

Is London Really Open? Perceptions from Young People Living in Stigmatised Neighbourhoods

Mario Washington-Ihieme

Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science

The representation of London as an open city seldom acknowledges the spatial divisions of its inner neighbourhoods. This is the result of a reduced visibility of geographical borders and the ease of commuting between different sectors of the city, making London more accessible. Its multicultural persona and the endless opportunities acquired make it an attractive city to all.

However this rhetoric has been challenged through conversations surrounding social exclusion and inequality experienced by young inhabitants that live in London's inner neighbourhoods. Specifically, areas which hold certain representations and a formulated reputation portrayed by the media have highlighted its presence within London. Findings from recent research with 16-25 year olds in Tottenham – coined the most diverse area in London, and

Brixton – informally known as London's Gun Capital – found that young people defined the city as unequal and not open to all, for reasons surrounding class and racial inequalities perceived within the city through their own experiences, in addition to the presence of neighbourhood violence within their communities.

With issues surrounding social inequality still present in London's neighbourhoods, the discourse surrounding the city as a warm and welcoming place to live can only go so far before it is acknowledged that there is still work to be done in the inner neighbourhoods. Particularly, the representations embedded within these territories, and their reputation carried throughout the city not only affects the inhabitants individually, but the society as a whole.