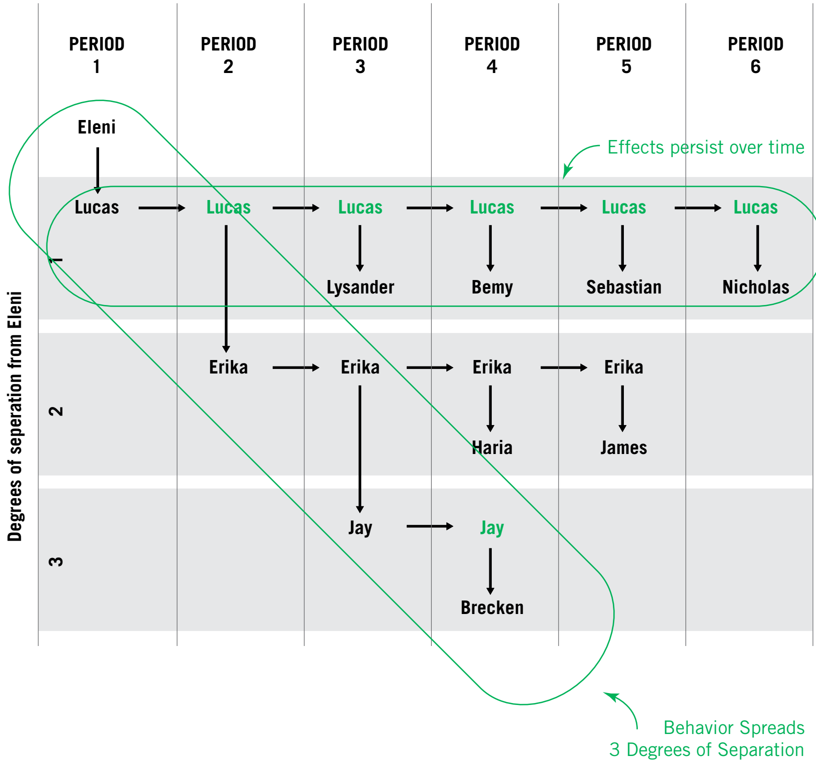
More important is the fact that responses that focus on tackling anti-social behaviour solely through punitive means do little to inspire positive patterns of behaviour. Outside of the field of criminology, social theorists are starting to test whether proactive, civil behaviours can prove as infectious as uncivil ones. Anecdotally we recorded many examples of practices – such as drivers thanking each other by flashing their emergency lights – which were maybe less common a decade ago but which are increasingly taken for granted.

Transport for London (TFL) have commissioned a project call **Acts of Kindness** by artist Michael Landy as part of the TFL series Art on the Underground. Acts of Kindness celebrates everyday generosity and compassion on the Tube. Landy has invited passengers and staff to send stories of kindness that they've seen or been part of on London Underground. A selection of these stories will be placed in Central line stations and trains between 2011 and 2012.

http://art.tfl.gov.uk/actsofkindness/about/

Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, leading proponents of social network theory, have shown that people can 'catch' emotional states they observe in others over time frames ranging from seconds to weeks. For example, when college students are randomly assigned to live with mildly depressed roommates, they become increasingly depressed over a three-month period.[68] In a more recent experiment they have proved that small acts of kindness can be infectious. To prove this they asked a small group of students to perform a small act of kindness. Their research (see Figure 2) shows how a single act of civility perpetuates itself through the social network: if Eleni performs an act of civility, it benefits Lucas (one degree of separation), who gives more when paired with Erika (two degrees of separation) in period two, who gives more when paired with Jay (three degrees of separation) in period three, who gives more when paired with Brecken in period four.[69] They label the phenomenon a 'cascade of cooperation'.

Figure 2: How a single act of kindness can spread between individuals and across time[70]



Others have proved that behaviours such as environmental stewardship can be infectious.[71] Charity flows through networks: surveys of people who have given money to charitable causes find that roughly 80 per cent did so because they were asked to by someone they knew well. Research on civility in the workplace has shown that when workers feel helped by the work of a group, they will reciprocate by exhibiting favourable treatment of others.[72] Emotional contagion can also take place between strangers and even online. Although patchy, there are examples of codes of cyber civility, or 'netiquette', emerging in similar ways. Wikipedia, for example, has a strict code of civility which both 'assumes good faith' (AGF) but is clear about the parameters of behaviour. A whole school of etiquette – 'wikiquette' – has developed and uncivil contributors are engaged, argued with, warned and then courteously banned.

Netiquette
As South Korea approaches nearly universal Internet access (currently 97 per cent household broadband penetration), it has enacted new laws and established initiatives to ensure that young Koreans grow up to be well-mannered citizens of the cyberworld. This includes providing school children with textbooks about Internet etiquette and netiquette classes, which encourage positive cyber messaging. A 2007 law requires posters to popular web sites and portals to submit their real names and residence registration numbers before posting comments.

http://www.gossipgamers.com/korean-kids-learn-online-manners-netiquette-song/

Arguably, the army of voluntary contributors to Wikipedia would be less likely to help if the online encyclopedia was profit-making. Other movements, such as the Compassionate Action Network, the Random Acts of Kindness Movement, Guerilla Hugs, Because it Matters and the international Kindness Day seek to put in place civil patterns of behaviour for others to emulate. For example Politestranger.com allows people to post the nicest thing that a stranger has done to them, whereas The Kindness Offensive encourages people to perform both small- and large-scale random acts of kindness to make people happy. As an offline example, local authorities in Newcastle-under-Lyne held carnivals outside nightclubs to help diffuse tensions at closing time.

Street pastors: groups of adults who offer help to people as they leave clubs and pubs. Working independently from local authorities and the police, they patrol the Town Centre on Friday and Saturday nights between 10pm and 4am. Their sole aim is to offer practical help – from flip-flops for unsteady girls who can no longer walk in their stilettos to a shoulder to cry on. They have proved to have a calming effect on the streets and are effective at defusing violent situations.

www.streetpastors.co.uk

Civility seems to thrive better when it is embedded from the outset as an integral and explicit element of any strategy or new venture. This has important implications for strategies aimed at improving stocks of civility, including the need for leadership that emphasises civility – rather than anti-social behaviour – as the norm.

7 Changing the context for civility

The shopping centre in Stratford is busy. Young girls stroll in and out of clothes shops, giggling. Mothers call after their small children. Shopkeepers are eager to strike up conversation with potential customers. Out of nowhere a young man in his 20s starts barging through the crowds. He acts menacingly and shouts obscenities. Some shoppers are clearly offended. But others begin laughing. The young girls manning the shrimp stall tells me that he is simply putting up an act, "trying so hard to be offensive is simply ridiculous." Peace is soon restored, the young man left feeling embarrassed and the shoppers carry on with their weekly errands.

— *Field notes: London*

Promoting civility is as much about changing the public mood and encouraging positive behaviour, as it is about a clamp down or penalties, which can be effective in the short-term but are unlikely to instil the culture of stewardship which underpins civil societies.

Policy responses can be reactive. When there is a problem – such as littering or dog fouling – authorities will step in to correct it and this can often take the form of punitive means: threats of fines, enforcing alcohol or chewing gum bans or closing off public spaces. Sometimes, as shown by the zero tolerance policy in New York in the 1980s and more recently in the UK, such short-term measures can prove effective when it comes to allaying the fears of local populations. If followed through they can be very popular.

Laws and customs such as anti-discrimination legislation and provisions to protect people from civil disorder and the worst forms of anti-social behaviour are necessary conditions for building civility. Anti-discrimination laws, for example, have been critical in exposing and changing attitudes that are hugely damaging to those being discriminated against and to wider society. Likewise, many of the most positive impacts of the anti-social behaviour strategy have been felt in the most vulnerable communities and groups, such as the elderly and the disabled.[73] But they are not sufficient.

For the most part, common incivilities happen outside the reach of the law, imperceptible in the grainy CCTV screen, and are hard to define objectively. The scope for sanction is therefore limited. The temptation to go too far is great; park benches with spikes may deter public drinking but they do very little to achieve the overall aim which is to create contexts that are conducive to civility. Not only do they create ugly and hostile environments, they undermine the overall aim, stirring up cultures of distrust and anonymity, and reducing the space for contact in public spaces. Studies have found that these approaches can increase fear of crime overall.[74] Police forces report frustration at the fact that members of the public increasingly turn to the law for help in resolving matters which in the past would have been resolved by the community.[75]

While fixing broken windows may help 'stop the rot'[76] in places where anti-social behaviours have come to dominate, it does little to inspire civil behaviour among people. Other work by the Young Foundation has shown that they could even discourage the types of positive actions which our respondents seem to feel most need for: smiles, helpfulness and small acts of generosity.[77]

As argued by some of the greatest observers of urban social life, such as Richard Sennett and Jane Jacobs, top-down efforts to enforce civil behaviour through rules and sanctions alone can in the long term prove counter-productive. Jennifer Lee, in her studies of corner shops in one of the most diverse areas of New York, has shown how even in the most tense situations, people who share communities will take action to manage tensions and smooth out incidents before

they escalate.[78] Whether it is in Harlem or in Hackney, experience shows that enforcement alone very quickly starts taking the place of what Jacobs called “casual enforcements” and “low-level interpersonal sanctions”. People start to look to the police to contain behaviour, which could alternatively be controlled because people are looking out for each other or care about what is happening on their streets. As the recent riots showed, once civility breaks down, the impact can be swift and dramatic and incredibly difficult for police to contain without excessive force and the risk of exacerbating tensions. Some of the key moments of the riots, widely shared online and discussed by media and public alike, were those examples of instances where members of the public did not retreat from the social sphere: the woman in Hackney who stood amongst rioters berating them for the vacuity of their behavior, and the post-riot clean ups and the online sites which helped to raise money for lost businesses.

The challenge is to find ways to ensure that the ‘good bacteria’ of civility thrives, so that when tensions do occur, communities are better able to deal with them and bounce back. We argue that subtler interventions – building a context in which civility almost becomes second nature and where people keep each other’s behaviour in check through peer pressure, shame or positive example – are likely to be more sustainable. This requires a collective effort by residents, local organisations, public servants, the media and those in positions of authority. In the words of one park warden we spoke to, the best thing authorities can do is set in train positive behaviours for others to emulate because “people comply with the norm”.

While working closely with civil society, public policy does have a role to play in this mission not least because people look up to authorities when it comes to controlling incivility, as shown in many opinion polls and reflected in our conversations. Behavioural change approaches currently being applied to reduce obesity or increase recycling could be applied far more systematically in the promotion of civility.

The Slow Movement

A movement that encourages people to take stock of disconnection and the pace of modern life. Eating less fast food, travelling by train rather than plane and reading more books or rediscovering traditional skills, the aim is to rediscover the value of traditions and traditional ways of doing things. It has also launched a Citta Slow group in Italy whereby cities of under 50,000 people pledge to a number of actions to improve hospitality and quality of life.

http://www.slowmovement.com

Initiatives such as Acts of Kindness on the London Tube, or experiments such as playing classical music in crowded areas (as tested in New Zealand) have a significant role to play in easing daily abrasiveness. In the words of Antanas Mockus, former mayor of Bogota in Colombia and the architect of one of the most successful experiments in promoting civility: “If people know the rules, and are sensitised by art, humour and creativity, they are much more likely to change.”[79]

8 Conclusion

Civility is widely debated but ill understood. Debates are most often grounded in the generalities about social decline. Single incidents or images are held up as emblematic of declining standards, a reflection of the broader state of our social affairs. Very little investment of expertise and resources has gone into measuring, understanding and thinking about ways of influencing civility (particularly when compared to the investments made into the fields of criminology, for example). We argue that there are several reasons why this imbalance needs to be addressed.

First, civility is an issue that matters hugely to people. Far from outdated, it is something that people still value, and which is critical to overall wellbeing. While the term civility may not always resonate, people relate to the concept. Most recognise that as we wrestle with high density living, greater levels of cultural diversity and individualism, as we become less deferent and as technology begins to permeate almost every aspect of our social lives, civility becomes more rather than less important.

Second, our research shows that generalisations about declining standards of civility are inaccurate and problematic. While there are flashpoints of incivility, these tend to be contained to certain places or certain times. But in general Britain remains a well-mannered and courteous country. We still compare favourably to other developed nations. Most people still feel like they can trust others and that their neighbourhoods are free from anti-social behaviour.

Generalities about incivility pose a number of problems. They get in the way of a more granular understanding of the conditions that drive incivility, the character of a specific area or the qualities of specific people. They also inspire wider public unease and unhappiness, irrespective of people's actual experiences. They can fuel prejudices against certain groups, particularly young people. Ultimately they can deter civil behaviour, as people are likely to live up to the negative generalisations rather than positive examples. More data and thorough empirical analysis on the state of civility in Britain are needed in helping to dispel some of the inaccurate generalisations, which dominate.

Finally, we argue that a lack of serious focus on this area has limited thinking about the best ways of tackling incivility and inspiring civility. The policy landscape around this area tends to rely on a very narrow set of responses, most of them focused exclusively on sanctions. Punitive responses have their place and will continue to be needed, particularly in areas where incivility has become the norm, threatening the most vulnerable groups and triggering wider criminality. But overdependence on punitive measures is both costly and signifies a failure to establish a suitable balance between deterrence and positive steps designed to inspire civility: from respectful policing and public servants' duty to provide high standards of service to the design of public space.[80]

A better understanding of civility should be important to both central and local government; particularly at a time of austerity where 'hard', expensive interventions are squeezed and when communities face additional pressures. The findings of our research suggest that if we want to tackle anti-social behaviour and build stronger communities in the long term, a better balance is needed between punitive top-town policy and softer bottom up interventions based on local understanding of key tensions and perceptions. We already know, for example, that it is often our 'everyday' contact with public services that shape people's sense of satisfaction with the state.

However, this report is very clear: incivility is a shared problem that cannot be tackled by state interventions. People care deeply about civility but are not always aware of when their own behaviour is perceived as rude or offensive. The evidence set out here is as much about how we – the people – change our own awareness of what it is to be civil, as it is about the way in which institutions, public spaces and services understand the largely invisible role that civility plays in individual and community wellbeing.

The examples we refer to show that there are practical things that can be done to encourage civility and this report argues for the expansion of those kinds of social innovations that have shown they can increase empathy and civility. However, perhaps the most important lesson is that civility is 'contagious'; we hope this report makes a contribution to spreading the word.

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80. In 2011, the Independent Police Complaints Commission found that complaints about the policy had increase by eight per cent, to record levels of almost 58,400 - www.ipcc.gov.uk/en/Pages/stats.aspx

Civility can seem like an old fashioned concept and the British public tends to think we are on a spiral of decline when it comes to everyday politeness.

This report finds that far from a thing of the past, civility is something that people still care deeply about wherever they live, but it warns that long-term trends are making civility hard to maintain. It brings together what is known about civility from a range of disciplines and the findings of new empirical research undertaken in very different areas.

It argues that civility is the largely invisible 'glue' that holds communities together and that experiences of incivility cause hurt, stress and deeper social problems, and has a bigger impact of people's sense of social health than crime statistics. Perhaps most significantly it shows that civility operates on a reciprocal basis and that it is 'contagious'. Yet people, while quick to see incivility in others, seem far less aware of how their own behaviour can offend.

While the report suggests changes in emphasis in national and local policy, including a better balance between punitive measures and those which actively encourage civility, it concludes that we are all best placed to spread civility through being aware of how we conduct our daily lives.

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